



The Power of the Word II: Women's voices and the New European Order

A Women's WORLD pamphlet, edited by Nadezhda Azhgikhina and Meredith Tax

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Introduction

by Nadezhda Azhgikhina and Meredith Tax

In February 1999, a remarkable group of women writers, publishers, and journalists met at the Rockefeller Foundation's conference facility in Bellagio, Italy. We came together to discuss Women's WORLD, an international network of feminist writers that addresses issues of gender-based censorship, to analyze conditions in our various countries, and to begin to develop a strategy for work on these issues in Europe. We shared our discontent over recent events on our continent—the growing political and social tension, the information war, and the dramatic worsening of the position of women in general and women writers in particular. We brainstormed about how we could improve the situation.

The ten participants in our meeting were Nadezhda Azhgikhina, Editor of the Women's Page at the *Moscow Independent* and co-founder of the Association of Russian Women Journalists; Sazana Caprici, translator and Editor of *Sfinga*, a Kosovo women's literary

magazine and the publisher of a pioneering anthology of Albanian women's writing; Diana Çuli, novelist, and Director of the Independent Forum for Albanian Women in Tirana; Monica Nagler Wittgenstein, cultural journalist and President of Swedish PEN; Luisa Passerini, oral historian, essayist, and Professor of History at the European University in Florence and the University of Turin; Svetlana Slapsak, novelist, essayist, and Professor of Classics and Coordinator of Gender Studies at ISH (Institutum Studiorum Humanitas) in Ljubljana; Annamaria Tagliavini, Director of the library and documentation center at the Centro di Documentazione delle Donne, a feminist organization in Bologna; Tatiana Turina, journalist and co-founder of Women Writers in Transition in Belarus; Hilary Wainwright, journalist, researcher, and Editor of *Red Pepper*, a London monthly journal of opinion; and Meredith Tax, the only non-European present, novelist, essayist, and President of Women's WORLD.

This pamphlet is one of the outcomes of our intense, productive work at Bellagio. We had planned to publish it in the fall of 1999. But the outbreak of the war in Kosovo, just a few weeks after our meeting, made it impossible for our group to remain in touch. Because of her dissident history and long support for Albanian civil rights, Svetlana Slapsak was already persona non grata in Belgrade; when the NATO bombing began, the police confiscated everything in the office of her magazine *ProFemina*. Diana Çuli, like most activists in the Albanian women's movement, had to put her other work on hold because of the refugee crisis. And Sazana Caprici was one of the tide of refugees that fled Kosovo for Montenegro; we could not locate her for many months, and, though she is now back home, communications still suffer from infrastructural problems.

For this reason, and others, the essays in this volume vary in length. Some are extended analytical pieces. Others are short papers prepared for oral presentations at our meeting, which could not be expanded in written form because of the pressures of historical circumstances. In addition, though she could not attend our meeting, we have also included two essays by Dubravka Ugresic, feeling we needed her voice. Dubravka was involved in one of the major European censorship cases of the last decade, and has been a friend of Women's WORLD since its pre-natal days.

In the original conception of the Bellagio meeting, we had hoped to bring together not only women writers from Eastern and Western Europe, but also to include writers from the immigrant populations of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, who have become such an essential part of the European mix in the post-colonial period. Because of scheduling constraints and the incompleteness of our own networks, we were unable to fulfill this part of our plan, but we are determined to broaden our scope before we meet again. Diversity and inclusion—bridging ethnic, linguistic, and cultural boundaries—are at the heart of our agenda for the New Europe.

While the ideas expressed in these essays reflect the opinions of the authors and are not necessarily positions taken by Women's WORLD as a whole, this book is meant as a call. We hope that the discussions in this little book will interest many of you, and we are looking forward to your feedback, as we believe that it is only through the joint efforts of women in many countries that we can improve the situation.

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I. The New European Order: Human Rights, Women's Rights, and Gender-based Censorship

by Nadezhda Azhgikhina

The recent decade marked a new stage in European development, giving rise to new hopes as well as to new problems and controversies. The fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, symbolized the beginning of this new era, leaving behind the exhausting Cold War and its traumatic realities—the escalation of mutual tensions, the arms race, and the cultural isolation between the two parts of the continent. Many people in both East and West welcomed the fall of this Cold War symbol: artists painted on its fragments, poets read their poetry on its ruins, and intellectuals still keep small pieces of the concrete monster on their bookshelves as a souvenir of that time's enthusiasm and romantic expectations.

Indeed, a lot of things that happened then inspired us and encouraged us to speak about the prospect of an abundant and shared cultural future. In the first years of the new united Europe, democracy began to develop in Eastern Europe; totalitarian ideology collapsed; censorship and state-party control over publishers and the mass media were abandoned; and open intellectual debate became possible. Many formerly banned books by East European authors were published in their countries of origin, and later appeared in the West. The Eastern European countries also welcomed an abundant inflow of texts by Western authors, including feminist papers.

Cultural workers in different countries were able, at last, to meet in person. The nineties were marked by all kinds of contacts, conferences, discussions, and joint projects, which began, in 1989, with the first meeting of Eastern and Western authors, called "Beyond the Barriers," and initiated by a woman philologist from Denmark. The Russian literary critic Galina Belaya, a participant in this meeting, remembers it as "one of the highest peaks" of her entire life. "Suddenly," she recalls, "I saw how diverse, rich and friendly the world is, how interesting we are for this world. I saw that it was possible to work, to create, and to discuss literature without turning round to see who is watching you behind your shoulder, without fear. I did not expect to live to see this happen."

The end of Eastern Europe's isolation from the rest of the world, with the cultural vacuum that had created, stimulated diverse initiatives within the region and the emergence of many new and talented authors. One of the most remarkable manifestations of this process was the appearance of new women's literature in a number of countries. New collections of women's prose were published, complete with authors' manifestos, reflecting women's view on current events. Remarkable new authors appeared, like Yurga Ivanauskaitė, who later became the most popular writer in Lithuania, and Salome Pavlychko in Ukraine. As soon as they were translated into other languages, books by such women writers as Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, Tatyana Tolstaya, and Svetlana Alexievich became the subject of intense discussion and study by scholars throughout the world. Alexievich was awarded Swedish PEN's prestigious Kurt Tucholsky Prize, and when Wislawa Szymborska of Poland won the Nobel Prize for literature, it seemed that Eastern European women authors had become a valued and integral part of [world literary culture.

But a number of unexpected problems began to emerge in the first years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Re-unified Germany was the first to be affected. Residents of the poorer, eastern part of Germany were perceived as disturbing, even threatening, competitors by citizens of the more prosperous western Germany. Their long separation from the West gave rise to unending social and psychological conflicts in which East Germans increasingly complained of discrimination in employment, publishing, and even literary reviews.

The situation was aggravated by the "search for Stasi trace" campaign (the Stasi was the former East German secret service), by which many cultural workers were affected. In the former German Democratic Republic, as in the former USSR and many other Eastern European countries, many writers and translators had been forced to sign a loyalty oath in order to get employment or to go abroad. Now, in this new situation, the document they had signed effectively blacklisted them from their profession. It is notable that the "Stasi trace" campaign affected men and women differently. Christa Wolf, known internationally for her feminist and pacifist work, was selected as a major campaign target, while many male authors, who also had had contacts with the Stasi in their youth, were left alone. This situation was not exclusive to Germany. In free Lithuania, Kasimira Prunskėnė, the first prime minister of the independent republic, who contributed greatly to its attainment of sovereignty, became the target of a massive campaign of harassment based on her assumed (but not proven) former contacts with the KGB. It seemed so easy for people participating in the campaign to forget all she had done for the benefit of the country and to stigmatize her as "a Soviet spy"—perhaps as a warning to other politically active women.

Ironically, the European public in many countries has welcomed former staff officers of the KGB, men who have since become writers of novels and stories, like Mikhail Lyubimov, a KGB colonel, who was once expelled from the UK and declared persona non grata, but who is now greeted as a guest of honor and invited to prestigious literary events. (He is known to be a personal friend of John LeCarre.) The fact that Victor Yerofeyev, one of the most popular Russian authors in Europe, is the son of a KGB official has never hampered his popularity with the liberal intelligentsia in any country. These and other similar stories hint at some hidden agenda in contemporary Europe, some process that, unofficial and undefined, tends to separate men and women, creating favorable conditions for the former and hurdles for the latter.

In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, literature has gone through an intense, dramatic process of liberating itself from dependence on the state, not only in terms of ideology but also of property. The ownership of publishing facilities and media, formerly owned by the state and now privatized, and writers' unions, which under the old regime were the source of benefits such as country homes, writing stipends, and opportunities to travel, have been key arenas of struggle. In Russia, this process went on for a number of years and was so intense that it could be compared to a "civil war" in literature. Writers who supported democratic reform established the April Group; among its leaders were remarkable women like the literary critics Natalya Ivanova and Tatyana Ivanova, the prose writer Nina Katerly, and the poet Tatyana Kuzovleva. Their publications caused heated debates in the press.

Women also played an outstanding role in the revival of national literature and national identity in a number of post-totalitarian countries. The Armenian poet Sylva Kaputikyan was a symbol of the Karabakh Movement; the publisher Lydia Istrati and the journalist Alla Molodanova founded the Women's Liberal Christian Party in Moldova, which promoted the Romanian culture and language; the writer Lyudmila Kovtun established the Yevfrosinia Polotskaya Foundation, in Belarus, to support Belarussian literary traditions and democracy; Salome Pavlychko and other Ukrainian women poets joined the movement for the revival of Ukrainian culture; while Yurga Ivanauskaite and many other Lithuanian women writers were members of the democratic reform movement Sajudis.

However, this revival of national identity and culture was not entirely free of negative side effects, including the growth of national chauvinism and the exaggerated influence of religious institutions, which has led to a kind of censorship in which any open criticism of national or religious leaders is banned. This censorship has strong gender aspects, not only because the new ideology in post-totalitarian countries merges the national ideal with the so-called "natural destiny of women" (that is, to cook, clean, have babies, etc.), but also because it has become virtually impossible to discuss certain aspects of women's lives.

The case of Poland may be the most dramatic: not only did the adoption of the infamous anti-abortion law cause practical difficulties for women, it also deprived them of the opportunity to discuss the problem openly. Even while busloads of Polish women travel regularly to Belarus, ostensibly as tourists but in fact to obtain an affordable abortion, respectable periodicals, including *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the symbol of democracy in Poland, refuse to publish articles and letters to the editor against anti-abortion legislation because the press does not want to endanger its relations with the Catholic Church.

Relevant data collected by public health services and reports by international organizations are never published in the mainstream media. Instead, articles feature "women murderers of babies," or discuss the "moral values of a true Polish woman." A similar situation prevails in neighboring Catholic Lithuania, where even the leading democratic newspaper, *Lietovas Ritas*, refuses to publish any material in defense of women's right to abortion. According to prominent woman journalist Dalya Gudavichute, the church has not only outlawed abortion and contraception, feminists have even been banned from entering Catholic churches!

In such an atmosphere, any reference to the church that departs from strict canonical rules is punishable. A novel written by the famous Lithuanian woman writer Yurga Ivanauskaite, a love story between a girl and a priest, was banned soon after publication, and its many readers could only buy it under the counter. In countries and regions experiencing a revival of Islam and Shari'ah [check spelling] traditions, including Azerbaidjan, Tatarstan, and the Russian Caucasus, the official media promote obligatory wearing of veils and the hijab by women; advise girls to attend Moslem schools where they can learn how to be good wives rather than professionals; and even question the value of educating women.

In the nineties, the actual practical situation of women worsened in all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Economic reforms and the transition to market economies were associated with crises in the national economies, the rapid growth of unemployment (women comprise the majority of the unemployed), the disruption of the system of social security, and the deterioration of women's health. Along with their communist ideology, countries in transition abandoned many socialist mechanisms for the protection of women, including maternity pay and quotas for women in governmental bodies. The feminization of poverty is a fact of our contemporary life.

So is the traffic in women, which is widely acknowledged these days. Criminal gangs send thousands of Eastern European women to brothels in both the East and West: women from Poland and the Baltic countries are sold to Scandinavia, Germany, and Italy; Albanian women are sold to Italy and Spain; Russian women are sent all over Europe as well as to Israel and Japan. According to international organizations, as many as half a million women are trafficked each year from countries of the former Soviet Union alone.

The press say very little about this. The press has very little to say about women in general. In 1996, women—including prostitutes, criminals, and pop stars—were featured in only 1 percent of the articles in Russian newspapers. (Admittedly, in 1998, this ratio increased to 1.5 percent.) In all the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, women's main form of public representation can be found in pornography and sexist advertising, which are perceived by some publishers as integral to media freedom. Virtually nothing is said about women's real lives and issues, or about women's movements. The mainstream media portray women either as sex objects or as housewives; Gorbachev's idea of the "natural destiny of women" is promoted, and active and independent women are made the objects of ridicule. The new Eastern European situation, which combines squeezing women out of the labor market, denying them access to large-scale property, and creating new gender stereotypes in the culture and mass consciousness, has been

termed, by gender researcher Anastasia Posadskaya, a "post-socialist patriarchal renaissance."

The reverse side of this "renaissance" is that women themselves, including women writers, have been silenced. The "traditional women's agenda" (ranging from peace activism to protection of social benefits) was not included in the program of market reforms designed according to neo-liberal concepts. Women who were among the initiators of the political transformation found themselves denied access to power. Now, even the sound of women's voices raised in defense of other women citizens of their countries seems to arouse suspicion among politicians and opinion-makers. In many countries, the word "feminism" has a negative connotation; it is commonly believed that "a real woman" should not be a feminist.

Market reforms have also had a negative impact on women's self-expression. Although, at the start of the decade, many brilliant publications were brought into being, at present, women writers are finding it increasingly difficult to get published. Those women who do publish are under-reviewed or completely ignored by the literary critics. Very often we hear that there is no such thing as women's creative expression, that the well-known women writers are just a few exceptions to the rule, and that women's creativity is secondary to men's.

Due to the difficult economic situation, women are increasingly limited to auxiliary positions in mainstream culture. Low-paid journalists and assistant editors are mostly women, while editors-in-chief, heads of writers unions, and directors of large periodicals are mostly men. In Latvia, according to the journalist Anita Kekhre, although almost 90 percent of journalists are women, they either do not dare to write about women's situation or do not understand the meaning of the women's agenda. In Russia, this feminization of journalism, especially in local media, has been accompanied by a sharp decline in journalists' financial security. Female staff members of mass media organizations or publishing houses find it extremely hard to convince their superiors that they deserve promotion and support. Nor are women's issues on the agenda of human rights advocacy: in fact, women's rights are generally not even perceived as part of the concept of human rights. Alexander Tkachenko, director of Russian PEN, honestly admitted during a conversation about women's rights, "I do not understand anything about it."

For the first time since the Second World War, the European continent has witnessed bloodshed, bombings, and attacks on civilians. The first armed conflicts began in the USSR shortly before the collapse of the Berlin Wall; these were the tragedies of Sumgait and Baku, the plight of the Meskheti Turks, the hostilities in Moldavia and in Central Asia. Many in Western Europe did not pay much attention to those events, since they seemed to be taking place very far away. But a few years later, war began in the Balkans, shaking Europe with its brutality. Soon after, the first Chechen war broke out. Both conflicts persist. People of many nationalities are still dying in Kosovo, and the war in Chechnya continues, causing uncounted losses and an exodus of refugees through Russia and into neighboring countries. In the Northern Caucasus, people are routinely kidnapped, and while some Russian and Western European hostages have been freed, many others are still captives, facing the threat of death. Human rights are violated on a daily basis, while both the international community and national governments stand by helplessly. Among those whose rights are systematically violated are minority ethnic

groups, women, and children. These wars have exceeded the boundaries of local conflict; they have, to an extent, had a global effect by threatening European stability and the normal development of the region.

Wars invariably breed hatred and revenge and are used to justify censorship and ethnic intolerance. The information warfare waged by international media around the conflicts in former Yugoslavia and Chechnya threatens to erect a new invisible, psychological wall between East and West in Europe that may be as hard to wreck as the Berlin Wall. Information warfare creates a strong mythological image of an enemy, locating the perceived "threat to humanity" in whole nations, rather than in individual governments, paramilitary groups, or criminals. This happened during the recent war in Kosovo, when the world's most influential media spoke about "Serbian atrocities," without distinguishing between the Milosvic government, the Yugoslav army, Serbian paramilitary troops, and the civilian population, making the public believe that the whole nation was a threat to European security. "I feel sorry for Serbian children," said Marit Paulsen, a Swedish member of the European Parliament, "because today it means to be children of the devil. It should not be so. I know what it means, because my father served in the German army."

Thousands of people in democratic countries were influenced by propaganda that justified NATO's bombing of civilians by demonizing the entire Serbian population as villains and nationalists. Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in the early days of the conflict that "violence and violations of human rights took place on both sides." But, like all military propaganda, the justification of the NATO bombings did not stop at quoting incorrect figures and distorted facts. Not until the Albanian population returned to Kosovo, and it became apparent that not even the peacekeeping forces could protect the Serbian population, did the media begin to admit that the violence had been mutual, and that no one is totally right or wrong in a conflict, just as no one wins any war.

