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**Love as an Ideology: The Reflections on "Sexual Crisis" in
Aleksandra Kollontai's Writing**

SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

"Love as an Ideology. The Reflections on "Sexual Crisis" in A. Kollontai's Writing".

The dissertation considers the manner in which A. Kollontai's writing became preoccupied with love and sexual matters. The choice of love (rather than sexuality) as a central topic for the present dissertation meant to suggest the extent to which the discussion on love served in the years leading up to 1917 and a decade after it as a sign of the speaker's rapport with an ideal community. By analysing love, Kollontai was engaged in the process of defining the border between public and private life of individual, deciding where the autonomy stops and collective existence begins, and questioning the modes of attachment that make personal and collective. The word "love" is meant to encompass two different terms: love "in the broad sense" (as an agent of the transformation of society) and "in the sense of relationships between the sexes". Chapter I discusses Kollontai's concept of Eros against the backdrop of her time and the theory and praxis of love in the turn-of-the-century Russian culture. To highlight the hierarchy and connection between love "in the broad sense" and "in the sense of relationships between the sexes", the attention is paid to the status of family (or couple as an isolated union) in relations to community (political authority), articulating and implementing the public intervention in the relations between the sexes and her perception of the distinction between private and public space. The second purpose is to pursue how sexual behaviour was constituted in socialist thought oriented to the construction of the new social order. The second chapter follows the interconnection between radical reconsideration of the role which love should play in women's life and Kollontai's variant of the concept of New Woman.

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I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. Historiography

The ideology of Aleksandra Kollontai is predominantly the Western subject of historical research. With the new wave of the feminist movement in Europe and the world wide interest in history of women it provoked, Kollontai's theoretical writings on women's rights have enjoyed a surge of popularity in the West and opened for the European readers the part of Russian history, which was previously neglected by historians in the West and is still mostly ignored in Russia.¹ As the result of the almost simultaneous appearance of three biographies, Kollontai is now the most widely covered of all the Bolsheviks of the second echelon leaders². In England Kollontai's works were first translated and introduced in the early 70s by Alex Holt.³ She was rediscovered (despite her disavowals) as "a feminist of enormous historical

¹ Kollontai was never fully forgotten in or after her life in Russia. Two collections of Kollontai's essays appeared in the Soviet Union in the 1970s (*Izbrannye stat'i i rechi*. Moskva, 1972; *Iz moei zhizni i raboty: vospominaniya i dnevniki*. Moskva, 1974). However, interest to her personality and political activity did not generate any discussion, resembling that in the West, on her views on sexual morality and women's emancipation. Her ideas on love and sexuality, for example, were practically excluded from the publications during the Soviet time; the accent was made on her political activity rather than on her prolific writing on sexual matters. Kollontai's image as the first woman ambassador and prominent member of Bolshevik party could exist independently and quite comfortably for a long time without any further references to the other side of her activity. Her ideas on love and sexual relations were only briefly discussed. Although Kollontai's attention to the "woman's question" can hardly be avoided, and indeed it "has never been doubted that women should play a large role in the labour force; but with careful censorship of her vision of the elimination of the domestic economy, contemporary reality could be shown to correspond more or less to the goal that was set at the beginning" (Holt A. "Introduction". In: *Selected Writings of Aleksandra Kollontai*. p. 25). The relatively recent edition of Kollontai's writing excludes her articles on sex, and simplify her views (*Selected Articles & Speeches*. Ed. by I. M. Dazhina, M. M. Mukhamedshanov, R. V. Tsvilina, International Publishers Company, Inc., Moscow, 1985).

² Clements, Barbara Evans. *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Alexandra Kollontai*, 1979; Farnsworth, Beatrice. *Aleksandra Kollontai. Socialism, Faminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution*. Stanford, California, 1980; Porter, Cathy. *Alexandra Kollontai, A Biography*. London, 1980

³ Kollontai, A. *Selected Writings*. Ed. by Alix Holt. London, 1977

and inspirational value and extraordinary originality”, as a “Bolshevik”⁴ (or “Socialist”⁵) feminist, a crusader for women’s rights and sexual freedom in a class-conscious society. Feminists have recognised Kollontai as “an important figure in their history”⁶. Some historians considered it possible to present Kollontai’s ideology as an “important case study of the fate of works that chose to criticise totalitarianism by making the Soviet revolution and the subsequent development of Soviet bureaucracy the focus of such a reflection”.⁷

I see two main periods in historical writing on Kollontai, which roughly coincide with the development of gender studies as a method of historical analysis in general and studies on Russian women's history in particular, which became an independent and influential part of Western historiography. The first period has started with Barbara Clements’ contribution to Edward’s *Reconsideration on the Russian Revolution*, which was characterised by the first attempt to reclaim Kollontai from the “myths” and misinterpretations of her life and thought that began to appear immediately after the revolution, in particular, the belief long held both in the Soviet Union and in the West, that Kollontai was responsible for the advocacy of “the glass of water theory” on sex and that her teachings led directly and logically to the moral anarchy and the abysmal lack of human decency that accompanied it.⁸ The word “myth” is very often used by feminist historians to question the legitimacy of the

⁴ Stites R. *Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia*. Princeton, 1978, pp. 346-359

⁵ Farnsworth B. “Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai”. In: *American Historical Review*, 81, no. 2 (April, 1976), p. 294

⁶ Holt A. “Introduction”, In: *Selected Writings*. p. 13

⁷ Faure, Christine, “The Utopia of the New Woman in the Work of Alexandra Kollontai and its Impact on the French Feminist and Communist Press”. In: *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change*. Ed. Judith Friedlander. Bloomington, 1986, p. 377, see also, Sipnovich, C. “Kollontai, Alexandra and the Fate of Bolshevik Feminism”. In: *Labour-Le Travail*, 1993, No. 32, pp. 287-295

dominant views on Kollontai on the public and academic levels. I use this word in quotation marks as I only partially agree with those authors who consider the appearance of these views as absolutely groundless. Kollontai's writing is full of ambivalence and her major works do really constitute an idea of a wide variety of relationships between the sexes in the communist society, which by no means were supposed to be realised only in the framework of the monogamous family. Besides, the numerous "stereotyped, sexist image of some eye-witness accounts", which male historians reproduced in their studies, the "intention to extend critique from Kollontai's personal life to her political views", to present her "as a romantic adventurer with bizarre sexual opinions"⁹, just reflects one obvious idea (although sometimes expressed in a very cynical form, and its criticism by feminist historians seems absolutely justified) that Kollontai's writing is extremely personalised and "cannot be fully understood outside the context of her personal life both before and after Revolution".¹⁰ In this sense, I suppose that Kollontai presents an example of those personalities, whose lives are not less interesting in history, than the fates of their intellectual ideas.

Although works written in this period display a variety of approaches and make different theoretical assumptions, the main questions of historical interest were the correlation between feminism and Marxism/socialism in her ideology and practical work and the relationship between class and gender - question which is central for the analytical concept of gender studies in their intention to challenge the

⁸Clements, B. "Alexandra Kollontai: Libertine or Feminist?", In: *Reconsideration on the Russian Revolution*. London, 1976, pp. 242-55

⁹ Donald M. "What did you do in the Revolution, Mother? Image, Myth and Prejudice in Western Writing on the Russian Revolution". In: *Gender and History*, Vol. 7, No. 1, April 1995, pp. 93-94

¹⁰ Stites R. *Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*. p. 346

prevailing discourse of social class as not encompassing the experience of women. Besides, the interest in these questions was strengthened by the attempts of the contemporary feminist movement in 70s to combine Marxism and feminism in a unified theory. Kollontai became interesting as an example of the first efforts to reconcile revolutionary Marxism with the women's movement and her works were perceived as "the most important contribution of its period to the development of relationship between the women's movement and the socialist programme".¹¹ Just a few historians, however, had seriously confronted the obvious question whether they might be compatible with each other.¹² Bammer expresses the opinion of quite large group of feminist historians when she writes "progressive Marxist thinkers, then as now, have recognised that the feminist analyses of Kollontai are not only not incompatible with Marxism but embody the very essence of a dialectic-materialistic method".¹³ As a consequence, her contradictions with Bolshevik party were explained as a result of ideological orthodoxy of Bolsheviks in the matters of sexual relations, distortion of Marxist ideas and the symptom of the growing totalitarianism.

The second period (from the early '90s) of writing about Kollontai was connected with the shift from an exclusively women's history to the concept of gender with its purpose of identifying how the knowledge about sexual differences was constructed within society. With the introduction of methods of analysis of fiction as a historical source historians have started to pay special attention to

¹¹ Holt A. "Introduction". In: *Selected Writings*. p. 27

¹² A recent essay in Marxist theory cites Kollontai as an exception to the otherwise pervasive distancing from sexual matters found in Marxist texts (Parker A. "Unthinking Sex: Marx, Engles and the Scene of Writing". In: *Social Text*, No. 29, 1991, pp. 28-45

¹³ Bammer, A. "Women and Revolution: Their Theories, Our Experience". In: *Bucknell Review*, 27, No. 1 (1982), p. 146

Kollontai's literary endeavours.¹⁴ Just a few works about Kollontai appeared in '90s, but they present a significant reconsideration of her ideology. The main figure here is Eric Naiman who in his study of Bolshevik sexual ideology in the period of NEP considers that Kollontai "phrased the entire question of communist sexuality in a manner wholly in keeping with the prevailing reductive and puritanical discourse" and "shared a common language, a discourse which found female biology and female sexuality oppressive".¹⁵ Moreover, according to him "in Kollontai's fiction, political disgust with the state of party policy becomes a sexual disgust, and female physiology and capitalism are paired as enemies of the Communist state"¹⁶. Naiman's point of view seems extremely interesting as it tries to challenge the traditional perception of liberational potential of Kollontai's ideology and brings up the new questions: how radical was Kollontai? Did her writings manage to challenge the prevailing discourse about sexuality or did they constitute just another of its many variants? However, in my point of view, Naiman ignores the feminist considerations which lie behind the visible similarity of Kollontai's and contemporary communist rhetoric of sexuality. Kollontai's concept of "new woman" is full of ambiguities. The extremist denial of old-style femininity is followed in her ideology by the strong desire to overthrow the standards of double morality in sexual relations and to make women genially free. It seems, that she wrote about the reconstruction of the

¹⁴In the previous decades Kollontai's fiction had been scorned even by those who take Kollontai's political writing seriously. Clements' description of Kollontai's fiction includes its dismissal as "bad fiction". (Clements B. *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Alexandra Kollontai*. pp. 228-231). Beatrice Farnsworth takes the fiction to be important principally for what it reveals about Kollontai's own life. (*Aleksandra Kollontai. Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution*, pp. 326-27). For the recent works on Kollontai's fiction, see, for example, Cheure, E. "Das Schicksal dreier Generationen oder Von der Illusion zu Desillusionierung, (Zu Aleksandra Kollontajs "Die Liebe der drei Generationene"). In: *Ost-Europa*, October 1993, Vo. 43, No. 10

¹⁵Naiman E. "Revolutionary Anorexia (NEP as Female Complaint)". In: *Slavic and East European Journal*, 1993, Vol. 37, No. 3, p. 320

relationships between the sexes in a way the male theorists did not (and could not), as according to her words "women and their fate have been the preoccupation of my entire life, and it is women's lot that drew me to Socialism".¹⁷ And this horizontal and vertical division of class and gender is always presented in her ideology.

The same critique could be addressed to Birgitta Ingemanson's article on the role of domestic objects in Kollontai novels. She suggests that "Kollontai's stories describe less the battle between men and women about women's sexual and economic independence than the one between capitalism in its death throes and fledging socialism".¹⁸ It seems, that the author exaggerates the political aspects of the stories (political considerations are vivid only in two of her stories, in others they exist mostly as a background), viewing it more as a political poster, literary form of expression of political ideas, and underestimates their primary purpose, which was clearly expressed by Kollontai herself. In the preface to "Great Love: she wrote: This novel is neither a study in morals nor a picture of the standard of life in Soviet Russia. It is a purely psychological study of sex relations in the post-war period. Many of the problems presented are not however exclusively Soviet Russian; they are world-wide facts which can be noted in all countries. These silent psychological dramas, born of the change in the sexual relations, this evolution, especially, in the feelings of women, are well known to the younger generation".¹⁹

I also see in the idea that "good and bad" characteristics of her heroes are divided "neatly along gender lines", as "they are really personifications of socialism

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 317

¹⁷ Kollontai A. *Iz moei zhizni i raboty*, p. 371

¹⁸ Ingemanson, B. "The Political Function of Domestic Objects in the Fiction of Alexandra Kollontai". In: *Slavic Review*, 48, no. 1 (1989), pp. 72-73

and capitalism"²⁰ - as a significant overstatement. We could hardly call "theoretician Senia" who was supposed to present in the novel "Great Love" one of the leading theoreticians among Marxist circles abroad "a member of bourgeoisie" (as his lover Natasha is not a "worker", but the representative of intelligentsia). At the same time Volodia in "Vasilisa Malygina" is portrayed by Kollontai (although probably without intention) as a rather careful and sensitive person. Here the main idea, in my opinion, is that even among the revolutionary circle, which aimed to radical transformation of society, and in the post-revolutionary society, the traditional perceptions of gender roles persisted and socialist revolution did not automatically resolve the problem of women's emancipation. Women's freedom is possible only through social activity and relegation of love to the sphere of secondary importance. It seems, that despite the innovative character of the article and the new line of enquiry it introduced, it simplifies already quite schematic character of Kollontai's fictional writing.

As Kollontai's case demonstrates, her writing and life as such were in fact the subject for manipulation and/or one can say that they were ascribed to the different discourses. Her ideology has been described and employed in a multitude of ways. The present work can hardly escape the same tendency, but tries to extend the horizon of possible interpretations of Kollontai's ideology by posing new questions and situating it in different contexts. In other words, this is not an attempt to reshape the narratives accepted in the 70s - it is just a different way of looking at a single topic.

¹⁹ Cited by Rowbotham S. *Women, Resistance and Revolution*. London, 1971, p. 154

²⁰ Ingemanson B., op. cit., p. 75

I.2. Love as an ideology; Defining the purposes of the dissertation.

Love's problematic has surprisingly occupied a significant place in different disciplines and a lot of scholars, traditionally associated with "serious topics", contributed to the production of the various interpretations of love. Love's connection in an immediate way with issues of reflexivity and self-identity, autonomy, individual-collective relationship makes it the subject not only of the numerous literary endeavours, but also the subject of scholarly interest. The intensities of these multiple domains indeed designate love as a special issue. Love together with such other "expressive" relations (sentiments) as patriotism or sense of community became the focus of scholarly attention as they are seen to be promoted across public and private domains. Love builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relations. Love (or rather the idea of love) (as one of the many other components) correlates and in many respects defines the border between public - private and collective - individual existence of the person. The works written on love (whose cases traverse many disciplines and domains) vary widely in the methodological approaches they employ, but are similar in their intention to find a rational explanation for love.²¹ They seek to understand the guiding principles that encourage people to identify love with freedom from societal conventions, and having a life with having an intimate life. By analysing love, by subjecting it to analysis, one consciously puts him/herself in the position when he/she shifts (merges, blurs, etc.) the border between public and private life of individual, deciding where the autonomy

²¹For example, N. Luhman's book is striking in its complete subjection of love to analysis; he pushes his investigation until the border than love ceases to be the sentiment and became one of the explicable

stops and collective existence begins, and questions the modes of attachment that make persons and collective. In tracing the processes by which love is institutionalised in society, their works usually reveal much of the rhetoric of the hegemonic public sphere, partially because the various speculations on the theme of the relationships between the sexes (and love as their integral part) always presented the conscious challenges to the public/private taxonomy from feminist, socialist, radicalist, anarchist or whatever perspective. Kollontai's writing on love is not an exception and anticipated the lines of inquiry of the many contemporary researches in this area.²² It functioned as an irruption of the contemporary forms of intimate eligibility, a determining of individual and collective destinies. What kinds of collective/personal existence can be supposed, and what kind of collective/personal future can be imagined if, sexuality/love is no longer bound to something institutional (like patriarchal families) and the necessity to sustain the system of property. Love in her writing poses a question of scale that links the in(stability) of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective, constantly reflecting the anxieties about being together and being alone. A related aim of Kollontai's reconsidering of love is thus to engage and disable a prevalent discourse on the proper relation between public and private, spaces traditionally associated with the gendered division of labour. These categories are considered by Kollontai to be very important because the space described by the public and private has, historically, organised and justified other

mediums of personal/collective communication. (Luhman N. *Love As Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*. Cambridge, 1986).

²²Anthony Giddens turns to what Foucault specifically neglects: the nature of love and, in particular, the rise of ideas of romantic love. He subjected love to analysis and surprisingly constructed his arguments according to the same lines as most of the utopian projects. His search for a "pure relationship" witnesses to the same desire to discover an ideal resolution to the relationship between the sexes in the finding of middle ground between the preservation of self-autonomy and appreciation

legally and conventionally based forms of social division (male and female, work and family, coloniser and colonised, friend and lover). A simple reconsideration of love can be resulted in complete reframing of all its structuring components related to the functioning of society.

I will consider the manner in which Kollontai's writing became preoccupied with love and sexual matters. As I focus attention on Kollontai's projection of ideological and political anxieties onto a sexual problematic (on the sphere of the relationship between the sexes), my primary goal will not be to describe her actual participation in Bolshevik's politics (which, in fact, is very well documented), but to examine the ideological uses made of love and sexuality in political theory oriented to the construction of the new social order. The word "love (by its somewhat conceptual vagueness, which lies at the basis of Kollontai's writing itself) is meant to encompass two different terms: love "in the broad sense" (as an agent of the transformation of society,) and "in the sense of relationships between the sexes". In the first chapter I will discuss Kollontai's concept of Eros against the backdrop of her time and the theory and praxis of love in the turn-of-the-century Russian culture. Here, I would touch upon her perception of the nature of the problematic relations between the sexes and the possible solution of "sexual crisis". To highlight the hierarchy and connection between love "in a broad sense" and "in the sense of relationships between the sexes", I will pay attention to the status of family (or couple as an isolated union) in relations to community (political authority), articulating and implementing the public intervention in the relations between the sexes and her perception of the distinction between private and public space. I would like to devote some space also to the

of the other. (see, Giddens, A. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in*

problem of socialist ethic(s) of sexuality. Kollontai's writing will be the prism through which one of the versions of socialist vision of sexual ethics will be evaluated. My purpose is to pursue how sexual behaviour was constituted in socialist thought oriented to the construction of the new social order. Here, I mean, first of all, the problem of rationalisation of pleasure with its strategy of elaborating the code allowing individual to achieve the status of *freedom* by putting constraints on his/her desires. One can see behind Kollontai's desire to establish new sexual regime the fear of disorder - and even the pleasures - that desire can bring. The emphasis is put on the superiority of social activity, on the liberative character of the non-alienated labour. Sexual energy freed from the repression of modern capitalist institutions and bourgeois morality finds its most adequate expression when is directed to common good and social purposes.

In the second chapter I will try to follow the interconnection between Kollontai's variant of the concept of New Woman and radical reconsideration of the role which love should play in women's life. The discussion of sexual emancipation and different versions of femininity within feminist discourse (with close attention to gender aspect of liberation) gives especially rich insight into the problem of finding an adequate categories for evaluating their potential from the point of emancipation. What is the measure of liberation (and women's emancipation)? What does constitute liberation? The coexistence of "repressive" and "progressive" trends at any particular time shows that those terms have meaning only in a relational sense informed by our own partial perspective. Even if we try to evaluate the liberative potential proceeding from the feminist stand point we still encounter with some difficulties, since elements

that existed in the feminist discourse around sexuality, love were manifold and contradictive. Besides, in my opinion, the feminist historians who try "to trace a history of feminism from the inside" face the danger to impose the modern feminist thinking on the realities of the *fin de siècle* Europe. And what does this "inside"²³ mean, if we assume that feminist discourse neither in the nineteenth century nor in 90s was coherent. Moreover, as many of the historical feminist studies demonstrate, the value judgements built in the characteristic of the 18-19th centuries feminist activities, are in fact the part of the formation of the present feminist thought(s) rather than an attempt to consider why (how, in response to which historical situation, within which ideological frame) the demands and concepts were formulated.²⁴ I think that it

²³As, for example, Harriet Anderson claims to do in her research on feminism and women's movements in fin-de-siècle Vienna. (Anderson, H. *Utopian Feminism: Women's movements in fin-de-siècle Vienna*. New Haven, 1992).

²⁴For example, there is a tendency among feminist scholars to draw the line between early utopian socialists and later generation of Marxist scientific socialists from the point of their attitude towards sexual issues. Thus, the authors of the *Powers of Desire* suggest that while Marxists saw sex as secondary, derivative of the real relationship of production, many of the earliest socialist theorists took sexual matters very seriously. In their point of view, within the general Victorian discussion of sex, women, and the family, Marx and Engels advanced enlightened insights combined with conservative assumptions. Unlike earlier socialists, Engels did not extend his insights into a vision of a sexual order incompatible with the mores of his age. He criticised legally sanctioned monogamy as part and parcel of a system of private property, but he idealised the nuclear family and monogamy itself. The socialist future would bring an end to legal marriage, but monogamy, freed of the distortions of capitalism, would flourish on a higher plane. "Monogamy, instead of collapsing", he predicted, "at last becomes a reality" for men as well as women, a formulation which, whatever its enlightened intentions, still ironically paralleled the conservative goals of the contemporaneous bourgeois social purity movement. (Introduction, *Powers of Desire. The Politics of Sexuality*. Ed. by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, New-York, 1983, pp. 9-51). This division with the clearly expressed intention to label both trends with some sort of "conservative" and "liberative" marks seems rather superficial unless the issue of sexuality is integrated into the whole complex of political questions and the connections between sexuality and broader spectre of politics in socialist ideology (at least within heterogeneous discourse) is uncovered. Thus, for example, the preservation of monogamous family as such could not be taken as a point of departure for the evaluation of any ideology' conservative potential if it is treated in isolation from the whole spectre of questions concerning the status of family in relation to the state, sexual division of labour, etc. The whole definition of monogamous family could have a shifting meaning within the whole complex of ideas about sexuality even within feminist discourse. At the same time the advocacy of multiple and varied sexual relationships (which usually came to be associated with cultural liberation) could be subjected (as in Kollontai's case, for example) to the idea of dissolution of the isolated couple in the community of labouring people and the restriction of privacy, and, as a result, could bear some repressive traits. It seems that the potential for liberation could not be estimated on the basis of the fixed categories. The same categories were playing different roles during the history

is only by first following the arguments along their paths that an insight can be reached which permits to make a differentiated critique. I see my purpose in a deeper integration of Kollontai's writing in historical intellectual context, by which I mean first of all the spectre of ideas of that period rather than concrete historical events. It was the time when feminism was just at the beginning of its ideological formation. To follow the logic of feminist argumentation(s) rather than to find the "truth" of femininity and women's emancipation is the issue of my current investigation. It provides ground for leaving the radical/moderate or liberative/repressive dichotomy which seems to dominate the discussion so far.

