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The Capitalist Hijacking of International Women's Day: Russian and American Considerations

By Barbara LeSavoy¹ and Garrett Jordan²

Abstract

What are the origins and purpose of International Women's Day (IWD) as a gender equality platform and what is the symbolic significance of IWD in and outside the United States (U.S.)? Of particular interest is IWD as comparatively observed in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia where the day, born in Sweden and Germany under socialist ideals, gained contextual ground. Using the 2011 IWD centenary as a research lens, analyzed within feminist theoretical frameworks and via Soviet historians, this paper provides a historic synopsis of IWD and of women in Russia, then considers the neoliberal and materialist backlash of IWD in the U.S and Russia. In comparative analysis, we argue that IWD eludes agency to Mohanty's (2003) vision of global feminism, and instead serves as lip-service to what Eisenstein (2007) assesses as hegemonic ways of seeing and narrating feminist activism and gains.

Key Words: International Women's Day, Transnational Feminisms, History of Russian Feminism/Socialism

Looking-Back, Thinking-Forward

What are the origins of International Women's Day (IWD) as a gender equality platform and what is the symbolic significance of IWD in and outside the United States (U.S.)? Of particular interest is IWD as comparatively observed in Soviet/post-Soviet Russia where the day, born in Sweden and Germany under socialist ideals, gained contextual ground. Our interest in IWD began over two years ago, spurred by the 2011 ceremonial burst around IWD's 100 year anniversary, and with this, the presumption that the U.S. and sister nations are deeply involved in a global women's movement. We look to IWD and associated gender constructions in Soviet/post-Soviet Russia as means to understand the day's historical evolution. We argue that western cooptation of IWD has eroded its socialist footing in a region where IWD developed. We further argue that despite this erosion, as extensions of state and nation, we enact festival around the day as means to reach across empires and feminisms in unity for gender equality. Our critique rests in this IWD reach where networks across borders do not quite meet and unity around global feminism remains elusive.

March 8, 2011 marked the 100th anniversary of IWD. Global advocacy groups positioned this milestone birthday as a gender equality initiative launch-pad. Issue-based campaigns targeting sexual violence, girl-education, and reproductive health as example, engendered

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activist platforms enacted across continents and amidst backdrops of large structural breaches facing women worldwide. In its 100 year centenary, IWD captured a strategic looking-back, thinking-forward imprint of women's status around the globe. While impressive in scope, IWD initiatives juxtaposed against rising incidences of gender inequality made us question the day's utility as a celebration and activist springboard. Here, our IWD research exposed a knowledge void on the origins and purpose of IWD in its gender equality footing. We were particularly struck by the transitory nature of IWD in the U.S. where empowered movement around gender equity issues quickly loses momentum. Further, in examining IWD in a global context, we discovered that in modern Russia, a country with strong IWD ties, the day is steeped in patriarchy, now marked by a *Hallmark* like holiday of flower and candy giving versus an activist harness to gender equality causes (Chatterjee, 2002; Hutton, 2001). In the Russian example, we were intrigued by this seemingly progressive IWD ceremony in the face of newfound market-driven forces breeding inequality in women's roles. The Russian girl rock band *Pussy Riot's* recent insurgency against pillars of state and religion, along with U.S. liberals still arguing for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), made us pause in our 100 year fête of women worldwide. We do not inherently reject feminist values that IWD embodies nor expect the day to correct deeply-entrenched societal codes that produce gender disparities. We do however question interpretations of IWD's socialist roots. Does fanfare around IWD, while important in symbolic magnitude, potentially mask women's structural oppressions?

Using the 2011 IWD centenary as a research lens, analyzed within feminist theoretical frameworks (Eisenstein, 2010; Eisenstein 2007, 1996, 1984, 1981; Mohanty, Pratt, & Riley 2008; Mohanty, 2003), and via historians (Chatterjee, 2002; Clements, 1985; Goldman, 2001; Lapidus 1975; Stites, 1978), this paper provides a historic synopsis of IWD and of women in Russia, then considers the neoliberal and materialist backlash of IWD in the U.S. and Russia. In comparative analysis, we argue that IWD eludes agency to Mohanty's (2003) vision of global feminism, and instead serves as lip-service to what Eisenstein (2007) assess as hegemonic ways of seeing and narrating feminist activism and gains.