A similar situation is developing in and around the Russian Caucasus. Trying to justify their military operation in Chechnya, Russian official propaganda has demonized all Chechens, making no distinction between bandits and peaceful citizens. As a result, the majority of Russians are in favor of this war; for many Russians, being a Chechen equals being an enemy and a terrorist. Notably, the demonization of women has also been a part of war propaganda. Many Russian media featured stories about women fighters, mythological "snipers in white pantyhose," whom no one has ever seen but everyone has heard about. These women, reportedly fighting on the Chechen side, are not ethnic Chechens, but Lithuanians, Russians, Ukrainians. They supposedly fight with extreme cruelty, aiming at soldiers' knees and genitals, and are universally loathed by Russian soldiers. This myth, which, in fact, had started long before the Chechen war, around the time of the hostilities between Georgia and Abkhazia, has proven very persistent. Its emotional appeal highlights the fear and loathing of women that often surfaces in time of war. Similarly, Chechen propaganda, echoed by the mass media of some Western countries, depicts all Chechens as heroes, forgetting the hundreds of kidnapped, among them many peacemakers, ignoring the killing of innocent hostages, such as the British engineers who were decapitated.

Escalation of ethnic conflict and mutual hatred does not facilitate a civilized resolution of the conflict and the restoration of human rights in the region. One cannot but remember

the words of Swedish physician and humanist Erzsébet Eisinger, a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, who said that "even the greatest European culture cannot save a country from fascism when it is in the state of humiliation and misery." He was speaking of Germany in the thirties, but his words hold true today, as the virus of nationalism and aggression spreads throughout Europe. The dogs of war wander in our streets, threatening basic human rights, freedom, democracy, and stability.

The new round of militarization, with NATO expanding to the East, will not counter this trend and promote stability. Instead of supporting their national social security systems, many countries in Central and Eastern Europe are being forced to invest in NATO programs, further distorting economies already suffering from neo-liberal policies. An unhealthy environment develops around new military bases; according to Hungarian women journalists, NATO soldiers view Hungarian women merely as available providers of sexual services.

Two years ago, at a meeting of women from Central and Eastern Europe focusing on these issues, women from non-governmental organizations and the mass media expressed their concern over NATO expansion and adopted a document that described the new militarization of Europe as a direct threat to women. Need it be mentioned that only the independent women's press covered this event, while the official media did not find it significant? Nevertheless, during the recent military conflicts European women developed new strategies, refusing to be passive victims and witnesses, the only roles ascribed to them by the national authorities.

In Russia, a broad and highly respected movement of Mothers of Soldiers has been active for a decade. In 1995, they organized the March of Motherly Compassion from the Kremlin to the Chechen village of Samashki, where they were welcomed, as in all the other places they passed on their way, with friendliness and understanding. The Russian Army forced the mothers to terminate their march when their appeal to stop the war elicited a broad public response. Jointly with Chechen mothers, the Russian Mothers of Soldiers committees have established Echo of the War, an organization whose priorities are to promote peace and non-violence, to help soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress, to search for and identify the bodies of killed soldiers, and to free prisoners-of-war and hostages. Dozens of POWs have been liberated by their efforts. Another priority of this organization is to offer protection to young men who refuse to go to war.

Similar women's pacifist movements are emerging all over Europe. During the war in Kosovo, German mothers marched along the streets of Belgrade; they appealed for peace and took their sons—NATO soldiers—back home. The Women in Black movement in former Yugoslavia has gained international recognition. For eight years, every Wednesday, women dressed in black have stood silently in Republic Square in Belgrade, holding anti-war placards. In Transcaucasia, the Dialogue of Transcaucasian Women has brought together women activists in Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, many of them translators, poets, and journalists, and has established a rehabilitation center for child war victims from all three countries.

The Dialogue's main goal is to create a culture of peace and non-violence, to promote the non-violent resolution of political issues. "If I succeed in convincing my neighbors that Abkhazians are not our enemies, that our enemies are corrupt officials and all those who push us to conflict and aggression, that will be my contribution to the cause of

peace. We, the women, should start with ourselves, with reaching out to other women," says Nani Chanishvili, professor of philology in Georgia. These ideas are shared by members of Women for a World Without Wars and Violence, whose members are from the Transcaucasian countries, Russia, and the ethnic regions of the Northern Caucasus.

Many women journalists and writers have also spoken up about the realities of war. Their reports from the major conflict zones have elicited a tremendous response, primarily because the women did not write from a military point of view, focusing on contested localities seized by either of the conflicting sides, or on the number of losses, but instead wrote about the human, or rather the inhuman face of war. Ciara Valentini from Italy, Teresa Moutinho from Portugal, Elena Masyuk and Nadezhda Chaikova, Russian reporters who covered the events in Chechnya—all have shown us how war affects every human life. The fact that the international community has defined mass rape, based on ethnic origin in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a crime against humanity owes much to the efforts of these women journalists, as well as to women's human rights organizations.

Wars are directly related to the competition inside criminal structures, primarily those in the production of and trade in weapons. Many countries in Eastern Europe are riddled by corruption and largely controlled by mafias. In this situation, journalism has become an increasingly dangerous profession. The Russian Committee for the Protection of Glasnost and the international Committee for the Protection of Journalists both issue yearbooks with reports of violations of media rights in post-Soviet territory. Every year, women journalists are among those listed as killed, beaten, or threatened and harassed. Nadezhda Chaiko was killed in Chechnya under unknown circumstances; Elena Masyuk was held hostage and humiliated by Chechen bandits (although her sympathies were often with the fighting Chechen units). Larissa Yudina, editor-in-chief of a Kalmyk opposition newspaper who exposed corruption around the president of Kalmykia and was killed, became a symbol of professional honor and integrity for all Russian and CIS journalists. During the recent war in Chechnya, military commanders tried to keep reporters away from the war zone; nevertheless, journalists wrote about the war, and their reports, like Anna Politkovskaya's articles and essays, reflected the real state of things, often in contrast to official coverage.

Any war is unacceptable to women, not only because it causes death and suffering. Wars marginalize women, who traditionally are a majority among refugees and forced migrants. Wars are used as justification to remove women's agenda from the list of perceived priorities. We—women writers, publishers, editors, and journalists—are convinced that violence is unacceptable in principle as a method of conflict resolution. We believe that the tradition of using force before exhausting all diplomatic resources is responsible for the continued violence and bloodshed in our continent.

We insist that our potential in diplomacy, dialogue, and discussion of all issues be tapped, for we are certain that European women have sufficient wisdom and experience to be able to prevent new tragedies. Women should be part of all negotiations relating to war; we are a vast source of underutilized skill and wisdom. Women are never interested in war, we never gain from war, although some of us do fall into nationalist traps and become victims of political manipulation. Women's experience in conflict zones shows that women on both sides of a conflict are able not only to overcome prejudice but to cooperate productively, because they have common interests.

We are against kidnapping and terrorism in all its forms. We believe that all those responsible for terrorist acts and hostage-taking must be brought to open trial, rather than used by various political forces to provoke new rounds of violence. We are against the present militarization of Europe, which threatens us with new aggression, including psychological aggression. We insist on the priority of social issues over military interests.

We are against information warfare in the mass media, and we are convinced that information should be focused, as a matter of priority, on the interests of the individual, and on basic human rights and freedoms. National stereotyping and intolerance in the mass media, whether the national media or global broadcasting networks, such as CNN, could bring us to the edge of a new global confrontation. We oppose the creation of new Cold War-type stereotypes; we oppose nationalism in all its forms; we are against any nation or country being presented as "the enemy."

We stand for the free exchange of information and for cooperation. We stand for freedom of expression, for the freedom of the media and literature from all types of censorship, for the right of a writer and journalist to her or his own point of view.

We are against the victimization and marginalization of women. We stand for the development of women's initiatives and for a broad and open discussion of all issues with non-governmental movements and organizations because, very often, the non-governmental initiatives have the experience and expertise that the authorities lack and that are necessary to stabilizing a situation.

We stand for the unconditional observance of rights of all minorities, including the smallest groups in any country, because protection of minorities is an integral part of democracy.

We stand for cooperation between Eastern and Western countries, for a constructive dialogue about the future democratic development of our continent.

We believe that the common sense and good will of the healthy political forces in Europe will ultimately win. We believe that our continent will become peaceful and affluent, that the day will come when writers are respected more than military commanders, when children know the meaning of the word "war" only from history books, when all cultures, nations, and groups develop in the spirit of mutual friendliness, and enrich one another by their diverse and unique talents.

Although we believe this time will come, how soon it comes will depend, to a large extent, on our talent, persistence, goodwill, and belief that tomorrow should bring more harmony to the world than we are experiencing today.

Nadezhda Azhgikhina, a writer, journalist, and activist, is the founding Editor of the Women's Page of the *Moscow Independent*, and Co-Editor, with Colette Shulman, of the Women's Studies journal, *We/Myi: The Women's Dialogue*. She is the founding Co-Chair of the Association of Russian Women Journalists.

II. The Pebble and the Lake

by Meredith Tax

I. The World Situation

Women's WORLD was founded in 1994 in response to changes in the world situation caused by the end of the Cold War: globalization, on the one hand, and the rise of backlash social movements, on the other.

By globalization, I mean a new form of capitalism in which fundamental economic decisions are removed from elected politicians and local financial leaders and placed in the hands of an international financial ruling class accountable to no one. Increasingly, the nation state is being superseded by multinational corporations and international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, whose policies of "structural adjustment" have imposed a dog-eat-dog, nineteenth-century version of the free market upon countries in the Global South and Eastern Europe. "Structural adjustment" has brought widespread starvation and economic chaos to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, while, in the formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe, it has led to a resurgence of ethnic war, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and crime, a dramatic rise in the traffic in women, and the descent into poverty and unemployment of millions of people.

Everywhere globalization is producing a widening gulf between rich and poor, with women and children making up a disproportionate percentage of the latter group. This is true not only in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, but also among the poor, minority, and immigrant populations of North America and Europe. At the same time, the new weakness of the nation state, easily perceived by demagogues and aggrieved groups, has led to an increase in local conflicts led by warlords trying to carve out their own nations or ethnic enclaves. Driving peasants off the land and into cities and borderlands where they cannot feed themselves, these wars have created an unprecedented number of refugee women and children fleeing extermination or starvation. These local wars are one result of an epidemic of backlash social movements, atavistic movements that yearn for the age of barbarism, invoking the mythic past of their people, tribe, or religion. Atavistic social movements target their next door neighbor, the hereditary enemy. They emphasize control over women, whom they see as symbols of national or communal honor.

Virulent nationalism drives one kind of atavistic movement; religious fundamentalism another. Fundamentalist movements have taken advantage of the weakness of the nation state to sow the seeds of theocracy in many places. Creeping theocracy can be seen in Egypt, where the courts enforce a Shariat law substantially different from the laws enacted by the legislature. It can be seen in Israel, where fundamentalist settlers, believing they are destined to control all the land that was Biblical Israel's at its point of greatest expansion, have repeatedly derailed the peace process. It can be seen in the United States, where a conservative Congress brought government to a standstill for almost a year in its zeal to enforce, not the law of the land, but a "higher law" under which a President could be impeached for sexual misconduct.

Women today are caught between the two conflicting forces of globalization and backlash social movements. The pressures of globalization draw them out of villages into factories and export processing zones, breaking down age-old patterns of female

subordination and isolation. Local patriarchs, losing economic and political power to global forces, see this breakdown of the traditional family as the most disturbing aspect of globalization, the place where they must reassert control or lose everything. The women are caught in an intolerable contradiction, pulled at once towards a commercialized future and pushed back into a traditional past.

Women writers—feminist writers—express this contradiction in vivid, memorable language and, by articulating the issues, make other women more aware. But, by doing so, they become the targets of traditionalists, who see feminists as the most vulnerable symbol of the modernity that is destroying their power and their way of life.

II. The History of Women's WORLD

Women's WORLD formed in 1994 to protect women writers under attack and to amplify their voices. The feminist network that became Women's WORLD began to organize in the United States, where our confidence that women were making progress was jarred in 1986, at an International PEN Congress in New York. (International PEN is a world writers' organization founded after World War I.) Norman Mailer, then President of PEN American Center, had told the press this Congress would bring together "the best writers in the world," and it became a media event, occupying the front page of The New York Times every day. This is not normal in the United States, where literature is normally confined to the back pages of newspapers. But writers attending the Congress found that "the best writers in the world" appeared to be almost all white men from Europe and North America. Out of nearly 120 speakers, only 13 were women. For American women writers, this was disturbing partly because there had been a strong feminist presence in our country for twenty years; we felt as though we were being swept back into the 1950s. Two hundred of us held a spontaneous lunchtime meeting in the hotel ballroom;; we developed a petition to circulate among our fellow writers, gave a press conference, and refused to leave the hall until we were granted speakers at the closing assembly.

We went on to organize a Women's Committee in PEN American Center. Grace Paley and I were its first co-chairs. Though there was some opposition at first, our committee organized such brilliant, well-attended literary events that within a year or two we were considered a credit to PEN. A number of members of the Women's Committee were elected to the board of PEN American Center, and, in 1989, I was made a Vice President and sent to an International PEN Congress in the Netherlands. The small number of women delegates there indicated a need for some feminist organizing, and a few of us came together around the idea of starting a Women Writers' Committee in International PEN. International PEN was then led by a small group of elderly European men whose views on the subject were summed up by one French Vice President, "I love women, they are my muse, but why a committee?" Still, by the time of the 1991 International PEN Congress in Vienna, we had convinced the majority of delegates that a Women Writers' Committee would be a good thing. The birth of the Women Writers' Committee was the first of many changes that have since come to International PEN, including new leadership and a reformed constitution.

I served as founding Chair of the International PEN Women Writers' Committee between 1991 and 1994, a period when the number of feminist writers being persecuted seemed to be on the rise, as did the seriousness of their cases. In 1993, Svetlana Alexievich, a

brilliant Belarussian oral historian who broke the story in Russia of what the army was doing in Afghanistan, was put on trial by the military. In 1993 and 1994, the "Five Croatian Witches," charged by the Zagreb gutter press with insufficient nationalism, were subjected to a "trial by public opinion," which eventually drove three into exile. In 1994 and 1995, Taslima Nasrin, whose book *Shame* exposed persecution of Bangladesh's Hindu minority, was indicted by the government for offending the views of religious Moslems and put under death threat by Islamist politicians. She went into hiding, and people in International PEN, including the Women Writers' Committee, played a role in getting her to safety in Sweden.

The rising influence of virulent nationalism and political fundamentalism illustrated by these cases convinced a group of us that a new organization was needed to pursue a more aggressively feminist program on women's right to free expression than was possible in PEN. At feminist book fairs and conferences, we had made contact with writers and publishers from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, who were not in PEN and wanted to work on issues of gender-based censorship. In 1994, Paula Giddings, Ninotchka Rosca, and I incorporated the Women's World Organization for Rights, Literature, and Development. We held a founding meeting that fall. Those present were Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana), Marjorie Agosin (Chile/USA), Lucy Friedman (USA), Paula Giddings (USA), Aicha Lemsine (Algeria), Ritu Menon (India), Ninotchka Rosca (Philippines), Mariella Sala (Peru), and I; Grace Paley agreed to be the first Chair of our Board of Directors.

Our first project was to write down our analysis of gender-based censorship and the changing world situation in a pamphlet, "The Power of the Word: Culture, Censorship, and Voice," which we brought to the UN's Beijing Conference on Women. We then began to try to imagine a program that would be both local and international. Because our resources were very small—for much of our history I have been the only staff member—we decided to work on the basis of partnerships with local organizations. We began to outline a strategy for this in 1996, at our first world conference on gender-based censorship, held at the Rockefeller Foundation's Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy. We now have partnerships forming or underway in Albania, Argentina, Ghana, India, Italy, Peru, Russia, South Africa, Uganda, and the United States, as well as an international program consisting of defense and support work in individual cases of censorship, coordination of regional programs, and the development of publications and a website. All these programs address the intersection of gender and censorship, which we define more broadly than do most human rights organizations.

III. Gender-based Censorship

We define censorship as any means by which ideas and works of art that express views not in accord with the dominant ideology are prevented from reaching their intended audience. Every society has some degree of censorship, which it carries out by its normal means of social organization and control. In a military dictatorship, censorship is exercised by the military; in a communist country, by the state; in a market-driven society, by market forces, though the state may have to intercede if these do not suffice.

Gender-based censorship, as we see it, is much broader and more pervasive than official, organized suppression. It is embedded in a range of social mechanisms that

mute women's voices, deny validity to their experience, and exclude them from political discourse. Its purpose is to obscure the real conditions of women's lives and the injustice of patriarchal gender relations. It strives to intimidate women writers, targeting women who don't know their place in order to silence the rest. While some of those who silence women writers are government officials or religious fanatics, other forces of censorship are parents who think it doesn't pay to invest in a girl's education, teachers who discourage girls from having ambitions beyond motherhood, publishers who don't think it worth their while to publish books by women, and critics who are unable to take work by women seriously. Such pressures from one's family or closest associates can lead to the most pervasive form of censorship, self-censorship, that holding back inside when one cannot face the consequences of speaking the truth—consequences that can range from loss of love to causing pain to being thrown in jail, pushed into exile, or killed.

Gender-based censorship can also be seen in the economic and political priorities that mandate widespread female illiteracy. The terrible illiteracy in which so many of our sisters are kept is not simply an unintended consequence of poverty and overwork; it is a social mechanism designed to perpetuate discrimination and deny women a public voice. Attacks on female education are a manifestation of the same agenda.

The rise of atavistic social movements means that open gender-based censorship is becoming increasingly visible in the world today. But that does not mean it is a phenomenon only found in traditional societies. North America and Europe, too, have their own ways of muting the voices of those who protest, methods that combine traditionalism with the new power of globalization. The United States provides an advanced example of this combination of pressures.

IV. Gender and Censorship in the United States

While women in the United States have overcome most obvious barriers to publication of their books and recognition of their literary achievements, ancient patterns persist: major literary prizes generally go to men; there is still a tendency to treat literature by women as being of a different, lower order; and women authors who violate taboos still tend to be discussed in terms of their morals, if not, indeed, their appearance. But these patterns of gender-discrimination are relatively minor irritations compared to two factors affecting all US writers: the concentration of the publishing industry in a few hands, and the culture war against all the ideas of the sixties.

