A postwar sexual liberation?

The gendered experience of the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War

*Une libération sexuelle de l'après-guerre ? La Grande Guerre patriotique et
l'évolution des rapports de genre en Union soviétique*

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Mie Nakachi

- 1 Igor' Kon, the foremost Russian sexologist, characterized Stalin's sexual politics as "consistently repressive, based on suppression and negation of sex (*osnovannoi na podavlenii i otritsanii seksa*).” Kon recognizes that the Great Patriotic War had a significant influence on family relations, sexual morality, and subsequent demographic changes. In his view, the July 8, 1944 Family Law attempted to suppress wartime influence on sexual behaviors and strengthen the family by making divorce even more difficult than the 1936 Family Law had stipulated, while depriving out-of-wedlock children of various legal rights, such as inheritance.¹ This paper attempts to elaborate on Kon's point about war's significant influence on family relations and sexual mores. In doing so, it reaches a new conclusion: postwar Stalinist sexual politics did not suppress, but encouraged the continuation of sexual behaviors that developed during the war.
- 2 In a comparative context, this development of Soviet sexual politics in the postwar period helps us better understand the different trajectories of sexual revolution in the Soviet Union and “the West.” In his study of the role of American and British women during World War Two, John Costello vividly described and dissected the ways in which families were broken-up by mobilization, the rise in temporary sexual relationships, and how women's expanded roles outside the home during the war had a great impact on changing sexual desires and postwar norms. This wartime transformation destabilized the family, making divorce, illegitimacy, and venereal disease much more prevalent. Costello also demonstrates that after the war was over, political, economic, cultural and religious forces supported demobilized men's wish to get their jobs back from women and to have their wives waiting for them at home. Women were pushed back into traditional family roles in order to restore the gender order of the prewar period, resulting in the postwar baby boom. Divorce and illegitimate births were condemned again. The suburban home, equipped with electric appliances, one or two cars, and

several children, became the model of American life, and the symbolic global vision of the postwar wealth of America.

- 3 In the West, the wartime legacy of looser sexual attitudes and women's economic independence did not end here. In the late 1960s, women began to question whether they had indeed been living "in a dream" and remembered about the excitement, materially difficult, but emotionally fulfilling time they had had as workers and military volunteers during the war. They were bitter about the fact that they were pushed back into the home, without being given a choice of staying at the job they had become good at. Was real happiness only to be found at home raising children and taking care of one's husband? This realization is said to have triggered the women's liberation movement and sexual revolution in the West in the 1960s.² In this way, the wartime experience of work and sexual liberation became a source of empowerment for women in the long-run.
- 4 Although Soviet women also worked in the military and industry, and experienced a looser sexual atmosphere during the war, these experiences did not lead to a women's liberation movement later on. For the female workforce, the war years were not as transformative in the Soviet Union as in the West. In 1940, 39% of the Soviet labor force was already female. It grew to 56% in 1945 and was reduced to 47% by 1950.³ Thus, working outside the home during the war was not the same kind of novel experience for Soviet women as it was for British and American women, because many were already working in the prewar period and many remained in the workforce after the war. Because so many men never came back from the fighting or came back crippled, Soviet women remained in the workforce to make a living and support their families. Unlike the British and American government, the Soviet government needed to keep the female workforce for postwar reconstruction. As a result, Soviet women were more likely to be forced to remain in the workforce than to be forced out of it. By 1970 when women in the West were calling for women's liberation from the home, over 50% of the Soviet labor force was already female.⁴
- 5 If labor was not a transformative factor, what did wartime sexual liberation bring to Soviet women in the postwar period? In order to examine this question, this article analyzes various ways in which romantic or sexual relationships between women and men evolved during the war, producing at the end of the war entirely different partnerships from those imagined at the time of separation. First I discuss the enormous demographic transformation and the types of new sexual practice that developed during the war. The Soviet Union's total mobilization, more total than in most other countries, affected nearly all families. Evacuations and deportations also shifted population across the vast territory affected by the conflict. Despite many men and women wishing until the end to be reunited after the war, deaths, the prolonged separation and wartime liaisons often resulted in broken marriages. This involved not only Soviet citizens, but also relationships with the enemy in the occupied areas. No demographic shifts on this scale had happened in the US since the American Civil War. As Soviet men and women fought, worked, and lived in extreme conditions often away from families, temporary sexual relationships developed, which transcended sexual norms in the prewar period.⁵ Considering the scale of Soviet demographic change and mobilization, the thoroughness of sexual transformation, as measured by what percentage of the population was directly affected by the war, the level would be higher in the Soviet Union than the United States. Second, I describe the newly promulgated 1944 Family Law and its immediate effects on the decisions women and men made about sex, marriage and family toward the

end of the war. The wartime development of demography and sexual practice produced different and often conflicting interests for women and men. I will argue that far from reimposing traditional sexual values, the Soviet government actually promoted the continuation of wartime sexual practice in the postwar period.

- 6 In the early Soviet period, Alexandra Kollontai's "free love" and "withering away" of the family were key theoretical views on communist sex and family. Previous studies of sex and family in the Soviet Union tended to focus on how actual Soviet sexual practice and policy were not as liberal as Kollontai's theory would have suggested.⁶ However, this does not mean that Soviet policy always promoted conservative sexual norms, such as sex within legal marriage. After years of wars and revolutions, revolutionary family laws made divorce easy to get, made legitimate and illegitimate children equal, and legalized abortion. These changes were intended to modernize the family and improve women's status in marriage. However, women complained that their husbands took advantage of revolutionary laws, had extramarital relationships, and got divorced often without taking responsibility for their families.⁷ Stalin's 1936 Family Law tried to discipline such paternal behaviors, making divorce difficult and increasing fathers' responsibility for child support.⁸ However, this disciplining of male sexuality was short-lived because of the mobilization for the war.⁹ When another, more devastating war killed 27 million citizens, the Soviet government, mainly concerned with the demographics, reversed the prewar policy and encouraged sexual promiscuity, in a way Kollontai could never have imagined.

