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RUSSIAN WOMEN ABOUT THE WAR

A GENDER ANALYSIS OF EGO-DOCUMENTS

Woman and War: the Historiography in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia

The role of women in World War II has been studied by Soviet historians for a long period of time from the position of glorifying the socialist state. Articles and books about the mass participation of Soviet women in defense of the socialist Motherland were already written during the war time.¹ Such books had much in common with literary novels and journalistic essays and did not have any deep generalizations and conclusions. Nevertheless, the great role of Soviet women-patriots in protecting their Motherland, their dedicated work in factories and in farm fields, and their heroism at the front or in partisan groups and Komsomol underground were shown in those volumes. The political message was clear: It was emphasized that gender equality can exist only under a system of socialism.

Stories about military and labor feats of Soviet women can also be found in a number of books printed during the first postwar decade.² The authors used numerous documentary materials in these volumes. And yet, many of them had many important limitations in their account caused by the limitation on sources from those years. A number of historical papers about the participation of Soviet women in World War II appeared further after the XXth Communist Party Congress, which defined the direction of scholars' research, and especially after the publication of the decree of the Central Committee on September 12th, 1957 which was called "About the publica-

¹ Klavdia Nikolaeva and Lidiya Karaseva, *Velikaja Otechestvennaja vojna i sovsetskaja zhenshina* [The Great Patriotic War and the Soviet Woman] (Moscow: Gospolizdat, 1941); *Devushki na fronte: Sbornik* [Young Ladies at the Front Line. Collective Volume] (Leningrad, 1943); *Devushki-voiny* [Young Ladies to the War] (Moscow 1944).

² Natalya Aralovetz, *Zhenchina – velikaja sila sovsetskogo obshestva* [The Woman is the Great Power of the Soviet Society] (Moscow 1947).

tion of the History of the Great Patriotic War of Soviet Union, 1941-1945".³ During 1960-1980s, many Soviet historians, especially women, did their research on the role of Soviet women in World War II.⁴

The whole complex of research literature, formed during the Soviet period, covers the theme of women's participation in the war in a similar way. Historians until the early 1990s tried to show the power of the Soviet socialist system. Papers about the contribution of women to the victory over the enemy were written from this perspective. Therefore, the Soviet historical papers on women's participation in World War II cannot be fully assigned to the works on critical gender studies which ask about male and female narrations – they are rather to be classified as an illustration of alleged gender equality in Soviet Union.

The papers about women's role in the war written from the gender position appeared only in post-Soviet historical science. Monographs and collections of papers in gender studies have been printed since the late 1990s in post-Soviet countries, such as Lithuania (the publishing house of

³ *Geroini vojny. Ocherki o zhenshinah – Gerojah Sovetskogo Sojuza* [Women-Heroes of the War: Stories about Women – Heroes of Soviet Union] (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1963); Airo Sarkisov, *Geroicheskie docheri Kavkaza* [The Heroic Daughters of Caucasus] (Baku: Rik, 1965); Marina Chechneva, *Boevye podругi moi. O letchicah 46-go Tamanskogo gvardejskogo aviacionnogo zhenskogo polka* [My Battle Girl-Friends. About the Pilots of 46th Taman Guards Aviation Regiment] (Moscow: DOSAAF, 1967); Vera Murmanceva, *Sovetskie zhenshiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojne* [Soviet Women in the Great Patriotic War] (Moscow: Izd. Mysl', 1974); Nina Kondakova, 'Trudovoj podvig sovetskih zhenwin v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny' ['The Heroic Labor of Soviet Women during the Great Patriotic War'], in Andrej Grechko, ed., *Velikaja pobeda sovetskogo naroda. 1941-1945* [The Great Victory of Soviet People, 1941-1945] (Moscow: Izd. Nauka, 1976).

⁴ Marina Chechneva, *Kommunisticheskaja partija – vdohnovitel' boevogo podviga sovetskih zhenwin v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny* [The Communist Party is a Father of the Heroism of Soviet Women during the Great Patriotic War] (Moscow: n.p., 1967); Larisa Avdeeva, *Kommunisticheskaja partija Sovetskogo Sojuza – vdohnovitel' i organizator geroicheskogo truda zhenwin-kolhoznic v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny: Na materialah Rostovskoj, Krasnodarskoj i Stavropol'skoj partijnyh organizacij* [The Communist Party of Soviet Union is a Father and Organizer of the Heroic Labor of Women during the Great Patriotic War: Materials of Rostov, Stavropol and Krasnodar Party Organizations] (Moscow: 1970); Aleksej Zhinkin, *Dejatel'nost' KPSS po mobilizacii sovetskih zhenwin na ratnye i trudovye podvigi v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny: Na materialah partijnyh organizacij Rostovskoj oblasti i Krasnodarskogo kraja* [The Work of Communist Party in the Mobilization of Soviet Women to the Heroic Labor during the Great Patriotic War: Materials of Rostov and Krasnodar Regions] (Krasnodar: Kn. izd-vo, 1981); Hava Karataeva, *Trudnyj put' k pobeде: zhenshiny v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny: Na materialah partijno-gosudarstvennyh organizacij Severnogo Kavkaza* [The Hard Way to the Victory: Women during the Great Patriotic War: Materials of the Party and State Organizations in the North Caucasus] (St. Petersburg: Gos. un-t, 1994).