1.3. Why "sexual crisis"? Conceptual approach.

There are distinct problems with reading ideology as an absolutely coherent text. First, how do we know where the boundaries of a given ideology lie? In ideological analysis it is much more difficult to fix textual boundaries. The present work attempts to discuss the ideas proceeding from the historical intellectual space (which captured the ideological anxieties of the age) of a given time rather than making stress and analysis on the one particular discourse. It tries to trace how individuals derive meaning both from the ideology of political group they associate themselves with and from the cultural context in general. The former dictates genre and puts limits on discontinuity of possible interpretations, the latter prevents the reading of ideology as an interpretably coherent text. In finding the middle ground between the two approaches I see one of the purposes of the present work. In other words, this work does not approach one's ideology (or ideology in principle) as a self-

and subjection or prescription them just to one meaning significantly suppress the possibility to

contained entity, but rather, tries to disclose connections between different ideological trends. Kollontai is unique in this sense since her ideology is obviously a mixture of different discourses and bears the traits of the different intellectual streams.

It is difficult, when assessing the ambivalent and contradictory type of her ideology to define which events and ideas had the greatest influence on the formation of her views. One can see in her works the incompatible, from the first sight, sources of different intellectual trends. She read Havelock Ellis, and no doubt took the opportunity to acquaint herself with the debate in Western Europe on matters of love and sexuality. My emphasis is, that the ideas of Kollontai present an intellectual history, and could be viewed as a part (and in some sense continuation) of the development of Russian philosophy on sexuality in the turn-of-the-century Russia. In this sense, Kollontai's ideology is a syncretic creature. Marxism, a socialist ideal, seeking liberation in collective endeavour, is combined in her philosophy with feminism, on one side, and the Russian philosophical tradition on sexuality, on another.

Speaking about Kollontai, one could think that at least a generation separates her socialist vision of sexuality from the wide discussion on sexuality in *fin-de-siecle* Russia. However, she was a contemporary of Berdiaev, Rozanov and many other philosophers and publicists who contributed to the elaboration of "Russian version of sexuality". The theme "sexual crises" (so often appearing on the pages of Kollontai's writing) was a part of the European cultural phenomena²⁵ of that time and was a common rhetoric of Russian liberal intelligentsia to describe the contemporary

understand their role in this particular moment.

situation in the sphere of sexual relations. She was not the first who mentioned "that throughout the long journey of human history, you probably won't find a time when the problems of sex have occupied such a central place in the life of society".²⁶ The centrality of sexual questions was recognised by many Russian philosophers and most of the anxieties of the contemporary society were expressed in sexual categories.²⁷ Berdiaev pointed out in 1911, that "the coming of the creative epoch marks the transformation of natural order, and this transformation will start first of all in the point of sex, in the point of man's attachment to the natural necessity".²⁸

Most of the Bolsheviks did not operate by such categories, considering the solution of the sexual problems as an automatic result of the socialist revolution, and distanced from the elaboration of the theoretical questions on sex, instinctively feeling, that being not only "a part of superstructure" they presented a sphere of human relations, which are not completely subjected to scientific analysis. In her interest (not in the way of solution, of course), to sexual problems and psychology Kollontai was closer to the liberal intelligentsia than to Bolsheviks. In this sense, Kollontai was obviously the only one who inherited many of the problems of these highly theoretical discussions and tried to integrate them in the complex of political theory as a concrete basis for the future construction of the communist society. Berdiaev (who will appear many times on the pages of this work) wrote in *The Meaning of Creative Act*: "The revolutionary consciousness could be rarely met in the

²⁵In this respect "Russian Eros" does not stay apart from the traditions of European culture, however much of the ideas expressed by Russian philosophers do not have a direct analogue in the Western European thought.

²⁶ Kollontai A. "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle". In: *Selected Writings*, p. 237

²⁷Engelstein L. *The Keys to Happiness. Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siecle Russia*. Ithaha and London, 1992, pp. 1-13

²⁸ Berdiaev N. *Smysl tvorchestva*. Paris, 1985, p. 237

sphere of sex and love, as there it must be especially radical, or I can even say - religious. Social and scientific radicals and revolutionaries think only about the necessity to provide comfortable social and physiological environment for sex and never go deeper".²⁹ It seems remarkably true not only in a sense, that Kollontai, was unique among prominent Bolsheviks in seeking to incorporate the concept of sexuality into the revolutionary framework, but also in a sense, of the radical, very often extremist character of her ideology.

Situating Kollontai in the framework of Russian pre-revolutionary philosophy, I by no means want to identify it with the source of her ideology, in a sense of determining the character of its theoretical assumptions. Here, the major influence of Marxism on the character of her writing seems obvious. (Its individual elements were not particularly unique; she combined the ideas of Engels and Bebel with the concepts of emancipated womankind then under discussions in feminist circles, added Bogdanov's notion of the role of ideology in the class struggle, and developed a relatively consistent analysis of female liberation and sexuality³⁰). What I am seeking for is the tradition of philosophical writing on sex in Russia in her ideology; my main argument is that despite the fact that Kollontai, striving for the radical transformation in the relations between sexes and sexes and society, appears in opposition to the prevailing discourse on sexuality in Russian culture before the revolution (and after), she inevitably departs (in her critique of the contemporary situation and the model of sexual morality she produces) from the theoretical stances embedded in contemporary philosophical thought.

²⁹ Berdiacv N., op. cit, p. 354

³⁰ Clements B. "Emancipation through Communism: The Ideology of A. M. Kollontai". In: *Slavic Review*, 32, no. 2 (June 1973), pp. 327

Kollontai's writing is striking in its sentimentalisation of Marxist historical analysis, and it borders on the emotional in its erotisation of politics and reinscription into future communist society of the code of sexual behaviour which is supposed to bind individuals together by the erotic means. Its moral tenets about sex, however, may have been closer to those of the liberal intelligentsia than those of the Bolsheviks who founded the Soviet state. Soloviov's *vseedinstvo* and collective ideal, Berdiaev's thoughts on love, women, family, *byt* - all these elements would be shuffled and recombined in the formation of Kollontai's revolutionary vision of sex, community, and physiology. Although the language is quite different we still can hear the echo of the bright intellectual discussions and previous searches for ideal type of relations between the sexes, reconciliation of differences between the sexes in the turn-of-the-century Russia. The language became more primitive, as it usually happens with the ideas which are elaborated with the purpose to be implemented in practice, but with all schematism of these ideas they still bear the stamp of yet recently high Russian culture.

While the twentieth century assertion of sexuality has on the whole been an abstract one, Kollontai's ideas were, an exception to the rule and present a deliberate effort to establish a new sexual regime as a part of the desired revolutionary transformation of the Russian society. She situated the problem of sexuality in the social context and perceived the working out of the new morality and new sexual relations as part of the construction of the new society. She subjected the social relations of sexuality to sharp critique and stressed the need for social change. Kollontai retained a socialist perspective on the need for change in economic structures. Her theoretical works clearly expressed her desire to fully understand the

place of her new ideas in the Marxist framework. She reiterated in clear terms the need to see the issue of morality as a political issue and sought to rationalise the relationships between sexuality and broader movements for human freedom. Sexuality became a political subject in her ideology and was understood as one of the sides of political struggle and a medium for emancipation. Launching the critique upon the contemporary sexual regime she concentrated on sexual repression as the essential underpinning of modern institutions (ranging from a family to the institution of private property) or the capitalist system. She asked what role sexual ideology might have played in the struggle for public power and cultural influence waged between the old regime and the new social forces unleashed by the state's own program of modernisation. When she examined the conflict between personal autonomy and conventional social relations, she often used the hierarchy of sexual power and subordination to represent structures of domination and submission in the larger social world.

1.4. Sources and the problem of their interpretation

The dissertation is based on two types of sources: Kollontai's political writing and fiction. I do not have an intention to treat fiction "as only simple commentaries on the ideas outlined in her theoretical works". Using them together I would like to achieve the complex understanding of her ideas on love. It is true, that her fiction "lacks the strength of her sometimes overwritten but generally lucid and well-organised non-fiction. When she discussed the same issues in non-fiction, she produced work which suffered less from her didactic tendencies and which presented

her ideas in more complete form".³¹ But to apply the analytical tools of literary criticism is not my purpose. It is not the discovery of untold profundities in such fiction which is important for me, but the visible distance between her theoretical writings and fiction. The destination toward which I want this study to point has its purpose in posing the question of correlation of one's political and fictional writings. The result, I hope, will be a mutually productive dialogue that does not replace or supplement Kollontai's political writing with fiction but enriches the understanding and uncovers the new meanings of both.

The border between Kollontai's political writing and fiction is definitely blurred. Her political texts are obviously eroticised "so that [they] could ultimately be more effectively politicised". Kollontai sentimentalises political text by introducing such categories as love, friendship, spiritual bonds, etc. The range of literal epithets she uses is quite rich and one can consequently question the line between her fictional and political texts. On another side, there is much from didactic and political phraseology in her fictional writing: she was acutely conscious that she participated in the process of shaping of women (and men) of the future, who would preside over a more unified culture than the existing one. However, the genre she accepts dictates its own rules in both cases. Her fiction and political writing reflect different dynamics. Kollontai's political writing prophesied a new kind of relationship between men and women. Her novels, on the other hand, reflected ambivalence toward any emotional relationship with men, or using the language of contemporary philosophy, the possibility of reconciliation of sexes. She examines how society creates some of the tensions women experience as lovers and workers in their social needs and their social

³¹ Clements B. *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Alexandra Kollontai*, p. 231

relationships. Kollontai's fiction is grounded in the present and exactly this different time dimension determines the ideological tone and "mood" of her novels. Novels like *Vasilisa Malygina*, *Red Love*, etc. offer valuable alternative accounts of sexuality and desire in Russian culture. By situating the plot of the novels in the present, Kollontai had to face the difficulty of finding a resolution for the problematic relationship between the sexes, but the inability to do so made her lean in the opposite direction, towards ascetism and women's withdrawal from the long-term relationship. There is no middle ground between socially correct and dissolute themes, only a quick and irreversible transition from the hypocrisy of bourgeois family through purity to the joyful state of labouring community. The question of how one gets from here to there requires the establishment of a link between the flawed present and the unflawed future. But she was unable to find a golden mean between the old, bourgeois morality (a world in which women are consistently abused and humiliated) and the joyful state of love in the future communist society. The interplay between the literary texts reflecting the experience of women within the context of a society undergoing radical structural changes and her theoretical works elaborating the desired type of sexual regime with the obvious traits of utopian thought, is especially interesting for me.

The main components of Kollontai's ideology seem to have remained remarkably the same from 1903 to 1922 (the period of theoretical activity). Given her relative ideological consistency, I consider it possible to study the main works on sexual morality and family written before and after October Revolution, without fear of obscuring any major development.³² In this sense, I can not agree with Alex Holt

³² Kollontai saw fit to republish her pre-revolutionary works together with the new articles after the revolution under the title of *New Morality*, and since the works were widely circulated and frequently cited, it is possible to treat its four component articles as a major part of Kollontai's sexual doctrine.

and those authors who argue that Kollontai failed to adopt her ideas to the current situation. Formulated before revolution they did not correspond any more to the quickly changing political situation³³. I can hardly agree also with the statement that "the ideas Kollontai was putting forward seem today mild and reasonable; the furore they created at the time is indicative of the intellectual and cultural climate of the mid-twenties".³⁴ In my opinion, the large part of Kollontai's ideas from the beginning bore the traits of the utopian vision of love and human's psychology and large part of her ideas remains just the product of utopian thought.

Utopia plays a central role in her ideology. One may approach it as a part of the revolutionary myth, whose rational content died in the fervour of the emotional, ideological zeal with which the ideas were impregnated. Utopia ceased to be an empirical formulation and became instead a goad to action, a sustainer in the battle, an interpreter of events, a sanctifier. The myth is important not for the contours of its vision but for its power to bear the believer up. With Kollontai, whose dedication to the future played so strong a role in her motivation, the myth interpretation of her ideology's function seems valid³⁵. In understanding its importance one begins to understand the fact that in Kollontai's ideology liberation and repression often go paradoxically hand in hand. Utopianism is never truly atemporal; its blueprints necessarily involve a rejection of the present and of all that is unpleasant in contemporary "culture. The desire for a perfect future and the desire to be rid of the

Kollontai A., "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 225-231; "Sexual relations and the Class Struggle", pp. 237-249; "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", pp. 276-292, In: *Selected Writings*; "The New Woman". In: *Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman*. Ed. by Iring Fetscher. New York, 1971.

³³Holt A., op. cit, pp. 13-28

³⁴ Holt A., op. cit., p. 204

imperfect present are inseparable, just as dreams and their motivating wishes cannot be divested of the mechanics of repression.³⁶ At the same time I by no means want to view her utopia only as a part of "communist revolutionary myth". It is important that the "revolutionary myth" in her ideology was connected with the utopian and "ahistorical" vision of the resolution of the relationship between the sexes which was characteristic to Russian philosophical thought. And here once again the role of tradition seems important.

Sex, in particular, presents problems for utopian mentalities, for sexual desire is relentlessly metonymic, predicated upon fantasies of contact and contiguity. As Erik Naiman puts it, frequently dependent on imagery of penetration, possession, and difference, sexuality may become a utopian obsession. Since sexual desire and activity are so fraught with vulnerability, and since sexuality often operates around the notion of the (at least figured) presence of an Other, utopian integrative aspirations and fears frequently manifest a particular dread of erotic urges. Copulation is controlled with mathematical precision or must be obliterated by monastic rules or self-mutilating strategies of defence. Moreover, sex is so evidently an avenue for contamination that other metonymic categories tend to become equated with it. It may be bound with language as equivalent agents of pollution, it may be depicted - by virtue of its role in procreation - as the embodiment of historical and therefore anti utopian forces, and it may combine easily with disease or crime to produce cultural

³⁵Clements, B. "Emancipation through Communism: The Ideology of A. M. Kollontai". In: *Slavic Review*, 32, no. 2 (June 1973), p. 337

³⁶Naiman E. "Hysterectomies. On the Metaphysics of Reproduction in a Utopian Age". In: *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*. Ed. by Jane T. Costlow, Stephanie Sandler, Stanford, 1993, pp. 264-265

events and themes capable of holding a society spellbound.³⁷ Sexual matters usually function here as a metaphor for thoughts about something else: politics and ideology.

³⁷Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 15

IL CHAPTER I

LOVE AS AN IDEOLOGY.

II.1. The Reflections on "Sexual Crisis"

The choice of love (rather than sexuality) as a central topic for the present dissertation meant to suggest the extent to which the discussion on love served in the years leading up to 1917 and a decade after it as a sign of the speaker's rapport with an ideal community. A common critical reaction of the culture's obsession with sexual matters was to read current talk and behaviour as a symptom of social decease. The failure of the 1905 Revolution to generate meaningful social change was seen by many Russian progressives and scholars as the origin of the culture's turn toward sex. Sexual content seemed to possess the alarming power of filling all the old forms and fora of social debate.³⁸ But the wide *fin-de-siecle* discussion on the relationship between the sexes, on love was a part of more general context - "sexual crisis" - the peculiar time when the relationship between the sexes were becoming less dependent on the structures of property and love institutionalised itself as a separate subject in its full force. Love problematic was strongly inbuilt in the whole issue of the questions of morality. Love (or rather the idea about love) correlated and in many respects defined the border between public - private and collective - individual existence of the person. The spectre of gender confusion and sexual disbalance (especially in the family) were used to depict the problems of contemporary society. The problems of the relationship between genders were often used to depict the system of

³⁸See, for example, Laura Engelstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-10

contemporary political injustices. The discussion on love in this respect came to imply an indirect way to talk about much broader issues. By analysing love, Russian philosophers were engaged (though on a highly abstract level) in the process of defining the border between public and private life of individual, deciding where the autonomy stops and collective existence begins, and questioning the modes of attachment that make the personal and collective.

The *fin de siècle* period in Russia is known as a Silver Age. The Silver Age culture is particularly resistant to categorisation. There are two main conceptual approaches to this period in historiography. For most historians of Russia, it is marked by the repudiation of the materialist ethos of the 1860s, and by the advent of unprecedented freedoms. In his authoritative study Peter Moller has argued that the broadening of discussions on sex can be directly attributed to the influence of Tolstoy's famous story "The Kreutzer Sonata". Moller divides the years following The Kreutzer Sonata's appearance into two periods. In the first, which lasted until 1895, there was emphasis on the dangers of the sexual instinct; in the second, puritanism and ascetism were replaced by a stress on erotic liberation and the rehabilitation of the body, and "the raising of sexual morality was not nearly as topical as the question of sexual liberation without any kind of religious justification".³⁹ Another approach, taken as a point of departure in the present work, views this period more as continuation of the previous philosophical doctrines rather than a radical reconceptualisation of the concept of sexuality in Russia. As Catriona Kelly puts it "the process was less one of substitution than of augmentation".⁴⁰ The last two

³⁹Moller P. *Postlude to the Kreutzer Sonata: Tolstoy and the Debate on Sexual Morality in Russian Literature in the 1890s*. Amsterdam, 1989, pp. xiii-xiv.

⁴⁰Kelly C. *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992*. Oxford, 1994, p. 127

decades before the revolution certainly saw an increasing admission of explicitly erotic material to philosophical debate and to literature, most particularly in the years after 1906, when official censorship of books and journals had been relaxed and the discussion had crystallised into a self-proclaimed sexual crisis, a "sexual question".⁴¹ But although puritanism and ascetism were replaced by a stress on erotic liberation and rehabilitation of the body, the new eroticism by no means put paid to Russian culture's earlier ascetism; political radicals, including most socialists, continued to voice doctrines of sexual continence, which were in turn buttressed by scientific or quasi-scientific debate on such matters as sex crime and sexually transmitted disease. For their part, many of the writers on the new sexual morality and proponents of "sexual liberation", continued to justify their pronouncements in religio-mystical terms, if not necessarily in the terms of a narrowly orthodox Christianity, well after 1895.⁴² The recent studies demonstrate that despite the fact that the ideologists of Silver Age polemicized with the nineteenth-century utilitarianism, much of the philosophical works of this period were in many senses a continuation of the previous tradition. Thus, for example, Merezhkovsky's *Third Testament*, which was based on the fusion of love, religion and social action, was in many ways a continuation of nineteenth century radicalism. Historically, these three elements formed a triad in the Russian utopian tradition. In the nineteenth century, the ideals of love and religion took the semiotic form of their polar opposites - militant ascetism and atheism - but paradigmatically they performed the same function, as in Chernyshevsky's "What is to be done?" The ideal of *obshchestvennost'* remained unchanged and was common to all

⁴¹Engelstein L., op. cit., pp. 1-13

⁴² Kelly C., op. cit., p. 127

Russian utopian thinkers of the Silver Age.⁴³ Based on the Trinitarian formula of the "three in one", which subsumed man's individuality and his merging with another in the act of love, the ideal of religious community became the core of philosophical writings on sex in Russia in that period.⁴⁴

Restoring Eros and the sacredness of sexual love, suppressed by the Christian Church, to its rightful place, Russian philosophers sought new forms of sexuality. They did not subscribe to the popular justification of sexuality on the basis of reproduction and endorsed the generally held view of love as an activity that should somehow bind the individuals together with their fellow men. But emphasising the central role of erotic love, most of the proponents of sexual liberation rejected its physical consummation in keeping with nineteenth-century utopian thought as a whole. Sexual intercourse was viewed as an unsatisfactory way of achieving the unity. Copulation divided as much as, if not more than, it unified. As Berdiaev put it, "In sex man feels always something shameful and humiliating for his personal dignity. Man always hides here something. ... There is something disgusting in sexual act itself. Leonardo da Vinchi tells, that sexual organ looks so disgusting, that humanity would cease to exist if only people did not become so subjected to the uncontrollable emotions ... There is something humiliating for a man in the sexual life ... There is nothing individual, personal in sexual act, it unites man with the whole animalistic world".⁴⁵

⁴³Matich O. "Zinaida Gippius: Theory and Praxis of Love". In: *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism*. Ed. by Boris Gasparov, Robert P. Hughes. Berkley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1992, p. 239

⁴⁴Matich O., op. cit., p. 239

⁴⁵Berdiaev N., "Razmyshlnie of Erose". In: *Russkiy Eros ili filosofia l'ubvi v Rossii*. Moscow, 1991, pp. 266-267

Present in most utopian thought is a striving for wholeness, and in sexual act difference becomes most apparent at the very moment where the drive to obliterate it becomes most intense: "The flesh of two should merge together into a single flesh, they should completely penetrate each other. Instead of this an act of transparent union occurs, too temporary and too superficial. The price must be paid for fleeting union is still greater disunity"⁴⁶ The solution was found in the idea of androgyny. Here the spectre of the questions was determined in large part by the major discussion in European countries and especially Austrian Empire (in the framework of Austrian Secession) about the reconciliation between the sexes and even total abolition of sexual differences. The notorious figure of Otto Weininger was extremely popular in Russia, where his idea of bisexuality was transformed in the concept of androgyny, as a particular way out of "sexual crisis", salvation from the "horror of sex".⁴⁷ In the sexless whole of androgyny the desperate difference between the sexes is overcome. The complete unification is achieved and in this cosmic harmony there is no place for aggression anymore. For Berdiaev, who spells out his theory in much more detail, man's quest for the restoration of a lost androgynous ideal would culminate in an act of "creation" constituting the freely chosen union of man with God. "In the depths of sex, the creative act must conquer birth, the individual personality must defeat the species, and union in the spirit must triumph over natural union occurring in flesh and blood. This will be possible only with the appearance of a new, creative sex - androgyny, with the revelation of the creative mystery of man as a sexual being".⁴⁸ Erik Naiman points out the fact that Berdiaev's glorification of sex located him in the

⁴⁶ Berdiaev N. *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 228

⁴⁷ Berdiaev N. *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 239

centre of a somewhat deceitful 40-year-old tradition in the "left" Russian intelligentsia. The advent of liberal, realist fiction had led to scandal with its advocacy of "free love" and its "awareness of the details of concrete, material existence, even the petty, ugly or revolting ones", but free love for Chernyshevsky and his heirs had, ideally, involved very little physical mating, as Berdiaev was want to point out.

I approach Kollontai's ideology, as containing all the complicated and occasionally contradictory strands of thought of Russian philosophy that aspired to fundamental liberation in matters personal, even as it held more repressive potential. She was a part of a long tradition in the Russian intelligentsia that claimed to be glorifying sexuality (redeeming the "flesh") and condemning ascetism, but did so only by redefining these terms so as to exclude what had once been inherent in their definitions.