Departure

- 7 On June 22, 1941, German attack, the infamous Barbarossa, triggered Soviet mass mobilization to and evacuation away from the front. Up to 1945, 34 million men and 0.6 million women underwent mobilization. These women were often employed in positions involving military administration, sanitation, and medical services and many went for some training first, so few left for the front immediately, waiting out the first, most brutal months of the war, when the German advance seemed almost unstoppable and going to the front could easily mean being over-run and captured or cut off behind German lines. Nevertheless, later most were relocated to the front, military bases, and production units, leaving their families behind.¹⁰ The process of family break-up was also accelerated by evacuation. Those who lived close to the western border of the Soviet Union were evacuated to Siberia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, totaling approximately 16.5 million.¹¹ In German-occupied areas, civilians were sorted and killed, most notably and completely, over two million Jews, the first step towards Hitler's final solution. Other able bodies, both women and men, were taken for labor. In the midst of such huge demographic shifts, all numbered in the millions, many millions of families lost touch with each other.
- 8 Separated family members expressed their desire to meet again when the war was over. All desired return to earlier, better times, whether mobilized, evacuated, or deported, and departing soldiers had an almost existentially strong desire for their family members to wait for them to come back. Many of them were leaving for the front believing that their aim was to protect those whom they loved from the enemy, and in fact, the enemy's brutal behavior in occupied areas would prove this thesis to be correct. Soldiers brought photos of family members with them. They wrote letters to their

parents, wives, lovers, and children to inform them that they were alive. “Wait for me,” was the strong sentiment shared by many mobilized soldiers, which crystallized in a very popular wartime poem with that title authored by Konstantin Simonov. This poem created a powerful image as the very act of waiting became a lifeline to survival for male soldiers, in particular.¹²

...Let my mother and my son
Believe that I have died,
Let my friends, grown weary
Sit by the fireside
And drink the bitter wine
To my memory...

He who did not wait for me
Let him say 'twas luck...
Why I survived
Only you and I will know
Simply, you knew how to wait
As no other knew.

- 9 Simonov’s vision inspired deep feelings of loyalty in many readers, no doubt, but the realities of life during the war and into the postwar were something else.
- 10 Most people attempted to wait for their partners. However, waiting for someone without knowing whether or when he would come back was often very difficult, particularly since correspondence was irregular. The prolonged separation and extreme wartime experiences changed both men and women physically and emotionally, creating a fear that mutual attraction might have already disappeared. E. Sakharova, a Moscow doctor, who was waiting for her mobilized husband Sergo, wrote in June 1942 in her diary, “[...] If Sergo saw me now, he would not know me — so greatly have I changed.”¹³ In such wartime conditions both men and women engaged in romantic relationships with new partners.

Transformation

- 11 The promise between lovers, married or not, to wait for each other would have been strong at separation, but wartime conditions made it difficult for many to wait for someone who might not come back, or come back greatly changed. Wartime society, both military and civilian, was filled with dislocated people and offered optimal conditions for new sexual unions. Among civilians, women who were separated from lovers and husbands sometimes were united with men who were not drafted. “Masha [...] had stopped writing to her husband and had taken up with a lame musician,” writes Ehrenburg.¹⁴
- 12 This theme was common in artistic representations of wartime relationships. In “Nastia,” a story about the Leningrad siege written by Vera Ketlinskaia in 1945, the hero Pavel, remains in Leningrad, when his wife and children are evacuated, and has an affair with his colleague Nastia.¹⁵ This representation survived long after the postwar period. The internationally-popular 1957 movie, “The Cranes are Flying,” also draws on this theme. Here the heroine marries her lover’s brother, who escaped mobilization by bribery.¹⁶ A 1959 film “Ballad of a Soldier” depicts a scene where Aleksei finds out during his six-day vacation from the front that the wife of a soldier who asked him to deliver a gift of soap

to her, was living with another man.¹⁷ Also in the 2000 novel *Kazus Kukotskogo*, Elena Georgievna, the heroine “marries” Pavel Alekseevich Kukotskii, the main character, the surgeon who operated on her to remove her cancerous reproductive organs during evacuation, while her husband was fighting at the front. Later, she learns that he died on the very day on which she first had sex with Dr. Kukotskii, the hero. “Oh my God! How can I continue alive?” the heroine cries as she reads the date of death.¹⁸