European Humanities University⁵) and Ukraine (the Kharkiv Center for Gender Studies⁶). In Russia, central and regional centers study theoretical and practical gender problems.⁷ The Russian Association for Research in Women's History, chaired by historian Natalya Pushkareva, was founded in 2007.⁸ Much attention in publications in post-Soviet Russia has been paid to the role of women in the war, the peculiarities of women's writing, and visual images of the war.⁹ This short historical excursus can point out the

⁵ Elena Gapova and Almira Ousmanova, eds., *Antologija gendernyh issledovanij* [*Anthology of Gender Studies*] (Minsk: Propilei, 2000); Elena Gapova, Almira Ousmanova, and Andrea Pető, eds., *Gendernye istorii Vostochnoj Evropy. Sbornik nauchnykh statej* [*Gender Stories of East Europe: A Collection of Papers*] (Minsk: EGU, 2002); Elena Gapova, ed., *Zhenshina na kraju Evropy* [*Women on the Edge of Europe*] (Minsk: EGU, 2003); Sergey Oushakine, *Pole pola* [*The Field of Gender*] (Vilnius-Moscow: EGU, 2007).

⁶ *Journal Gender Studies* from 1997; Irina Zherebkina, "Prochti moe zhelanie..." *Postmodernizm, psihoanaliz, feminizm* ["Read my Desire..." *Postmodernism, Psychoanalyze, Feminism*] (Moscow: Ideja-press, 2000).

⁷ Natalya Pushkareva, Yelena Trofimova, and Zoja Khotkina, eds., *Zhentchina. Gender. Kul'tura* [*Woman. Gender. Culture*] (Moscow: MCGI, 1999); Sergey Oushakine, ed., *O muzhe(N)stvennosti: Sbornik statej* [*About Masculinity. A Collection of Papers*] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2002); Pavel Tcherbinin, ed., *Zhenskaja povsednevnost' v Rossii v XVIII-XX vv.: Mat-ly mezhdunar. nauchn. konf. 25-26 sentjabrja 2003 g.* [*Women's Everyday Life in Russia in 18-20 Centuries: A Collection of Papers From the Scientific Conference, September, 25-26 th, 2003*] (Tambov: Izdvo TGU, 2003); Elena Metcherkina, ed., *Ustnaja istorija i biografija: zhenskij vzgljad* [*Oral History and Biography: The Women's Point of View*] (Moscow: Nevskiy Prostor, 2004); Irina Tartakovskaja, *Gendernaja sociologija* [*Gender Sociology*] (Moscow: Nevskiy Prostor, 2005); Galina Brandt, *Filosofskaja antropologija feminizma. Priroda zhenshiny* [*Psychological Anthropology of Feminism. The Nature of Woman*] (St. Petersburg: Aleteyya, 2006).

⁸ See <http://www.rarwh.ru> (last visited 19 July 2011). This association has organized the annual conference on gender themes since 2008.

⁹ Alexey Ermakov, 'Zhenskaja "Sluzhba truda" v Germanii v gody Vtoroj mirovoj vojny' ['Women's Service of Work in Germany during World War II'], in Inna Chikalova, ed., *Zhenshiny v istorii: vozmozhnost' byt' uvidennyimi* [*Women in the History: The Chance of Being Noticed*], vol. 2 (Minsk: BGPU, 2002), 130-41; Nechama Tec, 'U partizan: sud'ba zhentchin' ['With Partisans: the Fate of Women'], in Elena Gapova, ed., *Zhenwina na kraju Evropy* [*The Woman on the Edge of Europe*] (Minsk: EGU, 2003), 168-88; thereafter Tec, 'U partizan'. Irina Nikolaeva, 'Politika nemeckikh okkupacionnykh vlastej v Belorusi v otnoshenii zhenskogo naselenija (1941-1944)' ['The Policy of the German Occupation Government in Belorussia toward the Women Population'], in Inna Chikalova, ed., *Zhenshiny v istorii: vozmozhnost' byt' uvidennyimi* [*Women in the History: The Chance of Being Noticed*], vol. 3 (Minsk: BGPU, 2004), 68-76; Olga Nikonova, "Davajte prygat', devushki!", ili sovetskij patriotizm v gendernom izmerenii' ["Let's Jump, Girls!", or the Soviet Patriotism in Gender Meaning'], *Gendernye issledovaniya* [*Gender Studies*], 13 (2005), 38-56; Olga Nikonova, 'Zhentchiny, vojna i "figury umolchanija"' ['Women, War and Silencing'], *Neprikosnovenny zapas* [*Emergency Ration*], 2-3 (2005), 40-41.

important role of women studies as a trend of social history in contemporary Russia.¹⁰

Characteristics of Collected Sources and Research Methodology

My aim for this chapter is to analyze collected sources of women's experiences of World War II from a gender perspective, but with a focus on female texts. In order to analyze women's narrations about the war, its everyday life, and questions of sexuality and sexual violence, this paper discusses the study of gender-specific oral and written memoirs about the war which were collected in Krasnodarkij Kraj and the Republic of Adygea.

