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MARTYRS, TRAITORS, HEALING HOUSEWIVES

THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE WAR EXPERIENCES IN BORIS GORBATOV'S *TARAS' FAMILY* (1943)

Boris Gorbatov's story *Taras' Family* enjoyed great success in the Soviet Union: it first appeared as a series in *Pravda* in 1943 and was broadcast on the radio before being published as a novel later that year. In 1946, Gorbatov was awarded the Stalin Prize for it. Until the 1980s it was sold successfully in a number of editions.[1]

The story is set in a city in eastern Ukraine during the Second World War. It features the life of three generations of a local family under German occupation. The time of publication – 1943, in the midst of war – is of special interest in terms of the portrayal of gender roles. At that point, gender roles in the Soviet Union, especially the image of women and conceptions of femininity, seemed to be being challenged: with men drafted into the Red Army, women took over formerly male-dominated occupations in heavy industry and agriculture. Additionally, between 800,000–1,000,000 Soviet women participated in the war in the ranks of the Red Army and in partisan units.[2] They entered the realm of war and

[1] Elena Penskaja, 'Arctic Narrative Semantics in Soviet History: Fiction and Art of the 1930s', *Enthymema* XIII (2015): 167–83, here 179; Olga Gershenson, 'Between the Permitted and the Forbidden: The Politics of Holocaust Representation in *The Unvanquished* (1945)', in *Soviet Jews in World War II: Fighting, Witnessing, Remembering*, eds. Harriet Murav et al. (Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 168–86, here 169f.

[2] Numbers used by researchers vary, see for example Carmen Scheide, ' "Unstintingly Master Warfare": Women in the Red Army', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Melanie Ilic (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 233–48, here 233; Susan Corbesero, 'Femininity (Con)scripted: Female Images in Soviet Wartime Poster Propaganda, 1941–1945', *Aspasia*, 4 (2010): 103–20, here 104; Olesya Khromeychuk, 'Experiences of Women at War: Servicewomen During WWII and in the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the Conflict in Donbas', *Baltic Worlds* X, 4 (2017): 59–70, here 60.

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violence that had hitherto been denoted as exclusively male. However, as the war ended, their experiences and participation in the war were mostly excluded from official Soviet historiography and commemoration.[3]

This text examines how the role and experiences of women had been portrayed in the tumultuous times of war before the official Soviet narrative of the 'Great Patriotic War' with its emphasis on male heroes had been sanctioned. It depicts the existence of those female experiences omitted by Gorbatov and by the official narrative, and the negative implications of their exclusion. The text offers an analysis of the gender roles of the women in *Taras' Family* in a close reading of three characters. The findings are contextualized by an overview of dominant gender images in Soviet culture, politics, and historiography before, during, and after the war. The text also shows how traditional gender roles were used in Soviet war literature and propaganda both to agitate and to stabilize Soviet society, omitting and trivializing the experiences and trauma of individual women.

Gender Roles in Soviet Politics and Culture Before, During, and After the War

Soviet gender policies in the 1930s were ambivalent. The early Soviet period had seen intense political discussions on the question of the liberation and emancipation of women, as well as progressive laws on divorce and abortion. However, the 1930s were characterized by a reversal of these tendencies: the Women's Department (*Zhenotdel*) of the Central Committee was disbanded in 1930. Officially, the 'woman question' was considered as solved by then. Even though women had entered the workforce, their roles as mothers and wives were fostered and re-traditionalized by the legal prohibition of abortion in 1936 and by restrictive marriage legislation.[4] At the same time, women were professionalized and

[3] See for example Anna Krylova, ' "Healers of Wounded Souls": The Crisis of Private Life in Soviet Literature, 1944–1946', *The Journal of Modern History* 73, 2 (2001): 307–31, here 326; Khromeychuk, 'Experiences' (see note 2), 65; Scheide, 'Women in the Red Army' (see note 2), 234.

[4] Roger D. Markwick, ' "The Motherland Calls": Soviet Women in the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945', in *Handbook of Women* (see note 2), 217–32, here 218–20; Carmen Scheide, *Kinder, Küche, Kommunismus: Das Wechselverhältnis zwischen sowjetischem Frauenalltag und Frauenpolitik von 1921 bis 1930 am Beispiel Moskauer Arbeiterinnen* (Zürich: Pano, 2002), 15, 33, 239–43.

