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VIOLENCE, GENDER AND WAR 4.

## Women's Traumatic Experience at World War II: the Soviet case

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### **Abstract:**

This article highlights the problem of women and the war from the perspective of traumatic nature of female experience. The official policy of memory of World War II in the Soviet Union did not include women's experience of sexual violence because it can break the concept of glorification of winners-Soviet soldiers. Women who experienced the attempts of sexism and sex violence at war became the hostages of the official politics of memory in the peacetime and thus they were forced to “work through their past”. Ideological slogans of the Soviet time became the part of the collective memory and were reflected in the personal memory. Thanks to the stories of participants and witnesses of World War II the new war images and concepts are formed which can be included in the cultural memory about the war nowadays.

The analysis of one oral interview showed the depth of the problem of sexual violence during the war. The impossibility of the women-victims of such relations to describe their experience, the absence of the special psychological and social services during the post-war period, which can help women to overcome their troubles, show us the problems of “working through the past” and the policy of the oblivion.

**Key words:** World War II, sexual relationships and violence, gender, oral history

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### **Women's Traumatic Experience at World War II: the Soviet case**

For several years I made the oral history interviews with different groups of witnesses of World War II in the South of Russia. I try to reconstruct the every day life at the occupied zones, in the partisan groups or at the front line. In time I turned to analyse the language of narration in terms of gender specification. Usually I came to the informant and during the interview just followed the speaker, sometimes asking about the details of the narrated episodes. This narrative method of making interview helps to observe how the speaker identifies himself in present days by recalling the past (e.g. Rosenthal 2006: 1-16). I noticed when the informant speaks about his or her traumatic experience of the past; the personal self-identification in the narrative may vary.

I would like to prove this thesis and to highlight the way of the variation of self-identification of the speaker on the materials of the only one oral history interview with the former female soldier. This interview surprised me as a scholar from the very beginning. This

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story is lacking the part of reconstructing the history of hostilities, in which the storyteller has taken part. But it is very provocative in terms of narrating the gender experience. In oral history, memory becomes not simply a source for the investigation of the past, but an object of study in its own right<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of this article is therefore to understand the reasons and the way of presenting women's traumatic experience at the war, such as rape and other kind of sexual violence against women. The dialogue between the one and the many will show how we can use one narrative to move between individual and group experience<sup>2</sup>. This study appears to be the pioneering in the post-soviet discourse for two reasons. There are only few special studies about the sex violence at war in the contemporary Russian historiography up until now (I will point them out in the first part of this article). Based on the de-coding of the text of one oral history interview I would like to highlight the problem of describing by meanings of words or silence women's traumatic experience at war.

### **Women at World War II: soviet and post-soviet historiographical overview and the politics of memory**

The whole complex of research literature, formed during the Soviet period, covers the theme of women's participation in the war from the perspective of the glorification the women, who struggled against the enemy. Historians until the early 1990-s tried to show the power of the Soviet socialist system and the unique role of women-soldiers (e.g. Nikolaeva 1941; Devushki na fronte 1943; Devushki na fronte 1944; Aralovetz 1947; Chechneva 1967; Murmanceva 1974; Kondakova 1976)<sup>3</sup>. It was important to them to show the scope of the Soviet women's participation in World War II and the number of such works therefore dominated over the studying the internal world of women-soldiers.

The Russian historian Elena Seniavskaya (1999) in the 1990-ies was among the first scholars who explained the gendered perceptions of the war by psychology. Also Belorussian journalist and writer Svetlana Alexievich (1988: 61-62) interprets the different memories with the help of psychology:

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

As Svetlana Alexievich argues, the war was a contradiction to her feminine nature. It was not only psychology as we can see by the statements of the women. They had to deal with the breaking of stable social roles during wartime what seemed to women as the wreckage of life itself.

Cases about the sexuality in the army and sexual violence in and beyond the military

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<sup>1</sup> Bosworth, Michal. “Let me tell you...”: memory and the practice of Oral History. In Joan Tumblety ed. Memory and history. Understanding memory as source and subject. New York and London: Routledge. 2013. P. 31.

<sup>2</sup> See the same experience of analysis of one narrative about bombing in France made by Michal Bosworth in Memory and history. Understanding memory as source and subject. New York and London: Routledge. 2013. P. 31-56.