Kollontai employs social categories to describe the "sexual crisis". But the major theme is still the same - the genius union, the "reconciliation" between sexes is impossible in the contemporary society. Cursing the isolation of individual and solitude on the societal level, she branded any attempt to find really close relationship as doomed to failure. The unit of men and women in the contemporary society is a pure illusion: "... spontaneous wave of new attempts at living is developing from within the social fabric, giving man and woman hopes and ideals that cannot yet be realised. We are people living in the world of property relationships, a world of sharp class contradictions and of an individualistic morality. We still live and think under the heavy hand of an unavoidable loneliness of spirit. Men experience "loneliness" even in towns full of shouting, noise and people, and in a crowd of close friends and

⁴⁸ Berdiaev N. *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 237

work-mates, because of their loneliness men are apt to cling in a predatory and unhealthy way to illusions about finding a "soul mate" from among the members of the opposite sex. They see sly Eros as the only means of charming away, if only for a time, the gloom of inescapable loneliness".⁴⁹ To overcome his loneliness man tried to find another person, a loved one, to whom he could be close, but he did so selfishly with the single goal of fulfilling his own needs. Even free love did not solve the problem, if those practising it had been reared on the old values. In contrast to the contemporary philosophical discourse Kollontai seems to put the concrete analysis of the relationships between sexes at the centre of her theoretical works. *In Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle* she provides a sensitive picture of the sexual relations in contemporary society and depicts the factors that distorts the human psyche and thus prevent from the realisation of the ideal type of relations. But if we look more attentively to the rhetoric she uses it becomes clear that the solution of the crisis is still based on mere abstraction. She continues to raise sexual relations to a higher ideological plane and transform them into a more spiritual category. Hope existed only in the emerging emotion of proletarian consciousness, or "comradely solidarity", which would allow "spiritual closeness". "The magic key" for the solution is found, although in a more realistic form than in contemporary philosophy (as the political genre of her works dictated to do), outside the sphere relating directly to the relationship between two sexes. She was unable to depict the transitory period from the old, bourgeois morality to the joyful state of love in the future communist society.

⁴⁹ Kollontai A. "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle", p. 240

II.2. Erotic means of binding individuals together

To describe the character of the relations between the people in the future society, Kollontai employs the category "Eros". Kollontai following her predecessors is looking for the "creative form of love". She hoped for an inner transformation - for a "new Eros under communism", a love which extended throughout humanity. The concept of "Eros" has a deep tradition in Russian philosophy and has never been associated only with the relations between the sexes. It was always a starting point for raising physical relations to a higher ideological plane and more spiritual sphere. As Berdiaev writes: "I always thought that one needs to make difference between Eros and sex, love-Eros and physiological life of sex. These spheres are interconnected, but they are different"⁵⁰... "Love is by no means a sexual act, and does not have those positive or negative connection with it, which people with kin consciousness see everywhere; and love in its very deep sense is in opposition to the differentiated sexual act, but is in opposition in a difference sense than ascetism"⁵¹. Kollontai, like Berdiaev, insists on a distinction between sex (narrowly physical) and Eros (a broader and more spiritual category). "Love in its present form", she wrote, "is a very complex condition of the soul, long since detached from its original impulse - the biological instinct of reproduction - and often in sharp opposition to it. Love is a conglomerate, a complex combination of friendship, passion, maternal tenderness, affection, sympathy of spirit, concern, attraction, habit and many, many other nuances of feelings and experiences ... The existence of love-friendship where the element of physical attraction is absent, of love for one's work or for a cause, and of love for the

⁵⁰Berdiaev N. "Razmyshlnie of Erosee", p. 266

⁵¹Berdiaev N. Smysl tvorchestva, p. 241

collective, testify to the extent to which love has become "spiritualised" and separated from its biological base".⁵² The pre-revolutionary perception of love undergoes a major revision as Kollontai transposes it into the context of the Revolution. She wrests deification of sex free from its domestic, essentially bourgeois settings and put it to the service of revolution. Sex becomes a physiology free, transformative force - highly eroticised political power, collective/public driving force.

Her "winged Eros" is characterised by conceptual fogginess, but under its vagueness terminology two shapes assume some substance. The first was the tender erotism of "love-play". It is an erotism with the jealousy and possessiveness removed, it was the attraction of equals that enhanced the harmony of the group rather than isolating the couple in self-absorption. But proclaiming the rights of "love-play", she at the same time subordinates it to the second form of love and more powerful emotion of "love-comradeship", of "love duty to the collective"⁵³ - the ultimate goal of communist workers. Kollontai saw the development of such love as an integral part of the building of communism. For a collective to prosper, its members must care for one another. All must learn to work together in mutual respect and forbearance, and those men and women who loved one another erotically must learn to live that love without separating themselves from the group or attempting to possess one another. To achieve this transformation, communist society must increase the human being's ability to care for his fellow creatures, must civilise, or rather perfect, human nature. Her Eros is organically connected with the creation of the new type of love. Love here is not used in traditional individualistic perception: "Collectivism of spirit can then

⁵²Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 286

⁵³Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 291

defeat individualist self-sufficiency, and the "cold of inner loneliness", from which people in bourgeois culture have attempted to escape through love and marriage, will disappear.⁵⁴ However great the love between the two members of the collective, the ties binding the two persons to the collective will always take precedence, will be firmer, more complex and organic. Bourgeois morality demanded "all for the loved one". The morality of the proletariat demands "all for the collective".⁵⁵

Yet, in this spiritual collective, friendship and not sexuality, are the dominant images. Neither the self-absorbed couple nor sexuality would dominate. Each would be relegated to a lesser place, and collective work would be the generating motor and the unifying force. The friendship and mutual commitment of the collective would replace a couple's need for each other and provide emotional solace to a greater extent than could the single spouse. Kollontai's perception of love is not really bound by earthly desires. In her texts, love is not overtly sexual, nor is it cheapened by desire for a single other; rather desire is transformed into the worshipping of collective spirit. The task of love consists in strengthening the bonds between the individual members of the community. One can say that through the language of love and emotions the idea of collective got its extra strength. Not accidentally, Kollontai's description of collective is replete with the metaphoric language of love: "For a social system to be built on solidarity and co-operation it is essential that people should be capable of love and warm emotions. All these "warm emotions" - sensitivity, compassion, sympathy and responsiveness - derive from one source: they are aspects of love, not in the narrow, sexual sense but in the broad meaning of the word. Love is an emotion

⁵⁴Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 290

⁵⁵Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 231

that unites and is consequently of an organising character".⁵⁶ In order to achieve full self-realisation, a person must be integrated into the collective and man's task in achieving this state is to eliminate the spiritual hymen dividing him/ her from all others. In love - the community with what we experience outside ourselves - people could see the other person not as an object to be owned but as one who stood for the whole society. This was why, Kollontai wrote, however great people's love for each other might be, "the ties binding them to the collective will always take precedence, will be firmer, more complex and more organised".⁵⁷ Kollontai spoke of a community of people bound together by love rather than oaths, laws, or law enforces.

All the ideas about the Collective seem the conclusion of one of the main ideas of Bolshevism - the abolition of the private property and nationalisation of the means of production, which are necessary preconditions to make a person genially sociable. But what was more important in Kollontai's idea of "love-collective", is the intention to find the way for the solution of the sexual problem, to reconcile the contradictions between the sexes. And this solution, what is typical for Russian philosophical tradition, is found outside the borders of relations between the sexes. In opposition to the isolation of the couple in bourgeois society, the promise of happiness in this utopian vision refers to the collective. Happiness is only conceivable inside social reality. The spiritual bonds of community removes the lovers, as an isolated union" into a homogeneous "cosmos" of the collective. "The stronger the collective, the more firmly established becomes the communist way of life. The closer

⁵⁶Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 285

⁵⁷Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 234

the emotional ties between the members of the community, the less the need to seek a refuge from loneliness in marriage."⁵⁸

Modern love always sins, because it absorbs the thoughts and feelings of "loving hearts" and isolates the loving pair from the collective. In the future society, such a separation will not only become superfluous but also psychologically inconceivable.⁵⁹ "The untroubled relations" are possible only by subordination of the individual love to the love for collective. The couple is not self-sufficient unit and two individuals relate not to each other but to community. That is why, there is no place for aggression of the struggle between the sexes. It is totally absent in the new community. Non-violent relationships between the sexes and towards society are only imaginable in the world of social activity and comrade solidarity. Kollontai demands the merging of the two figures into one large shape of collective: "Communist morality requires the education of the working class in comradeship and fusion of the hearts and minds of the separate members of this collective".⁶⁰

Kollontai writes about conflict of "love loyalties" in the modern society. The key to the solution is found once again in the "love-collective". People were conflicted, she writes, by their simultaneous feelings for work, for lover, for child, and for the collective; and the most tempestuous of these conflicts was the simultaneous fondness for two people of the opposite sex.⁶¹ This was not the cheap adultery or the multiple affairs of bourgeois life; it was a genuine and inevitable feature of life in an

⁵⁸Kollontai A, "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 231

⁵⁹Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 290

⁶⁰Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 230

⁶¹Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 287

age of increasing human association and psychological complexity.⁶² Must the worker fear and suppress such natural feelings? asked Kollontai. Not in the collective of the future. Instead of the tyranny of individual love, a network of warm relations between the people would support the individual in the idea that sexual passions could be made tractable. In the collective, "the more such threads connecting soul to soul, heart to heart, and mind to mind - the more strongly will the spirit of solidarity inculcated and the easier it will be to attain the ideals of the working class - comradeship and unity". People would see the beauties of "the many-sidedness and many strings of the winged Eros" within the larger loving embrace of the "love-collective", the final form of human love; and they would do so whether their love took the shape of long alliances or brief liaisons.⁶³

Kollontai's favourite theme of "love for two men", which often appeared in her theoretical works and fiction to illustrate the reconciling effect of "love-collective", resembles Chernyshevsky's concept of the erotic triple union as the agent of a "common cause". It was modelled on the French utopian socialist ideas about collective love and Pierre Leroux' belief that the love triangle reflected the Trinitarian order of the universe.⁶⁴ According to this practice, which was translated into the chaste *menage a trois* in the idealistic forties, two men and one woman live together in idyllic harmony, even, though the woman loves both men simultaneously. Following Chernyshevsky's ideas about triangular love and political action, which are closely linked in his theory, Kollontai gave the triple union almost the same meaning.

⁶²Stites R. *Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, p. 352

⁶³Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 288

⁶⁴For a discussion of Leroux' view of the romantic triangle as a reflection of the Trinity, see Klenin, E. "N.G. Chernyshevskiy's *Chto delat?* and Two Novels by George Sand: *Jacque* and *La Comtesse de Rudolfsstandt*". In: *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie*, 51, pp. 367-407).

Hurt, jealousy, and possessiveness would disappear because people are united by the ties which are much stronger than love in a narrow perception of this word - by common cause and shared ideology. "Only the ideology and the life-style of the new, labouring humanity can unravel this complex of emotion".⁶⁵ By propagating the collective form of Eros, Kollontai was looking for the erotic means which would help to bind individuals together rather than separate them.

II.3. "To speak naturally about natural processes" (August Bebel)

When Kollontai transfers discussion from the "philosophical level" to the problem of concrete regulation of the relations between the sexes and the sexes and society her language becomes rather harsh. Throughout her whole writing she claims to deny the interference of collective in the sexual matters and relegates sexual questions to the sphere of privacy. She emphasised, that "once the relations between the sexes cease to perform the economic and social function of the former family, they are no longer the concern of the worker's collective".⁶⁶ There are two grounds on which, in the interests of the workers' collective, the relationships between the sexes ought to be subject to legislative regulations: 1) the health and hygiene of the nation and the race (this concern for the health of the human race does not establish either monogamy or polygamy as the obligatory form of relations between the sexes, for excesses may be committed in the bounds of the former, and a frequent change of partners by no means signifies sexual intemperance.⁶⁷ 2) the increase or decrease of

⁶⁵Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 287

⁶⁶ Kollontai, "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 227

⁶⁷ Kollontai. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 229

population required by the national economic collective.⁶⁸ Most of the historians of the "first period" base their analysis in complete accord with these statements. I suppose that we cannot take the above declarations at face value without encountering with a lot of contradictions.

Kollontai does not appeal to sexual abstinence and sublimation of sexual desire, which characterised much of the rhetoric of early Bolshevik ideologists in the sphere of sexual relations,⁶⁹ moreover she criticises sexual restraint as harmful for the health: "The preservation of health includes the full and correct satisfaction of all man's needs; norms of hygiene should work to this end, and not artificially suppress such an important function of the organism as the sex drive."⁷⁰ Kollontai employs rather pragmatic language to describe the sexual relations and puts no limits to people's realisation of sexual desire. Even though she does not recommend "excesses" in sexual relations, she puts no moral judgements, the language she uses is still "scientific" and determined by the consideration of health: "Science has discovered that when a woman has relationships with many men at one time, her ability to have children is impaired; and relationships with a number of women drain the man and effect the health of his children negatively".⁷¹

The authoritative source for Kollontai on this issue was August Bebel's book *Women in the Past, Present, and Future*⁷², where he stated that the natural exercise of the sexual functions is a necessity for the healthy development of the individual,

⁶⁸ Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 228

⁶⁹ See Naiman E. "Revolutionary Anorexia".

⁷⁰ Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 229

⁷¹ Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 229

⁷² Bebel A. *Woman in the Past, Present, and Future*. London, 1885

whether man or woman.⁷³ No doctor or physiologist can more forcibly express the necessity which every sound person is under of satisfying amatory desires. It is a law which every individual must fulfil as a sacred duty towards himself, if his development is to be healthy and normal, to neglect the exercise of no member of his body, to refuse gratification to no natural impulse. Each member must discharge the functions assigned to it by *Nature*, on pain of injuring and stunting the entire organism. The laws of our physical development must be as exactly studied and obeyed as those of our mental development.⁷⁴ It is unquestionable that neglected satisfaction of the sexual impulse exerts the most detrimental influence on the mental and bodily condition of men and women, and that no social institutions can be regarded as healthy which prevent the normal gratification of the natural instincts.⁷⁵ Completely following much quoted passage from Bebel, Kollontai wrote: "The sexual act must be seen not as something shameful and sinful but as something which is as natural as the other needs of healthy organism, such as hunger and thirst. Such phenomena cannot be judged as moral or immoral. The satisfaction of healthy and natural instincts only ceases to be normal when the boundaries of hygiene are overstepped". This association between the ethics of sex and the ethics of the table was constant factor throughout the whole history. The reference to nature came to imply the combination of three basic appetites, relating to food, drink, and reproduction in one set of pleasures.

In *The Use of Pleasure (The History of Sexuality, Volume II)*, Foucault traces the long history of the connections between alimentary ethics and sexual ethics as

⁷³Bebel A. op. cit., p. 48

⁷⁴ibid., p. 43

manifested in different ideological doctrines. He considers it necessary to discover how over a long period of time, the play of elementary prescriptions became uncoupled from that of sexual morals⁷⁶, by following the evolution of their respective importance (with the rather belated moment when the problem of sexual conduct became more worrisome, than that of alimentary behaviours) and the gradual differentiation of their specific structure (the moment when sexual desire began to be questioned in terms other than alimentary appetite).⁷⁷ In Kollontai's ideological framework this triangle functions mostly like a remnants of this system: eating, drinking, sexual desire have the same ethical connotations – they are bound together by the same reference to nature, to the natural origin of these instincts. Eating, drinking and sexual intercourse constituted analogous ethical material; they brought forces into play that were natural.

Nature is engaged in explanation. The concept of nature is taken as given or as *natural/real*, as something which exists outside economic/social space and is not distorted by the influence of socio-economic conditions. It permitted a common denominator to be found for sexuality, which was increasingly becoming a topic in its own right – as nature did not need explanations or justifications. By naturalising sexual instinct, by making nature - *natural*, Kollontai finds it to be a sufficient reason for rejecting all ascetic speculations concerning the sexual act. It was a conscious step towards making sexuality free from its moral norms imposed by society. There is a

⁷⁵ibid., p. 47

⁷⁶Eric Naiman demonstrates how during NEP the pairing of these two instincts came to serve as an ideological sign: sexual consumption and gastronomic consumption were routinely lumped together as symbols of social corruption. Excess in eating and excess in sexual behaviour were two of the traits used to distinguish the bourgeois from his or her hardworking proletarian counterpart. (Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public*, p. 209).

⁷⁷Foucault M. *The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 2, London, 1984

clear intention to return sexuality to the set of biological instincts, to rationalise desire and make the humanity free of meaning attributed to the sexual act. But nowhere did she asked what is *Nature*. In this sense Kollontai is not different from many other Marxist writers who were preoccupied with finding a real nominators as a point of departure for the construction of different theories. Nature is relegated to the side of reality. Nature, natural, science, medicine, - all these words are invoked to find "solid" basis for the integration of sexuality into the superstructure. "Nature remained nature. ... And our only salvation, as Bebel puts it, lies in a return to nature and to natural intercourse between the sexes, in casting off the unhealthy, spiritualistic ideas of humanity which cling to us today".⁷⁸ Thus, despite the fact that Marxism relegates sexuality to periphery of its ideological constructions, it has not ceased to include sexuality to its good fortune from its conceptual field. Kollontai, in this sense, provides a good example how Marxism (in its logical finality) tends to find a rationalistic explanation for natural forces and thus to integrate sexuality into its theoretical constructions.

Naturalisation of sexuality can be viewed as part and parcel of the deconstruction of an essential subjectivity that has marked capitalist society or "repressive reality"⁷⁹, as Kollontai called it. Bebel, rejecting the "hypocritical prudery, shamefacedness, and concealed lasciviousness which characterises our own day", calls for speaking "naturally about natural processes".⁸⁰ Kollontai demonstrates the same tendency: she tries to liberate sexuality from the moral and social constrains imposed by society. One can say that she, to some extent, is purposefully trying to

⁷⁸Bebel A. op. cit., p. 70

⁷⁹Kollontai A. "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle", p. 247

return sexuality to the sphere of nature and pure instincts. The awareness that sexuality is a cultural construct (not really just limited to the socio-economic structure⁸¹, though, of course, different from its post-modern understanding) is demonstrated throughout her whole writing.⁸² She constantly tries to uncover the connection between sexual norms (especially in the family) and the socio-economic basis⁸³, but as soon as she starts talking about socialist society she seeks the way to reduce sexuality just to the satisfaction of the purely physiological instincts. She looks for the "pure form" of sexuality which is only possible to achieve in the socialist society. I consider the attempt to rationalise sex in this way as the element of structuring sexuality, and the redistribution of power elements on a different level: as *natural* and even necessary as sexual act may have been considered, it is nonetheless the object of her (moral) concern. It calls for a delimitation that would enable one to determine the proper degree and extent to which it could be practised. The struggle for sexual liberation became the part of the self-same apparatus of power that it

⁸⁰Bebel A., op.cit., p. 35

⁸¹"If the sexual crisis is three quarters the result of external socio-economic relationships", she wrote, "the other quarter hinges on our "refined individualistic psyche", fostered by the ruling bourgeois ideology", "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle", In: *Selected Writings*, p. 240.

⁸²"All the experience of history teaches us that a social group works out its ideology, and consequently its sexual morality, in the process of its struggle with hostile social forces", Kollontai A. "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle". In: *Selected Writings*, p. 249

⁸³"Each historical (and therefore economic) epoch in the development of society has its own ideal of marriage and its own sexual morality" ("Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of marital Relations". In: *Selected Writings*, p. 228); "Family and marriage are historical categories, phenomena which develop in accordance with the economic relations that exist at the given level of production. The form of marriage and of the family is thus determined by the economic system of the given epoch, and it changes as the economic base of society changes. The family, in the same way as government, religion, science, morals, law and customs, is part of the superstructure which derives from the economic system of society" ("Theses of Communist Morality in the sphere of Marital Relations". In: *Selected Writings*, p. 225). In a different place Kollontai writes about the evolution of love throughout the history: "... at all stages of historical development society has established norms defining when and under what conditions love is "legal" (i.e. corresponds to the interests of the given collective), and when and under what conditions love is sinful and criminal (i.e. contradicts the tasks of the given society). "Make Way for Winged Eros". In: *Selected Writings*, p. 279

denounces.⁸⁴ The question, thus, appears not in the form whether she was the author of "glass of water theory" (the overall public disgust with which was connected precisely with its bordering on pure [animalistic] side of physiology) or not, but in what was the purpose of relegation of sexual activity to the sphere of nature and equitation of sexual act with satisfaction of such other human's needs as hunger and thirst. The central issue, Foucault argues, is not to determine whether one says yes or no to sex ... whether there was more or less sexual intercourse, greater or fewer opportunities, whether one asserts its importance or denies its effect... but to account for the fact it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, how it articulated with other discourses, and how the various discourses of sexuality served to constitute, rather than merely reflect their object.⁸⁵

Kollontai's concept expressed the fact that nature/natural instinct was gradually liberating itself from society's fetters and, as nature, had the right to do so. Family (as a social institute) was rejected for the constraints it placed on time and form of the satisfaction of the sexual desire; sexual instinct appears to be directed to its full gratification, for this was the only way in which it could appear as natural. But at this point the concept of nature also symbolised differentiation - and no longer perfection in its essential forms - nature brings forces into play that have the tendency to be excessive and possess the same type of danger: that of exceeding what is necessary; and they all raised the same question: how could one, how must one "make use" of this dynamics of sexual energy, desires and acts? In Kollontai's doctrine of the

⁸⁴Foucault M., op.cit., p. 8

⁸⁵Foucault M., op.cit., p. 45

sexual act, the excessive force of pleasure had its principle not in the moral considerations, but for her this force was potentially excessive by nature, and the question was how to confront it and regulate its economy in a suitable way. However, it is not clear where the line is drawn between "natural" form of instinct and its excess, "perversity" and "normality" and the measure of excess appears to be a highly manipulated figure.⁸⁶ This is the point for Kollontai where society comes to interfere into the regulation of the relationship between the sexes. *Nature* stops being *natural*. But for Kollontai this was obviously not a question: she does not ask if there is something like *Nature* or sexuality outside of society. The introduction of such measure as "excess" presupposes that her doctrine is rather the reformulating of the prevailing views rather than liberation from the "fetters of capitalist society".⁸⁷

The idea that sexual activity could be dangerous to the individual because it potentially excessive and may be resulted in a loss of vital energy had been widespread in nineteenth century Europe and America. In Russian pre-revolutionary medical discourse⁸⁸ this idea finds its reflection in the advertising of the physical

⁸⁶As Eric Naiman demonstrates, that despite the fact that most of the Bolsheviks denied were own puritanism, "any manifestation of sexual desire was tainted by the possibility of excess; the logic of the discourse demanded a retreat to a point where sexuality's "swollen" size would become infinitely small. Many pedagogues, doctors, and politicians entering the lists of the debate on sex seemed to suspect where their language was leading, for the denial of asceticism became a standard trope in discussions of sexuality ... After each disclaimer, however, came a "but" and such a vigorous attack on sexual excess that by the end of an article or speech the denial of ascetic purpose carried virtually no weight. (Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public*, p. 129).

