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## **Women's labor and everyday life in the great patriotic war years**

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### **Abstract**

Based on archival materials and a comparative historical method, this article analyzes the labor contribution of women to the formation of the military mobilization economy based on the materials of the Kazakh SSR. As a result, poor conditions at work and in everyday life often served as a reason for the violation of labor discipline and staff turnover, therefore, documents often contain facts

of "labor desertion", harsh measures were taken, but wartime punishment was reduced under this article. In conclusion, extremely difficult living and working conditions could cause widespread discontent in certain communities.

**Keywords:** Labor heroism, Rear work, Economy.

## El trabajo femenino y la vida cotidiana en los grandes años de guerra patriótica

### Resumen

Basado en materiales de archivo y un método histórico comparativo, este artículo analiza la contribución laboral de las mujeres a la formación de la economía de movilización militar basada en los materiales de la RSS de Kazajstán. Como resultado, las malas condiciones en el trabajo y en la vida cotidiana a menudo sirvieron como una razón para la violación de la disciplina laboral y la rotación del personal, por lo tanto, los documentos a menudo contienen hechos de "deserción laboral", se tomaron medidas severas, pero el castigo en tiempos de guerra se redujo bajo Este artículo. En conclusión, las condiciones de vida y trabajo extremadamente difíciles podrían causar un descontento generalizado en ciertas comunidades.

**Palabras clave:** Heroísmo laboral, Trabajo posterior, Economía.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The problems of war and woman, war and female labor, war and everyday life remain in the center of attention of researchers. In European historiography, the problem of women and war has become a special object of historical studies (BARBER & HARRISON, 1991; GLANTZ, 1999), and these problems were actively developed in the 90s of the XX century. Interest in the social history and everyday life

of the Soviet people during the Great Patriotic War of Russian humanities specialists is growing more and more. More recently, women's history and everyday life have become popular in Kazakhstani historiography.

Studying the role of female labor and rear everyday life makes it possible, going beyond the framework of the Soviet propaganda strata, to penetrate the rear reality of the war years, to come closer to understanding the Soviet people, the motives of their actions and public moods. Turning to this topic will allow to consider in a new perspective the relationship between the government and the population in the rear, the particularities of female labor and the attitude of managers and women themselves to it, to identify mobilization factors focus that were beyond the focus of the researchers due to propaganda or commemorative practices. The social history of the Kazakhstan society of the period of 1941-1945 in these views did not become the object of a special comprehensive study. Addressing this problem in the article will not only reveal some features of the rear life of the USSR in the national republic, but also touch upon some problems of the everyday life of Kazakhstanis, including such a category as women.

In order to get a general demographic picture and the role of women during the years of World War II, we present a brief description of the state of population on the eve of the war. Thus, if the ratio of men and women in the Soviet Union as a whole was 47.9% (81694889) and 52.1% (88862204), the female population prevailed in

the Union as a whole (by 4.2%). In the Kazakh SSR, as a result of migration, which aimed to provide a rapidly developing industry with labor, the age and sex structure by 1939 had a slightly different picture than that of the union. In 1939, 6151102 people lived in the Kazakh SSR, the percentage of men and women was as follows: 52.1% and 47.9%. Another consequence of industrial migration was changes in the age composition of the population of the republic. In 1939, compared with 1926, the proportion of young people aged 20 to 29 years increased significantly to 20.7% and people aged 30 to 49 years increased to 25.8%.

In publications of European authors, interest in this problem intensified in the 1990s-2000s. Azza Karam's article provides an overview of the situation of women in wars and argues that most of the publications written tend to view women as victims rather than active participants; it is argued that women actually play several different roles and create different fates for themselves. The article presents various situations and living conditions of women in the war (KARAM, 2000). A number of researchers study the problems of adaptation and the role of women in World War II (DAWSON, 2019). The articles of Weatherford Gazeley Ian considered the share of female labor in industry during the Second War, as exemplified by American and British women (GAZELEY, 2008).