Oral history studies on World War II are a fairly new phenomenon in Russia. Most of this kind of research has appeared since the late 1990s and especially in connection with the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Victory.¹¹ Before, a history from below showing the experiences, feelings, and thoughts of 'Joe Citizen' was not possible. The fear of politically unwanted opinions was too strong. The stories of war veterans are now collected in nearly every region of Russia. But the level of the research and the professional quality of interviewers are different in every region and depend on the researcher's training skills in using the oral history method. The NGO *Memorial* plays an important role in collecting memories of World War II.¹² Its staff develops different programs and allocates funds to study the Soviet past from a personal point of view. Its center of oral history and biography has made more than 300 audio and video interviews with former concentration camp inmates. The annual school competition called "Russia. The Twentieth Century" is intended to attract the younger generation to future potential research work with personal sources.¹³ Studying World War II through the personal experience of their relatives is the main theme of this student project. Professional historians in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Stavropol, Petrozavodsk, and in other regional centers are engaged in the collection of oral stories.¹⁴

¹⁰ Approaches from within a history of masculinity are rare. See Kerstin Bischls' article in this volume for an overview about the research.

¹¹ See <http://www.pobeda-60.ru/main.php?trid=5587>; and <http://www.iremember.ru> (last visited 21 September 2011).

¹² See <http://www.memo.ru> (last visited 14 November 2011).

¹³ See <http://urokiistorii.ru> (last visited 14 November 2011).

¹⁴ Marina Loskutova, ed., *Pamjat' o blokade: Svidetel'stva ochevidcev i istoricheskoe soznanie obvestva: Materialy i issledovanija* [The Memory of the Siege: the Testimonies and the Historical Consciousness of the Society: Materials and Researches] (Moscow: Novoe

A similar project exists in Krasnodar. In 2006, the students' scientific group on oral history was formed at the Department of History and Social Communications, Kuban State University of Technology, Krasnodar. The main interest of this group is based on creating and analyzing the complex of ego-documents on World War II. In 2007 together with colleagues from Stavropol, a project about the everyday life behind the frontline was developed. The result of the project was a web page with the voices of people who remember the wartime.¹⁵ We published the oral histories in order to share our experience of collecting oral stories with historians who study the same problems.

During 2008-2010 we made over 30 interviews with women who struggled in or experienced the war. Most of our women informants were already retired persons. Most of them lived in rural areas, had large families and kept the house. Many of them had had to work since they were adults to help their parents, so they did not have the opportunity of studying in higher schools and universities. Several classes of elementary or middle school were all that they had behind them. When the war began they were young girls or adolescents. Only one of our story-tellers had been married and had a small child by then. All our informants experienced the occupation of their native town or village. The responsibility for working on the farm, forced work for the occupation government, and household management fell on the shoulders of women and adolescents when the men moved to the front. In addition, we made several interviews with former women soldiers and medical workers.

Unpublished written memoirs of women-members of the partisan movement in the Kuban region became another important source of this paper. These documents can be found in the State Archive of Krasnodarskij Kraj and in Center of Documentation of Modern History in Krasnodarskij Kray. The main part of a regional complex of memories of World War II was accumulated in 1960-1970s. Among the memoirs were people of different ages, some of them were over 70. Women wrote memoirs mostly in pre-retirement age. Among the authors of the complex, women-memoirists were generally younger than the male authors. Women, who wrote memories about the events of World War II were former Komsomol activists, residents of occupied zones, underground fighters, and partisans.

izdatel'stvo , 2006); Elena Strekalova, 'Vozmozhnosti "ustnoj istorii": k postanovke problem' ['The Capabilities of Oral History'], Paper presented at *Novye issledovatel'skie praktiki izuchenija mestnoj istorii. Internet-konferencija* [New Research Practices of Studying Local History. Internet Conference], 20 October 2005, available at <http://newlocalhistory.com> (last visited 9 April 2011).

¹⁵ See <http://oralhistory.kubstu.ru> (last visited 16 July 2011).

Oral and written memoirs of World War II have their gender-specific features along with other functions. The analysis of these sources can be useful in identifying patterns of the perceptions of women themselves of the war in reconstructing the woman's perception of war as a whole picture.

The methodology of military-historical anthropology highlights the task of collecting information about the everyday life of people in wartime. We can study the most important material and the common, cultural and psychological characteristics of human existence at the time such as housing, food, medical care, work, family relations, the role of official propaganda, religion, inter-ethnic relations, the image of the enemy and ally, and relations with the occupying authorities, etc.

Using the method of oral history indicates, first of all, the increase of historical knowledge through the personal testimonies of witnesses and participants in ordinary events. Russian sociologists Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina use the method of "analysis of categorization" when studying biographical interviews. The goal of such technique is to explore the way of constructing the descriptions of everyday life in the texts of interviews. Informants in their stories usually use categories that have inter-subjective meaning and, therefore, provide the possibility of understanding in the frame of existing culture.¹⁶ The interview, therefore, is a narrative that contains the categories through which the informant describes social interactions in the specific field of study.

In her article "Feminist Strategies of Interviewing and Data Analysis", the Russian philosopher Tatyana Klimenkova states that "two women, the researcher and the informant have an experience of justifying knowledge and an unspoken understanding of cognition, which provides for the mutual understanding between them".¹⁷ Thereby she stresses a common gendered experience as a common ground for interviews – a methodology where the experience and personal background of the researcher is in all cases especially important. Russian scholar Viktoriya Konstantinova compares traditional and feminist methods of making interviews in her article "Interactive

¹⁶ Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, 'Analiz narrativa: vozmozhnosti rekonstrukcii seksual'noj identichnosti' ['The Analysis of Narration: the Reconstruction of Sexual Identity'], in Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, eds., *V poiskah seksual'nosti: Sbornik statej [In Search of Sexuality: A Collection of Articles]* (St. Petersburg.: Izd-vo D. Bulanin, 2000), 549-58.

