

# The 1997 J.B. Rudnyckyj Distinguished Lecture

University of Manitoba

Presented by

## Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak

Historian, Author,  
Director of the Fulbright Exchange Program Ukraine

Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, a historian and author, is director of the Fulbright Exchange Program in Ukraine -- her third major career change. She has been a university professor at Manhattanville College and such universities as Johns Hopkins, George Washington, Catholic, Harvard, Seton Hall, and Fairleigh Dickinson. Then at the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington she headed programs to support scholarly research. In September, 2000, she assumed her present position in Kyiv. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, she earned her Ph.D. at Columbia University in 1968. She has received numerous fellowships and awards, including Fulbright fellowships to Poland and Ukraine. Among the works she has written are: *The Spring of a Nation: Ukrainians in Eastern Galicia in 1848* (1967), *S.N. Trubetskoi: An Intellectual Among the Intelligentsia in Pre-Revolutionary Russia* (1976), and *Feminists Despite Themselves: Women in Ukrainian Community Life 1884-1939* (1988) -- a work that has defined the field, received two prizes and also appeared in Ukrainian translation in 1998.

### **WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN INDEPENDENT UKRAINE: PROSPECT OF POWER**

The Soviet totalitarian regime's obsession with security with little understanding of women's needs, as well as Eastern European traditions of a patriarchal society vitiated the women's rights won in the first flush of the Revolutions of 1918. Today, in popular view feminism is either identified with communism or with frivolous Westernism; in both cases it is discredited. The peculiarities of Soviet gender policy, lack of familiarity with modern sociological discourse on gender, and the attraction of the ostensible golden age of domesticity are some of the factors that influence the behavior of women in contemporary Ukrainian society and hinder the resurgence of their lost tradition of community activism. The notion of gender as the socially determined role of sex, as contrasted with biologically determined sex roles, is only slowly gaining recognition among the intellectual elite in Ukraine. Women's organizations themselves are equally slow in popularizing the usage.

Nevertheless, although women participate little in the political and economic life of Ukraine, their lives stand to change most dramatically with the rise of a consumer economy.[1] Women constitute more than half of the population of Ukraine and the demographic situation in the country is such that the government is forced to pay attention to the position of women.[2] The population of Ukraine declined, due partly to a high abortion rate and a decline of birth rate.[3] Rise of single-parent families, high incidence of illnesses among children and the decline in multi-generational housing place heavy financial burdens on the government. The extra financial pressure on a badly strained budgets forces the government to develop social structures better suited to using human resources. The effectiveness of these programs in large measure hinges on the participation of women and their willingness to cooperate with the government in implementing whatever measures are developed.

Despite their seeming absence, women in Ukraine have demonstrated their potential power. In the last months of the existence of the USSR women's organizations outside the control of the Party mounted mass demonstrations that challenged the Soviet political system. In the six years of Ukraine's independence, over fifty women's organizations were created, most based upon broad community principles. Gradually, they became visible in the public arena because their traditional interests – welfare, family, health care – had political repercussions. The public demonstrations of women on behalf of family and domestic issues crossed existing social and ethnic divisions, thus creating another forum for the civil society in Ukraine.

The disintegration of the USSR coincided with the United Nations decade of Women. The thrust of this UN initiative was to stress the importance of establishing nongovernmental organizations of women that would implement development programs. Just as Ukraine, the country, had to refashion itself as a genuinely independent state from a Soviet Republic, so its women had to create its women's organizations that would enable them to participate in the international women's movement. From the initial United Nations First International Conference of Women in Mexico in 1975 to the Fourth conference in Beijing in 1996, the path for women in Ukraine was one of growing self-awareness, assimilation of alternative terminology and conceptualizations to those used by the Soviets, and the creation of new organizations.[4] Within the Soviet Union, only those women's organizations authorized by the party had been permitted; none of them were specifically Ukrainian.[5] Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, tried to muster active women's support for his cause by authorizing the establishment in 1987 of a separate Council of Women of Ukraine (Rada Zhinok Ukrainy).[6] It was headed by Maria A. Orlyk, closely connected with the Party apparatus, and did not gain new support for Gorbachev.[7]

When women mobilized it was in response to abuses in the army perpetrated against their sons. Mothers of draftees were the first activists in the late 1980's to form an effective pressure group. Awareness of the brutalities against Soviet draftees was made more acute by the fact that soldiers served in republics other than the one from which they stemmed and were cut off from informal contact with civilians[8]. 8 Because the soldiers found little recourse for their grievances in the vast Soviet Army, women organized themselves into the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers (Komitet Soldatskykh Materiv) to defend their sons. The Committee originated in Moscow and the first mass demonstrations were held there in 1989. Although the

Mothers' Committees were strong in Ukraine, which had borne a heavy burden of the unpopular war in Afghanistan and which used recruits to clean up the nuclear waste at Chernobyl, the most visible of its activists were not connected to any of the so-called Ukrainian nationalist groups. The organization drew media coverage but was not accused of nationalism or of political sabotage[9].

The Committee of Mothers held its first All-Union Congress in September, 1990 in Moscow demanding that Gorbachev create a Presidential Inquiry Commission to investigate the abuses. Gorbachev authorized the Commission only in November, but limited its competence so as not to undermine the military. In August 1990, within days of the proclamation of the sovereignty of Ukraine, the Committee of Mothers of Soldiers in Ukraine, headed by Liudmyla D. Trukhmanova and actively supported by Valentyna Artamonova, held a mass rally in Zaporizhzhia, a city not known for its Ukrainian nationalism. That was an important factor because the activities of women could not be dismissed as merely expressions of nationalism.[10] When the mothers realized they were helpless before the whole Soviet military-industrial complex, they reasoned that a national army, close to home would be more likely to reform. It was not the case of patriotism driving the women to support the national army, but women deciding that a national army would protect their sons from abuse better than the All-Union one ever could. Later, political motivation was read into the activities:

" The differences [between Ukrainian and Russian women] were clear in the manner in which the Ukrainian faction reacted to the conclusions of the Presidential Commission. As the co-chair of the Ukrainian Committee Valentyna Artamonova pointed out, the investigation convinced the Ukrainian women that their sons would never be safe from abuses in a Soviet army. "We mothers finally realized that the Soviet Union is such a huge state that such atrocious actions could take place and it would be impossible to prove anything... And so we began the struggle for our independent state and for our army." [11]

Service in the military placed young men at risk, disregard of ecological safety endangered all children. The disastrous ecological conditions, of which Chernobyl was merely the most publicized example, made many mothers aware of the connection between the policies of the regime and the welfare of their children. By early 1990, women active within the emerging opposition movement, Rukh, established a "Women's Community (Zhinocha Hromada)" to encourage women to join the reformist movement. Within a year, the Community established itself as an independent organization that included representatives of organized minority women in Ukraine.

Even a few months earlier, by the beginning of 1990, independent women's groups formed in the small towns of Western Ukraine. They discovered the indigenous independent non-socialist women's movement in Ukraine that had been part of the women's world movement.[12] By January 1992, representatives of the branches of the independent Women's Union (Soiuz Ukrainok), convened in Kyiv to claim to be "the heir to the democratic traditions of the Women's Union (Soiuz Ukrainok) that functioned in Ukraine since 1917 and had been liquidated as the result of Bolshevik occupation." [13] The reference to a women's organization of the pre-1917 period drew the new women's movement into the historical framework of Ukraine and legitimized it as patriotic activity.

Formerly official women's organizations also distanced themselves from the immediate past. After the proclamation of Ukraine's independence, the Women's Council (Rada Zhinok Ukrainy) restructured itself as the Spilka Zhinok Ukrainy (Confederation of Women of Ukraine), promoting economic programs for its members, and holding open meetings with representatives of other women's organizations.[14] Its government subsidy severed, the Spilka turned its attention to helping their members set up commercial enterprises.

Others galvanized women for the opposition. The Women's Community in Kyiv used the socialist International Women's Day [15] on March 8, 1991, to spearhead a major political demonstration aimed against the whole socialist system. In conjunction with the Committee of Mothers of Soldiers, the Union of Women of Ukraine, the newly formed "Committee of Families with Many Children," a society of mothers who have more than five children, and "Mother-86," a group of mothers whose children were born around the time of Chernobyl, the Women's Community organized the largest independent women's rally in Kyiv and the first one in fifty years that raised political issues.[16] Larysa Skoryk, a member of the Ukrainian Parliament, was followed by speaker upon speaker decrying the pitiful condition of women.[17] Although the women stressed that no one would help them unless they help themselves, the theme that brought out the strongest response was still the fate of the soldiers held captive in Afghanistan and the ratification of the law limiting service to the territory of the republic.[18]

In the euphoria of the days of the collapse of the USSR the organizations of women that emerged often returned to the rhetoric of the nineteenth century of the woman as the keeper of the hearth, the solace of the heart, the giver of life, the guardian of children. Historical legacy predisposed political activists not to raise women's concerns but at best to link them to policies relating to family and child welfare. In Ukraine, as in other post-Soviet states, women's presence is more evident in community than in political organization. In political parties and in political discourse of the first five years of Ukrainian independence one rarely comes across women's issues or upon conscious attempts to integrate women into the overall political activity.

One of the themes of women's rallies was the creation of an all-encompassing Council of Women of Ukraine. Before the assertion of independence, the democratic wing of the women's movement argued that such a Council, recognized by the venerable International Council of Women, the oldest international independent organization of women, would mark yet another step in the road to independence. At the same time, given the tradition, resources, and membership of the League of Ukrainian Women, there was fear that such a consolidation would strengthen the old party stalwarts. There is no single voice speaking on behalf of the women of Ukraine, although the various women's organizations cooperate on specific issues and attend as guests each others conventions.[19] Women distrust a unified organization that could serve as a means for various agencies in the government to claim control over the women's movement.[20]

In addition to the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, with their activity on the wane, there are three major women's organizations. All view the situation in Ukraine from different perspectives. The Rada-League-Confederation had been satisfied with the Soviet regime, especially during its perestroika phase that gave the women a chance to engage in activities to supplement their income. It did little to promote Ukraine's

independence. The Women's Union from its inception primarily, although not exclusively, focused on issues relating to Ukraine's national independence. Women's Community stressed political and national rights and active cooperation of all women's organizations. All women's organizations in Ukraine take for granted the responsibility of the government for basic social welfare of the whole population, especially for women and children. Maternity leave, childcare, benefits for more than one child are not questioned, and cuts in these services vigorously protested.

A closer look at some of the major women's organizations will enable us to discern the evolution of the views of women in Ukraine.

### **The Women's Union (Souiz Ukrainok)**

The Women's Union consciously drew upon a patriotic reading of the tradition of the interwar eponymous organization. In June, 1990 the Women's Union organized a conference to discuss the role of the "Ukrainian Woman in the Struggle for the freedom of Ukraine." This was followed in December 1991 with the official establishment in Kyiv of the united organization headed from the beginning by the poet Atena Pashko, who summarized the program:

"Our aims are to channel the creative forces of Ukrainian womanhood toward the rebirth and assertion of national sacral [places], to foster ideals and spiritual culture of our nation; to create in Ukraine a climate of tolerance [dobrozychlyvosti] for the whole population; and to help in the rebirth of the democratic women's movement; and in upbringing of the new generation of Ukrainian youth, capable of building a law-abiding Ukrainian State." [21]

Pashko defended her organization from attacks that it was not feminist enough and that it is too politicized:

"As to our being an organization interested keenly in political matters, our opponents are quite right. [...] The whole history of Soiuz Ukrainok [stressed] the struggle for freedom of Ukraine, hence it could not be a purely feminist organization, because in conditions of colonialism [bezderzhavnosti] the social emancipation of women was inconceivable without national emancipation. But that does not mean that with the achievement of an independent state all women's issues will be automatically solved. Hence today we view feminist demands favorably and do not avoid them in our work, but over and above those we also consider our broader tasks." [22]