In the last fifteen years, US publishing has been transformed from a relatively broad and diverse industry, marked by many independent, medium-sized presses, to an industry dominated by three multinational media corporations. Most publishing resources are now concentrated in the hands of these corporations, which are entirely ruled by commercial values and a culture of celebrity. In this world, brand-name writers are marketed as commodities, and pre-publication tie-ins between books and other media are increasingly sought; literary or socially conscious authors lack commercial interest or are considered passé; while poets and radicals have become endangered species outside the university. New, small presses are springing up to fill the vacuum, but differences of scale and resources make it difficult for them to compete with the hegemony of the corporate giants.

An additional difficulty, for feminist writers at least, is the culture war waged for the last twenty years by right-wing ideologues with enormous access to money and to the media. These conservative intellectuals are particularly worried about changes in the position of women, minorities, and homosexuals; they launch campaigns against any book with a progressive agenda in these areas. In the resulting climate of political backlash, publishers may prefer to publish "post-feminists," particularly since these can often find their own funding from right-wing Institutes. Conservative groups also attack feminist books for children and try to remove sex education materials from the public school system. One of my own books, *Families*, was removed from the first-grade curriculum of the state of Virginia after a campaign by the Christian Coalition; it was then dropped by its publisher. Right-wing groups also attack women's studies, gay studies, affirmative action, and sex education programs at the community college and university level.

The same conservative lobby has successfully pressed for cuts in all federal spending on social services, particularly welfare and education. This means that the poor are increasingly denied the education necessary to gain access to publication, the media, and a public voice. Such economic censorship feels so natural that it is not even recognized as such; in the years of debate over welfare, for instance, almost no one who actually receives welfare has ever become a media spokesperson; women on welfare are routinely represented by others, and this is so normal no one remarks upon their lack of voice. Economic censorship, which functions by denying access to adequate education, intersecting with a public information system entirely controlled by commercial interests, has effectively excluded the voices of large parts of the population: the poor, minority groups of all kinds, and anyone whose ideas challenge the reign of the almighty dollar. Since the majority of the poor are women and children, one aspect of this exclusion is gender discrimination.

IV. The World of Thought and Action

In her book *Cassandra*, Christa Wolf reminds us that Athena, the goddess of abstract thought, was not born of woman but sprang full grown from the forehead of her father Zeus. She asks, what would "the history of thought" have been like if it had come from some place other than the head of a male god? What would it have been like if women had helped to shape it? Until very recently, political thought in particular has been almost entirely the work of a small group of privileged men, emerging from their life experience and vision. Most of the human race has been excluded even from literacy, let alone participation and voice. This should be remembered when politicians invoke "our people's sacred traditions," or "our ancestral culture."

Despite the fact that feminists have been organizing for a couple of centuries, an extremely small number of women have had the time and social space to develop their ideas to the level of abstraction required by "the history of thought." Few women's movements have even been able to sum up their experiences, raise them to the level of strategic thinking, and transmit them to the next generation. Over and over, feminist movements have arisen, won some changes, and been swept aside by a tide of conservative reaction, their achievements washed away like writing in the sand, buried in inarticulate memory and obscure archives, to remain out of print until another feminist upsurge starts the process over again. If this has been true of the movements of educated women, it has been a thousand times more true of the movements of

grassroots, working, and peasant women, who have kept few written records. Our organizations did not last, and the lessons of our work were not summed up and passed down, so each generation of feminists has had to re-invent the wheel. People who are re-inventing the wheel seldom reach the point of strategic thinking.

Globalization has increased women's burdens by making subsistence more difficult. But it has also begun to create the conditions for transcendence, conditions that may permit the global women's movement to overcome its historic limitations and to reach a new stage of development. For most of human history, too few women were literate to preserve the experience of women's popular movements. Recording, describing, analyzing demands a substantial number of women who can read and write. Despite the still dismal literacy statistics, and the cutbacks due to globalization, more of the world's women can read and write than ever before. As our writing and thinking accumulates, it reaches a strategic mass; finally, there will simply be too much stuff to wash away.

And if feminism is buried in one country, it can be preserved in another, for we are now a global movement; we can help one another survive. This was not true to the same degree for past feminists; the suffrage movement and women's labor movements of the early twentieth century tried to link up internationally, but were hampered by lack of funds and very slow communications, and overwhelmed by two world wars. Today, despite our fragmentation, we are learning to wage global campaigns. Linked by modern communications technology, we can begin to imagine having many bases in the same struggle.

We can even imagine strategizing together, for we are learning long-term strategic ways of thinking to which we have had little access in the past. Men, working in business, accumulating estates, serving in military campaigns, even leading sports teams, had occasion to think strategically, to make long-range plans, to build organizations that could outlive them. But, until very recently, women were barred from such activities; we could not accumulate capital or order armies. Most of us worked in subsistence agriculture and handicrafts, childcare and household management, low-level mercantile activity, garment or food production for small local markets. In our centuries of small-scale work, we developed habits of thinking that emphasized cultural transmission, frugality, the value of human life, the importance of human relations. The end of a separate economic sphere for women, the penetration of women into government, business, sports, and even the military, has opened up new sources of experiential knowledge; we can combine what we already know with macro, long term, strategic methods of thinking previously monopolized by men. And by combining and interrogating these methods of thought, we will transform them.

V. Our Vision and the Global Women's Movement

The global women's movement today is larger, more international, broader, better educated, and more able to think strategically than ever before. It has the potential to learn how to defend women against both globalization and the backlash movements that attack us. But at the moment, this is only potential, because we lack what we need most—a clear and compelling vision and strategic plan. In fact, we have not one but many global women's movements:

- The international women's health movement, whose victories are enshrined in the documents that emerged from UN conferences in Cairo in 1994 and Beijing in 1995—although the gains of these documents represent have proven more difficult to win in practice.
- The international movement for women's human rights, which has forced mainstream human rights organization to recognize that violence against women—including rape and domestic violence—are human rights violations.
- The movement of women in economic development, which has changed the lives of many poor women.
- The international movement for political representation, which has focused on women's legal rights and on getting more women into positions in government.
- The international environmental movement and peace movement, both led by women activists in many regions, with feminist caucuses within them.

While each of these movements has made enormous gains, they go their separate ways, working on their own issues, with no overall vision or strategy to unite them. There is not even any global forum or publication where such strategic debates might take place. And culture is a missing link in their discussions. Although culture is the terrain on which most of our struggle with traditionalists takes place, it is a curiously neglected aspect of women's emancipation in terms of program. We talk of economic development, health care, equality, human rights, the environment, and peace—but women need more than bare survival, more than political representation, more than clean water and the absence of war. In 1912, during a textile workers' strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, immigrant women first raised the slogan, "We want bread and roses too!" Nobody in the women's movement talks about roses anymore. This is a mistake, for, in the words of Mariella Sala, "sustainable development, political equality and peace must be based on full human development. . . . art and culture are therefore strategic questions."

One purpose of Women's WORLD is to put roses—free expression and cultural development—on the agenda of the global women's movement. Women writers must make sure this happens for we cannot do without it. In order to do so, women writers need four things:

- Land: We need our own spaces, all over the world, "rooms of our own," both real and virtual; safe places where we can come together to read, write, study, and talk; where we can say things nobody has ever said before because there was no place to say them.
- Money: We need money of our own with which to build and save our work and our lives, money that is fluid enough to move from one country to another if things get dangerous. The situation in the world today is so unstable that any country could change completely in just a few years. We must preserve our ideas.
- Organization: We need local, regional, and international networks in order to overcome our isolation, strengthen our voices, and make it harder for our enemies to silence us or suppress our work. We need to work in coalitions with other women's organizations and other free speech organizations.
- Voice: We need our own media to make our voices heard: presses, journals, radio and television networks, and internet and distribution networks to ensure that our work will reach its intended audience. We also need access to mainstream media, so we are not marginalized.

VII. A Vision

Ten years ago, in 1989, when I started doing international work, I had a vision. It came at a dark time in my life, when I was trying to find a way to leave my second husband. I had no money, no home, two children to take care of, and I was not doing much saleable writing because I was so obsessed with building an international network. One evening, sitting alone in my room, almost in despair, I asked myself, "Why am I doing this? Am I out of my mind?" And I had a vision.

I saw a lake in the middle of a dark forest made up of fir trees, a kind of tree that grows in the northern parts of my country. In a forest of fir trees, nothing else can live. They sap and devitalize the soil, growing so close together there isn't room for anything else. In a forest of firs, no light gets through; the air is close and stuffy, and nothing moves.

In the middle of this forest, there was a lake, clear, blue, and absolutely still. No fish, frogs, or birds disturbed its surface. It was like a pane of glass. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, a pebble dropped into the middle of the lake, and ripples began to spread. Beyond all reason, the ripples spread further and further, growing more powerful as they grew larger, until they reached the shore, where the fir trees grew almost to the edge of the water. But the ripples didn't stop at the water's edge, they spread onto the land, and, as they spread, some of the trees began to fall.

It was like watching one of those slow-motion films where you see a flower grow; everything seemed to be happening very quickly, though I knew it must actually be taking a long time. As the trees vanished, the sun shone in; winds blew; the air became clean; the water seemed to sparkle. I heard the buzz of insects; plants and wild flowers sprang up in the clearing; then other kinds of trees: oak, maple, crab apple, chestnut, rowan, flowering sumac. Rabbits and squirrels appeared, and robins and blue jays; a deer came down to the water to drink; ducks and geese floated on the lake; herons dipped their beaks; fish jumped. The place had come alive.

And I said to myself, "What does this mean?" As soon as I asked the question, I knew the answer. The trees are the words of men. The ripples are the words of women. And we—the conscious ones, the ones who want to change the world—we are the pebble.

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III. Some Reflections on the Possibility of Creating Women's WORLD in Western Europe

by Luisa Passerini

Most Western Europeans would approve of the idea of creating an association such as Women's WORLD in continents like Asia, Africa, and South America. But they would

likely react to the proposal of developing a strategy of struggle against the censorship of women's voices in Western Europe with surprise and the question: "What is the problem?"

In reply, let us say right from the beginning that we need to develop a wider notion of gender censorship, which will include the forms it takes in relatively prosperous and democratic countries. Let us not forget that, while over the last three centuries, Western European women have found the literary public sphere relatively open as a forum for their expression, the political arena has been largely closed to them, as have been the media that dominate it, such as political newspapers. As for the academy, it is still open to very few women; and while huge differences remain between countries, in most situations we find women employed largely at the lower and medium levels, with very few reaching the heights.

As a first step, let us consider briefly the heritage of feminism in some of the countries of Western Europe. (My direct knowledge is limited to Italy, France, Great Britain, and to some extent Germany, Spain, and Greece. Therefore these considerations are partial and will require elaboration as we go on.) The historic importance of feminism in Western Europe and its achievements in various fields are undeniable. Nevertheless, in order to better understand the relationships between women from this region and women of the rest of the world, we must look at its weak points. Only with a clear perspective on these, it seems to me, will we be able to use feminism's strengths to their full potential.

First, there is the question of relationships between this political generation and younger women. The problem is one of communication, where language becomes crucial. "We" use a language that is largely self-referential and our interlocutors have most often been inside our own generation. Because we have made little effort to transmit our political heritage, our political tradition exists only in a partial and often implicit way. While a minority of women in their twenties and thirties are beginning to show interest in the history of feminism and in feminists, by and large we are still under the influence of the last two decades, when younger women were diffident about the experiences of their mothers and their teachers.

All this has taken place in an environment characterized by the emergence of new images of women. The first is relatively new to the European scene, if we think in terms of mass culture: that is, women deeply involved in their professions. The second image, women of the Right, is not new, but it has taken on a newly aggressive character in recent times. In this context, the heritage of feminism is not well known; it is often distorted by the media and by public opinion, and it has seldom been the object of scholarly study. All these factors lead to a silencing of women's voices, particularly in the exchange between generations, due in part to our own lack of foresight as well as to the absence of adequate structures.

A second difficult area is that of the relationships between the women of Eastern and Western Europe. Here again, communication is a major problem, and many misunderstandings have arisen over terms like "feminism," "consciousness-raising," and "abortion." Such inability to communicate is certainly the result of the Cold War and the division of the continent for more than seventy years, but it is also due to the tendency of Western European feminists to consider their own experiences as universal and to

inadequate efforts to listen to others. I have the impression that women from the USA have until now done more than we have in the direction of establishing links with women in Eastern Europe.

It is most urgent that feminists in Western Europe foster all sorts of exchanges with women from the Eastern parts of the continent, with the aim of clarifying our outlooks and to establish areas of agreement and disagreement. Facing these disagreements will be a challenge, but we might, for instance, consider organizing a seminar focusing on such contested terms as the three spoken of above. Why do they each have such different resonances? Can we hold onto these differences and still find common ground? A reciprocal understanding of both the potential for and obstacles to the expression of women's voices in different situations is crucial to our purposes. Again, the reciprocal silencing that keeps Eastern and Western European women from hearing each other has both structural causes and internal reasons; the latter require some reflection on our own attitudes and our own potential. The analysis of what groups like the Women's Center in Bologna have done in this area could be an inspiration and stimulus to others.

The third problematic area is the relationships between local women and feminists and those who migrate here from the "global South." Although cultural initiatives exist in various countries (for example, Alma Mater and Alma Terra, in Italy), it has been difficult to promote exchanges capable of maintaining both equality and difference. (Some of the most important work is being done in elementary schools with largely immigrant populations, where most of the teachers are women, but this is a subject with which I am not very familiar.) While many of the women who have migrated to Western Europe from Africa, Asia, and Latin America have found jobs that deal with the material aspects of life and the body (domestic work, care of the old and the sick, prostitution), their voices are scarcely heard—it is their bodies that we see in streets and homes. What must we do in order to best hear what they have to say and write about their experiences of life and work, their perceptions of us? How are we going to talk to them? We have much to learn, for it is evident that the majority of Western European feminists have yet to articulate an understanding of the connections between gender and race, an understanding that is absolutely urgent in our situation.

It is against this background that our own strategies must be formulated. We need to grasp the relationship between the forms of censorship of women's voices in areas marked by poverty and lack of respect for democratic rights and areas like ours, where the silencing of women's voices is more implicit. One of them is self-inflicted silence, the lack of communication with others. But we should not overlook the laws of the market, from production to distribution and consumption—including the weight of so-called public opinion and the ways in which it is manipulated through book promotion networks of reviews and publicity.

In facing this task, we should not be blinded by the illusion that the levels of democracy and prosperity reached here—while we value them for what they allow us—are sufficient for giving a voice to each woman. Women find many obstacles to their expression, especially those whose voices are antagonistic to the existing order. We must understand the nature of these obstacles if we are to fight and overcome them. We may be particularly interested in those areas relating to writing (including translation from one language to another and transcription of oral forms of expression), but we must consider

writing in the context of women's free expression in various fields, from the arts to the media.

All of this must be understood in a global context, as analyzed in Women's WORLD pamphlet *The Power of the Word: Culture, Censorship, and Voice*. The success of many women writers, coinciding with the difficulties many other women around the world today have in finding expression, must be understood in terms of globalization. While women are being emancipated, at the same time many forms of oppression have continued or been worsened by wars and the various fundamentalisms. In the New World Order that has developed over the last three decades, the word "women" sometimes seems to hold too many contradictions to be useful. So many women benefit in various ways from this system of global power; so many do not. Let us work with the intent of understanding and promoting the possible forms of solidarity between those women who suffer from direct forms of oppression, and those who are more privileged than others but refuse to take this condition for granted, recognizing the still existing, if hidden, forms of oppression to which they are subject.

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IV. Nice People Don't Mention Such Things

by Dubravka Ugresic

On the table, in the glow of the wax candle, stood the tiny bronze Europa riding a galloping bull. Balocanski took the tiny figurine in his hand and began to examine it under the light holding it close to his eyes, so that he seemed to be sniffing at the little Europa like a dog.

Miroslav Krleža, *The Return of Philip Latinowicz*

1. An acquaintance of mine in Zagreb once introduced me to the love of his life. She was a quiet, pale little woman who exuded calm—"I'm going to marry her," said my acquaintance. "She's a wonderful sleeper, she can sleep for twenty hours a day," he explained, tenderly. Now they are happily married. This little real-life episode may serve as a preface to the interpretation of a love story. Let us say, at once, that what we mean is the love between East and West Europe. And let us say, also, that in our story Eastern Europe is that sleepy, pale beauty, although for the time being there is little prospect of an imminent marriage.

2. I wondered exactly when I realized that what was at stake was an attachment between two different halves. It must have been at the moment when I felt on my own skin that frontiers really do exist, that one enters countries and leaves them, and that for this simple spatial transaction one needs an identification document. Before, when I crossed frontiers freely with my Yugoslav passport I did not feel their reality. Today, I possess a Croatian passport and I know the offices of many consulates and embassies

in European cities. For example, in order to obtain a small Dutch stamp in my passport, I have to show a letter of invitation, proof of the reason for my journey to the Netherlands, proof of health insurance, international or travel cover, proof that I have money and a return air ticket which confirms that I shall leave the country, in this case the Netherlands, by a set date.

At airports I stand in the queue for passport control. Signs over the booths behind which uniformed officials sit indicate my place. In some places it says *others*, in some there is merely an absence of the blue board with the ring of little yellow stars. My queue is long, it drags on slowly. The EU people in the parallel queue enter quickly. I notice that none of them looks in our direction. There is not a single glance expressing sympathy, curiosity or, if nothing else, contempt. They have no time, the queue is moving too quickly. But we, *others*, have plenty of time to observe them. We are different, our skin is often dark, our eyes dart suspiciously about or stare dully straight ahead, our movements are sluggish and subdued. No one chats or laughs in our queue, we are quiet, there is something surreptitious about us. The tension of our bodies testifies that we have only one thought in our heads: just to get across this frontier.