¹⁷ Tatyana Klimenkova, 'Feministskie strategii interv'juirovaniya i analiza dannyh (Po stranitzam stat'i M. Devult)' ['Feminist Strategies of making Interview and Analysis of the Data: According to the Papers by M. Devult'], in Marina Malysheva, ed., *Vozmozhnosti ispol'zovaniya kachestvennoj metodologii v gendernykh issledovaniyakh: Materialy seminarov [The Possibility of Using Qualitative Methodology in Gender Studies]* (Moscow: MCGI, 1997), 127.

Interviewing: The Concept of Ann Oakley".¹⁸ She argues that it could be established the Subject-Subject relations between informant and researcher in the feminist strategy of making interview. The woman-researcher and the woman-informant could give "signs of engagement" during the interview. However, of course not only women can show signs of engagement for women. And, of course, engagement in oral-history-interviews by the interviewed depends also not only on the sex of the informant, but also on the importance of the theme of research. For example, if we want to interview a war veteran about the postwar period and his or her adaptation to the peace, he or she would be less involved in the interviewing process than talking about the main period of their life, the participation in the war. Further, there are other categories than age etc. For example, when we study the events of the past, our informants will be much older than the researcher. And in this case the informant's experience becomes relevant and the aim of the researcher is to construct her own 'visual' experience of those events.

Studies in qualitative sociology and oral history research point at the general problem of differences between using 'male language' and describing the 'female experience'. Even greater difficulties arise in the description of women's experience of war. War is considered to be the man's job, and the role of women in it focused on the rear and medical fields until World War II. World War II represented an example of mass participation of women on the front lines in the partisan groups, in underground organizations.

Everyday Life in Wartime narrated by Women

The Russian historian Elena Seniavskaya explains the gendered perceptions of war by psychology.¹⁹ Also Belorussian journalist and writer Svetlana Alekseevich interprets the different memories with the help of psychology:

¹⁸ Viktoria Konstantinova, 'Interaktivnoe interv'juirovanie: koncepcija A. Oakley' [Interactive Interview: the Concept by Ann Oakley], in Marina Malysheva, ed., *Vozmozhnosti ispol'zovaniya kachestvennoj metodologii v gendernyh issledovanijah: Materialy seminarov* [The Possibility of Using Qualitative Methodology in Gender Studies] (Moscow: MCGI, 1997), 132-43.

¹⁹ Elena Senjavskaja, 'Zhentchina na vojne glazami muzhchin (Psihologicheskij jeks-kurs v istoriju Rossii)' ['A Woman at War in the Men's Perception (The Psychological Excursus to the Russian History)'], in Elena Senjavskaja, ed., *Psikhologiya voyny v XX. veke Ist opyt Rossii* [Psychological War in the 20th century. Historical Experience in Russia] (Moscow: ROSSPEN 1999), 216, available at http://krotov.info/library/18_s/en/yavskaya_03.htm#555 (last visited 7 August 2011).

“Women’s memories cover the part of human feelings in the war which usually escapes the attention of men. If a man grasped the war as an action, a woman felt and endured it differently because of her feminine psychology. The bomb attacks, the death and suffering were not the whole war to her. The woman felt strongly the physical and moral overloads of the war. It was difficult for her to bear the ‘masculine’ way of war life.”²⁰

She argues that war was a contradiction to feminine nature. It was not only psychology as we can see by the statements of the women. Firstly, they had to deal with the breaking of stable social roles during wartime what seemed to women as the wreckage of life itself. In the countryside, norms had been quite stable before the war and were to some extent also still valid for the urban population. A sense of catastrophe permeated the entire structure of women’s memories and predominated in their tonality.²¹ Further, the army discipline, a soldier’s uniform, and heavy physical exertion was a new and difficult experience for them. The loss of privacy was a further shock for those serving in the army or fighting in partisan groups: There was no space for women; there were no mirrors, no place for extra washing etc.

Nearly all of women-memoirists focused on the description of their first “baptism of fire” because it was their new role that they had to carry on during the war. Svetlana Tyurikova, who was the head of the department of children’s literature in the local library before the war, and in 1942 became a member of the partisan group “Kubanetz”, recalled:

“It’s difficult to put into words, and it’s even more difficult to describe the feeling of the first campaign, and participation in the combat operation. The first meeting with the enemy face to face; I remember that for all my life.”²²

The writing about Russian women in World War II concentrated until the 1990s on their shown courage and bravery in struggle with the enemy along

²⁰ Svetlana Alekseevich, *U vojny ne zhenskoe litzo. Povesti [The War Doesn’t Have a Woman’s Face]* (Moscow: NoOstozh’e, 1988), 61-62. Thereafter Alekseevich, *U vojny*.

²¹ Michail D. Ryzhih, *Vospominaniya byvshego komandira gruppy razvedki 1-ogo Neftegorskogo partizanskogo otrjada v period okkupacii Kubani nemecko-fashistskimi zahvatchikami [Memoirs of the Former Leader of the Military Intelligence of the 1st Neftegorsk Partisan Group during the Nazi Occupation of Kuban Region]*, Mashinopis’ [Print copy], 1979, in Center of Documentation of Modern History in Krasnodarskij Kray (hereinafter abbreviated CDMHKK). 1774-R/2/1126/2.