⁸⁷In this respect, her views were not different from that of Bebel, who suggested that "too much sexual indulgence is even more injurious than too little. A misused organism can be ruined even without the aid of venereal disease; impotency, sterility, spinal complaints, idiocy or imbecility, and various other derangement are the consequences. Moderation is therefore quite as necessary in sexual enjoyment as in eating or drinking or the gratification off any other human requirements".⁸⁷ (Bebel A., op.cit., p. 104). It is interesting that sexual act is here once again linked to such other "natural" instincts as hunger and thirst.

⁸⁸ In Russia, as in Europe, the intrusion of the capitalist marketplace, the emergence of commercial culture, and the institutional consolidation of professional expertise generated a contest over the authority to regulate sexual conduct, to determine the boundaries of individual autonomy, and to demarcate public from private. Questions of social order, of the relationship between public and

labour as the key to keeping one's desires in check. The luxury of idleness produces the hyperactive fantasy and untapped physical resources that fuel a sexual self-indulgence. Social commitment will was suggested as diminishing the privileged man's self-absorbed quest for pleasure.⁸⁹ Exposure to injustice and dedication to the common good can deflect his appetite for personal gratification. In a more extremist form this idea passed to the early Bolshevik ideology Professor Aron Zalkind, a psychoneurologist who wrote prolifically about sexual matters in the Komsomol press, borrowed selectively from Freud to produce a theory which justified the redirection of sexuality into social reconstruction. He explained that "rich, secure segments of society, possessing an excess of energy for which they have no outlet, develop a monstrous sexual sensuality whither they direct the overwhelming portion of their parasitic interests".⁹⁰ Protecting one's ideological purity entailed controlling one's sexual urges. However, the dictate to sublimate sexual desires quickly evolved into the recommendation that young communists abstain from sexual intercourse.⁹¹

It is hardly possible to make a direct parallel between some of the views on sexuality in the pre/post-revolutionary professional discourse and the pre-revolutionary philosophy on this matter. Yet, with all philosophical abstractedness of

private, reason and passion, surged to the forefront of scientific discourse, intensifying and transforming the existing public interests in sex. As Laura Engelstein puts it, after 1905 many observers felt that conventional moral values had lost their power to shape private norms, just as political beliefs had ceased to channel public behaviour in constructive ways. The problem was to replace the discredited authorities with others employing more effective disciplinary techniques. Professionals with scientific expertise stepped into the breach. Science, claimed the psychiatrist Vladimir Bekhterev in 1910, must provide rational guidance in an era when "neither religious nor moral norms are able to contain sexual desire within the bounds necessary for human well-being". A "materialist and liberal", Bekhterev believed that scientific objectivity, not political ideology, was the key to social renovation. Marriage, he said, "should be regulated not by the ritual aspects of religion but by basic biological goals" (Engelstein L., op. cit., p. 243).

⁸⁹Engelstein L., op. cit., p. 231

⁹⁰Cited by Naiman E. "Revolutionary Anorexia (NEP as Female Complaint)", p. 306

⁹¹Naiman E. *ibid*, p. 306

the latter, it bears a striking resemblance (though on a different level) to the ideas employed in the concrete reclamation of the relationship between the sexes. In Russian pre-revolutionary philosophy the idea of sexual excess got a peculiar continuation of the themes under discussion in the professional circles. If we look at the rhetoric of contemporary philosophy we can see the same intention to transform the erotic energy into creativity and social action. For the "new man" of Chernyshevsky, Solov'yov, Nikolai Fyodorov and Berdiaev, love was the agent of the transformation of life and was strongly associated with the social service which goal is the alteration of the world. According to Berdiaev, "it is a mistake to identify sex with sexual intercourse". The sexual energy could be realised in a various ways; thus, it could be directed to the creative act. Berdiaev speaks about sexual desire as the reflection of the "creative energy in a person".⁹² There is a torturing excess of energy, which demands the outcome in the outside world, in an object.⁹³ The sexual activity could be directed to the creation of another type of the world, to the continuation of the creative act. The weakness of sexual act is not yet the equivalent of weakness of sex, as the energy of sex, permeating the human nature, can have many features and directions. When one says, that men conquered sex in himself by the power of spiritual creativity, it is not the sex what is conquered in this case, but that the different direction to the sex energy is given - it is directed to creativity. One should not exaggerate the significance of the sexual act for the life of sex. The life of the individual is possible even without the sexual act and even richer.⁹⁴

⁹²Berdiaev N. *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 236

⁹³Berdiaev N. *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 229

⁹⁴Berdiaev N. *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 218

In Kollontai's writing these two trends: the philosophical search for an energy to be directed to the creative act and much more practical considerations on the proper use of sexual energy interestingly mingled together and transformed the link between sexual activity and the depletion of energy into a phenomenon that affected all areas of social and economic interaction. The conceit of intercourse as entropy practically lost its status as metaphor when she writes about the Civil War years:

There was neither time nor a surplus of inner strength for love's joys and pains". Such is the law of the preservation of humanity's social and psychological energy. As a whole, this energy is always directed to the most urgent aims of the historical moment ... The unadorned sexual drive is easily aroused but is soon spent; thus "wingless Eros" consumes less inner strength than "winged Eros"(when no feelings are involved) , whose love is woven of delicate strands of every kind of emotion. "wingless Eros" does not entangle the rational workings of the mind. The fighting class could not have fallen under the power of "winged Eros" at a time when the clarion call of revolution was sounding. It would not have been expedient at such a time to waste the inner strength of the members of the collective on experiences that did not directly serve the revolution. Individual sex love, which lies at the heart of the pair marriage, demands a great expenditure of inner energy. The working class was interested not only in economising in terms of material wealth but also in preserving the intellectual and emotional energy of each person.⁹⁵

Kollontai was looking for the possibility to transform erotic energy into a driving collective public force. Echoing the pre-revolutionary philosophical discourse, Kollontai writes: "Emotional energy has accumulated men and women, even of the working class, have not yet learned to use it for the inner life of collective. This extra-energy seeks an outlet in the love-experience⁹⁶. "Working men and women, armed with the science of Marxism and using the experience of the past, she writes, must seek to discover the place love ought to occupy in the new social order and determine the ideal of love that corresponds to their class interests".⁹⁷In the tradition of contemporary (pre-revolutionary) definition of "love" she hinted that the greater Eros' wings, the less sexual relations would occur: "The boldest fantasy is incapable

⁹⁵Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 277

⁹⁶Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 278

of grasping [Eros' future] form. But one thing is clear: the more strongly the new mankind will be welded together by the lasting ties of solidarity, and the greater its spiritual-emotional union in all aspects of life, comradeship and society, the less room will remain for love in the contemporary sense of the word".⁹⁸ The greater the intellectual and emotional development of the individual the less place will there be in his or her relationship for the bare physiological side of love, and the brighter will be the love experience.⁹⁹ While exulting in the triumph of "Winged Eros", Kollontai spoke of sexual activity in terms that compressed its legitimate sphere. Her language - "the boldest fantasy is powerless (or impotent) to grasp its form" - hints at a gulf between an imagined ideal future and a realm of the flesh that the perfect society will lack the "potency" to grasp. The literal implications of Kollontai's observation, "the morality of the working class, insofar as it has already crystallised, distinctly discards the external form assumed by love relations between the sexes", suggest a discomfort with the shape of sex and with the physical contours of intercourse. Kollontai dreams of a time when the outer shell - or body - of sexuality will be shed, leaving us only with love's content: "the disembodies joy of angels equipped with ropes that bind rather than arrows that pierce",¹⁰⁰ the erotic means which bind individuals together, rather than separate them. The basis of the future union is friendship not hedonism: "The individualists, who have the chance to change their sexual relationships so that

⁹⁷Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 285

⁹⁸Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 290

⁹⁹Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 231

¹⁰⁰Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 228

they are based on the creative principle of friendship and togetherness rather than on something blindly physiological".¹⁰¹

The "discomfort with the shape of sex and with the physical contours of intercourse" does not presuppose that Kollontai perceived the sexual act as an evil; for her it was not the object of a moral disqualification. But the text bear witness to an anxiety concerning the activity itself. And this anxiety revolve around two basic points: the preservation of the autonomy of the individual (the preservation of self in the relationship with the other) and the relationship between the couple as an isolated union and collective. While exalting the joy of erotic union, she also questions: "How can sexual relations be structured so that as they increase the general sum of happiness they do not contradict the interests of the collective?". When the question was phrased in this manner, it was difficult to define the territory within which class interests might not have reduced the potential for sexual relationship to non-existence. Kollontai could not hold the view of non-interference in sexual relations from the moment when besides purely "biological/natural" basis of sexual relations she starts speaking about couple as a union with a special psychological interests. "From the very early stages of its social being", she writes, "humanity has sought to regulate not only sexual relations but love itself"¹⁰² ... "Working men and women, armed with the science of marxism and using the experience of the past, must seek to discover the place love ought to occupy in the new social order and determine the ideal of love that corresponds to their class interests".¹⁰³ And here, her rhetoric is much harsher than before. Actually, the regulation of the relationship between the couple and

¹⁰¹Kollontai A., "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle", p. 240

¹⁰²Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 277

“collective” has the central place in her ideology, and she persistently tries to present the couple (as an isolated union) as harmful to the community. The loving couple, absorbed primarily in each other, would not be welcome. In her vision, the friendship and mutual commitment of the collective would replace a couple’s need for each other and provide emotional solace to a greater extent than could the single spouse. In an atmosphere of the actual disturbing social divisions in the contemporary society, the question of regulation/control inevitably became paramount in all areas fraught with fragmentation. It was logical that Kollontai, striving for coherency, will eventually begin to tighten its grip on previously "natural" areas of people's activity. And despite the assertions of an individual's rights to sexual privacy she succumbed to an increasingly strong discomfort with individual life outside the collective. Her writing reflected a conscious attempt to introduce measures to penetrate privacy and witness about the utopian desire for the elimination of potentially disruptive differences, of rifts between individual members and the collective, to erase (or shift) the line dividing public from private life.

II.4. Achieving Total Transparency

Many of the ideas outlined above have their origin in Kollontai’s advocacy of "less stability" in the relations of the sexes in the pre-revolutionary period, when she proclaimed the merit of the comradely but short-lived relations. She explained why the less stable marriage, with its greater flexibility in the relations of the sexes, corresponded to the needs of the proletarian class. Imagine a bourgeois financier who, in a moment of business crisis, withdraws his capital for his family’s sake. Kollontai

¹⁰³Kollontai A. "Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth", p. 285

believed this would be seen as proper in terms of bourgeois morality, in which family needs come first. She compared him with the strike-breaker who, in the interests of his family, wanted to work during a strike. Would his comrades not urge him to put the interests of his class first? Hence the stronger the ties of the individual couple or family, the poorer the outlook for workers' solidarity. The worse, too, for the liberation of women, who to be free had to learn to view love and the emotions within family relationships as men did - as only one part of their total existence.¹⁰⁴ The contention that "less stability" in the relations of the sexes coincided with the needs of the working class had a certain plausibility in the pre-revolutionary era if one accepted the premise that people needed to be free for the uncertainties of battle.¹⁰⁵

In Kollontai's novel *Vasilisa Malygina* sexual and ideological elements are closely linked. Ideology directly interfered into the relationship between the sexes and stays on the way of sustaining of the healthy atmosphere inside the couple. *Vasilisa Malygina* and its chief characters are obsessed with purity, both ideological and sexual. The action takes place primarily in the provincial town to which Vasilisa's husband invites her, and most of the dramatic tension revolves around her discovering the extent of his ideological and sexual infidelities. The word "pure" surfaces repeatedly, as Vasia questions both her lover's and her own ideological and sexual correctness. The pursuit of purity is compulsive and endless; the disquieting message of most of the novella is that one can never be clean.¹⁰⁶ Kollontai tells her reader that the two lovers have been intimate since soon after the Revolution, and she dwells on

¹⁰⁴Kollontai A. "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle", p. 248

¹⁰⁵Farnsworth B. *Aleksandra Kollontai. Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution*, pp. 166-167

¹⁰⁶Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 229

Vasia's nostalgia for October 1917 and the years preceding NEP, when the air was heavy with the purity of ideological commitment (and when lovers spent most of their time apart). In contrast, the atmosphere of New Economic Policy is thick in the novella with dramatic overtones that set off the bright Golden Age of the revolution and Civil War. In essence, Kollontai's heroine has faithfully followed the policy mandated by the party during NEP: she has cohabited with the agents of capital and has mated with someone who has transferred his loyalties to the "dead" class. Strengthened by her experience, she abandons capitalism and merrily begins a new, postcapitalist life in the community of ideologically homogeneous people. Still, "the proportionately large number of pages spent on the disturbing aspects of intercourse with the enemy"¹⁰⁷; Kollontai constantly promotes the idea that love with the ideological opponent is unavoidably doomed to failure. Ideological inconsistency destroys the collective ideal based on the sharing of thoughts of each of its members and threatens the possibility of achieving the joyful state of total transparency - where no fear, no anxieties would continue to exist due to the priority given to the collective interests. Total transparency - the dreadful picture of which was drawn in such anti-utopian texts as Zamiatin's *We* and Orwell's *1984* - gets a completely different overtone in the Kollontai's vision. It is the state of being when private retreat from collective ceases to exist and when everyone feels that his interest conform with the interests of the entire collective. Every person feels pain, feels burdened, if his personal interests in any way contradict the interest of the collective. "In view of the need to encourage the development and growth of solidarity and to strengthen the bonds of the work collective", she writes, it should above all be established that the

¹⁰⁷Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 252

isolation of the "couple" as a special unit does not answer the interests of communism."¹⁰⁸ To Kollontai the subordination of private to collective (class) interests, of personal sensibility to communal norms - a model to which the individualised upper classes could aspire. For it was through the working-class comradeship, that untroubled "erotic friendships" developed.¹⁰⁹ Only after a series of such early guilt-free sexual relationships (which had been common amongst the proletariat, in opposition to official hypocritical morality, for several decades, and which must now be welcomed and encouraged could people experience a "great love, completely free of any dark aspects".¹¹⁰

To the nineteenth-century bourgeois notion - a result of the cleavage between the world of work and the world of leisure - that the individual private family was a refuge from a heartless world, Kollontai replied that in a human socialist world that problem would be irrelevant, socialist society would be total harmony. Far from viewing the family as a refuge, she saw it as a narrow cell that fostered a selfish egotism.¹¹¹ To those who suggested that the family die away as an economic unit but maintain its vitality through its spiritual ties, Kollontai asked whether those ties were sufficient to keep the family, reduced to its functions, from gradual decomposition.¹¹² She thought not. And what is more important she did not welcome this result. Unlike other Bolsheviks, Kollontai recognised and faced frankly the likelihood that a marriage freed from economic concerns and family responsibility might falter the initial romance and lose its stability as it ceased to be of material

¹⁰⁸Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 230

¹⁰⁹Kollontai A. "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle", pp. 248-249

¹¹⁰Porter C., *op.cit.*, p. 321

¹¹¹Farnsworth B. *Aleksandra Kollontai. Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 160

necessity to the partners. Kollontai was unique in that she not only welcomed this outcome but built a theory on it. Kollontai anticipated that the affectionate functions formerly part of the family would diffuse throughout the collective, so that the collective evolve more spiritual and living tendencies within the Soviet people to replace the selfishly intense, emotional supports of the individual family. The needs and interests of the family and marriage must be weakened, and on the other, men and women need to be educated in solidarity and the subordination of the will of the individual to the will of the collective.¹¹³ The family teaches and instils egoism, thus weakening the ties of the collective and hindering the construction of communism. The family disintegration would, thus, have an extremely positive effect on an individuals' relationship to the society - egotism would give way to a sense of connection with fellow citizens. Public schools would inculcate a healthy attitude toward the collective at an early age. Women would learn to seek and receive support from the collective rather than from their husbands. Kollontai saw the right of a wife to be transferred to the area where her husband worked as damaging to the collective bonds of the group.¹¹⁴ The friendship and mutual commitment of the collective would replace a couple's need for each other and provide emotional solace to a greater extent that could the single spouse. In rejecting this individual preference, Kollontai's ideology suggests that within the liberation potential it has something of the authoritarian. The ambiguity remains throughout her whole writings and reflects that the liberation and repression in Kollontai's ideology go hand in hand.

¹¹²Kollontai A. "Communism and the Family", pp. 250-260

¹¹³Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 230

¹¹⁴Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 227

It is not difficult to find the disturbing elements behind her praising of the "love-comradeship". The abstractedness of her rhetoric in depiction of Eros is changed to rather pragmatic language of regulation of the relationship between couple and collective/state. "The preservation of marriage regulations creates the illusion that the workers' collective can accept the "couple" with its special, exclusive interests.¹¹⁵ What kind of interests does she mean is not clear, as she expresses the idea that the abolition of private property and state economy together with state's responsibility for the upbringing of children weakens the bonds of family and two individuals. The answer is not given. Kollontai's vagueness suggests that she had no obvious political explanation, just an intuitive conviction that people in the interests of their personal liberation, must not permit themselves to be overwhelmingly observed by the love to the representative of the opposite sex. They would be better served in the commune, which by dint of common and purposeful work would banish the "heavy weight of spiritual solitude" that impelled the bourgeois into romance. In the commune, on the ruins of the former family, a new and looser union would arise, between two equal workers, "a union of affection and comradeship". It seems, that rather than a union or an embodiment of the triumph of Eros, the couple in the community - suggests that their "relationship" is a petrified regression in which the two lovers no longer belong to each other (as Kollontai abhors the idea of possession), not self-sufficient but fully integrated in the life of the community. There is no idea of the eternity in love anymore), "the length of relationships" are not regulated and Kollontai vividly enjoys the opportunity for short-lengths relations. Couple would live together so long as love lasted and would separate when it ended. There is no

¹¹⁵Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p.

obstacle for separation, as economical consideration do not exist anymore, and the new society would honour and protect motherhood as a social function unrelated to marriage.

The rejection of the cellular individualism and the passionate egoistic possessiveness of the bourgeois family came to imply the necessary superiority of external social activity to the inner life. The category of work plays a crucial role in Kollontai's understanding of "love". Collective labour and communal life were the concrete modes of organising behaviour. The cycle of work, merriment, love, and rest are all accomplished in an aura of what Kollontai calls complete freedom. Without work no enjoyment and no enjoyment without work. Kollontai imagined a socialist future of personal accord and non-alienating labour from which no private retreat need exist. The idea is derived in large part from ideology of virility and class solidarity in labour. Unlike Fourier's phalanstery where individuals would fulfil themselves in passion, Kollontai's people, although sexually free, would relegate sex to a second place - while on the rock of collective work they would built the new society.¹¹⁶ Kollontai's position, derived partially from the previous philosophical tradition, was based on fusing sex and work. In her ideology we can find a rhetoric of sublimation and work in the Russian philosophical tradition, which borrowed it with some corrections from radicals of the 1860s. Her projected commune, alarming to the party because of its suggestion of freer, less conventional marriage patterns, appears really to be a somewhat rigid, work-oriented institution.¹¹⁷ Kollontai presumably envisioned the labour collective and the living collective to be coterminous: "... a

¹¹⁶Farnsworth B. "Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai". In: *The American Historical Review*, 81, no. 2 (Apr. 1976), p. 310

¹¹⁷Farnsworth B. "Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai", p. 311

family of a collective of toilers, wherein it is not the blood relationship, but rather the common labour and the unity of interests, aspirations, and goals which will bind the members tightly together and which will make true spiritual brothers of them".¹¹⁸ It is evident for her that labour should be organised on principles of perfect freedom and democratic equality, in which one represents all, and all one, must awake the highest sense of solidarity and a spirit of cheerful activity, and call forth a degree of emulation such as is nowhere to be found in the contemporary industrial system. And this spirit must react on the productivity of labour and the growing improvement of the product. Moreover both the individual and the community, inasmuch as each works mutually for the other, are interested not only in making the work as substantial and complete as possible, but also in getting through it as quickly as possible, either with a view to reducing the time of labour, or to gaining time for the manufacture of new products, for the gratification of higher claims. This will induce all to devote their ingenuity to the improvement, simplification and acceleration of the process of production. Everyone develops his faculties to benefit himself, and in doing this he benefits the community as well. Today personal egotism and public welfare are two contradictory things which exclude each other; in the new society these contradictions are done away with, personal egotism and public welfare become synonymous and interchangeable expressions. In a socialist community all society is organised, as everything will be reduced to system and regulated by plan and order, the estimation of the demand for the various articles of consumption can be accomplished with ease and after a certain amount of experience has been gained, the whole organisation will go on like clockwork. From the discourse of labour Kollontai eventually comes to the

¹¹⁸Stites R. *Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, p. 356

discourse of sex and visa versa, from the discourse of productive forces to that drives, where one finds the same ultimatum, that of production in the literal sense of the term. Erotic energy is strongly bounded with (or even inbuilt in) labour discourse. Its original meaning in fact, was not only to save energy and to transform it into production, but also to render visible or make appear. Everything is to be produced, everything is to be legible, everything is to become real, visible, accountable, transparent; everything is to be transcribed in relation of force, systems of concepts or measurable energy; everything is to be said, accumulated, indexed or recorded - "the coherence and transparency of homo sexualis has no more existence than the coherence and transparency of homo economicus".¹¹⁹

In her book on Kollontai Elisabeth Farnsworth asked a provocative and laconic question: is there any place for privacy in Kollontai's vision of collective?¹²⁰ She believed that Kollontai was a part of Soviet discourse which meant to eliminate private life along with private property. For the Bolsheviks "private" was politically dangerous and deprived of social meaning. While it might appear rather obvious that from their point of view the "private individual" was ideologically incorrect, it is remarkable to discover, as Svetlana Boym puts it, "that the Russian intellectual tradition also holds little respect for what is described as "Western, bourgeois" idea of privacy"¹²¹. The nineteenth century conceptions of the personality and the Russian soul challenge various European understandings of self and society and at the same time reveal a peculiar Russian-European hybrid. The release of passion and the

¹¹⁹Baudrillard, J. *Seduction*. London, 1990, p. 41

¹²⁰see, Farnsworth, Beatrice. *Aleksandra Kollontai. Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution*. Stanford, California 1980

¹²¹Boym S. *Common Places, Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1994, p. 73

emancipation of personality - important in Western liberal tradition - appear to be alien to Russian tradition. Private life in Russian carries less emphasis on individual life in the Western sense of the word and more stress on the conception of the "human lot", which does not fully depend on individual will. Here individual particularity and individual rights matter less than the idea of true brotherhood. The "I" has to sacrifice itself to society and not merely not demand his rights, but on the contrary, give them up unconditionally for society". Dostoevsky stresses that what he seeks is not "depersonalisation" but "personality in the highest sense, much more developed and higher than in the West ... Complete self-conscious and boundary sacrifice of one's entire self for the sake of society is a sign of the highest development of personality".¹²² In this view Russia contributes to the world not "enlightenment" but illumination, not material abundance but spiritual communality, not individuality but personality, not "individual freedom" but liberation of the soul. The major cultural opposition in Russia is not between private and public but rather between material and spiritual existence, between *byt* and *bytie*.¹²³

In Kollontai's case one can obviously see the main traits of this historical tradition. The focusing on sexual matters happened to reflect the principal importance attributed to sexuality in demarcating the line between individuals and individual and society. Love in her writing poses a question of scale that links the in(stability) of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective, constantly reflecting the anxieties about being together and being alone. Isolation had a particular poignancy for Kollontai and caused her to respond strongly to those elements of Russian pre-

¹²²Boym S. op. cit., p. 82

¹²³Boym S. ibid., p. 83

revolutionary philosophy which promised community in the future, in which there flourished neither people alone nor escapes from love, but "new people" bound by friendship and "many-sided love". Moreover, Marxism in Russia, the country described as the "weakest link in the capitalist chain", also fed on many communitarian myths. While shifting the emphasis from peasant to worker, from the country to the city, from Russian to international, Russian Marxists preserved the utopian messianism and the stinging critique of individualism characteristic of the believers in the Russian idea. Hence the ideal "proletarian" of Russian Marxists was not too different from the ideal communitarian peasant (both were quite distant from the average Russian worker or peasant).¹²⁴ In her ideology the belief in the masses closely combined with the faith in the working class ability to work out new sexual morality. She sought to create a new morality based on what she saw as certain natural impulses of the proletariat. Under communism, society would be a collective built on principles of "comradely solidarity", the "consciousness of a community of interests", and the "emotional and spiritual ties established between the members of a collective". All individualism would die in the merger of the "wills and souls" of the participants.¹²⁵ "The single will is lost, disappears, in the collective effort". Each person in the group linked to every other by "innumerable psychological and emotional bonds" would possess "delicacy, sensitivity, and the desire to be useful to another".