And when I cross it, I shall not say anything about this to my Dutch friends. Nice people don't mention such things. Besides, why should I? Once I have passed through passport control I can go and pray in a little Muslim or who knows which shrine at the airport itself, if I really feel like it. I'm welcome, cultural differences and identities are respected here. However, my problem is of a different nature. My problem consists in the fact that I am not and do not wish to be different. My difference and my identity are doggedly determined by others. Those at *home* and these *outside*.

3. I come from a Land of Blood Groups, from Croatia. There the dedicated blood-cell counters noted each of my blood cells. As a result I became . . . *no one*. Write: *no one*, I say to the officials in the booths each time they ask me my nationality, and they ask me often. Hurry up, they say, tell us what it is. Nationality: *no one*. Citizenship: *Croatian*, I repeat. We don't have that *no one* of yours in the computer, they say. The right to be *no one* is guaranteed me by the constitution of this country. Citizens are not obliged to declare their nationality if they don't want to, I say. In real life it's different, they say, everybody is obliged to be *someone*. That's just why we have wars, I say, because everyone agreed to belong to their own blood group. That's why we have wars, they say, because people like you wanted us all to be *no one*.

In the computers of Croatian officialdom, my name is entered in the category: *others*. I insisted on my position. They insisted on theirs: I no longer exist there. It's quite understandable, I myself insisted that I was no one. Now I live *outside*. Now, outside, I am what I no longer am *at home*: a *Croatian* writer. The representative of a country in which I barely exist, a country from which I ran away into exile, on the assumption that exile meant freedom from enforced identification.

Here, alongside my occupation, *writer*, they never fail to put that designation, *Croatian*. So along the way they learn the name of a new European statelet, stumbling over it, *Cro-Cro*, *Cro-a-tian*, that gives them some satisfaction. People respect ethno-identities. I understand that, they don't wish to offend, I must be extra sensitive about these things, that's just why there's a war in my country, after all. And so: me Tarzan, you Jane . . . The more politically aware will add: *former Yugoslav*. The more culturally conditioned will

add: *East European*. The politically sensitive will add: *post-communist*. The gender-aware will add: *woman*. The best-read will add: *Central European*. (For heaven's sake, Croatia was always Central Europe, wasn't it? What do they mean, Balkans? What nonsense!) And it seems I have no way of taking off the labels they have so kindly stuck on to me. Because it is only with those labels that they can recognize me, place me, communicate with me, it is only with those labels, they believe, that they can read and understand me *properly*. I understand them, it is only through my otherness that they can realize their specialness.

And I, a *voluntary* exile with a Croatian passport in my hand, am obliged to show reciprocal kindness: they expect me to accept my identities as though they were real. It all reminds me of a role-playing game, and although I am tired of games, I do after all agree to play. So, me Tarzan, you Jane . . .

4. When I asked her to sketch her own, inner, map of Europe, one of my West European acquaintances said: "This is where I am. Around me are Germany, Belgium, this is France, that's England, down there is Italy, and, yes, then there are Spain and Portugal as well, and here is a line. Beyond that line is nothing, a great blank . . ." On her inner map, the great blank stretched eastwards from Berlin.

My acquaintance is not stupid or uneducated or insensitive. She was just being honest. And she told the truth: for many *Westerners*, Eastern Europe is a mental empty space. It begins somewhere beyond the *iron curtain*, somewhere behind the *wall*, even now when there is neither a curtain nor a wall. "And if something doesn't exist, I can't be anything other than indifferent to it," said my acquaintance.

That innocent-indifferent ignorance gives rise to those numerous true anecdotes which serious people consider unworthy of repetition. For instance, the anecdote about a West European acquaintance of mine who, after visiting Russia, was touched to discover that Russians really loved small children . . .

5. Of course, not all *Westerners* were indifferent. There were those who passed through the *wall* and the *curtain*, permitting themselves an affair with Eastern Europe. Today, in their post-traumatic state, they lick their wounds and endeavor to be indifferent.

I always wince uneasily when I see *Westerners* excited by the slightest sign of a possible return to communism. Television pictures of miserable people in worn clothes decorated with dusty communist medals waving flags on Red Square flash round the world with lightning speed. There they are, the *commies*, raising their heads again! The experienced and watchful followers of East European communist systems immediately reach for their pens and round on the poor supporters of a return to communism, vigorously writing their angry diatribes against the communist president chosen by some Poles or Bulgarians in their recent elections.

"*Ostalgia*"—nostalgia for the vanished East German everyday which is enacted by young (former) East Germans—is a newly coined term for an emotional trend, whose followers need not necessarily be East Europeans. The *Westerners'* excitement at television shots of communist zombies on Red Square surfaces via a complex route. Suddenly they are seeing on the screen the image of their East European sweetheart the way she might be once again. And what was she like?

Eastern Europe was a different world from the West. If nothing else, then, for years she confirmed the *Westerner's* conviction that he lived in a better world. Eastern Europe was the dark reverse side, the alter ego, a world which Western Europe could have been like, but, fortunately, was not. And that is why the *Westerner* loved her. He loved her modest beauty, her poverty, her melancholy and her suffering, her . . . *otherness*. He also loved his own fear, the quickening of his pulse when he traveled there, he was excited by that entry into the empire of shadows and reassured by the reliable exit light: passport, embassy, credit card. He loved his own image of himself shopping cheaply, oh so cheaply. There, in the East of Europe, he inhaled a kind of personal freedom, yes, over there he felt closer to what he really was. Over there time was not measured according to agendas and schedules, it's true that there were shortages of all kinds, but there was an abundance of time. The *Westerner* came to Eastern Europe, she could not go to him, and that was freedom too, freedom from reciprocity. Eastern Europe was always there, waiting for him, like a harem captive. He loved her with the love of the master. He was the researcher and colonizer, he placed his little flags joyfully in the territories he mentally conquered. It was freedom from reciprocity.¹ Eastern Europe was his secret, a mistress content with little. At home he had a faithful wife, order and work. Like every mistress, Eastern Europe only strengthened his marriage.

6. "The times we live in are disgusting!" a West European acquaintance of mine complained to me recently. "You can't distinguish Russians from French people any more, and when you go abroad there's nothing to bring back any more! You can buy everything everywhere!"

7. Things have changed. Gray, silent Eastern Europe has begun to speak, to cross frontiers, and, hey, she doesn't seem to need the *Westerner* any more. He feels disappointed, no, not only because of the loss of an intimate territory . . . His former mistress is increasingly like his own wife! Russians send their children to the best English and Swiss colleges, buy diamonds in Amsterdam and chateaux in France . . . They speak English without an accent—who would have thought it, before they could not pronounce an ordinary *full stop* without that Slav bleating, and look at them now—they all stand straighter, they slip effortlessly across frontiers, they're everywhere, you can't walk down the street without bumping into them, they're all over the place, they're buying up whole quarters of Paris, Berlin, London, they've become greedy; it's all the mafia, of course, they've inhaled their first mouthful of freedom and now they think that no one can get in their way . . .

And our *Westerner* feels a kind of discomfort (*What if Eastern Europe moves here, to me?!*), loss (*Where are the frontiers? Is the whole world going to become the same?*), slight contempt (*Oh, couldn't they think of anything better to do than resemble us?*), self-pity (*When I took them jeans, they liked me!*) . . . And as he watches the shots of aging *commies* on Red Square, the *Westerner* wonders whether it would not have been better if that wall had stayed where it was.

8. And what about the *Easterners*, did they love the *Westerners* and if so, how did they love them? *Easterners* did after all know more about Western Europe. Or their knowledge had a different quality. In their inner map of Europe there were no indifferent empty spaces. In many homes there was a map of Europe on the wall; in the kitchen, as in a museum, people kept empty containers from Danish biscuits, English tea and French cheese. These little museum exhibits and the map of Europe were sad

substitutes for the countries they were firmly convinced they themselves would never see. Western Europe was a dark object of desire, for it was a world in which people really lived . . . more humanly.

Easterners loved foreigners. Foreigners were walking geography, a small-favor service (they could take something, bring something), their addresses were carefully preserved in address books. (*What if I should by some miracle really make it out?*) Foreigners were living confirmation that the world about which he, the *Easterner*, had dreamed, really existed. The only thing was that these foreigners weren't people. Their lives were too good for them to be considered people, that was it. Because what made the *Easterners* (in their own eyes) superior was the unshareable experience of humiliation. Humiliation was the only thing *Easterners* could place their copyright on, it was their inner legitimation, the unique *Made in Eastern Europe* product . . . The misfortune of humiliation is a broad manipulative field, the *Easterner* gladly created an institution of his misfortune. Here he was an expert, besides, his superiority in the domain of emotion had always been acknowledged . . . What about the *Westerners*? God knows what it was that beat in their Western breasts in place of a heart . . .

But the *Easterner* did understand all his own East Europeans—all those poor Romanians, Bulgarians, Poles—but he did not like them. They were all in the same shit, the same contemptible human trash. And no one could make him consider them his *brothers*. What kind of brotherhood was that supposed to be, brotherhood in misfortune!? All in all, the *Easterner* did not doubt that he was a European, but his language gave him away. He never said "We Europeans" but always "Europe and us." The *Easterner* lived in the mousetrap of that traumatic paradox, without being aware of either the mousetrap or the trauma or the paradox.

9. These commonplaces jotted down in haste from an imaginary list of frustrations (and fascinations) between East and West Europe are as inaccurate as they are accurate. Originating in the production of figments, belonging to the realm of cultural stereotypes, these commonplaces serve to crystallize some traumatic points which, whether they are true or false, do, it seems, really hurt. The twentieth century is characterized by psychoanalysis: by its discovery at the beginning of the century and its trivialization at the end. Contemporary television confessionals in which ordinary viewers come before an audience of millions and simulate their traumas— personal, collective, social, historical—reduce trauma to the level of popular, cheap emotions accessible to all.

That is why one should believe an acquaintance of mine, a Russian, who, after an attack of unduly violent anger, apologized: "You see, my nerves have been historically damaged . . ."

10. Since ancient times, Europe has built its identity on the contrast with the *East*, with *Asia*. Hippocrates and Aristotle did not blame the differences on people, but on the climate. According to Aristotle, it was because of the cold climate that Europeans were courageous, but not particularly able or wise. The connections between them are weak, they are incapable of managing others, nor do they like others to manage them. Equally, it is because of the climate that the inhabitants of Asia are gifted, but they lack courage and will. That is why they tend to be servants or else they gladly rule over people.

A similar set of characterological oppositions has been current for many centuries. It is on this contrastive base—initially innocently conditioned by climatic differences—that with time new elements in the construction of the European identity were gradually built up (enlightenment, culture, science, civil society, civilization, as opposed to primitive cultures, Christianity, as opposed to other religious systems, freedom, equality, brotherhood, rationalism, and so on and so forth).

The mental construct called *Europe* has been the concern of European thinkers, artists, rulers (secular and religious), warriors (let us remind ourselves that even Hitler fought against *Asia*, while German soldiers died *for Germany, for Europe!*). Europe has always built its identity and its sense of self in Opposition to an "other": to *Asia*, to the *East* (to *barbarians*, to the *inferior*, to the *primitive*, to *communism*, to *émigrés*, *Gastarbeiters*, *Islam* . . .). Europe has rarely integrated, rather it has tended to banish. So the inhabitant of Europe has adopted not only knowledge of geography but also the basic notions: us, Europeans, and *them*, people from beyond the border.²

Others and frontiers, these are the two conceptual points around which Europe has built its identity. For almost half a century Europe was divided by a security wall. The Western half experienced the wall as a shield, the Eastern half as an insult. Inert, servile *Asia*, in this case Eastern Europe, slumbered behind the wall, in a befuddled, totalitarian trance. Today Western Europe is afraid of the consequences. They are not only of a practical nature (fear of huge migrations from the East to the West). A certain unease follows the disappearance of the opponent, the mirror in which Western Europe contemplated itself for so long, nurturing its narcissism.³

Meanwhile, the war which occurred in Europe, in Yugoslavia, only confirmed the aforementioned set of frustrations and once again proved their vitality.

11. The first thing a foreigner notices when he endeavors to discover from a citizen of former Yugoslavia why the war came about is an inability to articulate a reply and the wide use of the language of emotion. With time, following the media, the citizens did manage to memorize a few general formulae. However, these merely simulate rational discourse, for the language of trauma very quickly breaks through what has been learned. For instance, Serbs will swear that they meant no one any harm, but that no one in Yugoslavia had ever *liked* them. They will interpret the genocide they perpetrated against the Muslims, if they accept that they did perpetrate it, as revenge for unrequited love.

One reason for the generally accepted language of trauma is its broad political and journalistic legalization. That is the language spoken by political leaders, elected representatives, that is the language in which debates are carried out in the newly founded parliaments, and it is the language of the media, the language of ordinary people.

"That journalist of yours really doesn't like us," said an embittered Bosnian Muslim refugee to me recently. He is now teaching at an American university. That "yours" meant *Croatian*.

"What do you mean?"

"She writes about us as though we were some kind of 'Shiptars'!"⁴

If we accept the logic of an amorous trauma, then we can say that the former Yugoslav peoples lived a double, parallel trauma: one directed inwards, the other to the outside world; one towards another nation in the former shared country (often several of them!), the other towards . . . Europe.

The beginning of the European *he loves me, he loves me not* episode is marked by the moment when the peoples of former Yugoslavia placed *Europeanization* in the place of honor in their transitional ideological package. (*We're going into Europe!*) At that moment Europe was trembling at the possibility of *balkanization*, and itself clinging ever more tightly to its own *Europeanization*, which is also, they say, called *Brusselsization*.

12. What does the word "Europe" mean for the former Yugo-peoples? At the beginning of the transitional process *Europe* was a metaphor for a direction and aim (transition), for a system of values, for democracy, a better life and an equal place under the protective umbrella of the quality label: *Europe*.

For the Croatian media, political leaders and ordinary people Europe was a territory, from which the Balkans, Serbia, were erased. (The Serbs do not belong in Europe.) That is why the Croatian political scene keeps doggedly sending love signals to its Europe: we are anti-communists, Catholics, we are a democratic country, we are defending Europe from Serbo-Bolshevism, communism, Byzantinism, barbarism, balkanization, we are a civilizational, European, Christian shield which will prevent that terrible *East* from reaching Vienna. (Metaphorically and literally what's more, for the Croatian authorities drove out the majority of their own citizens of Serbian nationality!) At the same time Croatia was building an identity she herself projected, adapting her image to imagined, self-evident European standards. And when Croatia finally became an internationally recognized European state, the euphoria was followed by disappointment. For she had been recognized not because she had in any case always been in Europe, not because that was where she belonged in every sense, not because she was *equal*, but simply because at a given moment she was a victim. Realizing that formal international recognition still does not mean an invitation to dinner (maybe just permission to peer from outside through the window of the illuminated restaurant where the gentlemen are dining), collective feelings altered. Europe turned from a long desired beauty into a faithless *whore*.⁵

Bosnian Muslims, the greatest victims of this war, have similar emotions—a mixture of hope of assistance and deep disillusion. However, the Serbian media and public opinion are also soaked in the same emotions. There too the pendulum of collective emotion towards Europe swings from the idea of Belgrade the *Europolis* to an insurance company which bears the name *Europa* and apparently offers its services with the advertising slogan: *This is the only Europe that thinks of you!*

All this creates a complex traumatic field.⁶ Dreaming their dreams, the newly emerging European statelets are left to wait in the vestibule of Europe. Both of them thinks itself more worthy and that, because it is *more European* than the others, it will be first in line. It is highly debatable when and whether *Europe* will ever allow them in. For the time being they are accorded the attention one accords to the inferior and to children. And the statelets put on a show of infantilism, immaturity, play the role of the victim. At the same

time that is what they really are: infantile, immature, victims. The statelets which have hatched out of the ruins of communism still do not exist on the mental map of Europe. On the other hand Europe (whatever it means) is an inseparable part of their newly acquired identity. The statelets see this relationship solely as a story of unrequited love. If we ask the question why these statelets think they ought to be loved, and, since we are talking of love, who it is they themselves are prepared to love, our questions are unlikely to be answered.

13. Does this Europe (this projection created by the traumatized imagination of the small nations of former Yugoslavia) also have *feelings* or are they reserved only for the wretched?

Europe read about the Balkan situation through its own established, long-standing stereotypes about *that part of the world* (not of Europe, note!). It approved the disintegration of Yugoslavia, for that state was in any case *an artificial creation*, in which the small nations did not have the opportunity to realize their national self-awareness and statehood like other, *normal* European countries. The disintegration of Yugoslavia was equated in European minds with the collapse of communism (*The Soviet Union, for instance, such communist federations are not viable!*) and therefore had a positive connotation. Disintegration went along with democratization. Proudly waving its own unification, Europe supported disintegration in a foreign territory. Emphasizing the principles of multiculturalism in its own territory, it abetted ethnic cleansing elsewhere. Swearing by European norms of honor, it negotiated with democratically elected war criminals. Fiercely defending the rights of minorities, it omitted to notice the disappearance of the most numerous Yugoslav minority, the population of anational, "nationally undetermined" people, or the disappearance of minorities altogether. When the war really flared, it was suddenly horrified at the bloodthirstiness of *tribal* account-settling and withdrew into a corner. And it immediately drew a borderline (*It's incomprehensible! Those must be ancient ethno-customs! These people are not like us!*). To start with many Europeans rushed into the polygon of the war (let us recall, among others, Lord Owen who sliced Bosnia into ethnically pure cantons with a surgeon's satisfaction) and then withdrew. Now they are writing their memoirs.

