

# Women and History:

Gender perspectives of everyday life (1970s-1980s)





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## Foreword

For years, women combined multiple roles in everyday life – mothers, breadwinners, workers, etc. Though the roles were always considered a part of daily life, they have rarely gained particular attention in the public discourse. Women often need to juggle between different tasks and maintain the public image of the perfect mother, wife, and worker. The global pandemic has put a focus once again on the redistribution of gender roles in the household, economic life, and everyday life in general. Times are different, but the challenges are similar – the invisible contribution of women in society's functioning remains in place.

The Heinrich Boell Foundation is a continuous supporter and promoter of gender democracy through a wide scope of activities within its work in different countries, including Georgia and Ukraine. This includes a number of publications and initiatives aimed at expanding the local discourses on gender topics.

The main idea of the joint project, implemented by the Heinrich Boell Foundation offices in Kyiv and Tbilisi, is to promote public discussion on Women and History. Over the years, a number of important initiatives to support research on women's history have been implemented in both Ukraine and Georgia. However, much more can and needs to be done in this area and we hope the project will contribute to this process.

This year's pilot project covers two countries, Georgia and Ukraine. Based on the example of the articles from these countries, we invite you to explore different aspects of women's domestic and professional life. Women's domestic and professional life during the late Soviet period (1970s and 1980s) is a result of discussions with Heinrich Boell Foundation partners, to whom we are particularly grateful. During discussions, we raised following key questions:

- What were women's social and economic conditions under state socialism during the 1970s-1980s (e.g., policies of paid maternity leave, directives for women's equal participation in the labor market, material and institutional support for raising children, etc.)?
- What were the preconditions for women's economic empowerment and integration into the labor market?
- What were the discourses of sexuality during the Brezhnev era and how were these discourses changing when they were cross-cutting local cultural and nationalist aspects? How did the discourses of sexuality affect women and how did women internalize some of the disciplinary practices?

The research period, 1970-1980s, was selected with a purpose to review the events and practices of the rather recent past and also, during discussions with our partners, it became obvious that there was not much research done on this period and it would be useful to have academic articles covering late Soviet period.

The cooperation resulted in a publication combining four articles from both countries (two from each country) under the umbrella of the joint topic “Gender perspectives of everyday life.” The publication is useful for students, researchers, and academics working in different fields of history and gender studies. We will also hold an online public presentation of the publication.

The countries share much in common, starting from similar everyday practices and going through active transformation processes over the last decades. The presented works in this publication serve as a starting point into extending further regional and thematic collaboration among wider circles of researchers and academics, including representatives of other countries (e.g., Armenia, Belarus, etc.). We believe that the project will contribute to enlarging the regional network of feminist researchers on memory politics and will strengthen cooperation among them. We also hope that our project continues in future focusing on women writers, protests/activism, war experiences starting from the 1990s, and more. The publication is useful for students, researchers, and academics working in different fields of history and gender studies. We hope that a critical approach towards the past and its respective analysis will contribute not only to strengthening cooperation, but also to changing the narrative on the role of women in our history.

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WORKING WOMAN



MOTHERHOOD  
AS WOMEN'S KEY  
SOCIAL function?

KINDERGARTEN

SCHOOL

# **“TRADE UNIONS ARE ALSO WORKING HARD IN THIS REGARD”: LABOUR POLICY AND GENDER ISSUES OF WOMEN’S WORK IN UKRAINE IN THE 1970s – EARLY 1980s**

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## **Abstract**

This study provides an overview of the main activities and agendas of trade union committees regarding the organization of Ukrainian women’s daily wage work in the 1970s and early 1980s. It outlines major trade unions’ roles, objectives, and agendas concerning gender issues within the labour market and the discourse on women’s roles in society. It focuses on the issues of improving women’s working, social, and living conditions, which local and national trade union committee members were responsible for implementing and controlling. The analysis of a case study on the transfer of women workers from the prohibited for women work demonstrates how trade union committees of various levels and government officials discussed and adjusted implementation of gender labour policy on the shopfloor.

In 1975, in the article "Trade Unions and Women," published by the International Democratic Federation of Women in the *Women of the Whole World* journal, Alexandra Biryukova, the secretary of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (ACCTU), wrote: "Socialism has opened endless opportunities for women to use one of the greatest human rights – the right to work. The Soviet state guarantees employment to all women who want to work. [...] Having declared motherhood women's social function, the Soviet state took care of the health of mother and child: paid maternity leave, free medical care, special occupational safety and healthcare for women, and development of a preschool institutions network. Trade unions are also working hard in this regard. For a woman to be able to productively work in the production sector, she must be sure her children are safe. [...] Due to the wide female participation in social production, women need greater help in domestic work and performance of their duties as housewives."<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared 1975 the International Women's Year and thus opened the UN Decade for Women (1975–1985). During 1975, existing gender inequalities in professional, labour and educational spheres, in healthcare and housekeeping were discussed at both national and international levels. In Ukraine, enterprises and trade unions celebrated International Women's Year by holding socialist competitions and all-Union inspections of women's working, living, and leisure conditions. The State Five-Year Plan for National Economic Development of the Ukrainian SSR for 1976–1980 determined that special attention should be paid to "improving women's occupational safety and healthcare conditions."<sup>2</sup>

In the 1970s, numerous articles published in national and international Soviet journals, as well as reports and reviews by female members of Soviet delegations at the congresses of women's organizations or at International Labour Organization meetings, were similar to those expressed by Alexandra Biryukova. They all reiterated that in the state socialist country, women were not only employed in the production sector on equal terms with men and enjoyed equal rights, but also successfully combined their working and childrearing tasks with the help of the state's support that protected them via numerous social institutions and mother and child care system. Since the late 1940s, this thesis dominated the Soviet rhetoric aiming to demonstrate the Soviet socialist project's success in improving women's labour conditions and labour rights.

Emancipation was one of the major state socialist promises to women. However, working women's lives in Soviet reality could be characterized by presence of the "double day", elements of patriarchal social order, equality on paper and in numbers rather than in family life or work, understanding of motherhood as women's key social function, and priority of state interests over women's concerns.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Александра Бирюкова, «Профсоюзы и женщины», *Женщины Мира* (1975): 51–52.

2 Про державний план економічного і соціального розвитку Української РСР на 1976-1980 роки, Постанова Ради Міністрів Української РСР, 11 грудня 1976, [ips.ligazakon.net/document/KP760520?an=2&hide=true&lang=ua](https://ips.ligazakon.net/document/KP760520?an=2&hide=true&lang=ua).

3 Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman. Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922–53* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (New York, NY: Harvested Wheatseaf, 1989); David L. Hoffmann and Annette F. Timm, "Utopian Biopolitics: Reproductive Policies, Gender Roles, and Sexuality in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union," in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, ed. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 87–129; Mie Nakachi, *Beyond Replacing the Dead: Women's Welfare and the End of the Soviet Union, Replacing the Dead* (Oxford University Press, 2021); М. Смольницька, «Жінка в радянському суспільстві: офіційний образ і реальна практика», *Україна ХХ ст.: культура, ідеологія, політика* 16 (2011): 162–74; М. Смольницька, «Материнство як соціальна роль (друга половина 1940-х – перша половина 1960-тих років)», *Україна ХХ Століття: Культура, Ідеологія, Політика* 20 (2015): 98–110; Ю. А. Тищенко, «Сім'я в радянській Україні у 1970-х – на початку 1980-х років: Погляд із сьогодення», *Наукові Праці Історичного Факультету Запорізького Національного Університету* 48 (2017): 195–200.



Since the late 1920s – early 1930s, the Soviet state offered women a dual role in society, namely that of a mother and a worker. During this period of rapid industrialization, women began to be involved en masse in the production sector. At the same time, the country's authorities considered the pronatalist policy, which aimed to increase population growth, no less important and, therefore, did not disregard the definition of motherhood as women's key social function. Pronatalism as a policy that regulated population reproduction through economic, administrative, legal, and informational methods was reflected in programs for social support and benefits provision, campaigns on the importance of motherhood and family, and in a ban on abortion and contraception. A number of pronatalist measures and decrees were passed to encourage women to perform their motherly duties. For example, the Family Code of 1936 criminalized abortion and introduced financial assistance to mothers with many children.<sup>4</sup> In 1944, when the need to increase the birth rate became acute again, Soviet authorities passed a decree "On Increasing State Aid to Mothers and Pregnant Women and Enhancing Maternity Protection," which extended maternity leave and expanded the categories of women with children receiving social benefits. At the 1971 party congress, it was announced that child benefits would be further expanded.<sup>5</sup>

The combination of productive and reproductive labour led to a "double day" or development of the so-called "gender contract of the working mother," which assumed women's active participation in the full-time wage work while also performing a major role in caring for the children, family and household<sup>6</sup>. The state authorities constantly reported on the development of a kindergarten network, provision of workplace amenities and social services, and organization of a working regime for women aimed to help them to shoulder work and care responsibilities. Like in other state socialist countries of this period, focus on material and institutional support for women and motherhood, which, nevertheless, did not undermine their role as wage workers, demonstrated the dependence of the socialist economy in Ukraine, and in the USSR as a whole, on women's participation in production.<sup>7</sup>

This study analyzes the main activities and objectives of trade union committees regarding the organization of Ukrainian women's daily wage work in the 1970s and early 1980s. It outlines major trade unions' roles, objectives, and agendas concerning issues of gendered labour market and the discourse on women's roles in society. It focuses on the questions of improving

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4 David L. Hoffmann, "Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 1 (2000): 35–54; David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 107; Yoshie Mitsuyoshi, "Maternalism, Soviet-Style. The Working 'Mothers with Many Children' in Post-War Western Ukraine," in *Maternalism Reconsidered: Motherhood, Welfare and Social Policy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Marian van der Klein et al. (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2012), 209–210.

5 To learn more about pronatalism and social policy regarding women, see Nakachi, *Beyond Replacing the Dead*.

6 А. Темкина и А. Роткирх, «Советские гендерные контракты и их трансформация в современной России», *Социс* 11 (2002): 6–9.

7 For the case of Hungary see Susan Zimmermann, "It Shall Not Be a Written Gift, but a Lived Reality': Equal Pay, Women's Work, and the Politics of Labour in State-Socialist Hungary, Late 1960s to Late 1970s," in *Labor in State-Socialist Europe, 1945–1989: Contributions to a History of Work*, ed. Marsha Siefert (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2020), 337–372. For the case of the German Democratic Republic see Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

working conditions for women, which local and national trade union committee members were responsible for implementing and controlling. Staying close to the sources, this study explores the case study of women glassblowers transfer from prohibited for women work to demonstrate how trade union committees of various levels and government officials discussed and adjusted gendered labour policy implementation on the ground. Although women workers' issues were not limited to social security and better working conditions in the Soviet period, this study does not cover the problem of equal pay, discrimination in employment and dismissal, as well as vocational training and development.

To analyze the main agendas of trade union committees in organizing and improving women's working conditions, this study explores archival sources, such as reports, notes, information from meetings of local and regional trade union committees, women's commissions, and the Ukrainian Republican Council of Trade Union Committees. The basic principles of gender, pronatalist, and labour policy of the 1970s–1980s, Soviet authorities' promises, legislative changes regarding women's working and living conditions, and central trade unions' directives provide a context for discussing local trade unions' objectives and activities. The combination of such sources allows this study to trace the trade unions' areas of responsibility and the problems that trade union committees identified and tried to solve to improve women's working conditions.

## Trade Unions

In Ukraine, trade unions were an integral part of the Soviet system of workers' control and social care. They had a distinct hierarchical structure and were subordinated to the party. Factory, plant, and local trade union committees were the primary element of the trade unions' structural organization. They worked directly at enterprises and represented workers' interests regarding production, working and living conditions, as well as cultural activities. They reported to the regional and central branch committees of trade unions, which in turn were subordinated to the Ukrainian Republican Council of Trade Unions. The Congress of Trade Unions, which took place every five years, was the highest trade union body in the USSR; between the congresses, this function was performed by the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1970s, factory, plant, and local trade union committees monitored the implementation of production and economic plans, and work quality, implemented measures to increase labour productivity, organized socialist competitions, as well as monitored the administration's compliance with the Labour Code and government regulations. Trade union

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8 Sarah Ashwin and Simone Clarke, *Russian Trade Unions and Industrial Relations in Transition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 17–23; Paul Kubicek, "Ukrainian Trade Unions since 1945," in *Trade Unionism Since 1945: Towards a Global History*, vol. 1, *Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East (Trade Unions. Past, Present and Future)*, ed. Craig Phelan, vol. 1 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 292–93; Устав Профессиональных Союзов СССР (Утвержден XIII съездом профсоюзов СССР 1 ноября 1963 года, изменения внесены 04.03.1968; 24.03.1972; 25.03.1977), 1977, [www.libussr.ru/doc\\_ussr/usr\\_6015.htm](http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/usr_6015.htm).

committees were entitled to approve the administration's decisions concerning working conditions, dismissal, and resolving workers' daily issues. They could make proposals to higher economic and government agencies, apply measures to improve working conditions and organize and distribute social and material assistance.<sup>9</sup> However, protest as an instrument of pressure on the employer, disagreement with, or negotiations on the improvement of working conditions and remuneration was not available at any level of the trade union committees' organization.

As Aleksandra Biryukova pointed out in the article cited above, to support women in dealing with their productive and reproductive roles, trade union committees aimed to organize work and daily support as well as provide social and material assistance to women and working mothers. The Regulations on the Rights of the Factory, Plant, and Local Trade Union Committees, approved in 1971, emphasized that the trade union committee, together with the enterprises' and organizations' administrations, "shall take measures to ensure benefits established by law for women, healthcare services for them, and improvement of women's working and living conditions."<sup>10</sup> Trade union councils and committees formed commissions for work among women that monitored and inspected women's sanitary and hygienic conditions at the workplace, amenities at enterprises, provided social assistance and childrearing support, as well as organized meetings, seminars, lectures, and socialist competitions among women. Members of these commissions reported to union's leaders at the workplace about any problems they identified, and complaints they received. Also, they held the right to make suggestions and recommendations to governing bodies, other commissions of the trade union committee, and even state administration.<sup>11</sup> However, control and improvement of women's working conditions were the responsibility of not only commissions for work among women; these issues were also addressed by other committees within the structure of trade unions.

## Implementation of Women's Labour Policy

Trade unions monitored the implementation of regulations and labour laws, organized workplace amenities, and helped resolve conflicts that could arise while implementing plans to improve working conditions, as was the case with female glassblowers. In 1975, the Technical Inspectorate of the Ukrainian Republican Council of Trade Unions demanded that

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9 Про затвердження Положення про права фабричного, заводського, місцевого комітету професійної спілки, Указ Президії Верховної Ради СРСР, 1971, zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/v2151400-71/ed19710927#-Text; Устав Профсоюзных Союзов СССР.

10 Про затвердження Положення про права фабричного, заводського, місцевого комітету професійної спілки.

11 Э. С. Новикова, В. С. Языкова, и З. Л. Янкова, *Женщина. Труд. Семья (социологический очерк)* (Москва: Профиздат, 1978), 79–108; «О работе профсоюзных организаций республики по проведению Международного года женщин в Украинской ССР», 1975, Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9597, Арк. 3-5 (Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України); Протокол заседания Комиссии Президиума Укрсовпрофа по работе среди женщин, 19 декабря 1976, Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9597, Арк. 6-8 (Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України); «Справка о работе комиссии по работе среди женщин Житомирского областного совета профсоюзов», 1975, Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9597, Арк. 21-25 (Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України).

the administration of the Christmas decorations factories in Terebovlya, Lysychansk, and Klavdiyevo and the Lutsk factory of household items “release” about 500 women working as glassblowers and replace them with male workers. This request aimed to improve women’s working conditions and “release” them from heavy and hazardous types of work. To support this demand, the inspectorate referred to the USSR People’s Commissariat for Labour’s 1932 resolution that forbade women to work in heavy and hazardous industries. Having inspected the working conditions at the Christmas decoration factories, the commission decided that “non-mechanized glass blowing,” that is the glassblower profession and, in particular, Christmas decoration production, belonged to the list of jobs prohibited for women. The factories’ female workers disagreed with such a decision and sent numerous complaints and requests to the Ukrainian Republican Council of Trade Unions.<sup>12</sup> The exact reasons for their dissatisfaction remain unknown, but, as the report stated, in the event of transfer to another position, women could lose the right to additional days off, free improved food provision, and additional retirement benefits, all of which they received while working as glassblowers.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the changes could cause them to lose their jobs if the factory administration was not able to find a new suitable position for them.