As the stories of political martyrdom of Ukrainian women came to be better known and hence no longer shocking, the organization began to reflect more visibly liberal middle class values. The Women's Union is a socially conservative organization to a greater extent than its historical namesake had been. Motherhood elevated through service to the community and love of God and fatherland are its motivating forces. One of the documents of the 7-11 July 1993 "Women and Democracy Conference" of Women's Union stated:

"... we are confident that it is precisely women who will return to the Ukrainian society the spirituality, high Christian morals that the communist regime destroyed, [that is precisely the woman] who will know how to give birth and to nurture physically and morally healthy, nationally conscious citizens of independent Ukraine." [23]

The January 1992 Congress of the Women's Union in Kyiv had 380 official delegates representing 6000 members from all parts of Ukraine. Embroidered blouses, for

generations symbols of Ukrainian identity, were the uniform of the day. The Congress enjoined the government to formulate a "concept of national education and its realization in all educational institutions in Ukraine," and offered to help the Ministry of Defense raise the national consciousness of soldiers by supplying their units with suitable reading matter in Ukrainian. They tied the welfare of the family closely to the effective functioning of the state, they called upon women to pressure the government to address women's concerns more forcefully, and argued for tighter laws against prostitution and narcotics. They demanded welfare support for the needy and the establishment of more schools to meet the ever-present demand.

Maintaining that a specifically feminist agenda was premature, Ukrainian women activists highlighted their own path toward liberation. The Women's Union went on record in its support of the eventual consolidation of all women's organizations in Ukraine, but on the basis of a clear-cut program with a traditional bent:

"The Women's Union should actively cooperate with all women's organizations in Ukraine, fostering the consolidation of active [women's] forces, as well as aiding the forces of democracy in building a humane, rich, Ukraine, equal among equals in the community of civilized states of the world. Help the Ukrainian nation, God, to enter the sanctuary of wisdom, light and prayer." [24]

The program proposed by the July, 1993, Congress was extremely ambitious. It included plans to set up community libraries, training courses, ecological awareness programs, private day care centers, schools and nursing homes, and programs for identifying gifted children from poor neighborhoods, as well as helping Ukrainian women in areas outside Ukraine on territories in the former Soviet Union return to Ukraine or cultivate their cultural heritage. Plans to publish books on folk arts, to prepare museum exhibitions, and to organize art shows particularly with the Diaspora were also discussed. Male representatives of the Parliament to the Congress were patronizingly deferential; one noted the peculiarities of the Ukrainian language, in which freedom, democracy, independence are of the feminine gender – "but they must be upheld by a strong male Will." [25] The July 1994 meeting held in Ivano-Frankivsk to commemorate the 110-th anniversary of the first public meeting of women in Ukraine was even more openly full of symbolic gestures that underscored women's patriotism. [26]

Ironically, the Soviet regime produced the middle class woman ready for volunteer service, but also expecting basic social services guaranteed by the state. The program of the renewed Women's Union reflects the changed nature of this organization from its inter-War predecessor. It stresses the cultural and educational programs rather than the modernization of the village [27]. Local branches, however, are increasingly demonstrating a practical approach. Lviv, for instance, developed, since 1996, a joint program with the Management Institute for the training of businesswomen and Kyiv has helped set up the only Center for the Study of the Menopause.

At first the organization published a four page regional newspaper every two weeks, Halychanka (The Galician Woman), that focused on local news, short fiction, reprints of pre-World War II cooking recipes, and suggestions for beauty care. At the initial 1991 congress, the women decided upon a more professional monthly publication, Ukrainka (The Ukrainian Woman) which seeks to attract a wider audience.

### **Women's Community (Zhinocha Hromada)**

The Women's Community (Zhinocha Hromada), initially a part of the democratic Rukh movement, in the fall of 1991 established its own independent organization that encompasses an array of women's groups in Ukraine, the Russian Federation, and Eastern Europe. It serves as an umbrella organization for organizations of women of Jewish origin, those of Tartar descent, and of an organization that seeks to provide support for women of the less numerous ethnic groups (currently headed by a Ukrainian Korean, Svidana Li), as well as the Society of the Mothers of Soldiers and the Society for Mothers of Many Children. Their most effective role is as a political pressure group. The Women's Community organized the first International Conference on Women in State Building, which was held in Kyiv, on May 28 through 30, 1993. Over 300 women from Ukraine were joined by American, Austrian, German, and Canadian participants. The speakers focused upon the creation of conditions that would foster the growth of civic society and on specific measures women should take to ensure the functioning of a democratic state, including lobbying, drafting letters and petitions, and canvassing for party and government work[28].

The resolutions were precise and specific, shunning the generally accepted flowery language. Predicting that women would be the first to lose their jobs in the impending unemployment, the Conference resolution drew on Ukraine's commitment to enforce provisions of the United Nations Document to End Discrimination of Women that Soviet Ukraine signed after the Nairobi Conference in 1985 to vouchsafe employment for women. The women also moved into the language of modernity, asking for the drafting of gender-related legislation and that measures be taken to combat covert discrimination, create conditions that would make sexual harassment difficult and eventually illegal, and support the creation of Women's Studies centers at institutions of higher learning.

The second major conference sponsored by the group was held on June 2 through 5, 1995. It drew on the professional expertise of women from all parts of Ukraine and focused on analyzing political, economic, social and to a lesser degree, psychological aspects affecting the life of women. In contrast to earlier gatherings, where the topics also included a heavy element of history and culture, in this meeting the women tackled realistically the political and societal problems facing them. This conference helped articulate the issues raised in preparation for the UN Conference in Beijing in August, 1996. In the last year, a number of the most active professional women from this organization have moved in posts in government administration, and the Community itself is becoming more involved in philanthropic activities.