- 13 In both the Soviet Army and Navy enlisted women were mainly in their late teens and early twenties, so a significant number of sexual unions and “marriages” were formed. Under extreme conditions at the front, young women surrounded by men often fell in love with male soldiers.¹⁹ In the military, being a woman among many men who lived every single day as possibly the last day of their lives and sought to have some warmth, meant that she encountered many sexual advances. In order to protect themselves, many girls tried to have one partner.²⁰
- 14 When mutual, such attractions quickly metamorphosed into unions, often casually, but almost universally described as “marriage (*brak*).”²¹ Happy marriages were brief in duration, often broken by death. But some endured. Svetlana N. Liubich, who was a sanitation officer (*sandruzhinnitsa*) in WWII knew a battalion commander and a nurse who fell in love with each other and “got married.” The commander was severely wounded in a battle and taken to a hospital in the rear. The nurse, who was pregnant, was left behind. The commander wrote to her to go to his parents and give birth to his son or daughter, showing his loyal intentions, should he return.²² E.A. Iasinskaia, who voluntarily joined the army and served in communications (*voisk sviazi*) met her future husband in 1943 and registered marriage in 1946 after both of them were demobilized.²³
- 15 Other unions in the military were more hierarchical in nature and typically mated officers with female soldiers or medical personnel. Often, the women in such relationships took care of the officers’ sexual and other daily needs, such as washing and cleaning. Such relationships, in time, began to be considered as a kind of “marriage.” The women involved were dubbed “field campaign wives (*polevaia peredvizhnaia zhena*, or *PPZh*),” especially by the rank and file soldiers. In return for their service to a male officer, PPZh were privileged in their living conditions, getting better access to supplies and transportation while other women went on foot.²⁴ On rare occasions, PPZh acquired the powers of their consorts and were labeled “autocratic queens (*samoderzhavnaia koroleva*).” Many got pregnant, since condoms were almost unavailable. Most chose to abort.²⁵ Discovery of an abortion attempt would, however, be cause for discharge.²⁶
- 16 Civilian women and military men also “hooked up.” Venereal disease records show that Soviet military men visited women during business trips, leaves of absence, and re-deployments. When possible, they visited families, but also women who lived nearby. Within the military, the most mobile personnel, such as drivers and those responsible for material procurement, tended to have excellent social opportunities. These behaviors were recorded by venereologists who were concerned with the growing rate of venereal disease in military and civilian population alike, since late 1943. VD reached such proportions that those on leave or official travel were required to obtain and carry certificates guaranteeing their disease-free status.²⁷
- 17 Female medical personnel also came into contact with on-duty or medically-discharged. Both those who were recovering and those who were dying had their charms. Healthier officers and soldiers also sometimes checked themselves out of hospital to visit nearby towns or villages. A March 1944 report from the military medical administration (*glavnoe*

voenno-sanitarno e upravlenie) to the Central Committee described drinking bouts, street-fighting and VD infection during such unregulated escapes. Clearly, casual sexual relationships were also involved.²⁸ Even worse, the upper-echelons of military medicine were increasingly convinced that their soldiers were becoming the major vector of syphilis in the general population.²⁹ In sum, officers and their men infected and impregnated civilian women on their way to, from, and during hospitalization.

- 18 Sexual violence occurred particularly when soldiers crossed borders. In German-occupied areas, some local women were raped by German soldiers. To offset this, the Germans created military brothels, where local women were made available on demand, in order to satisfy soldiers' sexual needs in an orderly manner. In Gatchina, a Leningrad suburb, approximately 2,000 women were housed in an "isolation house (*izoliatsionnyi dom*)" for sexual slavery.³⁰ In Ukraine younger women between ages thirteen and sixteen reportedly worked in officers' brothels. Not only Germans, but also the Hungarian, Romanian, and, finally, Soviet armies raped women in Ukraine.³¹
- 19 In the occupied area, a fair amount of fraternization took place between German men and Ukrainian women who sought a German partner on the street in the hope of getting material help and protection.³² Erenburg quickly felt the complexities, when the woman whose house he was billeted in briefly asked his help to trace a missing husband. He asked her how the Germans had behaved and she said that "No German ever set foot in here," only to be contradicted by her little son, "Mama, Uncle Otto used to come every day, he played with me, he played with you too." The side-product of this wide range of more or less coerced relations and deteriorated health services was high VD infection and abortion rates in German-occupied areas. Venereologists and doctors in women's medicine understood these special conditions. These sexual relationships with the enemy would have consequences for postwar marriage and divorce.
- 20 In 1944 and 1945, Stalin received information about Soviet soldiers' rape cases in Ukraine, Latvia, and Belarus.³³ However, he did not take strong disciplinary measures in the army, allowing more mass rapes to occur. When the Red Army reached Berlin, soldiers raped women left and right, German, Jewish, young and old.³⁴ For the same years and after, Norman Naimark's work has clarified how the Soviet military in Eastern Europe and Germany plundered civilian homes and conducted mass rape often in brutal, even fatal, forms. The young Alexander Solzhenitsyn, taking part in the German campaign wrote the following verses:

Zweiundzwanzig, Horingstrasse
It's not been burned, just looted, rifled.
A moaning, by the walls half muffled:
The mother's wounded, still alive.
The little daughter's on the mattress,
Dead. How many have been on it
A platoon, a company perhaps?
A girl's been turned into a woman.
A woman turned into a corpse...³⁵
- 21 Rape would remain a problem in Germany and elsewhere until 1947, when Soviet soldiers were confined to camp. A clear anti-rape position would not be formulated and enforced within the Soviet Union until 1949.³⁶