Between 1970 and 1985, according to Soviet statistics, women accounted for 51% of industrial employees in the USSR and ranged between 50-52% in the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>14</sup> Like in previous decades, Soviet authorities expected that women, while actively participating in the economy, would also continue to care for the family, run the household, and raise their children. The decline of the birth rate that became evident from the early 1970s<sup>15</sup> pushed Soviet authorities to return to the rhetoric that stressed that motherhood was women’s main social function. As women continued to be actively involved in economic production, it was the women workers who were at the center of the discussions on the importance of combining women’s wage work and care work.<sup>16</sup>

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12 Ю. В. Гаевский, «О высвобождении женщин с запрещенных работ», 16 мая 1975, Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9782, Арк. 3 (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України); Ю. В. Гаевский, «О высвобождении женщин с запрещенных работ», 25 апреля 1975, Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9782, Арк. 2-2а (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України); О. Я. Касьяненко, «Технической инспекцией Укрсовпофа...», 16 апреля 1975, Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9782, Арк. 1-2 (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України).

13 Гаевский, «О высвобождении женщин с запрещенных работ», 16 мая 1975; Касьяненко, «Технической инспекцией Укрсовпофа...».

14 Народное хозяйство СССР в 1985 году. Статистический ежегодник (Москва: Финансы и статистика, 1986), 395.

15 According to Soviet statistics, natural population growth rate in the Ukrainian SSR was 13.6 in 1960, dropped to 6.4 in 1970, and accounted for only 2.9 in 1985. Народное хозяйство СССР в 1985 году, 33.

16 Sue Bridger, “Young Women and Perestroika,” in *Women and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Linda Edmondson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 187–191; Nakachi, *Beyond Replacing the Dead*, 204-215; Linda Racioppi and Katherine O’Sullivan See, “Organizing Women before and after the Fall: Women’s Politics in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia,” *Signs* 20, no. 4 (1995): 818–850. Beyond Replacing the Dead; Linda Racioppi and Katherine O’Sullivan See, “Organizing Women before and after the Fall: Women’s Politics in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia,” *Signs* 20, no. 4 (1995)



The requirement to “release” women from heavy work, which caused a conflict at Christmas decoration factories, aimed to protect the health of “future mothers” from the harmful effects of glassware production. Since female protection relied on the vision of motherhood as women’s major social function, issues related to combining reproductive and productive roles were addressed in terms of protecting motherhood (and childhood).<sup>17</sup> Therefore, measures to improve women’s working conditions were driven by the ideas such as of protecting them from overwork and working in hazardous conditions and emphasized the importance of women’s reproductive role.<sup>18</sup> To the same end, the 1970 Labour Code restricted women’s work on night shifts and overtime hours and guaranteed maternity leave, provided breaks for breastfeeding, prohibited dismissing pregnant women, and reduced production norms for pregnant women and women with small children.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, to create working conditions that help women to combine their work and home responsibilities and improve their healthcare, trade unions and factories’ administrations were to arrange dining rooms, canteens, rest and “health” rooms as well as built sports grounds, open grocery stores at the workplace, and provide access to pre-school childcare, sanatoriums or recreation centers. Female employees were to be provided with sanitary facilities and workplace amenities, namely changing rooms, showers, washbasins, hygiene rooms, and rooms for feeding children.<sup>20</sup> Trade unions, in cooperation with the administration, were to implement these standards and monitor their compliance.

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17 Melanie Ilic, “Generals without Armies, Commanders without Troops’: Gorbachhev’s ‘protection’ of Female Workers,” in *Women in Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Rosalind Marsh (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 228–230. To learn more on the difference between the discourses of female workers protection and equality, see Eileen Boris, *Making the Woman Worker: Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919-2019* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 17–52.

18 For the analysis of the ideas and conclusions of sociologists, economists, and demographers of that time on how to solve women’s problems and needs in working life, see Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*, 166-171.

19 Об утверждении основ законодательства Союза ССР и союзных республик о труде, Закон СССР, 15 июля 1970, [www.libussr.ru/doc\\_ussr/usr\\_7348.htm](http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/usr_7348.htm).

20 See, for example, information, notes, reports and “Indicators of the All-Union Public Review of Working Women’s Working, Living and Recreation Conditions at Enterprises and Organizations” in various regions of the Ukrainian SSR and in various industries in 1975: Информации ОСПС о выполнении постановления президиума ВЦСПС от 11 апреля 1975 г. «О проведении на предприятиях и в организациях народного хозяйства Всесоюзного общественного смотра условий труда, быта и отдыха трудящихся женщин на предприятиях и в организациях Украинской ССР», Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9783, Арк. 5, 8, 16, 26-27, 38-43, 54-60, 68-71, 81-86, 97, 105, 115, 130, 134, 140 Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України); Информации УРК профсоюзов о выполнении постановления президиума ВЦСПС от 11 апреля 1975 г. «О проведении на предприятиях и в организациях народного хозяйства Всесоюзного общественного смотра условий труда, быта и отдыха трудящихся женщин на предприятиях и в организациях Украинской ССР», Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9784, Арк. 1-15, 20, 49-51, 54, 66-67, 70, 81 (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України); Информации УРК профсоюзов об итогах Всесоюзного общественного смотра условий труда, быта и отдыха трудящихся женщин за 1978 г., Ф. 2605, Оп. 9, Спр. 165 (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України). This information is also reflected in the reports of local trade union committees and commissions for work among women, for instance: З. П. Осташевская, «Информация Закарпатского обкома профсоюза рабочих текстильной и легкой промышленности», 1986, Ф. Р-1892, Оп. 2, Спр. 302, Арк. 9 (Державний архів Закарпатської області).

Inspections and all-Union assessment of women's working and leisure conditions, which were conducted every few years, were one of the means for collecting information on female workers' needs and problems. For example, in the course of the celebration of the International Women's Year in 1975 in Ukraine, more than 122,000 commissions were established to conduct such inspections. These commissions summarized information on women's social and daily needs in the workplace and trade unions' resource needs to improve women's working conditions.<sup>21</sup> In addition, they had to check women's working conditions to prevent health issues and ensure that maternity and parental leaves were provided according to the law. Together with the trade unions' technical inspections, the commissions for work among women also evaluated working conditions. As in the case of the glassblowing factories, they all reported on women workers' problems at the meetings with the trade union leaders and central administration.

For instance, during the 1970s and early 1980s, trade union women's commissions noted that the problem of "releasing" women from heavy and hazardous work remained unresolved in many cases. In 1978, the Women's Commission of the Ukrainian Republican Council of Trade Unions reported that the Ministry of Industrial Construction and ministries of other industries failed to mechanize women's labour and transfer women to lighter work with appropriate pay.<sup>22</sup> Resolving these issues, they believed, would contribute to the better organization of women's working conditions and take into account their social role and work obligations. In this regard women's commissions mentioned also the need for further automation, mechanization and reconstruction of production processes, abolition of night shifts and overtime work, and the possibility of part-time work for women upon requests. The commissions also called on employers and trade union leaders to increase the number of preschool child institutions, renovate existing ones, and provide better nutrition for children.<sup>23</sup>

In the glassblowing factories from the above-mentioned example, the problem of transferring women from prohibited work arose because of the protest of the women workers. Interestingly, together with women glassblowers, the Ministry of Light Industry and the Ministry

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21 «О работе профсоюзных организаций республики по проведению Международного года женщин в Украинской ССР».

22 Вера Ивановна Сиволоб, «О ходе Всесоюзного общественного смотра условий труда, быта и отдыха трудящихся женщин на предприятиях и в организациях народного хозяйства Украинской ССР», 1978, Ф. 2605, Оп. 9, Спр. 49, Арк. 7 (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України).

23 «Доклад о практике применения законодательства об охране труда женщин», 19 мая 1975, Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9597, Арк. 11-15 (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України); Протокол заседания Комиссии; «Рекомендации комиссии Президиума Укрсовпрофа по работе среди женщин», 29 января 1980, Ф. 2605, Оп. 9, Спр. 476, Арк. 26-27 (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України). Also implemented and failed measures were listed in reports, informations, and minutes: «Про хід виконання рішень партії та уряду щодо покращення умов праці й побуту жінок», «Про результати всесоюзних оглядів умов праці, побуту і відпочинку жінок, засідань комісії по роботі серед жінок»: Информации УРК профсоюзов об итогах Всесоюзного общественного смотра условий труда, быта и отдыха трудящихся женщин за 1978 г.; Информации ОСПС и УРК профсоюзов о выполнении постановления Советов Министров УССР и Укрсовпрофа №334 от 24 июня 1981 г. «О ходе выполнения решений партии и правительства в вопросах улучшения условий труда и быта женщин...», Ф. 2605, Оп. 9, Спр. 1355 (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України).

of Local Industry also opposed the decision to “release” women from glassblowing factories. In an appeal to the chairman of the Ukrainian Republican Council of Trade Unions, the ministries noted that such measures, aimed at improving women’s working conditions, could lead to factories closing and, ultimately, another category of goods disappearing from the shelves in the stores: “The prohibition of female work in Christmas decoration production will lead to the termination of this production as it is impossible to mechanize it because the process of item’s formation requires limited air supply and continuous pressure regulation. Traditionally, making Christmas decorations has been a women’s profession. Currently, it is impossible to involve men in this production[.] We are asking that women be allowed to continue working in this production.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite local administration’s attempts to encourage men to take women’s work in glassware and Christmas decoration production, none seemed to agree: “Though announcements about recruiting men as glassblowers at the Christmas decoration workshop were systematically placed in the newspaper ‘Radianska Volyn’ [Soviet Volynia] and at the city department of labour resources, there were no people willing to take this position and the factory did not employ a single person in the Christmas decoration workshop.”<sup>25</sup> The official explanation of men’s lack of interest in glassblowing referred to the traditional vision of this work as predominantly female occupation and lack of male labour in the region.

In search of ways and means to solve the issue of “releasing” women glassblowers, the Republican Trade Union Committee sent a request to the Ministry of Health to check the working conditions in Christmas decoration factories and women workers’ health to determine whether it was harmful for them to work at these factories.<sup>26</sup> Inspection results indicated that the women glassblowers’ working conditions were unsatisfactory: the factory workshops were too warm and noisy, the lighting was bad, and the ventilation was poor. Nevertheless, the inspection found no instances of occupation-related diseases among women and, hence, concluded that women could continue working in glassblowing factories if the sanitary and technical working conditions were improved.<sup>27</sup>

As a result, after almost a year of discussions and based on the Ministry of Health inspection report, the Ukrainian Council of Trade Unions sent a request to the ACCTU and the State Committee of the USSR Council of Ministers on Labour and Wages to move the glassblower profession from the category of prohibited for women to the category “hazardous works with the preservation of established benefits.” In addition, the name of the type of work

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24 Гаевский, «О высвобождении женщин с запрещенных работ», 25 апреля 1975.

25 Е. Т. Симинский, «Информация о выполнении письма ММП УРСР №17/34-1423 от 28.03.75», 30 мая 1975, Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9782, Арк. 4-5, (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України).

26 И. Гладкий, «Согласно разъяснению Государственного Комитета Совета Министров СССР...», 13 июня 1975, Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9782, Арк. 8-9 (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України).

27 А. В. Павлов, «По вопросу условий труда и состояния здоровья женщин-стеклодувов, работающих на предприятиях и в цехах изготавливающих елочные украшения», 6 сентября 1975, Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9782, Арк. 10-13 (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України).

performed by women was changed in documents from “non-mechanized glass blowing” to “blowing glassware from glass tubes using gas burners’ flame,” which was to emphasize that the process of making Christmas decorations was technologically different from the one previously prohibited for women.<sup>28</sup>

Two years after the incident at Christmas decoration factories, in April 1978, the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR and the Ukrainian Republican Council of Trade Unions issued a resolution “On Additional Measures to Improve the Working Conditions of Women Employed in the National Economy,” which instructed approving a new list of industries, occupations, and work with heavy and hazardous working conditions, in which the use of women’s labour was prohibited. In July of the same year, the new list was approved and the glassblower profession was not in it anymore.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

According to Soviet authorities, to ensure the successful combination of women’s productive and reproductive labour, the state promised to perform part of the work and responsibilities regarding child care and household duties while parents worked. Hence, it promised to develop a system of childcare and early education institutions and introduce social assistance to mothers and children as well as state healthcare programs for women and children. Gendered labour policy determined the organization of women’s work with regard to the ideas of their active involvement in both wage work and care work, and protection of “future mothers.” It aimed to reduce the working load on women, and foremost working mothers, “release” them from heavy and hazardous work, reduce working hours if possible, and meet women’s social and daily needs at work.

Trade unions of different levels played a significant role in organizing and improving women’s working conditions. During the late socialist period, trade union committees were supposed to implement and monitor plans for female workers’ social and daily support. Depending on many factors, such as the enterprise’s role in the country’s economy, its field of specialization, and even location on the map, they could be more or less successful in providing social services to women workers and fulfilling their needs. A further investigation is needed to answer this question. However, their work was not limited to supervision of labour policies application. Trade union committees and commissions for work among women identified and put on the agenda various issues regarding women’s work and measures that aimed to better organize women’s working conditions. Importantly, in the socialist system

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28 И. Степаненко и И. Гладкий, «Осуществляя государственный надзор...», 30 декабря 1975, Ф. 2605, Оп. 8, Спр. 9782, Арк. 16-17 (Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України).

29 Об утверждении списка производств, профессий и работ с тяжелыми и вредными условиями труда, на которых запрещается применение труда женщин, Постановление Государственного комитета СССР по труду и социальным вопросам и Президиума Всесоюзного Центрального Совета Профессиональных Союзов, 25 июля 1978, [www.libussr.ru/doc\\_ussr/usr\\_9713.htm](http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/usr_9713.htm).



of labour relations in Ukraine, trade unions had the authority to discuss and possibilities to adjust measures aimed at improving women's working conditions on the shopfloor. As the case study on Christmas decoration factories demonstrated, attempts to improve women's working conditions sometimes failed as women workers opposed these changes since they could lead to wage decrease, loss of benefits or even jobs. In such cases, local trade unions were able to negotiate with the central trade union administration and state authorities, and initiate a discussion on evaluation of such conflicting measures. During negotiations, they managed to adjust labour policies according to women workers' demands and economic needs of the region and country.



Море руда.



Пек каменноугольный.



Вариант II.

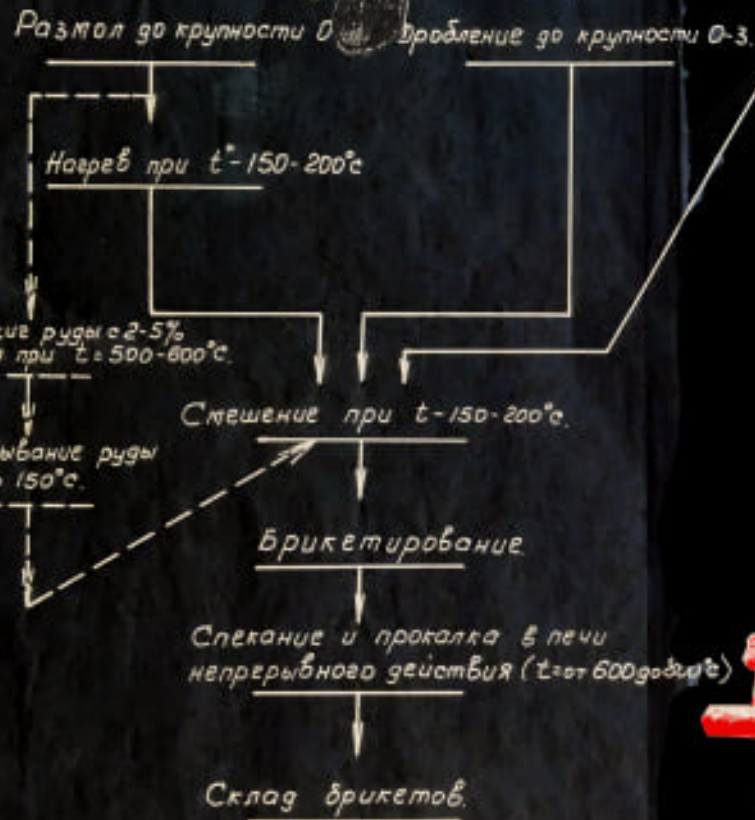
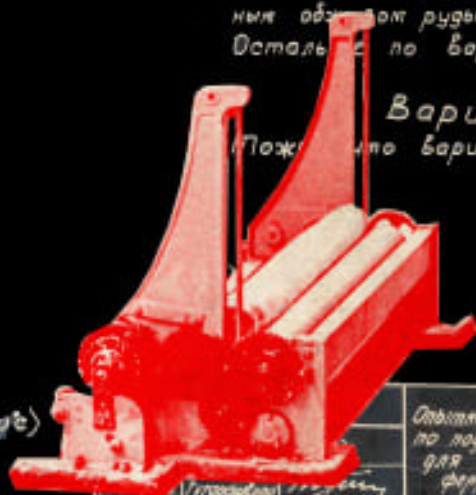
Приготовление брикетов при температуре 150°  
 (классический вариант) с добавлением связующего  
 и кокса. Остальное все по  
 варианту II.

