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TELLING STORIES. GENDER RELATIONSHIPS AND MASCULINITY IN THE RED ARMY 1941-45*

The focus on female Red Army soldiers and its shortcomings

In his memories, the former Red Army soldier and dissident Lev Kopelev remembers his female comrades primarily as women, who cared for their outer appearance, and in regard to their relations with other soldiers:

“Many commanders had their ‘constant battle companions’ (this friendly expression replaced the ordinary PPZh [Pokhodno-Polevaya Zhena, marching field wife]). Some generals thought of news assistants, waitresses, nurses, typists as their fair game. A special type of cute, perky girl emerged, with fitting uniforms, chrome leather boots, crimped hair, make up, coquettishly put on field cap or Cossack fur cap, and white furs half-way down their waists. The soldiers looked at them with cheerful malice, sometimes reluctance, but most of the time they envied those for whom these princesses glowed.”¹

His description differs a lot from what we are actually to think about the 800.000 female Red Army soldiers, who served as nurses, cooks, secretaries and radio-operators, or who fought as pilots, snipers, machine gunners or medical orderlies in front-positions:² Especially in the 1960s and 1970s³

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¹ Lev Kopelev, *Khranit vechno [To Be Preserved Forever]* (Moscow: Vsva Moskva, 1990), 81-82. All quotations are translated by myself.

² For exact figures see Vera Murmantseva, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny v Velikoy Otechestvennoy Voynе [Soviet Women in the Great Patriotic War]* (Moscow: Izd. Mysl, 1974); Yuliya Ivanova, *Khrabreyshie iz prekrasnikh: Zhenshchiny v Rossiі v Voynakh [Beautiful Becomes Brave: Russian Women in Wars]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002); Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat. A history of Violence at the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Thereafter Krylova, *Soviet Women*. The noteworthiness of female Soviet soldiers becomes clear by comparing them to the 500.000 women serving in the Wehrmacht, for instance: These were regarded as ‘helping hands’, unarmed and declared combatants just at the very end, on August 8, 1944. For their experience see Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten. Kriegserfahrungen und Lebensgeschichten von Wehrmacht-*

they were presented as very patriotic and heroic women, who along side men carried the burden of the Great Patriotic War.⁴ The Belarusian journalist Svetlana Alekseevich drew our attention to yet another aspect of female life in the Red Army.⁵ In the 1980s she collected the stories of former female soldiers and presented them as women who wanted to fight like men at the beginning of the war,⁶ but then reverted to female behavior and identity. While experiencing the bloody everyday life of a war full of

helferinnen [Holding the Line. War-time Experience and Eife-stories of Female Auxiliaries in the Wehrmacht] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2009). – In contrast to Germany and other nations the Soviet Union already had some experience with women serving in the army: Several thousand women fought in the Russian army in World War I as well as on both sides of the Civil War afterwards. For figures and stories see Laurie S. Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland. Russia's Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

³ At that time in official discourse the victory upon Nazi-Germany was taken away from the Generalissimus Iosif Stalin and given to the ordinary people. Joachim Höslér, 'Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit – Der grosse Vaterländische Krieg in der Historiographie der UdSSR und Russlands' ['Coming to Terms with the Past – The Great Patriotic War in the Historiography of the USSR and Russia'], *Osteuropa*, 55, 4-6 (2005), 115-26. Thereafter Höslér, *Aufarbeitung*.

⁴ For a list of publications from the 1960s and 1970 see the sources in Krylova, *Soviet Women*. For a Western historian who also blew this horn later on see Kazimiera Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance. Selected Biographies of Soviet Women Soldiers* (Nepean: Focus Pub, 1998).

⁵ Svetlana Alexijewitsch, *Der Krieg hat kein weibliches Gesicht [War's Unwomanly Face]*, trans. Ganna-Maria Braungardt (Berlin: Berliner Taschenbuchverlag, 2004). Thereafter Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*. Other oral history projects with women who served in the Red Army in WW II are the internet publication *Zhenshchiny – Pamyat – Voyna [Women – Memory – War]*, available at <http://wmw.gender-ehu.org> (last visited 7 July 2011); the exhibition "Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha" Frauen in der Roten Armee 1941-45' ["Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha" Women in the Red Army 1941-45'] at Deutsch-Russisches Museum Karlshorst, Berlin, 2002; and the interview with Vera Ivanovna Malakhova, 'Four Years as a Frontline Physician', in Barbara Alpern Engel, ed., *A Revolution of their Own. Voices of Women in Soviet History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998). Thereafter Malakhova, 'Four Years'.

⁶ The Russian-American historian Anna Krylova argues that it was a shift in the gender-relationships in pre-war times that enabled women to serve. In the 1930s women were still perceived as being binary to men, but no more as oppositional. They could and should combine their reproductive features with handling weapons. As a consequence, a lot of girls were trained in parachuting, shooting and other 'male' activities in the komсомол, the young communist league, and volunteered afterwards. Krylova, *Soviet Women*, 18. For a different perspective on the pre-war gender-relationships which denies that women became equal to men – or equally valued – even when they entered the workforce or military see Thomas G. Schrand, 'Socialism in One Gender: Masculine Values in the Stalin Revolution', in Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman, and Dan Healey, eds., *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002).

deprivations, at least some of them became eager to care for their bodies or sewed and ironed for their field-husbands.⁷