<sup>3</sup> The more detailed analysis of soviet historiography about the women at World War II: Rebrova 2012: 263-280.

were omitted for a long time in the Soviet and Russian historical studies. Especially the rapes during the war were excluded for a long time from national historiography. Even in West Europe and in the United States the topic of sufferings of women during the war was out of public discourse. The first public event that addressed women, gender, and the Holocaust took place in March 1983, when Esther Katz and Joan Ringelheim organized the ground-breaking “Conference on Women Surviving the Holocaust” at Stern College in New York (Hedgepeth and Saidel 2010: 4). As Elena Metcherkina (2001: 255), a Russian sociologist pointed out: “Men became heroes if they died at the frontline. At the same time, raped and murdered woman were never considered to be heroes, there is no monument in honour of them. Those who survived never tried to speak about their humiliation and traumatic consciousness”.

After publishing the novel “War’s Unwomanly Face” by Svetlana Alexievich, the topic of sexual violence during World War II appeared in the scientific post-soviet discussions. Feminist researchers began to speak about this kind of women’s traumatic war experience for the first time since 1990’s. The paper by American sociologist Nechama Teck (2003: 168-188) “Among Partisans: The Fate of the Woman” was among the first researches done on understanding the peculiarities of women’s practice of living mostly among men in the soviet partisan groups. The first stories of raped women appeared in the Russian mass media at the same time, in the 1990’s (e.g. Alexievich 1988; Katchenko 1994). There were no stories about sexual violence in memoirs written during the Soviet period because such stories could destroy the official policy of the memory about the war and the concept of the soviet hero who made the Great Victory in the Great Patriotic War<sup>4</sup>.

Currently, there are several fragments of arguments in the historical literature that the officers turned to account for their positions on the sexual violence against women-soldiers. Thus, the story of signaller Vera Yerokhina pointed that there were several women’s suicides after the attempts of sexual violence by men (Kapyshev 2000). The war veteran Yuriy Krimskij marked the cases when “the soviet officers had been handed over to the court, or sent to the penal battalion, or even been shot if they raped women-soldiers in their army” (Kljuchnikov 2000). A special meeting of the command and the political leaders of the Red Army in 1943 was devoted to this problem. Still, the study of women’s experience is complicated by searching for informants who normally preferred to forget and never speak about their experience of being raped.

The phenomenon of the *poxodno-polevaya wife*<sup>5</sup> was for a long time omitted in historiography also. In many cases we can classify these sexual relations as survival prostitution: for women, sex could become a reason of patronage by the officer, and therefore the slight possibility of staying alive at the front. Women usually tried to find a man who had some kind of powerful resource. In this sense, sex for survival must always be seen as a form of sexual violence in which some degree of personal agency is involved (Chatwood 2010: 67). For example, the Soviet officers could have a woman stay together with him in the rear. Usually men-officers had a regular family before the war. Their temporary wives had an opportunity of having tasty meals; they were sent to the front line rarely. However, the

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<sup>4</sup> In contemporary Russian society World War II related primarily not so much the danger of Nazism in Europe and the world in general, but to the Russian context. Because of this statement World War II for Russians is still not the “world” but the “patriotic” war, which had been started not in 1939, but in 1941, and its victory the Russians celebrate on May, 9<sup>th</sup> (but not on the 8<sup>th</sup> as the rest of the world). See: Dubin 2004: 66-81.

<sup>5</sup> «The field wife” – this was the category of women who had the sexual relationship with the officers during the war. Normally men had such relations with women only at war: in peaceful life they could have the official wife.

position of a temporary wife was unstable; such women could be set aside for different reasons. And they could lose all the blessings they had before (Krinko 2008: 257-265). One of our informants recalled:

*“Well, there are few people who can talk about it. Of course there were situations when you started relations with the officer. Then you could be sent to the other troop where you can start a love affair with another one. Some of such women got married finally”* (Garkov, Interview)<sup>6</sup>.

All social relations become stronger at the war. People had to live, as it was the last day of their life, because the death was coming along with them. Consensual sexual relationships took place by mutual agreement of both a man and a woman. Further, on the verge of death, they would not think about morality and social norms. Emotional needs caused by the loss of family members and a stable world was acted out in relationships. To give an impression about some numbers: the order № 0365 by the People's Commissariat of the Navy dated May 6, 1942 mentioned that among 21292 women, who had been called to the Navy in 1942 1878 were dismissed for “the lack of discipline in the behaviour” and for “pregnancy” (Katchenko 1994: 124).

