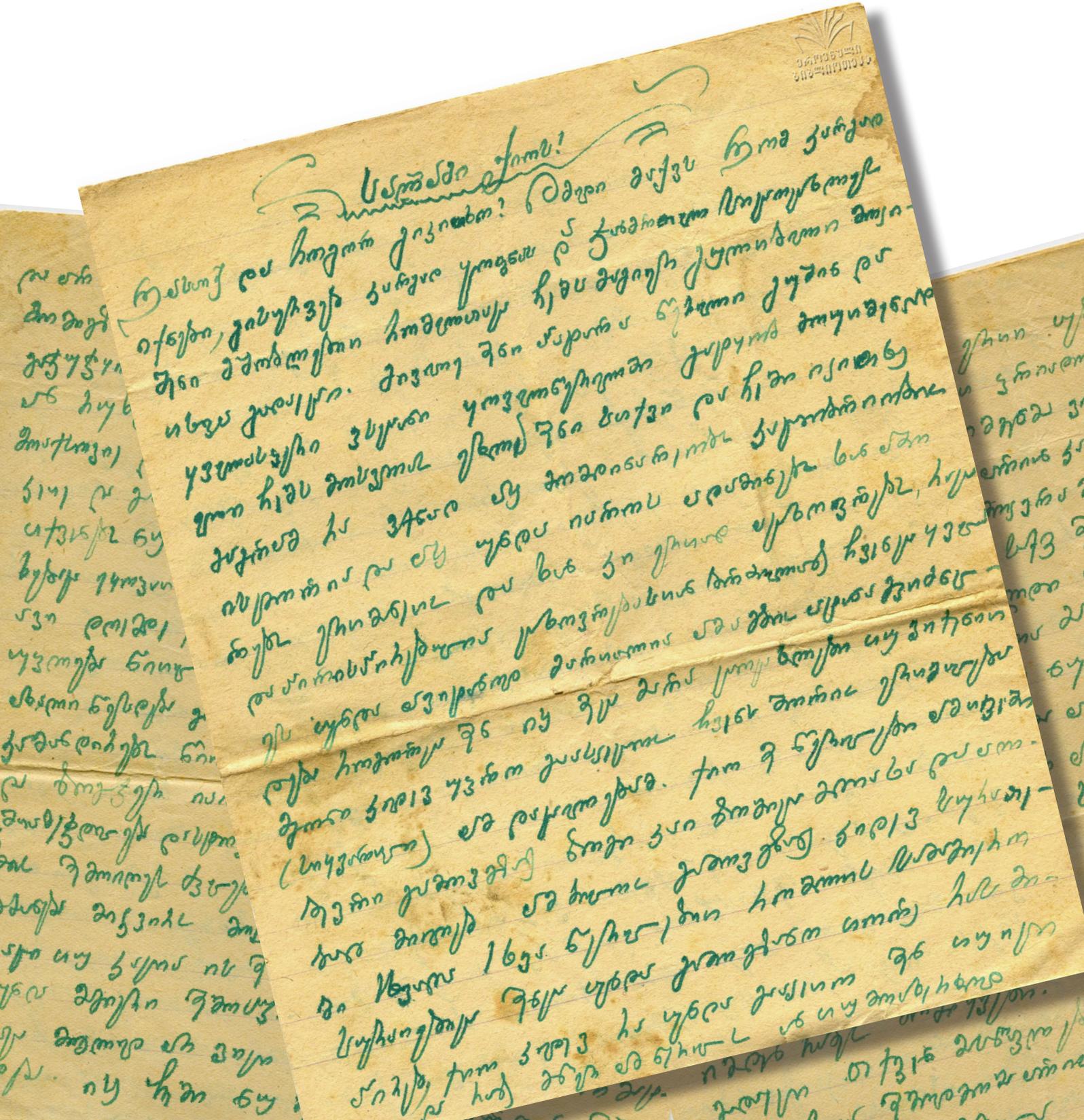


HOUSEWIVES ON THE HOME FRONT:

DEPICTING WOMEN'S ROLES IN GEORGIAN PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE DURING WORLD WAR II

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The paper was prepared within the framework of “World War II and Women”
a small grant project by Heinrich Boell Foundation Tbilisi Office

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The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and
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 **HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG**
TBILISI
South Caucasus Region

Tbilisi 2020

ABSTRACT

Based on private wartime letters, this paper reviews the roles and experiences of women on the home front in Georgia during the Second World War. In doing so, it refers to the gender policy pursued by the Soviet Union at that time. This paper aims at the critical rethinking of Soviet rhetoric pertaining to women's emancipation through the analysis of personal correspondence during the war. The research relies on the Ivereli digital library and its archival fonds, which are entitled "Letters from the Front". The paper analyzes the letters kept in the fond from the feminist perspective. This paper is meant for gender researchers, feminist activists, students and those interested in the social status of women in the Soviet Union.

Key Words:

- Women's Rights;
- World War II;
- Soviet Union;
- Personal Correspondence;
- Wartime Letters.

Photo on the cover: Tite Japaridze's letter to his wife Kio Kereselidze, 1940.

Collection "Letters from the Front", National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. Project "WWII in letters", author of the project: Maia Simonishvili.

Owner of the photo: Lia Japaridze

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INTRODUCTION

War is a gendered experience and affects women and men differently. Its main actors are mostly men. The war chronicles remember their names and actions, while women's participation in war and, conversely, the impact of war on women - is invisible. Their human loss, survival strategies and the feelings accompanying these processes are invisible. The war chronicles that focuses on events – time, place, actors - leaves no room for women's experiences. In war, men possess both political and symbolic power: they decide when to begin and when to end it. A woman's perspective, as indecisive and supplementary, is left out of the sequential stories of war.

Why is it important to study women's wartime experiences? And not just the experiences of women who fought: partisans, doctors, nurses and other women involved in the war? What might be interesting about the experiences of the women who remained in the back or on the home front or those whose houses were not on the front lines and who did not witness the explosions and shootings personally?