In the following paper, however, I will not continue with this perspective on women and female behavior. Instead, I want to draw attention to some facts and perspectives which are oftentimes forgotten, and this is that next to the 800.000 female soldiers almost 30 Million men served in the Red Army, who had their own gender-identity⁸ as well and a perspective – as we will see – as Kopelev did. Consequently the male soldiers' social universe will be described in my paper in order to specify their role(s) in the theatre of war. By focusing on them and the evolving hegemonic masculinity⁹, I want to strengthen my thesis that while serving in the army, male soldiers had to present themselves as brave soldiers. This gendered identity included a focus on a man's (hetero-) sexual potential and the soldier's right to (hetero-) sexual intercourse.¹⁰ It becomes obvious by the ways the men perceived women, their demands on them and by the stories they told about them. I will argue that in the course of the war and the shaken social structures of the Red Army, this focus and its accompanying behavior became more and more narrow, reducing women to sexuality. To put it briefly, due to German total war and internal dynamics, the gender-relationships within the Red Army radicalized as a chauvinistic masculinity evolved.¹¹

⁷ Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 49, 55, 79, 86-90, 104-5; Malakhova, 'Four Years', 197.

⁸ It is Joan Scott's meanwhile revised, but still canonical definition of gender, that will be applied: Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review*, 91, 5 (1986), 1067-8.

⁹ For the definition of hegemonic masculinity, a concept based on Antonio Gramsci, see Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995). Examples for the production of masculinity within the army are Pinar Selek, *Zum Mann gehätschelt. Zum Mann gedrillt. Männliche Identitäten [By Love and Force. Masculine Identities]*, trans. Constanze Letsch (Orlanda: Berlin, 2010); and Frank Barrett, 'Die Konstruktion hegemonialer Männlichkeit in Organisationen: Das Beispiel der US-Marine' ['The Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity in Organizations: The US-Marines as example'], in Christine Eifler and Ruth Seifert, eds., *Soziale Konstruktionen - Militär und Geschlechterverhältnis [Social Constructions - Military and Gender-relationships]* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1999).

¹⁰ There are no hints in sources or literature of homosexual encounters or desires among Red Army soldiers.

¹¹ Actually, the gender relations within the Red Army not only led to sexual harassment towards female comrades but also to sexual violence towards civilian women in the liberated and defeated states of Eastern Europe, especially in Germany. This last aspect will only be touched upon, even when it still remains a research desiderata explaining the Red Army soldiers' sexual violence in 1944/5 by terms of masculinity as it is done for phenomena of sexual violence in other contexts. For the Wehrmacht and the founding literature see Regina

Unfortunately, all my statements in this article are only of an illustrating nature and contain several generalizations which still have to be analyzed more profoundly. I can offer just a structural explanation, because the landscape of sources on the Soviet war is highly fragmented. Even when we have some diaries, letters and memories from a few male soldiers out of 30 million,¹² they have no statistical reliability nor cover a longer period of time. Oftentimes we also lack further information about the authors, their social backgrounds, or (combat-) positions.¹³ And we have to take into account that the Great Patriotic War is still a highly politicized topic in Russia – as it was in the Soviet Union with a tendency to make heroes of the soldiers.¹⁴ Such a political framework makes it even more difficult to remember and speak of fear and doubt, or of behavior that harmed comrades.

Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen. Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion 1941-44* [*Conquests. Sexual Violence and Intimate Relationships of German soldiers in the Soviet Union 1941-44*] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010). – Publications which deal with rape committed by Soviet soldiers in Germany, either rely on ahistoric, sometimes even racist explanations like their “Asiatic mentality”, “the dark side of men’s sexuality”, group behavior, alcohol or (over-) emphasize the results of the so-called Soviet hate propaganda. See Alexander Werth, *Russland im Krieg 1941-1945* [*Russia at War*], trans. Dieter Kiehl (München: Droemer Knauer, 1965), 644. Thereafter Werth, *Russland im Krieg*. Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany. A history of the Soviet Zone of occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 107-14; Manfred Zeidler, *Kriegsende im Osten. Die Rote Armee und die Besetzung Deutschlands östlich von Oder und Neisse 1944/45* [*End of the War in the East. The Red Army and the Occupation of Germany east of Oder and Neisse 1945/45*] (München: Oldenbourg, 1996), 105-9, 120-32, 147-51; Antony Beevor, *Berlin. The Downfall, 1945* (London: Viking, 2002), 30-60, 326-49; Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, ed., *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. Bd. 1: Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neisse, Teil 1* [*Documentation of the Expulsion of Germans from Middle-East Europe. Part I: The expulsion of the German inhabitants from regions east of the Oder-Neisse*] (Bonn, 1953), 60.

¹² We lack such sources from female combatants widely. Their testimonies had to be produced by oral-history projects, i.e. in interviews. For them see footnote 6 and the essay of Irina Rebrova in this volume.

¹³ Despise all these shortcomings the perspective remains fruitful as it provides quite different results as the US-historian Karen Petrone, for instance, who analyzed masculinity and comradeship in the Soviet Union until 1939 by looking at literature on the Russo-Japanese-War 1904/5. She also emphasizes the need to be a hero, but states furthermore his honorable features and the racist implications of the concept. Karen Petrone, ‘Masculinity and Heroism in Imperial and Soviet Military-Patriotic Cultures’, in Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman, and Dan Healey, eds., *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002).

¹⁴ Höslér, *Aufarbeitung*. Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s war. Life and death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Picador, 2006), 10-11. Thereafter Merridale, *Ivan’s war*.