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

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

And even more complicated issue is relationships between Russian women and German soldiers. The German historian Regina Mühlhäuser (2010) showed that a whole spectrum of relations, from rape and survival prostitution to love affairs, existed. In Russia even until now social taboos exist on stories about the intimate encounters between German men and Russian women during the war.

Survival prostitution and sexual violence at the war was the result of traditional (patriarchal) model of relationship between men and women in the Soviet times, and it continues to legitimize the inequality of subjects (man and woman) in the field of sexual

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<sup>6</sup> In 2008-2009 we made a project about the every day life at the occupied zones of the South of Russia. Our informants were mostly war children, but some of them at the end of war became soldiers. The theme of their war experience that way appeared in the interviews occasionally but gave the information about relations between young soldiers and women at frontline.

desire and pleasure in the extreme war situation. War influenced the life of women strongly even in the post-war period. It is interesting that according to the official data the rate of marriage in the post-war period was stable with the tendency to increase<sup>7</sup>. But the data cannot explain the individual cases of women-former soldiers, who remained to be single after the war. There could be several reasons for this fact. Women lost the opportunity to have children or they had abortions during the wartime. After the war they were also often unable to give birth. Patriarchal families always orient the future generations, and the inability to have children left many women single. Also, in peacetime, a woman did not need to find out the patron among the commanders and officers, and therefore such relationships stopped. On the other hand, strong women were in great importance during the war and after it, such women could not find their personal happiness with men, wartime friends, who were looking for the weak women as their wives

To understand the traumatic experience of women at war we could use the ego-documents, and principally oral history interviews that could help to reconstruct the dynamics of their war images, which were formed by the Soviet mentality on the one hand and on the other hand existed in the silent personal histories. We could find less official phrases of the past in the oral stories. Nevertheless, the narrative continues to be political on the whole. The communist ideology became a part of the individual consciousness of former soldiers. Therefore, most of them remember the Soviet past with nostalgia. There is no contradiction between the communism ideas and the real situation in their minds.

### **Reconstructing women's traumatic war experience: the case study**

The case study would be based on one oral history interview, which could be interesting from different perspectives. In this narration, silence memory about the sexual relationship during the war has been pronounced for the first time. The way the informant articulated her experience is very pro-soviet with pedagogical instructions. At the same time, the plot of the story is new and provocative.

This interview was held in the informant's apartment in autumn 2007 in Krasnodar, South of Russia<sup>8</sup>. Grandma Nadia (let us call her this way) celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary few months earlier, in the summer of 2007. Previously, I had an experience of talking with older informants than her, and most of them appeared to be quite sane people. Therefore, I did not hesitate about such an embarrassing age of my informant.

At the appointed hour, I was in the grandma Nadia's apartment, but she was not home yet. She was bathed in her neighbour's apartment. After that she needed some time for recovering after taking a bath. So I had time to have a look at the interior of her apartment. My storyteller lived alone for a couple of years; she never had kids and her husband died several years ago. By the words of her neighbours, she didn't have any other relatives. That's why she was taken care by her neighbours.

Her apartment consisted of the two rooms, hall, kitchen-room and toilet. I was amazed by the decoration of her apartment. All the walls in the hall and kitchen were hung with illustrations of girls and women, carefully cut from popular magazines in the Soviet times "Krestyanka", and "Rabotnitza i selyanka" and from different old calendars and newspapers.

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<sup>7</sup> Dannye CSU SSSR o brakah i razvodah v SSSR v 1940, 1943-1954 gg. i I polugodii 1955 g. [USSR Central Statistical Administration data on marriages and divorces in the USSR in 1940, 1943-1954, and first half of 1955]. In Rrossijskij gosudarstvennyj arhiv jekonomiki. Fond 1562. Opis' 41. Delo 89. Listy 128-131. [Russian State Archive of the Economy. Foundation. 1562. Inventory. 41. Business. 89. Sheets. 128-131.].

<sup>8</sup> About this interview in Russian see Rebrova 2008: 220-230.