The fact is, the effects of war resonate to areas far beyond those that lie on the front. These effects impact places where the sounds of explosions are not heard and where there is no immediate threat of death. The reverberations of war impact the lives of regular people, and especially women, who, after the mobilization of men, become the majority of the population and begin to fight on a second front to save themselves and their families, to feed and warm them, to find them shelter, provide education, protect them from illnesses, and take care of both land and home. These women maintain the economy during war; helping those in need when food, medicine, transport and fuel are in short supply. The experiences, feelings and thoughts emerging among women at such times give rise to a process of contemplation, reflection and the rethinking war. The image of war, seen through the eyes of women on the so-called second front, raises questions and adds confusion to patriotic slogans, to the promises of totalitarian leaders, to the rhetoric of heroism, self-sacrifice and the protection of dignity. These images of war diminish the high-flown phrases to seemingly trivial, and earth-bound details such as warmth, care, food, and spatial proximity – the essential elements for human survival.

Studying women's perspectives is to some degree taking back their voices into the history of war. Women, who represent half the population and are affected by the results of armed conflict, are underrepresented in the decision making process on matters of war. As the studies of women's military participation show, the women who fought in the Second World War in the name of emancipation, did not succeed in changing the general picture of gender inequality. The recognition of their services last only a while, confined to temporary appreciation.

After the end of the war, they revert back to traditional gender roles, which requires them to render power and conciliate with the patriarchal system.

Many women from the Soviet Union took part in World War II; they included doctors, nurses, pilots, snipers, partisans, drivers, and many others. Their participation is more or less examined. Studying the daily lives of women on the home front helps us better understand the gender roles that were actually in place despite the rhetoric of women's emancipation in the Soviet Union. Those who worked at factories and collective farms, also took care of family members and supported soldiers on the frontline.

This paper seeks to address two main issues: First, how the roles assigned to women on the home front were reflected in personal correspondence during World War II, and second, what was the state's policy towards these women during that period. This paper also describes the domestic work undertaken by women, such as taking care of the soldiers on the frontline. It also touches on women's sexuality and issues of reproductive health during the war period, as well as the (in)effectiveness of the social assistance provided by the Soviet regime at the time. The study is based on the private correspondence that took place during World War II across the frontline and the home front - between family members, spouses, mothers and sons, lovers and sweethearts, engaged couples, friends and relatives living in Georgia. Because it has become increasingly difficult to find women who witnessed the Second World War and to obtain sources free from Soviet censorship, letters are an alternative source for studying the war era. Conveying the daily lives of women through personal correspondence helps us to see the difference between them and the image of the Soviet Mother Heroine, which saturated the visuals and appeals depicting World War II.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the first years of the Bolsheviks' rise to power in the Soviet Union, relatively more attention was paid to women's participation in politics and decision-making. There were even women's sections¹ working to improve the legal status of women. In addition to political involvement, the women also sought to address issues related to employment, reproductive health, as well as issues centering on their liberation from household chores. Common dining halls, laundries, and childcare facilities were opened to shift domestic labor to the public sphere (Goldman, 1993). The divorce procedure was simplified and abortion became legal in 1920 (David, 1974)

However, as the 1930s approached, it became clear that the Communist Party was not seeking any real measure to women's liberation. On the contrary, the purpose of emancipation was to obtain women's support of the Communist Party and to engage them as a labor force in the implementation of five-year economic plans (Goldman, 1993). Party leaders claimed that these plans, which aimed at rapid industrialization, could not be implemented without the help of women (Zetkin, 1934).

Preparations for World War II had begun in earnest by the second half of the 1930s. Women's issues were pushed to the background because it was believed that emancipation had already been achieved by this time. Under the Constitution of 1936, the rights of women and men were declared equal in the Soviet Union (Markwick, 2018). The women's sections were abolished, although men dominated the ruling circles (Goldman, 1993).

In the article, "Women's Work and Emancipation in the Soviet Union - Women in the Stalin Era", Susanne Conze discusses the extent to which women's participation in World War II facilitated their emancipation. She argues that women's participation in the Soviet economy began long before the war, and that this participation was caused not by women's emancipation but, in the face of rapid industrialization, by labor shortages. This is evidenced by the fact that during the mass mobilization of the workforce during the war, no significant steps were taken in terms of vocational training for women, nor were any improvements made to their working conditions. The employment rate of women in industry continued to rise after the war. However, this largely due to their extreme poverty and the necessity of working in poor conditions in low-paid jobs in factories and mills (Conze, 2001).

Women's work in manufacturing was also stimulated by the Soviet propaganda. Slogans called on women to take the places of their male family members in the factories after they had gone off to war. They were asked to do so for patri-

1 Zhenotdel - The Women's Section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (1919–1930).

otic motives. The propaganda, by creating an image of a hero mother, also called on women to reproduce. However, the proper conditions for childbirth and child rearing was non-existent. Women worked outside the home amid a scarcity of food, shelter and healthcare. The availability of maternity leave and childcare facilities were minimal (Conze, 2001). These facts once again prove that women participated in the economic activities not because of emancipation, but as a result of the inevitable necessities and wartime propaganda.

Like Susan Conze, who studies the effects of World War II on women's emancipation in the Soviet Union, Roger Markwick analyzes the attitude of the Soviet state towards women during the same war. The author explores which policy Stalin pursued towards the women who took up arms and those who stayed at home. He also delves into whether or not this policy was in any extent emancipatory. Markwick reviews the role of women in warfare, as well as their engagement in industry and in domestic labor. He concludes that despite the Soviet rhetoric about equality, the Red Army was unprepared to accept the trained women into their ranks: "They were neither welcomed nor fêted, notwithstanding the expectations instilled in the 1930s Stalin generation that women could take up arms equally with men" (Markwick, 2018). The party leaders assured the women that their main duty was to stay at home, in production, in agriculture, and in families, in order to free the men fighting on the front from these burdens. Later, as the Red Army came short of human resources, party leaders found it necessary to involve women in the battle as well. Women participated in war mainly in a socially acceptable way – as doctors and nurses (most of the medical staff and the vast majority of nurses were women). Although there were many partisans, drivers, pilots, snipers and other women in the war, society did not receive them with open arms upon their return. Women heading to the front knew that they would encounter "a second front: against male contempt, sexual harassment and violence" (Markwick, 2018). The women who returned home hid their wartime experiences throughout their lives. Unlike men, they did not receive suitable job opportunities and their contribution to victory was set aside (Markwick, 2018).

As for the home front, Stalin's family policy was in direct opposition to Marxist and early Bolshevik policies. If the Bolsheviks demanded the liberation of women from household duties, Stalin vigorously encouraged women to become mothers (Markwick, 2018). Nevertheless, virtually no effective steps have been taken to support war-torn families, mothers and infants in the state. Conversely, during the war, when the majority of the workforce was women, the number of working days increased and the minimum age of employees decreased, reaching 14 years. This also limited the education possibilities for young women and girls. Despite motherhood and family-oriented rhetoric, maternal and infant mortality, abortion, and divorce rates rose during the war. Patriarchal families increasingly moved under the leadership of women (Markwick, 2018). However, this was not at the expense of emancipation, but at the expense of a triple burden: in addition to working in manufacturing and agriculture, women had to save their families from starvation and cold, and at the same time help those on the front.