Вариант IIб.

Приготовление брикетов при температуре  
 150° с предварительным восстановительным  
 обжигом руды при 500-600° (пунктир)  
 Остальное по варианту IIб.

Вариант IIв.

Похоже на вариант IIб, но без связующего



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 по литейной линии  
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Генеральный директор	Инженер
С. С. Сидоров	В. В. Виноградов
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Грузинский институт  
 металлургии

# WHITE OVERALLS AND A FUR LONG COAT WOMEN METALLURGISTS OF LATE SOCIALISM

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores life trajectories of Georgian women metallurgists, as well as their social and cultural roles during the 1960s and the 1970s. It aims to analyze the lives of women metallurgists of late socialism: their aspirations and priorities, the ways in which they navigated ideological and political commitments, as well as their personal and professional lives. As the historical sources and material discussed below demonstrate, in the post-war Soviet Union it became apparent that the public image of the Soviet woman had come to epitomize the new Soviet subjectivity, possessing an emerging political consciousness, and serving, unfalteringly and successfully, the collective interest. But drawing on the recollections of women metallurgists themselves, and engaging their lived experience through oral history interviews paint a different picture. In terms of gender politics, the policies of the Soviet Union in late socialism were contradictory, rather than monolithic, and affected the social and professional opportunities available to Soviet women metallurgists in diverse and heterogeneous ways.



## Introduction

In 1928, Liza Nadiradze, who had been sent to a metallurgical factory in Yuzovsk (Ukrainian SSR) as an apprentice, received a letter: "Let me know how many furnaces are in operation. Do visit the boiler room and have a look at the coiled ventilation shaft resembling a gigantic spider. I designed, planned, and calculated the parameters of that ventilation system. If you could find and bring back the diagram of the ventilation coil, I would be immensely grateful." The letter had been written by Giorgi Nikoladze – Liza Nadiradze's mentor and an older friend. Niko Nikoladze's<sup>1</sup> son and an established expert in metallurgy, Giorgi Nikoladze is remembered as the founding father of Georgian metallurgy who personally designed steam-boilers (among other things) and drew up the original plans of the Zestaponi Ferroalloy Factory (Pero).<sup>2</sup> The letter was reprinted in a 1962 issue of the Soviet journal *Drosha*, in Liza Nadiradze's profile, where she is referred to as the first female metallurgist in Georgia. According to the profile, Nadiradze had had the honor of working in the first experimental ferromanganese factory located in Didube, where they tested the furnaces that were later installed at Pero. The profile explains that now (1962), with thirty years of professional experience behind her, Nadiradze had decided to devote her knowledge and expertise to scientific research and had joined the Metallurgical Research Institute at the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR. "Now all her thoughts and energy are directed towards a singular mission – to design and construct a closed-top boiler-furnace, which would help avoid exposure to the 2000°C heat that metallurgists currently have to endure."<sup>3</sup>

Another profile of a woman metallurgist, published in 1974 as part of the 11<sup>th</sup> issue of *Akhalgazrda Zhurnalisti* (The Young Journalist), tells the story of Tamar Akhobadze, also referred to as "the first female metallurgist." The tenor of the profile is remarkably similar to that of Liza Nadiradze's: "Tamar Akhobadze was but a child when she decided to uncover the mystery of metallurgy and to master the technology of tempering steel. This was a courageous aspiration at a time when even male metallurgists, let alone female ones, were a rarity among us."<sup>4</sup> Akhobadze, too, ended up at Pero. After the completion of a practicum at the Chelyabinsk Ferroalloy Factory, she was transferred there and worked as an engineer in the Technical Department. By 1944 she had been promoted to head of the Department of Technical Supervision, while in 1971 she was awarded the Order of Lenin for her "invaluable contribution to the development of Georgian metallurgy."

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1 A politician, a writer and a public figure (1843-1928). Nikoladze graduated from the University of Zurich in 1868 and maintained extensive industrial trade relationships across Europe to execute projects like the construction of the Poti Port, the marketization of coal from the coalfields of Tkibuli and manganese from the mines of Chiatura, as well as various other undertakings. He had been the chairman of "Meore Dasi" (a political organization) since 1886 and was elected to the parliament of the First Georgian Republic (1917-1920).

2 He is also remembered for his contribution to the development of several sports in Georgia, including mountaineering, gymnastics and rowing.

3 M. Tomadze, First Female Metallurgist, *Drosha*, #7, July 1962 (მ. თომადე, პირველი მეტალურგი ქალი, „დროშა“).

4 L. Arsenadze, First Female Metallurgist, *Young Journalist*, #11, November 1974.



The number of profiles in the Soviet press featuring Pero's women metallurgists – like the ones cited above – and their life trajectories, allow us to envision women's socially and economically articulated roles, their participation in public life and politics, as well as their cultural representations in late socialism from a new perspective.<sup>5</sup> In what follows, I try to reflect on the political dynamism and power relations that 'tempered' the heroic images of women metallurgists engaged in selfless labor in late socialist Georgia, where to weld and to smelter alloys was still considered a man's job – a job associated with manly physical exertion and militarized industrialization.

In the paper I discuss the heterogenous nature of gender politics during late socialism that is narrated through the varied experiences of women metallurgists of the period. The archival materials from the party archives as well as Soviet press reports discussing womanhood and women's roles during the period showcase the far-reaching tendency of essentialization regarding women's work and the occupations available to women. On the other hand, oral history interviews with women who were working male-dominated jobs at the heavy metallurgy factory, illustrate that occupying 'men's jobs' was not only associated with better social status and privilege, but also with significantly more autonomy. Exploring the agency of women metallurgists of late socialism reveals that the abilities and skills of maneuvering and performativity were crucial for withstanding the political and patriarchal pressures characteristic of that period.<sup>6</sup>

## Methodology, sources and limitations

Studies of late socialism incorporate several theoretical approaches and varied methodological tools. The (partial) opening of Soviet archives since the early 1990s that was previously classified and unknown to scholars, brought into use a large array of information by provoking new research directions in Soviet studies. Traditional paradigms were displaced, and new questions were articulated.<sup>7</sup> The wider dissemination of oral history methodology brought about another important development in Soviet studies, which made it possible to bring to light previously unexplored stories and experiences, and gave voice to those who had been silenced by traditional scholarship. Oral history brought personal recollections of

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<sup>5</sup> "Late socialism" denotes a period between the mid-1950s and the onset of Perestroika in the early 1980s. In Soviet literature this 30-year period is referred to as "developed socialism". There are multiple different definitions of "late socialism" but its chief characteristics are a much-weakened repressive apparatus, decentralized economy, "transition to communism" and the promise of material abundance, a rise of consumerist culture, more civil liberties in cultural and social lives, etc. For socio-cultural and socio-economic analyses of late socialism, see "Late Socialism: An Eternal State" from Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More – The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Dominic Boyer et al., *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964-1985*, ed. Neringa Klumbyte and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, 1 edition (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012); 'Socialist Consumption and Brezhnev's Stagnation: A Reappraisal of Late Communist Everyday Life (Review Essay)', *Kritika* 17, no. 3 (2016): 665-78.

<sup>6</sup> Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More – The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton University, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Revisionism in Soviet History', *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (December 2007): 77-91.

ordinary people to the center of historical discipline, which enriched the scholarship on the Soviet Union and made it multivocal.

The recent scholarship draws often and extensively on family albums, ideological posters, and film. Therefore, the diversification of sources and methodological approaches creates new opportunities for revisiting the past in new ways.

To explore the history of Pero's women metallurgists, I employed several research methods, including archival study, discourse analysis and oral history interviews. The literature and past scholarship I drew on was just as diverse. More specifically, when discussing the gender politics of the Soviet Union I relied on academic literature widely acclaimed and cited in international scholarship; for reconstructing the late socialist context of Georgia I drew on archival material, newspaper articles and relevant works from the period. My preliminary research questions guided me in developing the selection criteria for the pertinent historical sources, which revolved around the issues of women's employment in heavy metallurgy, public debates – as well as closed-door deliberations – regarding gender politics and gender politics during late socialism. As for reconstructing the personal story of the main protagonist of my study, I brought into scholarly use the oral histories and the ego-documents these women personally shared with me during several field trips I took between May and July 2021.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, early on the research questions were the main determinants for analyzing the materials that were allocated. These questions were rather simple – what was it like to live during late socialism and what were the socio-cultural and political roles women metallurgists performed? However, the more deeply I delved into the research topic, more questions and new research directions emerged: what were the distinct features of the late socialist period and what was special about the lived experience of its women metallurgists?

It is important to note some of the challenges that accompanied the work on this paper. A dearth of Georgian scholarship on the period translates into the disorganized and often lacking nature of knowledge regarding the historical context of late socialist women metallurgists at Pero. Gaps in research on gender politics of the Georgian SSR in the 1960s and 1970s also makes it difficult to contextualize the life histories of Georgian women within an international context and complicates the task of comparing and contrasting their lived experiences with those from other SSRs or beyond. Contemporary scholarly works on gender politics in late socialist Georgia were also few and far between. The only contemporary sources available on these topics are often limited to propaganda leaflets and legislative statutes, where women's rights issues are seen through the ideological lens of the party or the union.

In light of these limitations, it is crucial to clarify a few points at the outset: first, even though the repressive apparatus associated with the Stalinist terror had, by the 1960s and the 1970s,

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<sup>8</sup> Although the text explicitly refers to the life history of a single woman metallurgist. When reconstructing the context and confirming the findings, I relied on oral history interviews conducted with three women. One of these women I interviewed twice (a total of 4 oral history interviews, each longer than two hours).

shrunk and been reduced considerably, the period was still politically charged, and it possessed its own full-fledged repressive mechanisms. Second, economically and socio-culturally active women of the time could not have been separate from the state apparatus. Instead, they lived in it and often participated in its reproduction. Finally, beyond the historical context and its broad structure, ordinary people lived personal and professional lives driven by private interests, aspirations and desires. To see their agency exclusively through political determinants would be reductionist. Such a perspective would produce a much-simplified account of the period and lead to a narrow political reading of its social complexity.<sup>9</sup> To avoid this, I ventured to pose questions that would guide me into novel research directions and the analyses of the social and cultural roles available to women of late socialist Georgia.

This paper is comprised of three sections. The first section provides an overview of the changing nature of womanhood and a variety of functions women were expected to fulfill in the public sphere throughout the history of the Soviet Union. The second section discusses of economic and cultural role as well as expectations women faced during late socialism. The last section tells the story of Shazina Gotsiridze, an accomplished and well-known metallurgist, whose personal history can reveal much about the forms of agency and life trajectories available to women in late socialism period. The paper concludes with a summary of findings and suggestions for future research directions.

## A Brief history of Gender Politics in the USSR

From the earliest days of the Soviet Union, ensuring and preserving gender equality had been an explicit objective of the newly-established state. But, despite the Marxist-Leninist ideology promise that the emancipation of the proletariat would also, by definition, bring about women's liberation, prominent Bolshevik women of the movement still faced significant intra-party confrontations when fighting for progressive legislation concerning women's rights as they related to divorce, marriage, property and other fundamental legislative programs.<sup>10</sup> The Women's Department – Zhenotdel (Женотдел) – comprised of women revolutionaries and backed by the Central Committee in the very first years of the Soviet Union, aimed far beyond guaranteeing the equality of rights: it set out to promulgate a structural transformation where individualized domesticity would be replaced with communal dwellings, collective kitchens and institutions providing daycare, laundry, child rearing and other kinds of family support services. But, with the rise of Stalinism in the 1930s and the closure of the Zhenotdel, these "utopian" visions of a family-free society were no longer included among the anticipated socialist goals. Meanwhile, the names of Bolshevik women revolutionaries became overused tropes of Soviet propaganda.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Alf Lüdtke, 'Polymorphous Synchrony: German Industrial Workers and the Politics of Everyday Life', *International Review of Social History* 38, no. 51 (April 1993): 39–84.

10 Gorsuch, "A Woman Is Not a Man": The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921–1928', *Slavic Review* 55, no. 3 (1996): 636–60.

11 Barbara Evans Clements, 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel', *Slavic Review* 51, no. 3 (1992): 485–96.

Throughout the history of the Soviet Union, assumptions and the public discourse about women's social role and the socialist mission varied according to the political agenda of the day. According to scholarly accounts of gender politics in the USSR, the women's emancipation movement in the Soviet Union had been waning since the 1920s and ultimately lost its radical potential in the context of Stalinist industrialization in the 1930s. Several factors contributed to the decline. Rapid industrialization deepened the reliance on traditional gender roles in the family – in a time of economic turmoil, women's domestic labor became a "cheap" asset that "financed" rapid industrialization.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, economic growth led to an increase in the demand for labor in factories and at construction sites. Women employed in the industry had to combine domestic labor with physically challenging and underpaid employment in the factories serving Stalinist industrialization.<sup>13</sup>

With the onset of World War II, the demand for human resources both on the military and the domestic frontiers surged dramatically, further intensifying women's workload in the family and outside of it. The Great Patriotic War transformed the publicly-articulated meaning of womanhood once again as the war transgressed traditional gender boundaries and recast women as heads of families, workers, and soldiers. The examples from the museum exhibitions dealing with women's representation in World War II reveal the emergence of new gender imagery in this period – "a woman worker providing the front with the necessary material resources or a woman taking care of wounded soldiers brought from the battlefields to the places of safety and those taking care of orphans; a partisan woman, a donor and a nurse and a hero mourning mother sacrificing her sons for the motherland and taking pride in their sacred devotion."<sup>14</sup> After the end of the war, men arrived home as "heroical invalids," while women returned with a new soldierly and more powerful subjectivities.<sup>15</sup> This emergent women's subjectivity with reconfigured concepts of masculinity and femininity, do not share a polarity, but embodied mutually reinforcing categories.<sup>16</sup>

The political dynamics of de-Stalinization, and the onset of late socialism recharged the social and cultural meaning of womanhood with even more peculiar and multi-faceted forms. The post-Stalinist period, along with the public denouncement of Stalin's cult of personality, was remarkable for its so called "second wave of modernization."<sup>17</sup> The notion, which encom-

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12 A number of recent works take on this issue, among them: Gijs Kessler, 'Wage Labor and the Household Economy: A Russian Perspective, 1600–2000,' in *Working on Labor*, ed. Marcel van der Linden, vol. 9, *Studies in Global Social History* (Brill, 2012), 353–69; Susan Zimmermann, 'Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism,' *Aspasia* 4, no. 1 (1 March 2010).

13 Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

14 Ana Lolua, "Presentation of Women in the Exhibitions dedicated to the Great Patriotic War: the Late Socialist Period in Georgia," *Heinrich Böll Foundation, Tbilisi office, World War II and Women*, 2020.

15 Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity Under Stalin* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

16 Anna Krylova, 'Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism,' in *The Cambridge History of Communism: Volume 1: World Revolution and Socialism in One Country 1917–1941*, ed. Silvio Pons and Stephen A. Smith (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 444.

17 Polly Jones, ed., *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, 1st edition (London: Routledge, 2006).



passed not just the USSR but became a global phenomenon, is associated with the accelerating growth of post-war economies recovering from wartime austerity. With increased production, consumerism grew and became a part of everyday life, while the Soviet State itself matured into the “Socialism with a human face,” where promises of a better life, increased affluence and improved welfare had become part of official discourse.<sup>18</sup>

As Lilya Kaganovsky, Marko Dumančić and others argue, physically and mentally traumatized men returning from World War II found themselves disoriented and unable to put up with the post-war life, experiencing a crisis of masculinity, whereas for women the post-war era brought new state-endorsed opportunities with a heightened focus on financial independence, upward social mobility and self-serving consumerism.<sup>19,20</sup> It is worth noting that despite the fact that extended rights and the liberal political climate improved educational opportunities and weakened gender boundaries for engaging in many spheres of social, economic, and political life, these changes did not necessarily translate into more equality and the erasure of traditional gender roles.<sup>21</sup> Policies aimed at gender equality from the 1960s and the 1970s had drifted far from the radical course set out by the revolutionary women of the Bolshevik movement in the early years of the Soviet Union.<sup>22</sup>

In the 1960s and the 1970s articles in the Soviet press (*Mnatobi, Drosha, Peromdnobeli*), as well as on radio and television programs, it became regular practice to cherish and celebrate women’s achievements and the success in their professional careers. In this discourse, it was the Soviet state that enabled the tremendous success and heroism of Soviet women. Moreover, women of late socialism were successful because they had obtained higher education, had become professional workers, were privileged enough to voice their opinions and views on social progress, could enjoy a modern lifestyle with existing material abundance, and could afford modern clothes as well as leisure travel. As the Soviet discourse propagandized, an accomplished woman of late socialism was, on the one hand, unapologetically idealistic, and a restrained and committed laborer. On the other hand, she could also be feminine and prone to dreaming. A woman capable of absorbing multiple identities and achieving success both in her work and in social and cultural life, made up another icon of female excellence. In short, the whole late socialist discourse about successful women pivoted on the formulation that all women living under Socialism were successful by definition, whereas those left outside of it were doomed for exploitation and oppression.