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militarized in paramilitary training, which was available during the 1930s to all Soviet citizens, regardless of gender, in preparation for war.

As a result a new type of "Soviet womanhood" began to emerge, "combining military expertise in war, violence, femininity and redefined motherhood".[5] Hence it became part of the self-image of young women in the 1930s to defend their country, using military violence if necessary.[6] However, when Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 and masses of women volunteered for the Red Army, they were mostly rejected or recruited only covertly.[7] Instead, propaganda posters and magazines urged women to express their patriotism on the home front, in agriculture or in heavy industry. This shift of women taking over occupations formerly denoted as male was presented not as emancipatory and lasting, but as "unwomanly and mediated by males"[8] – as a temporary replacement for male workers, or as marital duty to their fighting husbands.[9] The mass mobilization of women began in 1942, only after the Red Army had incurred heavy losses at the beginning of the German–Soviet war. During the war, women constituted about 3–8 % of Red Army soldiers and 2.59 % of members of partisan units.[10]

A largely undiscussed wartime experience of Soviet women, whether on the battlefront or on the home front, was sexual violence. Until now there has been hardly any research on sexual violence in the Red Army or in partisan units, or on the violence inflicted by them on Soviet civilians.[11] The foundation for research on the sexual violence committed by German

[5] Anna Krylova, 'Stalinist Identity form the Viewpoint of Gender: Rearing a Generation of Professionally Violent Women-Fighters in 1930s Stalinist Russia', *Gender and History* 16, 2 (2004): 626–53, here 646.

[6] Ibid., 636ff.

[7] Scheide, 'Women in the Red Army' (see note 2), 235; Khromeychuk, 'Experiences' (see note 2), 60, 63; Markwick, 'Soviet Women' (see note 4), 224. Many of these initial rejections are described in the literary-documentary work of Svetlana Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II* (New York: Random House, 2017).

[8] Corbesero, 'Femininity' (see note 2), 104.

[9] Ibid., 104–09; Markwick, 'Soviet Women' (see note 4), 220–22; Scheide, 'Women in the Red Army' (see note 2), 235ff.

[10] Scheide, 'Women in the Red Army' (see note 2), 233; Markwick, 'Soviet Women' (see note 4), 225.

[11] Alexievich, *Unwomanly Face* (see note 7), 235; Scheide, 'Women in the Red Army' (see note 2), 241; Volodymyr Hinda, *Seks i nimets'ko-radians'ka viĭna (1941–1945)*, unpublished monograph (Kyïv, 2018), 212–33 (chapter 4.4), 402–19 (chapter 6.2).

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troops in the Soviet Union has been established by the work of Regina Mühlhäuser. As she has shown, sexual violence committed by German troops was commonplace. This included rape and mass rape, body searches, the touching and hitting of genitals, forced (public) undressing, mutilation, and the display and photography of naked female corpses.[12]

One of the functions of acts like these was the humiliation of Soviet society and of Soviet men. This implies the underlying cultural construction of women as *verletzungsoffen* (vulnerable), and men as *verletzungsmächtig* (capable of vulnerating): women need to be protected by men. They thus become a target:

> "They symbolize one's own territory which needs to be defended, and the violation of which is especially humiliating. So the body of a woman becomes a battlefield: of a man-on-man fight, and of the fight against a whole ... community."[13]

Inherent in this is a culturally determined connection between "femaleness, honour, and nation".[14]

A similar cultural image of women prevailed in Soviet culture and politics, where it was also exploited for the war effort. Soviet wartime propaganda used the image of the vulnerable woman in posters and text, implying that large numbers of Soviet women were being forced to work in brothels in the German *Reich*.[15] Imagery like this was exploited to fuel the fighting spirit of the male Soviet soldiers and hatred of the German occupying forces.[16] The harm done to individual Soviet women experiencing sexual violence, however, was of no concern here. On the contrary, women raped by the enemy were often regarded as traitors or as having

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[12] Regina Mühlhäuser, 'Handlungsräume: Sexuelle Gewalt durch Wehrmacht und SS in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion 1941–1945', in *Krieg und Geschlecht: Sexuelle Gewalt im Krieg und Sex-Zwangsarbeit in NS-Konzentrationslagern*, eds. Insa Eschebach et. al. (Berlin: Metropol, 2008), 167–85.