After the outbreak of World War II, 16,000 women from Georgia joined the

front in different ranks (Janelidze, 2017). However, little is known about the lives of women in Georgia who have not been directly affected by hostilities due to their remoteness from the front. It is known that a large portion of employees working in light industry at that time were women. These enterprises relocated the production of military clothing and food from the beginning of the war. After the conscription of men into the war, the shortage of manpower on collective farms was filled by women, including older women and minors. Those who remained at home managed to help the military with clothes, shoes and money, but the reduction of production and agricultural lands led to food shortages (Surguladze & Surguladze, 1991).

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHODS

Private correspondence from WWII, published on the website of the Iverieli digital library, is used as material for the study. Particularly, the archival fond "Letters from the Front", which includes 891 documents. These are mostly letters from male soldiers sent between 1939-1946 from war front to Georgia.

Based on the research focus, which intends to study the gender roles of women in Georgia's civilian population during World War II, only letters dating back to 1939-1945 were selected from the collection. Postcards, telegrams, envelopes, poems, memoirs and letters sent before 1939 were excluded from the selection. Only the samples whose addressees were wholly or partly women, as well as those that were addressed to men but mentioned women and provided significant information about the research topic, were selected from the remaining material. There were only a few letters in the collection from women (sent to those on the front). In total, more than 300 letters were analyzed.

The addressee of the letters were mostly wives, and sometimes children, sisters, or parents. In cases where the addressees were parents, the author would make an introduction, where he would greet both parents and then continue the conversation with the mother, whether it was a greeting, request or something else. Therefore, the subjects of the study were women in the "Back" during World War II - wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, as well as lovers, friends and female relatives. They mainly lived in the regions of Imereti, Racha, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Guria. Only a few of them were from Tbilisi and many of these women's living locations were unknown.

The authenticity and style of these letters have been preserved. Maintaining them in this same style indicates the writing style of the authors, the character of the era, as well as the pace and tone of the writing. It also points to the author's individuality, forms of communication, immediacy and sometimes mannerisms. Maintaining style makes us feel better about the atmosphere of correspondence.

After selecting the materials, the letters directly related to the research question were digitized. The data was sorted using a coding table. During the first stage all the relevant materials were highlighted and combined into key issues. During the second stage the key issues were connected to the origin issues, and then interpreted and discussed in relation to the research question. During the last stage from the categorized data, the key concepts, main findings and aspects were identified.

To analyze the material, we used the discourse analysis method, which is used to analyze the social context in written or oral language (Tsuladze, 2018). In addition to the main text of the letters, a focus was placed on the addressing forms, the wishes to the addressees; on the facts and emotions related to the research

question, as well as the adjectives used to describe events and feelings. We took into account the context and some of the events that took place in parallel with the writing of the letters and how they influenced their content and form.

In the letters we found additional information on the labor and functions of women during World War II. We also explored the extent to which women had social and political power; what kind of images of the addressees were shown in these correspondence and how it changed over time.

Aside from being an important source for studying events, the letters preserved in the archives also give us an idea of the Soviet ways to lead these events. As Roger Markwick writes, correspondence between soldiers and their female family members during World War II was one way of overcoming the spatial distance between those on the front lines and their loved ones. However, the party also used the emotional connections made through this correspondence for propaganda purposes. Publicly reading the soldiers' letters to the villagers during World War II was a common practice in the Soviet Union. Many times, this was followed by collective response letters. Influenced by the emotional connections made this way, women were brought closer to the frontline happenings and their contribution to victory also increased (Markwick, 2018).

However, in addition to the fact that the letters help us to study less privileged groups in society, there are certain limitations to their use as a historical source. Dobson, on the example of World War I letters, discusses several such limitations: Firstly, both soldiers and women were instructed in writing letters; the soldiers were taught to show courage, while women in the "back" – [were taught] to refrain from talking about hardship. Secondly, studies have shown that when writing letters, authors were more motivated to give meaning to their own lives, to search for identity, than to reflect reality. Dobson also speaks of censorship during the war, which put a damper on the correspondence. She also points out the factor of the potential reader that pushed the author to adjust to his or her expectations (Dobson, 2008). Therefore, the metaphors and arguments the authors used to describe events or experiences were sometimes really about their personal attitudes, and sometimes were simply representations of a style appropriate to censorship. For example, during World War I, commanders in Europe paid particular attention to the fact that soldiers were writing according to pre-designed patterns, where battle and war experience would be conveyed in a way acceptable to the public (Dobson, 2008). There are traces of exactly the same pattern and self-censorship in these letters.

Because of the factors mentioned above, the limitation of the study is that most likely a significant portion of the authors and addressees' reflections and opinions were left out of the letters. Another limitation of the study is that the collection of up to 900 letters do not fully reflect the role of women in the "back" during World War II, nor do they reflect the true impact of Stalin's family policies on them. Due to the lack of relevant material in the archival fond, the study also omits the perspective of women living in urban areas of Georgia and members of non-dominant ethnic groups. Finally, the 'Letters from the Front' archive contains almost no letters from women. Consequently, women's perspectives can only be discussed on the basis of men's response letters.

WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE LETTERS DURING WORLD WAR II

This subsection shows the versatile function imposed on women on the home front in Georgia during World War II. In the beginning, descriptions of their triple burden followed by the transfer of men's activities to women are provided. These include taking responsibility for extended family members, caring for children's education, working outside the home, and taking double precautions to "protect dignity" – to maintain the image of a faithful wife, and a dignified mother, in the public eye. This section also describes the material and emotional support women provided soldiers on the front, who were not adequately outfitted with clothing and food by the state. Several issues are described related to sexuality and finally, the response of men to women's plight and spiritual crisis.