### **Confederation of Women of Ukraine (Spilka Zhinok Ukrainy)**

The Confederation of Women of Ukraine (Spilka Zhinok Ukrainy), reorganized July, 1993, is the new version of the Council of Women established under Mikhail Gorbachev. It still claims to number about 50,000 members. With the changes in the country, this association has focused on helping its members become economically self-sufficient. At its second conference in December 1992, it established a Society of Ukrainian businesswomen that annually awards the Lybid Prize to the most innovative successful business woman of the year. Among its ventures is a knitting cooperative Kalyna in which 200 women participate. The organization has also entered into a joint venture with the agricultural firm Zoria[29]. The activities of this group of women can best be characterized as those of urban women of the middle classes that stress self-sufficiency and self-confidence to maintain an acceptable

standard of living. They discarded the Party rhetoric, but have not devised a new symbolism or ideology. At the two conferences the organization held, both in Odesa, in 1992 and 1995, however, the program was heavily weighted with topics dealing with the history and culture of Ukraine. In addition to health and economic issues, the 1995 Conference, held in June 19-22, 1995 in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and the Odesa Academy of Food Technologies, included two sessions on Ukrainian women in World War II.[30]

This group publishes a small monthly called "Ia, ty, i my" – "I, you, and we." It had been informally connected, however, with the largest and most popular of the Ukrainian women's journals, the monthly magazine Soviet Woman (Radianska Zhinka) which became, under the able editorship of Lidia Mazur, simply Woman (Zhinka)[31]. By 1996 its circulation dropped in favor of its glossier more sophisticated rivals, Ieva and Natalie, private journals resembling a cross between Vogue and the old Cosmopolitan.

### **Olena Teliha Association (Asotsiatsiia Oleny Telihy)**

One of the most openly patriotic women's organizations, the Olena Teliha Association, created on June 9, 1994,[32] grew out of the need of the women on the editorial staff of the newspaper Our Word to distribute donated medicines. Officially founded by the Foundation of Oleh Olzhych, the society has as its aim: "... the continuation of the progressive traditions of the organized women's movement, directed toward the assertion in Ukrainian society of democratic ideals, national consciousness, preservation of territorial integrity and political sovereignty of Ukraine." [33]

This organization proposes to achieve through "patriotic education of new generations in the spirit of self-sacrificing service to the ideals of Ukrainian democratic statehood, raising the cultural level of the people, its welfare. [We] consider the patriotic upbringing of women, especially of youth, as the spiritual precondition of progress in all aspects of life." Openly promoting religious toleration and "inter-ethnic solidarity in the name of Ukrainian independence" the organization proposed that women "... constitute a major factor in the achievement of political stability, [which is] an essential pre-condition for the success of economic and political reforms, regeneration of national consciousness of Ukrainian women, Ukrainian language and spirituality, the preservation of the riches of our land, the solution of ecological problems." [34]

Working with all segments of the population – "from the elite levels (sciences, all branches of the arts and culture, scientific-pedagogical bodies) to clerks, peasants and workers – the society" promotes the strengthening of national statehood and the consolidation of the Ukrainian people.[35] Under the leadership of Olha Kobets and Oksana Kuts' the society spread to a number of Ukrainian cities, with an especially active branch in Simferopol.[36]

### **Other women's organizations**

Almost as an answer to the pacifism of the Mothers of Afghan Veterans, the League of Mothers and Sisters for the Soldiers of Ukraine took as its aim the amelioration of the spiritual and material conditions of the draftees. Many consider that the spiritual needs of the men are most pressing and organize cultural programs for them.[37] The International Association "Hope," in Alushta, Crimea, headed by Nina

Karpacheva, a deputy to the second Supreme Rada, cooperates with other women's organizations in helping the needy. Among the smaller organizations the Association of women-workers "For the Future of the Children of Ukraine," chaired by Natalia Pokotylo, is informally connected to the Supreme Rada. Another association of women, "For the Genetic Fund of Ukraine," appears to focus on prenatal health issues.[38] Some professional women have established their separate organizations that function as network connections. Among the most active ones is the Ukrainian Association of Women Cinematographers. Its meeting in May, 1996 attracted over two hundred participants.

The Institute of Government Management and Self-Administration, under the aegis of the Cabinet of Ministers in Ukraine and with the help of Canadian academic institutions, from its inception in 1992 included women among its students. The alumnae Association from this two-year program has been sponsoring, with the help of the Kyiv Soros Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a series of conferences on "Woman manager in Ukraine." Women's Community (Zhinocha Hromada) helped in the organization of these programs, but the program itself needs government and foreign support.[39] The conference of 1993 focused as much on economic and political policies, as on cultural affairs.[40] Also discussed were matters of health and education. In other words, the women did not limit themselves to the so-called women's and cultural issues, but used their specialized knowledge to discuss issues of general import.

#### **Women's Studies and Centers for the study of Gender.**

There is no feminist movement as such. Articles on women's issues, especially promoting greater involvement of women in politics, appear in various periodicals.[41] Responding to the argument that modern, western societies are characterized by active women's participation in all aspects of life, a group of activist academic women in Kyiv established, in November 1992 a Women's Studies Center, largely through the efforts of Svitlana Kupriashkina, a linguist with some experience at the Moscow Gender Studies Center and in women's studies programs at American universities. These women found a temporary home at the Institute of Sociology at the Academy of Sciences, where they organized lively scholarly discussions. Their major public event was a Women's Studies conference held in Kyiv at the House of Scholars, June 17 to 20, 1993. The small, professional conference with about forty participants from Ukraine, USA, and Russia, noted the need to build a women scholars' network in Eastern Europe and welcomed the resolution of the Women's Community calling for the integration of women's studies into the restructured curriculum of high schools and universities. Lack of institutional support make the work of this Center dependent on sporadic outside funding. The Odesa University of Food technologies is moving in the direction of setting up a women studies center. For the time being, courses on the history of women's movements are taught. By far the most active is the Kharkiv Center for Gender Studies, directed by the philosopher Iryna Zherebkina. With nine colleagues, she is developing the field. The group published an introductory textbook for gender studies.[42]

Activist women who are professionals argue for an autonomous broad and practical movement that would help women achieve their full potential.