[13] Gaby Zipfel, 'Ausnahmezustand Krieg? Anmerkungen zu soldatischer Männlichkeit, sexueller Gewalt und militärischer Einhegung', in *Krieg und Geschlecht* (see note 12), 55–74, here 66; also see 55–8; Mühlhäuser, 'Handlungsräume' (see note 12), 176–8.

[14] Mühlhäuser, 'Handlungsräume' (see note 12), 172, fn. 14. On functions of sexual violence by German troops see ibid., 173–9.

[15] Gelinada Grinchenko, 'The *Ostarbeiter* of Nazi Germany in Soviet and Post-Soviet Ukrainian Historical Memory', *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des slavistes* LIV, 3–4 (2012): 401–26, here 406f.

[16] Ibid., 406ff; Markwick, 'Soviet Women' (see note 4), 226.

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been dishonoured.[17] The 'canonization' of the murdered female partisan Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia, which already began during wartime, stands as another example of how women and female bodies were instrumentalized as symbols by the Soviet leadership: in presentations of Kosmodem'ianskaia and her fate, there was an emphasis not only on her military activities, but also on her act of self-sacrifice, her youth, innocence and femininity, as well as on details of her brutal torture by German troops.[18] In this way Kosmodem'ianskaia was stylized as the symbol of a "ravaged people and nation".[19]

As a rule, the symbolic presentation of women in the Soviet Union came at the expense of the representation of female subjectivity, individual experience, and the suffering of women during war. This is also the case in Soviet wartime and post-war literature, which was characterized by silence on female war trauma. Its main protagonists were the disturbed, physically and psychologically injured men returning from the war. Authors placed female characters depicted as "soul-healers" at their disposal:[20] waiting wives and fiancées, with healthy bodies and strong minds, welcoming 'their' men, unconditionally ready to heal, to mother, to revitalize. Female characters were limited to the domestic sphere and their psyche presented as banal. References to war experiences outside the home, of female distress, trauma, or inner conflict were lacking.[21]

Similarly, propaganda posters towards the end of the war presented women as mothers, wives, waiting brides, welcoming returning soldiers in intact and homely houses. The reinforcement of traditional gender roles was used as a means of overcoming the trauma of war: "[G]ender, as defined by heterosexual norms, served as a key organizing principle to help reconstitute the post-war landscape".[22]

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[17] Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion 1941–1945* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010), 49ff.

[18] Markwick, 'Soviet Women' (see note 4), 225; Adrienne M. Harris, 'Memorializations of a Martyr and Her Mutilated Bodies: Public Monuments to Soviet War Hero Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia, 1942 to the Present', *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 5, 1 (2012): 73–90, here 74–9; on symbolic use of Kosmodem'ianskaia, but without gender-specific analysis, see Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: BasicBooks), 76.

[19] Markwick, 'Soviet Women' (see note 4), 225.

[20] Krylova, ' "Healers" ' (see note 3), 324.

[21] Ibid., 310, 324ff.

[22] Corbesero, 'Femininity' (see note 2), 114.

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Another feature of this reinforcement was the marginalization of the participation of women in the armed forces, which began at the end of the war: at the official victory festivities in Moscow in 1945 among 40,000 soldiers there were no women present. They were demobilized quickly and had no post-war military career prospects.[23] Widespread narratives of female combatants perpetuated rumours of promiscuity and husband-hunting as the main motivations and activities of female soldiers.[24] Soviet culture and propaganda thus imposed a "healing discourse" and "social imperative"[25] of innocence, domesticity, and dedication / devotion on Soviet women, which was almost impossible to live up to in the context of their wartime experiences.