²² Svetlana Tyurikova, *Vospominaniya o boevykh dejstvijah partizanskogo otrjada “Kubanetz” Kurganinskogo rajona v period okkupacii Kubani nemecko-fashistskimi zahvatchikami [Memoirs about the Fights of the Partisan Group “Kubanetz” in Kurganinsk Region during the Nazi Occupation of Kuban Region]*, Mashinopis’ [Print copy], 1971, in CDMHKK. 1774-R/2/936/3.

with men.²³ The equality of men and women was politically wished and drawing back to a rationalist tradition they were shown as equal in war-time. Even more a gender division was supposed to be overcome by World War II. But the oral memoirs show another picture, quite opposite to the politically wished. The interviewed women in this project lived mainly in rural areas. After the end of the war they returned directly to their 'former' life and were satisfied with it. But they learned that they could fulfill man's work, and replace men in the field or in the workplace – and they narrate it with a sense of pride. Raisa Barkova, who had survived the occupation in the village Dahovskaya, recalled about the work, which she had to carry out as a young girl:

"They drove us to work. First we dug trenches, then – the ditches [they needed to dig trenches on the order of the Soviet government at the beginning of the war, and the trenches – with the arrival of the invaders]. And trenches were just that. [...] Well, how do you say? From this apartment till the end of the third building. We dug to the yard [she tried to show the distance of the trench which is about 70 meters]. After that the Germans forced us to work in the woods. Well, the forest was so high, and we needed to cut it. We cut it down to they could see when the guerrillas were coming."²⁴

The war forced the mass involvement of women in low-skilled labor; women had to develop ability in a traditionally 'male' profession. One of our story-tellers recalled:

"Oh, we worked. Personally I worked on tobacco fields. I wonder, as they are working now, and how we worked those years. I needed to wake up when it was dark, to heat the stove, to cook the meals. Then take the bottle of milk, eggs and go to the field. I left my younger sister at home alone. [...] I got up at five o'clock, filled the stove, milked the cow, cooked the meals and went to work. In the evening I needed to bring the firewood, because no one could do it for me. Then I needed to chop the wood and put it into the oven."²⁵

Women story-tellers described their hard, traditionally 'male' daily work in details which they needed to do in the absence of men. We can see a sense of pride. But, however, this substitution is not to be simply described as the equality of genders. We can also think of it as an prolonging of patriarchal relations. Obviously women worked for the war purposes in fulfilling the

²³ Julia Ivanova, *Hrabrejshie iz prekrasnyh. Zhenshiny Rossii v voynah* [*The Bravest among the Beautiful. Russian Women in Wars*] (Moscow: Rossiyskaya politicheskaya entsiklopediya, 2002).

²⁴ Raisa Barkova, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK08.

²⁵ Maria Kolobova, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK10. Thereafter Kolobova, Interview.

vacated jobs, but remained in the shadow of the fame of the battlefield. In the recovery period, women undertook any work, because of the lack of men. With the men's gradual return back to home, women started to do the housework again. Starting their own family life and having children stopped any possibility of women's emancipation at the level of development of traditionally 'male' jobs.

A characteristic of female texts is the 'modest narration': Nearly all female story-tellers spoke often and full of recognition of their male friends who fought at the front or guided the guerrillas. Their own participation, action in fighting, or supporting the partisans, was played down. It was, according to the women, the men who won the victory; their deeds came to be the part of the collective memory about the war. Further, they explained that the real motive of their participation in the fighting was the feeling of the revenge of dead friends and relatives. Svetlana Tyurikova wrote in her memoirs:

"It was hard to loose your friends, fellow soldiers. At the same time we became more aggressive towards the enemy, we all wanted to revenge the Nazis for the loss of our friends; we have to go on combat operations more often."²⁶

Another element of the 'modest narration' is the fact, that women pay much attention to non-battle-events, which, in their opinion, were more important than their own military experience. In general, one can state that women's memoirs are more emotional and less full of events in comparison with men's. An underlined emotionality of women is emphasized not only by scholars but also by the memoirists themselves, because it is in the character of people's image of women. Women's stories are full of epithets, similes, lyrical digressions, and metaphors. Factual descriptions in men's stories play a more important role. But we should remember that men's memories became quickly standardized. They had been edited by archival or journalistic staff several times, taking into account politically desired narrations. Women's memories stayed more authentic than men's stories, although the influence of social order of the glorification of the past can be traced in them. How the narration was influenced by social roles is shown in the example of the former prisoner Ludmila Avas. She is as many war veterans a frequent guest at school lessons on patriotism nowadays. Every year on February, 12 there is a lesson of memory in city schools on the anniversary of the liberation from the occupiers of Krasnodar. Therefore our informant recounts what she has to say in public many times. Her story contains personally experienced impressions of the war together with

²⁶ Svetlana Tyurikova, *Vospominanija* in CDMHKK. 1774-R/2/936/1.

the information from other official sources. She describes Krasnodar during the period of occupation in this manner:

“All the factories had been bombed, all the big buildings, all [...] the Drama theater, other buildings had been blown up and burned. It seemed that all the Kuban territory was on fire. We didn’t see even the sky. It was in summer, in August. Sun was so hot. The sun and the sky were not visible. There was smoke and all were in black.”²⁷

In general, living conditions, everyday life, is very present in women’s memoirs: They thematize the lack of food in general or any kinds of products. Maria Kolobova wrote many years later that there was no opportunity for cooking soup. At the same time she mentioned that she could cook the pottage with the roots she found in the forest. This illogical story makes the women’s memories a valuable source of everyday life in the pre-war period. Such stories suggest implicitly that the diet of working men consisted of soups in the conception of women from the rural areas. That’s why they missed soups in the everyday diet during the war in the guerrilla groups. Women in the partisan groups felt the difficulties related to the domestic chaos very strongly.