DOMESTIC LABOR

The letters that were analyzed show that during the war women had to work three times as hard. They were responsible for feeding and keeping their children warm. In addition, women living in rural areas had to take care of cattle, harvesting and housing, and at the same time, they were tasked with working on collective farms or enterprises. First they had to pay taxes, which included natural products, and then, for families of military personnel, certain benefits were imposed. This versatility of women during the war is well illustrated in a letter sent by the author to his wife, a mother of four: "Do not starve children... Why don't you write if you have started working... How are the [children]? Are they studying well? ...Now, Gogona, tell me if you have firewood and sawdust... Bring it by a big bag[.] Do not die of coldness... What about the pigs, if you can feed them... What is the price of corn there... It will be good if you buy beans ... It will be cheaper now and then the price will rise... Do not let the children starve, even if you need to take a debt. How do you earn money for bread, do they give you or how do you buy it?... Write to me[.] Do you get up at midnight (...) like last year[?]" (G. A. 1941).

After men were mobilized to the front, family responsibilities were placed squarely on the shoulders of women. This can be clearly seen in the following excerpts: "Guguli everything depends on you now. Stay put and make sure the kids have everything" (K. K. 1942). The same author says in another letter: "It is expected, my faithful, that I will turn my back on you and you will have to spend the rest of your life fulfilling the duties of both mother and father to our swallows, but hopefully you will meet this consciously and will not blame me"

(K. K. 1945). Examples of these are the following quotations from various letters: "Varo, don't disgrace me, for my enemies will laugh at me. Be sweet to everyone and life will be easy" (G. A. 1942); "Dear Valentina, do as your smartness and honesty says. What else to bother you" (N. B. 1944). "Maybe you will get a small job and do not break my family against all odds... Fine, just do it, my girl, keep your boy's name" (K. Kh. 1942). "Be like as if I am there and do not make people feel that I am gone and say: «if they had the capacity, they could do it without man»." (SH. M. 1941).

In addition to household issues and physical needs, women also took care of the education and development of their children. This can be seen from the letters that men wrote to their wives about childcare. Some of the children of the addressees went to school. At a time when there was famine in the country, men were fighting on the front lines, and mothers had to work outside the home, children had to go to school and not be left behind in school. According to the correspondence, some of the fathers tried to take part in their upbringing through letters. However, the main responsibility still fell on the mothers: "First of all, I have to congratulate our daughter's birth, second, the fact that you overcame this condition [Act of delivery] and third of all, I wish you will raise your children like a real Soviet mother does and the father plays a lesser role in this direction" (T. J. 1940). Fathers' messages to their children were mainly about learning and good manners. Several letters show gender roles when fathers tell girls to help their mothers with household chores and sibling care. In one letter, the father urges his daughters to stay home and study: "Giuli is my eldest daughter, I think she will never tease her mother. Helps the mother in everything and helps Gogona to become an advanced student - trains 2 hours a day. As regards Gogona, she is my girl and for my sake she will train well, she will not go after the children in the yard and be so sensible that everyone will be surprised" (K. Kh. 1942).

Women were also required to be "defenders of dignity", to maintain their "name" and, as the authors of the letters said – to "not make the enemy laugh". This meant leading the family properly and being faithful to their husbands. The demand for loyalty was sometimes expressed in the form of jokes and hints: "Kio, how is your daughter? I have to complain to you: I was not there, you gave birth to a baby five months after I left. Maybe she's someone else's? You, the Kereselidzes, have such a breed that you can give birth to a child in 5 and 4 months. Therefore, I have the right to nag (you will catch my meaning, and when you do, don't laugh or lose your temper)" (T. J. 1940). Elsewhere he writes: "Well, some women are not to blame for this, because it comes out of a man by nature who can not bear it because the need is bothering him. Not only women but also men are numerous like this and etc." (T. J. 1941).

Even when women worked outside the home, the letters show that a woman's right to work in a paid job was not inherent in all men. The argument against the employment of women in the eyes of men was also supported by the fact that women's working conditions in the Soviet Union during the war were so difficult, and wages were so meager, that they barely had enough to survive. For example, in several places in the letters, the issue of women's employment was

mentioned, where men advise the addressees to stay at home and take care of the family: "Well, my girl, you wrote me about your job - I think so too - It's better to stay at home and take care of children. Especially, I hope to help you from here - I expect a salary increase in the near future and obviously you [uncertain] will increase. Do not worry about me - over-winter wisely. Take care of the children and take care of yourself - it's better for everyone - obviously you will want for [?] a job[,] But what can we do?" (R. I. 1944). In one of the letters, the husband advises his wife to work as a teacher by her profession, because the author considers it as a more "suitable" profession for a woman: "Guguli, I do not recommend you to start working there, where you write, I know very well what is there, you must have iron nerves there. Shortly, I want you to continue working by your profession, Well, you know now..." (K. K. 1945) As can be seen from the above quotations, the male authors, who were backed by the state in this matter, were not ready for the emancipation of women.

CARING FOR SOLDIERS ON THE FRONT LINE

The women who stayed back at home taking care of family members also took care of the men who went to the front. This care was manifested in both material and emotional support. As mentioned above, the needs of soldiers who went to war were not adequately met by the state. They had to endure extreme hunger and cold. Therefore, they often asked for and received financial assistance and parcels or *pasilka* from their families. They especially needed warm, knitted socks and clothes. For example, one author writes: "Tell the father, and he will help you to find it somewhere, and a shawl also. And please, urgently, otherwise it is extremely cold here" (A. R. 1940). The second author instructs his wife to send socks and gloves: "Kio, you know what you have to do and why I wrote this letter? If you can of course, please send me socks and gloves, but not white please, it will get dirty soon, maybe you will mix black and white wool or get a grey wool or dye it, knit it with someone else and give her money, so that you can do it quickly and send it to me as soon as possible." (T. J. Date unknown)". The letters show that the women left alone were able to provide significant material assistance to family members who had gone to war. In addition to socks and clothes, money, drinks, and other non-perishable items were sent to the front: "Kio, if you are going to send *pasilka* for me, ask Lida to bring our nuts and send it a little to me. And please send the dried cheese and a small bottle of vodka, boys received here and it's possible to drink a little secretly. (T. J. 1940). The women also sent paper for letters because, according to the soldiers, there were not enough notebooks distributed for military training and there was a shortage of paper.