The German war of annihilation and the consequences for the Red Army

The German war against the SU – as it is widely known – was a sudden attack and a war of annihilation. Even before the first step onto Soviet territory, orders were issued which commanded the murder of Soviet commissars (*Kommissarbefehl*) or which denied the legal responsibility of German soldiers committing crimes against civilians (*Kriegsgerichtsbarkeitserlass*). There were also plans to colonize the territory and to get rid of the population (*Generalplan Ost*) which resulted in a policy of hunger (*Politik des Hungers*) to which particularly the masses of Soviet prisoners of war fell victim. Together with the SS and sometimes with a different pace of brutalization,¹⁵ the Wehrmacht fought a blitzkrieg neglecting all international laws of warfare. A huge territory in Eastern Europe fell under occupation and millions of Soviet soldiers were killed or captured. The Red Army had to retreat thousands of kilometers and stopped the Wehrmacht just before Moscow. After several months of bloody static warfare, with a back and forth full of bodily violence, the Red Army got the upper hand and began its march on Berlin.

In this setting, the Soviet soldiers not only had to face the ruthless fighting of the well-equipped and motivated Wehrmacht,¹⁶ they also had to deal with internal deficits. Due to purges in the late 1930s and the sudden German attack, the Red Army was not prepared for this war by any means. The commanders and officers were young and lacked experience. Soldiers complained about their incapacity – it was they who seemed to be responsible for the heavy losses and occasions of friendly fire.¹⁷ There was also a

¹⁵ Christian Hartmann, *Wehrmacht im Ostkrieg. Front und militärisches Hinterland 1941/42* [*Wehrmacht in Eastern War. Front and Military Hinterland 1941/2*] (München: Oldenburg, 2009), 282-3. For an interpretation of the Wehrmacht's brutalisation from within, see Omer Bartov, *Hitlers Wehrmacht: Soldaten, Fanatismus und die Brutalisierung des Krieges* [*Hitler's Army. Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*], trans. by Karin Miedler and Thomas Pfeiffer (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1999). For the perceived normality and other explanations of mass murder, see Harald Welzer, *Täter: Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* [*Perpetrators: How Ordinary Men Become Mass Murderers*] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005); and Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

¹⁶ For an interesting comparison of both armies see Gabriel Temkin, *My Just War. The Memoirs of a Jewish Red Army Soldier in World War II* (Presido: Novato CA, 1998), 38. Thereafter Temkin, *Just War*.

¹⁷ Nikolay Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy dnevnik* [*A Diary From the Front*] (Moscow: Nauka, 2005), 53, 283; thereafter Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy dnevnik*. Vladimir Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy*

huge lack of material, weapons and food. The soldiers had to organize most of it themselves; sometimes they stole it from others or bribed the ones responsible for it.¹⁸

Within these circumstances, the Soviet soldiers also had to cope with the war-time measures their leaders took to make them withstand the Wehrmacht. At a harmless level, propaganda posters called out for heroism by presenting images of male soldiers who protect their mothers, wives, and children by fighting the Germans with their own hands.¹⁹ But these aspirations were translated into Stalinist laws and a Secret Service within the Army, the *Smert Shpionam* (Death to Spies, or SmerSh), which ordered traitors and cowards to be shot immediately. This could be anybody who showed fear in front of the Wehrmacht, who overreacted and caused panic, who retreated or stayed alive as German prisoner of war, or who was absent from the front without permission.²⁰ There were also so-called blocking units created – armed forces from the People's Commissariat for the Interior which stood behind the regular soldiers and forced them to go into manslaughter with the Wehrmacht.²¹ Backed by all these laws, *Pravda*,

dnevnik: voennye stranitsy [A Soldier's Diary: Pages of War-time] (Moscow: Agraf, 2005), 40, 45, 47, 126. Thereafter Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy dnevnik*. Temkin, *Just War*, 117.

¹⁸ Temkin, *Just War*, 125; Sergey Polyakov, 'Zapiski malenkogo soldata o bolschoy voyne' ['Notes of a Little Soldier About a Big War'], *Sever*, 9 (1995), 115, 117; Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy dnevnik*, 74; Ivan Yakushin, *On the roads of war. A Soviet cavalryman on the eastern front* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2005), 37; Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova, *A Writer at War. Vassily Grossman with the Red Army 1941-1945* (London: Pimlico, 2006), 94; thereafter Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer; Poslednie pisma s fronta 1941* [Last Letters from the Front 1941] (Moscow: Voennoe Izdat., 1991), 88; thereafter *Poslednie pisma 1941*. Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 61; Leonid Rabichev, 'Voyna vse spishet. Neskolkto fragmentov iz knigi vospominaniy o voyne' ['War Writes Down Everything. Some Fragments from Memoirs about War'], *Znanya*, 2 (2005), 149; thereafter Rabichev, 'Voyna'. Levka Rubinshteyn, 'Isповed chastlivogo alpinista. Glavy iz trilogii' ['Confession of a Happy Alpinist. Chapters from a trilogy'], *Zvezda*, 5 (1995), 7. Thereafter Rubinshteyn, 'Isповed'.

¹⁹ Such posters are published in Pavel Aleksandrovich Snopkov, ed., *Plakaty vojny i pobedy. 1941-1945* [Posters of War and Victory, 1941-45] (Moscow: Kontakt-Kultura, 2005); thereafter Snopkov, *Plakaty*. Nina Ivanovna Baburina, ed., *Rossiya - XX vek. Istoriya strany v plakate* [Russia 20th century history of the country in poster] (Moscow: Panorama, 2000).

²⁰ The orders are published in Iosif V. Stalin, *O Velikoy Otechestvennoy Voiny Sovetskogo Soyuza* [On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union] (Moscow: Kraft+, 2002). For tribunals see Jörg Baberowski, *Der rote Terror: die Geschichte des Stalinismus* [The Red Terror: the History of Stalinism] (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2003), 229. Thereafter Baberowski, *Rote Terror*; and Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 157.