"The future of the women's movement depends on whether it will be supported by women, and women will support it, will become active in it only if they become convinced that the women's organization is not [simply] developing an ideology or being a vehicle for [individual] ambitions, but is ready to help women, that can

ameliorate her condition, teach her how to function in a market economy, will ensure her access to learn how to create a better life, how to help her family, feed her children and so on. Women are not struggling for a feminist society, but for a society free from sexism, from patriarchal [control], where conditions for freedom for all men and women prevail, and where the issues that today are characterized as "women's" will involve all. That, of course, necessitates a deep structural transformation of the whole context of social relations." [43]

Other women cluster in small religiously oriented societies that draw women into public activity for faith and good works. [44] Orthodox Church women's societies, known as sisterhoods, that in the eighteenth century supported charity and promoted education have sprung up sporadically. They focus on work for local churches and the local poor. Catholicism, which had been actively persecuted by Moscow and only in 1989 came out of the underground, has a tradition of supporting women's organizations for charity, prayer, setting up day care and food centers, and church beautification programs. This tradition infuses modern day activities especially in Western Ukraine, but it is by no means limited to that region. The Catholic Sodality of the Virgin Mary, largely a women's organization that focuses on a fuller understanding of the faith, has also reemerged. A "Youth for Christ" movement, originating in the 1930s, is enjoying a rebirth among teenage girls and boys of Western Ukraine. Although not particularly oriented toward women, Maria Devi Khristos Dzvigun, who was amnestied after serving two years in prison for her role in the apocalyptic White Brotherhood, not only considers herself the incarnation of Christ, but maintains that God has a female face. She drew her following from both sexes. [45]

An International Women's Club of Kyiv, composed of non-Ukrainian women working and living in Kyiv, has been serving since 1992 as a monthly meeting ground for professional women and those in the diplomatic community. In addition to social gatherings, cultural programs, and travel, the club members engage in major fund raising for a Ukrainian charity.

The small Ukrainian contingent at the working session of the UN to prepare for the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in July, 1995, was learning the ropes to assert the existence of the Ukrainian organizations. [46] Non-governmental organizations in Ukraine now play a more visible role on the overall NGO forum at the United Nations than previously. By early 1997 a Gender Center was set up in Kyiv which works with the UN and with the Ministry for the Issues of Family and Children.

The United Nations Development Fund, with the aid of the British Council, supported the publication of a brochure on the whole issue of gender as an aid for "workers in the media and organizers of courses on gender issues." [47] The Center for the Study of Gender will help acquaint civil servants in the new gender relations. It is supported by the UN, headed by Larysa Kobylanska, and it is to promote awareness of gender issues as well as gender equality. Their first project is to prepare a critique of the new constitution of Ukraine from the standpoint of gender relations. In the document on the activities the government should embark on to better the position of women, still in draft form, the following sentences sum up the situation: " ... although in its legislation Ukraine fully measures up to the statutes of the Convention against the discrimination of women-there is a clear discrepancy between the legislation on gender equality and the reality in practice. So far Ukraine still lacks

a state mechanism to ensure the enactment of the laws relating the welfare of families, motherhood and children, and to ensure the rights of women."

Cultural patterns are changing slowly, but the government has begun to use a language that suggests a more nuanced understanding the needs of women. Such concepts as feminization of poverty, double burden, violence against women, the need to develop legal outreach programs for women and stress on the enactment of laws, offer further proof of the changed conditions. The government of Ukraine is working on a statement on women that even takes into consideration the need to actively promote the overcoming of sexual stereotypes through the media. Its practical program, with planned conferences, leadership workshops, special programs for women, and provisions for the keeping of current statistics on the employment and promotion of women is most commendable. The problem, as all agree, will be implementation.[48] The increased openness to the outside world, the growing international community in Ukraine, especially in Kyiv, and more open travel, particularly study of students abroad, contribute to the changed attitudes toward the whole issue. In terms of overall contentment of their life, the professional women are basically content with the way their lives are going; the workers most uncomfortable with their lot. Women who do not pursue a higher education are most concerned to marry a good man, one who will be a good provider and who would care for the family. Next on their order of priorities is concern for health, domicile, and fear of losing their job. There appears to be a growth in shared household duties between wives and husbands, but the sharing is still slight. [49]

Women are now aware of the discrepancy between the relatively high educational level of women – women constitute 61 % of graduates of universities, higher, and middle schools – and their absence in "organs of power.[50] Both specialists and women activists in general look toward societal reasons for the discrepancy, not toward drawbacks of women. The burdens of housework and child rearing, which have been almost exclusively borne by women during the Soviet period, are now being decried. The dissolution of day care facilities that accompanies the decline of Soviet industrial enterprises and the growing dissatisfaction with communal child-care is working at cross purposes to women's involvement in the public sphere. Pressures of family life are cited as the single most salient factor in keeping the women from participating more fully in political and public life. But disillusionment in the efficacy of any political changes, and inability to see the direction in which the various political parties are headed are also important factors in preventing women from finding time to become politically active. Hence, the women activists within the government bureaucracy are encouraging programs that would raise the consciousness of women and encourage their fuller participation in public life. All the while, of course, they remain cognizant of the negative sexual balance: "for each 1000 men in Ukraine there are 1154 women; in the cities the ratio is 1000 to 1137, in the villages it is higher – 1192 women per 1000 men.[51] There is some talk of pushing for affirmative action, but the leftists in the Supreme Rada show no inclination in this direction. Women themselves realize the limitations of quota policies:

"Quotas are merely a means to include women into the formulation and implementation of government policies in accordance with the stipulations of international standards. It is extremely important that women themselves be prepared for such work, feel the inevitability of their active participation in political and societal life of the country. And for that we need evidence of targeted plan toward [the so called] 'woman question' and its support by the mass media." [52]

Professional women see discourse on women's political and social issues as one of ways toward effective adjustment of gender relations.