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18 Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 2013).

19 Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade*.

20 Marko Dumančić, *Men Out of Focus: The Soviet Masculinity Crisis in the Long Sixties*, 2021.

21 Donna Harsch, ‘Between State Policy and Private Sphere: Women in the GDR in the 1960s and 1970s,’ *Clio. Women, Gender, History* No 41, no. 1 (25 May 2015): 89-114.

22 Magdalena Grabowska, ‘Bits of Freedom: Demystifying Women’s Activism under State Socialism in Poland and Georgia,’ *Feminist Studies* 43, no. 1 (2017): 141-68.

## Women taking over Male-Dominated occupations

An extensive number of Soviet sources emphasized the common practice of promoting women at the workplace and in the communist polity during the 1960s and the 1970s. An official report, entitled “Women’s Work in the Soviet Union”, notes that by 1975, 73% of women had attained either secondary or higher education and that between 1965 and 1970 42% of the workforce employed in manufacturing consisted of women. Furthermore, by 1977, “a third of the seats in the Supreme Councils of the SSRs and half of the mandates in local soviets were taken up by women; one in every three judges and lawyers, and every other member of the jury was a woman.” Article 122 of the Constitution of the USSR from this period stipulated that women and men enjoyed equal rights in “all productive, state, cultural, social and political spheres.”<sup>23</sup>

Of all contemporary sources from the 1960s and the 1970s perhaps the most apropos is a collection published by the *Tsodna* state press, which notes that since the 1960s, “women are taking on jobs in manufacturing that were assumed, before World War II, to be traditionally designated to men. Women are replacing men in metallurgy, car-manufacturing, oil and coal production. They have mastered high skilled and challenging professions in a short period of time. Due to the determination of women steelworkers, women are on guard in Magnitogorsk and operate burst-furnaces and hearths in other metallurgical facilities.”<sup>24</sup> In a seminal study of women in heavy industry, Malgorzata Fidelis devotes the entire book, “Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland” to historicizing this tendency of rearranging gender hierarchies at heavy industry workplaces (such as those in mining and metallurgy) “by encouraging women to pursue skilled jobs long dominated by men”<sup>25</sup> in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union. Fidelis demonstrates several ambivalent contributions behind this rearranging.

First, as Fidelis argues, the development was driven by the Soviet government’s effort to increase the proportion of women in the total workforce. Since employment in heavy industry was more attractive in terms of pay and social advancement, state-endorsed policies brought women into the industrial workforce on an equal basis with men. At the same time, state representatives of late socialist government began a coordinated campaign against gender-based hierarchies. The speech delivered by First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party – Eduard Shevardnadze, at the 25<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1976 is representative of this effort:

“We must reduce women’s domestic workload as much as possible. [...] This would allow us to reduce time expenditures on household chores and to involve more women in socially beneficial work as well as the public life.”<sup>26</sup>

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23 Gabaidze I. “Women’s labor in the Soviet Union”, Publishing house of “Soviet Adjara”, 1977 (გაბაიძე ი., „ქალის შრომა საბჭოთა კავშირში“).

24 Kvachadze Z. “International year of women”, Society of Georgian SSR *Tsodna*, 1975, p.12 (კვაჭაძე ზინაიდა, ქალის საერთაშორისო წელი).

25 Malgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17.

26 E. Shevardnadze, *XXV Congress of Georgian Communist Party*, Final report at party committee, Tbilisi, 1976.

An oral history interview recorded with a former employee of a jewelry factory – where she had worked since the 1970s and had been an active Labor Union member since 1985 – speaks to the same tendency of high demand for female workers in the economic sphere. She recalls that she had been offered a generous reward for rejoining her workplace soon after giving birth, with a possibly shorter maternity leave:

“When my first child was born, I had to get back to work quite soon, abandoning my four-month-old infant under my mother’s care. As compensation, they offered me a car. A car was then an item of great luxury, and I did not refuse. Indeed, a few months later I received a “03”, which was the latest model available at the time. If you were a professional, and especially a woman, it was easy to advance in your career. They needed and looked for such cadres.”<sup>27</sup>

Another issue that contributed to the intensified demand on women employees in heavy industry during late socialism was the high rate of indiscipline, absenteeism, and the failure to meet production targets among men workers. The *feminization* of the workplace would, according to gender role assumptions, increase productivity and improve organizational issues on the shop floor. Fidelis explains that women who held jobs in male-dominated professions were valued because of and according to their traditional “feminine characteristics”, such as “maternal and domestic instincts, as well as emotional bonding with the machinery.”<sup>28</sup> These qualities would translate into caring for the factory as her “second home.” Fidelis cites reports from women’s departments within factories, which note that female employees were more disciplined than male staff. Rates of absenteeism were also lower among women.<sup>29</sup> A 1964 report prepared by the Party Committee at Pero attests to the same rationale. It complains that despite the large number of women employees in the central laboratory, “the corridor remains in disorder, there’s a lack of sanitation in the water titration room and in the test tube production unit.” The author of the report refers explicitly to the initial hope that the increase in the female workforce would lead to improved discipline and overall orderliness on the shop floor, as well as provide better maintenance of factory machinery and equipment and laments that nothing has actually changed. The author reprimands the head of the central laboratory and urges him to introduce more measures aimed at improving the labor culture at Pero.<sup>30</sup>

Since the masculinity crisis of 1960s-70s, as well as enlarged expectations towards women, social and economic engagement was translated into state-endorsed policies of workplace diversification. All these stimulated another reconfiguration of women’s roles and their public life. In particular, the image of women as committed, studious and disciplined subjects became a matter of re-politicization, which, in turn, served to create “the New Soviet Woman” – “[The Communist woman of late socialism] was a new type of person, fully committed to the socialist cause, and

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27 Respondent 1, oral history, July 2021.

28 Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*, 147–48.

29 Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*, 150.

30 Minutes of the Bureau meeting, Local party organization of the Central Laboratory at the Pero, 1964. Party Archive: Fond 2002, Folder 111

willing to put the interests of society above her personal desires.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the social engineering of late socialism and the policies that aimed to temper the “New Soviet Man” acknowledged “the New Soviet Woman” as a more successful project, while ascribing to it more political clout than to its male counterpart. This re-politicized subject had to succeed in raising both industrial productivity and a new generation of socialist youth. Fidelis confirms this assertion, arguing that state support for women’s professional advancement was presented, in official state and party discourse, as an achievement of the socialist system.<sup>32</sup> But Fidelis is careful to note that promotions among women never took on a truly widespread character and remained relatively rare. Documents analyzed as part of research for this paper confirm her arguments. More specifically, in August 1960 the secretary of Pero’s Local Party Committee harshly criticized the work of the Women’s Council at the factory. The speech he delivered is preserved in the meeting report:

“As of August 23, 1960, 437 women are employed at Pero, which amounts to only 17.1% of the staff. Among engineer-technicians and operators, 14 women are employed as heads or deputy-heads of workshops and departments. At the beginning of the year, the factory mobilized significant efforts to select, promote and support women in executive positions. But the effort has been flawed. The Women’s Organization Committee was set up at the factory, but the committee contributed nothing.”<sup>33</sup>

An April 26, 1963, another meeting of the Zestaponi Local Party Committee was dedicated to discussing the same problem. It was noted at the meeting that the factory’s management devoted insufficient attention to rewarding and promoting female employees – “over the past three years, 4 women were promoted from the engineer-technician personnel. It should be emphasized that the promotion of women is not receiving enough attention.”<sup>34</sup>

In her book, Fidelis asserts that despite the political and ideological pressure exerted on them, women employed in heavy industry never stood out for their devotion to work or for their interest in the affairs of the party and the ideology (this is especially true for women occupying relatively low positions). A Zestaponi Local Party Committee meeting report from December 17, 1959, attests to this finding:

“Among the 38 women employed in the chemical laboratory, 7 have received party assignments. 5 are active in the Union. The other 26 women are not involved in any social activity. Party work among these women is undirected. There are no lectures and presentations organized about their role and function; there are no meetings where they could assemble and share experience with each other.”<sup>35</sup>

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31 L. Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women’s Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53*, *Studies in Russian and East European History and Society* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1999).

32 Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*, 100-101.

33 Minutes of the Bureau meeting, Local party organization of the Central Laboratory at the Pero, 1960. Party Archive: Fond 2002, Folder 82

34 Minutes of the Bureau meeting, Local party organization of the Central Laboratory at the Pero, 1963. Party Archive: Fond 2002, Folder 92

35 Minutes of the Bureau meeting, Local party organization of the Central Laboratory at the Pero, 1959. Party Archive: Fond 2002, Folder 80

For more accuracy, it requires clarification that party meeting reports and issues raised by party cadres – cited here as primary sources – should not be taken at face value. The political demands passed down from higher echelons of power often shaped the content and nature of these deliberations. Often, they were purely performative and seized in content. Alexei Yurchak reflects on this phenomenon in his seminal work, which discusses the performative and hyper-normalized language used by late socialist officialdom. As Yurchak argues, the official intra-party deliberations were mostly bereft of any meaningful content and functioned only as ritual.<sup>36</sup>

An analysis of the historical context of late socialism reveals the contradictory nature of the period. As discussed above, the re-politicization of women's role and their public representation epitomized "feminine characteristics" of maternal care, a heightened sense of responsibility, self-sacrifice, self-discipline, and orderliness, as being essential and instrumental to women's excellence. On the other hand, what distinguishes the top-down gender politics of late socialism from those of earlier periods is the fact that women actively took advantage of the relatively open political and social conditions and tried to grasp opportunities for upward mobility on offer. Needless to say, opportunities for promotion and advancement were not accessible to all women. Perhaps this explains why those women who had no chance to capitalize on such possibilities, never participated in the party-ideological contest.

Finally, gender and women politics of late socialism used to be distinct for its social engineering and discursive reconfigurations, which fashioned new subjectivities of an accomplished woman and female excellence. Therefore, while in the 1930s, newspapers and magazines accentuated the happiness of Soviet women, declaring Georgia "the country of the happiest women",<sup>37</sup> by the 1960s and 1970s, the inflection point had shifted. Now Georgian Soviet press (*Drosha*, *Mnatobi*, *Akhalgazrda Zhurnalisti*, *Sakartvelos Qali*, *Peromdnobeli*) profiled and emphasized the stories of successful and professionally accomplished women, whose secret to success had been their devotion to socialism.

## In White Overalls

"A woman, this "delicate" creature of nature, has decided to grasp the secrets of iron and to master the technology of its processing. This has always been a man's job and such aspirations are courageous indeed at a time when male, let alone female, metallurgists are a rarity among us. She began working as a lab assistant and rose to the position of the head of the scientific-laboratory unit." This is an excerpt from Shazina Gotsiridze's profile published in *Peromdnobeli* magazine. At the time of publication in 1971, Gotsiridze had just been promoted to her new position. Eventually she would become a professor at Georgian Technical University, where she worked on and taught analytical chemistry. In 1978, Gotsiridze became the first woman appointed as head of Pero's central laboratory:

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36 'Chapter 3. Ideology Inside Out: Ethics and Poetics' (Princeton University Press, 2005), 77-125.

37 Maia Barkaia, "The Country of the Happiest Women"?, in *Gender in Georgia*, ed. Maia Barkaia and Alisse Waterston, 1st ed., Feminist Perspectives on Culture, Nation, and History in the South Caucasus (Berghahn Books, 2018), 33-46.





Shazina Gotsiridze. Photo from private archive.

“The head of Pero’s chemical laboratory had always been a man. When I started working at Pero, Akaki Metreveli held that position. This was in 1964. He promoted me from a junior lab assistant to the leader of the group. I rose through the ranks step-by-step since then and eventually became the head of the laboratory.”<sup>38</sup>

Gotsiridze’s vibrant life, a significant portion of which spent in late socialist Georgia, took multiple turns in different directions. To illustrate this, she shared with me two photographs from her personal album. The first photograph is taken in a Pero facility in the 1970s. Here she stands in front of a machine used for measuring rentgenofluorescence. She was in charge of selecting, obtaining, and organizing the transportation and installation of this brand-new technology at Pero. In her own words, the machine represented the last word in analytical chemistry. Its acquisition had a peculiar history:

“I visited the “Oriol” (Гипроприбор Орёл) – a factory-pavilion of scientific equipment near Moscow. When I came back, I prepared a report on the machine – its function, its price and whether we could use it. At the pavilion I learned that the machine cost half a million dollars abroad. But we only had \$8,000 to spend. Therefore, I had to find local manufacturers who could build an identical machine.”<sup>39</sup>

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38 Gotsiridze Shazina, Oral Story, May 2021

39 Gotsiridze Shazina, Oral Story, May 2021



Shazina Gotsiridze. Photo from private archive.

The second photograph is taken in Paris in 1977. In it Gotsiridze, dressed in a trendy fur long coat, poses with the Eiffel Tower in the background. She explained to me that she had to buy the coat illicitly, “under the counter”, but no one could possibly object. She had dreamed of visiting Paris for a long time and when an opportunity arose for her to go on a trip, she couldn’t let it go. From Paris she brought back foreign perfume, sweets and souvenirs, which reminded her of this trip for a long time after. Today the photograph makes her nostalgic about her youth and the life she had had.

The first photograph depicts Gotsiridze as the quintessential representative of her professional class – a successful female industrial worker – and epitomizes one side of the late socialist imagery around femininity and female excellence. Her white laboratory coat and restrained posture underline her professional, scientific demeanor. In the second photograph she presents an altogether different agency. In this photo she symbolizes the materially and culturally self-serving woman of late socialism. Foreign surroundings and the Eiffel Tower in the distance, as well as her stylish, memorable attire speak of conspicuous femininity and self-confidence.

What these two photographs share – apart from the fact that they are of the same woman – is the fact that they both depict the social engineering of success and excellence typical for late socialism. One shows an accomplished chemist, who demonstrates the latest scientific equipment in analytical chemistry with characteristically Soviet unpretentiousness. The other shows a successful woman who refuses to restrain herself from the satisfaction of her interests and desires. Traveling to Paris and wearing a trendy fur coat might be a desire and

an aspiration familiar to a lot of women around the world, but for Shazina Gotsiridze it was more than just a desire – it meant reclaiming her own agency.

Gotsiridze grew up in a family of Pero's first generation workers. Her father had worked as an electrical engineer at Pero since 1933. Her mother, Tinatin Alavidze, had been an economist at the factory's water supply division. Both Shazina and her sister were passionate about metallurgy as children: "the social environment played an important role in making us interested in metallurgy. The example set by women metallurgists who came before us – like Elia Nadiradze and Tamar Akhobadze, who introduced and developed analytical chemistry at Pero – was so important." – recalls Shazina Gotsiridze. She fondly remembers the evenings at home, when well-known metallurgists, chemists and engineers from Pero came for dinner and discussed, among other topics, factory affairs and operations.

Between 1966 and 1972, Gotsiridze worked on her dissertation, "without breaking away from production", in analytical chemistry. She studied the application of tetraacetate ions in the analytical chemistry of manganese: "I chose this topic because deriving electrolytic manganese through the 'Agladze method' was popular at the time. A whole separate division [at Pero] was dedicated to it. I used this very method for purification and obtained ultra-pure electrolytic manganese" – she explains to me. She highlights the support of the factory administration, without which, she notes, it would have been impossible for her to work on and defend her dissertation – "all my mentors at the factory shared my enthusiasm and dedication and they actively supported me", she recalls in an interview. She emphasizes how much her colleagues and the party valued her work. Apart from her work in the factory, Gotsiridze served for a number of years as the secretary of the Local Party Committee. She contributed multiple "Rationalization Proposals" as well, which helped raise productivity, improve the industrial production process and reserve the raw material expenditure at the factory.