Close Reading: Gender Roles and Female Images in *Taras' Family*

The writer Boris Gorbatov was born in 1908 in a mining camp in today's Luhans'k Oblast' (Ukraine) and grew up in the same region, referred to as the Donbas – then part of the Russian Empire and later part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. He was a party member, one of the founders of the proletarian writers' union in the Donbas and a secretary of the All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers. He worked as a war correspondent for *Pravda* on the frontline at the beginning of the Second World War.[26] The setting of his story *Taras' Family* is most probably the city of Voroshylovhrad (today's Luhans'k), where Gorbatov conducted interviews in 1943 after the Red Army had reconquered the city.[27]

The story presents the life of three generations of a family under German occupation, with Taras, the 60-year-old head of the family, as the main character. Its central topics are conflicts of loyalty and the dilemma faced by the characters between survival on the one hand and the precept of not bowing to the German occupying forces on the other. Taras, the moral authority of the story, repeatedly states his solution: "Everybody

[23] Markwick, 'Soviet Women' (see note 4), 226; Scheide, 'Women in the Red Army' (see note 2), 238.

[24] Scheide, 'Women in the Red Army' (see note 2), 240; Khromeychuk, 'Experiences' (see note 2), 63; Krylova, 'Stalinist Identity' (see note 5), 650.

[25] Krylova, ' "Healers" ' (see note 3), 330.

[26] Penskaja, 'Arctic Narrative' (see note 1), 178f.

[27] Jeremy Hicks, 'Confronting the Holocaust: Mark Donskoĭ's *The Unvanquished*', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 3, 1 (2009): 33–51, here 41.

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only thinks about saving their life, but one should also think about saving one's soul".[28] In the eyes of Taras, one should rather die than betray the Party, the Red Army, the Soviet Union, or Russia by collaborating with the German occupiers in thought or action. Against this backdrop, the following section analyses the portrayal of female characters in the story: how are their war experiences narrated and how do other characters judge them? Which experiences are represented and which are omitted? Which character traits are ascribed to the women and what do readers learn about their inner lives?

Nastia

18-year old Nastia is one of the main characters in the story. Using metaphors of flowers, her father Taras describes her as a wonderfully beautiful girl turning into a woman. As such, Taras suspects that she is striving for fulfilment through love. He prohibits Nastia from leaving the house unless she is dressed in shabby old clothes. It remains unclear whether Taras fears that Nastia could fall victim to sexual violence or whether Taras thinks that she herself, driven by her youthful longing for love, might seek contact with the German soldiers – or whether Taras sees a distinction between the two. Indeed, sexual violence on the part of German troops was so widespread that women dressed poorly when leaving the house to protect themselves, or went completely into hiding, leading to considerable limitations on their everyday life and freedom of movement. Many women blamed themselves when German troops inflicted sexual violence on them.[29]

The character is mostly portrayed through the eyes of her father Taras and Nastia herself remains largely silent. Neither through dialogues nor inner monologue does the reader learn about her interior life. Taras worries constantly about Nastia's stance in the ongoing war. In a scene of reunion between Nastia and her early love Pavlik, the reader has a

[28] Boris Gorbatov, *Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Ministerstvo kul'tury SSSR. Glavizdat. Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoĭ literatury, 1953), 451.

[29] On deliberately shabby clothing for protection, see Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen* (see note 17), 106; Evgeniĭ Krinko, 'Okkupanty i naselenie v gody velikoĭ otechestvennoĭ voĭny: problemy vzaimovospriiatiia', in *Voenno-istoricheskaia antropologiia: Ezhegodnik 2003 / 2004*, ed. Associaciia voenno-ictoricheskoĭ antropologii i psikhologii 'Chelovek i voĭna' (Moscow: Rosspėn, 2005), 329–44, here 333f. On victim blaming, see Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen* (see note 17), 49ff.

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glimpse of her patriotic attitude. When Pavlik assures Nastia that he has remained faithful to her, Nastia replies: "And to all the others?"[30] It seems that Pavlik's patriotism and loyalty to communism are more important to her than their personal relationship. At the same time, she is very attentive towards Pavlik, worrying about him, pitying him, assuring him of her fidelity. As Pavlik asks her how she has dealt with questions of loyalty during occupation, she pretends to be naïve and apolitical: "I am a very ordinary, average girl. I have simply lived according to my conscience".[31] It is not until the end of the story that the utterly surprised Taras and the reader learn that Nastia has been secretly active as a partisan. But before Taras has the opportunity to talk to Nastia about it, she is discovered by German troops and hanged.