International Women's Day Origins

IWD, launched in 1911 in Denmark by German socialist Clara Zetkin, and first celebrated in Sweden and Germany, fused tenets of socialism with feminism, championing suffrage as essential to advancing women's civic voice (Chatterjee, 2002). In Soviet Russia, early Bolshevik rule rejected the initial two IWDs, couching them as feminist deviations counter intuitive to communist gain (Chatterjee, 2002). But in 1913, Bolsheviks strategized IWD as means to de-gender society and transform family-minded working mothers into meaningful Bolsheviks (Chatterjee, 2002; Williams, 2012). Celebrated sporadically until 1917, then yearly thereafter, Soviet adoption of IWD endorsed Bolshevik ideals on women's emancipation. Yet this gender equality stance waned in theory as Soviet leadership began to question women's civic capacities juxtaposed against their domestic obligations (Chatterjee, 2002; Williams, 2012). This ambiguity over women's societal role troubled Soviet support for IWD, turning Bolshevik patronage of a women's day into Party manipulation designed to engage female laborers, seemingly backward and politically apathetic, into proletarian struggles for country unity; it also enabled Party collaboration around feminist and suffrage causes (Chatterjee, 2002; Williams, 2012). State sanctioning of IWD is visible in Zetkin's early conceptualization of a women's day, and it careens its way through to current IWD observances in Russia and on home turf. IWD's

civil and labor intersections similarly are pervasive and reify Zetkin's social agitation ideals. Zetkin advocated international recognition of women's rights to link nations around women's universal suffrage needs. Chatterjee (2002) notes that Zetkin strategically selected March 8 as the IWD celebration to align it with European affairs and commemorate a 1908 New York City needle workers demonstration where women marched in large numbers in support of the vote and unionization of needle trade laborers.

Known for its socialist roots, IWD gained international ground through the 1945 United Nation (UN) charter, proclaiming gender equality as a fundamental human right, and the 1975 International Women's Year, where the UN sanctioned March 8 as IWD (UN Women, 2011). UN's 2010 chartering of *UN Women: An Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*, added a global and schematic foundation to IWD prospects. Today, IWD is an official holiday in Vietnam, China, Russia, and eastern-bloc countries that belonged to the former Soviet Union. These and many other nations commemorate the day in staged activities following state cultural practices.³ In the U.S., IWD often passes with little to no ceremonial fanfare, although its centenary engendered spurts of visibility and momentum. Many U.S. liberal feminist organizations, the National Organization for Women for example, advance IWD as a gender equity platform. Marching to recognize women's societal contributions through labor and enfranchisement captures the spirit of IWD as Zetkin originally conceived it. Festive marches and parades remain common fixtures to IWD ceremony, emblematic of labor movements rallying in solidarity of working class interests.

Labor and suffrage define IWD origins, but the global feminisms behind IWD garner contention. Mohanty (2003) distinguishes three levels of feminist activism: personal, where day-to-day feminist activities inform our identities; within feminist community networks, where we engage others around social transformations; and theoretically, where we disseminate our feminist thought in classrooms, bridging feminist-produced knowledge with feminist-lived praxis. Although a systematic formula for action, Mohanty (2003) argues that this feminist mode of thinking as practice, particularly within insular circles of the academy, spawns problematic, often divisive ideologies of power constructed within narrow confines of western feminist thought. Contemporary IWD is an instructive example of this phenomenon, where we see western manufactured feminism overlaying transnational feminist spaces, co-opting feminist agency and its potential gender equality outcomes. The forces of neoliberalism further hamper these feminist practices, particularly when engendered within imperialist boundaries that dictate societal expectations of women's and men's equality (Eisenstein, 2010; Eisenstein, 2007). Looking at Russia and its IWD, modernization adds a weighted spin as we see women's progress both advanced and impeded by interplays of traditionalism competing against newfound market-driven forces, each an extension of the state, which itself serves as a gatekeeper to paradigms of patriarchal custom and function.⁴

Russia offers a useful lens as we examine feminist activism and questions of gender equality across borders and as we consider the meaning that informs IWD in a region where it was adopted from Scandinavian origins. In Russia, the day and its feminisms transverse a span

³ IWD celebrations range from state-sponsored speeches and educational forums to resistance rallies around pay equity, reproductive health, and gender-based violence. Examples explicit to Soviet society, see Chatterjee (2002), chapters 3-4; for global examples, see, <http://www.un.org/en/events/womensday/history.shtml>

⁴ Contemporary legislation barring Russian women from driving trains, fighting fires, and 460 male-occupied jobs deemed "hazardous," evidences patriarchal perseverance. Historically, women's labor and domestic exploitation grew beneath IWD celebrations and representations of "freed" women; this continues today. See <http://www.pri.org/stories/world/jobs-women-can-t-do-russia1427.html>, and Racioppi & O'Sullivan, (2000).

from communist protection to a free market economy. This shifting political and economic landscape as it intersects gender ideology illuminates ways societal structures enact gender roles.

Women and Feminism in Russia

Evident in early press and Bolshevik propaganda, women's emancipation was vital to success of Soviet socialism (Lenin, 1919a). Much of Lenin's 1919 public discourse asserted gender parity yet also warned of difficulties to achieve this end. This and ensuing contradictions on gender equality typify Soviet history and complicate understandings of IWD and what was valid versus pretense to realizing women's equality.