Gotsiridze recalls that even though her salary was high, she supplemented her income with her work as a tutor – "This provided me with additional income, which equaled my salary at Pero, and it was never too much." For her money was not an end in itself, but rather a means to more autonomy and a way to satisfy her desires:

"I loved to travel... I have traveled across the globe – to Asia, Europe, Africa, Japan. I went as a tourist. I remember the first time I went to England, looking around with astonishment. I loved fashion and I looked for special and uncommon outfits. Apart from this, I managed to build a very nice dacha in my native village in Racha. I loved cars too. I owned at least three different cars in that period. I bought the first one in 1978, when I was appointed the director of the laboratory. I was the first woman in Zestaponi to own a car – it was a red Lada."<sup>40</sup>

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40 Gotsiridze Shazina, Oral Story, May 2021

Gotsiridze has never been married – “I never married; it was my decision. My life never reached that point. I guess I enjoyed pursuing my own life too much.” Her decision on this personal matter is related to the historical context of the period. Archival records show that among accomplished female employees at Pero, only a few were married. Fidelis also reflects on the marital lives of women employed in heavy industry and describes the demography of the small industrial town of Silesia. She observes that top-down policies that increased the number of women employed in mining and metallurgy caused the distortion in the traditional gender roles and perceptions regarding women’s sexuality. It has subverted the ‘traditional ethos’ about marriage and family life by producing the image of a single woman working in a mine or a factory as “unfit” for domesticity. This notion combined with increased financial independence led to transformations in the autonomy of women’s sexual lives. According to data cited by Fidelis, more than 88% of women employed in heavy industry were not married, while the same figure in other economic sectors did not exceed 50%.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

Life histories of women metallurgists at Pero – as well as the effusive magazine articles and profiles written about them – are a remarkable source for studying the gender politics of late socialism. But this is not the case only with female metallurgist. The Soviet press and the state discourse produced similar images of female doctors, teachers, agronomists, and others with equal zeal. Nevertheless, what distinguishes the case of female metallurgists is the emphasis on their “courage” and “fearlessness” on the one hand, and on their “tenderness” and “maternal nature” on the other. This is just one of many contradictions characteristic of late socialist soviet culture and gender politics.

Another form of contradictions is related to the sharply contrasting visions of revolutionary women activists and the gender politics of late socialism. The former aimed at a wholesale transformation of the family structure and the social order. The latter merely attempted to present individual women’s success as the achievement of the Soviet system, resorting to social engineering to construct images of female success and “the New Soviet Woman”.

The agency of women in late socialism was equally varied and heterogeneous. Stories of women metallurgists from the 1960s and the 1970s show that they had the ability to take on multiple social identities while also being able to integrate them into a single whole. The imagery of female excellence is not reducible to ideological purity or professional accomplishment, but incorporates instead, notions of material independence, individualism and distinctness.

In summary, the state devoted significant political and administrative resources to women’s empowerment, but this was neither necessarily emancipatory, nor a guarantee of more equality. Often these efforts covered limited and exclusive groups of professionals who

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41 Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*, 135.

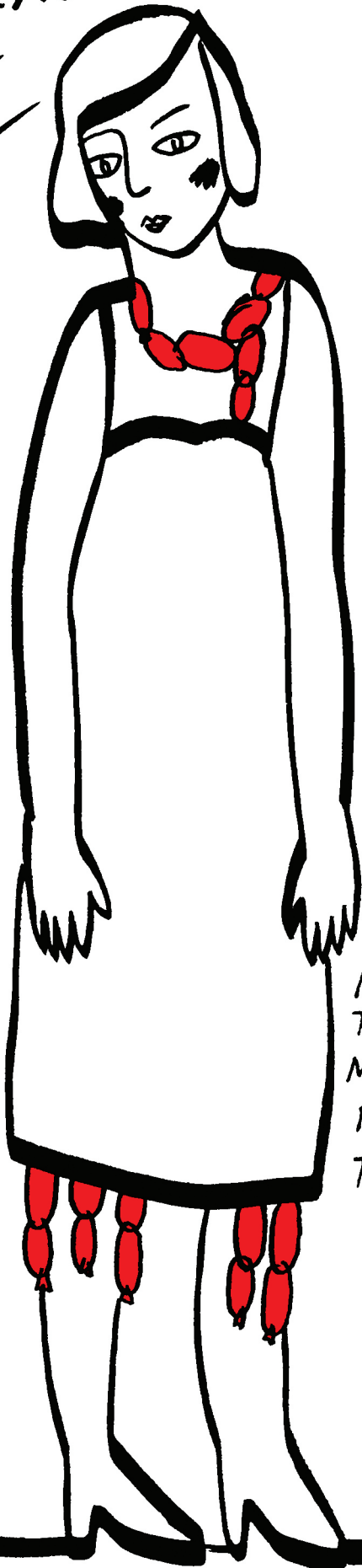


could take advantage of emerging opportunities, while most women were excluded. Shazina Gotsiridze's history provides a case in point – professionally accomplished and politically active women could and often did take advantage of social and professional opportunities, while also being able to pursue their private aspirations and without having to sacrifice them for the collective interest. Wearing a chemist's white overalls in one photograph and dressed in a trendy long fur coat in another, Gotsiridze epitomizes the late socialist image of female success. Exploring her life trajectory allows us to see the past in a new light, but this new perspective leaves us with more questions than answers.

As I interviewed Shazina Gotsiridze, I asked myself the same question over and over again: how do we distinguish between the subjectivity produced and nurtured by the Soviet ideological apparatus and the intrinsic agency of my respondent? To what degree can we consider her socially and professionally accomplished self a Soviet project? Or should we ascribe it to her intrinsic qualities, her social environment, her family and her character? These questions, in turn, lead us to even deeper challenges as they relate to women's role and gender politics in late socialism: was the late socialism transformation of femininity a political project, or was it a consequence of post-war economic and social dynamics? What impact, if any, did the international women's liberation movement of the 1960s have on gender politics of the USSR? And lastly, why did patriarchal norms and traditional constructions of femininity persist despite the socio-cultural circumstances and political opportunities late socialism created?

Research and careful analysis would hopefully answer at least some of these questions. A better understanding of these issues is crucial for realizing a politically sustainable emancipatory project attuned to the specificities of historical context.

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LABORATORY HEAD  
OF THE KYIV  
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CHECKPOINT

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INTERESTINGLY,  
THERE WAS  
NO FEMININE  
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THIS TERM

[CARRIER]  
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# THE ROLE OF UKRAINIAN WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOVIET SHADOW FOOD MARKET (1970s – MID-1980s)

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## **Abstract**

Women's participation in illicit food trade in the 1970s and first half of the 1980s was a well-established practice, which both enabled fulfilling the Soviet gender contract of the "working mother" and provided a visible increase in society's food standards. Based on official documents, oral histories, literary texts of the era, urban folklore, and articles and drawings from the satirical magazine "Perets", this article analyzes the reasons why women participated in shadow transactions, women's use and/or creation of shadow food mechanisms, gender-labeled practices of food fraud, and the effects of horizontal and vertical segregation of the labor market on women's inclusion in shadow transactions.

## Tasks, Methodology, and Sources

The shadow food market was an important segment of the second (unofficial, informal) Soviet economy in the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s. It arose as a complex system of economic practices, illegal and semi-legal interactions between various actors, including those from the Communist Party, law enforcement, economy, trade, distribution structures, and consumers. It included dozens of scenarios for creating and distributing “illegal” food items, such as workplace thefts, manipulations to “write the goods off,” postscripts in reports, fraud with the weight and volume of dishes in “obshchepit,” speculations, creation of artificial food shortages, and so on.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, it is necessary to note that the shadow market was not a market in the classical sense. Using this definition, we also use synonymous terminology established in historiography, such as informal transactions, illicit trade of goods, or semi-legal activities.

Ukrainian women<sup>2</sup> were not only consumers but also shadow trade actors in the food market. The article focuses on analyzing women’s participation in illicit food trade, reasons for participating, involvement in shadow transactions, and the effects of the Soviet gender contract of the “working mother” and the official Soviet image of women’s fragmentary or systemic involvement in informal food transactions in the 1970s – mid-1980s.

Given the widespread knowledge of its existence and the involvement of a large number of people in it, James Millar called the rapid growth and spread of informal/non-state economic activities (legal, semi-legal, and illegal) “the little deal.”<sup>3</sup> The latter assumed that in exchange for the urban population’s loyalty, the Brezhnev authorities allowed the expansion of a number of forms of small private economic activity (some of them were legal, some

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1 Gregory Grossman, “Notes on the Illegal Private Economy and Corruption,” in *Soviet Economy in a Time of Change: A Compendium of Papers* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1979), 834–55; Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia’s Economy of Favours: “Blat,” Networking and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Valeriy M. Rutgaizer, “The Shadow Economy in the USSR,” *Berkeley-Duke Occasional Papers on the Second Economy in the USSR*, paper no. 34 (February 1992), [www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer:1992-900-03-Rutgaizer.pdf](http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer:1992-900-03-Rutgaizer.pdf); Vladimir G. Trembl, Gregory Grossman and Kimberly C. Neuhauser, “A Study of Labor Inputs into the Second Economy of the USSR,” *Berkeley-Duke occasional papers on the second economy in the USSR*, paper no. 33 (Bala Cynwyd, PA: WEFA Group, 1992); Vladimir Trembl and Michael Alexeev, “The Second Economy and the Destabilizing Effect of its Growth on the State Economy in the Soviet Union: 1965–1989” (Durham, N.C: Duke University, 1993), [public.econ.duke.edu/Papers//Other/Trembl/2ndecon.pdf](http://public.econ.duke.edu/Papers//Other/Trembl/2ndecon.pdf); Светлана Барсукова, *Неформальная экономика: экономико-социологический анализ* (Москва: Изд. дом ГУ ВШЭ, 2004); Ольга Бессонова, *Раздаточная экономика России: эволюция через трансформации* (Москва: Российская политическая энциклопедия (РОССПЭН), 2006); Роджер Киран и Томас Кенни, *Продавшие социализм: Теневая экономика в СССР* (Москва: Алгоритм, 2010); Евгения Эвельсон, *Судебные процессы по экономическим делам в СССР (шестидесятые годы)* (London: Overseas Publications Interchange, 1986).

2 Here, the term “Ukrainian women” relies on political and civic, rather than ethnic, grounds. Hence, the category “Ukrainian women” includes not only ethnic Ukrainian women, but also Russian women, Jews, Roma, and Belarusians — all the women living in the Ukrainian SSR in the respective period.

3 The statement alluded to Vera Dunham’s famous concept of “the big deal” between Stalin and the middle class that guaranteed some stability and social support. For more details see Vera Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).



semi-legal, and some clearly illegal).<sup>4</sup> Pretend and real commitment or, at least, indifference to the basic political principles and slogans of the Soviet state was the cost of the party's declared commitment to citizens' consumer interests.

The concept of "the little deal" is a powerful methodological basis for considering and analyzing the set tasks, since it can help reveal not only impersonal structural and systemic interactions that determine economic, social, and consumer processes, but also the agency<sup>5</sup> of actors, who were the driving force – as participants, clients, consumers, and critics – of the social practices related to the development and creation of an important consumption segment, the shadow food market. The ability to innovate when the old rules fail to meet needs, the pre-reflexive ability to challenge social dictate, the ability to act within and outside socially conditioned roles, and the ability to retrospectively analyze decisions<sup>6</sup> – all these agency types ensured subjectivity even in situations when helplessness and irresponsibility seemed the only possible social reaction to food deficits and shortages, queues, poor quality of goods and dishes, and so on. After all, it is the agency of the shadow food market's participants that allows analyzing it as a complex system of social interactions with changing rules and various involvement tactics rather than an impersonal force born in the slums of the official Soviet economy and immobilizing consumers, the victims of fraudulent transactions.

The sources that provide the grounds for analyzing women's role in creating and using shadow trade of goods and demonstrating female actors' agency are a set of documents, including inspections of public eating and trade establishments by representatives of the People's Control Committee of Ukraine, complaints of disorders and fraud to higher authorities, criminal cases, and statistics. Oral histories, urban folklore, official satirical discourse, feature films, and cartoons are also crucial for analyzing the shadow patterns of women's consumer behavior.

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4 James R. Millar, "The Little Deal: Brezhnev's Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism," *Slavic Review* 40, no. 4 (1985): 697.

5 Margaret Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Alex Callinicos, *Making History: Agency, Structure and Change in Social Theory* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988); Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, "What is agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 4. (January 1998): 962–1023; Stephan Fuchs, "Beyond Agency," *Sociological Theory* 19, no. 1 (March 2001): 24–40.

6 Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder, "Time, Self, and the Curiously Abstract Concept of Agency," *Sociological Theory* 25, no. 2 (June 2007): 170–91.

## Women's Powers in "the Little Deal"

The materials studied suggest that the reasons women participated in the shadow food market included the gender configuration of the "little deal," which relied on the Soviet gender contract of the working mother<sup>7</sup> and gender segregation of the labor market, the main parameters of which remained unchanged in the 1970s-1980s.

Considering the social process of the authorities and the middle class coexisting within "the little deal" suggested by James Millar<sup>8</sup>, it should be noted that both women and men participated in it. However, according to unwritten rules, they received different powers and functions regarding the deal's implementation. As Sheila Fitzpatrick rightly pointed out, the major function of organizing household chores was delegated to women in the 1930s, when they also had to learn "to obtain goods, both legally and illegally, and be able to identify their quality."<sup>9</sup> In contrast, in the late Soviet era, illegal practices of "acquisition" (bribery, nepotism, and "acquaintanceship") did not pose a threat of repression, and, therefore, were at least allowed if not encouraged by state discourse. Female rights and responsibilities involved "obtaining" goods; developing "taste" and style in children (and husbands); organizing a healthy lifestyle and proper behavior; choosing books, movies, and plays; and so on. In a sense, the burden of supplying food and ensuring taste control (both physiological and aesthetic) became the third (besides work and family responsibilities)<sup>10</sup> burden for women, as Paulina Bren claims. According to the researcher, this third burden, on the one hand, "was a sign of traditional female weakness," but on the other hand, was a sign of "their new power in the days of late socialism."<sup>11</sup>

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7 Анна Темкина и Анна Роткирх, «Советские гендерные контракты и их трансформация в современной России», *Социологические исследования* 11, (2002): 4–14.

8 Millar, "The Little Deal," 694–706.

9 Шейла Фицпатрик, *Повседневный сталинизм. Социальная история Советской России в 1930-е годы: город* (Москва, 2008), 195.

10 Chris Corrin, *Superwomen and the Double Burden: Women's Experience of Change in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (London: Scarlet Press, 1992).

11 Paulina Bren, "Women on the Verge of Desire: Women, Work, and Consumption in Socialist Czechoslovakia," in *Pleasures in Socialism*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Northwestern University Press, 2010), 189.

## Food Hassle: At Different Levels and from Different Sides of the Counter

“Food hassles” took most of the time and resources in this list of responsibilities. According to the results of the Taganrog I, II, III sociological projects<sup>12</sup> conducted by Soviet sociologists in the 1970s and 1980s, the time spent on them by women and men in 1968–1978 increased by an average of two hours per week, with time for cooking accounting for more than a half of this increase (1.4 hours) and about one hour for purchasing food.<sup>13</sup> Compared to other family members, an urban married housewife spent 70% of her time buying groceries, while her husband spent 4%, other family members 6%, and together 18%.<sup>14</sup>

As a result, in the days of late socialism, the food market, in a broad sense, became a space of women’s “new power,” an expressive space involving a remarkable sense of agency. Female purchasers created demand, circumvention practices, and “product solidarity” networks (providing information on what is “given” and where), constantly enhanced their skills of “obtaining” products, and facilitated circulation of undeclared money (through “overpayment” for certain products).

On the other side of the counter in grocery stores and public eating establishments, saleswomen, female cooks, waitresses, female dishwashers, and female managers of cafes and restaurants, wholesale depots, or food factories were “waiting” for female buyers. The peculiarity of the Soviet labor market, due to both economic needs and social agreement on the notion of “female” and “male” jobs, was that some “national economy” branches were wholly or predominantly feminized. Trade<sup>15</sup> and public eating were among the most feminized industries. In 1970 in the USSR, women accounted for 83.2% of industry workers (988,300 people), 85.7% in 1980 (1,249,100 people), and 85.3% in 1985 (1,268,000 people).<sup>16</sup> According to Gaddy, lower-level sales personnel received “extraneous income” (through theft and bribes) of 120.08 rubles, which was almost 30% higher than their salary of 92.60 rubles.<sup>17</sup> Probably, the amounts of illegal income were women’s “extraneous income” in the shadow food market.