A number of articles examine the experience of women's participation in wars, their role in the Red Army (GLANTZ, 1999). The works of the last decade highlighted a number of problems of the

war period: the sphere of consumption of the Soviet people, the price of mobilizing resources in a wartime economy, the role of the Soviet women in the victory, etc. (FILTZER, 2010; HARRISON, 2004). A significant range of literature in the Soviet historiography is devoted to female labor in the rear, however, only achievements and exploits were studied, the remaining layers of the problem were outside the research field. Russian centers set up in the 1990s, programs and projects are working on gender studies, including on the issue of woman and war. Researcher analyzes the origins and motives of the labor heroism of the Soviet women, their role in the rear regions of Russia. The authors consider the traditions of studying this problem in Russian historiography (BUSHUYEVA, 2017), military and rear everyday life in 1941-1945.

In journalistic literature, taboo topics such as women, love, and violence in war began to be raised more often. In the works of Professor Petrova, plots about the tragic and heroic fates of women of the war years were considered, documentary materials of the war years on women's issues were selected in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History. In Kazakhstani historiography, complex monographic studies on women on the fronts and in the rear, their daily lives, every day, psychological and other problems, are few. In recent years, interest in gender issues of the mobilization policy of the USSR during the years of World War II has intensified (CARDONA & MARKWICK, 2019).

At the present stage, the theme Women of Kazakhstan during the Great Patriotic War is being developed at the Center for Ethnocultural, Historical and Anthropological Studies at the Karaganda State University as part of a project under a grant given by

the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. One of the first comprehensive monographs in the republic was published, where the role and contribution of the women of Central Kazakhstan on the fronts and in the rear during the war was studied. The scientific publications of Karaganda researchers about women of Kazakhstan during the war years involved a significant layer of new source materials, touched on the problems of women's daily life in Central Kazakhstan in the war 40s of the XX century (ABDRAKHMANOVA & SAKTAGANOVA, 2019).

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

When writing the article, various general scientific methods were used: empirical research methods i.e.comparisons, descriptions, observations during interviews; methods of theoretical knowledge; general logical methods and techniques of research i.e analysis and synthesis, analogy, a systematic approach. Special historical methods were also used: a comparative historical method when studying and analyzing the memories of female rear pilots, a microhistorical approach that allows to trace the influence of macroevents on survival tactics, and behavioral stereotypes of women in the rear during the war years.

The article involves documents of the Kazakhstan regional archives: The State Archive of the East Kazakhstan Region (EKRSA) and the State Archive of the Karaganda Region (KRSA). The

recollections of Kazakhstan female rear-viewers of archival funds and interview materials conducted by the researchers in 2019 at Karaganda University during the implementation of the project on women of Kazakhstan during the Great Patriotic War were also used.

### **3. RESULTS**

Analysis of the share of female labor in the economy of the Soviet Union and the Kazakh SSR showed that in the prewar years the proportion of women in the USSR was 41% among industrial production personnel, 42.9% among workers, but by 1944 it amounted to 53.5 and 54.3%, respectively (LIVSHIN & ORLOV, 2003). The largest share of women in the composition of the USSR population employed in the economy was achieved in 1944. Since 1945, in all sectors of the national economy it fell down when men returned from the army. They needed jobs to be provided, and women faded into the background. In general, in the military economy of the USSR, the maximum proportion of women was 57% in 1943-1944; in the union industry, female labor amounted to 53%, all-Union indicators of the share of female labor in construction were 36% (LIVSHIN & ORLOV, 2003).

In comparison with the data of foreign countries, in the number of women employed in industry amounted to 35% the USA and 27% in the UK (GAZELEY, 2008), but in German industry the share of female labor was only 8% (GLANTZ, 1999). This gap in the number

of women employed in German industry is explained by the fact that Nazi Germany employed 8 million foreigners, that is, a quarter of the total contingent employed in industry, 2 million of them were prisoners of war.

According to the data of 1944, women made up almost half of the entire working class (48.5%) in the Kazakh SSR. Women's labor played a huge role in the development of such leading industries as non-ferrous metallurgy, coal, oil, making up from 28 to 50% in 1943-1944. Moreover, in a number of sectors the growth of female labor ranged from 1.5 to 2 times. In the system of new industries created in Kazakhstan during the war years the share women accounted for 47-50%.