Early Soviet policies relied on collusion of labor and theorized destruction of private property as means to equalize men and women's roles (Conze, 2001; Schwartz, 1979). Collectivization enabled Soviet leaders to distribute domestic and paid labor evenly among the sexes and to see socialism forward. But ideology eluded practice. As women gained entry into the workforce, long-steeped gendered traditions left men little way or incentive to assume domestic responsibilities. Women defaulted to subservient wife and mother roles, despite mass distribution of household work designed to disrupt female domestication and drive 1920s Soviet policies for employment and educational equity (Conze, 2001; Schwartz, 1979). Lenin (1919b) deemed women's work in the home as petty labor that drained Soviet progress. Dining rooms, nurseries, and Laundromats followed, introduced to streamline women's domestic inefficiencies (Buckley, 1981; Lapidus, 1975; Lenin, 1919b). Disrupting capitalism as agency to women's emancipation set the USSR apart from other world powers (Lapidus, 1975). This socialist thread informs and complicates IWD's history as these male-fabricated gender solutions used sex-blind Marxist doctrine that muted women's voices, casting them as "backward" Soviet citizens needing Party guidance (Clements, 1985; Goldman, 2001; Schwartz, 1979; Stites, 1978). The "backward woman," juxtaposed against forward-looking IWD celebrations, enabled Soviet leadership to exploit the day as hyperbole to women's advancement (Chatterjee, 2002; Williams, 2012).

Soviet approach to gender emancipation expected women to maintain societal and maternal roles, a familiar gender duality across nations recognized in the Soviet Union as the "double burden." Facing 1920's labor shortages, Soviet leadership used women workers to propel modernization and production forward. Goldman (2001) notes that Soviet inclusion of women, albeit in unskilled, heavy labor positions, reached 42% of the labor force by 1934, surpassing many Western countries. Party leadership regarded women in the workforce as essential to Soviet progress, but male laborers viewed women as intruders into what had been a bastion of masculine control. Economic circumstances and rise in mass production furthered these tensions as many semi-skilled jobs replaced skilled-jobs, producing falling wages and contention between men and women workers (Goldman, 2001). Sexual harassment and job discrimination ensued, making it difficult for women to fulfill Party expectations. Seeking economic independence, many women entered Party education programs yet seldom advanced. Soviet mindset encouraged women's civic engagement while still demanded that they maintain the domestic sphere

Historians highlight Soviet women who challenged this paradox. One such group, the Zhenotdel, orchestrated women's liberation campaigns into the early 1900s and used IWD as an activist platform (Lapidus, 1975). Integral to the Zhenotdel's success was its leadership under Aleksandra Kollantai, one of many names synonymous with Soviet feminism, though Kollantai

and her peers sternly identified as socialists over feminists (Clements, 1985). Kollantai's feminist distance can be partly attributed to neoliberal stigmas associated with feminism; also for Kollantai, her Marxist loyalty to socializing labor, and her collusion with state advocacy of motherhood as a societal duty, rose at odds with feminist narratives (Chatterjee, 2002; Clements, 1985). Bolshevik leadership further complicated Kollantai's and the Zhenotdel's efforts. Although partnered as socialist comrades, leadership doubted the Zhenotdel's fidelity to class struggle, believing women would privilege family over work and domestics over revolution (Chatterjee, 2002; Williams, 2012). This implicated IWD as agency for Party progression but a threat to collectivism under hands of Bolshevik patriarchy. Fragmented allegiances paint many nations' suffrage landscape where like objections to enlarging the franchise resided in doubts of women's public over private capacities. Despite contentions around identity and place, Kollantai's commitment to Marxist doctrine was not inimical to feminist gain. Soviet Marxism did not effectually diffuse gender hierarchies, but Marxist classless aim held theoretical promise for gender parity. Guided by Marxist and feminist ideals, Kollantai and the Zhenotdel challenged male-dominated hegemony and led resistance across revolutions. Still, in 1930, the Zhenotdel disbanded as leadership deemed their "feminist" activities a threat towards true socialism (Lapidus, 1975). Many feminist-type activities persisted, but women's advances largely stalled with the Zhenotdel's fall (Lapidus, 1975, Chatterjee, 2002). IWD endured these transitions, becoming an inscribed Soviet holiday, but it steadily morphed into a state icon of gender progress rather than Zetkin's day of agitation to secure women's gains (Chatterjee, 2002; Stites, 1978).

IWD's socialist and feminist intersections harness mixed political agency. Animosity between capitalist nations and the USSR festered and still characterizes views of post-Soviet Russia. The Soviet Union grew up amidst unstable policies overlaying vast geography comprised of diverse populations, all factors that tested its place in world affairs. Transitions in leadership and world wars stymied women's activism. World War I as example revived narrow gender stereotypes of men and women's roles (Meyer, 1991). World War II bore faces of Soviet women as sufferers shouldering family and income duties in men's absence and liberated workers engaged in occupations previously open solely to men (Krylova, 2004). Many women ambitiously defended their country, nearly 800,000 on the front lines, yet similar to labor stratifications, were denied serving in male-only infantry positions (Krylova, 2004). Despite perseverance, women's military contributions largely went unrewarded as Soviet leadership feared women's visibility in defense would tarnish the country's world image. Rumors of women's wartime roles as prostitutes and husband-hunters went unchecked by Soviet leadership (Carleton, 2004). Conversely, and a common wartime narrative across nations, images of women waiting for their heroic men to return home replaced images of women as active combatants (Krylova, 2004). Aligned to state and Party, women as wife and mother became a vanguard to Russian IWD practices (Chatterjee, 2002).