In the field of “socialized” work, women held less prestigious and lower paid positions. Statistically, this was recognized as the “engineer’s formula”: there was only one woman per

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12 The official name is “Public Opinion Functioning in the City Context and State and Public Institutions Activities.” Boris Grushin, Leonid Gordon, Natalia Rimashevskaya, Alexandr Zhavoronkov, Tamara Dridze, Ivan Levikin, and others took part in the project.

13 Елена Груздева и Элеонора Чертихина, Труд и быт советских женщин (Москва: Политиздат, 1983), 11–145, [www.a-z.ru/women/texts/chertihinar-7.htm](http://www.a-z.ru/women/texts/chertihinar-7.htm).

14 Ibid.

15 In official Soviet statistics, there was no difference between industrial trade and trade in food products.

16 Торговля в СССР. Статистический сборник (Москва: Финансы и статистика), 293.

17 Clifford G. Gaddy, *Uncovering the Hidden Wage: Public Perceptions of Opportunities for Side Income in Various Occupations in the USSR* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, Department of Economics, 1991), 20.

every 12 chief engineers and other chief specialists.<sup>18</sup> The same vertical gender segregation of labor was observed in food trade and public eating establishments. The incomes of males – directors of shops, restaurants, canteens, food factories, wholesale depots, and so on – were much higher. It was at these levels that systemic ties were established with other food market segments (collective farms, meat-packing plants, food factories, etc.), as well as with Soviet officials (heads of trade and food departments of district, city, and regional executive committees) and law enforcement representatives. At these levels, it was not about a hundred rubles of “extraneous income,” but about thousands, tens and hundreds of thousands, and sometimes millions. LaPorte notes that underground factories and plants could bring their “owners” 10-12 million rubles in profits annually, of which 10-20% were so-called “informal payments” to Soviet officials, law enforcement, and others.<sup>19</sup>

## Women at the “Low” and “Medium” Levels of the Shadow Food Economy

The structural hierarchy of the shadow food market and differences in job opportunities for males and females and, hence, their income levels and transaction volumes suggest that ordinary women established and were part of mostly small- and medium-sized shadow businesses, which did not require long and systemic interactions or long-term strategies and were organically integrated into everyday life, while their female participants often did not consider and assess them in terms of “illegal” or “criminal” activities.

In addition, inclusion in the “you help me, I help you”/“service for service” relationship, which made life much easier and formed a system of quasi-barter exchanges, was considered normal and labeled as a mutually beneficial relationship and assistance: “*I wangled a lot of scarce products for my family. I made deals with shop sellers and I got building materials for them in exchange for scarce products.*”<sup>20</sup> Hosking believes such practices were neither market nor modern ones, but rather reflected a throwback to natural exchange in the form of gifts or barter, as described by sociologist Marcel Moss.<sup>21</sup>

Some of the practices related to workplace product theft, which often involved women, are also difficult to consider market relationships, at least when thefts were committed to meet family needs. Even caught in the act, “nesuni” [carriers] (interestingly, there was no feminine

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18 Наталья Римашевская, «О некоторых проблемах положения женщины (по материалам экономико-социологического исследования)», в Женский вопрос: точки зрения и подходы к новому осмыслению (Москва: Академия общественных наук при ЦК КПСС 1991), 28–41, [www.a-z.ru/women/texts/rimashrdd-e.htm](http://www.a-z.ru/women/texts/rimashrdd-e.htm).

19 Jody Marie LaPorte, “*The Logic of Kleptocracy: Corruption, Repression, and Political Opposition in Post-Soviet Eurasia*” (PhD diss., University of California, 2012), 18.

20 Ніна К., 70 р., маляр, пенсіонерка, м. Донецьк, запис зроблений М. Сабініною, 2010.

21 Джеффри Хоскинг, «Структуры доверия в последние десятилетия Советского Союза», Неприкосновенный запас, 4 (2007), [magazines.russ.ru/nz/2007/54/ho5.html](http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2007/54/ho5.html).



form for this term in contrast to the term associated with bribery, for which the feminine form was quite acceptable and common), not only were not deprived of the stolen items, but also were in no way punished. For instance, in February 1974 alone, the laboratory head of the Kyiv sausage factory was detained twice at the checkpoint and refused to “confiscate sausage products from herself” (in Russian, “изъять из себя”).<sup>22</sup> The reason for such indulgence, according to inspection materials of the People’s Control Committee of Ukraine, was that the woman had to feed her family, and the fact of pilfering sausage was not properly recorded because “the factory access system does not ensure effective control of product pilfering.”<sup>23</sup>

In addition to workplace thefts and subsequent exchange of goods for services or other (non-food) goods, women resorted to other transactions that provided either a larger amount of “pilfered goods” or money that could be obtained via transactions, or both. This situation aligned with the general trend in the shadow economy’s development noted by Pavlo Melnyk: if mainly material values were subject to misappropriation in the 1960s, mostly in the production industry, in the 1970s, money becomes the main misappropriation object, in which surcharges, markups, and income from transactions with material values were converted (in our case, food).<sup>24</sup>

In practice, average “conversions” looked, for example, like what a “Perets” magazine correspondent wrote. For several years, the cook at Berdychiv secondary school №11 Neonila Sobol “solved” simple mathematical problems: “if annually 13,850 cutlets are delivered at a price of 10 kopecks each, what profit could be earned if they were sold at a price of 12 rather than 10 kopecks?”<sup>25</sup>

Such markup-based product deals involved a gender mode only because of the nuances of the labor market. Some other deals arose from traditional female practices of economical cooking, which were part of the Soviet economy of “organized poverty.”<sup>26</sup> A good housewife had to be able to cook soup, roasts, and cutlets from one chicken, and even process lunch or dinner leftovers into something edible. Women (employees of public eating establishments) used the same skills and practices to improve their own financial situation, participate in shadow barter exchanges, maintain the planned performance of respective establishments, and cover “shortages.” Though all meals cooked in public eating establishments were included in respective “collections of recipes” approved by the Ministry of Trade (and, in the case of

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22 Первому секретарю ЦК КПУ Щербицкому В.В. от рабочих Киевской колбасной фабрики, ул. Менжинского, д. 39. 1 серпня 1966, оп. 2., спр. 3009 (Київ: Державний комітет народного контролю. Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади і управління України), 3.

23 Докладная записка о проверке письма без подписи о хищении мясопродуктов на Киевской колбасной фабрике, оп. 2, спр. 3009 (Київ: Державний комітет народного контролю. Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади і управління України, 11 вересня 1966), 6-8.

24 Павло Мельник, «Кримінально-правове забезпечення протидії організованій злочинності в УРСР (1960–1991 рр.)» (Дисертація на здобуття ступеня кандидата юридичних наук, Київський Національний Університет імені Тараса Шевченка, 2019), 130.

25 О. Черногуз, «Математички. Три вправи з одним невідомим», Перець 4 (1980): 7.

26 Римашевская, «О некоторых проблемах положения женщины».

baby or medical nutrition, the Ministry of Health), deviation from the state cooking standard enabled women, using a good housewife's skills, to make illegal income and/or feed their families (and close relatives) with quality and prestigious products.

In borscht, cutlets, salads, and other "obshchepit" dishes, a critical Ukrainian eater was taught to feel not the taste of food, but the taste of misappropriation, without any additional tools, such as reporting. *"I had a portion of borscht and ate a few spoonfuls,"* wrote a "Perets" journalist from Kharkiv, *"or, rather, sipped it – so watery the borscht was. As for its taste bouquet, it immediately evoked noble thoughts in me – about friendship and mutual help. I wanted to share the borscht – with anyone."*<sup>27</sup> *"As for the cutlet 'Osoblyva' [Special],"* wrote a "Perets" magazine correspondent in 1971, *"the only thing that turned out to be special in it was that it could be easily decomposed into ingredients – meat and bread."*<sup>28</sup>

Inspections and press materials constantly recorded the "recipes" of the "obshchepit" shadow market. *"In the Podillya restaurant in Khmelnytsky, borscht with meat was cooked with low quality canned greens, there were pieces of lard instead of meat, cabbage with mushrooms was made with rotten mushrooms, mashed potatoes were served cold and poorly mashed"*<sup>29</sup>; *"In a restaurant in the city of Myrhorod, spoiled food products that had turn sour were sold."*<sup>30</sup> Finally, the long-standing list of public eating establishments' shortcomings identified by the People's Control Committee inspectors, namely "disregarding cooking recipes, dispensing underweight portions, overcharging customers,"<sup>31</sup> was the exact formula of the "small" shadow economy created and used by female industry workers.

Overcharging buyers, underweighting via specially adjusted scales that started weighing not from zero but from 10-50 grams, selling substandard goods that should have been written off, selling undeclared goods excluded from invoices, and forced sale of goods "in load" were all "schemes" used in the food trade system of both state and cooperative trade shops and collective farm markets. They were also gender-marked due to the labor market's horizontal and vertical segregation. Moreover, the object of thefts and transactions depended on what exactly the swindlers were dealing with. For example, as butchers in shops, markets, and restaurants, males were mostly involved in meat, sausage, and meat product transactions, while females dealt with other groceries.

However, a number of illegal transaction "schemes" can be considered entirely female, because their development was based on the female idea of delicious, necessary in the kitchen, useful here and now. This is about creating local artificial shortages, which occurred together with general shortages of meat, fruit, sausages, green peas, mayonnaise, butter, and other

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27 Л. Шиян, «Секрет кулінарії», Перець 2 (1972): 5.

28 Ibid.

29 «Дело №14-80». Материалы проверки состояния общественного питания в областях УССР. Январь–сентябрь 1970, оп. 2, спр. 4604 (Київ: Державний комітет народного контролю УРСР, Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади і управління України), 168.

30 Ibid, 139.

31 Ibid, 143.

products. These local shortages sometimes looked weird: *"We are aware of the truly limitless ingenuity of some trade workers. They can make a shortage even out of those goods that were a dime a dozen yesterday. But for salt to become a deficit... that's too much..."*<sup>32</sup>

Thus, products "hidden from sales" were not included in the prestigious food basket and did not fit into the overall picture of food shortages. However, they perfectly fit into the good housewives' perception of economic needs.

According to the People's Control Committee inspections in 1971-1979, rusks and gingerbread were such products, "absent" in several stores in Sverdlovsk (now Dovzhansk, Luhansk Oblast); in a store in Krasny Luch (Luhansk Oblast), it was "Extra" salt and refined sugar;<sup>33</sup> in the central food store of Bila Tserkva, "1,500 kg of flour, 264 cans of tomato sauce" were hidden in the storage room, off of the shelves (at the time of inspection in October 1970);<sup>34</sup> and in store №132 in Sumy, "40 kg of starch, 30 kg of millet, 80 kg of oatmeal, 72 jars of zucchini caviar were hidden in the storage room."<sup>35</sup> At a food depot in Mykolaiv Oblast, artificial shortages were created, for example, for vanilla sugar, gelatin, and red pepper.<sup>36</sup>

Local shortages were short-lived and the formation of increased demand was aimed at women who would be interested in tomato paste to cook borscht; spices for roasts; vanilla sugar for sweet homemade desserts; cereals, a vital part of the Soviet eaters' menu; salt, without which it is impossible to cook at all; and so on.

When it came to state inspections, small female swindlers had no own names in the food market. In the People's Control Committee materials, stores, rather than their female employees, were the "authors" of store transactions. The spontaneous shadow market existed as an unnamed power. However, the boundary that separated this "power" from organized, and, most importantly, long-lived and systemic transactions, was relative. The more unpunished petty thieves felt, the more systemic their misappropriation methods and the greater the number of transaction participants became. This notion fully applies to women's involvement in illegal schemes, in which some female managers of eating establishments and networks moved from the "small" shadow business to developing broader quasi-business schemes.

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32 В. Бондаренко, «У чому сіль?», Перець 8 (1980): 4.

33 Материалы проверок выполнения постановления СМУССР № 369 от 5 мая 1966 года «О дополнительных мероприятиях по дальнейшему улучшению торгового обслуживания населения Украинской ССР». 13 ноября – 24 декабря 1966 г., оп. 2, спр. 356 (Київ: Державний комітет народного контролю УРСР. Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади і управління України), 128.

34 Материалы проверки состояния торговли товарами повышенного спроса в областях УССР. 15 мая – 27 сентября 1970 г., оп. 2, спр. 1801 (Київ: Державний комітет народного контролю УРСР. Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади і управління України), 33.

35 Ibid, 59.

36 Ibid, 48.

## Women in Large-Scale Shadow Deals

One of the most high-profile female stories of a criminal enrichment scheme involving transactions with “violation of the technology of culinary product cooking and creation of unaccounted surpluses”<sup>37</sup> was the case of the Kyiv restaurant Stolychnyi. In February 1974, as reported by the Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR Ivan Golovchenko to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, production manager Lydia Yolkina “entered into a criminal relationship with engineer-technologist Polishchuk L.Y., cost accountant Shulman P.M., subordinate cooks, cashiers, and waiters”<sup>38</sup> and sold unaccounted products to restaurant clients, appropriated the money earned, and distributed it among the “crime participants.” As reported by the investigation, the daily revenue amounted to 500 rubles.<sup>39</sup> The misappropriation scheme was created and implemented by the women themselves: in addition to the above-mentioned organizers, the “group of misappropriators” also included female controllers Lomayeva, Zhigunova, and Kholodenko, as well as cashiers Benyukh, Bakhireva, Makhotkina, and Lyadova.<sup>40</sup>

A sum of 100,000 rubles (in cash, bonds, and contributions to savings accounts) was confiscated from all detainees (and later convicts) and property worth 200,000 rubles was described and confiscated.<sup>41</sup> Lydia Yolkina, the misappropriation scheme organizer, had 71,000 rubles confiscated, as well as gold jewelry, cut glass and porcelain items, and fur clothing worth a total of 60,000 rubles.<sup>42</sup> People gave her the nickname “Shahinya” (female Shah, Shahbanu).

Sophia Goldenberg, director of the bar Vezha in Lviv, was no less legendary. In the late 1970s – early 1980s, according to eyewitnesses, the bar regularly housed the “cream of society”: high-level criminals, black marketeers, “tsekhoviks” (owners of underground factories), and “shpilevojs” (gamblers). One of the first VCRs was installed there and used for group movie viewings. “There were rumors that they sometimes showed forbidden erotic entertainment for only their own people.”<sup>43</sup> Having paid the bar management, “their own” clients (from the categories above) could stay after the official closing. Money was also paid to a police squad that was on duty nearby to make sure that ordinary people did not get inside.<sup>44</sup>

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37 Центральному комитету КП України. Інформація в доповнення к ранее направленням Вам інформаціям №0177/ГЛ от 6 марта 1974 года и №0259/ГЛ от 9 апреля 1974 года, оп. 25, спр. 1085 (Київ: Центральний комітет Комуністичної партії УРСР. Центральний державний архів громадських об'єднань України), 71.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Повідомлення про результати дальших оперативно-слідчих заходів по кримінальній справі на розкрадачів соціалістичної власності в ресторані «Столичний» м. Києва. 9 квітня 1974 року, оп. 25, спр. 1085 (Київ: Центральний комітет Комуністичної партії УРСР. Центральний державний архів громадських об'єднань України), 67.

41 Ibid, 68.

42 Ibid.

43 Ігор Лильо, Львівська кухня (Харків: Фоліо, 2015), 152.

44 «Мажори, порно та блатні пісні. Доповідна КГБ про ресторани Львова, Одеси і Харкова», Тексти, 15 листопада 2018, [texty.org.ua/articles/89344/Mazhory\\_porno\\_ta\\_blatni\\_pisni\\_Dopovidna\\_KGB-89344](http://texty.org.ua/articles/89344/Mazhory_porno_ta_blatni_pisni_Dopovidna_KGB-89344).

In addition to the Vezha bar, which was opened at a water tower to the director's efforts, Sophia Goldenberg ran two food stores. This allowed selling store products (including scarce ones) through the bar using a restaurant markup. During the first inspection of the food store in February 1980, a typical list of goods "hidden" from ordinary buyers in storage rooms was found: 75 bottles of oil; 115 cans of condensed milk; 16 cartons of eggs; 24 boxes of mayonnaise; 102 kilograms, 38 boxes, and 18 sets of candies/chocolates; 10 kg of pork legs; 75 cases of champagne; 40 bottles of vodka; 44 bottles of rum; 448 bottles of liqueur; 2,569 bottles of cognac; and 127 bottles of other alcoholic beverages.

