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CHILDHOOD, MEMORY, AND THE COLD WAR

EDITED BY MNEMOZIN



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Soviet Feminism?¹

Nadia Tsulukidze

It happened at school. She was 11 or 12 years old. The teacher was too late for class and the whole class was happily jumping around. Some boys even went into the hall and her friend and her followed them. They were laughing loudly and having fun, when suddenly a Russian language teacher appeared. She was not teaching their class, but she had a bad name among students. Everyone was scared of her and hated her. She grabbed the kids by the arms and pushed them into the classroom. 'You are girls!!!', she screamed. 'Do you think this is appropriate behavior for girls?' 'Well', the girl said, 'you are a woman, do you think grabbing us by the arms and pushing us into the classroom is an appropriate behavior for a woman?' The teacher became even angrier and yelled at the girl, pointing her finger right into her face: 'who are you to talk to me like that?! Who are you, ha?!' The girl answered with a calm voice, telling the teacher her name. The whole class broke out in laughter. Their class teacher, who followed them inside, got furious and screamed at the whole class: 'Why are you laughing? Do you hear her name for the first time?' Her classmate answered with a smile: 'Of course not, but it was the first time we heard it spoken out at such a perfect occasion!'

She has been coming back to this memory very often and thinking about the teacher and her question. 'Who am I?' became a central question in her artistic work.

Feminism in the Soviet Union is an interesting topic. On the one hand, it was ok as a woman to drive a tractor and work in the *kolkhoz*, but, on the other hand, any sexual behavior and expression of individuality

1 This is a childhood memory produced as part of the Reconnect/Recollect project discussed in the introduction to this book.

was seen as a threat to the communist regime. Female hero figures were Mothers of Nation, Mother of a Soldier, Khokhoznica (collective farm worker), Proletariat, etc., all very functional for the society, but not for their own pleasure. And in that sense, there may be many parallels to the religious icons in Christianity. Since psychoanalysis was banned, libido had to be controlled. The private space/body had to be sacrificed for the common good of the society. If one thinks of a communist party as a replacement for God, everything becomes logical. Hahaha.