It seems obvious, that to judge Kollontai's model of the relationship between the individual and community through the prism of the Western liberal perceptions of

¹²⁴Boym S. op. cit., p. 80

¹²⁵Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 230

privacy is hardly possible; they do not seem to be valid here. For Kollontai, freedom (independence) of an individual was a state that could be approached through the exercise of self-mastery/self-sacrifice and through restraint in the pursuing of individual goals and desires. If it was so important to govern desires, if the use one made of them constituted such a crucial problem, it was not because she wanted to maintain a purity or suppress the individual will; it was because she wanted to be free and to be able to do so. This could be regarded as further proof, that freedom in her ideology was not considered simply as the independence of the community as a whole, while its individual members would be only constitutional elements, devoid of individuality or interiority. The freedom that needed establishing and preserving was that of the citizens of a collectivity of course, but it was also, for each of them, a certain form of relationship of the individual with himself. The freedom of the individuals, understood as the mastery they were capable of exercising over themselves and renouncing their egotism, was indispensable to the prosperous functioning of the whole community. This individual freedom should not, however, be understood as the independence of a free will. Its polar opposite was not a natural determinism, nor was it the will of an all-powerful agency; it was an ability to subject one's interests to the interests of the whole community and to express themselves in common accord.. To be free in relation to desire/passion was to be free of their authority, it was not to be subjected to it. In subjection to one's overwhelming emotions Kollontai sees the origin of dependency (first of all for woman).

For Kollontai this was one way of re-defining the relationship between the sexes. The idea of Russian philosophers, dreaming about a reproachment between the sexes and even the total abolition of their difference, has become an abstract

community of socially active citizens, from which virtually all representational features have disappeared. Two sexes are reduced to their social function and are equal before labour. The difference between the sexes was neutralised in a community of socially active citizens. All this inevitably should evolve in her conception to the radical reconsideration of femininity, which was associated with love and emotional sphere before. Another way, found in her novels, lay in reducing woman to the loneliness of a self-sufficient and independent woman (See Chapter II).

II.5. Anti-utopian reflections on the same issue

The present theme seems beyond discussion, yet I find it interesting to trace how the qualities of "collective love" the way they are depicted by Kollontai, were perceived as a danger to the democratic functioning of society. Here I will try to follow the ideological uses made of love in the anti-utopian texts. Utopia and anti-utopia, are equally obsessed with the sexual matters as a metaphor for thoughts about something else: politics and ideology. Kollontai's utopian aspirations and anti-utopian texts chosen for this work, present two models for the expression of anxieties about the place of individual within the collective, the problem of the demarcation line between the public and private. Taking together, they demonstrate how the same qualities of love can be viewed as the potential both for liberation and for repression, informed by our own partial perspective and ideological point of departure. To accomplish the above mentioned task, I will shortly discuss two anti-utopian novels: Zamiatin's *We* and Orwell's *1984*.

The *1984* is set in an imaginary future in which the world is dominated by three perpetually warring totalitarian police states. *1984* depicts a completely bureaucratized society, in which man is a number and loses all sense of individuality. The book's hero, the Englishman Winston Smith, is a minor party functionary on one of these states. His longing for truth and decency leads him to secretly rebel against the government, which perpetuates its rule by systematically distorting the truth and continuously rewriting history to suit its own purposes. Smith has a love affair with a like-minded woman, but then they are both arrested by the Thought Police. The ensuing imprisonment, torture, and re-education of Smith are intended not merely to break him physically or make him submit but to root out his independent mental existence and his spiritual dignity until he can love only the figure he previously most hated: the apparent leader of the party, Big Brother. Smith's surrender "to the monstrous brainwashing techniques of his jailers is tragic enough, but the novel gains much of its power from the comprehensive rigour with which it extends the premises of totalitarianism to their logical end: the love of power and domination over others has acquired its perfected expression in the perpetual surveillance and omnipresent dishonesty of an unassailable and irresistible police state under whose rule every human virtue is slowly being suborned and extinguished".¹²⁶

It is easy to forget that *1984* is also a love story, but the oppressive gloom of the state's control is briefly lifted when Winston Smith and Julia are able to enjoy their secret moment together. For them sex becomes a form of liberation, a way not only of rebelling against the dictates of the Party, but a means by which they can

¹²⁶Crick, B. *George Orwell, A Life*. London, 1980, p. 397

enjoy the sense of freedom in the release of passion.¹²⁷ Julia's uninhibited approach to sex is portrayed as a hopeful sign of the ordinary person's determination to be free of outside restriction, no matter how beneficial they may be in the abstract. The Party is eager to control the sex instinct because it is the one area in each person's life that is so resistant to outside restrictions. If the Party can kill the sex instinct, it can strengthen its control over everyone. Only by completely eradicating individual desire at its source could the complete transparency be achieved and could one be sure of one's place within the community, certain never to be "alone", face to face with one's own material and sexual desires. Passionate love (or simply love) has always been considered as liberating in a sense of generating a break with routine, duty and societal fetters. It was precisely this quality of love which set it apart from existing institutions, and was used by Orwell in order to oppose in literary form the total domination of the collective will to the power of individual desire and sentiments. Orwell's heroes, Winston and Julia, show that destroying such a powerful urge of desire is impossible and that the mere expression of that urge can be valid form of protest against Big Brother. It is a reaffirmation of life in the face of Big Brother's attempt to eliminate all signs of a vital existence among his subjects. Love in Orwell's book is presented as a category outside of ideology and power. It is about feelings, sentiments, it is also about diversity, and because of this it acts as a power capable of resisting the total absorption of the world. In the society of a total transparency love functions as a sentiment hidden from public control, and because of this quality has the potential for reviving of the whole society. In this respect, it is totally different from the Kollontai's variant of socialist Utopia, where individual feelings are

¹²⁷Shelden M. *Orwell. The Authorised Biography*. New-York, 1991, p. 432

precisely the source of constant anxiety and threat to the prosperity of the collective. The emotional involvement with the other is pervasive - so strong that it may lead the individual, or both individuals, to ignore their ordinary obligations. Passionate love has a quality of enchantment which can be uncontrollable in its fervour. For this reason, seen from the point of view of rationally organised order and collective interests, it is dangerous. Kollontai's orderly fantasy of a unified collective body stands in marked contrast to the individual desire glorified in Orwell's novel ...

The importance of sex in Zamiatin's novel *We* might strike some modern readers as an idiosyncratic curiosity, but the prominence of sexual questions in some of the more radical quarters of Russian thought in the years preceding and immediately following the Revolution made sex a virtually obligatory element in a book concerned with depicting the anti-utopian aspects of such thought. Teasing out - in a sexual context - the logic of War Communist discourse, Zamiatin shows what happens when a nation does indeed collectivise love.¹²⁸ Life, work, and love have been denuded of colour, passion, and conflict among ordinary Numbers (citizens) of the United States. In a scene near the end of the novel, Zamiatin exposes the true nature of the only type of sexual behaviour the collective body can engage in - the only form remaining when individual differentiation and "the Other" no longer exist. "I-330" instructs Zamiatin's hero-chronicler to pretend at a later time that she is with him and to lower the shade of his room - a conventional sign in the United State that sexual intercourse is occurring within. This scene essentially "lays bare" one of the sexual consequences of War Communist mentality, for when all society is bound up

¹²⁸Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 212

in a collective body, the sole sexual activity that can occur is masturbation.¹²⁹ The "musical factory" provides the tunes that lead them to work and play; their rituals are purely passive and deferential. Freedom means unity of thought: the only self is embedded in the collective "we". Human relations in the United State seem like an answer to the prayers of these nihilist reductionist of the Russian Revolution who wanted to break all forms of human expression and "equalise" all humans into faceless and expressionless units. This Zamyatin deftly and unforgettably accomplishes by using numbers for his citizens, dressing them in identical uniforms, and having them function according to an elaborate mathematical table based on the Taylor system - in short turning them into machines without passion or fantasy.¹³⁰

It is interesting to look at the way home is presented in *We*. Home has always been the integral part of the concept of privacy and came to signify in the European tradition both a realm of affectionate intimacy and a realm of secrecy, concealment, and suspicion. For Kollontai home came to imply the exemption from the public, it symbolises deprivation, the lack of a person's public role (see, Chapter II). In *We* the values are reversed: the apartment turns into a refuge, the mean to protect the essential element of personhood. The builder of the Integral and loyal citizen of the Single State, D-503, inhabits an architecturally perfect house-commune with transparent walls; in such a house people live perpetually in public sight, bathing in light. Curtains are provided only in exchange for pink coupons during the "sexual days". The most incredible event in D-503's life is a visit to an "ancient house" with apartments in quotation marks:

¹²⁹Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 214

¹³⁰Stites R. *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. Oxford, 1989, p. 187

I opened the heavy, squeaky, opaque door in the gloomy, disorderly building (they call it "apartment house) ... White on top, dark blue walls, red, green, and orange covers of ancient books, yellow bronze – candelabra, the statue of Buddha, and the curves of furniture, contorted, not fitting any rules ... We moved through the rooms with little baby beds (children then were also private property). And again rooms, the shining of mirrors, gloomy cupboards, unbearably bright sofas, a huge fireplace, a large bed of red wood. The presentdayglass-beautiful, transparent, eternal – existed only in the shape of the fragile little squares of the windows.¹³¹

Only from a revolutionary perspective of the resident of a perfect house-commune can a fairly ordinary, if not banal, bourgeois interior of the turn of the century, with its minor excesses of orientalism, appear so radically strange. This is precisely the kind of interior that it was fashionable to criticise in the circles of the radical intelligentsia in Russia and in the West. It has all the obvious excesses – of privacy, fancy, and eclecticism. But in the permanent theocracy of good taste the low ceiling and fanciful curtains promise liberating surprises and erotic seduction to the inhabitant of the rationalist utopia, where the sky is a constant bright blue with hardly a single shapeless and unpredictable cloud to spoil the view.¹³² Here the interior is feminised; guarded by an old woman and worshipped by a young one, it becomes a site of seduction.¹³³ The ancient, overcrowded, eclectic interior conceals illegitimate love-making, no pink coupon required. When D-503 experiences unbridled emotions toward I-33, he loses control over the interior; it seems to him that he disappears inside the huge cupboard and the darkness of private furniture. The builder of the Integral makes love not only to I-33 but also the old-fashioned bourgeois interior, the archaeological relic from prerevolutionary time, a forbidden zone.

¹³¹Zamiatin, Evgenii. *We*. New-York, 1967, pp. 26-27

¹³²Boym S. op. cit., p. 130

¹³³Boym S. op. cit., p. 130

III. CHAPTER II

THE FEAR OF BEING IN LOVE. KOLLONTAI'S CONCEPT OF "NEW WOMAN".

III.1. The fear of being in love

The concept of the "withering away of the family" could be in many respects the point of departure for the evaluation of many of Kollontai's ideas on "love" and "new women". The composition of Kollontai's writing suggests two related ways of treating it. On one side, the family for Kollontai is first of all an economic unit and the embodiment of women's economical dependence. In her justification of the abolition of the family from the economical point of view she follows more or less precisely the Marxist scheme of analysis. She sees the family as a part of superstructure, which form "is determined by the economic system of the given epoch, and it changes as the economic base of society changes".¹³⁴ In the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat there is a transition to the single production plan and collective social consumption, and the family loses its significance as an economic unit. The communist economy does away with the family. The family is ceasing to be necessary either to its members or to the nation as a whole.¹³⁵ The economic determinism allowed Kollontai to give prominence to the idea of first bringing women into the area of social production to perform those tasks which previously they had fulfilled in the family. For her the abolition of domestic labour was one of the central tasks of the

¹³⁴Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations". *Selected Writings*, p. 225

¹³⁵Kollontai A. "Communism and the Family". *Selected Writings*, p. 253

transition to socialism and had an important social consequences for the transformation of women's status. Work as the ultimate liberating force for women forms a persistent theme in Kollontai's writing. She applauded the labour conscription that characterised the civil war years and believed that work is the best hope for women's true liberation. Only by becoming economically independent could she begin to establish the independent worth which was the measure of true individuality.¹³⁶

On the other side, to the Marxist analysis of the economic base of bourgeois marriage Kollontai added a lament on urban solitude and the psychological dimensions of female inferiority. She tended to see the family also as a cultural institution which maintained the old values of authoritarianism and domination, based on female submissiveness and emotional dependency. And much of her critique and the insistence that it must disappear as a nuclear union grew out of her fear that if any variant of the traditional family structure survived, women would be unlikely to maintain a sense of themselves as free and equal citizens who can realise themselves in the social activity. The family hindered women's freedom and impeded the development of a more humane society. She accepted Engel's' observation that bourgeois marriage was a fraud based on property and prostitution, but she added that it also destroys women's individuality, because it taught women to view love and the emotions within family relationships as the only preoccupation in their life. Kollontai asserted, woman's inferiority was imbedded in the pattern of erotic love, the most private of human relationships, and family (as a life-long union) just strengthened it, as all education of women made her to distrust her own abilities and find satisfaction

¹³⁶Kollontai A. "The New Woman". *Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman*.

only in marriage. She gave up her individuality to man's demands because that was what society said she should do, "as though she had no worth of her own, as though her personality was to be appraised only in relation to her husband".¹³⁷ In contrast, "the woman of the present", she writes, "feels in marriage a fetter, even when no outer, formal bond exists".¹³⁸ Ideals about romantic love were plainly allied to women's subordination in the home, and her relative separation from the outside world. She neglected to see that the development of such ideas was also an expression of women's power, a contradictory assertion of autonomy in the face of deprivation. Autonomy understood in a latter sense was not an autonomy at all within this ideological framework and was completely alien to her thinking - it was an imprisonment of women's self within the restricted and pressing world of home. The solution to this individual and collective misery was the breaking of family ties and the social acceptance of temporary sexual relations which are based on mutual affection but do not necessarily consider marriage as a goal. This must be combined with a developed system of maternity protection and of course the acceptance of illegitimate children. Developments like these would have a number of beneficial consequences for the individual. Not only would many women find the essential emotional and sensual nourishment otherwise denied them, but man's position of tremendous power over women would be undermined for this position rests, more on his sexual freedom than on his economic strength. Such a sexual order would also lead to the eradication of prostitution, because it acknowledges men's need for sex

Ed. by Iring Fetscher. London, 1971, p. 86-87

¹³⁷ Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 66

¹³⁸ Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 83

without commitment in a way that benefits both sexes rather denying the need as the customary moral tracts did.

Most of these outlined ideas were formulated before revolution and if we look more attentively to the rhetoric she employs we can find besides the strong Marxist influence on her views on the family the response and the continuation of the prevailing discourse of the family in the liberal philosophical thought. Russian philosophers produced rather “negative” attitude to the family, which was always associated with social institutions established in the interest of the state to regulate social life. As Rozanov put it, the culture was penetrated by the “anti-family spirit”.¹³⁹ Family was relegated to the side of social life of the individual and treated as something absolutely alienated and even as being in contradiction with genuine feelings and love. As Berdiaev wrote, “the family was, is and always will be the positivist social institute of biological and sociological reglamentation of the life of kin. The forms of the family, subjected to transformation in the process of human history, were always the forms of social adaptation to the conditions of existence, to the conditions of managing. There is no phenomenon which could be so successfully explained by economical considerations as the family. The family - is first of all economical unit, and its connection with sex is only indirect. The connection of the family with love is even much further”¹⁴⁰... “Family is a hierarchical institution which is based on domination and subjection. Love within a family is identical to its subjection”.¹⁴¹ Moreover, love, in his perception, is tragic in itself. It could not be

¹³⁹ Etkind A. *Eros Nevozmozhnogo: Istoriia psikhoanaliza v Rossii*. St.-Petersburg, 1993, p. 143

¹⁴⁰ Berdiaev N. *Smysl tvorchestva*. Paris, 1985, p. 243

¹⁴¹ Berdiaev N. “Razmyshlenie ob Erose”. In: *Russkiy Eros ili philosophia l'ubvi v Rossii*. Moscow, 1991, p. 268

subjected to reglamentation, to any norms.¹⁴² There was not far from this thought to the direct association of the "family with *byt*, though love with *bytiye* (being)".¹⁴³ This identification of the family with *byt* as a negative category in Russian culture, passed in even more extremist form to the Bolshevik ideology. Following in the footsteps of Berdiaev, Bolsheviks considered the entire category of bourgeois.¹⁴⁴ But what is more important for our understanding of Kollontai's negative perception of the family is that the unspoken equation beneath society's hostility toward this ontological category was "family=*byt*=woman".¹⁴⁵ Kollontai protested against this association and repeatedly criticised the tendency to return women to the restricted world of home and domesticity, which always associated in her perception with women's dependence in the realm of sexual relations. In her fiction the prominence she gives to the ability of domesticity to enslave women has an interesting continuation of her theoretical works.

This unspoken association of women with *byt* and family determined in large degree the character of Russian women's writing. Catriona Kelly in *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992* points out to the fact, that if in the Anglo-

¹⁴² Berdiaev N. *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 248, see also, "Razmyshlenie ob Eroze". In: *Russkiy Eros ili philosophia l'ubvi v Rossii*. Moscow, 1991

¹⁴³ "I belong to those generation of Russian people who saw in reproduction and family - *byt* and in love - *bytiye*", Berdiaev N. "Razmyshlenie ob Eroze". *Russkiy Eros ili philosophia l'ubvi v Rossii*. Moscow, 1991, p. 266; "The legalised love is a dead love. Legibility exists only for an every day life, love does not suit it", *ibid.*, p. 268; "The socialisation of sex and love is one of the most repelling processes of the human history, it breaks people's lives and causes numerous sufferings", *ibid.*, p. 268.

¹⁴⁴ Naiman E. "Historectomis. On the Metaphysics of Reproduction in a Utopian Age", In: *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, Ed. by Jane T. Costlow, Stephanie Sandler. Stanford, 1993, p. 270

¹⁴⁵ Erik Naiman points out to the fact that association of "*byt*" and woman in an image of femininity (that represented the undead past) was widespread throughout NEP. As Bolsheviks struggled to create a "new *byt*" in place of the "absolutely rotten", "extremely conservative", "inimical", and "hateful" *byt* that "we have inherited from the accursed past", as they struggled to save woman from her ideological backwardness, they continued to use both "*byt*" and "woman" as useful skeletons in history's closet. The appearance of woman in ideological discourse frequently served to remind Bolsheviks of the flaws

American tradition, the settled domestic world of Austen or Gaskell is perhaps the most familiar kind of "feminine writing"; in the Russian tradition, by contrast, *realia* (*byt*) are spurns, ordinarily being seen as a muddied clog that weighs down flight in the world of ideas. Many Russian women writers have not even allowed *realia* the powerful, if disgusting, charm with which are invested by, for example, Gogol or Goncharov.¹⁴⁶ Women writers tried to escape association with *byt*. In Kollontai's novels, especially in *Vasilisa Malygina*, *byt* became important ideological category and embodies everything against what her heroines are fighting. She presents in literary form a serious political discussion of the connection between bourgeois *meshchanstvo* and the sphere it inevitably creates to enslave women. In her interesting work about the role of domestic objects in Kollontai's fiction Birgitta Ingemanson sees, first of all, the political function of Kollontai's stories and domestic objects, stressing that they describe less the battle between men and women about women's sexual and economic independence than the one between capitalism in its death throes and fledging socialism.¹⁴⁷ This is just partially true. It seems that Ingemanson caught just one side of the problem: juxtaposition of the revolution to the *byt* in Bolshevik culture and did not catch the other, more important for Kollontai, the general hostility to *byt* in Russian culture and close association of *byt* with family and women. The main message is not only juxtaposition of bourgeois and socialist cultures in any specific sense but moral regeneration, the self-formation of "new woman" who could take on the task of overthrowing the old evils of the restricted

in the Revolution's incarnation and of the necessity of patiently preserving ideological virtue. (Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 115).