Reproductive Consequences of Wartime Sexual Behavior and Postwar Policy

- 22 While both women and men experienced various types of non-conjugal sexual relationships during the war, the kinds of consequences they faced were deeply gendered.³⁷ Several elements separated women's and men's consequences of wartime relationship. First, men were more likely to die in time of war, and women were more likely to be left without partners. The sex-imbalance among the adult population made it easier for men to find sexual partners than women.³⁸ Second, women faced such reproductive consequences as pregnancy, abortion, and miscarriages as a result of sexual relationships. Due to the criminalization of abortion since 1936, finding a safe underground operation was very difficult, and wartime material deprivation often made pregnancy uncomfortable and difficult to carry to term.³⁹ Third, women were far more likely to be socially condemned for wartime sexual liaisons than men in the postwar period. For example, women from the front were often considered sexually promiscuous and therefore undesirable brides after demobilization. After the war, demobilized women often felt compelled to hide the fact that they had served in the army and did not wear medals because the reputation of female soldiers as a group was tainted.⁴⁰ This contrasted with demobilized male soldiers whose sexual practices were generally not questioned. In the 1980s Nina V. Il'inskaia, who served in the war as a nurse, lamented:
- A man returns and he's a hero. A [potential] bridegroom! But if a girl returns, then she is immediately looked upon askance (*kosoi vzgliad*) as if to say, "We know what you did there..." And the whole family wonders, "Why marry her?" To be honest, we covered it up and didn't want to say that we had been at the front. We wanted to become normal girls again. [Potential] brides.⁴¹
- 23 The fact that women suffered more than men from the reproductive consequences of wartime sexual encounters was unavoidable, given not only women's reproductive functions, but also wartime demographic, social, cultural, and emotional conditions. Nevertheless, it would be a serious oversight to consider the war as the only major cause of postwar Soviet women's difficulties. The 1944 Family Law in particular created a more disadvantageous position for women than otherwise, while releasing men from the responsibilities of fathering out-of-wedlock children.
- 24 The 1944 Family Law was a pronatalist policy recommended and drafted by N.S. Khrushchev, the boss of Ukraine, as a response to wartime losses, the scale of which was not revealed to the Soviet public during Stalin's lifetime. After passing under Molotov's and Stalin's editorial eye, the draft was promulgated as all-Union Law on July 8, 1944. Given the extremely unbalanced sex ratio, Khrushchev thought that accelerated population growth would be possible only if men were given incentive to impregnate women other than their wives, and if unmarried and widowed women were given sufficient support to raise out-of-wedlock children. Despite this spirit of encouraging extramarital sexual affairs, and the general state of marriages in flux, the law made it harder to get a divorce. Moreover, for highly fertile women, significantly increased financial support would be provided. As for single mothers, new aid would be provided at the same monetary level as the prewar child support payment.
- 25 For men the necessary incentive was identified as a release from financial responsibility for their post-1944 out-of-wedlock children. In order to release men from financial and legal responsibilities, the new law recognized only registered marriage, moving away

from the revolutionary family law which recognized common-law marriages. Mothers not in registered marriages were now considered “unmarried” mothers under the law, and could no longer register the child under the name of the biological father. Instead, single mothers could pick a patronymic for the child, while the line for the “father” on the birth certificates would be left blank or marked with a dash.⁴²

- 26 This pronatalist policy with the explicit intention to encourage the births of out-of-wedlock children might have been able to help postwar “unmarried” mothers, if it provided sufficient financial and material support for them, and if unmarried mothers and fatherless children became socially and culturally accepted. However, neither happened. With regard to the amount of child support, in the final law it was lowered from the level initially proposed by Khrushchev’s draft. In this way, unmarried motherhood would become associated with poverty. Khrushchev’s draft proposed to include a propaganda effort for normalizing unmarried motherhood, however, to my knowledge, this never became a part of the policy. Although unmarried postwar mothers may not have been openly discriminated against, particularly because it was often difficult to distinguish them from postwar widows with children, it is clear that unmarried mothers considered it a plight for children not to have the name of the father on their birth certificates.⁴³ Because pronatalist policy made it more advantageous for women to be in registered marriage than to be unmarried mothers, postwar women aspired to be in legal marriage.
- 27 By the time the law was promulgated, it was already becoming important for women to obtain legal marital status with their prewar and wartime partners, because wives of dead or missing soldiers received various forms of state aid and pension as long as they did not remarry. Already on April 28, 1943, Sovnarkom SSSR issued a decree (*postanovlenie*) providing lump sum payments to the wives of general and high-ranking officers (*nachstov*) of the Red Army who were missing or dead in the war. The amount of the aid was substantial: up to 100,000 rubles.⁴⁴ Around the same time, the government also provided lump sums or pensions for wives and families of rank-and-file service men and lower-ranking officers.⁴⁵ To be eligible for such aid, wives had to provide marriage certificates and proof that they had not subsequently remarried.
- 28 Women who were already married in the prewar were also deeply affected by this law, that made divorce difficult to get, but made it easy for men to have extramarital sexual relationships. Some of them at least initially welcomed the law as they thought it was protecting their marriage from their husbands’ wartime liaisons.⁴⁶ However, the difficulty of divorce did not stop their husbands from pursuing their desire to be with wartime or postwar partners. Such a moment was depicted in the story “Nastia,” mentioned above, when the hero Pavel tried to decide whether to go back to his wife and children or stay with his wartime lover, Nastia.⁴⁷ During an oral interview with me, A. (born in 1929) talked about a woman whose husband did not want to be with his wife after being demobilized from the war. “They had three children. She chased him in town, at work, in the metro, but that didn’t do anything. He went to another woman, got married, and had two children. He just didn’t want to live with her.”⁴⁸
- 29 In contrast to postwar women who wanted to obtain or maintain the state of legal marriage, many men wanted to get a divorce or be relieved from child support responsibilities. Soon after the 1944 Law was introduced, legal experts noted that most cases of divorce were filed by men in the military and white-collar male workers.⁴⁹ In 1944, in the city of Moscow, of 470 divorce cases, 386 were filed by men, and 84 by

women. In Moscow oblast, of 50 divorce cases, 38 were filed by men, and 12 by women. The majority of those who filed for divorce were between 30 and 40 years old and had been married for five to ten years.⁵⁰ In Ukraine of 32 divorce cases, 25 were filed by men, and 7 by women. In the city of Leningrad, of 59 cases examined from September to December 1944, 51 were filed by men, and 8 by women.⁵¹

30 In a 1944 study of divorce by NKIU, the presence of another *de facto* family and infidelity of the spouse were two of the three most common reasons for divorce in Russia and Ukraine, the third one being family quarrels and dissimilarity of characters.⁵² In this way, broken relationships under two labels, one called *de facto* marriage, the other, infidelity, became the most common reason for divorce.