Many pictures have faded and they were dull, but the hostess does not remove them. Some of the illustrations were attached to the interior doors and mirrors. Different in size and quality, these pictures formed a sense of nostalgia for beauty and could be associated with the personal experience of grandma Nadia. These illustrations, as well as many wall-calendars and greeting cards for the different anniversaries of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War seemed to be the main subject of the genuine pride by the apartment's owner. She kept greeting cards and testimonials as the main evidence of her involvement in the victory. The newspaper notes with the congratulations to the veterans occupy prominent places of honour in the apartment, as well as portraits of beautiful women instead of being neatly tucked away in the boxes.

Before the interview I asked grandma Nadia about the reasons of hanging all these pictures and cards on the wall. *"Because I want to be with them, with these soldiers"* (Razumnaya, Interview), she replied. It was a very strange answer, because there was no picture of the soldier. Images of beautiful women were the first that attracted the attention of the stranger in that apartment; and after that one can pay attention to the greeting cards and newspapers notes. It is obvious that a person notices pictures firstly and then tries to read notes. By the way, it seems that all these images from the post-war magazines became a silent memory of the war traumatic experience of my informant.

Moreover, it was no doubt that the interior of the apartment was made to legitimize the fact of the participation of her owner in the war, and women's portraits were a kind of crying for her lost and ruined youth.

It should be mentioned that I worked on a project about social memory of the wartime in the Kuban region<sup>9</sup> at that time. That is why I considered that interview as unsuccessful at first, because it was not about everyday life at the war in the studied region. Also the audio of the interview was overrun with the deviations from the theme of our conversation, and generally speaking it was not a qualitative oral history interview. However, after some time, when I transcribed the audio file, I found out the obvious unique nature of this interview in the part of studying women's military experience and peculiarities of silent memory of the events. That is why I wanted to make a re-interview. Unfortunately, it appeared not possible due to the informant's bad health.

If we try to reconstruct the informant's life story, we get the following plot. Grandma Nadia was born in 1917 in the village Maryanskaya, Krasnodar region. She had an older brother who died during World War II. Her father died before the war. Apparently after her father's death the family moved to Krasnodar. The informant found the beginning of the war in this city, survived the initial period of the occupation of Krasnodar, and then she was mobilized by the age in autumn of 1942. She began her career as a soldier in Red Army in the 12<sup>th</sup> air defence corps. She struggled in Ukraine and Romania as a soldier and then as a sergeant. Her corps was briefly in the environment. She was not logical in naming the places where she had to fight. So according to the text of the interview it is impossible to reconstruct the route of her corps or the course of military operations. However, relying to the ego-documents only we cannot solve this task. This interview is unique in the context of the interpretation of the war events and in the field of studies the women's traumatic experience of survival at the war.

The informant was an educated woman, that is why she was in the unit constantly, and was never been sent to the front. After the war she demobilized and began to work at the oil

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<sup>9</sup> The river Kuban in the main river in the south of Russia, Krasnodarskij kraj.

plant in Krasnodar. At that time she met her future husband. Their family had no children. From late 1990-ies she lived alone, because her husband died. I did not get any other information about her other relatives. We can assume that she really did not have other relatives, or they quarrelled, because her neighbours looked after her at that time.

To analyse the text of the interview I used the concept of trauma and silent memory. We could suppose that there has been something in the time of her military youth, which she tried to forget all her post-war life. This assumption could be confirmed by the words of grandma Nadia about her war experience:

*“In general, how can I say, this is difficult story, too many years have been passed. I'm trying to forget it all”* (Razumnaya, Interview).

Researchers of the social processes in the 1990's found out that the concept of trauma, which caused in late 19<sup>th</sup> century especially in medicine and psychiatry, become a central issue of the cultural imagination in the present studies. One of the scholars described the nature of cultural trauma as “a variation between memory and oblivion” (Leys 2000). There are cultural (Sztompka 1993), sociological (Alexander 2002) and psychological (LaCapra 1999) concepts of trauma. It should be noted the study of the psychoanalytic school from the classical psychoanalysis of Freud, who rehabilitated the term “the oblivion”, through the Carl Jung's (1964) theory of archetypes to the Teodor Adorno's (2005: 45-67) concept that involves the analysis of such concepts as “the guilty complex”, “working the past” and other. Cultural trauma could be described as a break in tradition, the loss of meaning and uncertainty in the future. To overcome any cultural trauma a man can only by “worked with” it, by searching the causes and explanations, by the partial oblivion, and to some extent, by amnesia (Ricoeur 2004). Petr Sztompka (1991) considers cultural trauma as a process, which is constantly developing, passing six stages: structural and cultural past; traumatic events or situations; special ways of defining, interpreting, language or interpretation of traumatic events; traumatic symptoms (the special way of behaviour and points of view); posttraumatic adaptation; and overcoming the trauma.