²¹ Altogether, about 158.000 men were sentenced (and probably shot) as traitors or cowards throughout the war; a much higher number served in penal battalions. Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 157-9; Baberowski, *Rote Terror*, 229-32.

the main Stalinist newspaper, could make a clear cut distinction and considered all those as traitors who did not support the Red Army wholeheartedly.²² A further measure taken by the state was that being shot as a traitor rather than being killed as a hero in battle meant harsh consequences for the soldiers' families at home. They could be arrested, lose the social support by the state and their jobs, not to mention the public disrespect.²³

As a consequence, the Red Army soldiers accepted this being forced to be brave soldiers when they welcomed, obeyed, and even enforced the Stalinist orders themselves by taking part in tribunals or preventing comrades from escaping.²⁴ Mansur Abdulin, an infantryman, perceived them as a "relief from uncertainty".²⁵ The results of this force can also be traced in the soldiers' Ego-documents, especially in the letters where they applied the vocabulary of heroism and its implications for their own identity: They sent "Red Army greetings" to their relatives and wives and let them know, how they were beating the Germans.²⁶ They were convinced that cowards die faster²⁷ and reminded their wives that it was better to be a hero's widow than a coward's wife.²⁸

Shaken social structures within the Red Army and the implications of violence

But the Soviet soldiers' eagerness to become and to present oneself as brave soldiers was also shaped by the social structures among them and the atmosphere within the army, because throughout the war, these structures

²² Pravda dated on July 30, 1942 is quoted in Werth, *Russland im Krieg*, 300.

²³ Marius Broekmeyer, *Stalin, the Russians, and Their War 1941-1945*, trans. Roz Buck (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 151.

²⁴ Aleksandr Danilovich Shindel, ed., *Po ob storony fronta - pisma sovetsskikh i nemetskikh soldat, 1941-1945* [On Both Sides of the Front – Letters from Soviet and German soldiers, 1941-1945] (Moscow: Sol, 1995), 154. Thereafter Shindel, *Po obe*. And Olmehchenko in Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 157.

²⁵ Mansur Gisatulovich Abdulin, *Stranitsy soldatskogo dnevnika* [Pages of a Soldier's Diary] (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 1990), 30. Thereafter Abdulin, *Stranitsy*.

²⁶ As examples see *Poslednie pis'ma s fronta 1942* [Last Letters from the Front 1942] (Moscow: Voennye Izdat., 1991), 332; Thereafter *Poslednie pisma 1942. Poslednie pis'ma s fronta 1943* [Last Letters from the Front 1943] (Moscow: Voennye Izdat., 1992), 251; Shindel, *Po obe*, 59-69.

²⁷ *Poslednie pisma s fronta 1944* [Last Letters from the Front 1944] (Moscow: Voennye Izdat., 1993), 39; thereafter *Poslednie pisma 1944*. Abdulin, *Stranitsy*, 61.

²⁸ *Poslednie pisma 1941*, 58, 244; *Poslednie pisma 1942*, 72; *Poslednie pisma 1944*, 554.

were heavily shaken and the Red Army became a *total institution*.²⁹ Right in the middle of the scorched earth, the soldiers had no exit nor access to civilians and their own civilian life, because in the Soviet Army there were no furloughs³⁰ and the field-post was not working properly.³¹ Relationships with friends and relatives, who also served in the Red Army, were also not stable, because oftentimes these served in different units. And once in the army, they could die there as fast and arbitrarily as oneself through German, sometimes even through Soviet bullets.³²

As a consequence, we have testimonies that tell us about the experienced loneliness within the masses of soldiers.³³ Distrust was felt widely,³⁴ which was probably connected to the theft, the political surveillance, and the fact that due to the heavy losses and constant replacements a lot of the comrades were unknown strangers. Furthermore, there were ongoing conflicts, sometimes violent ones, among the soldiers, especially with officers.³⁵ The lieutenant for supply, Andrey Kovalevskiy, describes the atmosphere in his unit, when there was no fighting at all, as “not healthy.”

²⁹ All armies are total institutions as it is analyzed by the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman. Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Doubleday, 1961). But in the Red Army and due to the war the measures taken were more rigid than average.

³⁰ Baberowski, *Rote Terror*, 232.

³¹ It could take a letter several weeks to reach its recipient, when it did not get lost at all. As a consequence letters maintained furthestmost a list of greetings just to stay in relationships with one's family and friends. As examples see Shindel, *Po obe*, 150; Evgeniy I. Ovsyankin, ed., *Pisma s fronta 1941-1945 [Letters from the Front 1941-1945]* (Arkhangelsk: Severo-Zapad. Kn. Izdat, 1989), 211. For furthergoing analysis of field post by Red Army soldiers, see Elke Scherstjanoi, ed., *Rotarmisten schreiben aus Deutschland. Briefe von der Front und historische Analysen [Red Army Soldiers Write from Germany. Letters from the front and historical analysis]* (München: Saur, 2004).

³² The British historian Catherine Merridale states that it was just a few weeks that an average rank and file Red Army soldier from the infantry was likely to survive. See Merridale, *Ivan's war*, 16, 199.

³³ Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy dnevnik*, 63; Rabichev, *Voyna*, 148; *Poslednie pisma 1941*, 88, 196, 202.

³⁴ A. Zharikov and P. Jurchenko, “...v polk pribyli sibiryaki” [“In the Regiment were Siberians...”], *Sibirskie ogni*, 5 (1989), 147; *Poslednie pisma 1944*, 39; Abdulin, *Stranitsy*, 61; *Poslednie pisma 1941*, 95-96.