Women also expressed emotional support for men who went to war. It is true that in the archival fond, "Letters from the Front", women's letters were almost non-existent. But this can be deduced from the letters of the soldiers, where they talk to women about their feelings. What is clear from the letters of the male authors can be divided into several parts: One – that the male authors

told the women (despite the constant scarcity of time they experienced due to 12 hours of training or military operations) their emotions, adventures, observations, discoveries, hardships or small joys they encountered during the training and war; Second – they gained encouragement and refuge by writing and reading letters; Thirdly – they satisfied the desire to see their loved ones being away from home: "Maybe, you are bored with so many letters from me, but when I write letters, I feel entertained" (T. J. 1940). The letters also show that the pictures sent from home were of special importance to the soldiers. This encouraged and motivated them: "It was good that you sent me a picture, it had such an effect, as if I saw you." (T.J. 1940). One author writes to his wife and another to his family members: "If you do not send me your pictures, you have to forget my name forever. Do not mention my name at all, because I am encouraged and amused by seeing your pictures" (L. Ch. 1938). By exchanging emotions through letters, women became a kind of accomplice to war events, or bearers of memory. This communication connected soldiers with themselves and the past: "For those who are physically separated from close ones, the act of letter-writing can provide a medium for reconciling past and present and fashioning a workable sense of self." (Dobson, 2008). In this way, women, simply by being the people for whom the authors could write letters, acted as a means of emotional support.

Therefore, women's caring functions during the war extended to the household and male family members on the front. This can be seen both in the analysis of the men's main messages and in the analysis of the topics discussed in the wartime correspondence. Examining the letters, it was found that the phrase "look after" used to refer to women, was used almost fifty times. Also, the words "take care of", "nurse" etc. are often used. The same component is seen in the topics that men talk about in their letters to mothers and wives: clothing, food, warmth, and their own health. Authors often write to mothers about their appearance, their stamina, and how they are praised by others. In the correspondence with women, the words "socks", "pants" and "gloves" are mentioned many times, which was sent in the form of a parcel. In addition to money, clothes and shoes, they included tobacco, cigarettes, vodka, wine, dried fruits, walnuts, and dried spices – all of which are products that connected men to the house, covered their basic needs, or were simply an act of care.

MEN'S ADDRESSES

Understandably, women also experienced a disturbance due to the hardships caused by the war. However, it was considered inappropriate for a patriotic Soviet woman to express this. The letters make it clear that many women had difficulty adjusting to their new reality. Sometimes they wrote to men on the front about their own anxieties. Men's responses show that it was inappropriate for women to express emotions. Women were required to cover or ignore melancholy, fear or gloom altogether: "Veriko! My dear, I heard that you are showing signs of sadness, it is impossible, because it affects children badly and on the

other hand it indicates that you can not take care of the family[.] Why should you make those around you feel this, when you can handle things easily? Or again: will sadness and crying do anything? Didn't you say that I do nothing for the house? So you were the one then and you have to be a housewife now as well, as a rule, I do have no doubt about that" (K. K. 1942). In the second letter, moreover, the author restricts the woman from talking about her feelings: "If you remember, I wr[o]te to you once, that don't write me anything bad, but you still persist, and in particular, what is it, Kio, that you write: "I am very ill. I am just about to go out of my mind, begin to throw stones." And things like that. Kio, from now on, please do not write to me such things, even if you are dying[.] I have enough to worry about, I do not sleep day and night, night and day[.] I have seen how much trouble since I left [home], how are we struggling now, what should you or someone else know, but I still write that I am fine because I know if not someone kills me by force, I will not die in these two years and I will take my soul as it will be, despite the fact that a man must wait for death here at any moment" (T. J. 1940). Then he adds: "And you too, Kio, strengthen yourself[.] I know how you will be[.] A woman's heart is always weaker than a man's heart[.] But we must obey the law of nature[.] You are with your parents for all, even if you get ill, you will still have parental care, when a person dies in his house[.] it is also happiness[.] I, personally, Kio, if I come back from here, I will not be afraid of anything in life, no matter what I encounter[.] because a person here goes to the extreme hardship and endures it[.] And you[.] as an inexperienced person[.] have not seen any difficulty yet[.] you are weak[.] a simple thing frightens you[.] that is not good" (ibid).

Against the backdrop of the famine and poverty that accompanied the war, it was not easy for the women left alone to lead the households. Some of the men encouraged them and assured them that they would cope with everything easily; some simply sympathized with them, and some, on the contrary, reproached the women left at home and oversimplified their suffering compared to the soldiers on the front, and women who fought armed in the war or provided medical assistance to the wounded.

In encouragement, the men pointed to the fact that they themselves were well and their wives, mothers, sisters or children should not worry about them – the main thing was that the addressees were well. In these letters, the word "worry" is used in hundreds of places in the following context: "Do not worry about me", "Do not worry for me". These phrases are found twice or even three times in some multi-line letters. They persuaded their wives to care for themselves and their children despite their hardships. Women sometimes were called upon to be well because of their children: "Don't hesitate to do anything in order to stay healthy, Guguli, so that the children are well" (K. K. 1941). Others saw the woman's leading role in the family in masculine terms: "He said, you are a manful woman[.] ... [unlike] the whiner women who have men at home and still complain. So I have high hopes for you[.] be strong, Gogona, do not be afraid[.] It is no joking matter to have a family of five to sustain[.] but right now you have to be strong, take care of yourself, take care of the children as you can" (G. A. 1942). Some of the authors expressed their encouragement in propagandistic terms: "Hey, Kio, I am not boring you, am I? Be well and cheer up[.] Don't

lose your courage. Don't let the enemy win[.] Keep standing and fight for the life as a Bolshevik[.] Women here are flying in the air like birds[.]” (T. J. n. d.) Others based this encouragement on political motives: “My swallows, the time will soon come when we will defeat the enemy to the end and meet [each other] with joy. Now kiss your mother on the lips from me” (K. K. 1941). The authors were allegedly influenced by propaganda and censorship of the war, making phrases with similar content "mandatory". The stereotyping of letters does not mean that they are useless. The discursive approach to these letters shows that no matter how "credible" they are, they still give us some information, even on what topics the author is silent on or what "clichés" he uses during the conversation (Dobson, 2008).

Some of the authors sympathized with the women left with doubled responsibilities and tried to verbally express their support: “Do as your conscience says, my Ketunia, look after our pitifully scattered family and children. One more thing I ask of you, is to go begging until our eventual death or return - do not separate the children from each other, they have experienced enough orphanhood[,] - let them eat a crumbs of bread, but keep them together like ducklings[,] cherish them like the brood-hen would do[,] and thus you will win my love and respect 1,000 times!”(K. Kh. [1942]).