“Once I became a guerrilla, I began to cook the meals for all the men with the permission of the commander. At first it was very difficult: there were no spoons, or plates, no salt or something else.”²⁸

The daily struggle against such details as lack of provisions, plates or other things settled permanently in the memory of women who were faced with similar difficulties during the war. And again, one can notice that the life organization in the guerrilla group had much in common with the traditional “Domostroy” with the man as a warrior, defender of the motherland; and the woman as a housewife. Living standards had been changed, but gender roles remained traditional. Of course, this should not surprise us: In extreme situations persons were used according to their individual skills, and women learned cooking. But the fact that even men who were not trained with an arm before got guns and women not so, shows the prevalence of gendered role models.

The women who stayed at the ‘home front’ described also the lack of everyday ordinary meals and clothes. Women who remained to live in the

²⁷ Ludmila Avas, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK01.

²⁸ Maria Kolobova, *Vospominanija o boevyh dejstvijah partizanskogo otrjada “Kubanetz” Kurganinskogo rajona v period okkupacii Kubani nemecko-fashistskimi zahvatchikami* [Memoirs about the Fights of the Partisan Group “Kubanetz” in Kurganinsk Region during the Nazi Occupation of Kuban Region], Mashinopis’ [Print copy], 1977, in CDMHKK. 1774-R/2/938/2.

temporarily occupied territory described the difficulties they faced during the war in detail. The need not only for clothes, but for beautiful clothes shows that especially the then young women wanted to preserve their human dignity in fulfilling their need for being well-dressed and to feel good-looking. One of our interviewees, who was a pretty young lady of 17 years old in 1945, recalled:

“The Soviet military sector was situated in our village for some time after the end of the war. We were at the age of falling in love with young handsome men. There were some kinds of dance-parties in that military sector. But I had nothing to wear. My father made shoes and fabricated the leather by himself. And I didn’t have any shoes or dress to go for dancing. It was terrible. This is my worst memory that I had nothing to go in. And didn’t have any dress...”.²⁹

Another person interviewed remembered how they tried to conserve good clothes:

“My mother had dresses, and even she bought fabrics. Also we patched the skirts and took them to work. We wore the clean clothes when we went to the job and then changed the clothes. I don’t remember if we had any trousers, but we didn’t have any shoes.”³⁰

Further, from the memoirs it becomes clear that women adapted quickly to the extreme situations – and they are proud about this. Women memoirists underline that overcoming the difficulties tempered their character, made them more sturdy and strong persons. “We had such a very difficult way of life so that all partisans, including me, envied the dead people. But no one of us thought that he could leave the forest or stop destroying the enemy.”³¹ One can imagine how great the difficulties and emotional stress were that fell on the women’s shoulders, if a terrible phrase “the envy of the dead” comes out in memories after many years of peaceful life.

Sexuality and Sexual Violence in Wartimes: From a long silence to first narrations

One of the aspects of female experience in wartime Russia was omitted for a long time: sexuality in the army and sexual violence in and beyond the

²⁹ Nina Belovitskaya, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK09.

³⁰ Kolobova, Interview.

³¹ Nadezhda Beljanskaja, *Vospominaniia o podpol'noj rabote v g. Krasnodare v 1942 g. Rukopis'* [Memoirs about the underground struggle in Krasnodar in 1942], Mashinopis' [Print copy], 1977, in CDMHKK. 1774-R/2/1348/16.

military. Especially the rapes during the war were excluded for a long time from national historiography. As Elena Metcherkina, a Russian sociologist pointed out:

“Men became heroes if they died at the frontline. At the same time raped and murdered woman were never considered to be heroes, there is no monument in honor of them. Those who survived never tried to speak about their humiliation and traumatic consciousness.”³²

In the 1990s feminist researchers spoke about this kind of women’s traumatic war experience for the first time. The paper by American sociologist Nechama Tec “Among Guerrillas: The Fate of the Woman” was among the first research done on understanding the peculiarities of women’s practice of living mostly among men in the soviet guerrillas groups.³³ The first stories of raped women appeared in the Russian mass media at the same time, the 1990s.³⁴ There were no stories about sexual violence in memoirs written during the Soviet period because such stories could destroy the official policy of the memory about the war.

Currently, there are several fragments of arguments in the historical literature that the officers turned to to account for their positions on the sexual violence against women-soldiers. Thus, the story of signaller Vera Yerokhina pointed that there were several women’s suicides after the attempts of sexual violence by men.³⁵ The war veteran Yurij Krimskij marked the cases when “the soviet officers had been handed over to the court, or sent to the penal battalion, or even been shot if they raped women-soldiers in their army”. A special meeting of the command and the political leaders of the Red Army in 1943 was devoted to this problem.³⁶ Still, the study of women’s experience is complicated by searching for informants who usually prefer to forget and never speak about their experience of being raped.