These "hidden" products and drinks were "passed through the bar," in which accounting was simulated,<sup>45</sup> or they could be sold at inflated prices at food stores' "back doors." During the 15 months of covert surveillance and investigation, Goldenberg illegally earned 77,500 rubles at Vezha alone. The total sum of illegal profits was estimated at 213,000 rubles. Rumors in Lviv suggested Sophia Goldenberg invested money from transactions in foreign currency and diamonds, which she smuggled abroad in a very ingenious way. There were rumors that she accompanied her friends and relatives emigrating to Israel and the U.S., and, kissing them goodbye, passed the diamonds. Her husband was convicted and shot for illegal transactions with soda vending machines. Sophia Goldenberg was sentenced to 14 years in prison for the "misappropriation of socialist property,"<sup>46</sup> remaining a city legend nicknamed Sonya Diamond or Sonya Diamond Hand.

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45 Лильо, Львівська кухня, 153.

46 Ibid.



## Conclusion

The shadow food market had several levels depending on the scale and number of participants in transactions. Assuming that some industries (such as food and trade) were considered and statistically were predominantly “female” ones, the labor market’s gender division, retaining in its vertical structure a “male boss principle,” caused the development of shadow female agency at the lower and middle levels of the “informal” economy. This included exchanges of scarce products for services, overcharging customers, illegal markups, transactions related to writing-off allegedly spoiled products, etc. Some of the illegal ways to earn money and “in-kind” income were gender-labeled: awareness of the daily gastronomic demand allowed women to create and benefit from unique local shortages, such as in salt, pepper, zucchini caviar, flour, and the like. Numerous and varied ways of making “a change” in the recipes of public eating establishments developed out of the traditional for Soviet “organized poverty” practices of economical home cooking “out of nothing.” Replacing meat with bread and rusks; diluting milk, sour cream, or cream; reducing portion weights; and using fewer ingredients or yesterday’s leftovers in today’s dishes created artificial leavings that were converted into exchange transactions in other informal economy segments and/or money. Soviet gender policies aimed at increasing – sometimes imitatively – female representation in management positions caused some female participants of the shadow food market to create larger schemes and move to the “middle level,” though never reaching the highest level, at which the money supply was measured not in tens of thousands, but millions of rubles.







# GEORGIAN DISCOURSE ON SEXUALITY DURING THE BREZHNEV ERA

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to describe and study the sexuality discourses in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia and their impact on women's lives during the Brezhnev-era. The sexuality discourses in the Georgian SSR intersected with the local cultural and nationalist discourses, modified its nature, and, consequently, shaped the experiences of women living in the republic. The study revealed features that are characteristic of the Georgian discourse on female sexuality, which include the strict supervision of women's lives and behavior by their fathers, husbands, or family members, as well as the internalization, self-observation, and self-normalization of these disciplinary practices by women themselves.

## Introduction

In this paper, which was written based on a master's thesis "Docile Bodies, or the Soviet Discourse on Sexuality"<sup>1</sup>, I will try to analyze the discourse of sexuality produced during the Brezhnev-era Georgian SSR (1964-1983), and highlight its main features. Although the Soviet Union was characterized by a centralized nature of governance, the sexuality discourses in its various republics were diversified by local cultural and national elements. Therefore, the discourse of sexuality in Georgia produced during the Brezhnev-era, can be distinguished by its uniqueness, as it intersects with local cultural and national characteristics.

In Georgia, the efforts to reevaluate the Soviet past are often reduced to an understanding of it as a single historical phenomenon. The neglect of the historical or political context that follows this type of reasoning obscures the essential aspects that were prominent at different stages of Soviet history and makes the whole analysis fragmentary. The history of the Soviet Union is not monolithic and consists of different stages. They differed from each other in the policies pursued by the Communist Party at one time or another.

The periodization of Soviet history is offered differently by various historians and theorists. In this paper, I will refer to the periodization of Roy Medvedev, who notes that for the purpose of research, the history of the Soviet Union might be divided into different stages based on economic, social, and other factors. However, due to its "centralized and authoritarian" nature, the author asserts that it can be divided into the ruling eras of those who at one stage or another were heading the Soviet Union. Medvedev considers the eras of Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev as such. He asserts that the periods that these leaders were in power differed due to economic and social realities of the period; "the state of social well-being, the methods of political and economic governance, the nature and characteristics of the ruling elite", as well as many other factors.<sup>2</sup>

In order to comprehend the complexity of Soviet history, it is also important to discuss issues such as gender equality, women's emancipation, and sexuality, since gender policies were quite distinct during different eras of the Soviet Union. While the discourses on the emancipation of women had been widely articulated since the founding of the Soviet Union<sup>3</sup> and, at the same time, there were many opinions and positions on human sexuality<sup>4</sup>, abortions were banned during Stalin's rule.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the diversity of discourses on sexuality that characterized the period of the founding of the Soviet Union has diminished, and converse-

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1 It was written in 2015, within the framework of the Tbilisi Ivane Javakishvili State University master's degree in Gender Studies.

2 Roy Medvedev, *The Soviet Union at The Beginning of New Era*, *Socialist Register*. Vol 20 (1983); 172 available at: <http://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/issue/view/419#.VaCiUPmqqkr>

3 Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993), 1-13.

4 Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 7-8; Frances Lee Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex: Lifestyle Advice for the Soviet*, (Northern Illinois University Press, 2007): 14-5.

5 Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 333-334.

ly, the discourse that equated female sexuality with purity and motherhood was strengthened.

A gender study of Brezhnev's rule is minimal in the analysis of theorists. Although, at the time the discourse of sexuality in the Soviet Union was quite moralistic and inevitably related to the reproductive ability of women, the overview of this period seems important to me because this is the period when the Communist Party faced the dilemma of women's labor, their involvement in economic relations, and simultaneously, concern for improving demographics.

## Methodology

In this article, I will focus on the sexuality discourses produced in Georgia during the Brezhnev era Soviet Union, and its intersection with cultural and nationalistic discourses, which made the experiences of women in the Georgian context special and forced the perception of their sexuality in a more traditional context. To analyze this topic, I used the method of critical discourse analysis.<sup>6</sup>

To analyze the Georgian discourse of the Brezhnev period, I reference the Georgian SSR-era publication *Georgia's Woman*. My choice was primarily based on the fact that it was the only Georgian publication that dealt with women and their problems. I also chose this publication for its sheer diversity of content, and the way it clearly shows the attitude of women towards their sexuality and the supervision of their sexuality by society.

It is also important to note that I analyzed the issues of *Georgia's Woman* published during the Brezhnev era (1964-1983) with a one-year omission. This gave me great material and a broad view of the main trends and discourses of sexuality that existed in Georgia at that time. I researched texts of different genres, be it short stories, articles, letters, or others. I chose the necessary material, on the one hand, based on any connections with sexuality, and on the other hand, based on the uniqueness and informativeness of the text.

In this paper, I will concentrate on analyzing only the Georgian discourse of the Brezhnev-era and, consequently, will focus on the following main questions: What was the discourse of sexuality produced in the Georgian SSR like? How did this discourse intersect with Georgian nationalistic discourse or cultural characteristics, and how did this produced knowledge shape the experiences of Georgian women?

In addition, I consider it important to emphasize that in the process of analysis, I have identified and distinguished central concepts, words, and tendencies for Georgian discourses on sexuality. I also highlighted the intertextual and interdiscourseal connections that various texts and genres formed by the repetition of these concepts, words, or trends, thus

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Reisigl, Ruth Wodak "The Discourse-Historical Approach" in *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak, Michel Meyer, 2nd revised edition (London: Sage, 2009): 93-4.



underlining the coherence and unified nature of these discourses. I evaluated the available data using the method of semiotic analysis, since this method, as Rose points out, helps to bring the ideology to the surface, which is the knowledge that is constructed in such a way as to “legitimate unequal social power relations”.<sup>7</sup> The abovementioned analytical methods have enabled me to examine the dominant discourses of sexuality that existed in Brezhnev-era Georgia, to focus on their underlying causes, and to emphasize the maintenance and strengthening of power relations or hierarchies such as gender inequality and attempts to control female sexuality.

## The Gender Aspects of the Brezhnev Era

To analyze the discourse of sexuality in the Soviet Republic of Georgia during the Brezhnev-era, it is important to study the context of the history of this period, to mark its gender aspects, and raise the issue of nationalism in the Soviet Union, which will clarify the foundations of sexuality discourses of this period. When reviewing the gender aspects of the Soviet Union, it is crucial to discuss the Soviet vision and practice of women’s emancipation. Even though women in the Soviet Union were actively involved in the labor force, the economic and demographic indicators often influenced their economic empowerment. The involvement of women in the labor force often changed at different stages of the country’s existence, and stemmed from different sources – be it labor shortages as a result of men going to war, an industrialization period, and job creation, or others.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, women’s involvement in the workforce was driven by economic and demographic reasons.<sup>9</sup> Gail Lapidus highlights the fact that the Soviet government in the 1960s took the last step to increase the number of employed women because, as the author notes, the “untapped source” of labor in this period was the housewives. For instance, this is vividly illustrated by the fact that out of 18 million women employed from 1960-1971, 14 million were housewives.<sup>10</sup>

Buckley, for his part, notes that the employment of women in the Brezhnev-era was not an implementation of the idea of women’s emancipation under the communist ideology, which was actively promoted in the early stages of Soviet Union’s development. Rather, Buckley argues, “economic growth had led to a focus on efficiency, for which equality was not only secondary but also in conflict with it.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the active employment of women in the Brezhnev-era stemmed from the issues that were founded on the number of men and, consequently, the shortage of manpower.

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7 Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, (SAGE Publications, 2001): 70.

8 Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development and Social Change*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978): 165-7; Mary Buckley, *Women in The Soviet Union*, *Feminist Review* 8, (July, 1981): 79-106 available at: <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/fr/journal/v8/n1/full/fr198113a.html>

9 Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 168; Buckley, *Women in The Soviet Union*, 84.

10 Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 166

11 Buckley, *Women in The Soviet Union*, 84.

During this period, women were employed in large numbers, albeit typically in low-paying fields like agriculture,<sup>12</sup> education, and medicine. Non-prestigious and low-income professions such as teacher, pediatrician, etc. were marked as “feminine” activities.<sup>13</sup> Lapidus emphasizes that in all areas of the economy, “the number of women declined as soon as the hierarchies of status and authority emerged.” Additionally, both as a result of “horizontal segregation and vertical stratification”, women earned less than men.<sup>14</sup> Buckley attributes the mobilization of women to low-paying jobs and the lack of advancement in the career hierarchy to gender stereotypes and the social role of women, as they were seen as “unsustainable participants in the labor market,” due to the responsibilities imposed on them in the family and the lack of desire for employment in high positions, which was due to the “double burden” of women.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, Lapidus adds to these two factors the elements of education and gender stereotypes, which attributed specific skills or professions to women, their participation in production was a priori drawn as the emancipation and neglected the cultural and political dimensions of gender roles.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, in the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union, both economic and demographic problems, as well as the involvement of women in the labor force, are represented. In this regard, I find it interesting and relevant to note Michel Foucault’s theory about regulating sexuality through public and useful discourses, which leads to bringing forward the modification of power mechanisms for the disciplines and governing of the body.

Foucault points out that one of the great innovations in the power techniques of the 18th century was the emergence of “population” as an “economic and political problem”. The government perceived it as a whole, and was characterized by its specific “phenomena and its variables” such as “birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, and state of health”.<sup>17</sup> According to Foucault, this placed human sexuality at the epicenter of the existing “economic and political problem” and gave impetus to the formation of political, economic, and technical interests in the discussion of sexuality. This manifested itself in the importance of “analysis, classification, and the specification, of quantitative or causal studies”<sup>18</sup> of sexuality and, consequently, its “regulation through useful and public discourses.”<sup>19</sup> Foucault highlights the two basic forms of power/modification of the influence of power on human life: the “anatomopolitics of the human body” and the “biopolitics of the population.” The first one, in his theory, is used through the disciplinary procedures of power to define the human body, “its discipline, the optimization of its capabilities” and the increase of “the usefulness and the docility” of the human body. According to Foucault, this tendency to form “docile bodies” was aimed at its effective functioning in economic and other systems. The second form of pow-

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12 Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 175-6; Buckley, *Women in The Soviet Union*, 88.

13 Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 186-8.

14 Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 171.

15 Buckley, *Women in The Soviet Union*, 89.

16 Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 194-5

17 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, (London: Allen Lane, 1979): 25.

18 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 23-24.

19 *ibid*, p.25.

er or biopolitics, focused on “the species body” – that is, body skills such as reproduction, health, mortality, and so on. Therefore, these forms of power are directed, on the one hand, through disciplinary mechanisms and, on the other hand, through the regulatory methods on the supervision and control of the human body. Foucault also states that these two forms of power do not contradict each other, but rather constitute “two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations.”<sup>20</sup>

The soviet gender policy often brought forward family and reproduction issues. Nevertheless, while in the early days of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party was actively working to deconstruct the idea of the family: from the Stalin period onwards, family strengths became a central issue in the Soviet political and economic life. In the 1930s, the family gained new meaning in cementing the existing hierarchies, increasing the birth rate, and growing labor productivity, by engaging women who had previously been limited to the family sphere but still imposing household chores on women.<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, as Lapidus contends, there was a confrontation between the emancipation of women and the strength of family, as an important socioeconomic institution. And this conflict was resolved again and again by the refusal to liberate women, since, under Stalin’s rule, a decree that was adopted in 1936 banned abortions, complicated divorce proceedings, and increased fines for non-payers of alimony.<sup>22</sup> The divorce reform that was undertaken in 1965 and the introduction of the basic principles of family law in 1968, simplified divorce proceedings and legalized abortion, which in turn as Lapidus underlines, replaced the legal prohibition on both procedures with “moral suasion”.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, a centralized means of controlling women’s lives, such as the law that was amended in Brezhnev-era Soviet Union, which should have prompted other methods of supervising or controlling women’s reproduction or sexuality. Such may be considered the dominant discourses that were actively created to achieve these goals in the Brezhnev era. These prominent examples could be the dominant discourses that were actively created in this period to achieve these goals.

Finally, while one of the most important attributes of Communism may be its internationalism, the Soviet policy reinforced and cemented nationalist sentiments and discourse, using them to govern various republics as well as people. As Yuri Slezkine points out, the policy pursued in the Soviet Union regarding nationalism promoted ethnic particularism in the Soviet republics. While socialism saw nationalism as a bourgeois fiction and that assimilation was a “progressive process” to promote the unification of the proletariat,<sup>24</sup> it was Lenin’s and Stalin’s policies that sought to strengthen ethnic nationalism because it linked nationalism

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20 *ibid*, 139.

21 Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 237.

22 Peter H. Juviler. (1977) “Women and Sex in Soviet Law”, in *Women in Russia*, ed. Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin, Gail Warshofsky Lapidus (California: Stanford University Press, 1977): 243-265.

23 Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 239.

24 Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism”, *Slavic Review* 53, no 2 (Summer, 1994): 414-452.

to territory and language. This, in turn, was aimed at spreading and strengthening communist ideas.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, the active work in the Soviet Union to separate nationalities from one another, to give them special status for their culture and language, and to equate nationality with ethnicity and territory, began as early as the 1920s. As a result, nationalism is directly related to the gender aspect and not only is founded on it but also promotes the power distribution that is based on gender norms. According to Nira Yuval-Davis, another “essentializing dimension” in various nationalist projects is created by “culture and tradition”, which is usually associated with religion or language.<sup>26</sup> Yuval-Davis uses Armstrong’s term “symbolic border guards” to refer to people who form and draw the line between different nationalities and can identify people as “members or non-members” who connect to a specific style of culture, behavior, and most importantly, language.<sup>27</sup> Yuval-Davis emphasizes that gender symbols, the construction of manhood and womanhood, as well as sexuality and gendered relations of power, are very closely linked to the creation and strengthening of nationalist projects. At the same time, in her opinion, women in such projects are often embodiments of “border guards” as well as a source of cultural reproduction.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, Soviet policies aimed at consolidating ethnic nationalism equated nationality with a place of residence and language. Such an approach, on the one hand, promoted the formation of a hostile environment towards ethnic minorities in the Soviet republics, and, on the other hand, pushed women’s sexuality, reproductive skills, and body on the line of “border guarding” their own nationality.

## Georgian discourse

Based on the data collected during the research, it can be inferred that the discourse on sexuality produced in the Brezhnev-era Georgian SSR is distinguished by unique features and merges with the cultural and nationalist aspects characteristic of Georgia. Based on materials found in the journal *Georgia’s Woman*, it can be argued that the discourse of this period is characterized by the development of special, stricter disciplinary practices of self-normalization, such as family or community supervision, aimed at imposing strict sexual norms on women. This, as a result, created a special experience for Georgian women and promoted the traditional perception of sexuality from them.

The central theme of female sexuality in Georgian discourse is the creation of a family, which is related to the following concepts and themes: love, marriage, and dignity; motherhood and reproduction; nationalism and Georgian women.