Arguably, Soviet women's military contributions enabled gender emancipation, yet war's casualties tested women's dual obligations to Party and family (Conze, 2001). Here, Soviet leadership criticized abortion, arguing declines in reproduction inhibited Soviet progress. These 1920-30s Stalinist transitions from progressive to traditional gender policies are not unique to the Soviet Union (Schwartz, 1979). States exerting population controls on women typify contemporary times and play out across political rhetoric and in IWD resistance rallies at home and abroad. But Soviet pronatalist tactics to strengthen families and empire became more utilitarian than revolutionary (Hoffman, 2000). And Soviet leaders began to treat abortion and

also prostitution as national issues that endangered state security. Like many war-torn nations, Soviet demographers analyzed birthrate fluctuations in efforts to favorably manipulate these variables; such strategy ebbed and flowed (Hoffman, 2000; Reid, 2002). In 1917 under Lenin's sway, leadership decriminalized homosexuality, abortion, and divorce, then in 1934, with Stalin at the helm, recriminalized homosexuality, and two years later, abortions, deeming heterosexuality and reproduction state priority (Carlton, 2004; Riordan, 1993). This 1920s liberal to conservative ideological swing grew more draconian in the 1940s approaching World War II, ultimately cementing muted understandings of gender identity. Stalin's leadership favored strong families realized in dominant husband and subordinate wife, but following his death, the USSR maintained old-style policies regarding sex, self-identifying as an "asexual" country (Kon, 1993).

Soviet leadership re-legalized abortion in 1955 under Khrushchev's administration, which loosened its hold on citizens as gesture away from Stalin's decree, although echoing earlier gender-pigeonholing, state edict alleged women would choose motherhood over termination. Today, similar to the U.S., Russian women's reproductive freedoms face resurging patriarchal contest. People across nations continue to tackle prostitution as capitalist incursion, and feminist factions and IWD rallies across continents cyclically assess its objectification versus liberation impact (Dines, 2010). Soviet nurses or teachers turning to prostitution as a private income source, while not exclusive to Soviet life, contradicts the Soviet Union's communist ideals (Khodyreva, 2005). Once viewed as asexual, Soviets joined a universal map of women as objects for sale, sanctioning prostitution as an industry to treat "problematic" aspects of male sexuality (Khodyreva, 2005). The enigma of problematic male characteristics that Soviets scrutinized as women's issues, has universal reach in its gender double standard, yet the Soviet example shows the forceful intersection of sex as capital when capitalism itself defies desired societal norms. Conceived under socialist canons, IWD encumbers this capitalist complicity.

International Women's Day: Freedom or Cooptation

IWD as a stage for enacting gender equality is a paradox for change across borders, despite evolving gender roles. Eisenstein (2007) argues that contemporary sex and gender fluidity and progression is all too often conflated with sex and gender justice. Gender bending as potential redistribution of male capital allocated to women, or vice versa, has only increased the many bodies that reproduce and sustain heteropatriarchal power. In similar ways, feminist activism reaches for freedom and liberation, but often as unknowing agents of state and nation, become sexual decoys of sorts that stage what appears to be expanding spaces of gender equality (Eisenstein, 2007). In global arenas, operating under westerner constructions of gender roles, gender marginality and oppression is partially hidden by seemingly forward steps of a feminist movement constrained by the very institutional boundaries under which it operates. Essentially, to grab a piece of the pie is to be in the pie, where the pie itself, by default, is hegemonic patriarchy. Scaffolding patriarchal systems has yielded greater traction than constructing feminist spaces outside the system. We struggle to conceptualize salient alternatives to this system-reliance. But working inside the system does not preclude interrogating its failings; rather, such critique provokes tactical awareness. If we consider IWD within this hegemonic pie, we see stakeholders of feminism perform ceremonies that reinforce illusions of gender equality where national fronts help enact feminist rituals that both broadcast voices of discontent in the midst of celebrating gender gains. Movement around global feminisms, despite embracing categories of

gender diversity, expose the mechanisms whereby sitting structures of political powers, notably, neoliberal forces, further obstruct versus advance policies that enable such gender diversity. In effect, as women enter into spaces of presumed equality, they enter along firmly established hierarchical divides that push back on these evolving gender pluralities, propagating what is really ideological gain versus sustainable feminist progress (Eisenstein 2007).