But also the phenomenon of the *poxodno-polevaya* wife was for a long time omitted in historiography. In many cases we can classify these sexual

³² Elena Metcherkina, ‘Massovye iznasilovanija kak chast’ voennogo jeposa’ [‘Mass Raping as Part of the War Epos’], *Gendernye issledovanija* [Gender Studies], 6 (2001), 255.

³³ Tec, ‘U partizan’, 170.

³⁴ Alekseevich, *U vojny*; Evgenij Katchenko, *Seksual’naja kul’tura voennosluzhawih* [Sexual Culture of Military], Ph.D. thesis, Moscow University, 1994; thereafter Katchenko, *Seksual’naja*. Tec, ‘U partizan’.

³⁵ ‘Ne zhenskoe jeto delo – vojna’ [‘The War is not a Woman’s Business’], *Komso-mol’skaja pravda*, 14 April 2000, 6.

³⁶ Andrej Kljuchnikov, ‘Ljubov’ na fronte’ [‘Love at the Frontline’], *Argumenty i fakty*, 19 (2000).

relations as survival prostitution: For women, sex could become a reason of patronage by the officer, and therefore the slight possibility of staying alive at the front. Women usually tried to find a man who had some kind of powerful resource. For example, the Soviet officers could have a woman stay together with him in the rear (as can be noticed in the case of our informant). Usually men had a regular family before the war. Their temporary wives had an opportunity of having tasty meals; they were sent to the front line rarely. However, the position of a temporary wife was unstable; such women could be set aside for different reasons. And they could lose all the blessings they had before”.³⁷ One of our informants recalled:

“Well, there are few people who can talk about it. Of course there were situations when you started relations with the officer. Then you could be sent to the other troop where you can start a love affair with another one. Some such women got married finally.”³⁸

Survival prostitution, which was the result of the traditional model, continues to legitimize the inequality of subjects (man and woman) in the field of sexual desire and pleasure in the extreme war situation. The fact that there was a low rate of marriage in the postwar period marked the powerful nature of intimate relations between men and women at war. Women lost during war time to get children or they had abortions. After the war often they were also unable to give birth own children. In peacetime, the woman did not need to find out the patron among the commanders and officers, and therefore such relationships stopped. Also a lot of men returned with unhealed venereal diseases and therefore were not attractive for women.

All social relations become stronger at the war. People had to live as it was the last day of their life, because the death was coming along with them. Consensual sexual relationships took place by mutual agreement of both a man and a woman. Several war survivors' memories point at the fact of exaggerated sex drive in war times. People had to live as if it was the last day of their lives, because death was coming along with them. Further, on the verge of death, they would not think about morality and social norms. Emotional needs caused by the loss of family members and

³⁷ Evgenij Krinko, Irina Rebrova and Irina Tazhidinova, ‘Problemy adaptacii zhenchin-voennosluzhatchih k boevym uslovijam v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny’ [‘The Problem of Adoption of Women-Soldiers to the War Reality during the Great Patriotic War’], in Dmitrij Genadevitch Matishov, ed., *Vzaimodejstvie narodov i kul'tur na Juge Rossii: istorija i sovremennost'*: *Sbornik nauchnyh statej* [Interaction of Nations and Cultures in the South of Russia: History and Modernity] (Rostov n/D.: Junz RAN, 2008), 257-65.

³⁸ Semen Garkov and Elena Garkov, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK04. Thereafter Semen, Interview.

a stable world were acted out in relationships. To give an impression about some numbers: the order № 0365 by the People's Commissariat of the Navy dated May 6, 1942 mentioned that more than 8% of women who had been called to the Navy in 1942 were dismissed for "the lack of discipline in the behavior" and for "pregnancy".³⁹

To the question "what relations were there in the troop between men and women" a male informant replied: "The only women we had was a nurse in our troop. We considered her as a soldier like we were. Any sex relations were forbidden."⁴⁰ His way of answering stopped any attempt of the researcher to find out details of interpersonal relationships. The storyteller clearly did not want to talk about these relations – firstly for not been being compromised in the eyes of this wife, who was present at the interview. Secondly, the official memory about the war, which was created by the Soviet government, still prevented him from speaking publicly about the sex relations at war. There is no place for such stories in the official image of the war. Moreover, the myth of friendship between different nationalities, as well as between men and women who won the war was very popular during the Soviet period.

The official policy of the memory of World War II could not include women's experience of sexual violence, sexual exploitation, and survival prostitution in the army because it can break the concept of the glorification of soldiers. Women who experienced sexual violence at war became the hostages of the official politics of memory in the peacetime and thus they were forced to "work through their past". Ideological slogans of the Soviet time became part of the collective memory and were reflected in the personal memory. Thanks to the stories of participants and witnesses of World War II about their war experiences, new images and concepts are being formed which can be included in the cultural memory of the war nowadays.

Among these are stories about problems caused by biology. There existed particular stress situations for women in army and partisan groups, such as menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and abortion. It is known that women in the war used various methods of traditional medicine to get rid of the undesirable consequences of sex relationships with men. Women became barren as a result of such experiments on their bodies, as well as various kinds of sexually transmitted diseases. There were many cases of the death of women.

These stories could help in the reconstruction of the dynamics of the images of relationships, formed in the Soviet mentality on the one hand and on the other hand existed in the silent personal histories. We could find less

³⁹ Katchenko, *Seksual'naja*, 124.

⁴⁰ Semen, Interview.

official phrases of the past in the oral stories. Nevertheless, the narrative continues to be political on the whole. The communist ideology became a part of the individual consciousness of former soldiers. Therefore, they remember the Soviet past with nostalgia. There is no contradiction between the communism ideas and the real situation in their minds.