31 In the capitals, Moscow and Leningrad, the presence of another marriage was the most common reason for divorce. In L'vov oblast, Moscow oblast, and the city of Sverdlovsk, from 24 percent to 76 percent of the cases were motivated by the desire to legalize postwar families.⁵³ Given the prevalence of wartime liaisons, this is not surprising. For example, Comrade Shiriaev of Khar'kov filed for divorce in December 1944, because his new "wife" would soon give birth. He wanted to "legalize" the new marriage to register the child under his family name.⁵⁴

32 For men, a wife's infidelity, a wartime liaison, was another common reason for divorce.⁵⁵ Condemnation was strongest when fraternization with the enemy was suspected. This happened most commonly to couples who were from areas occupied during the war, which probably explains why infidelity was higher on the list of reasons for divorce in Ukraine than in RSFSR. When infidelity was the reason for male-initiated divorce, women's wartime sexual behavior, such as fraternization with Germans, was condemned. Captain I.M. Sukach wrote,

during the German occupation of Ukraine, my wife got married to a German militia man in order to avoid labor deportation to Germany. She lived with him for a while, that is, until the arrival of the Red Army. Then he was killed, and she was left alone. I learned about this directly from her in the letters she wrote to me. She asks me to accept her again. But because I was at the front for the whole time, and she got married to a German lackey, I decided to break off all ties with her... Please explain to me what I need to do so that my official documents do not include my wife, who got married to a German lackey.⁵⁶

33 As seen in Sukach's letter, when demobilized male soldiers wanted a divorce due to their wives' infidelities, they often expressed their entitlement to divorce because of their military service in WWII. This feeling was strongly expressed by I.T. Avdeev, a WWII invalid. Avdeev wanted a divorce because when he went back to Osipenko in Zaporozhskii oblast, which was under German occupation during the war, he found out that his wife had lived with a "German fascist invader" until the German retreat. Avdeev emphasized that he should be given a divorce because he had defended his country and his former wife was a taint on his record which needed to be cleansed.

34 Avdeev expressed his indignation with his wife all the more strongly for his own desire to legalize his wartime relationship — also adulterous. Avdeev had found a "true" Soviet woman to marry. Strictly speaking, the fact that he had already found a woman to marry before legalizing divorce could also be considered infidelity, but Avdeev self-righteously presented his position as a hero entitled to special consideration:

At this time my wife is not in Osipenko and it is not clear where she is. Now I must divorce her, because I found for myself a different wife, who is a real Soviet woman (*polnost'iu sovetskai a zhenshchina*) [...] If my former wife returned to

Osipenko, no one could force me to live with such a woman, who betrayed not only me, but also our Fatherland and our people whom I defended. I was decorated for destroying German fascist beasts, so if I live with this bitch (*svoloch'*) again, it will be a shame and disgrace (*pozor*) for the people (*narod*) whom I freed and defended. I ask for your help in this matter so that I can purge (*ochistit'*) myself and my document of such scum (*nechist'*). Also, I do not have the means to pay the legal costs because my wife squandered everything while I was absent...⁵⁷

- 35 In postwar Ukraine, this case was not unusual. NKIU Ukraine reported that according to the analysis of cases between February and March 1945, many military men initially covered up the presence of the new family or intimate relations with other women (*blizkaia sviaz' s drugimi zhenshchinami*) and made up "irrelevant motives (*nesushchestvennyye motivy*)" instead. Citizen Dorogobuzhan, for example, filed in Khar'kov's People's court to divorce his wife Evgeniia. They had two teen-age daughters. He reported the reason for divorce as his wife's adultery with German occupiers. However, during the court hearing it was revealed that the plaintiff was living with another woman. The oblast court decided not to grant the divorce.⁵⁸
- 36 Other demobilized husbands wanted not only divorce, but also punishments for wives who did not await the return of their husbands. For example, P.V. Grigor'ev asked for *gratis* divorce as a Red Army soldier earning only 65 rubles per month. He also wanted to know under what law his wife could be punished for infidelity.⁵⁹ Other soldiers were indignant at the possibility that unmarried women who conceived children by Germans could be entitled to state aid provisions in the 1944 Family Law.⁶⁰
- 37 As husbands, men demanded divorce, arguing that wives' infidelity, and their own patriotic service in the war entitled them to it, even if the biggest reason was formalizing marriage with their wartime partners. As fathers, they also inquired about their child support obligations under the new law, but these questions were often inspired by diametrically opposed conceptions of personal interest. Men wanted to know the limits of their new "freedom." For example, I.I. Garban' (Ivanovo oblast) asked if he should be paying support for the children of his prewar common-law marriage. He had three. Already before he was mobilized into the army, he had separated from his wife and began paying 25 percent of his salary as child support. After demobilization, even before locating his family, he wanted to know the personal implications of the new law.⁶¹
- 38 In contrast, women, as mothers regardless of what the law said, felt that fathers should take part in childrearing, at least financially. P.M. Nikitichna wrote to the editor of the journal *Working Woman* (*Rabotnitsa*) after receiving no help from the court:
- "Dear Comrades! Please put yourself in my shoes and advise me. I am in a very difficult family situation. My husband, Razuvaev Ivan Leont'evich, with whom I lived eleven years together in one room has now left me for another woman, leaving me with two children [...] The father categorically refuses to help his children and said "You are not my legal wife. Our marriage was not registered. The new law abolished child support, so I will not pay it. Go ahead. Sue me." I contacted People's court in Pervomaiskii raion. My case was not accepted."⁶²

Conclusion

- 39 Both Soviet women and men transformed their understandings of family, sex and marriage in a state of war that brought death into every household and, from the perspective of those experiencing it, had no predetermined length or outcome, making very real the possibility for many that their last days, weeks and months had arrived.

Under the extreme wartime conditions, Soviet men and women engaged in sex without thinking about their prewar lives as wives and husbands. Men far away from their wives engaged in extramarital sex with their female comrades in the military, local women living nearby, and enemy women. Women in the military, at the home front, or in occupied areas also sometimes had similar experiences, because they also needed company in the face of death, together with material and/or emotional support during the toughest period of so many peoples' lives. In the rear, the news of death also came often. Many sought comfort where they could find it.