¹⁴⁶Kelly C. *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992*. Oxford, 1994, p. 11

¹⁴⁷Ingemanson, B. "The Political Function of Domestic Objects in the Fiction of Alexandra Kollontai". In: *Slavic Review*, 48, no. 1 (1989), pp. 72-73

world of home and domesticity. Home came to imply a realm of isolation, secrecy and concealment

The image of "home", "the walls of home" is central to some of Kollontai's novels. Actually, all her positive heroines are almost homesick, in traditional perception of this word and nothing, with the exception of work, bind them to one particular place. Vasilisa Malygina lives in a small shabby room in the commune house and considers it the normal style of living. In this sense she opposes the standards of living of her husband, who wants to surround himself and his wife by a comfortable atmosphere. Her husband's house with all its "domestic objects" plays in this context, the role of starting point for women's enslavement, which automatically reproduce the previous forms of women's dependence and inevitably returns her heroines to the point of their departure - the restricted world of the house-wife. Volodia tells Vasia upon her arrival at his house that she will be a "lady of the manor", and it is in this aristocratic setting, with its grandfather clock, paintings in gilded frames, and stuffed hunting trophies, that Vasia makes her chilling discoveries. His house takes Vasilisa far from her home town, from her social activity and warm atmosphere existed between her former Communist comrades. A sanctuary for him, a prison for her, this house becomes the focus of all her submerged feelings of anxiety throughout the novel about her inactive and dependent life: "She wanders back and forth through the dark, empty rooms. It seems [to her] that an unexpected sorrow is brewing in this strange, unfriendly house it signals a disaster". "She herself did not know what was wrong, but all was so unusual, so strange. And she herself was such a stranger, unneeded by anyone" "Something was torturing Vasia, gnawing at her. She couldn't say what, exactly, but her soul was uneasy". "As if in a dream", Vasia tries to

understand what has happened to Vladimir and to her old, ideologically pure world, but she seems intentionally blind to Volida's affairs. The days drag on, "melancholy and long", the evenings are spent "in the dark apartment" waiting for Volodia to return. Vasia is repeatedly depicted lying sleepless in bed - or waking suddenly to see her lover primping for his next meeting with Nepman or with his mistress. The only one source of pleasure for her - the garden, is the only way out - association with the outside world.¹⁴⁸ Kollontai's equitation of the narrow world of home with traditional femininity and female sexual/emotional dependency would be constantly replayed over and over again in her novels. Other fiction by Kollontai from this period - including stories situated abroad before the Revolution - are also replete with "claustrophobic" tendencies. In "A Great Love", the heroine waits for her lover for days on end in a German hotel, which, with its long, deserted corridors, resembles a haunted house full of "melancholy and fear". In this story we find once again a confluence of motifs that establishes an affinity between Kollontai's critique of female dependence and her portrait of home/secluded premises as the source of women's enslavement. For Kollontai home came to imply the exemption from the public, it symbolised deprivation, the lack of a person's public role.

Most of her heroines demonstrate complete indifference to the "vulgarity" of practical everyday life. They are materially unsuccessful; dressed in ragged clothing. They often starve. Their meals consist of millet or bread and soup from the public kitchens, and they have no interest in fashion. The young communist Zhenia in "Three Generations" is always dressed in the same "worn, black skirt". Vasilisa Malygina cannot correspond to her husbands demands to look like a directors wife.

¹⁴⁸ Kollontai A. "Vasilisa Malygina", In: *Love of Worker Bees*, p. 70

Describing the counter-image of the positive heroines she prescribes them traditional traits of women of an old type: concentration on love as the only preoccupation in life and the desire to improve their byt, to provide an appropriate comfortable environment for their love. The letter of Vasilisa's husband's mistress embodies the very essence of what, in Kollontai's opinion, constitutes the traits of women of an old type. She depicts her heroine as a "helpless and defenceless" woman, whose only happiness and sense of existing is in a man's love. Thus, Nina wrote to Vasilisa's husband: "There is nothing, nothing in the whole world better or more important than a love like ours". Writing this she immediately jumps to another sphere: "Nikanor Platonovich tells me that in the new district you're going to be given a sweet detached house, with a dining room done out in gothic style. He say there's no lamp, and I've already found a heavenly chandelier for it. It's on the expensive side, but it's absolutely exquisite and I know you'll love it".¹⁴⁹ The connection between the "petty love" and byt is established, and the vicious circle is closed. This letter, replete with diminutives and clichés appropriate to the eighteenth century's cult of feeling, horrifically appropriates the sentimental language of Kollontai's own early work, distorting communist sentimentality into repellent corruption. Nina, with her "hot little lips" and her devotion to organs of pleasure and *L'Origan Cotys* (a product doubly obnoxious because it bears the name of the anticommunist perfume magnate who by this time was editor of the conservative *Le Figaro*) rather than to the organs of the Revolution, provides a terrifying representation of what can happen to women

¹⁴⁹ Kollontai A. "Vasilisa Malygina", In: *Love of Worker Bees*, p. 156

who are unable to escape from one man to another, reproducing in her sexual behaviour the activity of capitalist lucre.¹⁵⁰

In her political works Kollontai was much harsher. In the summer of 1922 Kollontai wrote a long article for *Kommunistka* explicitly attacking NEP as "the new threat". In her analysis, NEP-based unemployment was once again making women dependent economically and socially on men. They were being forced to choose between prostitution and marriage, a return to "that domestic bondage form which the revolution was supposed to have freed them". The revolution had supposedly swept away "doll parasites" like harmful moths (*babochki vreditel'nitsi*) in a summer storm". Now, however, when women constituted some 70% of the unemployed, prostitution and concubinage threatened the whole outcome of the revolution for women: "Once a woman ceases to work in production, once her labour is no longer taken into account by the responsible organs, what kind of a "comrade" can she be? And then how can you talk about women's equality in the family and in marriage?"¹⁵¹ Women should not remain anymore the helpless victim but become an active makers of the new order. Throughout her theoretical works Kollontai persistently stressed the high moral ethics of labour. The struggle over economic and political strategies is legitimated as a struggle, through which women get integrated into the sphere of social activity, as an "active tiny wheel in the mechanism of the economy".¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰Naiman E., *Sex in Public*, p. 246

¹⁵¹ Cited by Wood E. "Representations of Sexual and Political Anxieties in Postrevolutionary Russia", In: *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*. Ed. by Jane T. Costlow. Stephanie Sandler, Stanford, 1993, p. 130

¹⁵²Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 86

This ultra-leftist rejection of women in the traditional role of house-wife had a double consequence. Inspired by the intention to make women truly free, Kollontai at the same time significantly contributed to the perception of traditionally “feminine” preoccupation as backward, and stigmatising “backwardness” as feminine. In this sense, her position was in a manner wholly in keeping with the prevailing assault on domesticity carried out in the 1920s. As Catriona Kelly puts it, the intention to define such traditional activities as housework as “backward”, “ignored the fact that working-class and peasant women’s sense of autonomy derived in part from a gender-based division of labour within the home. The result was a contradictory dynamic according to which gender discrimination persisted in the public sphere and in the home, yet and palliative effects deriving from the traditional divisions of labour were eradicated, since women could no longer feel a sense of pride in “women’s work”.¹⁵³ The new image of femininity given by Kollontai appears thus as an abstract product, a deviate of the master narrative without reference to experiences of the historical women; it is born without historical analysis. Kollontai's optimism about the women's involvement in the sphere of production is infected by its abstractness; it is more a convincing, abstract vision than one based on lived experience.

At the same time Kollontai’s reconsideration of women’s social activity, the intention to take her from the “narrow” framework of family inevitably gave way to the reconsideration of women’s emotional life. From an everyday life, “Kollontai came to see that economic independence and a determination to choose partners freely did not automatically enable the woman to achieve perfect relationships with

¹⁵³ Kelly C. *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992*. Oxford, 1994, p. 229-230

men”¹⁵⁴. In contemporary society Kollontai asserted woman’s inferiority was imbedded in the pattern of erotic love, the most private of human relationships. And the narrow domestic world of family just strengthen the women’s perception of love as the only mode of their existence. As Kollontai defines the overwhelming love (“the dissolution in love”) in women’s life as a sin, the social activity (creativity) acquires a tremendous role in her ideology.

In some sense, the problem of women and creativity was not brought up by women. Kollontai’s central attention to this problem looks like a response to the contemporary (male determined) philosophical doctrine in this sphere. Essentially Russian philosophers accepted the prevailing tendency in Western Europe to view female sexuality as all-encompassing, to equate sexuality with femininity, because sexuality supposedly had a far greater impact on a women’s life than it did on a man’s. For Berdiaev, the uninterrupted nature of female sexuality was not only a temporal but also a spatial phenomenon: “In man sex is more differentiated and specialised”, but in woman it is spread over all the flesh in the organism through the entire field of her soul”.¹⁵⁵ Since a man’s sexuality is only an appendage and does not take up his whole life, it gives him the opportunity of psychological distinguishing it from the general background and thus of comprehending it. A man may juxtapose himself to his sexuality and contemplate it isolated from the rest of him. Berdiaev makes a virtue out of the "differentiation" implicit in male sexuality, men's ability to detach himself from sexual urges while incorporating "the entire plenitude of his personality's spiritual life independent of time. “Man is not subjected exclusively to

¹⁵⁴ Holt A., op. cit., p. 19

¹⁵⁵ Berdiaev N., op. cit., p. 254

the power of love, as he always has his creative act, his business, all completeness of his power".¹⁵⁶ Thus, the idea that man's identity is constructed and determined by his "creative act", his ability for creativity was formulated. The starting point for evaluation of women is given: "Women is a human being of absolutely different type than man", writes Berdiaev. She is much less human being than men. ... Woman is all sex, her sexual life - is her life, absorbing her completely, because she is a woman and not a human being"¹⁵⁷. The ability for creativity is placed at the centre of evaluation of sex differences.

Kollontai criticises the tendency to evaluate women's personality "almost exclusively in terms of her sexual life".¹⁵⁸ The ideal type of a woman is depicted by Kollontai in concrete opposition to the given theoretical assumptions. Formulating her ideas on "New Woman"¹⁵⁹ she puts them in a form directly opposing to the prevailing philosophical discourse. But the point of evaluation of person's identity is the same. To the declaration that women lack personality she responds: "Before us

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 255

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 254

¹⁵⁸ "This man, the husband or the lover, throws the light of his personality over the woman, and it is this reflection and not the woman herself that we consider to be the true definition of her emotional and moral make-up. In the eyes of society the personality of a man can be more easily separated from his actions in the sexual sphere. The personality of a woman is judged almost exclusively in terms of her sexual life" (Kollontai A. "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle", p. 245).

¹⁵⁹ Much of Kollontai's ideas on "new woman" were derived from a conception she took with some modifications from nineteenth century feminism and socialism. The Europeans who played the leading role in developing this ideal were George Sand, Charles Fourier, Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill, August Bebel, and Henrik Ibsen. Although differing on the proper role of women in the family, these writers agreed that the defining characteristic of the new woman was independence from prescribed roles and male domination. She was an individualist, determined to pursue self-development, to seek, in Mill's words, "a life of rational freedom" in defiance of custom and even of the legitimate claims of those she loved. Mill assumed, as did Bebel and most writers on the new woman, that she would choose to express her freedom in socially responsible activity, for neither Mill nor Bebel was inclined to embrace a pure, anarchic, self-indulgent individualism. Indeed, "rational freedom", the goal of liberals and socialists alike, demanded a high degree of commitment to the welfare of others on the part of men as well as women. Although the defining characteristic of the new woman was independence, it was an independence in which she chose voluntarily to serve society while serving

stands not a mate - the shadow of a man; before us stands a personality - a Woman human being".¹⁶⁰ To the statement that "women is completely absorbed by the happiness of love or sufferings from unhappiness, she completely dissolves in it, and puts herself in it"¹⁶¹ she declares: "Love affairs, passion, romance are only the episodes of life", "Love ceases to form the only substance of her life, it is allotted the subordinate role it plays with most of men"¹⁶². She accepts the postulate that women's inferiority status consists of her inability to realise herself in the sphere of social activity as given and formulate her ideal type, New Woman in full accordance with the existing model. She railed against the "eternally female" (or using the language of Russian philosophy against "encompassing sexuality"), "the soft female soul, suppressed, loved, full of feminine contradictions" and seeks an identity of women in the social world, and thus completely repeating the prevailing assumption, which stresses that one's identity is mostly based on his social activity, "creative act". At the same time she wrote: "The demand set forth by women that the man should love and appreciate not so much the impersonal feminine, but rather that which presents their spiritual substance, their individual "ego".¹⁶³ The standard phrase in the rhetoric of her fictional heroines addressed to their lovers, passing from one novel to another: "you love only women in me and not personality". "The new woman forgives an affront to the "wifie" in her, but she never forgets the least inattentiveness

herself. (Clements B. "The Birth of the New Soviet Woman". In: *Dolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*. Ed. by Gleason A., Kenez P., Stites R. Bloomington, 1985, p. 222

¹⁶⁰ Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 94

¹⁶¹ Berdiaev N. *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 255

¹⁶² Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 86

¹⁶³ Kollontai A. "The New Woman", pp. 79-80

vis-a-vis her personality".¹⁶⁴ Thus, being in complete opposition to the prevailing discourse, she nevertheless accept its main theoretical stance and did not escape from the prevailing mentality of her age and intellectual tradition; she also considers femininity as regressive potential and equate it with the lack of personality, or "impersonal" and criticises the female elements in women. The new femininity is constructed by Kollontai in such a way as to overcome the association of women with nature and "otherness" and integrate women in the realm of male dominated social activity. But the intention to get access to a male dominated culture brings unavoidably repression of "the eternally female" and silencing of the specificity of women's experience.

Criticising women's "atavistic longing for an enduring and absorbing love", Kollontai does not deny love completely. In her theoretical works she proclaimed the merit of the comradesly, not determined by time-limited relationships. For women who rejected the erotically unfulfilling prison of marriage and the consuming self-centred passion of the "free union", there was an alternative to sexual loneliness, something that could be described as "erotic friendship". In "erotic friendships" with men, women could satisfy all their longings for intensity and tenderness without drawing their ego or suppressing their independence, and could learn the art of a new kind of love that required "attentiveness, sensitivity, sharp awareness and a profound penetration of the partner's soul, rather than the eternal smiles and roses". Love need not be suffering, it could be bright and joyful so long as it was not based on money or blood ties. The human psyche would become increasingly sensitive and complex as it passed through successive monogamous relationships and an infinitely wide variety

¹⁶⁴ Kolontai A. "The New Woman", p. 80

of new emotions and relationships, and so developed its capacity for a "great love" which was purified of jealousy. In the future, when society assumed responsibility for the care of mothers and children, "there is no doubt", she wrote, "that love will become the cult of humanity".

Whereas, before, the burden was always on the woman to build all her emotions around men so as to ensure the continuity of the marriage relationship, "the new woman assumes a rejecting or indifferent attitude to the firm bond, and is altogether in no hurry to pursue her love relationships in any particular fixed or determined form. The state of being in love - of passionate love - are but transient periods in her life". Struggling to harmonise her inner freedom and self-reliance with the "all-consuming passion of love", the "new woman" knew that it must be through work, not emotion, that she would finally and fully develop her social personality. The New Woman had to triumph over emotion, to display resilience, control, strength, toughness of mind. Above all, her personality had to survive.¹⁶⁵ If a woman did have a romantic relationship, said Kollontai, it had to be equal and had to leave the woman's ego intact. Refusing to accept Mme. de Stael's verdict that "for a man love is only an episode while for a woman it is the whole story", Kollontai pushed love and sex to the side.¹⁶⁶ "Love affairs, passion, romance are only the episodes of life. Its real content is that "holy cause" which the new woman serves: the social idea, science, creativity And this cause, this goal, is often more important, more worthy, and holier for the new woman than all the joys of the heart, all the

¹⁶⁵Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 89

¹⁶⁶Stites, Richard. *Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*. Princeton UP, 1978, p. 355

pleasures of passion".¹⁶⁷ To ensure equality, independence, and her holy mission, a woman had to evince "self discipline instead of emotionalism, recognition of the value of freedom and independence instead of submission and a faceless personality, assertion of individuality instead of the naive attempt to absorb and reflect the alien nature of the "beloved", insistence on her right to earthly happiness instead of the hypocritical donning of the mask of virtue, and finally, a willingness to put the expression of love in a subordinate place in her life. Before us stands not a mate - the shadow of a man; before us stands a personality - a Woman human being".¹⁶⁸

"Love-friendship" is a permanent category in most of her theoretical works, but her fiction vividly demonstrates that Kollontai is more optimistic about emotional love between the members of her much desired community than passionate sexual love between men and women. Her theoretical works call for a new, more sensitive man as a partner to a liberated woman. But in her novels the Communist heroines reject love for the warmth and comradeship existing among Communist workers. In Kollontai's fiction women discovered fulfilment in an existence without men. Celibacy became a mode of autonomy and most of her heroines look more as erotically self-sufficient women, than those who can pursue the pleasure of "love-game" or "love-friendship". The New Woman preserved her own integrity, her own "I", to use Kollontai's often repeated word, and as a result she is often alone: "She goes away, quietly smiling to him at parting, she goes to seek the dream of happiness she planned, she goes, carrying her own soul with her, as if she were alone".¹⁶⁹ Solitude, the curse of modern existence, became for her a badge of achievement, for

¹⁶⁷Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 86

¹⁶⁸ Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 74

she had learned that she overcome many obstacles, not the least of them her own traditional longing to be dependent on men. Her characters grow in the painful process of challenging their old oppressive dependence on men; they leave us at the point of abandoning their lovers.¹⁷⁰

One of the most interesting theme of Kollontai's fiction is the problem of the overcoming of the "chains of love, "burdens of love". The right for love propagated by the women writers of previous generations is challenged in her fiction to the analysis of love as an emotional experience with its harmful effects for women's lives. This is not a struggle for the right to love, "this is a protest against moral imprisonment, even that of the outwardly freest feeling".¹⁷¹ Love exists in her novels as a destructive power which "binds the wings" of her heroines and prevent them from self-realisation. Love is portrays by her as overwhelming the ego, and thus akin to a kind of sickness and culminates in a loss of identity.¹⁷² Such notions as "chains of love" appear quite often in Kollontai's fiction and works. By repeatedly using the language of "feters" and "chains", she projects the theme of captivity inward, so that so many of today's critics see as the external projection of inner anxieties, explicitly becomes a conflict within the self.¹⁷³ "How much more we could have created and achieved", she wrote, "if our complete energy had not been divided in an endless struggle with our own I and with the feeling for another. Indeed, there was an eternal

¹⁶⁹Cited by Clements B. *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Alexandra Kollontai*, p. 72

¹⁷⁰ Porter C. "Introduction", In: *Great Love*, p. 8

¹⁷¹Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 89

¹⁷²One of the heroines of *Vasilisa Malygina* says that "love always brings unhappiness. As soon as love allows you a glimpse of happiness, grief slips into its shadow" ("*Vasilisa Malygina*", In: *Love of Worker Bees*, p. 179).

¹⁷³Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 246

defensive war against the encroachment of men on our I, a struggle revolving about the problem: Work or marriage and love".¹⁷⁴

In most of her novels Kollontai explores the way in which love prevents her heroines from self-realisation and the acquiring of an independent status. Unable to depict the joyfulness of love she sought to evade conflicts of women's inferior status and female subordination imposed by the sexual relations in a sexless secession from the male world. In "Vasilisa Malygina" Kollontai shows why it is impossible for Vasilisa to retain her old independence. She has only a borrowed existence as wife, she no longer has her work, especially her political work in the factory and the party. When she tries to leave him she says, "I have panted enough in this cage, I have played the Directress enough..... Take for a wife one of those who value such a life". When she finally goes she throws off "a skin which did not fit me". But in fact love held her to him for a long time. Kollontai brings out the clash between the struggle for "identity" (here we can ask identity as a women or human being"?) and the ties which had developed over the years when they were together, as well as the very real sexual passion. At first her love was in harmony with the other ways she communicated with him. But ultimately there is opposition between the feelings he can still arouse in her and their obvious incompatibility. In this novel love is depicted in such a way as if its power could destroy Vasilisa's own personality. The only solution is to leave him. Once again work and social activity are presented as the only way for her heroine to acquire the sense of self-respect and finally her own identity as a "woman human being". She goes away, and is able to rid herself of her jealousy of her husband's mistress Nina, the traditional feminine, in an understanding mixed with compassion.

¹⁷⁴ Kollontai A. "Autobiography". In: *Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Woman*, p. 11

She finds her identity thus only by denying the existence of the man and her own sexuality (although Kollontai always transfers sexuality in the more spiritual categories of women's emotional dependence). The only solution possible is no real solution.¹⁷⁵ As Sheila Rowbottam writes, "it was a negative freedom: a freedom of non-attachment ... There was a sense in which very strong personal emotion almost inevitably appeared in opposition to the liberation of the women because traditionally such emotion bound women. But this tended to force women to accept that emancipation meant denying part of themselves - part of their feminine identity".¹⁷⁶

This inability to find a solution for the relationship between the sexes in the present resulted in the active advertising of work as the only salvation from the misery of contemporary situation in the relationship between the sexes. For new woman there is at present only one solution: to give, like man, her life a meaning through work in public sphere and not to depend solely on a love relations for her won vitality. In *Great Love* Kollontai reaches the same embittered conclusion that relationships with men always end in mutual recrimination, that women must pursue their own careers. Her heroine Natasha, after the whole frustrating process of love, which took her away from worthwhile party work, realises that the psychological price of the involvement outweighed its yield, and she would break away - resentful of the time wasted - to return to work: "They were killing time. Precious time was trickle through their fingers, wasted on trivial, futile things".¹⁷⁷ The story concludes as Natasha steps on to the train that will take her away fro Senya forever, bravely preparing to face solitude and danger in her life in the underground. By then, "the great love which

¹⁷⁵ Rowbotham S. *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, London, 1971, p. 156

¹⁷⁶ Rowbotham S., *ibid.*, p. 156

made her heart beat all those years which she thought would never fade, had gone forever ... Nothing, no tenderness, no prayers, not even understanding, could reawaken it ... Now she belonged body and soul to her work".¹⁷⁸

Indeed, the conflict between passion and freedom appears in her fiction almost as a natural tension. And, in some sense, this "love-work conflict" is not only about "how to have enough time, and spiritual space to integrate these two needs into a unified, balance life",¹⁷⁹ but, as she put it herself, the necessity to chose: "love and marriage or work". Love is viewed by Kollontai as something what possess destructive effect itself. "The woman, she wrote, not only rejects the outer fetters, she protests "against love's prison itself", she is fearful of the fetter that love, with the stunted psychology peculiar to our time, lays upon lovers".¹⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, the origin of the "love-work" conflict sometimes is not clear. For example, in the novel "Thirty two pages" Kollontai presented women torn between men whom she passionately loves (and who loves her) and the work which was her means to independence and self-realisation. But the question why actually her heroine cannot realise herself staying with her husband remains unclear till the end of the novel. Once again love is seen as an obstacle simply because it is associated with women's enslavement. Woman is associated with an "encompassing sexuality" and that is why she should get rid of it. After much agonising over the loneliness that such a choice entails, the unnamed heroine finally chooses to leave her husband. Walking alone along a foggy street at night, she examined her love for a man and for her work as a

¹⁷⁷Kollontai A. *A Great Love*. London, 1981, p. 95

¹⁷⁸Kollontai A. *ibid.*, p. 133-134

¹⁷⁹ Barrowclough S. "Alexandra Kollontai. Review of the "Love of Worker Bees". In: *History Workshop Journal*, Spring 1981, p. 182

scientist, which she had to curtail in order to live in the provincial town where her husband is employed:

She will go her own way, she won't let herself be shackled by the chains of love. Not thinking about him, not looking back. Going ahead all the time, toward her goal. Alone, so that no one will delay her on the way, deflect her to the side. Going, as now, through the fog, but knowing that ahead there is a light, her goal, her scientific work. It doesn't matter that it's difficult, that her feet stick in the sand, that the package of books and provisions weighs down her arms, that the hem of her skirt beats around her legs unmercifully. Isn't it difficult to be alone? In return, you gain freedom, in return you belong to your beloved work - scientific work. Herself and her work. And no more misunderstanding, no resentment that there are differences with him, that he doesn't listen to her soul, doesn't value her cherished work. Living and not suffering. Living and not loving anymore with a feeling of despair.¹⁸¹

The point of tension lies in love itself and the struggle of woman for independent identity in relation to man and the contradictions between her intellectuality and her sexuality, are too superficially resolved. Over and over again, Kollontai shows the women's vastly diminished sense and professional self-esteem then the men are simply present in their life. It seems that if in her theoretical works Kollontai shared the easy optimism characteristic of communist in the period - that "intelligent educators" would somehow escape the taint of the past and teach the values of solidarity and comradeship in their revolutionary purity - in her fiction the only possible solution for women is to achieve freedom in the form of abandoning their lovers, to liberate themselves from "atavistic", "awkward emotions". Love (for the individual of the opposite sex) is not only relegated to the second sphere it simply disappears from the life of her heroines. She persistently describes the ways in which love can usurp a women's responsibility for her own life, cripple and finally destroy her. As a result, her novels give the impression that the "individuality of woman" can be formed and exists independently of the man; and they witness more about woman's desire for autonomous, "emancipated" power over herself, her body, her

¹⁸⁰ Kollontai A. "New Woman", p. 89

desires and her sexuality, than about the possibility to form the new type of relations between the sexes. In wishing to make women independent of all bitterness of love, so they might escape from the restricted and destructive world of emotions, she was advocating a strategic retreat and not a liberation, a denial of feelings and not a mastery of it. "Freedom, independence, solitude", she wrote, "are the substance of her (woman's) personal desires".¹⁸²

This "living and not loving anymore with a feeling of despair" has got its continuation in the most scandalous of Kollontai's novels *Love of the Three Generations*. Her heroine Zhenia became notorious. The story of Zhenia has been much interpreted at the time of publication in '20s, usually to prove that Kollontai was irresponsibly and deliberately advocating promiscuity among the young. The literature appeared in '70s tried to "justify" this image. Almost all biographers of Kollontai stress the fact that the treatment of Zhenia in isolation from the Kollontai's theoretical works could make an absolutely wrong impression that Kollontai was advocating a promiscuity and reducing "love " to the satisfaction of the purely biological instinct. Some historians tries to explain Zhenia's image as the illustration of the "wingless Eros" born in the years of chaos during the Civil War.¹⁸³ Though it is true that during the Civil War one could find young men and women who lived like

¹⁸¹ Kollontai A. "Thirty Two Pages". In: *A Great Love*, p. 138

¹⁸² Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 63

¹⁸³ Clements sees girls amorality as a product of her dedication to communism and her inability to establish long-term relationships in a time of crisis. (Clements, B. *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Alexandra Kollontai*, 1979, p. 230). Alex Holt claims that Zhenia became convenient reason to distort Kollontai's ideas and then attack the distortions (Holt A. *Selected Writings of Aleksandra Kollontai*, p. 206). In Porter's opinion, Kollontai is clearly as bewildered by this guiltless promiscuity as Zhenia's mother. (Porter, Cathy. *Alexandra Kollontai, A Biography*. London, 1980, p. 406). Stites suggests that careful reading of this story in the context of Kollontai's other writings should be sufficient to dispel the double myth surrounding it which says that it contains the origin of the "glass of water theory" of sex and that Zhenia was simply echoing the views of the author. (Stites, Richard. *Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*. Princeton, 1978, p. 357)

Zhenia, the fact is not entirely relevant to Kollontai's story. Zhenia was Kollontai's "a flight from love", literary fantasy of a more autonomous, less painful life lived without entangling emotions and reflects her intention to create in the framework of literary expression the image which could embody in itself the possibility of separation feeling from the satisfaction of the sexual desire. Here we could see the realisation in the extremist form of her permanent and persistent theme, (which we can trace back to 1913 and the publication of her essay "New Woman"), held that love should play a subordinate role in a woman's life and that her primary commitment should be to work. Moreover, Kollontai clearly makes a statement that Zhenia's behaviour could be considered as a possible form of a new morality. Actually, the whole story is constructed as an evolution of the norms of sexual morality on the example of three generations of women in one family as the expression of her idea that sexual relations are subjected to transformation within history. The sexual patterns of the first two generations oppose each other and are then carried forward into a new resolution in the third.¹⁸⁴ The grandmother, Maria Stepanovna, is a "progressive" woman who left one husband and married another, but a woman committed to monogamous marriage. Olga, her daughter, is committed to "free love", which she posits against her mother's ideal of a freely contracted love marriage. Olga, believing in freedom from conventional marriage ties, finds herself in love simultaneously with two men, one a comrade whom she loves spiritually, the other a man whose politics she does not respect but whom she loves sensually. Olga's mother, whose morality is entirely oriented toward love for one man, can only disapprove of her daughter's conflict. But the real focus of the story is Olga's

¹⁸⁴ Farnsworth B. *Aleksandra Kollontai. Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 331

daughter Zhenia, the third generation. She has a numerous "lovers" (without being emotionally involved) and begins a casual affair with her mother's lover, describing it in simple terms as an extension of the Marxist philosophy of the abolition of private property to love: Comrade R., who lives with mother and daughter in their one-room apartment, is not her mother's possession. Kollontai lets Zhenia to make the following statement: "... one must have time to fall in love. I have read novels and I know how love takes possession of one's faculties to the exclusion of everything else. But I have no time. Our activity in the district has taken hold of us all so completely that none of us had time to think of anything else, of personal matters".¹⁸⁵ Her mother Olga claims that it is not the affair she finds so distressing as the heartlessness and cynicism of the pair, for whom there is no love and no passion. Olga, remembering how she suffered and struggled to rid herself of the entanglements of love cannot tolerate their coldness. Their involvement with each other is "vulgar debauchery".

To justify the "immorality" of her heroine, Kollontai once again invoked the notion of "love-comradeship" (sexless love) - spiritual bonds - category to which she gave priority through all her theoretical writings. It is striking that Olga's daughter in "Three Generation", for all her rebellion in the realm of sexual relations, declares her fidelity to the things "that really count":

There are people whom I love very much, other people besides mother. There's Lenin, for instance - don't smile, I mean it! I love him far more than all the men I like and have slept with. I'm always beside myself for several days whenever I know I'm going to see him and hear him talk - I'd give my life for him too! And there's Comrade Gerasim, do you know him? He's our district secretary. Now there's a man for you! I love him too, I truly love him and even if he's not always correct I'll always submit to him because I know that his intentions are good. Do you remember when there was that scandal about him last year? I didn't sleep for nights, and what a fight we put up for him! I mobilised the entire district to support him. yes, I love Gerasim.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵Kollontai A. "Three Generations". In: *Love of Worker Bees*, p. 207

¹⁸⁶Kollontai A., *ibid.*, pp. 210-211

Here I can see just one more illustration of the preference she gives to the spiritual love, comradeship in the future society, where friendship (sexless love) and not hedonism plays the main role. There are no more conflicts of loyalties in love. There is just one valuable thing - love for community, where the interests and emotions of individuals dissolve in the mutual "love" for each other. The emphasis is still the same - subordination of "feminine" desires to the Cause, to the social activity. The advocacy of promiscuity was far from her purpose, but Zhenia did reflect Kollontai's fascination with the possibility of a life of camaraderie lived without romantic love and tries "to solve the problem by divorcing strong emotions from her sexuality". She presents the statement of the dilemma and attempts a particular way out. ¹⁸⁷ In "The make way" she says: "Relations where no personal feelings are involved can have unfortunate and harmful consequences (the early exhaustion of the organism, venereal diseases, etc.), but however entangled they are, they do not give rise to "emotional dramas".¹⁸⁸

These kind of images were not new in Russian intellectual thought. In one of his fantasies Rozanov seriously, as something benevolent and desired, imagined the mechanism of total obligation of sex, which later became the subject of anti-utopian nightmares of Zamiatin and Orwell: "The passing by, stops in front of those whom he likes and says her: "Hello, I am with you". After this she stands up, and not even looking at him, comes into his house. And becomes for this day his wife¹⁸⁹. Zhenia, the Communist activist who had lovers but no time to fall in love, emerged as a rather

¹⁸⁷ Rowbotham S., op. cit., p.157

¹⁸⁸Kollontai A. "Sexual Relations and Class Struggle". In: Selected Writings, p. 287

¹⁸⁹Cited by Etkind, A. *Eros Nevozmozhnogo: Istoriia psikhoanaliza v Rossii*. St.-Petersburg, 1993, p. 343

depressing stick figure despite Kollontai's effort to portray her in a friendly way. If she was utterly convincing in her wide-eyed protest that of course she loved her mother but that her affair did not concern her, it was because Kollontai did not really know the figure she projected. "She was not the first author who did not understand her own creature".¹⁹⁰ Zhenia's image witnesses the difficulty for Kollontai in coping with changes she was trying to introduce. One could say that she had internalised the male model of sexuality, tying sexual experience, a "quest" built on variety, but, for a combination of social and psychological reasons, this was a destructive strategy. Given pre-existing sexual orientations of "a woman of the past", Zhenia's image makes an impression that compulsiveness in sexual behaviour, as in other areas, is illusionary autonomy. Of course, it is easy from the position of our time, knowing the consequences of some revolutionary undertakings, to see in Kollontai's "gloomy pictures" ("love in a heartless world") the features of the authoritarian societies. But the fact that this trait of disappearing of the individual love and exclusiveness in love was perceived by her contemporary, Zamiatin, as one of the basis of totalitarian power, illustrates that Kollontai's utopia primarily had the traits of negative character.¹⁹¹ Yet one cannot deny that the heroine depicted by Kollontai witnesses more about the desperate search for women's autonomy rather than about sexual promiscuity or the actual suppression of intimacy/privacy. As I tried to show in the first chapter privacy was not an essential element in Kollontai's ideological composition. In the maximum involvement into the public life Kollontai saw the main source for people's real liberation.

¹⁹⁰Farnsworth B. *Aleksandra Kollontai. Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 332

III.2. Maternity

Kollontai is extremely sensitive to the ways in which "femininity", female experience, had made women weak and pays much less attention to the ways in which it had made them strong. Interestingly, in my opinion, this tendency is revealed in Kollontai's approach to motherhood - women's prerogative which symbolises the power of women in the society. The importance of the myth of the maternal in Russian culture has relatively recently been documented by Joanna Hubbs in her book *Mother Russia*; she identifies many Russian writers who draw on these myths, as well as those who claim that the myth of the Mother is the key to Russian culture.¹⁹² Considering Kollontai's views on motherhood, some historians seem to treat them in the framework of the same academical tradition. Thus, Beatrice Farnsworth suspects that Kollontai pictured socialist women as mothers for reasons that went beyond the society's need for children, that reached deep into the Russian symbolism of "*Matushka-Rus*", the enduring and capable mother. She suggests, that Kollontai's unexamined assumption that the Russian woman would of course bear children supports Vera Dunham's notion that the Russian ethos of the strong woman did not include the spinster.¹⁹³ It is true, that Kollontai ardently believed in the natural and sacred function of motherhood and said so many times. Much of her political effort after Revolution was devoted to ensuring adequate medical care for working mothers.

¹⁹¹Of course, Kollontai's own literary vision of the future society ("Soon (in 48 Years' Time". In: *Selected Writings*) draws an absolutely different picture of collective community.

¹⁹²Hubbs, J. *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture*. Bloomington, 1988

¹⁹³Farnsworth B. *Aleksandra Kollontai. Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution*, Stanford, 1980, p. 149; See also, "Introduction". In: *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*. Ed. by Jane T.

She also believed that society had an obligation to assist mothers by helping to raise their children. Her primary concern was that every woman would have the right and the genuine opportunity to have children and to be sure that they would be cared for. "Every mother must be convinced that once she fulfils her natural function and gives a new member to communist society, i.e. a new worker, the collective will love and attend to her and her child". Marriage and sex were personal affairs; but motherhood (and child), she said, was a social concern.¹⁹⁴ She considered childbirth the natural right and duty of the woman, entailing certain obligations. Avoidance of maternity was seen by Kollontai as a selfish and immature lack of responsibility.

But despite the insistence that motherhood is a duty of a woman, Kollontai seems to have shared the view of some Russian philosophers, that sexual love was higher, theologically speaking, than maternal love. "Although I personally raised my child with great care", she tells us in her memoirs, "motherhood was never the kernel of my existence".¹⁹⁵ In this respect she differed greatly from many of the sexual reformers of the "Right to Motherhood" movement of pre-war Europe who saw mother-love as a substitute for sex.¹⁹⁶ In "The New Woman" Kollontai, wrote that "it is characteristic that the joy of motherhood was viewed as the surrogate of women's happiness. If she was not happy with marriage, ... maternal concerns and maternal joys remained as the last refuge".¹⁹⁷ And this ambiguity, in my opinion, is partially the result of the prevailing discourse on maternity in the pre revolutionary

Coslow, Stephanie Sandler. Stanford, 1993, p. 17. It is stated there that Kollontai participated in the mythic elevation of maternal so typical of Russian culture.

¹⁹⁴Kollontai A. "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations", p. 227

¹⁹⁵Kollontai A. *Autobiography*, p. 11

¹⁹⁶Stites R. *Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, Princeton, 1978, p. 354

¹⁹⁷Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 84

philosophical thought. As the recent studies in this area (considering the interwinnings of the maternal and the sexual), demonstrate, the veneration of the mother and the maternal was problematic, not axiomatic; beneath and intertwined with idolatry of the maternal they uncover considerable anxiety about the body and sexuality. Alongside the veneration of the mother in Russia exists, for example, a feeling of revulsion toward the maternal body.¹⁹⁸

Russian philosophical discourse here was also largely dominated by Otto Weininger. For him not only was maternal love “instinctive”, “involuntary”, “amoral”, and “blind”, it was also egotistical since directed only toward a women’s progeny, not toward all mankind. For Berdiaev, birth represented the “bad infinity of physical reproduction”; it was a reminder of the change of generation and of the seeming inevitability of human decay. He believed that “the opposition between love and childbirth is profound”, and declared: “birth is always the sign of the failure of the personality to attain perfection, of falling short of eternity”.¹⁹⁹ Solovyov is willing to admit that maternal love is based on sacrifice, but he cannot forgive its role in condemning man to live among the beasts: “To a mother her child may be dearer than all else, but this is precisely, because it is her child, just as with other animals; in other words, here the purported acknowledgement of an other’s unconditional significance is in reality founded upon an external, physiological connection”.²⁰⁰ Criticism of blind, unthinking, and animalistic motherhood had been prevalent in the early

¹⁹⁸See, for example, Heldt, B. “Motherhood in a Cold Climate: The Poetry and Career of Maria Shkapskaya”. In: *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*; Naiman, E. “Historectomis. On the Metaphysics of Reproduction in a Utopian Age”. In: *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*.

¹⁹⁹Berdiaev N., op. cit., p. 229

²⁰⁰Solov'ev V. “Smysl lyubvi”. In: *Sobranie sochinenii*, vii, Brussels, 1966, p. 510. Cited by Eric Naiman. “Hysterectomies. On the Metaphysics of Reproduction in a Utopian Age”. In: *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, pp. 262-263

century; to varying degrees Fedorov, Berdiaev, and Solov'ev had founded their utopian philosophies on the elimination of mothers. Berdiaev's imagery had been distinctly hostile to procreation, seeing in reproduction and young children the mere repetition of the past rather than a leap into the future.²⁰¹ "I have always been repelled by the pregnant woman", he wrote, "... the process of reproduction always seemed to me to be alien to the individuality", "the perspective of a kin's immortality stays in strike opposition to the individual immortality",²⁰² "Sex belongs to the life of a kin, though love belongs to a life of personality. The feeling of alienation towards the kin's life belongs to the most essential traits of my character".²⁰³ A strong line of hostility toward maternal power runs even through the work of writer who left apparently ennobling depiction of childbirth and who have devoted considerable effort to praising good mothers while condemning bad ones. One of the central stories in Tolstoi's career is his effort to come to terms with maternity, and the lesson of much of his work may be that men are far better off when mothers do not survive into their son's adolescence.²⁰⁴

Although there was a natalist trend in the Soviet press, calls of encouragement for the creation of new citizens coexisted with a savagely misogynist critique of maternity. Kollontai following this separation of the sacred function of motherhood from maternal presents overwhelming mother love as negative and narrow. "The woman who is called upon struggle in the great cause of the liberation of the workers - such a woman should know that in the new state there will be no more room for such

²⁰¹Naiman E. "Hysterectomies", p. 189

²⁰²Berdiaev N. "Razmyshleniya of Eroze". In: *Russkiy Eros*, p. 271

²⁰³ibid., p. 271

²⁰⁴ Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 44

petty divisions as were formerly understood: "These are my own children; to them I owe all my maternal solicitude, all my affection; those are your children I am not concerned with them"205 Henceforth the worker, who is conscious of her social function, will rise to a point where she no longer differentiates between yours and mine; "she must remember that there are now only our children, those of the communist state, the common possession of all the workers".206 "Why", she asked, "Should this instinct be confined exclusively to narrow love and care for one's own baby? Why not let this instinct, so precious for working humanity, branch out and rise to its highest level - that of caring about other children, equally helpless though not one's own, and of devoting love and attention to other babies".207 Clements comments this passage as "it was not love itself that she rejected but the institutional forms of bourgeois society".208 It seems, that her perception could be partially viewed in the light of her ideas on collectivisation, socialisation of domestic tasks and state upbringing of children, to make women free for the participation ("to relieve the working mother of the unproductive labour") in sphere of production and self-realisation in social activity. However, I think one more consideration is important: she tries to abolish the physiological connection between mother and child and thus to destroy this "animalistic" association, which was imbedded in Russian philosophical thought, by socialisation of maternal love and spreading it to all children. She agreed that the bearing and nursing of children established a special relationship between mother and child, but insists on a radical reduction of the period mother should spend

205 Kollontai A. "Communism and the Family". In: *Selected Writings*, p. 259

206 Kollontai A. "Communism and the Family". In: *Selected Writings*, p. 259

207 Kollontai A. "The Labour of Women in the Evolution of the Economy". In: *Selected Writings*, p. 144

with her infant. Kollontai posited the first few weeks of a child's life as the critical time when the exclusive attention of the mother was needed. During that period, there existed an important physiological tie between the nursing mother and the infant that made the mother's care essential; later, however, the mother's care was not as important.²⁰⁹ The accent is put on the communal upbringing of children. This idea was one of the basic postulates of Marxist ideology stressing the importance of the public upbringing of children. In our context it is interesting as a radical reconsideration of the perception of woman-mother as mediator, teacher, a guardian of moral values within family and society. Motherhood is reduced in Kollontai's ideology to the fact of biological gave of birth and it is not perceived as a whole complex of child-mother relations including (besides biological connection) the educational and moral obligations of mother. It seems that this ultra-leftist denial of the exclusiveness of maternal love and traditional preoccupation connected with maternity was the result of the same ideological system which defined the value of one's personality in relation to the sphere of production and in social activity. In some sense, motherhood is also evaluated by Kollontai in terms of women's relation to production - the production of the new labour force.

This rationalisation of women's life in favour of work, the sublimation of emotional and sexual desires in social activity lead to the radical transformation of the perception of "femininity" or (using Kollontai's language) to the creation of the New Woman. The paradoxical combination of economical determinism and voluntarism, the hope that women's personal dignity and independence can be won by submission to work and impersonal necessity contributed to the categorical rejection of "old-

²⁰⁸Clements B. *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Alexandra Kollontai*, p. 334

styled femininity". The traditional spheres of women's activity were perceived in negative terms, the emotional world of women totally reconsidered, and the question thus appears in the form what does actually remain from the feminine identity, is there "a direct link between assimilation to the public life and assimilation to masculinity"²¹⁰ or as the editor of a pre-revolutionary liberal journal wrote "the new woman is not a woman, no, and it is not a man either - it is an entirely new sex, a new organism, which we can legally only consider a transitional type"²¹¹ Kollontai constantly plays with the limits of sexual differences. In her community she abandoned the gender distinction altogether, and both sexes are symbolised within one coherent social body in their relation to work and social activity. The price she paid was the abandonment of the traditional features of femininity. The "masculine model" she accepted offered more opportunities for self-realisation, but to choose it meant to renounce womanhood, to declare traditional femininity as inferior. In Kollontai's vision of women's appropriate role in the society the traditional traits of femininity are always presented as the disturbing, dark aspects of femaleness which prevent women from their self-realisation, as the self-realisation and one's identity themselves are defined only in terms of social activity.