In that dark corner of Europe, some European liberal thinkers found a provincial, museum Europe which, imagine, still read books and had real paintings on its walls (e.g., Finkielkraut), or a romantic, peasant Europe uncorrupted by the evils of urban civilization, in which one could still eat plums unpolluted by pesticides (e.g., Handke). Their writings may also be read as texts which affirm a new non-transparent racism, concealed by the mask of European concern (*It's true that in the Balkans people slit each other's throats, but they do really love small children!*).

Europe did, of course, also help, it received refugees, offered them generous assistance in the form of food, money, medicine and other things. But it was not all loss, something was also earned: a positive moral and political self-image, a still firmer reason for homogenization along Brussels lines, and who knows what else.

But still, does this West have feelings? Certainly, feelings is just what it has in abundance. European (and American) journalists, intellectuals, artists, analysts, thinkers, experts on countries in transition acquired with the war in Yugoslavia an opportunity once again to show off their colonial love, the love felt for a victim. They did

not enter into a dialogue with the victim (*What dialogue! The victim is by definition dumb!*), they confiscated its tongue (*The victim's role is to suffer, and not itself to articulate its misfortune*), they became its interpreters (*The language of the victim is in any case unusable in the codes of the Western market*), representatives of its misfortune for which they would, of course, take their percentage . . . It is true that in all of this they were disturbed by the insatiable egocentricity of the victim. It did not once occur to the victim that others were impatiently waiting in line: Rwanda, the Chechens . . .

It is precisely feelings and sympathy that the West brings as its gifts. Dozens of West European (and American) writers, artists, film directors, photographers are today camping in the field of the Bosnian misfortune. They listen attentively to what the victims say and make notes so that they can later call the world to account, prick its indifferent heart, ennoble themselves through another's misfortune, give Western emotional standards a little shake. And who dares accuse the sated West of indifference? On the contrary, it is precisely feelings that have invaded the Western market.

14. The iconographic image of Europe crowned, dressed in a robe with the design of a geographical map, on which the sixteenth-century designer did not forget either *Lithvania* (on the contrary, it's larger than *Moscovia*), or *Vangaria*, or *Sclavonia*, nor *Bulgaria*, nor *Polonia*, nor *Macedonia*, has been transformed today into an indifferent blue board with a ring of little yellow stars. The ring of little yellow stars is a modern substitute for the former Imperial crown—a crown deprived of the lovely head of its famous bearer. The new emblem of a United Europe, its modern iconographical representation, suggests only a number (stars—members) unlike the earlier ones which seethed with meaning like tarot cards. Today everyone is free to read his own meaning of Europe into it.

And many do. The great European ideas are today most naturally adopted as parody. Ideas of internationalism are most consistently acted out by representatives of the global mafia as they build the powerful network of their secret routes from China to South America. Newly baked European nationalists are today the fiercest proponents of European ideas of a democratic society. Post-communist profiteers and thieves passionately promote the European idea of work and the proliferation of capital. Post-communist dictators, mafiosi and dogs of war are today the greatest proponents of peace and peaceful coexistence between peoples. United Europe does not seem to recognize or does not wish to recognize the differences. Or it refuses to do so. For it already is Europe, clearly and conclusively defined. However, it is not only ideas which mutate, people also mutate. That fact conceals some hope, if that's what it is. While an increasingly clear division between the *compatible* and the *incompatible*, those *within* and those *outside*, strengthens intolerance on both sides, so the frighteningly numerous migrations caused by the collapse of the communist systems and the war are bringing into being new people, cultural mutants, "wossies."

15. Let us end our disjointed story in the genre which we promised at the beginning. The result of a love affair is usually descendants. So, let us say something about them. The descendants of the love affair from the beginning of our story are today the new inhabitants of Europe. They too are divided: some express loyalty to the nation, others loyalty to money. However, we are interested in the third group: the *stateless*, *nomads*, *bastards*, *wossies* . . . Those who unite in themselves the traumatic *Wessie* and *Ossie* genes. They do not respect their forebears.⁷ They belong to a new tribe of people of *no*

fixed abode. They feel most natural in an airplane. They are hard to recognize because they are good at mimicry. Their skill is the skill of *humiliation*,⁸ their achievement is mental, personal freedom. If nothing else, they have won the freedom not to blame anyone for their own loss. Mutants have sharpened sight and hearing. They are skeptical, deprived of rights, they possess nothing, they are *sub-tenants*.⁹ They are *Trümmerleute*, people who mentally clear up the ruins, because they have emerged from ruins, people who can therefore build a new idea about life, a new morality. In their former lives they had a chance to test available ideas about good: they had a home, and a homeland, and a nation, and a community, and successful careers. Today nothing can be taken from them, because they have nothing. Little can be given to them, because they once had everything. That fact gives them a kind of advantage. They do not consider Europe a privilege. Their privilege is the loss of illusions. Europe is for them just a temporary place of residence, the choice of country is most often random. Let us not forget, they belong to the countless race of *sub-tenants*.

And finally, what gives me the right to judge such things, where is the proof, where are the facts? Let us remember, this is after all only a story. I myself am a *Trümmerfrau*, a *sub-tenant*, a *bastard*, a *nomad*, a *Wossie*. I have no other proof. And perhaps the idea of Europe, the figment of its East as opposed to its West and vice versa, the dilemmas about better and worse worlds, will be solved by those who are yet to come. That is why the end of this story belongs to them.

When the war in former Yugoslavia began, many people thought of going abroad, and discussed where they might go and where it was possible to go, to America, Europe, Australia or New Zealand. Remembering the best of the accessible worlds, which was not (nor could it be) determined by frontiers, or countries, or ideologies, a child suggested: "Mom, let's emigrate to McDonald's . . ."

NOTES

1. "In short, the Western Europeans came to have a strong and growing interest in keeping Europe divided. [. . .] The more secure that division, the easier it was to imagine a closer and more prosperous union of nations on the west of the line—while at the same time holding out the illusory prospect of that union's hypothetical expansion to the east 'one day.'" [Tony Judt, *A Grand Illusion? An Essay on Europe*, New York, 1996]

2. "One is tempted to say that the post-war creation [or, rather, re-creation] of Europe proved to be perhaps the most seminal, and thus far the most lasting consequence of the communist totalitarian episode. After many false starts before, this time the new European self-identity re-emerged, in an almost textbook fashion, as a derivative of the boundary." [Zygmund Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, Oxford, 1995, p. 244]

3. The otherwise self-sufficient, self-satisfied, even selfish "Europe" centered in Brussels became a beacon for the rest of the continent and source of respect and credibility for itself because of the promise that this Europe was not Zollverein, no mere neo-mercantile partnership of the rich and famous, no temporary practical and empirical solution to daily economic dilemmas. This Europe was the Europe of all Europeans—even if there were practical political impediments to their immediate membership of it." [Judt, *A Grand Illusion?* p. 43)

4. "Shiptar," derived from the Albanian word for Albanian, is used as a derogatory term.

5. Let us add that the metaphor of a country or a continent as a *whore*, a *fallen woman*, or else a *sick old woman*, which often circulates in the former Yugoslav media with reference to Europe, is not the exclusive copyright of the wretched Balkan peoples. An American journalist crossing the (former) Yugoslav frontier experienced the local landscape in the following poetic way: "The earth here had the harsh, exhausted face of a prostitute, cursing bitterly between coughs." [Robert Caplan, *The Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, New York, 1994, p. 27]

6. "For Europe is not only a place where we have always been, but also an aim towards which we are moving. Its presence in us is experienced just as powerfully as its absence. It is the territory of the most sublime values of justice, liberty and equality, but at the same time the place where these values are perverted. It is as much the object of our adoration and desire as the object of disillusion and abomination. As its chosen people who save it now from its fiercest enemies, now from itself, we are more European than Europe itself, but also more anti-European. For not only do we sacrifice ourselves for it, we are also its victim. As the altar of our sacrifice, it is the gleaming monument of our glory, but also a festering sewer down which our hopes ebb away like illusions. So how is it possible that all these unbearable contradictions should exist in our Croatian identity in harmonious symbiosis, as in a legal system of madness? So that Europe is nothing other than a figment of our imagination?" [Boris Buden, *Barikade*, Zagreb, 1996, p. 139]

7. "We insist on our dislocation, rootlessness, our illegitimacy. We have not been given an identity [. . .]. Our forebears are not what determines us, we choose our forebears [. . .]. We build our own identity, capturing the past from the conformism of history, building our archaeology of the civil society." [Arkzin, November 11, 1996, p. 2]

8. "It is saddening because if there is anything good about exile, it is that it teaches one humility. One can even take it a step further and suggest that exile is the ultimate lesson in that virtue." [Joseph Brodsky, *On Grief and Reason*, New York, 1996, p. 25]

9. "We are poor relations, and the poor relation sees better than the property owner. France is divided into property owners and sub-tenants. I belong to the race of sub-tenants," said the Polish poet Adam Zagajewski, who now lives in France, in an interview.

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V. Glossary

Homeland:

My homeland was called Yugoslavia. But its borders did not coincide with the borders we learned in school. My homeland was somewhat larger, stretching from Triglav in Slovenia to the Black Sea. Because that's where we went every summer to visit my grandparents.

Among the Slovenes, Croats, Bosnians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Albanians, Macedonians, I felt Yugoslav, and that's how I described myself in my identity documents: a citizen of Yugoslavia, mixed, anational, unspecified, nationally indifferent . . . There were people like that living in Yugoslavia, Yugoslavs, and it didn't bother anyone at the time. Or at least that's how it seemed.

Identity:

A few years ago my homeland was confiscated, and, along with it, my passport. In exchange I was given a new homeland, far smaller and less comfortable. They handed me a passport, a "symbol" of my new identity. Thousands of people paid for those new "identity symbols" with their lives, thousands were driven out of their homes, scattered, humiliated, deprived of their rights, imprisoned and impoverished. I possess very expensive identity documents. The fact often fills me with horror. And shame.

My passport has not made me a Croat. On the contrary, I am far less that today than I was before.

I am no one. And everyone. In Croatia I shall be a Serb, in Serbia a Croat, in Bulgaria a Turk, in Turkey a Greek, in Greece a Macedonian, in Macedonia a Bulgarian . . . Being an ethnic "bastard" or "schizophrenic" is my natural choice, I even consider it a sign of mental and moral health. And I know that I am not alone. Violent, stubborn insistence on national identities has provoked a response: today many young citizens of former Yugoslavia, particularly those scattered throughout the world, stubbornly refuse any ethnic labels.

Patriotism:

In my language there is a word for "love of one's homeland": *domoljublje*. I don't feel that love. All the more since "homeland" is on the whole synonymous with "state." All the more so since people take them, homelands, from me and give them to me if it occurs to them, and still ask me to love them unconditionally. Any forced love, including that of one's homeland, strikes me as perverse.

Nationalism:

Nationalism is the ideology of the stupid. There is no more stupid and tedious ideology than nationalism. Nationalism as a religious and therapeutic refuge is the option of those who have nothing else. Blood is only somewhat thicker water.

Fascism:

Nationalism is often only a nicer name for fascism. The "Yugoslav" war was a fascist struggle for new national and state borders. The winners are power-mongers, mafiosi, criminals, war profiteers, national tycoons, and the losers the now ethnically cleansed peoples.

Communism:

The most stigmatized set of ideas and ideological practice, which serves today as an enormous bank for laundering a bad conscience, both personal and collective. The phrase "it's all the fault of communism" relieves millions of people who lived in it and participated in it of all responsibility. Combined with nationalism, it becomes even more effective. I hate all Russians, said a Romanian. Why? Because they were all communists.

The therapeutic function of communism lies above all in its officially declared death: life can really now start again from scratch. Dead communism is an effective therapy; it offers people an irresistibly agreeable sense that they were both victims and the righteous who helped to shift the heavy iron curtain a millimeter or two. The process of passing from a worse to a better life resembles an improvised waiting room and has a pleasant name: transition. Transition is for many an exceptionally exciting time of (criminal) freedom.

National history:

History really is written by the victors. As the victors are always men, there are no women, children, or losers in history. The men swiftly occupy the academies, publishing houses, universities, ministries of culture and education, and similar useful institutions which will transform their victory into one, coherent, national history. National history is the hyper-revised biography of the nation. The authors of the new histories relate to history as to gossip, that is, they know that it takes far longer to deny or refashion gossip than it does to create it. And they know that few people are interested in later revisions. So gossip, myths, and confabulations often become great national truths.

Language:

The language I write was called until recently Serbo-Croat (or Serbian and Croatian), and it was the language spoken by Croats, Serbs, Bosnians, and Montenegrins. Today people are trying to force me to recognize Croatian as my mother tongue, and Serbian and Bosnian as—foreign languages!

I like the irony of the recently coined abbreviation for the divided language: BSC. That is the term used by officials of the Hague Tribunal in their internal communications for the language spoken by the recently arrived war criminals. BSC: Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian.

Language is an instrument of communication. I do not "buy" the thesis about language as the "national essence." All the more so since several hundred thousand people sacrificed their lives for such an "essence." When they need them, the national language and national literature are abundantly manipulated by the state-makers. I refuse to serve affairs of state.

A nation's writer:

My Croatian passport does not make me a Croatian writer. It is easiest and most profitable to be a national writer, particularly if the nation is small. I have chosen a less profitable way: I do not wish to belong to anyone, not to a people, nor a nation, nor a national literature. If I have to belong to someone, then it's to my readers. Wherever they may be . . .

A writer's nation:

I refuse to be a writer of "my nation," especially of a nation which destroys books. Over the last few years, tons of books, dozens of libraries, many schools have been destroyed. Dozens of writers have been thrown out of the school curriculum and literary life. The literary map has changed just as the map of the former country has: writers are now divided according to ethnically cleansed cantons.

Izabel Skokandic, the unqualified director of a small library on the island of Korcula, recently threw dozens of books into garbage dumps. There is not much to choose between the director of the library and the better-known poet-general Karadzic-Mladic (who destroyed the national library in Sarajevo).

At the beginning of 1998, Izabel Skokandic executed several members of "my family": Oscar Wilde, Ivo Andric, Branko Copic, Mark Twain, Jack London, Victor Hugo, Ivana Brlic-Mazuranic . . .

Exile:

The experience of exile, just like the experience of my homeland, is one of my earliest experiences. As a child, obsessed with a secret passion, I used to get up in the night and in the dark turn the buttons on our first "Nikola Tesla" radio. Those solitary nocturnal navigations through the sounds of different languages are among the most exciting experiences of my life.

Today, living in exile, I do not "buy" the thesis that every exile is traumatic. On the contrary, I consider my decision to possess only a suitcase one of the better ones of my life. Repressive homelands are far more traumatic.

Besides, I remember the film *The Wizard of Oz*. Interpreting that film as a story about home and flight (ie., about exile), Salman Rushdie says: "So, Oz finally *became* home; the imagined world became the actual world, as it does for us all, because the truth is that once we have left our childhood places and started to make up our lives, armed only with what we have and are, we understand that the real secret of the ruby slippers is not that "there's no place like home," but rather that there is no longer such a place as home: except, of course, for the home we make, or the homes that are made for us, in Oz: which is anywhere, and everywhere, except the place from which we began."¹

Witches:

A milieu which destroys books has no mercy towards their authors either. Several years ago, my (national) culture milieu declared me a "witch" and burned me on a media pyre with undisguised glee.

At the same time, the university professor of literature with whom I had worked for some twenty years on the culture of "challenging" (the professor's term), suddenly rejected "challenging" as a method of intellectual and artistic thought. He opted for the culture of the no-conflict collective. Instead of writing about the smell of the recent conflagration, he wrote flattering articles about the "dignity of Croatian literature." As a "witch," I was thrown out of local literary life.

Today, from the perspective of my nomadic exile, I can only be grateful to my former cultural milieu. I invested my own money in the purchase of my broom. I fly alone.

1. Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz*, London, British Film Institute, 1992, p. 57.

Dubravka Ugresic is the author of many books, including five translated into English. Her book of essays, *Culture of Lies*, from which this essay and the previous are reprinted, won the Charles Veillon Prize in 1996. Since 1993, she has lived in self-exile and currently resides in Amsterdam.

VI. Censorship in Yugoslavia, A Personal Story

by Svetlana Slapsak

To understand the way gender and censorship intersect in today's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), made up of Serbia and Montenegro, one must grasp the depth of the patriarchal backlash produced by the rise of nationalist militarism, with its ideas of collective unanimity and the "duties" of women. And to do that, one must begin by looking at censorship in the former (socialist) Yugoslavia.

Although there was no official censorship in the former Yugoslavia, there was considerable repression involved in that peculiarly Yugoslav mix of patriarchal patterns, consumerism, and ideological restraints. A legal formula known as "verbal delinquency," related partly to the slander of ethnic minorities, was applied regularly against those who criticized the regime. The criteria for such lawsuits were arbitrary, and, in fact, we never knew when, whom, or why the regime would hit. While women were seldom the objects of such lawsuits, this may have been because they formed such a small percentage of authors, journalists, and public figures.

The difference in the status between men and women can easily be seen if one looks at the professional organizations of writers and translators which served as a location of ideological transfer and as a place of negotiating *nomenklatura* privileges among the intelligentsia. Even today, in all the states formed out of the former Yugoslavia, associations of authors are predominantly male, and associations of translators are predominantly female. Similarly, in academia, women would disappear when they came up for tenure; they still do. Only in political life has there been a radical change, for the former socialist quotas and women's associations have been abandoned in the name of "democracy"—a form of democracy characterized by the presumption of male supremacy and the absence of women in public space.