- 40 After the war, in the US and Western Europe, the government and religious leaders tried to restore prewar sexual mores and gender relations pushing women back into the home and expecting and encouraging demobilized soldiers to become responsible workers, husbands, and fathers. In large part this worked out, as the postwar middle classes adopted these roles and mores. The Soviet government did not choose this path. Toward the end of the war, when Soviet victory became obvious, the 1944 Family Law offered increased support for women and children on paper, but in practice was encouraging citizens, particularly men, to continue to engage in sex, without thinking about the long-term consequences, in order to increase the birthrate. With contraception virtually unavailable, every sexual act carried with it high probability of pregnancy. Men would not be held responsible for the reproductive, social, economic, and cultural costs of extramarital sex. And without men's commitment to participate in the raising of their own offspring, women were more likely than not to abort.⁶³
- 41 When the war was coming to an end, men and women began thinking about relationships and reproduction in longer terms, and many wanted to legalize ties developed during the war. However, the 1944 Family Law created new problems for both men and women, whose family lives had been torn apart by the war. Many men were unable to get a divorce due to the strict, time-consuming, and expensive procedures. Women could not register their marriages because their new partners were married, or the partners were not interested in registering a marriage. Nevertheless, this did not stop the men from leaving their prewar legal or common-law wives to start living with the new partners.
- 42 Women accepted living as extra-legal wives often against their will, because so many husbands and future husbands had died in the war, becoming a wife and mother in a traditional form of marriage became an unattainable perspective for millions of Soviet women.⁶⁴ Also, since the law made it easier for men to walk away from childcare responsibilities, they were more likely to take advantage of it. This official promotion of irresponsible fatherhood, often created unhappy "unmarried" mothers who could not register the marriage or register their children under the names of the biological father. Fathers who left for a woman other than the wife were likely to stay with the new partner with or without a divorce. Between 1945 and 1955 alone, new liaisons would produce 8.7 million out-of-wedlock children, and the average rate of out-of-wedlock births in the rural and urban areas of the Soviet Union ranged between 15 and 20 percent of all births in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. This meant that extramarital sex was very common and tolerated, even if prejudice remained. Moreover, this practice was promoted by the government. We may call this phenomenon a postwar sexual liberation, sponsored by a government pronatalist policy.
- 43 It has been argued, for the West, that the 1950s was the time when traditional sexual and gender norms made a comeback. Women returned home, got married, and had babies. For Soviet women, it was otherwise. The recovering economy needed them, so they

remained in the workforce. One out of every six children born in the Soviet Union was officially born out-of-wedlock and additional millions grew up without fathers. In a social environment where men all had many prospects for sexual relationships and where contraception was not available, becoming a single working mother was a real possibility, but not a desirable prospect.⁶⁵ In such a situation, finding a responsible partner for legal marriage became a more urgent concern for women than liberating oneself from the domesticity of family life.⁶⁶ The trajectories of sexual liberation also differed between the Soviet Union and the West. In the West, sexual liberation began as a grassroots reaction to a decade of traditional sexual roles and norms. In the Soviet Union, it was implicitly promoted by the government itself, against the will of women who often wanted stable sexual and family relationships. Although Stalin was repressive in many respects, a wide-range of sources attest that extramarital sex flourished after the war. The experience of wartime sexual transformation and postwar pronatalist government intervention took Soviet women down a different road from the path taken by their sisters in the US and Britain.

NOTES

1. Igor' Kon, *Seksual'naia kul'tura v Rossii: Klubnichka na berezke* (M.: Vremia, 2010), 271-277.
2. John Costello, *Virtue under Fire: How World War II Changed Our Social and Sexual Attitudes* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1987), 257-274. Betty Friedan discussed this contradiction of unhappy postwar American middle-class women living a comfortable material life in her influential work, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).
3. Gail Lapidus, "The Female Industrial Labor Force: Reassessment, and Options," in Arcadius Kahan, Blair Ruble, eds., *Industrial Labor in the USSR* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979), 237.
4. Lapidus, "The Female Industrial Labor Force...", 237. In the United States, between 1900 and 2001 the percentage of women in total workforce shifted from 18 to 47 percent. The percentage of working women among total number of adult women increased from 28 percent in 1940 to 34 percent in 1945. However, more than 50% of women who were mobilized into the workforce during the war left after the war. Daron Acemoglu and David H. Autor, "Women, War, and Wages: The Effect of Female Labor Supply on the Wage Structure at Midcentury," *Journal of Political Economy* 112, 3 (2004): 498-499.
5. Oleg Budnitskii's paper in this collection provides a detailed description of this development within the Red Army.
6. Lenin criticized Inessa Armand for supporting the notion of "free love," which, he feared, bourgeois ladies might interpret as freedom from childbirth and acceptance of adultery. Cited in Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 252. Free love, as a theory was not rejected by male Bolshevik leaders, such as Lunacharskii in the early

1920s, but by the end of 1920s, free love, which was considered to have promoted sexual debauchery, was openly attacked. Kent H. Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 60-71. Sheila Fitzpatrick argued that “free love” was more popular among male than female students, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), in particular Chapter 4.

7. Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 171-176.

8. This policy change was due to demographic concerns and accompanied criminalization of abortion. Goldman’s book provides detailed coverage of family laws in the 1920s and 1930s.

9. Rudolf Schlesinger’s translation of family laws and related discourse provide useful materials. Rudolf Schlesinger, ed., *The Family in the USSR* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1949).

10. *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke: Istoricheskie ocherki*, t. 2, 1940-1959 (M.: ROSSPEN, 2001), 25.