III.3. Representation of the Body

The changes in women's social role, influenced not only moral standards but also the visual representation of femininity. Here the special attention to Kollontai's depiction

²⁰⁹Farnsworth B. *Aleksandra Kollontai. Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 152

²¹⁰Kelly C. *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992*, p. 244

²¹¹*Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*. Edited by Jane T. Coslow, Stephanie Sandler, Stanford, 1993, p. 24; The suggestion that the new woman is perhaps a completely mistaken idea, and that the feminine, a primary symbolic power, will always and necessarily be of secondary position, has curiously given rise to radical post-modern feminist theories of gender difference.

of women's body could be interesting. Eric Naiman, considering Kollontai's theoretical works and fiction in the context of NEP suggests that "Vasilisa Malygina" is constructed around a frenzied struggle against the female body in which female physiology and capitalism are paired as enemies of the Communist state. The novella's first paragraph, in his opinion, introducing Kollontai's heroine - who bears the usually masculine name of Vasja - already brims with physiological anxieties and with the desire to eliminate the body which produces them²¹²: "Vasilisa is a worker, a knitter. She is twenty eight. Thin, emaciated, pale, a typical child of the city". She has had typhus and her hair is short and curly; from afar she looks like a boy, flat chested in a shirt with a collar at the side and with a worn leather sash. She isn't pretty, only the eyes are good: black, affectionate, attentive and thoughtful".²¹³

Throughout the novella Kollontai dwells on Vasja's body, telling her reader how poorly Vasja fits into feminine clothing, how little she eats, how she refuses the extra rations to which she is entitled as a Party member. When Vasja leaves the city to visit her lover in the countryside, she finds that he has a young errand boy, also named Vasja, working for him, and although the lad makes few appearances, this "coincidental" doubling serves to emphasise the similarities between Vasja's form and the male body.²¹⁴ One of Volodia's faults is that he attempts to give Vasja a(n adult women's) body, and her breasts and hips become noticeable only when she has a dress made from the expensive fabric he has bought for her. Having a woman's body becomes tantamount to dressing oneself as an ally of the bourgeoisie. The female

²¹²Naiman E. "Revolutionary Anorexia (NEP as Female Complaint)". In: *Slavic and East European Journal*, 1993, Vol. 37, No. 3, p. 318

²¹³Kollontai A. "Vasilisa Malygina". In: *Love of Workers Bees*, p. 21

²¹⁴Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 228

body virtually does not exist until draped with the diaphanous desire for property and incarnated simultaneously by physical desire and ideological disgust. Volodia makes Vasia see her own body. His insistence on the materialisation of her flesh is one of the early signs that his priorities are incorrect. When he buys boots for her, she tries them on and "it was as if she were seeing her legs for the first time". At his "mansion" Volodia immediately takes Vasia into the bedroom and turns her toward a large mirror in the armoire: "You see, how convenient it is, you can see all of yourself in this mirror when you dress. Inside there are shelves. For your ladies' underwear, little hats, and other bits of clothes".²¹⁵

Eric Naiman points out to the interesting fact, that in her lectures at Sverdlov Communist University Kollontai professed belief in a corresponding pre-capitalist state of social development, an era of prehistoric Communism, when man roamed the earth in small groups, when there was no private property, and when "the physical attributes of women, her nimbleness and strength, differed little from those of men". Many distinctive female features - the developed bosom, developed only later, over generations, as women were transformed primarily into "females" [*samki*] with their principal role that of breeder of the species".²¹⁶ Vasilisa has this androgynous, pre-capitalist body.²¹⁷

The authoritative source on the issue was August Bebel', cofounder and leader of the German Social Democratic Party, whose influential 1883 book, *Woman and Socialism*, was translated into Russian in the 1890s. For Bebel it was obvious that the tragedy of women is social and was aware that masculine desire had been in some -

²¹⁵Kollontai A. "Vasilisa Malygina". In: *Love of Workers Beas*, p. 24

²¹⁶ Cited by Naiman E. "Revolutionary Anorexia", p. 318

historical - sense projected onto women. According to him, in limiting the scope for female activity in society, capitalist economic oppression had "led to a number of traits of characters peculiar to women, that are more fully developed from generation to generation. Men seem to find satisfaction in ridiculing these traits, but they forget that they themselves are to blame for them". In Bebel's view, these traits included "talkativeness and scandal-mongering; the inclination to discuss the most insignificant things at the greatest length; the exaggerated interest in outward display; the love of dress and coquetry; envy and jealousy toward the members of her sex, and the tendency of being dishonest and hypocritical". Bebel added that these traits had "developed under the pressure of social conditions and (.....) been further developed by heredity, example and education". Long continued oppression and the corresponding education have so accustomed the female sex to the arguments of its master, that it regards this state of things as perfectly right and natural.²¹⁸

But Bebel goes much further when suggests that even the biological signs are the result of the historical evolution rather than biologically given constants. For Bebel it was obvious that women's domestic slavery and man's feverish battle for survival distorted the body in tow divergent directions. According to him, there are no grounds for assuming that in this primitive state men were physically or mentally superior to women. He makes a reference to Tacitus, who states distinctly that among the Germans, the women were by no means inferior to the men, either in size or strength. Not only is such an assumption a priori improbable, the observations afforded us by savage races, demonstrate that "the size and weight of the brain differs far less according to sex than is the case among civilised nations, while in regard to

²¹⁷ Naiman E., *ibid.*, p. 319

bodily strength, little or no inferiority exists on the side of the women",²¹⁹... and further, in a different place: "the results of practice and training from childhood on the bodily development can be seen in female acrobats and circus riders, who could compete with any man, in courage, daring, dexterity, and strength, and whose performance are frequently astonishing".²²⁰ As all these things depend on education and on the conditions of life, or, in the plain language of natural science, are a question of "breeding", and as natural laws have already been applied in the case of domestic animals with startling results²²¹, there can be no doubt, that by the application of these same laws to the physical and mental development of mankind, even more unforeseen results will be attained, in as much as man, the object of training, being conscious of the aim in view, takes an active part in the endeavour.²²² His view seems extremely optimism-sustaining. It is interesting however to look at it in the broader ideological framework. Bebel does not really specify the characteristics of which sex are supposed to be subjected to the application of the natural laws. However, it seems that exactly female physical characteristics (however defined) happens to be the disturbing element in this composition. The above cited passages seem to hold out the hope that one might minimise physiological difference, but this minimisation is happening by the elimination of the socially conditioned female

²¹⁸Bebel A., op.cit., p. 35

²¹⁹Bebel A., op. cit., p. 7

²²⁰Bebel A., op.cit., p. 35

²²¹In another place Bebel specifies: "Natural science and the artificial breeding which is based upon it is able purposely to produce quite new forms and species among animals and plants. This breeding has been carried so far in the case of domestic animals that the head of a certain kind of ox is bred shorter to increase the relative weight of meat on the other parts of the body, the legs of pigs are shortened for the same reason, and other almost incredible changes are brought about through applying the recognised laws of growth. Therefore, if these laws were applied to the training of men and women, the final result would be the formation of certain given qualities of mind and body and the possibility of an harmonious development for the individual". (Bebel, A., op. cit., p. 130).

physical weakness. Female body functions like the initial distortion from the norm and can be subjected to change through the successful application of the natural laws.

Along with Bebel Kollontai insisted on the social nature of women's tragedy. According to her survey, the birth of private property had led men to acquire women as they would livestock, the chief source of wealth at the unspecified time. She argues that the peculiar female traits were not a simply biological given and could be changed by intense social work. But her position (with all similarity of its initial assumptions) present a dramatic challenge to Bebel's analysis. Bebel thought that women's oppression would end when society was radically restructured by fundamental changes in the relationship of production. Kollontai in general followed the same logic. But while Bebel, devoting a few pages to women's physiological suffering, was concerned mostly with sexually transmitted diseases brought by men to the marriage bed,²²³ for Kollontai female body functions as the constant source of anxieties. Kollontai's text (and especially her novels) presents a different dynamic. Even in communist society, when not only in word but in deed woman will have equal rights with man, her comrade, when there will be public kitchen, and when the public upbringing of children will have been organised, the anxieties concerning female body remained untouched. What renders Kollontai's writing particularly interesting is that the creation of the new woman goes hand in hand with the misogynist rejection of a woman of an old type.

"Vasilisa Malygina" is replete with anxieties concerning women's body. Where Vasia is "only eyes", her husband's mistresses are an opposite physiological

²²²Bebel A., op. cit., p. 126

²²³Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 194

number. These women are big busted with large, blood-red and predatory lips,²²⁴ they are the representative figures of the cultural series of old-styled femininity pointing to the Other (the Nature): the difference. The description of the meeting between Vasilisa and her husband's mistress Nina really presents the moment of a high tension between the two types of "femininity":

Nina Konstantinovna suddenly appeared from the other end of the park. She paused beside the bandstand, chatting to Savelev and two young men, completely oblivious to the way everyone was gaping at her. So here she was at last! She wore a thin white dress which enveloped her body in soft folds and clearly exposed her breasts, long sand-coloured gloves, and a matching hat tilted over her eyes so that Vasya couldn't see her face properly. All she could see were her lips, bright crimson, as though smeared with blood. "Why, look at her lips! They're just like blood!" she exclaimed. "That's lipstick", Maria Semenova explained sagely. "And you ought to see her eyes too, all smudged with soot! I'd just like to get a cloth and scrub all that mess off her face, then we'd see what she really looked like! Hah! Even I'd be a beauty for you if they primped me up like that!"²²⁵

And although the most negative words at Nina's address, Kollontai puts in the mouth of Marina Semenovna rather than Vasilisa, the above passage witnesses to a significant insecurity which "new woman" feels in the present of the "other" woman.²²⁶ The detested "other women" - with whom so emphatically resists identifying her heroine - is here reduced to facial symbols of female genitalia - bloody and repulsive lips. Resisting other woman's implication that any woman might look like this, Vasia stays as far away as possible from these rapacious signs of femininity.²²⁷ Kollontai's fears projected onto the canvas of the female body

²²⁴Naiman E., *ibid.*, p. 319

²²⁵Kollontai A. "Vasilisa Malygina". In: *Love of Workers Bees*, p. 149

²²⁶In a different place Kollontai depicted Vasilisa terrified by the perspective that her husband deceived her with another woman: "All she could think about was that there, in that very room, on this very bed, Vadimir had kissed, caressed, made love to another woman! A beautiful woman with pouting lips and full breasts. Maybe he even loved this woman? Yes, maybe he'd lied to her, just to spare her feelings! ("Vasilisa Malygina", In: *Love of Workers Bees*, p. 53).

²²⁷Naiman E., *ibid.*, p. 233

introduced an important change into the compatibility (agreement, conformity) between woman and community/socialism.

Kollontai's depiction of the disorganised body, in which sexuality has overrun its bounds and infused all other psychological functions as well as all culture, is similar to the pre-Revolutionary portrait of female sexuality as undifferentiated and tending to overwhelm all intrapsychic and intracorporeal divisions, "threatening and devouring, like the ocean".²²⁸ And while Kollontai's perspective stresses the social cause of the physiological "tragedy" of women and by this "historicise the pre-Revolutionary paradigm"²²⁹ (and therefore takes a step away from that paradigm's essentialist misogyny), she at the same time permitted the identification of the traditional type of women with socially degrading qualities. Capitalism had turned women into instruments of pleasure, but now, in the conditions, of a society undergoing the process of social changes, they present a threat for the construction of the new socialist society. The hostility with which Kollontai talks about the woman of bourgeoisie presumes that was something here directed against the part of self which is not that easily controlled. One can read its ambivalent (or hostile) attitude toward femininity as a sign of an internally directed ideological suspicion that occasionally borders on self-hatred. The traditional females function here not only as a remnants of the past, but as the part of the women of a present which should be purged out. She provides a rather nightmarish versions of relations between these two types of females who appeared to be not yet sufficiently distinguished from each other to prevent the

²²⁸Berdiaev N. *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 225

²²⁹Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 182

development of a striking autorevulsion of one type in the presence of the (not yet sufficiently) other.²³⁰

Women's bodies present a disturbing element - something that prevents the new concept of femininity institutionalising itself in its full force - it was hatred of that part of the self which had been made "other". The border between the traditional women and the new one is still uncertain and needs the constant efforts to maintain its validity/rigidity. It served as a constant reminder of the danger which new woman has to face on the way of acquiring of her independence. "Contemporary heroines", Kollontai writes at the conclusion of the essay, "must fight a war on two fronts: with the outside world and with the tendencies of their female ancestors that lie deep within them". Arguably, in "Vasilisa Malygina" this conflict of a woman with her own interior becomes liberalised, the female body and its insides functioning as hostile representatives of the not so deeply buried past.²³¹ As a result, the concept of femininity is split between the old-styled femininity and the new one - very vaguely defined. Kollontai's image of a new woman is extremely obscure and occurs mainly within the framework of what is constructed in opposition to the traditional perception of femininity. Yet, the concept of a new woman surprisingly fits the whole model of the newly organised homogeneous community of labouring people. The coherency is achieved by the removal of (extra)-femaleness, which restored the natural balance of biological forces favourable to collective, class-conscious activity.

Kollontai vividly detaches the gendered physiological differences from her heroines' body and even makes an attempt to explain some of the elements of

²³⁰Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 235

²³¹Naiman E. *ibid.*, p. 236

women's biology as culturally determined.. But does it actually mean that Kollontai shares the early Bolsheviks culture discourse, "which found female biology and female sexuality oppressive"²³² and does she put the emphasis on "liberating women from their sexuality and biology, rather than on achieving the free expression of women's sexuality and biology"?²³³ Once again Kollontai's concept in this sphere is full of ambiguities. On one side, she permanently struggled with the double standard in sexual relations and demanded the free expression of women's sexuality. In one of her works she considers the situation when the respected male member of society could marry his cook without serious consequences for his reputation. "Now", she wrote, "imagine another situation. A respected woman of bourgeois society - a social figure, a research student, a doctor, or a writer, it's all the same - becomes friendly with her footman, and to complete the scandal marries him. How does bourgeois society react to the behaviour of the hitherto "respected" woman? They cover her with "scorn", of course! And remember, it's so much the worse for her if her husband is good-looking or possesses other "physical qualities". "It's obvious what she's fallen for".²³⁴ "Sexual purity", sexual virtuousness, were the moral physiognomies of the women", she writes, "one who had sinned against the sexual moral code was never forgiven. Do not most men act thus and do we not, nevertheless, continue to "respect" them?²³⁵ She stresses that the "rebellion of women against a one-sided, sexual morality is one of the most sharply delineated of the new heroine... it is one of the characteristic traits of the new woman that she does not hide her natural physical

²³² Naiman E. *ibid.*, p. 318

²³³ Kelly C., *op. cit.*, p. 127

²³⁴ Kollontai A. "Sexual Relations and Class Struggle", p. 244

²³⁵ Kollontai A. "The New Woman", p. 91

drives".²³⁶ "In the life of women, the bearers of the future, physiology, in contradiction to the hypocritical views imposed on them, plays an incomparably greater role than with men".²³⁷

Thus, sexuality of women and the right for its free expression have been recognised by Kollontai. She does not see any danger in the liberation of "women's biology". Just the opposite. She persistently defends the right for its free expression, as the symbol of destruction of the canons of the double standards, the symbol of women's equality with men in the sphere of sexual relations. Female desire is no longer the unmentionable subject. It is one which must be mentioned. Sexual pleasure has become a requisite and a fundamental right. All sex/liberation lies in this strategy – the imposition of the right, status and pleasure of woman. The promotion of the female as a sex in its own right (equal right – equal pleasures). But as soon as she starts speaking about the whole range of emotions the involvement in the sexual relations evoke, as soon as she recognises women's sexual desire, she immediately gives preference to work and social activity. Emancipation of instincts in Kollontai's ideology is immediately followed by the demand to relegate their satisfaction to the sphere of secondary importance. The new liberties are at once reduced and taken under control. Sexual passion (which followed in her novels by women's emotional dependency) plays quite an important role in the life of her fictional heroines (in this sense, I cannot agree with Catriona Kelly's statement that Kollontai's heroines are "sterile"²³⁸), but it is presented as destructive power, whose only consequences are the loss of heroines' personal identity. The problem of Kollontai's writings and her

²³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 93

²³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 94

²³⁸ Kelly C. *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992*, p. 244

concept of New Woman is its ambivalence: it is a simultaneous enactment of desire and repression through which the split is closed within a utopian vision of an economically and rationally controlled consciousness. On the one hand, the liberation of women's sexual desire can be formulated against the patriarchal discretion and double morality. On the other hand, the new femininity with its emphasis on superior quality of social activity and the discipline of emotions is formulated in such a way as to impose control on the liberated emotions and desires. Love had to be fettered now, so that it could be free (i.e., self-controlled) later. This call for love's bondage often translated into policies designed to reduce sexual desire – and the potential for sexual desire – to zero.²³⁹ Kollontai's ideal is the woman who is capable of regulating her desire, of putting it toward the service of the social progress. And the problem of Kollontai's New Women is that emancipated as a labour force, from the double standards of sexual morality she simultaneously faces the problem of emancipation from her "encompassing sexuality". Kollontai's aim was to teach how the New Woman must move from the external (social) mechanisms of control to the necessity impose internal (personal) discipline of one's own emotions. Indeed, only the woman who is capable of regulating her desire, to put it toward the service of social progress could be considered as a positive heroine. She becomes a "New" woman only because she is "useful". Women are promised equality in the sphere of sexual relations, but into equal subjects they are made by work, which is only capable to guarantee the full equality of sexes. The concept of self-mastering and self-disciplining femininity is predetermined by the same dominated discourse, which oppose men and women as belonging to the different binary oppositions: body/mind, nature/rationality. To overcome this division women should integrate themselves in the "male" world and

²³⁹ Naiman E. *Sex in Public*, p. 137

accept those system of values which evaluate one's personality through his/her relation to the social activity or creativity. Repression (?) seems to be already here in full force, in the narrative of women's sexual and political misery. The use of the word "repression" here is once again conditional, since Kollontai's writing represents the search for women's autonomy and freedom. And here we can see the same dynamic as in the relationship between the individual and community. Freedom (independence) was a state that could be approached through the exercise of self-control and through restraint in the practice of desires. If it was so important to govern desires, if the use one made of them constituted such a crucial problem, it was not because she wanted to maintain a purity; it was because she wanted to make woman free and to make them able to do so. She liberated the feminine and placed at the service of a new collective Eros. But the irony of the situation is that when the feminine (far from being a set of specific qualities) proves once "liberated", ends in the loss of any specific qualities, as much in the social as the sexual sphere. The liberation is achieved due to the dissolution of the (traditionally defined) female in the coherent body of collective, yet collective here mostly bears the masculine traits. What happens is that the rejection of sexual difference, though on the highly abstract level (as I do not talk about Kollontai's works, devoted directly to the solution of the practical tasks) resulted in the formation of the collective body – masculine and sublimating- as female sexuality has always been functioning as the disturbing element in this composition. As a result, Kollontai's concept of a new woman completely corresponds to the whole model of the newly organised homogeneous community of labouring people. The difference is abolished in this utopian vision by incorporating women into the sphere of labouring humanity and making the difference between the sexes not only irrelevant but also (potentially) non-existent.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the maximalist context of the Revolution's promise of radical human and social transformation, currents of discourse that had previously seemed almost entirely the property of religion or metaphysics earned a new ideological respectability and were able to combine in strange ways with other, newly legitimised ideas about the shape of ideal community. Elements of communal utopia closely connected with the idea of collective Eros captured liberal intelligentsia in the last decades before the Revolution of 1917 and passed in the redefined form into the mental makeup of some of the representatives of socialist intelligentsia. And while the twentieth century assertion of sexuality has on the whole been an abstract one, Kollontai's ideas were, an exception of the rule and present a deliberate effort to establish a new sexual regime as a part of the desired revolutionary transformation of the Russian society. She situated the problem of sexuality in the social context and perceived the working out of the new morality and new sexual relations as part of the construction of the new society. Her theoretical works clearly expressed her desire to fully understand the place of her new ideas in the Marxist framework. The combination of Marxist ideology with the pre-revolutionary philosophy produced an interesting body of ideas on sexual matters. Kollontai's (essentially Marxist) ideology drew so many postulates from a whole array of indigenous Russian traditions, myths and aspirations, that in its finality it really presents the extraordinary conglomerate of divergent and sometimes hardly compatible currents. Kollontai became an interesting and may be unique example of political figure who appropriated many of the

circulating highly abstract philosophical ideas and integrated them in the revolutionary framework.

By situating Kollontai in different intellectual contexts I wanted not so much to trace the origin of her ideas as to pose the new questions to Kollontai's writing, and by doing this, to uncover the new semantic depths in her ideology. The choice of love as a central topic meant to suggest the extent to which the discussion on this matter served in the year leading up to 1917 and after as sign of the speaker's of rapport with an ideal community. Love (or rather the idea about love) correlates and in many respects defines the border between public - private and collective - individual existence of the person. By analysing love, Russian philosophers were engaged (though on a highly abstract level) in the process of (re)defining the border between public and private life of individual, deciding where the autonomy stops and collective existence begins, and questioning the modes of attachment that make persons and collective. Russian philosophers' collectivist ideals strongly bounded with the idea of collective Eros, were recombined and adopted in the formation of Kollontai's revolutionary vision of sex, community, and physiology.

The two chapters structure, I used in the dissertation allowed me, in my opinion, to arrive at the same conclusion using different paths. On the surface there is no apparent link between Kollontai's perception of "New Woman" and her concept of collective Eros: the former represents sexual equality and women's adaptation to the male-dominated world; the latter reflects the utopian vision of love in the communist society. Yet they can be seen in relation to each other. There is a common motivation behind them: to find the solution to the "sexual crisis" by the means of relegation of love (in a sense of the relationship between the sexes) to the sphere of secondary

importance. In Kollontai's novels the Communist heroines reject love for the warmth and comradeship existing among Communist workers and discover fulfilment in an existence without men. In her theoretical works love for the individual is completely subjected to the "love-collective". She liberated the feminine and placed at the service of a new collective Eros. But the irony of the situation is that when the feminine (far from being a set of specific qualities) proves once "liberated", ends in the loss of any specific qualities, as much in the social as the sexual sphere. The liberation is achieved due to the dissolution of the (traditionally defined) female in the coherent body of collective, yet collective here mostly bears the masculine traits. What happens is that the rejection of sexual difference, though on the highly abstract level resulted in the formation of the collective body – masculine and sublimating - as female sexuality has always been functioning as the disturbing element in this composition. As a result, Kollontai's concept of a new woman completely corresponds to the whole model of the newly organised homogeneous community of labouring people. The difference is abolished in this utopian vision by incorporating women into the sphere of labouring humanity and making the difference between the sexes irrelevant.

The idea of Russian philosophers about a reproachment between the sexes and even the total abolition of their difference has become an abstract community of socially active citizens, from which virtually all representational features have disappeared. Two sexes are reduced to their social function and are equal before the labour. The difference between the sexes is neutralised in a community of socially active citizens. In opposition to the isolation of the couple in the bourgeois society, the promise of happiness in this utopian vision refers to the collective. Happiness is only conceivable inside social reality. Yet, in this spiritual collective, friendship and

not sexuality, are the dominant images, neither the self-absorbed couple, nor sexuality would dominate. Each would be relegated to a lesser place and collective work would be the generating motor and the unifying force. The friendship and mutual commitment of the collective would replace a couple's need for each other and provide emotional solace to a greater extent than could the single spouse. Social usefulness became the moral criterion of one's identity in the society.

In the course of this work, I was trying to escape the evaluation of Kollontai's ideology proceeding from the liberative/repressive dichotomy. The short passage on "Anti-utopian speculation on the same theme" I included in the dissertation meant to demonstrate that the same qualities (in this case of love) can be viewed as the potential both for liberation and for repression, informed by our own partial perspective and ideological point of departure. To assume (as I planned to do at the beginning of this work) that "repressive" and "progressive" sexual trends or phenomena are both enmeshed in networks and relations of power" may guarantee rather "secure" position for the researcher who attempts to pursue the line of arguments according to their own paths and provide "correct distance" for the evaluation of political ideologies containing the problem of sexual liberation as the main purpose. Yet it might not be always realised in practice. It is obvious that in some places my preliminary intention to escape value judgements gave way to remarks determined by my own political sympathies and preferences. It turned out to be difficult sometimes to make sense of the issues if one stays within the overall theoretical assumption that there is no concept of sexuality free from power. It seems, that Anthony Giddens is partially right when he states that Foucault's notion of power

does not explain changes in sexual attitudes and outlooks. Such changes are at least in some part a result of struggle and it is impossible to deny that some emancipatory (or repressive) elements are involved.²⁴⁰ In the dissertation, I tried to combine both approaches, though it was not always possible to find the secure place between these two.

²⁴⁰Giddens A., *op. cit.*, p. 25

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