The handsome booklet Ukraine prepared for the Beijing conference had the obligatory historical introduction of Ukrainian women having enjoyed status in the historical development, as well as the soft focus photography that characterized Ukrainian Soviet women's publications. What more, the Ukrainian delegation to Beijing was headed by a man, Ivan Kuras.[53] But it also provided well structured statistical data, an overview of what Ukraine has done since 1983 when it signed the UN convention "On Eradicating All Forms of Discrimination against Women," and specific desiderata that need to be addressed in the country. Among these is the following:

"... taking into consideration that stereotypes about women are in general not fashioned nor preserved by the women themselves, – nor, for that matter is the fate of women decided by themselves – it becomes very important to introduce "feminology" [sic] – the study of how the position of women in the family, the social role of the woman in the system of humanitarian education, in moral upbringing, in training, and in public life."

A sociologist who studied political processes in Ukraine, came to the conclusion that, given the low level of political consciousness among women, especially in central and eastern regions, the inordinate difficulties of women to achieve a leadership role, and the total lack of interest or even of awareness toward the whole issue of gender in political styles of men and women, it will take much conscious effort and stress upon solutions of current issues before an effective bloc of women leaders emerges.[54] But the mass from which this force is to emerge is becoming evident even now.

#### NOTES

[1] Even simple information about items of household convenience will strengthen the revolution of rising expectations that doomed the Union of the Soviet Republics.

[2] The disproportion between the sexes is higher than in most other countries. Demographers suggest that this is due not only to the losses of Ukraine in the thirties and forties, but because of the high rate of early mortality of males. See Pyrozhkov, S.I., N.M. Lakiza-Sachuk, 1. V. Zapatima, *Ukraina v demohrafichnomu vymiri: Mynule. Suchasne. Maibutne* No. 35, Natsionalnyi instytut stratehichnykh doslidzhen Kyiv, 1995, p. 15.

[3] N.M Lakiza-Sachuk, *Deformirniushchee vlianie sovremennogo planirovaniia semii v Ukraine na osnovy demograficheskogo vosproizvodstva ee naseleniia*, No. 8. Natsionalny instytut stratehichnykh doslidzhen Kyiv, 1993, p. 25.

[4] Conscious feminism emerged in Ukraine at the end of the nineteenth century, and spurred the creation of separate women's organizations from 1884 on. In Western Ukraine, where these organizations were legal until 1939, they defended the interests of Ukrainian women and the political reality was such that the stress came to be placed, especially in writing about the organizations, on Ukrainian rather than on women. The Tsarist regime denied the claims of Ukrainians to a separate national status, hence there could not be any separate Ukrainian women's organization.

[5] Officially, feminism was branded bourgeois and non-Soviet Ukrainian women's organizations nationalist. Separate party women's organizations were disbanded in 1930, when the woman question was considered solved. New women's organizations were established after the Second World War to facilitate participation on the international forum. The organization was all-Soviet.

[6] The resolution authorizing the new organizations tellingly illustrated what the elite of the former USSR expected: "women [in the USSR], who continually enjoy the paternal care of the party, to support its policy of speeding up the socio-economic development of the country with all their heart. Quoted in *Visti z Ukrainy*, No., 1987, p. 2.

[7] A Council of Women of Ukraine, recognized by the International Council of Women, existed during the period of the Ukrainian National Republic and through a decade of exile in the 1920's. The Soviets opposed it, in much the same fashion as they boycotted the international women's movement outside the socialist camp. Marianna Kozyntseva wrote in an article "Puzzling over equality," in *News From Ukraine* no. 40, 1990: "Never since the 20s, when the independent feminist movement in this country was banned as 'bourgeois' have the governmental women's commissions been anything but mere rubber-stamps. The big question now is if they will change their role or become the antipode of popular women's movement."

[8] See for instance "I bude syn, i bude maty," by Oleksandr Kryvoshei and Liudmyla Chechel, in *Radianska Zhinka*. No. 11, 1990, p. 3 5. This journal, published monthly in a run of more than two and a half million and previously derided for its bland toeing of the party line, invited its readers to express their views on the demands of the mothers' committee. See also Bohdan Pyskir, "Materi dlia Batkivshchyny," in *Suchasnist*, June, 1994, pp. 70-82. The high mortality rate of soldiers from Ukraine in the Afghan war made mother acutely aware of the political issues in the country.

[9] Nevertheless, some journalists and even the democratic deputies who accused the army of dilatory tactics, argued that the women should have been more forceful in trying to limit the power of the military. One commentator complained that: "Mothers could play a particularly major role in this situation. But they, unfortunately, still remain passive." In an article published in Lviv on March 27, 1991, a student charged the women with lack of zeal in pressuring for the implementation of the reform. At a meeting of the Lviv Regional Council and the representatives of the Regional Military Command, held at the initiative of the Committee of the Mothers of Soldiers in the Lviv Region, the director of the political division of the Regional Military Command, Oleksander Kyzym, and the director of the draft board Victor Ivanov, expressed a personal willingness to cooperate with the wishes of the mothers but pointed out that the decisions could not be regionally made and depend on the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine. Andrii Voloshchak, "Soldatski materi, iednaitesia!" *Za Vilnu Ukrainu*, 27 March, 1991, p. 1. The same newspaper in its issue for February 5, 1991, published a statement of the Coordinating Council of the Mothers of Soldiers in Ukraine, accusing both the elected deputies and the government of not following through on the promise to limit service of the boys to the home country. The heading of the statement: " We will defend our sons."

[10] Text in *Radianska Zhinka*. No. 11, 1990, p. 27. Women demanded some civilian oversight, a shortened term of army service, increased leave time, and the creation

of permanent medical commissions responsible to the local elected councils. They also demanded that the Minister of Defense of Ukraine be a civilian; there was even a suggestion that Trukhmanova head that post. The appointment of Valerii Shmarov as the Minister of Defense in 1995 marked the first civilian in this post in the experience in any post-USSR state.