³⁵ Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy dnevnik*, 45-47, 59; Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer*, 73; Wladimir Gelfand, *Deutschland-Tagebuch 1945-1946: Aufzeichnungen eines Rotarmisten [German Diary 1945-1946: Records of a Red Army Soldier]*, trans. Anja Lutter (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2005), 35, 48-50, 53, 57; Grigoriy Pomerants, “Zapiski gadkogo utenka” [“Notes of a Rotten Duck”], *Znamya*, 8 (1993), 129. Thereafter Pomerants, ‘Zapiski’.

[...] There were plenty of all kinds of mutual ‘banter’ and cliques. Also, the superiors became somehow grim and exceedingly capitious.³⁶

In this muddled situation some of the soldiers became depressive and were close to nervous breakdowns, a state of mind they hoped to relieve with alcohol. Jakov Aronov, about whom we lack further information, tells his sister in a letter that something in his head is knocking, he wishes to drink in order to stop it.³⁷ Also Vladimir Stezhenskiy, who worked as a translator for the army, considers in his diary drinking himself into oblivion after he had seen the results of a bombardment.³⁸ And Nikolay Inozemtsev, a spotter who constantly drinks,³⁹ states in his diary: “[H]ere you have not only stagnation; here you have moral intimidation, a consciousness of your own total nothingness, a beastly fear for your physical existence.”⁴⁰ Some pages later he describes the soldiers’ moods to be like a suitcase: packed and stuffed, they are just waiting to explode, to get rid of everything in the fights. “The huge losses, the absence of letters, everything that determines the everyday life of war, is lightened up by one thing, by the expectation of the attack.”⁴¹

As we can conclude from that, moments of fighting did not only enable the soldiers to get rid of the Wehrmacht and the war. They also offered relief and delight, and they provided the soldiers with a feeling of unity⁴² as Viktor Gladkov, about whom we also lack further information, describes in a letter to his wife:

“The war turned out to be more frightful in our imagination than it was in real life. As soon as they had given us an assignment and it was clear what we had to do, everything became somehow easy and simple. I don’t know what the others felt, but I personally wanted from the bottom of my heart to start fulfill-

³⁶ Andrey Kovalevskiy, “Nynche u nas peredyshka.” *Frontovoy dnevnik* [‘“Today, we have breathing space.” A diary from the front’], *Neva*, 5 (1995), 72. Thereafter Kovalevskiy, ‘Nynche’.

³⁷ Shindel, *Po obe*, 127-8.

³⁸ Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy dnevnik*, 71.

³⁹ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy devnik*, 47, 56, 68, 70-72, 95-98, 117, 131, 138, 145, 150, 155, 159.

⁴⁰ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy devnik*, 286.

⁴¹ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy devnik*, 140, 180, 194.

⁴² Such phenomena can be traced for most acts of group violence. Ulrich Bielefeld, ‘Ethnizität und Gewalt. Kollektive Leidenschaft und die Existenzialisierung von Ethnizität und Gewalt’ [‘Ethnicity and Violence. Collective fervors and how they come into existence’], in Wolfgang Höpken, ed., *Politische und ethnische Gewalt in Südosteuropa und Lateinamerika* [Political and Ethnic Violence in South-East Europe and Latin America] (Köln: Böhlau 2001), 14; Wolfgang Sofsky, *Traktat über die Gewalt* [A Tract on Violence] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1996), 161.

ing the assignment as quickly as possible. We went into battle singing songs, we laughed and made jokes. Obviously no one thought of death. When we came under fire [...] and the shells started falling on our armour like hammers I got into such fervour and rage that I started to entirely forget about myself.”⁴³

Also Mansur Abdulin states that in moments of fighting, the army turned itself into a “great living being.”⁴⁴ And to be part of this, one had to be brave. And so he comments in the following on falling asleep while on duty:

“I hate myself for this! If only I had to suffer alone now, it would be less disgraceful. But it’s a pity for Suvorov. [...] Probably he is now thinking: ‘I have to blame myself for entrusting the alert post to Abdulin. What can you expect from him? That Mansur is useless and irresponsible, and he’s a brat. If I manage to get out of this story unscathed, I won’t be friends with Abdulin anymore. I don’t have time for this careless scapegrace [...]’ I sit and think it through and through, and I come to the conclusion: ‘Yes, I am greedy for sleep [...] Yes, Suvorov doesn’t need a friend like me.’ Even I myself don’t need someone like that. But after all, why am I so useless? If we escape [...] and return to our battalion, the commanders won’t say thank you anyway. They’ll take my medal ‘For Bravery’ [za otvagu] and they’ll expel me from the party.”⁴⁵

Taking together all this evidence, we can state that becoming and being a brave soldier was not just a soldier’s obligation in wartime, strongly enforced by military orders. For the Soviet soldiers and their unstable social situation it was also the only way to exist and to be part of social structures within and outside of the army. By that it became a deeply necessary and accepted identity – and as most identities it was gendered.⁴⁶

Gendered features of the male Red Army soldier

The fact that the identity of a soldier was assumed to be a male one was officially stated by the mobilization orders. These conscripted just men and intended to have women in non-fighting positions as it was also articulated

⁴³ *Poslednie pisma 1942*, 332.

⁴⁴ Abdulin, *Stranitsy*, 48.

⁴⁵ Abdulin, *Stranitsy*, 45.