The character of Nastia remains a symbol: of female virtues, on the one hand, such as faithfulness, empathy, beauty, and care. On the other hand, she is presented as the exemplary patriot and communist who sacrifices herself. Her character thus stands as an example of the contemporary politically required presentation and canonization of Soviet female heroes. Gorbatov reproduces the 'woman combatant / beautiful victim' narrative. It parallels the presentation of the 18-year-old female partisan Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia, who was hanged by German troops and who had been 'canonized' with the use of similar traits in *Pravda* one year before Gorbatov's book was published.[32]

What are Nastia's motivations? Does she hesitate to become a partisan and thus endanger her family, should she be discovered? How does she handle her secret duties in respect of her own family? What are her tasks and everyday life as a partisan? The reader learns nothing about Nastia's individual experiences or conflicts. This stands in contrast to the presentation of her brother, Stepan. A partisan himself, his diverse activities and meetings in organizing resistance against the German occupiers are described on roughly thirty pages in great detail. Similarly, the reader learns about the war experiences and duties of Nastia's other brothers, Andreĭ and Nikifor, in the Red Army. The symbolic nature of Nastia's character, as well as the surprise of her being a partisan, contribute to the lack of representation of women's participation in the war – the role of female partisans is minimized, while female Red Army soldiers are not mentioned at all.

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[30] Gorbatov, *Izbrannoe* (see note 28), 541.

[31] Ibid., 548.

[32] Harris, 'Memorializations' (see note 18), 74.

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Lizka / Luisa

The secondary character Lizka / Luisa is Nastia's school friend. After the arrival of the German occupiers, she renames herself from Lizka, using the German name Luisa. She is described as superficial, hedonistic, and treacherous: she wears make-up, dresses conspicuously and tantalizingly, and seeks contact with the German soldiers. She doubts whether the Red Army will return, and even if so, she prefers to enjoy her youth and beauty with the German soldiers rather than keeping a patriotic stance by staying away from them:

> " 'Meanwhile youth will pass us by!' Lizka sighed. 'The most beautiful time will pass. By the time our troops (the Red Army – M.K.) return, we will have become old women that nobody wants to look at. No', she shook her curly head, 'better somehow to enjoy oneself...' "[33]

The male characters condemn her behaviour. Lizka's longing for luxury is depicted as extraordinarily treacherous and reprehensible. She wears a beautiful sweater which she received as a gift from a German soldier, a sweater the German soldier has stolen from another woman, having beaten her daughter to death, and whose daughter's blood still sticks to it. A boy, Nastia's nephew, comments on Lizka's behaviour by singing a song he has picked up in the city:

> "... Young girl, so soon you have forgotten
> That in the terrible war for the homeland
> That for you, for the girls, in the very first battle,
> The young man shed his hot blood. ...
> In spring, to the lieutenant pilot, young girl,
> In tears you vowed to be faithful,
> But in difficult times you forgot the falcon,
> Sold yourself to the German for a bread ration. ...
> You know, this trade in affection and feelings,
> Girl, you will not be able to justify."[34]

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[33] Gorbatov, *Izbrannoe* (see note 28), 448.

[34] Ibid., 449. That such stances towards women as those expressed by this song existed seems plausible; see Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen* (see note 17), 50ff. As German wartime documents show, a version of this song actually existed and was sung in the streets of Kyïv, see Doklad o nastroenii i polozhenii v general'nom komissariate Kiev za period ot 13.–20.2.1943 goda, Nachal'nik policii bezopasnosti i SD v Kieve, 20 February 1943, f. 3767, op. 4, spr. 476, ark. 143ff, Tsentral'nyĭ derzhavnyĭ archiv vyshchych orhaniv vlady ta upravlinnia Ukrainy (TsDAVO), here p. 175.

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The connection between "femaleness, honour, and nation"[35] features prominently in this song, according to which male soldiers are defending the homeland and young girls in equal measure. The alleged actions of young women – seeking contact with German soldiers – are thus condemned not only as a personal treachery against their supposed partners who are fighting at the battlefront, but simultaneously as a treason against their homeland.[36] Furthermore, the song portrays a gender-specific division between the male-denoted battlefront and the female-denoted home front and the cultural conception of women as vulnerable. The ethics postulated by this song would fail to function if applied to female soldiers in the Red Army.