Looking back to the eighties, the most relaxed period of Yugoslav socialism, women writers were affected much more by patriarchy than by ideological constraints. On the one hand there was Dubravka Ugresic, who, despite her high level of irony on the subject of Yugoslav masculine folklore, was one of the most honored Yugoslav writers in the late seventies and eighties. On the other hand, critics passed patriarchal judgments of women's writing so harsh that they seemed intended to silence women authors. Igor Mandic, a Croat critic, was particularly poisonous in criticizing "kitchen" literature, such as the work of Dasa Drndic, a popular Belgrade writer, and the feminist writer, Slavenka Drakulic.

In *Fording the Stream of Consciousness*, her last novel published before the breakup of Yugoslavia, Ugresic included a satirical scene in which a critic was sexually humiliated by two imaginary foreign feminist writers: the critic was immediately recognized as Mandic, who elegantly accepted the joke. But the twisted turns of fate in Yugoslavia have brought a paradoxical twist to this story: Mandic did not become a Croat nationalist and, to show his willingness to re-establish communication, he came to Belgrade as early as 1994, where he was greeted by a young, male Serbian critic, Mihajlo Pantic, who had been an admirer of Ugresic's work but now took a different view of women's writing, praising Pantic for his earlier "knockouts."

The point is that the patriarchal censorship of women, and nervous reactions to women's voice, grew as nationalism did. Once right-wing, sexist, and racist ideas were established as a legitimate part of "democracy," this attitude became uncontrolled, random, and rabid, and it only became worse with the state of war and the very real endangering of men at war. The clearest example of this mentality is certainly the case of the five Croatian women writers and journalists (Slavenka Drakulic, Rada Ivekovic, Jelena Louric, Vesna Kesic, and Dubravka Ugresic) who were publicly accused of being "witches" and of "raping" Croatia. Three of the five had to leave Croatia, and now live abroad. Their main "crime" was that they were less patriotic than expected, and resisted the nationalistic manipulation of the rape issue, insisting that women who were raped be seen first as women, not primarily as Muslim, Croatian, or Serb.

In the new nationalistic cultures that flowered in the former Yugoslavia, only "patriotic" women writers were acceptable, and the highest status even they could reach was that of fellow traveler. This status was usually given to only one or two, while other women writers remained under suspicion, silenced by those at the center of cultural power, or even attacked in public. But, while the public space available to women's voice constricted during and after the war, writing became even more important to women in these troubled times.

In 1994 (thanks to the initiative of Sonja Licht, Director of the Yugoslav Open Society Institute, and Veran Matic, Director of Radio B 92), I became the editor-in-chief of a new quarterly of women's and feminist culture, called *ProFemina*. I soon found that women were eager to expand their creativity and even to enter domains like criticism, previously reserved for men. *ProFemina* became the only space for publishing open to anti-nationalist women and men in Belgrade. In a recent article, Mihajlo Pantic, mentioned above, tried to define this outburst of women's literary creativity (without mentioning *ProFemina*, of course) and concluded that women are master storytellers. He did not say that they are also masters of criticism, literary history, theory, and the essay, and, at the end of his praise of women narrators, gave himself credit for "not mentioning feminism even once"!

Biljana Jovanovic, the unique rebel writer of the seventies and eighties, the author of several successful novels, is an example of the way the public space for mentioning feminism has closed up. A confirmed pacifist and anti-nationalist, she organized a number of actions during the war in Yugoslavia, like the "flying classroom workshop," a series of meetings of intellectuals and artists from different parts of Yugoslavia, each held in a different city. Jovanovic died from a brain tumor in Ljubljana (Slovenia), in 1996, at the age of forty-three. We wanted to publish a collection of essays remembering and celebrating her literary work in *ProFemina*, and sent an invitation to every literary periodical, publishing house, and university department in the FRY and to many critics

personally. But not one of the male critics responded; only women would write about her. She was too provocative and potentially too damaging politically, even dead. We have created a *ProFemina* literary award bearing her name.

The first winner of this award, in 1997, was a young writer, Marija Ivanic, for her *Essay on Heroes*. Her next book, *Melita, Memoirs of a Porno-Star*, was scheduled for a public presentation at the Belgrade Cultural Center, but this event was abruptly cancelled when someone decided the book was pornographic. This, in the country that was once celebrated throughout the region for its sexual freedom. Although she was defended in the independent media, no one dared to review the book except myself, and the suppression had unpleasant repercussions in her private life.

Many other women writers found they could no longer publish, or that they were in danger because of their ethnic origin, "mixed marriage," or other effects of the war. Hana Dalipi, a very talented novelist who wrote ironically about her mixed Serb and Albanian origins, had to leave Belgrade; she now lives in Paris and no longer writes.

But, if women's share of public space constricted, they did not give it up easily. Many women have felt compelled to publish memoirs of war and suffering, collections of documents, or accounts of women's actions, and they have continued to resist as members of women's groups and in the pacifist resistance in all parts of the former Yugoslavia. The most famous example is the organization Women in Black, whose Belgrade members held weekly demonstrations throughout the wars in Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo, until the NATO bombing put a stop to that. Taking over an important public space to protest against the war and the regime, at a time when men did not dare go into the streets for fear of being drafted, Women in Black was responding not only to the war, but to women's real loss of political power and increased subjection to male authority; their actions strengthened the political consciousness of other women and gave them a sense of empowerment.

My own story is one example of the ways communist, nationalist, and anti-feminist censorship have intersected over the years. My intellectual and political vintage year is 1968, when I was involved in the students' uprising in Belgrade. This began my political dissidence, which led me and two friends, in 1970, to publish *Frontistereion*, a magazine that satirized the regime through ancient metaphors and puns. Only one of us was prosecuted, but I was badly beaten by the secret police and could not get a passport for five years. Although I got an award for being the best student in my graduating class, my history made it difficult to pursue a normal academic career in Ancient Studies. I taught high school Latin for a time, then, in 1972, got a post at the Institute for Literature and Art, in Belgrade, where several other '68 figures were already employed.

When Tito died, in 1980, there was a sudden blooming of ideas, publications, and historic revelations, accompanied by lively public discourse and much political growth. In this general flowering, I began to publish non-academic work like political commentaries, essays, and a novel. The dissident groups, mostly in Belgrade, Ljubljana, and Zagreb, formulated freedom of expression as the main question on the political agenda. But, as things eased up and dissidence became fashionable, the generation of '68 was joined by enthusiastic newcomers from literature, the arts, and academia. Many of these other dissidents were somewhat nationalistic and also were members of the Communist Party or close to power; they considered people like me "crazy leftists." And their nationalist narrative about collective and historical rights had much more power and seductive force

than did our "weak" arguments about freedom of expression, human rights, and democratization.

In 1986, I became president of the Committee for the Protection of Freedom of Expression of the Writers' Association of Serbia. In this capacity, I initiated petitions in favor of more than fifty political prisoners or prisoners of conscience, including Jehovah's Witnesses refusing military service in Slovenia; a famous Slovenian poet accused of "fascism" in his poems; the future presidents of Bosnia and Croatia, Alija Izetbegovic and Franjo Tudjman (both accused of publishing "questionable" books); the future Minister of Defense of Slovenia, Janez Jansa; and the future Serbian politician and suspected war criminal, Vojislav Seselj. All these people were considered dissidents at the time, and suffered police abuses and were imprisoned or persecuted, under official charges or media attacks.

In 1987, I initiated a petition on behalf of Adem Demaci, an Albanian who had been held in prison for twenty-nine years. When this petition became public, I was attacked on TV and in the state-controlled press. Soon my column in the periodical *Knjizevna rec* was banned, after an intervention by the wife of Slobodan Milosevic; she was then the main communist censor at the university. In January 1988, I was arrested by the Federal Secret Police; my passport was confiscated, along with money from a state grant I had just received for a stay in France; and I was told that an accusation was being prepared against me as a pro-Albanian spy and terrorist. I was released after twenty hours; a month later, I was formally accused of embezzling the grant for France that had been seized with my passport.

A show trial ensued, in which my lawyer, a former dissident friend, left my case one day before the trial started, explaining that I showed too much disrespect for leading Serbian cultural figures. (I had written a negative review of a book by the sister of the President of the FRY.) The President of Serbian PEN, Predrag Palavestra, told my husband before the trial started that he did not feel like getting involved. The leading nationalist writer Dobrica Cosic said I was trying to help the Albanians, and therefore did not deserve to be backed up. Most Belgrade writers and intellectuals had either become nationalists by then or were silent. In 1989, after the Milosevic regime imposed an embargo on the Republic of Slovenia, the Writers' Association of Serbia Assembly decided to proclaim a "cultural" embargo; I was the only one of more than four hundred writers present publicly to oppose this decision.

After I lost my job at the Institute, I had no possibility of getting work in Belgrade and my life became difficult; I did not agree with most of my former friends and colleagues and was publicly stigmatized as a "traitor." When the war began, I decided to move to Ljubljana, where my husband teaches at the university. Before the war, I had cooperated extensively with dissident circles in Slovenia, and I publicly defended Slovenian dissidents in Belgrade. But when I came to Slovenia, in 1991, I was suddenly "a Serb" and nothing else. I continued to speak up about issues of nationalism and freedom of expression, in both Slovenia and Belgrade, and suffered the consequences. At the annual congress of Slovenian PEN in Bled, 1993 (to which I was invited, not by my colleagues, but by Adam Michnik, a guest speaker), two leading Slovenian writers explained to me that I was a dirty foreigner who should have left already and that I did not have the right to write and publish on democracy in Slovenia, because I was a Serb. The elite literary quarterly *Nova revija* published an attack against me in which the author concluded that I was a Balkan woman and, therefore, did not know how to

behave in somebody else's house (meaning state), and that I was a Homo erectus but not a Homo sapiens! Despite the fact that I was married to a Slovenian, I was turned down for Slovenian citizenship twice; I finally received it in 1993, after diplomatic pressure from France and the USA. For similar reasons, I was unable to get a position at the university. I now teach at the Institutum Studiorum Humanitis, the first private postgraduate school in humanities in Ljubljana, where I coordinate two programs, Anthropology of the Ancient Worlds and Anthropology of Gender.

I traveled frequently to Belgrade to edit *ProFemina*. In 1995, the Serbian Writers' Association issued a document in which I was officially proclaimed a traitor to Serbia, with the explanation that I wrote a negative review of the work of Dobrica Cosic, who had served briefly as the President of the FRY. Over the next few years, I engaged in several debates in the Belgrade independent press, arguing against such prevalent ideas as: women should keep silent and wait for political change; feminists are the same as communists; and the opposition should not include women's issues among its political goals at this important moment.

At the same time, the state media constantly attacked *ProFemina* and me as "paid for by the West," which is true, because no local funding is available. Several days after the NATO bombing of the FRY started, the police seized the premises of Radio Belgrade 92, where *ProFemina* had its office, along with everything that belonged to our editorial board and the remaining issues of the magazine. On the day the NATO bombing stopped, Bogdan Tirnanic, a popular Belgrade columnist who gives his work to all the media, whether fascist, state, or independent, published a commentary entitled "Women's Writing" in the main state-controlled daily, *Politika*. It began, "NATO generals are Mother Theresa compared to feminists," and went on to say that, while international feminism is against the Serbs, Serbian feminists are the worst enemy ever and *ProFemina* is one of the enemy outposts.

It is true that we are an outpost of struggle against rabid nationalism and war, and that we continue to try to keep in touch with other feminists in all parts of the former Yugoslavia, including Kosovo. My closest friend, Nastasa Kandic, Director of the Foundation for Human Rights, traveled to Pristina regularly throughout the war to document war crimes committed by Serbs. I believe that her spirit of humanism and independent inquiry is strongly rooted in the Balkans, where women, secluded and excluded by patriarchal official cultures, became by necessity multicultural and communicative. Our history contains other such examples.

During World War II, the communist partisans invested heavily in organizing women, whom they needed to secure the logistics for guerilla warfare, including food and nursing care for the wounded. In 1944, they formed an organization called AFZ, the Anti-fascist Front of Women, which included a few educated women communists but mostly consisted of uneducated rural women. These women were mobilized for many different tasks after the war: clearing ruins, educating other women, popularizing basic ideological concepts, witnessing for the "people" at trials of quislings; they were the symbolic representation of a new order in which women's bodies gained respect and dignity. The AFZ had several million members when the Communist Party had only a few hundred thousand.

After the break with Stalin, this huge political body was suddenly dissolved by the party, who felt it was a potential danger; and the curious mixture of patriarchal and consumerist attitudes towards women that characterized my childhood slowly took over. In the seventies, when we held our first feminist meetings, some old women who had been AFZ activists appeared, tears in their eyes. We watched one another with some suspicion at first; after all, we had heard the AFZ caricatured all our lives, while they could not see the need for "Western feminism" in a land where women's rights had been fully realized. But at the risk of appearing naive, I think that the history of Balkan women shows that the combination of patriarchy and ideological pressure has produced a specific, subversive women's culture. The moral authority represented by both the AFZ and the women's peace movement has shown women's capacity to express themselves. We can surely come up with better solutions than those responsible for the political panorama we have been witnessing since 1991, which ended the century in a global nightmare.

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VII. The Situation of Women Writers in Albania

by Diana Çuli

The situation of women writers in Albania is closely related to the situation of Albanian women and Albanian society in general. This society has been very conservative and oppressive towards women throughout its history, which is filled with periods of Turkish occupation and characterized by a mixture of Oriental, Balkan, and Mediterranean cultures. These traditional cultures and their prejudices, stronger than in other Balkan countries, totally excluded women from all sorts of social or political life. Until the Second World War, there were only two or three women writers in our entire literary history, and they lived, not in Albania, but in other countries.

During the period of the communist dictatorship, because of the ideological program for the emancipation of women, the number of women artists grew, with the exception of women writers. Their number always remained very small, even while the number of visible women painters, dancers, TV spokespeople, journalists, historians, and scientists grew. It was extremely difficult for women writers to find a public voice because they not only had to face the stringent social controls of Albanian traditional society, but also the ideological control and the terrible censorship of the Communist Party. Many books written by women were prohibited while others were denounced. Women writers also had to deal with the well-known discriminatory attitudes of male writers, who were not pleased to share their proprietary field of literature with these new rivals. Male writers were at the top of every literary association, jury, and magazine, and they had an organized "strategy of silence" towards books written by women. It was very unusual for a jury to give a woman a literary prize, or for a literary magazine to write a critical article on a book written by a woman.

And then there was government censorship, which obliged writers to base their work on the principles of the so-called Socialist Realist method, which meant essentially that they had to write enthusiastically about life in socialist Albania, and not be influenced by any Western literary schools or currents. The few women who managed to write during the communist period in Albania tried to get around these strictures through a careful manner of describing everyday life, love, family questions, and historical events in other centuries. Even so, this way of writing was often criticized for "not describing the happy life of the socialist system," even if the story was only a bit sad, or did not have a happy ending. For this reason, the censors blocked two of my novels from publication by the only publishing house existing at the time; the same thing happened with one of the movies based on the subject of one of my novels.

The situation was somewhat alleviated, in the nineties, when Albania changed its political system, hoping to become part of the family of democratic countries. Women writers participated in the process of democratization with great hopes for freedom, in both society and literature. But it has not been easy. Centuries of totalitarian regimes in Albania have created a strong cultural tendency towards social control and censorship. The so-called transition period is a very complicated one, accompanied by chaos, the loss of humane values, crime, corruption, and a lack of the rule of law. Women are still an insignificant minority within our political class. The most tragic phenomenon is the chaotic state of the arts and literature in Albania: neither cinemas nor theaters function because the government no longer provides funds to the Ministry of Culture to support artistic activities. Since there are no strong publishing houses, writers themselves must finance the publication of their books, which is difficult or impossible. Artists and writers have become the most marginalized sector of the population, and a large number of artists, both women and men, are leaving Albania for other countries where they can live normally. The writers are not leaving because, for a writer, it is not so easy to begin to write in another language, to connect with important publishing houses in another country, and to publish in a situation where he or she is seen as a refugee.

The struggle between political parties, which in Albania takes the dramatic form of actual armed struggle, also has a direct impact on the life and activity of women writers, especially those involved in social and political life, as I am. The mass media is very hard on women who are politicians, decision-makers, or leaders of women's organizations. The political parties want to control all of civil society, so if you are a writer or someone in the public eye, and you are not a member of a political party, you come under constant attack. The objective is to put fear into others, so they will become the servants of one or another political party and not remain free and independent. This is true of both men and women, but, if you are a woman, the attack is much harsher. Women who are involved in social and political life in Albania—especially those of us in the women's movement, who are especially sensitive to the dangers of legislation that would deprive women of even the smallest legal freedom—are continuously accused of being thieves, child abusers, or criminals. Because Albania is such a small country, in which everyone seems to know one another and family ties are central, any woman who is publicly attacked gets pressured by her family and friends to withdraw from public life. So, while official censorship no longer exists, both male and female writers, but especially women, live a very stressful life if they desire to construct a real democratic Albania and a real civil society.

Other forms of censorship of and violence towards women writers involved in public life are mostly related to Albanian cultural traditions. A woman who writes about sex or similar issues simply cannot exist in our society; she would be seen, not as a real writer, but as some kind of prostitute. Because of these pressures, many women prefer to stop writing after a while. We do have a number of successful women journalists, but we lack women's magazines, so, in order to be accepted by the media, female journalists must write about the same subjects as men, and in the same way. The media does not recognize women's problems and is not an ally of any women trying to change society. The main images of women presented in magazines are as either homemakers or top models.

We hoped that after communism, we would have more women in the sphere of literature, but our hopes have not been realized. Our women are frustrated by the hard conditions of their lives and by the myriad social and political controls over their personal lives and work. With all these pressures, Albanian women writers do not feel free, but threatened. Those who continue to write need great courage, and they pay a very high price.