Some of the men reproached the female addressee if they complained of hardship. For example, we find reproach in this letter, where the author compares the women staying at home to the women fighting on the front: "Here, the girls like you are paramedics, holding a machine gun in their hands, and they go with an ambulance and taking the wounded in the back, fighting paramedics, and they bandage them. You, Tamara, Etera, Tamara, Babo - you all go like cows, don't get upset" (M. A. date unknown). Citing examples of courage and endurance of other women in the Soviet Union and comparing them to addressees was another tendency of these letters. The author of one of the letters mentions that “Ukrainian women showed great heroism, they used to fight hard and still threw food on the road in a convoy. This is how women fought selflessly” (D. B., 1942). The double standard by which the Soviet rhetoric defined the form of women's participation in war is also considerable here. On the one hand, it urged people to be equal in all areas, including the military, and on the other hand, it urged women who wanted to join the army to stay home and be involved in manufacturing, convincing them that this was their patriotic duty to the homeland. In this regard, the expectations towards women were mutually exclusive.

Several authors reprimand their mothers and wives for not sending letters more often. The reason for which, as is clear from the same letters, is that they do not know how to read and write properly: “Now Varojan if I write a letter, why do you not send me a letter? If you are not good at writing and are lazy about it, no matter how you write it, I will still receive it” (G. A. 1941); "I especially often write to you, Mother[.] I have not received a single letter [from you]. Have pity on me[.] Ask someone to write it for you and send it to me" (Kh. G. 1942). Some, after learning Russian during military training, accuse the addressee woman if she does not respond in Russian.

These letters often contain not only encouragement from men but also ad-

vice and preaching in managing family matters or other details of life. In the advicements, one often feels a reference to one's own superiority, coaxing, and patronizing in conversation: "So, Katusha, do as your conscience and womanhood says and at the same time how much modesty will you show towards the family members. Take care of everyone at home and respect them as if I am there and watching all your good deeds and good womanhood. First of all, what concerns you and what is your task, pay attention to and take care of grandmother, mother and my father, everyone in their place" (A. A. date unknown). There is a similar instructive tone in the following quote: "Bring bread from Mirana whenever you need it. Take care of the dogs and the cattle[.] Buy the barley [and] feed the donkey with it[.] Do not start grumbling that the breadwinner is not at home[.] Don't starve." (I. M. the date is unknown). Instruction sounds relatively harsh in the following quote: "Be smart[.] do not offend anyone[.] do not let anyone insult you[.] otherwise you will not be [my] wife anymore - I love you and do not think that I can not give you up. Do not become vicious[.] be the most humble. Take good care of the children" (A. K. 1941). The same tendency is in the following quote: "Lilly, stop buying something else, we will be able to purchase later, and dress warmly this winter both you and the baby and try not to get sick, try, otherwise you see I am far away and can not help you, try my dear" (A. R. 1940). In addition to pointing out the inequalities between the authors and addressees, these excerpts also show that being a woman was defined by nursing, care, and good housekeeping.

SEXUALITY

Another highlighted topic in the digitized letters is sexuality. Texts about sexuality are divided into several topics: intimate conversations in personal correspondence, women's reproductive health issues during the war; the rape of women in conquered countries and double standards of morality towards women living in Georgia and other Soviet republics. Analyzing these four issues helps us better understand gender roles during World War II in Soviet Georgia.

As far as the letters preserved in the archives of personal correspondence allow us to say, men avoid talking about sexuality with women, while in letters to men they discuss sexuality issues more openly. In the correspondence we meet intimate conversations with his wife with almost only one author. It is clear from his letters that they had a special relationship. The author tells the wife in detail about his daily life, experiences and impressions. He is also interested in her condition and asks her to talk about her life as well. In one of the letters, he recounts a dream in which he imagines an intimate scene with his wife: "Well, Kio, I saw you in a dream the day before yesterday, you wore a black "otti" dress, you looked great and I thought it's because we are apart and some other things. Kio, I often see you in my dreams but we are far away from each other and for some reason we do not speak as if there is some resistance between us" (T. J. 1941). The same author sends a similar letter at another time: "Yesterday, when I read your letter, it was already evening. When I fell asleep, I saw you in my dream if you know in

what shapes (you will understand) and I felt satisfied and after waking up dissatisfied. ... They should not bring married people into the army, but what can one do? A man does not belong to himself[,] you have to do as you are commanded to do" (T. J. 1941). Another author talks about an intimate relationship with his girlfriend: "What would it be like to sit at this small table now[,] at this moment where you stand or read this letter, staring at each other if not something else, furthermore you will understand what I mean" (S. Sh. Date unknown).

Several letters addressed the issue of women's reproductive health during the war in the Soviet Union. The correspondence shows that like one of the addressees Kio, the other women were pregnant too by that time when their husbands went to war. This also affected their physical and mental health. The fact that they did not have proper conditions for childbirth and the postpartum period can be seen from the letters from their husbands, where they advised them to go to relatives and other close ones who could feed them better: "Now, Kio, let me know your present and past condition, from now on you will rest, take care of yourself and stay healthy and put on weight. Go to Skhvava this spring, there is good air. Do not hesitate about eating" (T. J. Date Unknown). According to the letters, young, pregnant women, and women in the postpartum period confronted all the family activities, sometimes they had to seek shelter, move in with relatives, or with a foreign family. As mentioned earlier, reproductive health conditions deteriorated dramatically during the war. Maternal and child mortality increased, as did the number of abortions. Because the Soviet Union declared war on abortion in the 1940s, abortion performed in non-medical conditions became the leading cause of maternal mortality. As a result of war-induced separation, repression, captivity, and casualties, many women became widowed or left alone (Markwick, 2018).

Another topic about sexuality, rape, was revealed in Nika Agiashvili's² letter to his colleague where he wrote about the city taken by the Germans: "We visited it [city] at a short glance, but I will not forget Novocherkassk. That city was taken by the Germans that night, and perhaps now they are walking and harassing the beautiful girls of Novocherkassk!" (1942). Rape was used as a weapon of war during World War II in many participating countries, although it has not been recognized as a crime against humanity until recently (Kopelon, 1998).

Due to Soviet censorship, the letters kept in the fond do not provide material on similar actions of the Red Army, although some of the attitudes of the Georgian Red Army soldiers towards women living in other Soviet countries can be seen. In several letters sent to the male addressee, the author draws attention to the sexuality of women in other Soviet countries and their special interest in Georgian men: "We boys are in a tricky situation[.] Here are the girls begging us to take a money and there are these perky, sex thirsty [girls]. That's the peculiar situation we are in...and when we walk in town, all curious eyes are on us, sort of like - see they are Georgians..." (L. Tch. date unknown). In one or two letters we find a rude and derogatory reference to women in other Soviet republics in a sexual context, which indicates the soldier's double standards towards local and Georgian women.