As exemplified by the character of Lizka / Luisa, the main motivation for sexual or intimate encounters between Soviet women and German soldiers appears to be hedonism and an egoistic desire for luxury. It should be noted that instances of the exchange of sex for luxury goods are indeed known in the historiography of the Second World War. Furthermore, consensual relationships with German soldiers did exist, and the sexual and relational agency of women should be taken into account.[37] However, another possible motivation for intimacy with German soldiers is only mentioned in passing by Gorbatov: "the bread ration". The trade of food for sex was a reality under the German occupation of Soviet territory, ranging from single instances to regular contact.[38] Mühlhäuser

[35] Mühlhäuser, 'Handlungsräume' (see note 12), 172, fn. 14. The question arises as to whether the Soviet Union can be considered a nation, or with which nation femininity is being connected in the underlying case. In the Russian original, Gorbatov uses the word *rodina* (homeland). What this exactly refers to remains vague throughout Gorbatov's story, varying between Russia, Ukraine, Soviet power, or the Bolsheviks. This diffuseness is typical of Soviet war literature, in which Russia and the Soviet Union are often equated: see Marc Slonim, 'Soviet Prose after the War', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 263, 1 (1949): 101–13, here 102. As Krylova convincingly showed, the caring devotion of women has been depicted in literature both as a Russian virtue and as a quality present in Soviet women, see Krylova, ' "Healers" ' (see note 3), 327. Therefore, in this article the triad of femaleness, honour, and nation is applied to the wide, diffuse notion of *rodina* which prevails in Gorbatov's story.

[36] Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen* (see note 17), 258.

[37] On consensual relationships, motivations and the dangers involved, see ibid., 240–60. On luxury goods involved in sexual trade, see ibid., 167; Anatoliĭ Kuznetsov, *Babiĭ Iar* (Zaporizhzhia, 1990), 255, quoted in Hinda, *Seks* (see note 11), 123; for occupied Poland, see Maren Röger, *Kriegsbeziehungen: Intimität, Gewalt und Prostitution im besetzten Polen 1939 bis 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2015), 68.

[38] Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen* (see note 17), 156–62.

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refers to the structural violence and disastrous food situation, caused both by the retreating Red Army and by exploitative German occupation policies, which need to be considered as possible motivations for women to engage in the trading of sex as a means of sustaining themselves and their families.[39]

Both the motivation of women and their actual experiences of engaging in intimacy with German soldiers are trivialized and presented onesidedly by Gorbatov. Furthermore, Gorbatov romanticizes the experiences of such encounters, depicting them as "trade in affection and feelings". Except for consensual relationships, it remains questionable whether in the majority of instances of sexual trade, women experienced or gave "affection and feelings". Sexual trade could become dangerous for the women involved: on the one hand, because of the possible brutality of the soldiers, often armed and with recent experience of violence and battle; on the other, because of the potential for subjection to condemnation or harassment and even physical attack or death at the hands of the Soviet population, army, or partisans.[40]

The overall ethics of the story suggest that even in questions of life and death, women should rather have died than traded intimacy for food. It should be noted that the maxim of dying rather than collaborating with or giving in to the Germans is applied to both men and women in *Taras' Family*. Andreĭ, Nastia's brother and a Red Army soldier, surrenders to the German troops and becomes a prisoner of war. Upon his return home, his father Taras postulates harshly that Andreĭ should rather have let himself be shot than surrendered. However, in contrast to the case of the female characters, the reader receives insights into Andreĭ's interior world of thought and emotion: Andreĭ justifies himself and is furious at those who condemn him for surrendering: "You never smelled death, you never saw the German, but you want to ... have a say in all this. But who am I, alone against the Germans? All their force ... and me?"[41] He talks about the brutality of captivity in war, about his own doubts about whether or not he should have let himself be shot.

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[39] Ibid., 156, 160; on food shortages as reason for the spread of clandestine prostitution, see OKH Generalquartiermeister, Betr.: Prostitution und Bordellwesen in den besetzten Ostgebieten, 20 March 1942, Az. 1271 IV b (IIa) Nr. I / 13017/42, H 20 / 840, Bundesarchiv / Militärarchiv, quoted in Franz Seidler, *Prostitution, Homosexualität, Selbstverstümmelung: Probleme der deutschen Sanitätsführung 1939–1945* (Neckargemünd: Vowinkel, 1977), 139.