Looking closely at IWD ceremonials enacted in the U.S., we see broad strokes of feminist activities splattering an already painted canvas, well-scored in women's rights. These IWD platforms, voicing discontent around gender inequities, are best understood under a liberal feminism rubric, which, similar to earlier feminist movements, seeks access to patriarchal capital using patriarchal conventions. But unlike 1900s first wave suffrage campaigns, or 1970s sexual equality agitations by second wave movements, today's activism is suffused by a modern, third wave feminist movement with running narratives that are largely incomplete (Dicker, 2008). Despite a slew of social justice gains that are gendered, marriage equality the most recent example, contemporary feminist momentum is an evolving space with a multiplicity of concerns and identities. What was once a women's question has become a gender question that subsumes equality of women and place in opposition to patriarchal rule, but that encumbers a broader, changing landscape of issues performed by an expanding cast of feminists. Western feminism which spawned these gender bending movements is progressive to women's equality. Expanded definitions of woman and disruption of binary man/woman categories are a feminist/IWD fulcrum of strength. But in a monolith of a single day, this fluidity plays out as a series of unconnected dots plotted on a world map where each dot operates independent of the dots around them. The dots do join together in theory which presumes unity and they may indeed intersect across nations, but they do not unite in lived praxis that sustains an appreciation of our many distinctions.⁵ This surely is too much to expect of one day, and admittedly, IWD's symbolic energy engenders ardent reminders of feminist gain and future promise. Indeed, in IWD lie opportunities to construct dynamic bridges across difference. But IWD's impressive ceremonial fanfare constructs images of feminist accord that imagine endurance beyond the wave of the day.

Global perceptions of IWD unity across borders is further complicated by resurging conservative ideologies threatened by feminist gain. While not reason to abandon IWD symbolism, the wide face of feminism, performed on and around IWD, challenges conventional thinkers who are increasingly determined to preserve traditional gender roles. This return to traditionalism coined, "gender retraction," theorizes that during times of political and economic uncertainty, conservative thinkers seek safety in known gender boundaries constructed around traditional men's and women's roles (LeSavoy, 2011). This parallels Bolshevik and Stalinist gender manipulations in Soviet history, where feminist actors reaching for a multitude of equality issues disrupted patriarchal conventions (Chatterjee, 2002). Retracting gender back to age-old models of male men and female women clearly maps who can move to the front of the line. In capitalist driven markets, common to America and taking hold in Russia, moving to the front of the line follows a well-trodden materialist footprint that privileges political voice well before and long after IWD ceremonies unfold. Joining hands across borders and campaigning for gender justice in IWD has symbolic merit, but like most things mass produced under neoliberal doctrines, its origins and purpose are clouded by permutations that reshape its originating roots. IWD marches and rallies may inspire person-to-person solidarities that grow in

⁵This is a symbolic representation of IWD's variable nature across countries. IWD hinges on multiple issues as determined by women's values, traditions, and needs in countries of celebration.

meaning and reach. We underscore this IWD potentiality. But, to fight for gender justice under a guise of an international day for women where women's equality is equated with citizen rights, sets up a paradigm of liberal actions that sanction gender parities presumably already in motion or realized (Eisenstein, 2007). This merely distances gender violations as separate from state and national doctrines when these doctrines remain the root of most structural inequalities (Eisenstein 2007, 1984). As Mohanty et al. (2008) affirm, mobilization around global gender issues performed within infrastructures of western ruling elites, merely marshals anew further empire building that wrongly assesses gender justice, and instead, produces flawed rescue narratives telling stories of imperial efforts to civilize already civilized nations.

Russia and Mother Love

In Russia and its IWD, historians note early celebrations of the day as a symbol of gender emancipation where women in red scarves marched to secure worker's rights (Hutton, 2001). But in the 1930s, with Soviet leadership championing communist ideals, the glorification of motherhood transitioned a political platform informed by socialist aims for gender equality into a day which began to mimic capitalist constructions of the cult of true womanhood (Hutton, 2001). Purity and righteousness of women as mother ruled. Hutton (2001) correlates IWD in Russia with the U.S. practice of Mother's Day, where, beginning in 1937, Russian IWD celebrations began to depict women as well-dressed mothers adorned with children on their arms. Flowers and candy giving followed, serving as beacons of male appreciation still tantamount to current IWD custom. Women's participation in Russian society as workers and mothers, although manufactured as harmonious roles in support of communism, became lip-service to patriarchal values that constructed women's roles as subservient to men and state (Hutton, 2001; Chatterjee, 2002). This IWD example illuminates ways men in power as extensions of the state position women in roles of mother as essential to uphold the state. Interestingly, IWD in Russia as synonymous with America's practice of Mother's Day, parallels Russia's 1936 pronatalist tactics which outlawed women's access to abortion, fearing waning birth rates and ensuing population decline would erode Russia's political arm as it postured for place in world affairs (Hutton, 2001). Abortion was legalized again in 1955, but it is instructive to consider this slice of 1930s Russian history around women's reproduction, as we see in 2013, contemporary American right wing politicians reach for abortion restrictions under similar rhetoric of patriotism. Although decades and political orientations apart, both Russian and U.S. policy maneuvers undermine women's freedoms while support nation building largely administered around patriarchal rule. In shifting theme but like dogma, jump across to modern Russia where feminist musicians collide with political regime.