2 (1903-1984) writer and journalist.

STALIN'S POLICY TOWARDS WOMEN

This section, based on World War II letters, analyzes the state's policy toward women on the home front. In the beginning, their working conditions and the taxes introduced for waging war are discussed. Then state aid for single mothers is reviewed. This chapter also deals in part with the impact of Stalinist repression on women during World War II and the propaganda that called for women to make sacrifices. Finally, a woman's letter from the archival collection is quoted, expressing her perspective.

Based on the letters, the state policy can be discussed in two aspects. On the one hand, at the beginning of the war, women were forcibly deprived of goods to be delivered in the collective. On the other hand, in the ensuing years, the state provided some assistance to the families of soldiers. However, it was quite a bureaucratic process and it is also unknown how many women benefited from it, or whether this assistance was equally available to all.

“Everything for the front!” Soviet propaganda called upon women. The focus was on motherhood, family and homeland. Women had to make labor and human sacrifices for these three ideas. The Soviet printing press often portrayed women as role models in such sacrifices: at the machines in enterprises, or saying goodbye to sons going to war (Markwick, 2018). In addition to patriotic slogans, party organizations in collective farms were in charge of mobilizing women as a workforce. In addition to incentive competitions, there were penalties for those who avoided increased working hours or improperly performed their duties. Exile to labor camps threatened not only them but also the families of the prisoners of war and the soldiers who had retreated without permission. Women paid taxes in the form of products, money, firewood and fuel (Markwick, 2018).

From the letters we can conclude that after a certain period from the start of war, for some categories of women (elderly women, pregnant women or mothers of newborns) the state provided financial assistance and imposed tax breaks. However, the same letters show that receiving the aid was a difficult process. A special document had to be sent from the men on the front. The mail worked poorly and the letters were constantly lost. In addition, it was sometimes difficult to find out which person or agency would provide this assistance. “Lilly, find out where the money will be given to you[:] in Vani, in Chakvi, or in Tskhakaia, and I will send you a Spravka³ and take the pension that is for the disabled, you will receive it for three people – mother, father and child. Be sure to write to me” (A. R. 1940); The second author deals with the same topic: “Now you have to apply to get the aid for you and for mother[,] 100 rubles a month for both of you, you will

3 Справка - (Rus.) Reference.

take it as pregnant and my mother as dependent upon me. I repeat don't worry about anything" (A. E. 1942).

It is unknown from these letters how universal this financial aid was and whether everyone could benefit from it. Although Stalin introduced the aid program for the families of those in the military, in reality, the necessary resources for this kind of support did not exist. "Soviet archives provide glimpses of a silent, 'second' front, where the wives and children of Red Army soldiers and officers struggled to survive under a regime of scarce food, clothes, heating and accommodation." (Markwick, 2018).

Some of the women on the home front, as can be seen from the letters, were also financially assisted by men in military service. However, here too the difficulties in getting help are presented - soldiers sent the required document every day in the hope that at some point they would reach the addressee. The document was often lost, delayed, and in cases of untimely payment, it was canceled: "I have sent seven letters including this one, and got from you only one. Write to me, if you received the money with the certificate. I only know that you did not receive it from January 1942 to May due to the loss of the certificate, but from May the new certificate was sent by my unit [...] Let me know whether you receive it or not"(K. K. 1945).

The next letter shows that even the families of the "merited" Red Army soldiers were vulnerable in the face of Soviet terror. The letter describes how the wife and children of a man at the front are evicted from their home: "Eliko, I have received your and Meriko's letters where you tell me that they are disputing with you about the apartment[,] that they are going to settle the major into your house[.] None can expropriate the apartment from me[.] I am a fighter of the patriotic war [unclear] I have been wounded four times[.] Comrade Stalin knows well the heroic battles of our unit[.] Therefore I was awarded the Order of the Red Banner together with many of my comrades[.] I have sent a letter about the flat to the Secretary of the CEC, Comrade Charkviani[.] He will definitely help you to get rid of this, and if he does not help, write to me. I will write a letter to Comrade Stalin[.] And it would be a great shame for the Georgian leadership to have such illegal treatment of a fighter's family" (G. M. 1943).

In the following letters, which echo the icon of the Stalinist mother heroine, men encourage women in propagandistic terms. In this usual correspondence of family members, the official Soviet rhetoric enters with the characteristic phrases: "So, my Marie, be strong and cheerful you as well[,] and do not worry about anything. Despair is for cowards. The case requires so. Whoever loves the homeland, whoever loves the great Stalin, whoever loves his mother, father and wife, he will not spare himself for the protection of the homeland and will sacrifice himself[.] Now why am I writing[:.] How are things going with you? How are you or the children or our people" (N. Ts. 1941). In these propaganda letters, the men call on mothers and wives to fortify themselves because of the Red Army, Stalin, or the Soviet homeland: "Now, woman, as you are interested in how it's going with me, whether I go hot or cold, you know, the rider can bear everything. Even if you go hot, even if you go cold, you still have to be a rider. Our Red Army hates the lead-swingers" (Sh. M. 1941). These letters echo the role model

of a woman created in the Soviet Union during World War II, who had to sacrifice unconditionally for the sake of the "motherland".

From the second half of the war, the sacrifices for the sake of the "motherland" and Stalin were replaced by the promise of victory and a happy future: "... We will finally destroy [fascism], we will be able to see each other, before that you must encourage and be adroit, take care of yourself[,] the children" (K. K. 1942). "Eliko, how are you doing? How are the children? Do they study well? No matter how difficult it is for you, do not waste their time on work, let them study with the best grades. How is life? Work? Is it a very hard time for you? You have to be patient. War is to blame for everything. The war will end soon and life in the Soviet country will be delightful..." (G.M., date unknown). As can be seen from these quotations, the authors encouraged women at home in the name of victory over fascism. The authors justified the hardship, the distance, the abandonment of the family in unbearable conditions by referring to the icon of the enemy: "If I became a victim of the war, it won't be surprising, then it's all on you - raising children. I am sure, you won't let them feel my absence" (N. Ts. date unknown). And here the rhetoric is addressed to the daughter: "My Rusudan, so dear for the father, now it's up to you, how you will behave, won't tease your mother, be a model pupil and help me in destroying Fascists. Kissing much to you and your mother. Be healthy and well" (S. R. 1942).