The workers who went to the front were replaced by their mothers, wives, and daughters, having mastered the complex professions of drillers, fasteners, tractor drivers and drivers, constituted the monopoly of male labor in the pre-war era. For example, by October 1, 1941, 37% of women worked in underground mines of the Leninogorsk mine administration, and 44.7% worked at the enterprises of Ust-Kamenogorsk. At the Leninogorsk Lead Plant, with the beginning of the war, the number of women increased from 350 to 860, that is, 2.4 times, etc. During the war years, the number of women in the industry of the Karaganda region increased from 8800 to 25591, almost 3 times. Moreover, significant growth occurred in industries and in such fields as non-ferrous metallurgy; industrial cooperation. In 1941, women in Kazakhstan in the coal industry as a whole accounted

for 24%, in the Karaganda region their share among miners was more than 50%. As for the Karagandaugol plant, in 1941 there were 4455 women in the plant's system, and in 1945 their number increased to 18149 people. In 1945, 4436 women were involved in underground work, including 2450 for slaughtering, 935 of them were bulk pickers, 68 women were engineers and technical workers, 126 ones were taskmasters. During the war, the number of women employed in production increased by 2 times just in the Karaganda region.

But for many women who were dependent on their working husbands, who had deferrals from conscription, the norms of food distribution were insignificant, which were on the verge of half-starving existence. Thus, in general, according to the average union indicators, dependents received only 400g of bread per day, and sugar was supposed to be only 400g per month. In rural areas, the situation looked even more tragic, since the card system did not work here throughout the Great Patriotic War. Consequently, rural women were deprived of even the minimum standardized food supply and had to independently solve the problem of providing it to themselves and their family members. Numerous post-war memoirs of women who were in children during the war years, as well as documentary materials clearly and convincingly testify to various ways and means of people's survival. The recollections and interviews of the Kazakh women rear-witnesses testify to the rear problems, daily labor exploits and heroism shown by ordinary residents of the Kazakh SSR.

The memoirs of Z. Akhmetov contain the facts that girls aged 14 worked 10-14 hours in mines. Z. Akhmetov recalls; We lived in a

dugout, we had only three small rooms. It was very crowded, the family was big, so we had to sleep on the floor. The house was very crowded, there was no water, so in winter I had to melt the snow and wash with this water. In summer, rainwater was collected. The houses were without utilities, there was no running water, no sewage. There was no central heating. I remember how children and women collected coal near the mine. We also went there very often. We took a small sled to put coal. Coal was collected both in snowstorms and in frosts. Hands froze so much that we did not feel them.

Due to the fact that there were no normal sanitary conditions, we were often sick. Soap was difficult to get, as it was sold in the bazaar at a very high price. Many of my peers, including me, suffered from head lice. When I got sick, my grandmother washed my hair with kerosene. And my sister even shaved her hair. In those years, because of this disease, many children in our school were bald. In addition, we all had measles and mumps. At that time there was no vaccine and a lot of children died from those diseases.

Memoirs of M. Lotsmanova, a native of the city of Karaganda: Women replaced men in bulk dumping, at that time they still worked manually as bulk pickers, drifters. I went downstairs to study myself to work as an engineer in a logging machine. We worked a lot, 10-12, and sometimes 16 hours a day. None of us said it was hard; food supply was poor. Khruslova N.G., a native of the village of Khoroshevskoye in the Ulyanovsk region of the Karaganda region, recalled: When the Great Patriotic War began, we, at the age of 14,

were sent to study accelerated courses of agricultural mechanics. In August 1941, we were sent to work as an assistant harvester for harvesting at the Kalinin collective farm. Throughout the war we worked on a par with adults.

The analysis of the mobilization factors that influenced the manifestation of labor heroism of the Soviet women showed the following: firstly, in the war years a system of measures for labor mobilization was created. The war demanded a temporary rejection of the forms of replenishment of social production with labor force adopted in peacetime. Peacetime methods in the conditions of war could not provide the necessary attraction of labor resources. In order to continuously increase production and increase the capacity of the military economy, the government resorted to the forms of use of labor resources, which were determined by the specific conditions of the war (PANFILOVA et al., 2019; 2020).

The decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of February 13, 1942 set the task of solving the problems of mobilizing labor. In accordance with these tasks, 1317487 people were required to be mobilized, and 820856 were mobilized, the plan was not implemented by almost 38%, which seriously affected the production results. Among the urban population, only 87.7% were mobilized for 645,508 jobs, and 71% from among the rural population. The plans were not fulfilled either in the USSR, or in the republic, or in the regions. For example, the figures for Central Kazakhstan are as follows: in the Karaganda coal basin, the following points of

implementation of the draft were disrupted: by the beginning of 1942 only 60% of female workers had been trained, the plan for training new personnel for the first half of 1942 was fulfilled only by 10.6 % (ABISHEV, 1964). Such a shortage of labor could disrupt the entire work of the military economy. In this regard, great expectations were placed on women. During the war years, for the uninterrupted supply of industry with labor for all urban and rural areas, labor allocation was applied.

Secondly, the factor of material interest was included. There were objective reasons for the inclusion of women in production, since they remained the sole breadwinners after mobilizing men in the army. Therefore, for a certain part of women, the main reason for labor mobilization was the urgent need for earnings.

Thirdly, in our opinion, the sacrifice syndrome, typical of the mentality of the Soviet people, was triggered. The essence of the sacrifice syndrome was that ideology, during the difficult war years, introduced into the mass consciousness the attitude towards the greatest possible asceticism, patriotic enthusiasm, and the strengthening of mobilization potentials. For example, from the first days of World War II, women began to evaluate the results of their labor as frontline standards. The slogan in the rear as at the front demanded personal interests to be subordinated to the common, work at the utmost, ahead of the pace and speed of peacetime. It morally justified the hard work and overstrain of patriotic forces. Syndrome of sacrifice primarily relied on the high moral qualities of people:

patriotism, conscientiousness, industriousness, sacrifice, honor, work pride, and most importantly - on a deep faith in the victory.

Fourth, the repressive mechanism, which functioned during the war years, also played a huge role. People knew about the possible consequences of dissatisfaction: the massive repression of the 1930s were fresh in their minds. The factor of state power pressure on people, the repressive state mechanism destroyed both manifestations of social protest and individual people, carriers of this protest. Archival documents confirm tough measures for those who did not want to show labor enthusiasm in the rear. Preventive and forceful methods, the threat of imprisonment for absenteeism or being late for work, were used actively in wartime. Transfer to round-the-clock work, prosecution, removal from managerial posts, dismissal, transfer of cases to the prosecutor's office or to the courts - these are not the whole list of actions that were applied to negligent workers, but these measures worked effectively in wartime conditions.

In archival cases there are enough examples of a tough but effective solution to mobilization problems: workers were prosecuted for one-day absenteeism or leaving work. We give as an example a fragment of one of the cases. The order of July 20, 1942 on the construction of the Karaganda conversion metallurgical plant reflects the situation and mood of the military era. There are cases of gross violation of labor discipline, illegal, long breaks, sleep at the place of work, leaving work, etc. Such cases are regarded as sabotage, and those guilty of violation of labor discipline will be prosecuted under

wartime laws. For desertion from the construction of the plant the workers who left the work on July 16, 1942: (4 names are indicated) are to be prosecuted. Transfer all material to the prosecutor's office. For absenteeism and unauthorized departure from work of the plant construction to prosecute the workers.

Poor conditions at work and in everyday life often served as a reason for violation of labor discipline and staff turnover, therefore, documents often contain facts of labor desertion, harsh measures were taken, but wartime punishment was reduced under this article. Over the five years of the war, the number of cases on labor desertion decreased by 2.5 times. The reasons were twofold: on the one hand, a wave of general enthusiasm and patriotism, on the other hand, the tightening of legislation on these facts. But if repressive wartime measures helped to cope with violations of discipline, it was much more difficult to keep workers in production due to difficult working conditions - from August 1941 to June 1942 about 1000 women left the mines just in the Karaganda region.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

In the Kazakh SSR, during the war years, women accounted for 48.5% of the entire working class, women's labor played a huge role in the development of such leading industries as non-ferrous metallurgy, coal, oil; in a number of sectors, the increase in female labor was almost double. In the system of new industries created in Kazakhstan

during the war, women made up almost 50% of workers in the industry. In wartime, the sacrifice syndrome for both soldiers and rear troops became one of the determining factors of the Great Victory. Extremely difficult living and working conditions could cause widespread discontent in certain communities. But in the Soviet people, ideological and repressive pressure developed a sacrifice syndrome; during the war years this aspect was intensified by propaganda work. Therefore, genuine patriotism, enthusiasm, sacrifice became typical manifestations of mentality, the behavioral stereotype of the Soviet personality.

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