[40] Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen* (see note 17), 255ff.

[41] Gorbatov, *Izbrannoe* (see note 28), 477.

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The reader learns about his gender role conflict in times of war: Andreĭ feels uneasy as soon as he finds himself not fitting the common image of masculinity symbolized by the strong, glorious soldier, capable of vulnerating and of defending his homeland and family. He feels humiliated by the pity of the women who come to the fence of the camp for prisoners of war. He feels useless at the home front and burdensome to his family after he has returned home. The reader thus gains an insight into the psyche, emotional conflicts, and human, unheroic aspects of the war experiences of a man and a soldier. This does not apply to Lizka / Luisa or any of the female characters in Gorbatov's story: the one-dimensional martyr Nastia is accompanied by the equally one-dimensional traitor Lizka / Luisa.

Antonina

The secondary character Antonina worked as an accountant before occupation. She is married to Andreĭ. Antonina is presented as fearful and emotional and is repeatedly portrayed crying. When Andreĭ returns from captivity, she cossets him, holds his hand, snuggles against him. In his perception, the laundry she gives him smells of "the caring hands of wives".[42] The character of Antonina thus stands symbolically for the domesticity of women on the home front suffering from worry about their men at the front and perpetuates the alleged binarity of the female-denoted home front and the male-denoted battlefront.

The character highlights the double standard applied to women in the story in terms of their outer appearance: women who are perceived as beautiful or take care of their appearance are condemned and suspected of seducing the German soldiers (e.g. Lizka / Luisa). The character of Nastia seems to have internalized this suspicion. As Pavlik tells her how beautiful he thinks she is, Nastia replies: "But I am also ... honest".[43] In times of war, beauty seems to become reprehensible. However, as Antonina loses her beauty in the eyes of the male characters and the male-gaze narrator, this is depicted with harsh words. "She started to look unattractive and old from those many tears."[44] Beauty is essentialized as an inherent physical trait of women. In this story, the effect of war on women is manifested by their loss of beauty and their crying, whereas the effects on men are

[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 541.
[44] Ibid., 445.

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psychological in nature: "The same storms and woes that had been shaking Andreĭ, that had ripped apart and broken his body and soul, had also swept over the silent house in Kamennyĭ Brod (Taras' house – M. K.): they had made Antonina old, and Taras bitter."[45] This constitutes another example of how the subjectivity and psychological life of women are rendered banal.

The cause of Antonina's suffering remains vague. Perhaps she experiences sexual violence when forced by the German occupation forces to report to their labour office. She returns home in a perturbed state:

> "Taras looked at her and asked nothing. There was nothing to ask. Antonina silently sank down onto the bench, as if petrified. She sat in the gloomy kitchen, her arms hanging feebly by her sides, and did not say a word. Old Efrosin'ia sat next to her. 'Did they beat you?' she asked whispering. 'Beating was the only thing they did not do, but everything else they did', Antonina responded."[46]

The following night, Antonina dreams of her husband, a soldier. In her dream, she assures him: "I have never betrayed you, Andreĭ, neither in my heart, nor in my thoughts".[47] These allusions can be interpreted as a reference to Antonina's possible experience of sexual violence.[48] However, the exact events remain unspoken and implicit. Similarly, the discourse of witnesses about sexual violence in wartime has been characterized by vagueness of language which does not describe or name the actual violence. "This constitutes a reference to a collective imaginary, to certain pictures of rape which the recipients have in mind. What happens is left to their imagination".[49] In Soviet society sexual violence on the territories under German occupation was an "open secret".[50] Since being raped meant that women lost their "cultural attribution of innocence"[51] and

[45] Ibid., 481.

[46] Ibid., 442.

[47] Ibid., 443.

[48] The scene can be interpreted differently: Antonina surrendered to the German occupiers, pleading to be spared from violence and deportation to the *Reich* for forced labour. The fact that her husband is fighting against the Germans, and that she is now surrendering to them, could also feel like a personal betrayal of her husband. Again, this would imply cultural connotations of femaleness, honour, and nation, see Mühlhäuser, 'Handlungsräume' (see note 12), 172, fn. 14.