An even more complicated issue is relationships between Russian women and German soldiers. The German historian Regina Mühlhäuser showed in 2010 that a whole spectrum of relations, from rape and survival prostitution to love affairs, existed.⁴¹ In Russia until now there exists a societal taboo about intimate encounters between German men and Russian women. Even more surprising was the following fragment of an interview. Our woman storyteller did not speak directly about her personal war experience. Our storyteller that served in the army stressed that “there were the girls who made love with the Germans, and then had been punished by Soviet men”.⁴² First voicing the experience of the other girls in her troop, then she turned the conversation to another theme immediately, offering a meal to me or keeping a long silence. I had never heard such stories before, to hear about love and sexual relations between Soviet women-soldiers and German soldiers in the front area were very surprising. I made the interview with that story-teller for the second time and she spoke in the same way again. She always asked me to improve her words in the war veteran organization, because she was a real soldier. But we cannot verify her words. She spoke in the plural and impersonal about her women troop-mates. There is always an opposition of “me” and “they” in her story.

“I never went to the Germans, no. But I could talk to them. If they came to our side and started to talk to me. And we had girls who could simply follow them. You scolded those girls. Then the Germans began to be rude to you. And you tried to tell him in German that it was forbidden for an innocent girl to make love to any man. What can she tell her parents about her behavior at war. It’s hard.”⁴³

We can assume a shift in her memory: Women were maybe not sent there, but it was a hint that consensual relations existed which were condemned by the environment.

⁴¹ See Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion, 1941-1945* [Conquests. Sexual Violence and Intimate Relations of German Soldiers in the Soviet Union] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010). I thank Maren Röger for this remark.

⁴² Natalya Razumnaya, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK13. Thereafter Razumnaya, Interview.

⁴³ Razumnaya, Interview.

Instead of a Conclusion: Gender-specific Practices of Remembering

The gender specifications of written text and oral memories has become an important part of gender studies nowadays. Such kind of knowledge helps to interpret and analyze women's and men's⁴⁴ texts and oral interviews in a more detailed way.⁴⁵

When drawing conclusions about female narration patterns about the war from women's written and oral texts, we need to take into consideration the specification of our sources. Written memoirs and oral stories belong to the group of non-official sources. They did not become that quickly standardized in comparison to their male counterparts. The following differences between male and female texts can be observed. The first difference is the language of narration. There are more emotions and lyric in women's texts and fewer events, they are full of epithets, similes, lyrical digressions, metaphors. Most men's memories are like the series of events.

Secondly, men and women lined up their narratives differently. Men give universality to the described events, and make general conclusions. There is a combination of collective and individual memory. In the women's memoirs, by contrast, much attention is paid to details, personal emotions and experiences. Often their texts are devoted to one particular event or episode of the war, which remained in their memory forever.

Thirdly, men and women have different approaches to the description of their own military experience. To women it was important to describe the first successfully completed assignment, which truly made them a soldier. They did not hesitate to describe the fear, feelings and emotions.

⁴⁴ Compare Kerstin Bischls chapter in this volume.

⁴⁵ Ukraine researcher Elena Ivanova examined the differences in the mechanism of storing and recording of certain events of the past, based on the analysis of compositions about the history of Holocaust of today's schoolchildren. See Elena Ivanova, 'Pamjat' ob istoricheskikh sobytijah (na materiale Holokosta): gendernyj aspekt' ['Memory about the Historical Events: on the Materials of Holocaust (Gender Aspect)'], *Social'naja istorija, yezhegodnik [Social history, Yearbook]*, 5 (2003), Special Issue: Female and Gender History, 217-37. Natalya Pushkareva allocated about ten main differences between male and female image of the past in the article 'Androgyne or Mnemosyne? (Gender-specific practices of remembering and historical memory)', based on the analysis of foreign and Russian literature. She made the comparison of the practices of memorization according to the method and plot of narration, the spatial and temporal filling of narrative and other parameters. Natalya Pushkareva, 'Androginna ili Mnemoszina? Gendernye osobennosti zapominaniya i istoricheskoy pamjati' ['Androgyne or Mnemosyne? (Gender-specific practices of remembering and historical memory)'], in Yelena Anatol'evna Vishlenkova, ed., *Sotvorenije istorii: Chelovek. Pamjat'. Tekst [The Foundation of History: Man, Memory, Text]* (Kazan: Master Layn, 2001), 241-74.

Fourth, men and women differently defined their place as the author of the narrative in the text. It was important to a man to point out his personal contribution to the victory. The war becomes a lifework, the main event of the whole biography. Former veterans emphasize their personal treasure to the Great Victory. Women, in contrast, name as the main actors of their narration their friends and relatives. If they describe their own participation in the war, the language of narration becomes restrained and less significant. Thus, the individual pronoun “I” in the women’s memories dissolves into collective “we”.

Fifth, the way of the description of the everyday life of war depends on the gender of the memoirist. The everyday life becomes the background for the description of military missions in the ‘male’ image of the war. In contrast, the ‘female’ image of the war consists of detailed descriptions of everyday life. The woman-soldier or partisan could not take of use the military way of life. The lack of minimum conditions of life changed the normal way of her life greatly. Army discipline, a masculine environment, heavy physical exertion – all this was a difficult challenge.