⁴⁶ Usually, gender as a social category works in relation to other categories such as age, class, age etc. Because of the fact that reference to these categories is less detectable in the sources or even non-existent we can conclude that gender became the dominant category among Red Army soldiers.

in war propaganda showing only men as fighting soldiers.⁴⁷ Women were either presented as mothers calling their sons to fight against the *Wehrmacht*, as substitute workers in factories and fields, or as medical orderlies helping the soldiers. But the men's identity as soldiers included also an appeal to their sexual potential and access to women, which can be traced in the propaganda as well. Starting in 1942, posters showed kidnapped female Soviet citizens hoping for the liberating Red Army, or, in 1943, loving wives waiting for their fighting men. Especially the former were presented in a highly sexualized manner.⁴⁸ Such an idea of the sexually active soldier had also a very prominent place within the discursive practices of the army. There were the typical military expressions which said fighting the enemy means to fuck him; that a weapon in battlefield should work as well as a woman in bed, and that a soldier, who did not dare to fight bravely, should be too ashamed to talk to a woman.⁴⁹

How much these ideas were present in the soldiers' behavior is articulated in an incident, which the mountain rifleman Levka Rubinshteyn relates to us in his memories: After three years of war, he had the opportunity to visit his wife Ira, who happened to be in unoccupied territory. When he arrived, she was not able to hug him in order to welcome him. The whole evening she tried to keep her mother around. Even when Rubinshteyn was already lying in his bed with Ira, she did not want to send her away, although he asked to:

"She couldn't tell her mother to leave, but she couldn't stay with me neither. Because of exhaustion she had no menstruation. For her, all this was very difficult, even frightening. Finally her mother left. My little Ira tried very hard to do well, but... Still, I didn't really feel pity for her. Probably I couldn't really understand. Maybe I had become a real warrior, hadn't I ... And, by the way, I remembered a phrase from my sergeant: 'A gun should be as reliable in fight as a woman in bed.' That's higher wisdom and justice."⁵⁰

It does not become quite clear what happened between Rubinshteyn and his wife after his mother-in-law had left. But it will not bend the interpretation too much to argue that Rubinshteyn had sexual intercourse with his wife, not paying too much attention to her 'I can't', considering it her duty.

⁴⁷ Andrea Moll-Sawatzki, "Freiwillige an die Front" ["Volunteers to the front"], in Peter Jahn, ed., *Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha. Frauen in der Roten Armee 1941-1945* [*Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha. Women in the Red Army 1941-1945*] (Berlin: Museum Berlin Karlshorst, 2002), 23.

⁴⁸ See the posters No. 87, 93, 94, 118, 124, 132, 179 in Snopkov, *Plakaty*.

⁴⁹ Rubinshteyn, 'Ispoved', 31; Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer*, 80, 88, 102; Shindel, *Po obe*, 86; Pomerants, 'Zapiski', 163.

⁵⁰ Rubinshteyn, 'Ispoved', 31.

A narrowed perception of women and
a radicalization of masculinity in wartime

This demanding behavior and vulgarity as masculine features were to a high degree shaped in the soldiers' actual environment. That is, by the army and its social structures, especially by the position into which the female soldiers were forced and the way they were perceived. It started out with the idealization of women as waiting mothers and wives representing the homeland and the coziness of civil life.⁵¹ They were seen as the opposite to war, and so Vladimir Stezhenskiy, who constantly describes the madness of war and his own loneliness in his diary, hopes to fall in love with a woman.⁵² But Stezhenskiy, as the majority of the soldiers, had very little access to women, by whom he wanted to get his mind off war. The only ones available for them were their female comrades, as there were no furloughs and contact with civilian women on Soviet territory was rare.⁵³

Many of the Red Army women, to some extent accepting their 'female' tasks and idealization, wanted to care for the soldiers' needs and desires. In her diary, the nurse Tatyana Atabek writes that she cared for wounded soldiers as her mother had done for her.⁵⁴ Other female soldiers remember their extra burden as well. Sometimes it was their commanders who asked them to smile in order to keep up the moral support, as we hear from Tatyana Kurilenko, a secretary of the political section, in an interview:

“The commander himself met up with the women, the front and division commander. And he kind of gave instructions on how we were supposed to help them to survive, how to raise their mood, you see. Never start whining yourself, although you may feel bad, and stuff. We should always have a smile on our face. [...] There was great, great moral support, when there were women in the battalion or, let's say, in the division.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy devnik*, 289-9; Temkin, *Just War*, 151, Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy devnik*, 171-2.

⁵² Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy devnik*, 63.

⁵³ At least, there is very few contact to civilian Soviet women mentioned in the soldiers' Ego-Documents. When the soldiers met civilian women for short periods of time they describe these contacts in terms of love or of sexual exploitation. Cf. Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer*, 103; Kovalevskiy, 'Nynche', 70-83.

⁵⁴ Tatyana Atabek, 'Ozhidanie chastya. Dnevnik i pisma voennogo felshera Tatyany Atabek. 1941 -1945' ['Waiting for Happiness. Diaries and Letters of the Military Feldsher Tatyany Atabek. 1941-1945'], *Izvestiya*, 22 June 2002.

⁵⁵ Tatyana Kurilenko, Interview, available at <http://wmw.gender-ehu.org/docs/interviews/3.doc> (last visited 13 July 2011).