11. For this figure, see Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 1; From Moscow alone, 1.5 million (one-third of the prewar population) were evacuated. G.F. Krivosheev, “Ob itogakh statisticheskikh issledovaniĭ poter’ Vooruzhennykh sil SSSR,” in R.B. Evdokimov, ed., *Liudskie poteri SSSR v Velikoi otechestvennoi voine* (SPb., 1995), 77, as cited in Anna Krylova, “ ‘Healers of Wounded Souls’: The Crisis of Private Life in Soviet Literature,” *The Journal of Modern History* 73, 2 (June 2001): 309. Mention should be made of the millions deported as ethnic minority groups in preparation for the war, which is not included in the number of evacuees.

12. Vera Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 71.

13. “No. 67. Iz dnevnika moskovskogo vracha E. Sakharovoi,” in *Moskva voennaia 1941/1945: Memuary i arkhivnye dokumenty* (M.: Izdatel’stvo ob’edineniia Mosgorarkhiv, 1995), 657-687.

14. Ilya Ehrenburg, *The War, 1941-1945* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1964), 123.

15. Vera Ketlinskaia, “Nastia,” in *Den’ prozhityi dvazhdy* (1945) cited in Lisa Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941-1995: Myth, Memories, and Monuments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 108-110.

16. “The Cranes are Flying (*Letiat zhuravli*)” came out in 1957. The director was Mikhail Kalatozov.

17. The director of “Ballad of a Soldier (*Ballada o soldate*)” was Grigorii Chukhrai.

18. Liudmila Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo* (M.: Eksmo, 2006 (2000)), 23. She became the first woman winner of the Russian Booker Prize for this novel in 2001. Ulitskaia, whose readership is predominantly female, lived through this period and knows it well. Her works, and the eponymous television series, are what most educated Russians today know about reproductive issues of the wartime and postwar era. My thanks to Elena Vitenberg and Vladislav Zubok for introducing me to this novel and movie.

19. According to Anna Krylova’s study, Soviet female combatants during WWII considered that “not having a crush and not being emotionally involved was often treated by them as missing some essential experience of life.” However, they were not

supposed to engage in sexual acts while in military service. Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 282-284.

20. Interview material with Z.P. Grokhova (1921) at <http://www.gender-ehu.org/Interviews.htm>. Last accessed on February 28, 2012.

21. Before July 8, 1944, such a union, even without registration of marriage, would have carried legal meaning. In this sense, the use of the term “marriage” did reflect the legal reality. Despite the 1944 Law’s non-recognition of common-law marriages as legal, especially women continued to refer to such unions as “marriage.”

22. Svetlana A. Aleksievich, *U voyny ne zhenskoe litso. Poslednie svideteli: povesti* (M.: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1988), 170.

23. Interview material with E.A. Iasinskaia (born in 1922) at <http://www.gender-ehu.org/Interviews.htm>. Last accessed on February 28, 2012.

24. Barbara Alpern Engel and Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, ed., *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, 197-198.

25. Mark Popovskii, *Tretii lishnii: On, ona i sovestskii rezhim* (London: Overseas Publications Interchange, Ltd., 1985), 93-102. The author, an émigré to the USA, served in the war as a fel’dsher. He writes that he was asked to facilitate abortions by women or their sexual partners and that he also conducted a number of medical examinations to establish pregnancy, then used to dismiss female soldiers from the army.

26. In September 1942, there was a series of decrees and orders regarding state aid for pregnant women who worked in the military both as civilians and service women. They were published in Iu.N. Ivanova, *Khrabreishie iz prekrasnykh: zhenshchiny Rossii v voynakh* (M.: ROSSPEN, 2002), 241-243. One of them, the September 1, 1942 decree on “the procedure of wartime payment of state aid for pregnancy and birth among the enlisted and junior officers who were discharged from the Red Army, Navy, and NKVD troops” stipulated that discharged pregnant service women would receive state aid (*posobie*) for 35 days before birth and 28 days afterwards. In addition, at birth there would be an additional sum for the child. Ivanova evaluates these decrees and orders quite positively as “measures for the preservation of women’s health and restoration of the country’s population” (171) and never mentions that discharged pregnant service women were often stigmatized. However, many such women never even applied for such aid due to the stigma and the brief duration of benefits.

27. GARF (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii), f. 8009, op. 1, d. 489, l. 4-5.

28. RGASPI (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii), f. 17, op. 122, d. 72, l. 39, 100.

29. GARF, f. 8009, op. 32, d. 164, l. 1.

30. GARF, f. 8009, op. 1, d. 489, l. 5.

31. Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 114-115.

32. Ibid., 182-183. Of the 10,000 children that German soldiers fathered in occupied Ukraine, it would be difficult to distinguish what percentages were results of coerced or semi-coerced, and consensual sex. Historians have not yet studied this complex issue adequately.

33. GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 65, l. 211; d. 67, l. 324; d. 100, l. 30, 104.

34. Atina Grossman, "A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers," in Robert Moeller, ed., *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).
35. Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 73 (Translation by Robert Conquest).
36. Ibid., 69-121. The January 4, 1949 law "on strengthening criminal responsibility for rape (*iznasilovanie*)" was issued by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet SSSR. Harold Berman, *Soviet Criminal Law and Procedures: The RSFSR Codes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 62.
37. Here my discussion focuses on the cases that involved sex on a consensual basis among Soviet citizens. The cases of wartime rape under occupation requires separate studies and would be especially interesting if compared with popular and academic studies about survivors of Soviet rape such as Sander, Helke and Barbara Johr, eds., *Befreier und Befreite: Krieg, Vergewaltigungen, Kinder* (München: Verlag Antje Kunstmann GmbH, 1992). For academic studies, see Grossman, and Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion 1941-1945* (Hamburg: Hamburger Instituts für Sozialforschung, 2010).
38. In rural areas, for the age category 18-49 there were only 28 men for every 100 women. *Sovetskaia povsednevnost' i massovoe soznanie, 1939-1945* (M.: ROSSPEN, 2003), 296.
39. On this, see Mie Nakachi, "Abortion is Killing Us: Women's Medicine and the Dilemmas for Postwar Doctors in the Soviet Union, 1944-1948," in Frances Bernstein, Christopher Burton, and Dan Healey, eds., *Soviet Medicine: Culture, Practice, and Science* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).
40. Engel and Posadskaya, *A Revolution of Their Own*, 179. The aforementioned Iasinskaia said during the interview that people asked demobilized female soldiers when their children were born, suspecting that they were children of wartime sexual relations during their service in the Red Army.
41. Aleksievich, *U voiny ne zhenskoe litso*, 171, 225.
42. For details of this history, see Mie Nakachi "Population, Politics, and Reproduction: Late Stalinism and Its Legacy," *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
43. In 1948, party functionaries A. Abramova and O. Mishakova wrote a report addressed to Stalin, on the difficulties of single mothers caused by the war and the 1944 Family Law. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 118, d. 255, l. 49-50.
44. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 1614, l. 117.
45. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 1616, l. 1.
46. Laurie Bernstein, ed., Mary Leder, *My Life in Stalinist Russia: An American Woman Looks Back* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 2001), 255.
47. Vera Ketlinskaia, "Nastia," in *Den' prozhityi dvazhdy* (1945) cited in Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, 108-110.
48. Interview with A. in Moscow on November 9, 2002.
49. The rate of male plaintiffs was lowest in Moscow, where 59 percent of the selected divorce cases were filed by men. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 492, l. 57. Other regions recorded 60-80 percent. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 492, l. 151.

50. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 491, l. 50.
51. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 491, l. 2, 50, 72.
52. On RSFSR, see GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 491, l. 94. On Ukraine, see GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 491, l. 2-3.
53. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 491, l. 151-152.
54. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 1630, l. 107.
55. For examples, see GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 1630, l. 101, 141.
56. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 1630, l. 165.
57. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 1630, l. 232.
58. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 491, l. 105-107.
59. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 1630, l. 205.
60. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 1630, l. 158, 160. Interestingly, legal experts insisted on no exceptions to the 1944 Law's divorce clauses. Furthermore, Soviet law had no provision for punishing adultery, whether with allies, enemies, or countrymen. Children, forcibly conceived with individuals who belonged to enemy countries, were equally protected and entitled. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 1630, l. 158, 160.
61. The legal expert had a very clear answer to this question: those who were already paying child support in the prewar period were responsible for child support until their children turned 18. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 1630, l. 281-282.
62. GARF, f. 9492, op. 1, d. 1630, l. 153.
63. Alexandre Avdeev, Alain Blum, Irina Troitskaia, *L'avortement et la contraception en Russie et dans l'ex-URSS: histoire et présent* (Dossiers et Recherches, 41, INED, Oct. 1993) is the most comprehensive statistical analysis of abortion and contraception in the Soviet Union and shows clearly the path by which twentieth-century Russia became a stable abortion regime.
64. *Home Again*, a short 1947 novel by Zh. Gausner, mocks competition among young women in the postwar marriage market. Zh. Gausner, "Vot my i doma (Home again)," *Zvezda*, no. 11, 1947.
65. In a society where many children were raised without fathers, it was not always obvious who was born out-of-wedlock and who were offspring of soldiers who died in the war, so not all out-of-wedlock children and their mothers were identified and discriminated against. However, single mothers bitterly complained about their children not having the name of the father on their birth certificates. Also, when they were identified, they faced prejudice. See Abramova's report in RGASPI, f. 17, op. 118, d. 255, l. 55. By the 1970s, because out-of-wedlock children were allowed to have the name of the father in the birth certificate, and the rise in the number of divorced single mothers made raising a child/children alone a common experience, single mother life became tolerable. On this, see Jennifer Utrata "Counting on Motherhood, Not Men: Single Mothers and Social Change in the New Russia," Ph.D. dissertation, (University of California, Berkeley, 2008).
66. Even if Soviet women had full-time jobs, they were still doing most of the household work.

ABSTRACTS

Abstract

The Soviet Union's wartime mobilization and evacuation brought about unprecedented demographic changes, tearing prewar families and marriages apart. This article analyzes how romantic or sexual relationships between women and men evolved during the war, how they affected the formation of postwar marriages and family, and how the Soviet government attempted to influence this process. In postwar England and the United States, political and religious leadership often condemned the sexual practices that developed during the war and called for a return to traditional marriages where the husband, the breadwinner of the family, would support a housewife and children. This paper argues that far from reimposing traditional sexual values, the Soviet government actually promoted the continuation of wartime sexual practice in the postwar period due to its overriding pronatalist concerns. This postwar experience produced a different path to the women's liberation movement for Soviet women than for women in the West.

Résumé

En Union soviétique, pendant la guerre, la mobilisation et l'évacuation ont été à l'origine de changements démographiques sans précédents, séparant les familles et brisant les mariages. Cet article analyse l'évolution des rapports de genre pendant cette période, la répercussion de cette évolution sur la vie familiale d'après-guerre, avec notamment la formation de nouveaux couples, et les interventions du gouvernement soviétique. Dans l'après-guerre, en Angleterre et aux États-Unis, les dirigeants politiques et religieux ont condamné les pratiques sexuelles qui s'étaient développées pendant la guerre. Ils ont appelé à un retour à l'union traditionnelle, au sein de laquelle l'homme est le soutien de famille et pourvoit aux besoins de son épouse et de ses enfants. En Union soviétique, le gouvernement n'a pas imposé ce retour aux traditions. Préoccupé par le problème primordial de la natalité, il a encouragé les pratiques développées pendant la guerre, ouvrant ainsi une voie au mouvement de libération des femmes soviétiques différente de celle empruntée par les Occidentales.

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