Meet *Pussy Riot*, a young, Russian, ten-member, all girl punk rock band donned in neon tights, miniskirts, and iridescent colored balaclavas that hide identity. In February 2012, the rockers stormed the pulpit of Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral to protest in song the reelection of President Vladimir Putin. The Russian Orthodox Church setting was strategic, an appeal to the Virgin Mary to protect women from Putin's patriarchal rule. Their music and lyrics -- hard, angry, stylized on 1980s Riot Grrrl band *Bikini Kill* -- unravel in choral chant: "Holy Mother, blessed Virgin, chase Putin out!" (Cadwalladr, 2012). President Putin won reelection in March 2012, and as of this writing, two of the rockers, mothers to young children, face two-year prison sentences, charged with "hooliganism," a legal retort aimed to silence dissent, and one that revivifies cold war Communist ideologies casting feminist aim in conflict with church and

state ambition. It is the Zhenotdel decades forward with social democracy underfoot. While not the total state response, the Kremlin, church leadership, and some citizens defend *Pussy Riot's* criminal sanctions, wishing to preserve the sacred pillar of Russian Orthodoxy. Yet many bystanders in and out of Russia, even those who regard their acts as blasphemous, deem the rockers compassionate artists, “*girls*” as one journalist reverently caricatures, a satirical jab at Putin’s feebly cast foe (Cadwalladr, 2012). The band is unquestionably provocative in title and voice, implicating constructs of sex and mother that defy the coveted sanctity of a well behaved motherhood the church, state, and IWD venerate. With this, *Pussy Riot* has rifted faith and government invoking eerie parallels to suffrage wars, Bolshevik sexual hypocrisy and gender propaganda, and unnerving ways religious powers creep behind policy decisions despite doctrines that separate church from state.

The IWD intersection is subtle but symbolic. The day, born and cultivated among socialist aim and taken up by Russian feminists and Party members as a labor movement against capitalism, faces a radical rendering of feminist embodiment that challenges the very figures who have sanctioned such civic liberties, and in a country where religion and market forces were once subverted to communist interest (Chatterjee, 2002; Williams, 2012). Appreciably, news headlines document meaningful IWD protests in solidarity with the musicians, and human rights groups, Amnesty International for example, have taken up their cause. In this way, IWD extends an opportune platform under which to rally transnational unity for *Pussy Riot's* release. And there is refreshing diversity of voice and place here, that running narrative of third wave activists who reshape the feminisms we stigmatize under shadows of neoliberal causes (Dicker, 2008; Eisenstein, 2010; Mohanty, 2003). But the encroaching westernizing of IWD overtakes the injustices and remote remedies behind it. Evidenced in staying power of ritual and festival, outward IWD façade, even in staged resistance, tend to hide larger gender wrongs that transgress it. Similar to Bolshevik men fronting IWD as a face of supposed “backward” women’s progress, advocacy against gender wrongs presumes outcomes to overturn them (Eisenstein, 2010; Mohanty, 2003). This ceremonial trajectory resonates loudly as capitalist intrusion of flower and candy giving in Russia brand IWD in ways that sustain resolute structures that instigate girl rockers oppressed under resurging theocratic and patriarchal rule. Effectually, *Pussy Riot* disrupts an iconic motherhood Russian IWD extols.

ERA, Liberal Feminism, and IWD

Russia’s IWD Mother’s Day interpretation and *Pussy Riot* demonstrations are disjointing reminders of gender retraction ideologies that reinforce women’s long ascribed place in private over public spheres (LeSavoy, 2011). And while we criticize IWD ceremonial as lip-service to state affairs, Russia and nations around the globe mark the day in ways America does not. In fact in the U.S., IWD was barely visible until its 2011 centenary. American capitalism smacking up against IWD’s socialist roots is partly at play here. But IWD’s U.S. obscurity along with its westernized cooptation in Russia circles back to contradictions noted within the liberal feminist movement where women’s equality struggles are often equated with women’s legal over societal gains. In IWD, celebrations teeter between opposition toward, advocacy for, or homage to what are largely legal reforms that can convey deceptive gender equality assumptions. Using opposition to ratification of the ERA as example, Eisenstein (1981) makes an important distinction regarding reforms of law, such as the ERA, which serve as symbolic indicators of women’s equity, compared to reforms of substance, abortion access for example, which directly

impact women's daily lives. Eisenstein (1981) qualifies the ERA as a legal and thus symbolic reform, arguing that its ratification as policy, while embarrassingly overdue, would not dramatically alter women's lives day-to-day, although its ratification as legal doctrine would provide women solid footing to oppose policy maneuvers that undermine sex-class freedoms. The complications around the ERA lie in its required collusion with patriarchy as the requisite sanctioning body and equality icon, and with this, its ineffectuality to function as a reform of substance, where the symbolism of the ERA's lawful ratification would essentially occlude its substitutive impact. As a vessel of liberal feminism, IWD in America and Russia reifies this legal/substance dichotomy.