But in the end, there were too many men who had experienced war for these few women. They were overstrained by the war and their comrades. And so they saved their time and qualities for the officers and commanders, as the operator Zoya Gorokhova tells in an interview:

“And horrible were also the men around us. And they, of course, and every one of them, thought that he was alive that day, and where he’d be tomorrow was uncertain. And every one of them, he wanted something warm, you know, tender from life. He needed a woman. But there were only few of us, we struggled to fight our way out, it was very hard for us to exist in that zone. For that reason many of the girls got off with one single guy, in order to protect themselves from advances from the rest of them. [...] It was very hard. Even now here it’s difficult to speak about it.”⁵⁶

The medical orderly Sofia K-vich, who is also being interviewed, is more direct and hints that the men’s aspirations had furthestmost sexual implications:

“After a few months I went to his [the commander’s] dugout. What could I do else? Around you were just men; it was better to live with one constantly than to be afraid of all. During the fighting it wasn’t that bad as afterwards, in the breaks. After the fighting they were ambushing us constantly. In the night, you didn’t dare to leave your dugout.”⁵⁷

When he died, she went to the second commander, whom she loved but who left her after the war for his family at home.

By analyzing these statements we can state for the gender-relationships in the Red Army that the women had to deal with a lot of sexual harassment, so that there was much pressure to become a so-called *Pokhodno-Polevaya Zhená* (a marching field wife, or PPZh).⁵⁸ And we can conclude that the women’s bodily behavior, which was mentioned in the beginning of this article, had among other things a strategic meaning.

⁵⁶ Zoya Gorokhova, Interview, available at <http://wmw.gender-ehu.org/docs/interviews/4.doc> (last visited 13 July 2011).

⁵⁷ Sofia K-vich is quoted in Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 254-5. For another testimony on sexual harassment see an anonymous testimony in Peter Jahn, ed., *Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha. Frauen in der Roten Armee 1941-1945* [*Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha. Women in the Red Army 1941-1945*] (Berlin: Museum Berlin Karlshorst, 2002), 160; as well Malakhova, ‘Four Years’, 187.

⁵⁸ The abbreviation is in analogy to a gun. Kopelev, *Khranit*, 81. We lack research on official regulations concerning relationships between men and women at the front. Kopelev argues that they were forbidden but then rumors occurred that Stalin himself had declared them ‘normal’. Gorokhova states that officers were punished for having liaisons by being demoted. Zoya Gorokhova, Interview, available at <http://wmw.gender-ehu.org/docs/interviews/4.doc> (last visited 13 July 2011).

Sofia K-vich is convinced that most of the women at the front did what she did, but have not dared to speak about it. Probably it was good they did not, because there was a lot of disgust for the PPZh, who could be considered as whores.⁵⁹ But a closer look onto the sources, especially the ones by women, their positions and personalities suggests that there was a wide range of possible encounters between men and women at the front. A young medical orderly like Sofia K-vich, who was maybe the only female person in the whole regiment, had probably less possibilities to deal with this pressure than a well-trained female sniper in a unit of female snipers for instance. There were also women who had formal power or were bold enough to keep the men away by swearing at them or telling lies.⁶⁰ Of course, it is possible that there were women who just reacted to the power and sexual desires of the men and commanders.⁶¹ But maybe it was also possible that some women used their bodies as a resource among others in order to survive and to have an advantage the male soldiers did not have.⁶² And we know, that several women married their field-husbands afterwards; there was, maybe, mutual love.⁶³

Instead of this historical complexity, something else counted among the men – and this is described by Andrey Kovalevskiy as analytical as it is cynical:

“I think that the front soldiers will agree with me if I say, in order to simplify the wording: ‘The regiment’s doctor, if it’s a woman of course, lives with the regiment’s commander; the battalion’s doctor with the battalion’s commander [...] and so on.’ [T]his kind of ‘organizational structure’ is extremely characteristic in that matter. The thing is that in the army the statutory habits are so strong, which means that in all things, preference is to be given to the elders by rank, and these ‘elders’ always have a position twice as favorable in matters of love. First, women prefer people of higher rank, and [...] the lower ranked men leave all opportunities to their senior officer. If a senior officer [...] wants to approach a woman that has just come under his command, he is, first, in most cases not going to face any particular resistance from the selected object, and, second, he won’t have any competitors. But [...] if it becomes obvious after the

⁵⁹ Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer*, 121; Malakhova, ‘Four Years’, 215.

⁶⁰ Anne Noggle, *A dance with death. Soviet airwomen in World War II* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2001), 242; Malakhova, ‘Four Years’, 187, 196.

⁶¹ Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 23; Rubinshteyn, ‘Ispoved’, 24; Boris Tartakovskiy, *Iz dnevnikov voennykh let [From Wartime Diaries]* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2005), 131. Thereafter Tartakovskiy, *Iz dnevnikov*.

⁶² Kopelev, *Khranit*, 82; and Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer*, 105.

⁶³ Evgeniy Bessonov, *Tank rider. Into the Reich with the Red Army* (Philadelphia: Casemat, 2005), 242-3; for an explicit story of mutual love see Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 253.

first days, or sometimes even hours, that the senior does not intend to deal with the newcomer, then one of the other, the lower senior officers, will take the initiative into his hands. Notwithstanding, we are much less demanding here than we would be behind the lines. [...] Generally speaking, even if a poor soldier manages to have love relationships at the front, then he'll only get the last sort. By the way, using the word 'love' in these thoughts of mine is a blasphemy, because even if love exists somewhere in the world, it clearly does not at the front. Here, it's just f..."⁶⁴

This quotation in short says that PPZh represented the commanders' power, because it was their privilege to choose a woman as PPZh.⁶⁵ It was for them that the women were available, and, as we can take the hint from the opening quotation, for whom they decorated their bodies and glowed.