These approaches in the study of memory and forgetting, can be used in the analysis of the interview with grandma Nadia. Let us try to follow the logic of her narration and answer the main question: *what kind of trauma the informant experienced at the war, and by what means she can speak or keep silent about it.*

The process of interview became a kind of ritual to the informant, with the central action of the legitimation of her own war experience. In the very beginning of the interview grandma Nadia asked me to find in her papers in the other room and bring her certificate of her participants of the Great Patriotic War. This document is a formal confirmation of her involvement in the war and, therefore, in the Great victory. To her, it is important not to name the places of the war battles, in which she participated, but to show this document that legitimates the fact that she was a soldier. To her it was necessary to show the document, because *“you [the interviewer] did not see that I am a war veteran”* (Razumnaya, Interview). Maybe that is why she insisted on bringing and showing her document, which is stored in the most distant part of the bedroom, next to other important documents.

*“This is my passport [shows], this is my document that I participated in the war, here is my birth certificate, what else do you need? I also had orders and medals and all you see, these documents were writing not by myself”* (Razumnaya, Interview).

War veteran document is important evidence to her; it states her belongings to the “caste” of war veterans. The informant approved this way her military status in my eyes.

Perhaps someone could previously criticize the fact that she was a soldier. Moreover, she admitted that she was at the headquarters, under the protection of the officers and had never been sent to the frontline. Therefore her war veteran document became the main source of her involvement in the war; it also put her on the same stage with men, war veterans who fought and died at the front. The leitmotif of this evidence of her involvement in the war process appeared during the whole interview. Grandma Nadia repeatedly asked me to check her words in different state organizations:

*“Well, even in the recruitment office, even if you do not believe me, you can go there and ask if I were a soldier [she refers to her mother's family name and her first name]. And they'll tell you... But they are [the workers at the recruitment office] all young now... Probably, they must know me. The military authorities always congratulate me”* (Razumnaya, Interview).

This attempt to find the support from the official state organizations became another undeniable proof that she was really a war veteran. Why should she need to involve a wide range of confirmation to the fact of her participation in the war? My goal was to interview former soldiers, and therefore, when I asked grandma Nadia to speak about her war experience, I had no doubt about her wartime past. Perhaps, the informant herself needed in constant evidences, she had something to keep silent about, she never was at the front line, and maybe she might have been criticized in the post-war period that she was not a real war veteran? And now, at the end of life her main purpose was the legitimation of her military past, which observed latency in the decoration of her apartment and openly in the conversation with me as a stranger to her.

During the interview grandma Nadia could not hear the question often, and then answered off the topic. She distracted the conversation, trying to ignore the questions. She always referred to her old age, diseases and deafness. However, she heard my speech in a low voice with her neighbour well done. Then, I had assumed that her appellation to the deafness was just an excuse not to give answers on my questions and not to pronounce any kind of events in her wartime past. Another method of ignoring my questions was a display of her hospitality. Instead of continuing the story, she offered me different cookies and tea. She was genuinely offended when I refused and tried to continue the conversation. Analysing the text of the interview, I found that grandma Nadia turned to the food talk each time when the speech comes to the relations of girls with the Germans.

The central problem of the whole interview by the will of the informant became the story about the woman's sexuality and violence at the war. This is her traumatic experience, which she carried the whole life, and she could not speak openly even before the death. However, she said latently, by the means of the Soviet-era stamps. She talked not about her personal experience but about experiences of other women. She played a role of the high morality person who could convict sex relations of those bad girls.

*“We had a girl's corps. The general ruled it. There was very strictly, very strictly. But there were some girls who could break the rules. But I forgot something, well, it's all forgotten”* (Razumnaya, Interview).

Grandma Nadia stressed repeatedly *“to tell you honestly, I have not been sent to the front line. I was in the corps always. I did not move away from the officers, I was together with them [men commanders] all the time”* (Razumnaya, Interview).