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VIII. Gender and Censorship in Kosovo

by Sazana Caprici

[Note: This essay was written early in 1999, before the war in Kosovo, the flight of the refugees, and the imprisonment of the Albanian writer Flora Brovina on charges of treason.]

If the main goal of censorship is to control, or at least to hinder, freedom of thought and expression, then it has certainly been successful in deterring the freedom of thought and expression of the Albanian women writers in Kosovo. The damage has not been accomplished through formal censorship such as the prohibition, condemnation, or imprisonment of particular women writers. Such formal censorship may exist but it is not very common. Rather, it has been accomplished through the means of general propaganda, which turns out to be even more efficient.

Through wide and very aggressive propaganda, the Yugoslav state authorities have done their best to deny not only the existence of Albanian women writers, but the very possibility of the existence of such a category of Albanian women. The state explains this as a result of Albanian male chauvinism and fanaticism, which do not recognize any kind of women's rights. Thus, to the Yugoslav state, the disregard and denial of Albanian women's writing is due, not to the perceived danger of the writing itself, but with the aim of disparaging the enemy, the Albanian people. Albanian women are not considered dangerous to the state authorities as writers, but solely as women "with enormous capacity for reproduction." This propaganda, directed towards the Serbian people, is intended to justify the violence in Kosovo and, at the same time, to appeal to Serbian

women to give birth to more children as a counterbalance to these "machines of national reproduction."

Inevitably, the effect of such attitudes is very negative. Among Serbs it has created a stereotype of the Albanian woman as an uneducated person utterly subject to her husband's authority. Scarcely an Albanian woman writer is known to the Serb public as a result. Albanian men, on the other hand, have made use of this propaganda to reinforce their control over Albanian women. Every time women have tried to speak up against their inferior position, they have been accused of working in the service of the state, which in Kosovo is considered a foreign occupier. Even in the best case, the blame for the inferior position of women has been put on the state.

One woman writer was put in prison for her revolutionary activities in 1980. She was still being persecuted in 1999, a long time after her release. She found it impossible to obtain travel documents, was threatened from time to time by state inspectors, and was put under great pressure to become a spy.

All this time, her male friends glorified her as the ideal of Albanian woman. But, the moment she decided to express her revolt in female terms, and wrote as a woman about the way she was treated by both Serbs and Albanians (because she was sick and tired of it all, especially the way her own side acted), she lost her saint's halo.

She found herself transformed into the worst possible sinner, a woman who had to be punished and denounced. All because she dared to write a poem using words that "afflict national morale." "Filthy words" that men can use but women cannot—particularly revolutionary women.

Their sex is another reason that Albanian women writers are subject to censorship. Women may appear to be encouraged to write, but only if they write in a certain manner. It is worth mentioning a very rare phenomenon, possibly unique to Kosovo: men writing under women's names. This happens for several reasons. If a writer fears political accusation, he can hide behind a woman's name to avoid persecution. Or, if an author does not feel himself skilled enough to compete with other authors of his sex, he may believe it will be easier for him to make his way under a woman's name. This is because, under the socialist system, many books were published with no criteria, as long as the author was a woman. For this reason, women's books are still considered of secondary value and therefore irrelevant. Even works of real value by women have remained in the shadow.

The whole system operates to keep women in their place. They can write if they chose to, but must be aware of their limits. Women's names are also misused in pornographic magazine—that is, allegedly true stories are published under women's names—to satisfy the perverse tastes of the male reader and, thereby, to increase sales. Such writings are also used to frighten and discourage women engaged in other kinds of writing, not necessarily pornographic.

These two causes of censorship—one's ethnic group and one's sex—have produced a mutual third form—self-censorship, the most pervasive and efficient way of exerting control. The victims are Albanian women writers, of course, but not only them, for all the women of Kosovo suffer.

Years ago, George Orwell wrote that self-censorship kills the writer's imagination and dilutes intellectual courage. An example proves that it is just as true today. An invitation to a public round table to discuss the topic "Women and Politics" was received negatively. The women of Kosovo said, this is not the time to discuss such topics; it is too much of a luxury under the present circumstances. Nobody wanted to take part.

The other proposed topic, "Women against Violence," was perhaps closer to the spirit of the times, but even this subject required very careful deliberation. Consider the response of a woman journalist who reports from the war zones every day and who is a writer as well. "It is one thing to report in an objective manner," she said, "and quite another thing to speak your own mind. Although I must admit that there are quite a few things one could say on the topic." No comment.

Self-censorship is the most painful form of censorship. It is done without fuss, very quietly, so there are no witnesses. And how is one to fight something that is non-existent? Finally, it often happens that the person exercising self-censorship is not even aware of the fact. She may understand her silence as a temporary self-restriction, instigated not by outside forces but coming from some inner need.

Isolation appears to be a very strong means of control as well. Today not many women writers from the rest of the world are well known in Kosovo. One way or another, they are being ignored: They are not translated or written about, and rarely spoken about. Women's writing from the rest of the world provides examples for national moralists on how women should or should not write. And, with only a few exceptions, the public learns about these women only from the words of such moralists.

Indeed, there might seem to be little room left for women writers in Kosovo to express themselves. Nevertheless, they do continue to write and to try to find ways and means to publish their work. The fact that Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* has been translated and published in Kosovo now—seventy years after it was written—on the initiative of a group of women is proof of women's endeavor to overstep the limits imposed on them. Somehow they will find a way to break down their isolation.

[Note: Since the author's return to Kosovo, she has resumed editorial direction of the women's literary periodical *Sfinga*, which has succeeded in bringing out ten books, including a pioneering anthology of Albanian women's literature.]

Sazana Caprici is the founding Editor of *Sfinga*, an Albanian-language women's literary journal in Kosovo, and of a pioneering anthology of Kosovar Albanian women's literature. She is the Albanian translator of Virginia Woolf.

Between Politics and Culture: The History and Activity of the Women's Documentation Center in Bologna
by Annamaria Tagliavini

Considering that without documents women have no history, and without history women will be accorded little respect in the present or in the

future, therefore collections of archives, family papers, oral histories, and artifacts should be preserved to document and to honor the contributions of women, and information about women should include statistics, directories of women's organizations, and bibliographies of research on women.

The above is a quotation from the final statement issued at the end of an important world conference "Women, Information and the Future" that was held in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1994. The next quotation is from the draft resolution of the "Know How Conference on the World of Women's Information" that was held in Amsterdam, in August 1998:

We, the three hundred women from eighty-three countries and seven continents gathered together, represent the global community of information specialists, librarians, archivists, academics, politicians and activists in the field of women's information. The mission of the Know How Conference is to improve the visibility and accessibility of women's information on the global and local level. This includes information for and by immigrant women, migrant workers, refugees and lesbians. . . . Women of all nations should work together to share information and support each other's work to document the world of women.

Boston and Amsterdam were two crucial milestones in the construction of a global network of women's documentation centers, archives, and libraries—soon to become an international non-governmental organization supporting women's culture all over the world. There are now over two thousand documentation centers, in areas ranging from the Fiji Islands to Surinam, from Botswana to Kazakhstan. Taken together, they have collected an enormous amount of published and unpublished material which represents an extraordinary cultural heritage, collected from struggles against every kind of discrimination in the last century.

The oldest women's library is the Francesca Bonnemaison, founded in Barcelona, in 1909. Then the Fawcett appeared, in London, in 1926; the Marguerite Durand, in Paris, in 1931; and the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger, in Boston, in 1945. My own library, the Women's Documentation Center Library in Bologna, was born later, during the so-called second wave of feminism in the seventies, and it became an active partner in this global network from its first steps. Its umbrella organization, the Orlando Association, was named after the protagonist of the eponymous Virginia Woolf novel. It is an interesting example of how an independent women's institution, functioning at the national level, can develop a policy of international exchange and support for women's organizations in developing countries and in conflict areas like Algeria, Albania and Kosovo in the former Yugoslavia, and Palestine.

To begin at the beginning: In 1979, a group of feminists active in the women's movement founded the Orlando Association, which decided to develop a Women's Documentation Center and Library in Bologna as one of its first projects. All of Orlando's programs are designed to combine research with political activities in the context of an organization run by women for women. Its mission is to build a public women's institution that can:

- Assure the memory and duration of women's symbolic cultural productions and research.
- Collect, preserve, and share documents and resources dedicated to women's information and cultural production.
- Establish political and cultural networks—face-to-face, long distance, and virtual—among women at the local, national, and global levels.
- Rethink the relationship between personal life and political activity.

The largest part of Orlando's funding comes from contracts with the Bologna city government, but our administration has remained entirely independent of all political parties and institutions. We also get additional funding for specific projects from the regional government, the European Union, and the University of Bologna.

Orlando's activities are organized into four programs. I am responsible for the Italian National Women's Library (the largest one of its kind existing in our country), which contains more than 25,000 books and 350 periodicals, all written by women from different cultures and in different languages. It includes special collections like the Sofia Collection, which consists of more than 3,000 multicultural books for little girls (many of them in Chinese, Arabic, etc.); and the historical collection, which reconstructs the historical and cultural heritage of Italian women from past centuries in many fields including literature, poetry, art, music, and theater. We collect more or less 150 doctoral theses finished every year.

To document, increase, and spread women's writing and women's cultural productions in general must be considered crucial goals. In Western Europe, censorship of women may particularly mean marginalization of and discrimination against "new" women citizens, such as immigrants and refugees. We are faced with a curious paradox: according to recent Italian studies, many women are now at the top levels of management at publishing companies. Women are also great consumers of books, and make up a considerable percentage of the Italian community of writers. But even under such favorable conditions, it seems difficult to safeguard a gendered point of view. Yet such material is crucial if we are to develop new social models and guarantee equal access to cultural opportunities for women from all social classes.

A second program at Orlando is the Server Donne, the only women's Internet server in Italy, which produces and distributes a lot of information and gives free Internet access to an increasing number of organizations and individual women. Our server and our [website](#) are crucial tools, keeping us in touch with women's organizations all over the world and helping us to make the transition from being simply consumers of the net to becoming producers of information for women about women. We also have the Internet Tearoom, a women's public space created for free navigation and training in the use of new technologies. It is especially dedicated to the new generations of young women who would like very much to become cyberfeminists.

A third program, the Hannah Arendt School of Politics, is a project funded by the European Union, with the task of bridging the gap now existing between women and politics through specific training, and to introduce a gendered perspective and feminist interpretation into the "neutral" male game of politics.

The entire structure of the Orlando Association works to disseminate women's cultures and political thoughts and to establish connections among different and sometimes fragmented women's realities. This involves paying attention to the documentation of both our present situation and past traditions, as well as to the promotion of different means of expression: art, music, writing, cinema, theater, the visual arts. Orlando offers meeting rooms to women's groups as well as consulting services and training. It nurtures and fosters feminist and women's organizations of psychologists, writers, scientists, and historians at both the local and the global level. It also offers internationally recognized support to women's groups living under oppressive regimes through a fourth program, Women in Difficult Places.

From the beginning, we have wanted to pay attention to the realities of women living in difficult situations. In 1988, we began a major program to foster the growth and development of women's documentation centers in conflict areas, devoted to feminist politics of peace and conflict resolution. We began in the Palestine/Israeli area, where we supported the growth of the Nablus Women's Center coordinated by the famous Palestinian writer Sahar Khalifa. To strengthen our relationship with the newborn center, we organized an intense exchange of experiences involving visiting and hosting women, and assisted in training, program development, and fund-raising. And at the same time we also developed our relationship with Women in Black, in Jerusalem. We supported meetings between the two organizations to discuss different ideas and practices of peace and women's role in the peace process. Years later, in 1994, we helped set up a Women's Library in the University of Birzeit under a "Med Campus project" grant from the EU. In that case, we organized a training course for librarians with special competence in gender issues. Our ability to act on both a political and at a "technical" level gives us flexibility in program development and fund-raising.

In the nineties, our areas of activity expanded to the former Yugoslavia, where together with another Italian organization named Public Space of Women, we developed a new project "Women's Bridges across Boundaries," collaborating with three local women's centers that have different tasks and goals: Isidora is a women's cultural institution, in Pancev; Amica is a consulting center, in Tuzla, for women who suffered sexual assault during the war; and Mikia, in Prishtina, is a counseling center that supports women and children with problems arising from violence, whether inside or outside the family.

More recently, our Association has become the coordinator of a general "Women's Program for Albania" under a grant from the Minister of Social Affairs of the Italian government. We are working with two documentation centers in Tirana: the Reflektione Center and the Independent Forum of Albanian Women, which is coordinated by Diana Çuli. We are also projecting a center on reproductive health, sexuality, and prostitution in Valona, in partnership with various non-governmental organizations.

Our training programs use a standard curriculum and are in two residential stages: one in Italy and the other in the country of the women with whom we are working. In order to welcome women from our partner organizations, as well as refugee women, we recently rented a small apartment to use as a guesthouse for both long and short stays.

But developing new women's centers means more than training. Other important activities are necessary: fund-raising, cooperation in modeling institutions, discussion of

experiences, and cultural production. We strongly believe, in fact, that women's kinship comprehends all aspects of life and well-being.

Algeria has been another focus of our program Women in Difficult Places. Years ago, we were among the first in Italy to invite key figures like Assia Djebar or Khalida Messaudi, giving them the opportunity to present their writings and their struggle for freedom to a large audience. Algeria remains one of our top priorities. Now we are working on the development of a Documentation Center there, which is named DRIFA, an acronym that in French means: *Développement, Recherche et Information des Femmes Algériennes*; and in Arabic means, "highly educated woman." This center has been projected as a public space for women, including a library to collect and distribute women's writings and to preserve the culture of Algerian women, a space for conferences and seminars, and the requisite facilities to publish a newsletter.

DRIFA emerged from a partnership between the Orlando Association in Italy and the Algerian association RACHDA, again an acronym standing for "*Rassemblement contre la hogra* (injustice) *et pour les droits des Algériennes*," but also meaning in Arabic, "the woman who sees things clearly." RACHDA, chaired by Khalida Messaudi herself, has more than 1,500 members. Orlando is dedicated to setting up networks that will operate in the Mediterranean area in a broad sense, including the Maghreb and Mashreq.

In order to help develop the women's centers mentioned above, we successfully applied for funding from different sources, including specific European Union directorates (either for equal opportunities or in thematic areas) and the Italian government. In order to work at a more global level, we will look to the World Bank and UNESCO as possible sources of funding. We must push them very hard to allocate more financial resources for women all over the world.

Even as we do more global work, we can also see that the political changes of the last ten years mandate new fields of inquiry for us in Italy. We must consider not only how to include immigrant and refugee women and their needs in the perspective and activities of the Orlando Association, but, perhaps more importantly, how to make it not only an Italian feminist organization that works with women in other countries but a real multicultural women's institution.

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X. Woman as the Object and Subject of Contemporary Russian Literature by Nadezhda Azhgikhina

The recent decade, which coincided with democratic reforms in Russia, brought forward brilliant examples of women's literary talent. In the course of *perestroika*, in the late eighties and early nineties, new collections of women's prose appeared complete with manifestos by authors and editors. Literary periodicals contained heated discussions on women's literary work. The names of women writers, some well known like Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, or Nina Sadur, others new like Tatyana Tolstaya, Svetlana Vasilenko,

Marina Palei, and Lyudmila Ulitskaya appeared, and continue to appear, in articles and reviews. More recently, Russian women have mastered the broad productive terrain of popular culture; they now occupy leading positions among authors of crime fiction and mystery novels, and have introduced new styles of documentary writing and journalism.

It should be noted that none of the mainstream literary researchers expected this. At the dawn of *perestroika*, the literary community in the USSR lived in anticipation of changes while creating its own mythology. In this mythology, after the repeal of censorship and the introduction of freedom of expression, Russian literature would become the most brilliant and abundant in the world, and everyone would be amazed. According to the same mythological mindset, the market economy was expected to take our intellectuals directly to a paradise of material well being and creative inspiration. Normally, the anticipated Russian literary renaissance was associated with young male writers; leading Russian literary critics, for example, compared the young author Oleg Yermakov who wrote about the Afghan war, with Leo Tolstoy.

But, contrary to all expectations, the Russian literary renaissance did not occur except as manifested by the advancement of women's literature—a development that was both unexpected and unwelcome. Many male writers and researchers responded negatively to women's increased literary activity. One of them, Pavel Basinsky, a well-known critic, wrote in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* that women cannot produce literary prose of high quality because women's souls are "too close to their bodies." Regardless of such attacks, women writers increasingly attracted the attention of readers, primarily because their writing was an ethical and aesthetic novelty, removed the veil from previously banned subjects, and shared a special kind of knowledge, based on women's way of making sense of things and presenting reality.

The dramatic takeoff of women's literature in Russia, in the late eighties and early nineties, was based on considerable previous developments in Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet culture. Women writers had been present in Russian literature since Catherine the Great and Princess Dashkova. During the Soviet period, women wrote poems, novels, and articles as often as men; in fact, their writing was hardly distinguishable from that of men in its approach and subject matter since both were constrained to follow the letter and spirit of Socialist Realism. Thus, famous Soviet women writers like Lydia Seifullina, Vanda Vassilevskaya, and Vera Panova did not reflect a specifically female view of the world; however original and unique their work, they were strictly Soviet in their approach.

While women suffered comparatively little gender discrimination during the Soviet period, they suffered along with men from the pressures of totalitarian ideology and government repression. Like men, many of them were prisoners in Stalin's camps. Eugenia Ginzburg shared her experience of a women's prison camp in her book *Journey into the Whirlwind* (1975), completing and expanding the picture presented by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago* (ca. 1985). The famous poet Olga Berggolts was arrested when she was pregnant and suffered a miscarriage as a result of her interrogations and torture; this tragedy haunted her for the rest of her life. Eufrosinia Kersnovskaya's unique *Naskalnaia zhivopis* (Paintings on the rocks, Moscow, 1991) depicts a woman's version of hell and can be described as a female counterpart of Varlam Shalamov's deeply disturbing novels and stories about the gulag.