[11] Pyskir, in *ibid.*, p. 72, quoting an interview held in August, 1992, in Kyiv with Valentyna Artamonova and Fatima Bachynska, co-chairs, of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers in Ukraine.

[12] Western publications in Ukrainian introduced some of the women to women's studies and to community activities. Rukh activists were willing to organize public meetings for American women to talk to Ukrainian audiences.

[13] Text of the by-laws of the Women's Union (Soiuz Ukrainok), copy in the possession of the author.

[14] "Respublikanska rada zhinok," *Visti z Ukrainy*, No., 1987, p. 2. Valentyna S. Shevchenko, who served as the premier of Ukraine and V.A. Ivashko, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine and Gorbachev Party stalwart, helped organize the Council. Later, charges were made that the Women's Councils were used to launder party coffers, see *Samostiina Ukraina*, no. 13 (September) 1991, p. 3. By the fall of 1991, with the approach of the referendum on independence and the presidential elections, Orlyk used the Council to revivify the old party lines and to keep women in an organizational structure.

[15] May 8 as International Women's Day was the idea of Klara Zetkin Women's Day holiday; it is still deeply resented by nationalist Ukrainians who see it as exclusively a socialist Russian event.

[16] A cynical male reporter noted that "Ukrainian, Russian, Belorussian, Jewish, Bulgarian, Korean women chanted how difficult it is to live in slavery, and in unison humbly repeated the words of 'Our Father'." Gennadii Kyryndiasov, "Choho khoche zhinka, toho khoche Boh," *Vechirnyi Kyiv*, 11 March, 1991. The title of the article translated one of the slogans of the meeting: The will of the woman is the will of God. The leaflets calling for mass participation sought to speak to women's altruism. The hunger strike of the students of October 1990 was still fresh in people's memories, and the renewed wave of student unrest was also met with sympathy. The organizers reminded Kyivan women of the selfless dedication of the student demonstrators who wanted nothing for themselves – only a better government for the country. The phrasing of the leaflet was as emotional as it was awkward. Women were exhorted to "insist [on the election of] wise statesmen who would not force you out with your children to parade, merely because there was no order countermanding the parade; who will assure you a life and not mere existence (who knows what decree will fall on your head tomorrow); who will not send your children to fight into far off lands (75 young men from Ukraine are prisoners of war in Pakistan). In all critical moments the word of Woman became law. So forget your home burdens for an hour, come to the center of Kyiv, add your voice to that of the students." This leaflet was signed by the Women's Community of Rukh and by the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers.

[17] Volodymyr Skania, "Povernemo im sviato," *Holos Ukrainy*, March 12, 1991; also Stanislav Iatsenko, "Zovsim ne sviatkovy mitynh," *Molod Ukrainy*, March 12, 1991. To underscore its political character, the meeting was held at the October Square, renamed Independence Square, which since the hunger strike of the students in October, 1990, that resulted in the resignation of Vitalii Masol, the Prime Minister of Ukraine [the only such case in the history of the whole USSR] became the venue for major political demonstrations.

[18] The women drafted an open letter to the Women of Afghanistan asking for compassion for captive soldiers and assuring the Afghans that Ukraine had not supported the invasion of their country and would like to live in peace with it. The leaflet, passed at the meeting, was later widely circulated.

[19] *Visti z Ukrainy* No. 7, February, 1991, published a statement of *Soiuz Ukrainok* that its aim is the struggle for an independent Ukraine, and hence they found it impossible to cooperate with Orlyk's organization. The Women's Community in turn, called in flowery terms for that cooperation.

[20] The fact that the Ukrainian representation to the UN conference on women in Beijing was headed by a male, Ivan Kuras, as well as the high handed fashion in which Suzan Stanik in May, 1997, simply announced the chair of the Advisory Committee of Civic Organizations she convened riled most of the women's organizations. Tamara Hlushenok, Women's Union, interview in Kyiv, June.

[21] Atena Pashko, "Soiuz Ukrrainok v zhinochomu rusi: Prohramna dopovid," *Ukrainka* 2(26) 1994, p. 5. While never an arrested or recognized dissident herself, Pashko's marriage to Viacheslav Chornovil, the prominent democratic dissident, gave her a public forum few women enjoyed.

[22] *Ibid.* p. 5.

[23] *Ukhvala Mizhnarodnoii konferentsii Soiuzu Ukrainok i SFUZhO, Ukrainka i Demokratia.*

[24] All quotations taken from the program of the Union sent to me, along with a report on the meeting, by Valentyna Smirnova

[25] Phrase used by Les Taniuk, a popular theater director and deputy to the First Supreme Rada.

[26] The stress is not only upon nationalism, but also on the traditional role of the mother, work with schools and preschool education, and close contacts with the churches, especially with the Catholic church. This tendency is causing some dissatisfaction within the organization. The July 1994 convention held in Ivano-Frankisvk had a strong representation of Western Ukrainian women, and few from other areas.

[27] Comments by Rostyslava Fedak, a Women's Union activist from Sambir, at a gathering of the Ukrainian National Women's League in America in Sommerville, N.J., October 22, 1994.

[28]. Within six months, the texts of the presentations were published as a separate book that is being used in developing further programs and discussion. Drach et al., *Zhinka v derzhavotvorenni*.

[29] Luidmyla Smohar, "Feministychna tradytsia Ukrainy i pytannia suchasnoho zhinochoho rukhu, *Zhinka i demokratia*, Kyiv, 1995, 45-51.

[30] During the three day meetings, half of the sessions (held in either Ukrainian or Russian) dealt with some aspect of historical development of women in Ukrainian history, culture, and spiritual life. Health and economy covered two sessions and only one session dealt with "the role and place of women's organizations in the socio-political life of Ukraine." *Zhinky Ukrainy: suchasny status i perspektyvy*, Kyiv-Odesa, 1995– program notes.