Responding to my question whether a person could get used to the war, she said: *“I needed to hide for not being sent to the front line. There were girls who made sex with men, Lord forgive”* (Razumnaya, Interview). How could a young attractive girl hide from the front

line at the war? The only way to escape the front line was to find a patron, who could be a man with a powerful resource, as a rule. Such patrons were usually commanders or senior officers.

Even more surprising was the following fragment of the interview. Grandma Nadia did not speak directly about her personal war experience. She stressed *“there were the girls who made love with the Germans, and then had been punished by Soviet men”* (Razumnaya, Interview). She articulated the experience of the other girls in her corps, and then she turned the conversation to another theme immediately, offering a meal to me or keeping a long pause. I had never heard such stories before, to hear about love and sexual relations between Soviet women-soldiers and German soldiers in the front area was very surprising. We cannot verify her words. She spoke in the plural form and impersonally about her women troop-mates. There was always an opposition of “me” and “they” in her story. Sex relationship, therefore, becomes the product for both, for “us” and “them” (Ringelheim 1985: 741-761).

The life of girls at the war had been complicated by the dependence of biology and sexism. There are particular stress situations, such as menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and abortion, along with humiliation, rape, sexual violence, and sexual trade.

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

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

It is important to stress, that I asked Grandma Nadia to talk about her own war experience. The idea was to record the story of her personal emotions, feelings and impressions. But the narrator, firstly, pointed out a different field of studying, and, secondly, she often substituted the personal experience by the description of the behaviour of the other girls. She continually stressed that she was not one of those girls, who had sex relations with the Germans. Why did the informant use this way of narration? Whom and what was she trying to convince in, arguing the opposition of “they-bad” and “me-positive heroine, a sample of morality and decency”? Her speech seemed to become an attempt to whitewash herself in my eyes as a stranger; she appeared to be the main judge of these women in the whole interview-performance. This kind of narration leads a scholar to the problem of personal experiences of the traumatic past. “Collective memory is a memory of the moral duty of justice or prevention its implementation” (Ricoeur 2004: 7).

When people are on the verge of death, they would not think about morality and about “what parents will say”. She constructed her own image as an innocent girl, who thought about morality even during the war. Later, she made a reservation that her husband twitted her when she went to the theatre. Maybe he was jealous to her military background and did not trust her. In her youth she was an attractive and even beautiful woman (it is evidenced by the numerous photographs in her family album). She never had a baby. It happened not because she did not want a child at all. The explanation comes from her military youth. It is known that women at the war used various methods of traditional medicine to get rid of the undesirable consequences of sex relationships with men. A woman became barren as a result of such experiments over her body, as well as various kinds of sexually transmitted diseases. There were many cases of the death of women.

War was primarily directed against women. A woman dies more than one time at the war. She dies each time when her children are killed; when her home family life are breaking suddenly; when she feels a constant fear of being raped. Women are really afraid; they are afraid of their own nationality men and other men, because men have not left their aggressive masculinity on the battlefield. This masculinity entered their house, invaded the sphere of their private lives (Papich 1999: 17).

To perceive the stories of sexual violence during the war is not very easy, especially it is difficult to retell them. Some people believe that talking about this kind of things is not suitable; the discussion about sexuality is been insulted by the memory of the dead or the living persons (Ringelheim 1985: 753), or of the war in general. To other people, such stories are too hard and painful to think about. But there are people, who consider these cases as insignificant pieces in the spectre of patriotic ideas related to a Great Victory.

### Conclusion

The official policy of the memory of World War II could not include women's experience of sexual violence because it can break the concept of glorification of soldiers. Women who experienced the attempts of sexism and sex violence at war became the hostages of the official politics of memory in the peacetime and thus they were forced to “work through their past”. Ideological slogans of the Soviet time became the part of the collective memory and were reflected in the personal memory. Thanks to the stories of participants and witnesses of World War II about their war experiences, the new images and concepts are formed and they can be included in the cultural memory of the war nowadays. These stories could help to reconstruct the dynamics of the images of the relationship, formed in the Soviet mentality from one hand and existed in the silent personal history on the other hand.

This analysis of one oral history interview shows the depth of the problem of sexual violence at the war. The inability of women-victims of such relationships to speak openly about their experiences, the absence of special psychological and social services in the post-war period that could help women to survive the incident - all these problems shows the mechanisms of silent memory. Let us hope that the current generation of researchers will be able to listen, learn and voice traumatic experiences of women - participants of World War II.

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