The opportunities of the rank and file to get in sexual contact with women were very few; either they had to be brave or bold. Such is at least the message of stories the soldiers told among comrades or present as war-time episodes in their memories. In these, the commanders' alleged power over their field-wives could go so far that they ordered them to behave like prostitutes when brave soldiers were offered the chance to spend 30 minutes with them or were visited by them when lying wounded in the hospital.⁶⁶ When the women were not sent as rewards to the soldiers, they had to take the initiative themselves. Levka Rubinshteyn remembers a comrade who went to the commander's PPZh, said 'Come with me' and left with her. After half an hour he returned and told everybody 'What a girl!' making a gesture with his finger.⁶⁷

But even more enlightening is how this episode, the story told by Rubinshteyn continues: After the comrade's return and praise of the girl and, by that, of oneself, "the account on [it] was quickly spread in the whole squadron, and there emerged a majority that didn't believe, but wished to".⁶⁸ We can assume that, as a consequence, the soldiers, who wished to believe, who shared the story and retold it again and again, took this incident and the comrade as a role model in order to get what he got. By that, they became bolder to get their way with women, something

⁶⁴ Kovalevskiy, 'Nynche', 86-87.

⁶⁵ Stezhenskiy also states that the officers organized themselves a brothel at New Year's Eve. Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy devnik*, 99. How it looked like he tells not in detail. Actually, there was no organized brothel-system in the Red Army as in the Wehrmacht or the Japanese Army. Boguslav Shnajder, 'Neizvestnaya voyna' ['The unknown war'], *Voprosy Istorii*, 1 (1995), 109.

⁶⁶ Rubinshteyn, 'Ispoved', 24; Tartakovskiy, *Iz dnevnikov*, 131.

⁶⁷ Rubinshteyn, 'Ispoved', 25.

⁶⁸ Rubinshteyn, 'Ispoved', 25.

Nikolay Inozemtsev even admits in his diary,⁶⁹ and this increased the amount of sexual harassment in the army, which also meant increasing the female soldiers' need to be protected by a high ranked field husband. To sum my thesis up, a chauvinistic masculinity evolved and the gender-relationships within the army radicalized.

The reasons for this increased story-telling on women's availability, which made their situation so precarious, can be located in the social structures of the Red Army in wartime. When sitting together in unnerving boredom, the soldiers needed a common topic with the unfamiliar comrades with whom it was better not to tell about feelings and politics and who were likely to have a conflict with that. Talking about women was probably such a topic. By showing around letters and photographs from their wives or girlfriends back home, the soldiers could also present themselves as heroic as those who had wives and girlfriends at the front.⁷⁰ But their women at home were far away, their letters seldom. In the everyday-life of the Red Army it was the female soldiers who were next to the men and made up a better point of interest. By focusing on their availability for the commanders with formal power, for brave soldiers or for bold ones, they reduced them more and more to sexuality, as sexual potential became a feature of the real soldier.

Telling stories afterwards?

In the everyday-life of the Red Army and its shaken social structures, it was the institution of the PPZh which protected the women and restricted the men's sexual aspirations (mostly) to their talking. But there, as I would argue, these aspirations and demands grew: Women, especially the PPZh, were more and more reduced to the opportunities their sexualized bodies offered and became an attribute of power and braveness; and brave soldiers were perceived to have a right to sexual intercourse. This radicalization of the gender-relationships became obvious, when the Red Army soldiers won the war, threw out the Wehrmacht from Eastern Europe and marched as heroes to Berlin: On this way, in the liberated and occupied territories of Eastern Europe and especially in Germany the men got more and more in contact with civilian women without protection. Their sexual aspirations and chauvinistic masculinity were no longer restricted to their talking. As

⁶⁹ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy devnik*, 189.

⁷⁰ Dimitry Loza, *Fighting for the Soviet motherland. Recollections from the Eastern Front, hero of the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 146; Abdulin, *Stranitsy*, 56.

a consequence – and a further thesis – the unprotected civilian women had not only to deal with sexual harassment but with rape.⁷¹

What this war-time experience of radicalized masculinity meant for the Soviet population, which consisted to a high number of men who had served in the Red Army, is still unknown. Literature on behalf of the post-war gender-relationships in the Soviet Union is rare. In one of the few books, the German historian Anna Köbberling, argues that it was the women's very hard experience of war, their deprivations there, that resulted in lasting conservative gender-relationships in the post-war Soviet Union.⁷² But maybe it was rather the men's experience of radicalized masculinity and their ways to deal with the army's behavior in the last weeks of the war that shaped the post-war gender-relationships in the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, we lack research on masculinity, men and their stories at that time as we also lack analysis of how the men met their wives after being demobilized. Even well-known phenomena concerning the reunion have not received detailed research yet, as for example, the wide spread of sexually transmitted diseases among Soviet soldiers in the last months of the war and afterwards; the lack of an official pension or compensation for the soldiers; the consequences of the state-sponsored permission to loot and send the booty home; or the fact that a lot of soldiers had to pass through filtration camps and arrived home after long delay, as the government distrusted them after having stepped onto 'bourgeois territory'.⁷³

⁷¹ See footnote 12.

⁷² Anna Köbberling, *Das Klischee der Sowjetfrau. Stereotyp und Selbstverständnis Moskauer Frauen zwischen Stalin Ära und Perestroika* [The Cliche of Soviet Women. Stereotype and Self-image of Muscovite Women between the Age of Stalin and Perestroika] (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag 1997), 122.

⁷³ These phenomena are at least mentioned in Merridale, *Ivan's war*, 319-22, 351; Beevor, *Berlin*, 412; Werth, *Russland im Krieg*, 658.