[49] Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen* (see note 17), 57, also see 54–7, 108; eadem, 'Handlungsräume' (see note 12), 170–2.

[50] Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen* (see note 17), 108.

[51] Ibid., 53.

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honour in conjunction with a prevailing culture of victim-blaming, it seems plausible that the victims themselves and their loved ones did not speak openly about sexual violence. A general taboo on sexuality and sexual violence in Soviet society and the military contributed to this silence.[52]

Conclusions

With the help of the female characters in his story *Taras' Family*, Boris Gorbatov reproduces a narrative of gendered labour division during the Second World War, differentiating between a female-connoted home front and a male-connoted battlefront. The story employs the cultural construction of women as *verletzungsoffen* (vulnerable), and men as *verletzungsmächtig* (capable of vulnerating). Women allegorically represent the homeland, needing to be defended by men. Female Red Army soldiers do not fit into this narrative, and therefore their existence and experiences are omitted from the story. Even though female partisans do figure in the story, the reader learns nothing about their war contribution or everyday life. This stands in sharp contrast to the activities, experiences, and psychological struggles of male partisans and soldiers described in great detail in the book. The female partisan Nastia thus remains a symbol of feminine virtue and patriotism. In opposition to this stand the actions of those girls and women which are condemned as treason, especially trade in sex with German soldiers. As the motivation of the female characters for this trade Gorbatov suggests hedonism and a desire for luxury. As a result, sexual trade as a survival strategy is not considered, and the possible inner conflicts of the women involved are not covered.

Sexual violence on the part of the German soldiers, though widespread in reality, is only vaguely alluded to in the story. In this way Gorbatov reduces and trivializes female wartime experiences and the female psyche. The reader hardly learns about the inner lives and struggles of the female characters in contrast to some of the male characters. Instead, Gorbatov portrays and reproduces cultural and social requirements for women which were almost impossible to live up to in the face of women's actual experiences and that often implied double standards: devoted care, feminine domesticity, a need for protection, unabated patriotism, innocence, physical and sexual integrity, and beauty. "Especially in times of war, it was seen as the duty of women to secure stability at home, not least by

[52] Scheide, 'Women in the Red Army' (see note 2), 241.

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means of virtue and respectability".[53] These images of femininity show the conservative aspects of the Stalinist gender policy of the 1930s which fostered the role of women as mothers and wives. However, during the 1930s, in the course of the professional militarization of women, alternative concepts of femininity had begun to emerge, encompassing military discipline and violence alongside motherhood and charm. The image of the female defender of the homeland had become a part of the self-perception of many Soviet young women. But the portrayal of women and gender roles in *Taras' Family* and the fact that the story was officially sanctioned and awarded the Stalin Prize show that this change in traditional gender roles could not ultimately be established.

As Soviet wartime and post-war literature, propaganda, and politics of history show, the return and reinforcement of traditional conceptions of gender roles, with female devotion and self-sacrificial care as an unalienable part of them, were used towards the end of the war and in its aftermath to overcome the horrors of war and to stabilize post-war Soviet society. Female Red Army soldiers were soon demobilized and advised not to speak about their participation in the war. For a long time, they had no place in war historiography and commemoration which was dominated by heroic male soldiers, who were venerated as the liberators in the cult about the 'Great Patriotic War'. Female soldiers, in contrast, were stigmatized, their role in war was despised and reduced to alleged promiscuity and husband-hunting.

The trauma of women, whether at the battlefront or on the home front, found almost no representation in literature or politics. Instead, women were confronted with role expectations fraught with double standards and impossible to fulfil. The consequences for women could be devastating, exposing them to social isolation and stigmatization. A way of avoiding this was to keep silent about one's own experiences, which often led to isolation and a lack of processing of women's trauma. Furthermore, deviation from imposed role expectations could lead to identity crises and conflicts with the social environment. Not least, out of fear of stigmatization, demobilized women might not have asserted their claims to veteran benefits, which placed them in danger of material poverty.

The author would like to thank Olena Stiazhkina for drawing her attention to Gorbatov's book.

[53] Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen* (see note 17), 258.

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