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25 *ibid*, 418.

26 Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1997): 23.

27 *ibid*, 23.

28 *ibid*, 23.

## Love, marriage, dignity

The concepts of love and marriage are central in the materials identified in *Georgia's Woman*: they are repeated in different texts and establish an intertextual connection with each other, which indicates their importance for the Georgian discourse of sexuality. At the same time, in the Georgian context, love is not always related to marriage, but the latter is presented as a mandatory step for a woman, which is related to her dignity. Dignity is more important in this context than love and other concepts. For instance, the story of writer Sulkhan Ketelaury depicts a love story, where the main action takes place in Khevsureti. The protagonist of the story, a young man, arrives in his village for a summer vacation, where he falls in love with a village woman named Talala, and they meet each other every day, away from the public eye: "...no one could see us here. The rules and the village demanded exactly this from us in the first place."<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that the author, through his protagonist, also emphasizes the fact that "we listened greedily to the cries between our hearts, I do not remember ever touching each other, nor did we utter our love with words." Several concepts emerge in the text. On the one hand, the protagonist emphasizes the desire to stay away from society, because the "village and the rules" or those around him demanded it – which means that it is unacceptable in the minds of society for a young man and woman to meet, not to mention another kind of relationship. On the other hand, the protagonist notes that they "do not even touch" each other, which is again a tendency to follow certain norms, rules, and traditions.

Moreover, according to this story, talking about love is a shameful act, even the declaration of love evokes a kind of fear and awkwardness. The author notes that when the protagonist declared his love for Talana, "Talala was shocked, and there was fear in her eyes". "Keep quiet, what are you saying? ... Shut up ... it is shameful!"<sup>30</sup> At the same time, although they spend a lot of time together, not even physical contact, let alone sexual relations, unites them. The young man kisses Talala only once, which is unfortunate for them, as Talala's father, who catches them in the act, forbids the young people from ever seeing each other again, and locks his daughter in the house, and does not let her out until the boy has left the village.

Thus, the text raises two issues: societal scrutiny and strict norms that prohibit and control the encounter between a woman and a man, as well as the father figure as a supervisor, the defender of the purity and dignity of a woman, which is one of the main themes of the Georgian discourse. Consequently, society and the father – as supervisor – create disciplinary practices that normalize women's behavior.

It is important to highlight another concept of the Georgian context – the institution of marriage. According to the story, despite Talala's great love for the young man, she will be married off to someone else:

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29 S. Ketelaury, Khevsurian story. «Georgia's Woman» №7, 1964, p. 6.

30 *ibid*, p. 7.



“As woman wishes for a husband, she becomes grumpy. She needs to have a patron, or she will bring shame to the family. What does trust or love have to do with anything? No need to even mention it. A woman has to be loyal to her husband and raise kids. This is it, nothing else!”<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, it is clear that the father and the family, in addition to overseeing the woman's sexuality, also exercise control over her life. The notion of love becomes secondary and is replaced by such concepts as fidelity to husband and child-raising.

Yet the theme of the eternity of love is not lost in this text as it ends with the story of Talala, who is married to another and then the woman becomes a widow and is left with three children. When she meets her youth boyfriend she claims: “I am not what I should be ...”, because “sometimes I do not even think they are mine. As if they came to me from someplace and I have to care for them.. I know, I'm not right, I'm not complete ... I'm half a mother ...”.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, the theme of love is preserved in the story – a woman who is married against her wishes confesses to herself and her ex-boyfriend that she is not fulfilling her responsibilities as a mother, as she should, thus losing the only agency that would turn a woman into a social actor in Georgian society.

Love, according to this story, is a strong feeling that will accompany a person for the rest of their life. However, it is not this feeling that is important for creating a strong family, but a woman's fulfillment of her duties. Meanwhile sexual relations are entrusted to the sphere of the family and strict control is imposed on women's behavior in that regard. At the same time, in the Georgian discourse, a woman as a social actor is deprived of agency, her desires and consent are ignored, and, in general, a woman is presented as an object of supervision by society, the family, and the father. This in turn, is reflected in the language: “handing over to the patron”, “brought shame to the family name” etc. Therefore, the husband, father, family, family name are the guardians and “patrons” of the woman, without whose consent she has no right to make a choice, not even to have a desire. Attaching the purity and dignity of women to her family and family name is one of the unique cultural characteristics of the Georgian sexuality discourse.

The same tendencies, concepts, and meanings can be found in Diakonidze's story “It Will Be So”. The theme of strict norms and supervision of women's behavior is repeated here in the relationship between Potola and the main character, the narrator:

“I kiss Potola at the bottom of her ear, with my eyes closed, and then on her cheeks, close to her mouth...” The woman's reaction to this is negative, “brought shame to me”<sup>33</sup>, she agonizes and repeats the norms imposed on women and the tendency of self-normalization, and self-observation, as a disciplinary practice imposed by society and culture and internalized by her.

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31 *ibid.*

32 S. Ketelauri, Khevsurian story, 7.

33 O. Diakonidze, It Will Be So. «Georgia's Woman» №10, 1968, 21

The further development of the story breaks the narrative line of the previous work but confirms and repeats the main tendencies, thus once again highlighting the intertextual connections between these two texts, which become central to the Georgian discourse on sexuality. The protagonist of the story asks Potola to marry her, which she refuses, because, despite her desire, she will not be allowed to marry him.<sup>34</sup> However, in this case, this rejection does not materialize, because the couple marries, despite the resistance of Potola's father, which becomes the reason for his negative attitude: "I am watching as much shame is brought to my family" as "they are not legally married yet".<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that this text considers the validity of non-ceremonial marriage in the Georgian context, which in turn suggests the linkage of women's sexuality to her getting married, points to the central nature of virginity and female chastity and, therefore, highlights the differences that may exist in Georgian sexuality discourse and that of other country experiences. The narrator considers Potola to be his wife, as evidenced by his phrase: "The wife must be obedient, she provides care to the family when a man comes home from a hard day's work... she must provide comfort and solace"<sup>36</sup> – which, in turn, emphasizes the hierarchy in Georgian culture between men and women, the discriminatory nature of norms and attitudes towards women and, consequently, the centrality of these tendencies in the Georgian discourse, which undoubtedly impacted women and their lives.

Laert Chartolani's story "The Choice" provides another manifestation of a woman's sexuality being tied to the family; of creating a family based on mutual consent rather than legislation, and at the same time transposing a woman's body and freedom of choice to man. Kijo, with the help of several of his friends, kidnaps the girl and takes her to his relative, Nestor. Although the girl refuses to have any relationship with Kijo, he is still convinced that "she will voluntarily go with me, what else will she do?" In addition, Kijo and his friends discuss:

- "Before she realizes what is happening, Kijo will do the deed.
- I will get this done and will not even be late.
- What if she does not consent? Badri went pale.
- If she were on board, I would not bring her here, would I?"<sup>37</sup>

This section pronounces the degradation of the importance of women and their sexuality or consent. At the same time, it reflects a phenomenon in Georgian society, such as the abduction of a woman, a form of violence against a woman – sexual relation against her will, desire, and consent. It is also important to emphasize that silence on sexuality and sex in the Georgian context, says a lot and creates new methods for talking about this topic. Thus, for example, every word denoting the family union is directed at a woman's sexuality. "She is dignified" says Nestor in the story, "she is my wife" and "So it will be" says the narrator of the story. In the Georgian discourse of sexuality, female sexuality is necessarily linked to marriage and family formation.

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34 *ibid*, 21.

35 *ibid*, 22.

36 *ibid*.

37 L.Chartolani, Choice, "Women of Georgia", N7, 1980, 10.

Therefore, the Georgian discourse of female sexuality is characterized by the weakening of the meaning of love, while the strengthening of the notions of marriage and family formation. This, at the same time, is caused by bestowing female sexuality to the family realm. Although explicitly not found in any of the texts, the Georgian discourse on sexuality promotes concepts that are generated by the influence of silence on sexuality and are therefore aimed at covering up a woman's sexuality or using it solely in the context of family and dignity. At the same time, Georgian discourse is characterized by the neglect of a woman's desires, the depiction of her as a passive object, and necessarily connecting her with father and family. Women's behavior is under strict supervision, which, as can be seen from the texts, also creates a tendency for women to self-normalize. And as a result, they initiate self-observation and normalization of their behavior or actions. Accordingly, the Georgian discourse on sexuality is normative and includes various mechanisms for controlling or supervising women's sexuality.

## Motherhood and reproduction

The topic of motherhood and reproduction was central to the Soviet discourse on sexuality, and the Georgian discourse is no exception. This is evidenced by the copying and repetition of Russian texts on motherhood in Georgian editions. This underscores once again the deliberate linkage of sexuality discourse with the solution of demographic and economic problems during the Brezhnev era of the Soviet Union. This is evidenced by articles such as Nargiza Mgeladze's "December 5 Street", which depicts the lives of children abandoned by their mothers. The author imposes all the responsibility of childcare on mothers and, at the same time, exposes the mothers' "immoral life".<sup>38</sup> This represents the tendency of women's sexuality to be related to their gender. Moreover, this trend creates an image of the ideal woman, whose only permissible sexuality should be related to motherhood. And the denial of motherhood a priori means the sexual freedom of a woman, which is unacceptable and foreign to Georgian culture and context and, consequently, should become grounds for their marginalization, exclusion, and punishment by society.

The author of the article also dehumanizes women who refuse to have children: "It is difficult to speak to them in human language, especially to convince a woman who has abandoned a child."<sup>39</sup> She adds that a woman who has abandoned a child may have had a difficult time in her life, but "it is still impossible to justify this act because," according to the author, "it is easier to take your own life than to abandon a child".<sup>40</sup> At the end of the article, the author notes: "A well-brought-up child is the future of the country and is a reward for the mother."<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, the author explicitly emphasizes the importance of motherhood and, at the same time, criticizes women who refuse the social role of mother, attributing this act to female sexuality, and placing it in the sphere of moral judgment.

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38 Mgeladze, 5 December Street. «Georgia's Woman» №6, 1970, 11.

39 *ibid.*

40 *ibid.*

41 *ibid.*

The Russian-language texts on motherhood and reproduction, published in Georgia's *Woman* are also interesting to consider. For example, Galina Orshinskaya's "One Good Person" is a story about a young woman. She finds out that she is pregnant and although her husband asks her to think about whether she will be able to raise the child because she is a student and her husband, Victor is a sailor and will be gone for a long period, the woman is still determined to keep the child. The story is entirely aimed at emphasizing the positive qualities of the protagonist as she does not abandon her child and does not have an abortion. This highlights how important the childbearing and reproductive ability should be for women; and the support that the state provides in this regard. The author tries to emphasize how virtuous it is for a woman to have a child: "I was a silly girl. In the mornings I would run to work, in the evenings – to the institute. I would skip lectures ... " says the protagonist. The pregnancy brought another experience and for her, it became "the main thing that occupies my mind."<sup>42</sup> It is important to note that in this story the author attributes agency to the woman because, unlike all other stories, the narrator here is a woman. However, as the protagonist herself, she is given an agency only when she becomes pregnant; that is, she is involved in something useful for society. This, in turn, reflects the attitude towards women in the Soviet Union during the Brezhnev period. The tendency to assign agency to mothers also points to the importance of increasing female desire to reproduce during this period.

Consequently, one of the central themes of the Georgian discourse of sexuality is the connection between female sexuality and motherhood and her reproductive ability. This topic is one of the central ones not only within the Georgian, but also the Russian discourse. Its repetition in both Georgian and Russian texts, as well as the use of texts translated from Russian to disseminate in the Georgian space, testify to the universal nature of this topic amid the Soviet discourse on sexuality.

## Nationalism and the Georgian woman

As I have mentioned above, the promotion of nationalism in the various republics of the Soviet Union, the reduction of it to ethnic origin, and its attachment to language and territory, was an accepted and encouraged form of the policy of nationalism.<sup>43</sup> Georgia was no exception to this. It is important to note that the nationalist discourse produced in Georgia overlapped with the above-mentioned sexuality discourse on several issues. On the one hand, these two discourses were interspersed with the repetition of the notions of female dignity and morality, and, on the other hand, with the nationalist discourse providing one of the central roles to the Georgian mother and thus giving her the status of "the guardian of the nation's borders".

For example, in the article "The Knight in the Panther's Skin and the Georgian Woman" Natela Urushadze highlights the work of famous women in the history of Georgia and emphasizes

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42 G. Orshinskaya, *One Good Person*. "Georgia's Woman" №11, 1968, 15.

43 Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism", *Slavic Review* 53, no 2 (Summer, 1994): 414-452.

that Georgian mothers passed on the knowledge of the Georgian language to generations from century to century:

“In the old days, ‘The Knight in the Panther’s Skin’ was not only a source of pleasure for a Georgian woman. It was the best way to master the mother tongue in the important work of educating future generations.”<sup>44</sup>

The author concludes that “this is how Georgian women kept their mother tongue”, which should be a “role model for women today”.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, the author of the article promotes the involvement of women in the protection and preservation of the language. Thus, on the one hand, assigns to women the role of “the guardian of the border” for defending the central concept of the nationalist discourse – the Georgian language – and on the other hand, emphasizes the role of Georgian mothers in preserving the Georgian language and culture, thus also highlighting the importance of motherhood. Accordingly, the image of the Georgian woman is one of the important aspects of the Georgian nationalist discourse, which is also evident in other texts.

This tendency is also underlined by Nino Gegenava’s article “Tvishi Woman”, where the author recalls Akaki Tsereteli’s trip to the Racha-Lechkhumi region and tells the story of Kesaria Alavidze, who read Akaki her poem. To describe this woman, the author uses phrases such as “morally pure, virtuous and hardworking.”<sup>46</sup> At the same time, according to the author, she had six children, whom she raised alone, “but they grew up loving and victorious”, and one of them was even a revolutionary, and others actively helped, because “they were the children of an honest Georgian woman.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, this text reiterates the importance of motherhood for the nationalist project and, at the same time, adds the issue of “morality” and “purity”, which is inevitably associated with female sexuality.

The topic of motherhood and linking women with nation and nationality is also found in Marika Baratashvili’s article “Unlucky or Something Else?”, which discusses the “consumerist nature” of women and the bad impact that women may have on men. The article emphasizes that the image of a Georgian woman, which is related to motherhood, is a historical fact and that consumerism should be foreign to her. Accordingly, the author argues that such features of a Georgian woman as “firmness”, which is why, according to her, “the pillar that protects the roof of the house is called mother-pillar”, as well as “prudence”, “purity” which “a brave man takes with him, by carrying a wimple (Mandili) from his wife or beloved woman, as he goes away in the war ...”, should become integral to the fight against consumerism.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, when talking about the role of the Georgian woman, the author also puts forward motherhood and woman’s “purity”, which implies an interrelation of woman’s sexuality, or rather, a means of managing and controlling a woman’s sexuality, with nationalist discourse.

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44 N. Urushadze, *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin and the Georgian Woman* “Georgia’s Woman” №6, 1966, 13.

45 *ibid.*

46 N. Gegenava, *Tvishi woman*, “Georgia’s Woman” №6, 1968, 19.

47 *ibid.*

48 M. Baratashvili, “Unlucky, or something else?” “Georgia’s Woman” №1, 1970, 15.



## Conclusion

The Brezhnev-era Soviet Union, where solving the demographic and economic problems was quite important, faced a great challenge after the change in the law on divorce and abortion. It was necessary to devise new ways and methods of solving the above-mentioned problems, as the weakening of the rule of law could lead to a decline in the birth rate, which, in turn, would harm the economic situation. One of the most important ways to solve these problems was to control and supervise sexuality, such as managing people's sexuality through public discourse. In the Georgian SSR, soviet discourses of sexuality varied because they intersected with local characteristics such as cultural and national aspects. The discourse of sexuality produced in Georgia was characterized by such concepts as love, marriage, and dignity; family and reproduction; and women as "guardians" of national identity. In addition, in Georgian discourse, the concepts of love and marriage are inextricably linked to the image of the father, surname, and family, which oversee a woman's behavior and add a cultural dimension to the means of controlling her sexuality.

Lastly, the data collected within the framework of the study, show that the nationalist discourse of Soviet Georgia during the Brezhnev era was largely in line with the discourse of female sexuality, which at the time played a dominant role in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Consequently, the discourse on sexuality, which was already characterized by a hierarchical nature and subjecting the female sexuality and agency entirely to men, was further exacerbated by its intersection with nationalist discourse. This, in turn, portrayed female sexuality as a central aspect of a nation, a nationality, thus exacerbating the need for its oversight by society or the family.