After Stalin's death and the beginnings of partial liberalization under Krushchev, now popularly termed "Khrushchev's *fortochka*" (a *fortochka* is a small hinged pane for ventilation in windows of Russian homes), lively intellectual debate began in Russia. The intelligentsia divided up into two opposing camps in the sixties, reminiscent of the old separation between "Slavophiles" and "Westerners" in nineteenth-century Russian culture, and gravitated to different literary journals. Some of these journals, both new like *Yunost* and *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and existing like *Novy Mir*, attracted writers and critics who favored the westernization of Soviet life and culture, while others like *Molodaya Gvardiya*, *Nash Sovremennik*, and *Moskva* published writers who hoped for a return to the Old Russian patriarchal community. Both groups opposed official Soviet ideology. Both inspired remarkable books that, in their turn, gave birth to new literary trends in the decades to come. The "Westerners," such as Vassily Aksyonov, Anatoly Gladilin, Andrey Bitov, and, later, Yuri Trifonov, were authors of "urban prose." The "Slavophiles," who had been brought up on Solzhenitsyn's *Matryona's House* (1963), included Victor Astafyev, Valentin Rasputin, and Vassily Belov, and began a new literary movement, which was later termed "ontological natural philosophy writing."

Inevitably, male writers led both of these major literary trends, and each trend constructed its own stereotypical female character. The "urban" writers of the sixties featured a sexually attractive, romantic woman, who likes to dress up, wears perfume (which was totally incompatible with the official image of a Soviet woman), loves men, and is extremely dependent on them. The heroine of Vassily Aksyonov's cult novel *Surplussed Barrelware* (ca. 1985), for instance, does not think in logical concepts, but rather in interjections; her stream of consciousness is, in fact, a string of meaningless sounds ("a-a-ah:oh:wow"), while the leading male character is full of interesting ideas and displays normal intelligence. This type of female character has no personal interests and no professional or social concerns.

The "rural" writers, on the other hand, developed the stereotype of a peasant woman, guardian of a patriarchal life-style. Like the urban heroine, she is totally asocial, following only the laws of nature; she also believes in male superiority and is usually compared either to inanimate objects or to animals. Old women in Valentin Rasputin's books are associated with ancient trees, while Catherine, the wife in Vassily Belov's *Privychnoe delo* (The usual thing, 1966) is compared to Rogula, the cow.

During the same sixties period, women writers began to come to the floor, including me, Grekova, Galina Shcherbakova, Inna Varlamova, and, somewhat later, Victoria Tokareva. Unlike "urban" or "rural" prose by male authors, their writing did not provoke heated debates in literary circles. In fact, no one viewed these women as having any role to play in the future of Russian literature, and they were frequently attacked for "shallow topics" and "narrow-mindedness" because they wrote about the hard life of Soviet women, family issues, child rearing, relationships with men, and the challenge of combining the role of a good wife and mother with that of a good professional.

Natalia Baranskaya's novel *A Week Like Any Other* (London, 1993), which was published in the most progressive journal of that time, *Novy Mir*, tells a heartbreaking story of a young woman who does not wish to meet society's expectations that she will be both a good wife/mother and a good professional. The novel stirred tremendous international response and was translated into many languages, but received very little, if any, attention in the USSR. A new gender separation was occurring in Russian culture.

The search for identity and the meaning of life carried out by a male character, however weak and flawed, was considered a serious literary subject, but a similar search by a female character was perceived by critics as a petty and shallow topic. Women's experiences and work were pushed into the background and hardly ever mentioned in serious discussion.

This gender separation was accomplished in the context of the officially declared constitutional "equality of rights and opportunities for men and women" in the USSR. In fact, because men in the USSR never shared child-rearing responsibilities, and consumer services were severely underdeveloped, this equality was non-existent; the country was governed exclusively by men while women carried the double burden of productive labor and servicing the family. Whole generations of Soviet women were brainwashed into thinking that their problems were unimportant, even something to be ashamed of. It is no accident that in Soviet times, the subjects of childbearing, delivery, and abortion, women's diseases and sexuality were strictly taboo; you could only vaguely hint at them in literature. The story "*Abort of Nelyubimogo*" (Abortion of a child by a man I did not love) written by a young woman, was banned from publication for ten years exclusively because of the abortion theme; it was published only after *perestroika*, when censorship was lifted.

Feminist ideas had little chance to penetrate public awareness with one exception. In 1980, four women—journalists and writers in Saint Petersburg—published *Woman and Russia: Feminist Writings from the Soviet Union*, a *samizdat* collection in which they wrote about the real lives of Soviet women who suffered humiliation and trauma in maternity wards, were beaten by their husbands at home, were abused in prison, and were denied the status of valuable human beings by the national culture in general. The four main authors of the Almanac—Tatyana Mamonova, Natalia Malakhovskaya, Natalia Goricheva, and Yulia Voznesenskaya—were immediately expelled from the USSR.

Although by all formal criteria these Soviet feminists were dissidents, they were not accepted by the dissident community and remained fairly isolated from it. The main reason for this is that women's issues were never on the agenda of the mainstream dissident movement, no matter how many women fought in its ranks. Lyudmila Alexeyeva, one of Russia's best-known human rights advocates, head of the Moscow Helsinki Group and author of the book, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights* (1985), said in an interview that though women in the dissident movement performed the hardest and riskiest work and displayed miraculous courage and determination, all of the movement's leaders were men. Later, during *perestroika*, men were perceived as carrying the banner of human rights, and even now, they resist including the concept of women's rights in the mainstream human rights agenda.

With the onset of *perestroika* and the coming of democratic reforms to the USSR, the old Soviet stereotypes were replaced by a new gender mythology that humiliated and marginalized women. Taking its cue from Mikhail Gorbachev, who declared, "We should unburden our women and let them stay at home," the idea of the "natural destiny of women" became very popular, gaining the support of artists and the intelligentsia. While the mass media popularized the image of the "domestic" woman, an ideal housewife, as soon as the first beauty contests were held in Russia they developed another, parallel stereotype, the beauty queen and model. Press coverage seemed to have no room for

the working women who formed the majority of women in the country, even those who succeeded in the new market economy: journalists presented the first women bankers as deprived of love and relationships. Meanwhile, members of the women's movement in the West, and feminism in particular, were promptly placed in the vacated niche of "public enemies," and the media depicted feminists as a danger to everything wholesome and healthy.

The degradation of the image of women accelerated after the breakup of the USSR and the beginning of free market reforms. Immediately, the market started to exploit women's bodies as objects of consumption; innumerable pornographic magazines emerged, both Russian-language versions of western porno publications, like *Playboy*, and Russian originals like *Makhaon*, *Andrei*, and *Mister X*. Media that targeted young audiences often presented women only as sex objects. Advertisements debasing women with slogans like "Woman is the Businessman's Friend" (as in, "The dog is man's best friend") were broadcast on TV virtually every day. Ads for the positions of attorney or financial manager were offered exclusively to male applicants. Suffering from the negative social consequences of reform, unemployment in particular, women were not able for a long time to express their anger and frustration and to articulate their needs. It was years before an independent women's movement emerged in Russia to state women's demands, formulate a Russian women's agenda, and begin to negotiate with the authorities. By then, the damage was done: debasing gender stereotypes and negative connotations attached to the image of an active woman had taken root in the public mentality.

In general, women get very little coverage in the Russian print and broadcast media. According to the Association of Women Journalists, as little as 1.5 percent of space in newspapers and magazines is devoted to women, including articles about prostitutes, criminals, rock stars, and professional athletes. Women are rarely invited to speak on TV as experts on important public issues; female politicians appear on the TV screen markedly less often than men. Equally disturbing is the fact that as a result of the recent parliamentary elections the number of women in the Russian Parliament dropped from 11 to 7.5 percent. The election campaign of the only woman running for President had the lowest profile and the scantiest means of all the presidential candidates.

Women are consistently marginalized by both the authorities and public opinion and squeezed out of the mainstream. Evidence of this can be found, among other things, in the fact that the National Plan of Action for the Improvement of the Status of Women, which was adopted as part of the ratification of the UN's Beijing Conference documents, received absolutely no funding. The national budget does not have a separate line for women's issues. Family planning programs have been cut. Childcare benefit payments for families, however tiny, are delayed for years. The financial situation of women—and most people living under the poverty level are women—has deteriorated to the extent that there are cases of single mothers who have committed suicide, after killing their young children, simply because they could not feed them. Millions of children are homeless. Many older women (in Russia, women, on the average live twelve years longer than men) suffer extreme poverty and beg in the streets because they cannot survive on their tiny pensions. Meanwhile, tremendous sums are being spent on the war in Chechnya, rather than on urgently needed social programs.

Like the Soviet regime during the period of post-revolutionary five-year plans, and the postwar restoration of its destroyed economy, the new order has tended to overcome the difficulties of the transitional period at the expense of women. But gender-based censorship has replaced more direct ideological control, making it difficult for those who write about women's problems or offer alternative role models to reach a wide audience. Although a large group of highly gifted women writers appeared in the late eighties and early nineties, even now it is harder for a woman to get a novel published than it is for a man. Women often write on subjects and themes—abortion, violence, disease, and sexuality—that were formerly taboo; this tendency arouses suspicion and meets with a negative response from many well-known critics, who describe even well-known women writers like Marina Palei or Svetlana Vasilenko as "singers of *chernukha*" (ugliness) because they write about hospitals, violence, and cruelty. The work of these writers has nothing to do with any deliberate savoring of human pain; on the contrary, they show women helping to overcome suffering and open up new ways of addressing social problems. Nevertheless, they are stereotyped, just as women writers like Valeria Narbikova, who writes about sexuality, are pigeonholed as "erotic writers."

Another reason that the new women's prose which emerged during *perestroika* did not give rise to a strong literary trend in the following years is that the publishing industry of the transitional period did not show a consistent interest in women's literary work. Many women writers who needed a stable income to support their families moved into translation, write crime fiction or screenplays for TV, or turned to journalism. Others, like Dina Rubina or Marina Palei, left Russia; Larissa Vaneyeva entered a convent.

Despite these problems, in recent years, Russian women have produced remarkable literary creations in many genres. Thanks to democratization, women journalists in Russia have gained access to many spheres that used to be inaccessible to them. Among the many recent exposure of past abuses, two women journalists, Natalia Gevorkyan and Eugenia Albats, wrote the most brilliant articles about the KGB. Other female reporters produced excellent articles and essays about the war in the Caucasus. The Russian public has by now forgotten the names of most male war reporters, but everybody remembers articles by Yulia Nikulina, Anna Politkovskaya, and Nadezhda Chaiko (who was killed in Chechnya), and the reporting of Elena Masiuk. Their reports remain indelible because they show the inhuman face of war and the effects of military operations on the lives of real women and children.

One of the most eminent women journalists of the late eighties and nineties is Svetlana Alexievich, who lives in Belarus and writes in Russian. Her books, *War's Unwomanly Face* (ca. 1988), about women during World War II; *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from a Forgotten War* (1992), about the war in Afghanistan, and *Voices from Chernobyl: Chronicle of the Future* (1999), about the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe, combine documentary writing and creative non-fiction, creating a new literary genre that reflects the realities of our time and experience. Alexievich's writing represents a feminist approach to social conflict, an approach that is both active and existential, that reflects both on the individual human life and the future of the planet Earth. Although she has won many prestigious literary prizes, Alexievich is persecuted in Minsk, because she is opposed to President Lukashenko's policies. She has been sued dozens of times by the government and the military because of the pacifist, anti-military content of her books. She spent two years recording oral histories in the contaminated zone, while researching

her book on Chernobyl, and narrowly escaped death at that difficult time. Women's WORLD has been involved in her defense during several of these crises.

Other women have made statements in popular fiction. The best-known authors of crime fiction and mystery in Russia are women, including Alexandra Marinina, Polina Dashkova, and Irina Polyakova. Remarkably, their leading characters are independent women who do not need help from men and who are often superior to men in their personal character and professional skills. Marinina's main character, the criminal investigator Nastasia Kamenskaya, can be described as a true feminist.

Books of personal testimony about social and sexual life are also popular with Russian audiences. Readers favor such books as *Zapiski driannoï devchonki* (Notes of a bad girl, 1995), by Dasha Aslamova, or *P'esy dlia chteniia* (I, the women, 1991), by Maria Arbatova, not only because these books expose private lives in a sort of literary striptease (Aslamova writes about her sexual relations with male politicians, while Arbatova describes the sexual preferences of her friends and acquaintances), but also because they voice the opinions of active women who are not afraid to express their own views and to search for their own ways of making sense of reality. This is a totally new phenomenon in Russia.

Thus, in spite of considerable pressure from popular stereotypes, in spite of the government's neglect of women's problems, remarkable women's writing continues to appear. In 2000, Vagrius, a prestigious publishing house, began to publish a Woman's Novel series, high-quality books written by women. Books by Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, Nina Sadur, Olga Slavnikova, and Svetlana Vasilenko have already appeared. Recently, an international conference of women writers, held in Moscow, organized by the Association of Russian Women Journalists, brought together prose writers, poets, playwrights, and publicists from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. New collections of women's prose and poems will be published soon with support from the MacArthur Foundation.

Independent women's publications, and the feminist movement in Russia, also support and promote women authors. We believe that our joint efforts will overcome gender censorship, humiliating stereotypes, and misinterpretations by critics. Russian women are known for their ability to survive in the face of adversity and to retain their dignity, as well as their sense of humor, in the hardest of times. With confidence, a commitment to the freedom of literary expression, and the rich creative potential of women writers, we have all we need to succeed.

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XI. Women's Voices in Italy

by Luisa Passerini and Annamaria Tagliavini

In the 1970s, Italy had a broad women's movement, which, in the second half of the decade and the beginning of the 1980s, developed various forms of specifically cultural activity, including publishing houses, bookshops, and documentation centers. These were, at the same time, a sign of vitality and a new direction in political work, different from the previous engagement in consciousness-raising and discussion/action on social issues like abortion.

This new cultural engagement of the women's movement was somewhat double-edged, because it took place at a time of reduction and change in the traditional strength of the movement. Nonetheless, these feminist cultural organizations incorporated strong political values more or less explicitly. This was the case partly because Italy had not developed institutional spaces for women's studies like those in the United States. (The first Italian chair in women's history was not created until autumn 1998, at the University of Bologna. Women's cultural activities, therefore, continued to take place in an autonomous way. In addition, activities like documentation and publication were openly associated by some of the new cultural organizations with political engagement on an international scale. For instance, support to women's centers in developing countries or in conflict areas became a major goal for the Centro di Documentazione di Bologna and other non-governmental organizations.

By the end of the 1990s, some of these organizations had survived and even prospered, while conditions of the market had caused others to be either eliminated or obliged to restructure. One of the first independent, feminist publishing houses, La Tartaruga, founded by Laura Lepetit in Milan, in 1975, was recently incorporated into a well-established "general" publishing group. On the other hand, the Astrea Series, directed by Roberta Mazzanti at the Giunti publishing house, has successfully concentrated on women writers. Founded in 1986, it is still vital and active, with a catalogue of more than fifty titles, ranging from Rigoberta Menchó to Assia Djebar.

According to a survey published in 1997, there are now sixty-one women's documentation and research centers, libraries, archives, and bookshops, located in almost in every region of Italy, as well as *Legendaria* and *Leggere Donna*, two important periodicals devoted to reviewing women's books, both at the national and international level. All work to enhance women's culture through specific activities such as organizing meetings with women writers (including those from different cultures and experiences), presenting books, and building up international networks. They also produce various materials: booklets, catalogues, and "gray literature," which, while they do not circulate in the regular publishing market, are evidence of the voluminous amount of women's culture.

It is, however, true that the situation of women writers is characterized by strong contradictions. The general condition of women in Italy has gone through dramatic changes over the last forty years, particularly in the fields of work, education, and consumption. Political representation, however, is still very low. There are six women ministers out of a total of twenty-six in the present government, but the percentage of women in both chambers of Parliament is still only about around 10 percent. At the same time, certain formal indications of women's emancipation often come joined with post-

feminist or anti-feminist attitudes; think, for example, of the phenomena of women managers, or women on the right. A new, crucial phenomenon in the Italian context is the presence of significant numbers of immigrant and refugee women. They are most vulnerable to censorship because they speak different languages and represent experiences and cultures that are often marginalized.

The situation of women writers embodies these contradictions. On the one hand, in spite of the general crisis of books and bookshops, there is an eager market for writings by women and on women. On the other hand, such writings are often still considered second-class productions, not to be confused with the category of "general literature." While works by great women writers like Elsa Morante or Anna Maria Ortese are listed as belonging to this category, those of women writers who are less well known often end up in categories like "women's autobiographies." The organization of publishing and marketing is based on such categorization, so that being included in one or the other has important consequences, affecting whether a book will sell more or less copies and reach or fail to reach a certain public, whether it will receive reviews, and in which newspaper.

The result is an implicit, informal system of censorship of women's writing, ruled by the laws of the market, but also working through networks of allegiance existing in publishing houses, institutions, academies, and especially within the press. It should be noted that, even though the personnel in all these places is largely female, at least at the middle and lower levels, with the relevant exceptions of a few general managers, the forms of solidarity between women are strongly limited by the organizational and ideological setting. The situation is complicated by the fact that, while some Italian women writers are very successful commercially, this may have something to do with the conservative nature of their work, which confirms existing gender relationships. But this is not true of everyone. In short, the relationship of gender and informal censorship in Italy is sufficiently complex to benefit from further analysis.

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