Finally, it would be interesting if the voices of women, their position, and some kind of resistance are heard in these letters. There are very few letters from women in the archival fond. However, one of them expresses the feelings caused by the loss of a loved one: "It's 10 o'clock, children are sleeping, they are so happy, for they can feel nothing... And I have read this letter so many times already and still, I have not been able to find out the object-matter of the letter so far - tears always come first. Does this letter written by my boy's hands reach me and these very hands that were once ordinary for me, today are longed and desirable ...Is that the end of it all? .. Will my children not have a father? ...Do my children have to spend time in orphanhood like their father? Oh, my God... Tears again, shouldn't I be able to atone a person who is so dear to me with those tears?... Father of my children... I wonder how this little heart can hold so much sorrow?... I can not any more! Nora" (N. I. 1943). The letter shows that the author experiences longing, uncertainty, despair, regret, and injustice along with the pain, although she does not express all this with loud opposition.

SUMMARY

The research shows that the well-known view that women's participation in military service in WWII, their mass involvement in the economy and their taking a leading role in patriarchal families, promoted the emancipation of women, is somewhat removed from reality. Despite the Soviet rhetoric about gender equality, the essential practice of emancipation is not seen in these letters. On the contrary, we see that women played traditional gender roles, even if they worked outside the home. In the letters, where the emancipation of women was to some degree visible, it seemed that this process in the authors' thinking and communication style had begun before the war.

It is unknown whether taking leadership in the household and manufacturing, doubling functions and jobs, left women the time and opportunity to rethink their own and men's gender roles. The state not only failed to support them, but in the face of deteriorating healthcare in the wake of the war, it also imposed restrictions on abortions, and increased working hours and taxes for women and girls. Thus, during World War II, despite the constant call for motherhood, there was no policy in the Soviet Union appropriate to the needs of mother and child. And the families of the soldiers who retreated or were captured, became the victims of the repression.

The reasons given show that during World War II, women in the Soviet Union remained largely "housewives on the home front", in stark contrast to the talk of equality, heard in the early Bolshevik statements.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF LETTERS:

- 1) Hello, Gogona, Shota, Elguja, Mediko and Irma - Grisha (Grigol) Alkhazashvili, October 16, 1941
- 2) Greetings to Guguli and girls! Koté Kukhaleishvili, January 13, 1942
- 3) Greetings to Guguli, Nana and Lali, Koté Kukhaleishvili, January 25, 1945
- 4) Greetings to my dear wife and child, Giorgi Akopashvili, January 2, 1942
- 5) Greetings to dear Valentina, Nikoloz Bokuchava, October 20, 1944
- 6) My Keto, Carlo Khetereli, March 17, 1942
- 7) Greetings to Mariam Demchekov, Shakro Mosulishvili, August 2, 1941
- 8) Greetings to Kio!!! Tite Japaridze, May 28, 1940
- 9) Keto, Guguli - girl! Karlo Khetereli, February 25, 1942
- 10) Greetings to Kio! Tite Japaridze, January 20, 1940
- 11) Greetings to Kio, Tite Japaridze, March 2, 1941
- 12) Greetings to Guguli! Kote Kukhaleishvili, December 28, 1941
- 13) Greetings to Kio! Tite Japaridze, n.d
- 14) Greetings to Guguli, Nana and Lali! Kote Kukhaleishvili, November 24, 1941
- 15) Hello Gogona, Shota, Elguja, Mediko, Irma, Grigol Alkhazishvili, October 5, 1942
- 16) Greetings to my wife and children - inseparable from my eyes - Shaliko, Maro, Margo, Sasha, Marusa! Karlo Khetereli, [April 8, 1942]
- 17) Greetings to my Veriko! Konstantine Kavidadze, [April 6, 1942]
- 18) Greetings to Kio! Tite Japaridze, April 23, 1940
- 19) Diary of Davit Bregadze, 1942
- 20) Greetings to my Dear wife and child, Giorgi Akopashvili, December 23, 1941
- 21) A heartfelt greetings to the mother I have not seen in so long, Khariton Gvasalia, 1942
- 22) To Katusha, Aleksandre Akhvlediani, n.d.
- 23) Writes to a wife, Maro, Ilia Mtivlishvili, n.d.
- 24) Greetings to my Tamriko! Aleksandre Kakhiani, October 9, 1941
- 25) My Lily, Avtandil Rukhadze, October 17, 1940

- 26) Greetings to Kio! Tite Japaridze, n.d.
- 27) Greetings to Kio! Tite Japaridze, April 2, 1940
- 28) Greetings to Kio! Tite Japaridze, April 12, 1940
- 29) Greetings to Kio!! Tite Japaridze, [unclear] 20, 1940
- 30) Greetings to brother Gogi, Lado Tchitchinadze, October, 1938
- 31) Greetings to Kio! Tite Japaridze, February 9, 1941
- 32) Greetings to Kio! Tite Japaridze, June 15, 1941
- 33) Greetings to beloved and unforgettable Liziko, Stepane Shalvashvili, n.d.
- 34) Greetings to Kio! Tite Japaridze, n.d.
- 35) Dear brother Gogi! Nika Agiashvili, September 18, 1942
- 36) Greetings to brother Gogi, Lado Tchitchinadze, n.d.
- 37) Greetings to Lily! Avtandil rukhadze, March 20, 1940
- 38) My sister! Aleksandre Elizbarashvili, January 9, 1942
- 39) Greetings to Eliko, Meriko and Boria! Giorgi Matiashvili, March 28, 1943
- 40) Greetings To my Mariam! Nikoloz Tsertsvadze, February 20, 1941
- 41) Greeting to Maro, Shakro Mestiashvili, September 1, 1941
- 42) My Veriko! Konstantine Kaviladze, January 23, 1942
- 43) Greetings to Eliko, Meriko and Boria, Giorgi Matiashvili, n.d.
- 44) Greetings to my Maro, Nikoloz Tsertsvadze, n.d.
- 45) Hello my Nina! Stepane Rtskhiladze, February 9, 1942
- 46) Nora Iashvili, February 28, 1943
- 47) Greetings to My Gulo! Roman Iashvili, March 24, 1944
- 48) Greetings to Guguli Naniko and Laliko!! Kote Kukhaleishvili, January 5, 1945
- 49) Greetings to Guguli Naniko and Laliko!! Kote Kukhaleishvili, January 8, 1945