[31] A newspaper by that name had been founded by Milena Rudnytska and Olena Sheparovych for the Women's Union in 1936. It focused upon women's issues, even admitted to women being feminists and disseminated information on the new women's movement among the broad segment of the population. It ceased publication with the outbreak of World War II in 1939. When *Radianska zhinka* was contemplating a name change, I happened to have an interview with the editor. I told her about the inter-war journal, but I cannot claim any influence in the decision. Apparently, the editors had considered entitling the changed journal *Ukrainka* (the Ukrainian Woman).

[32] Olena Teliha, a poet who lived in Prague in the inter war years, returned to Kyiv in the aftermath of the invading German army, for a while worked in the newspaper *Ukrainske slovo* (The Ukrainian Word), and was soon executed by the Nazi Germans along with other members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia in one of the massacres in Babii Yar in Kyiv. A newspaper with the same title was founded in Kyiv in the early 1990s, and the women working in its editorial offices were the initiators of the group.

[33] Text taken from the By-Laws, approved June, 1994, point 2.1.

[34] Point 2.2 of the By-Laws.

[35] First paragraph of Point 2.3 of the By-Laws.

[36] Alla Topchii, "Zhinky-patriotky hurtuiutsia," *Khreshchatyk*, 23 September 1994.

[37] Halyna Iablonska, President, *Dobrochynna zhinocha hromadska orhanizatsia liha "Materi i sestry –voiinam Ukrainy"* Halyna Iablonska, President (*Zhinka i demokratia*. 1995, p. 154).

[38] *Asotsiatsia Zhinok "Za genofond Ukrainy"* is headed by Lilia Piltai. It was founded in April 1995 and does not appear to have been spread widely.

[39] Luidmyla Hrebenuk, "Zhinka v derzhavnomu upravlinni," in *Mizhnarodna orhanizatsia "Zhinocha hromada."* *Zhinka i demokratia: materialy mizhnarodnoii naukovo-praktychnoii konferentsi*, Kyiv 2-5 June, 1995. Tamara Melnyk, editor pp. 87- 89; also see articles by Karina Shumbatiuk, Taisa Halina, Natalia Petrova, Ivanna Ibrahimova, and others in the same publication.

[40] Analyzing the difficulties of reform of Ukrainian economy, difficulties due in large measure to the "incompleteness of its economic structure," Tamara Romaniuk singled out the continued need for some welfare support in view of the inevitable continuing inflation, Lidia Kononko bemoaned the low participation of women in political parties, Larysa Kravchenko stressed the importance of women's participation in the development of a democratic society. Zhinka v derzhavotyorenni. Materialy mizhnarodnoii naukovoii konferentsii, Kyiv 29-31 May, 1993.

[41] See, for instance, Valentyna Zlenko and Natalia Napadovska, "Zhinky v politytsi," Molod Ukrainy, 12 March, 1990, p. 3.

[42] Teoriia i istoriia feminizma: Kurs lektsii. Kharkiv: F-Press, 1996. She has also published a major study, Zhenskoe politicheskoe bessoznatelnoe: Problema gendera i zhenskoe dvizhenie v Ukrainie. Kharkiv Center for Gender Studies: F-Press, 1996.

[43] Luidmyla Smoliar, "Feministychna tradytsia Ukrainy i pytannia suchasnoho zhinochoho rukhu, Zhinka i demokratsiia. Kyiv, 1995, p. 51.

[44] The tradition of married Catholic clergy in Ukraine created a social ideal of the whole parsonage involved in educational outreach programs. A Catholic Ukrainian women's organization, which took the name of a nineteenth century one – The Myrrh-bringers – the women who visited Christ's tomb only to be the first mortals to see the Risen Lord, was among the first women's organizations to take to street demonstrations in 1989. It is spearheaded by a former political prisoner dissident poet, Iryna Kalynets, who champions the cause of peace, social activism, and liberation. She now heads the local Lviv Region Educational Council.

[45] The story of the Brotherhood, both its political and financial implications, goes beyond the confines of this article.

[46] Interview with Ella Lamakh, one of the Ukrainian representatives to the March meeting on the Commission on the Status of Women, see also my "Practical Concerns and Political Protests in Post Soviet Ukraine," Transition, September, 1996.

[47] Iryna Ihnatova and Oksana Kuts (eds) Genderni pytannia v zasobakh masovoi informatsii. 1997, translated by Maxym Kononenko and Tetiana Moskvitina.

[48] I used the July, 1997, working document of the proposed statement on government's policy toward women.

[49] These generalizations based upon polling and studies carried out by Yuri Neimer and his associates, see his "Rabotaiushie zhenshchiny (sotsialnyi portret gruppy)" Sovremennoe obshchestvo, Kharkiv, no., 2 and 3, 1994.

[50] "predstavnytstvo v orhanakh vlady," is the term generally used in Ukraine today.

[51] Predstavnytstvo OON v Ukraini, Orhkomitet pry Kabineti Ministriv Ukrainy po pidhotovtsi do IV Vsesvitnoi konferentsii z stanovyshcha zhinok, Zhinka v Ukraini. Chetverta vsesvitnia konferentsiia zi stanovyshcha zhinok (Beijing, 4-15 September 1995) n.p. 1995 p.13.

[52] Ibid., p. 43.

[53] It is interesting to note that in the inter war years, the Ukrainian co-operatives in Poland sent a man to represent Ukrainian co-operatives to the International Women's Co-operative Guild, although then also there were qualified women capable of doing the job.

[54] Valentyna Zlenko, "Politychnyi imidzh lidera," in Mizhnarodna orhanizatsiia "Zhinocha hromada," Zhinka i demokratia: Materialy mizhnarodnoi naukovo-praktychnoi konferentsii, Kyiv 2-5 June, 1995; Tamara Melnyk, (ed.), pp. 38.