IWD occupies a calendar marking of a day symbolic in its recognition of women laborers, pushing a liberal advocacy platform for policy reforms that crack into patriarchal capital. There is important symbolism here that echoes Eisenstein's (1981) ERA point on ways legal creed serves as representations of key ideology that are not necessarily lived on the ground, although such doctrines enable tangible use of strategic reforms that are or could be transformations of substance. IWD, in owning an annual day, carries international legitimacy, an authorized code that diffuses a sense of political muscle. And in title alone, IWD overlays global reach with presumed transnational and collective orientation to women's rights (Rupp, 1997). Problematically, in the largely west to east exportation of institutionalized feminism, IWD stages activist tropes with imperialism and colonialism dominating sought after gender equity outcomes (Eisenstein, 1996; Mohanty 2003). There is little day-to-day difference as IWD marks the year, and despite an array of vital feminist activities installed on and around March 8, Pussy Riot protests as example, the meaning and day are both complicated by capitalist productions of ways the west reifies international and women's rights. As point, histories from women in Russia chronicle strategy American feminists could harness as we oppose government powers exerting control over women's bodies. But these narratives take a back seat to American assessments of women's needs, and in contemporary Russia, Mother's Day like practices eclipse socialist substance. Feminism itself is often called into question because of its largely white, middle class origins, where many women across borders eschew the feminist label altogether, reading it as colonizing versus liberating in identity and form (Eisenstein, 1981; Mohanty, 2003). Kollantai and the Zhenotdel's firmly held socialist orientation lays historical ground. Likewise, in Eisenstein's (1981) legal versus symbolic play, many western observers equate American women's enfranchisement to achieving gender equality, whereas pre and post-Soviet Russians conceived suffrage as only the beginning of women's liberation (Chatterjee, 2002; Hutton, 2001, Stites, 1978). This liberal, sameness of treatment goal, overlays western feminisms and its materialist backlash in ways that cloud more complex aims associated with socialist ideals (Eisenstein, 2007, Mohanty 2003).

“Meet me on the Bridge”

The UN is one mainstay in seeing IWD forward in world affairs with impressive breadth and scope in addressing global gender injustices (Rupp, 1997). On IWD's 100 year anniversary, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (2011) reminded us that gender equality and women's empowerment was a radical idea just 100 years ago, yet today, women still remain second class citizens. On that 2011 IWD, the UN targeted gender equality as one of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), identifying women's and girl's education, poverty eradication, wage equity, and gender parity in political representations as global aims for 2015. These are

valid and important measures, and IWD's 100 year back extends a bridge to see these global initiatives forward. "Meet me on the Bridge" was IWD's 100 year anniversary theme, the bridge a symbolic means to join hands across borders in support of gender equality. On this bend, IWD potentially colludes in affairs of state and nations so as to enact transformations of substance that can hit women on the ground (Eisenstein, 2007). As window and voice for UN's MDGs, IWD grabs our attention. Visibility and awareness of gender issues are meritorious outcomes that plant seeds of change. We need this internal tension and its residual effect. Problematically, the UN MDGs accrue actions to actions that preceded them, and while meaningful universal guideposts to gender equity, they do little to displace the misogyny that necessitate their exigency, nor the capitalist structures that generate data used to assess their realization (Eisenstein 2007).

This is undeniably a pessimistic voice, critical of ways western constructions of equality skew our ideas of how best to navigate the globe of diverse gender injustices. And it similarly resonates Mohanty et al.'s (2008) feminisms as praxis critique where we all too frequently regurgitate feminist ideals within insular circles of intellectual privilege. Activism sensitive to indigenous state oppressions requires a culturally informed agenda that invites in voices in the margins versus resolves the margin from the center. In America and Russia, IWD galvanizes many around activities that are designed to rectify gender inequality, but in the end, the day loses vitality when performed and thus constrained within the very oppressive structures it challenges. Despite IWD rallies where issues of discontent find voice, in IWD, we are as Eisenstein (2007) asserts, giving lip-service to sitting political and economic powers, which, when put to bed until next year's IWD, often serve to reinforce structural inequalities that favor a masculine-run machine. Who accesses gender capital may be more fluid than in decades past where traditional gendering narrowly dictated how men as masculine and women as feminine were to behave. Gender fluidity notwithstanding, in affairs of state and nation, powers of rule have stayed powers of rule. Even with more varied bodies governing world affairs, rigidity in masculinity prevails where gender diversity does not translate to gender equality and where women's range of sex and gender role options do not translate to women's expanding sex and gender gains. The UN introduces promise of which IWD provides a yearly, built in a mode to champion reforms of law into reforms of substance. Drawing on Eisenstein (2007, 1981) and Mohanty's (2003) thinking, Clara Zetkin would likely oppose IWD's capitalist legs yet endorse such UN IWD politicking, particularly, its universal arm.

Where We Were, Where We're Going

Our study of IWD in the U.S. and Russia, on the back of its 100 centenary, exposes the paradoxes of feminist activism staged within patriarchal boundaries around a day that presumes profound implications in a global women's movement. Our thesis, that IWD is coopted by hegemonic and materialist pervasiveness in the U.S and Russia, is underscored by repeated sex-class oppressions among bygone Soviet leadership and now resurging Russian and American conservatism determined to preserve patriarchal advantage. We have come to distinguish IWD as a state and nation vanguard to transnational feminist activities, where, despite many celebrations and well-intentioned undertakings the day produces, its socialist resolutions are compromised under neoliberal feminist constructs. In this way, rather than a springboard to champion substitutive effect in women's lives, IWD in Russia and the U.S. garners symbolic rendering to what Eisenstein (2007) assesses as "lip-service" to hegemonic, western ways of seeing and narrating feminist activism and gains. IWD's early to contemporary patriarchal

manipulations in Russia through to its relative obscurity in America solidify these conclusions.

In historical and contemporary example, we have considered scatterings of Russian and U.S. contradictions in ways patriarchal paradigms intersect and inhibit women's freedom, of which IWD activities both resist and sanction. These become convenient IW platforms: the Zhenotdel collaborating with yet resisting Soviet manipulations, Pussy Riot rockers challenging church and state, and western feminists wrestling protracted, largely symbolic ERA reform. These movements rest on intersections of feminist activism and festival where IWD is a canvas versus the paint that depicts the day. Once a beacon for women's proletarian struggles against privatization and affluence, IWD has transgressed its own mass production. As case in point, feminist labor gains in Russia and the U.S., despite flat over competitive economies, map a shift from protection to free enterprise where underpaid women workers inadvertently bolster male capitalism (Eisenstein, 2010). Here, imperialism fuels a global marketplace exploited on the backs of women workers (Eisenstein, 2010). We theorize that IWD falls into this vortex of exploitation. A socialist reading potentially corrects this women-as-labor-class inequality, yet such Marxist ideals smack up against a global work-fence reliant on capitalist modes of production (Eisenstein, 2010). In this critique, we recognize subversive undercurrents do unfold in the seams of IWD. Similarly, weaving in feminist progress in diverse contexts refashions contemporary IWD activities. These are potent symbols of possibility. But have we lost our way as we see IWD forward, particularly in practices coopted by hegemonic patriarchy?

Clara Zetkin imagined a women's day of social agitation where solidarity among laborers resisted private incentive among capitalists (Chatterjee, 2002). Looking back to Zetkin's IWD ideals, the UN intersection to IWD captures our hope, Mother's Day like IWD interpretations in Russia confirm our skepticism. In between this polarization are an array of substantial IWD rallies, marches, and activist aims performed in Russia, in growing pockets of America, and in nations around the globe. Yet as we travel back to Russia and what was the former Soviet Union, women's "double burden" problematized under communist rule is merely magnified by a free market economy where women's employment access wanes while women as sexual objects for sale prosper. Lauding motherhood as the mark of Russia's IWD fractures feminist progression and civic entitlement while it embodies women as mother in a contained discourse that, critical to Marxist form, socializes family without bringing men into the home. This gendered phenomenon has universal reach in ways that traverse nation, policy, and law. This is not the fault of IWD, but it is not a leap to consider how gender constructs entwined within IWD play out in 2013 as we reflect back to Zetkin's capitalist challenges under socialist aims. In the permutations to IWD in Russia and the U.S., we see western mainstream feminism as a well-intentioned movement disrupted by forces of corporate globalization (Eisenstein, 2010). Thus, what is seemingly a universal women's rights platform in IWD, is more, a Eurocentric, capital-enlisted calibration of activism emblematic of neoliberal feminist concerns (Eisenstein, 2010).

We rest on IWD's capitalist complicity, and with this, liberal feminism's largely west to east rendering on gender parity. While we have confined our IWD inquiry to ways the U.S. and Russia conceptualize the day, IWD celebrations unravel across the globe, staging diverse activisms that have vitality. We do not wish to erase this, and in fact as limitation, recognize that we do not address these many variegated and rich IWD rituals as agency for gender justice. We do however urge intrinsic reverence to Zetkin's IWD's socialist roots where the competitive race for goods is not at the helm and where woman as mother is not the fêted shoulder upholding man and state. Rupp (1997) argues that international ties among diverse peoples are not innate but built. Using this intentionality, we envision ensuing IWDs as a bridge from Russia to America

where gender constructions engage radical dialogue germane to women's civic place among citizens and where IWD's substance is not co-opted by patriarchal hyperbole that is lip-service to hegemony. We extend this bridge across nations as we reinvigorate the next 100 year struggle for transnational gender liberation. Mohanty's (2003) vision of a viable global feminist movement compels this progressive IWD reach.

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