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“We Created Ourselves and the city”: Women's Contribution to the Development of Magnitogorsk in the 1950–1960s

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Abstract: The everyday life of Soviet women during the years of the Khrushchev thaw is one of the insufficiently studied issues of Soviet women's history. This article is devoted to its study using the methods of gender anthropology and multi-focal ethnography of urban life. Its analysis is based on: heterogeneous empirical material – published memoirs of contemporaries, their oral stories (recorded by the authors of the article), materials from periodicals, neglected works of fiction, and visual sources. Magnitogorsk was chosen as the main research locus due to it being a large non-administrative industrial center that had appeared even before the war, and in which demographic gender imbalance persisted even after 1945. After analyzing the features of the women's contribution to the formation of a new image of the city, the authors completed the picture of the lifestyles of urban women, showing several social types that changed the face of the industrial giant: architects, housewives, social activists, workers of the Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works. The collected material showed the success of the Soviet Union's new social policy, which was an innovative transition of the Soviet state from the harsh methods of management of the 1930s – early 1950s to Soviet democracy, including recognition of the importance of private life, including of Soviet women. However, everyday life of Soviet women from a half a century ago also revealed a number of issues such as: gender inequality and has the exposed the difficulties of organizing everyday women's domestic (family) and industrial life. By proving the importance of gender anthropology as an approach that expands the ability to analyze social idealism and hopes of the political thaw, this approach helps frame the period by showing how gender interacted with the shifting value-normative structures of Soviet thinking and the social image of the female builders of socialism.

Keywords: city's everyday life, production everyday life, gender, life, history of the USSR, oral history

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«Создали себя и город»: женский вклад в развитие Магнитогорска 1950–1960-х гг.

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Аннотация: Повседневная жизнь советских женщин в годы хрущевской оттепели – одна из недостаточно исследованных тем советской женской истории. Изучению ее с применением методов гендерной антропологии и многофокусной этнографии городской жизни посвящена эта статья. Она основана на раз-

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народном эмпирическом материале – опубликованных воспоминаниях современниц, их устных историях (записанных авторами статьи), материалах периодической печати, забытых произведениях художественной литературы, визуальных источниках. Основным исследовательским локусом выбран Магнитогорск как пример нестоличного крупного индустриального центра, возникшего еще до войны, в котором и после победы сохранялся демографический гендерный дисбаланс. Проанализировав особенности женского вклада в формирование нового образа города, авторы дополнили картину стилей жизни горожанок, показав несколько социальных типажей, менявших облик индустриального гиганта: архитекторов, домохозяек, активисток-общественниц, работниц Магнитогорского металлургического комбината. Собранный материал доказывает успешность новой социальной политики, выразившей инновационный транзит Советского государства от жестких методов управления 1930-х – начала 1950-х гг. к советскому демократизму, признанию значимости частной жизни, в том числе советской женщины. Обращение к теме советской женской повседневности полувековой давности вскрыло ряд проблем гендерного неравенства, обнажило черты трудностей организации повседневного женского домашнего (семейного) и производственного быта, доказав значимость гендерной антропологии как подхода, расширяющего возможности анализировать социальный идеализм и надежды времен политической оттепели, видоизменения ценностно-нормативных структур советского мышления, социального облика строительниц социализма.

Ключевые слова: городская повседневность, производственная повседневность, гендер, быт, история СССР, устная история

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Introduction

The global modernist project of the USSR transition to an industrial society could be fully developed only after World War II. The restoration of the country after the victory in 1945 took more than one decade. These years were marked by changing the political course, retreating from the Soviet autocracy of the 1930s – early 1950s and replacing it with attempts to democratize, to humanize the methods of building communist future. One of these attempts was the creation of a new Soviet urban environment on a previously undeveloped place, which was intended to embody decisive changes in the life of the country in general and of individual citizens in particular, their way of life and aspirations.

In Russian historiography there was reflected the history of the creation of a new urban environment on the site of the cities destroyed by the enemy (such as, for example, Stalingrad)¹, as well as the development of new spaces of the huge country, where before the war there were not planned any urban-type settlements (Angarsk, Salavat, etc.)². There was also analyzed the everyday life of Volgograd, Omsk, Angarsk, Salavat, and other Soviet cities as part of the problem of studying female social memory³.

Somewhat apart are non-capital cities and those far from the center, which even before the war gained great economic importance. One of these symbolic cities was Magnitogorsk⁴, about which in the 1930s the whole country knew from newspaper articles,

¹ I.V. Bogdashina, “Zhenskaia sotsial'naia pamiat' o privychnom i obydenom v dnevnikakh zhitel'nitsy Stalingrada [Women's social memory of the familiar and ordinary in the diaries of a resident of Stalingrad],” *Vestnik Ryazanskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, no. 3 (2020): 46–54.

² N.L. Pushkareva, S.I. Belov, and A.V. Zhidchenko, “‘Taezhnye leningradki’: povsednevnaia zhizn' zhenshchin Angarska v 1950-h – 1960-h gg. [‘Taiga Leningradki’: Everyday Life of Angarsk Women in the 1950s – 1960s.],” *Voprosy istorii*, no. 3 (2022): 95–104.

³ I.V. Bogdashina, “Zhenskaia sotsial'naia pamiat'”; N.L. Pushkareva, S.I. Belov, and A.V. Zhidchenko, “‘Taezhnye leningradki’.”

⁴ S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

radio reports, Soviet songs and films. In the early 1950s, the city was considered as the acknowledged “capital of iron and steel industry.” By 1959, there lived 311,101 people in it, of which 145,168 were men and 165,933 were women⁵. The gender imbalance caused by the war still persisted in the late 1960s⁶. At the same time, in historiography there are no works on the life of Magnitogorsk women seventy years ago – since literally no information about the pace of development of the social sphere can be found in the descriptions of the city of those years, and even later⁷.

The authors of the article aim to find out what was the contribution of the female residents of the city near the mountain Magnitnaya to the change in the Soviet way of life in the first post-war decades, and whether the efforts to preserve memory elements, the recording of the testimonies of the female residents of the city are worth the research attention. To what extent have the success and achievements of the female part of the city's population remained in the modern social memory? In general, the task set by the authors is to analyze the social and gender transformations caused by the socio-political and socio-economic changes in the USSR in the 1950–1960s in the exemplary Soviet city of the mid-XX century, both in its old part developed before 1941, and in the new right-bank part built after the war, to trace different aspects of women's life in the changing socio-cultural landscape of the thaw and, more broadly, in the general historical context. This task conceptually fits into the historical and anthropological turn of Russian science from the analysis of political cataclysms, classes, social strata to the study of the everyday needs and concerns of “ordinary people,” their ideas of success, prosperity, fullness of life, happiness – in this sense, the Soviet past can be “measured,” correlated with consumerist standards, which at that time were resolutely denied.

The authors tried to understand what role in creating a new urban everyday life was played by the female residents of the industrial center which at the same time was a deep rearward city, and what they thought of their role. Was their everyday life similar to the lifestyle of metropolitan women or did it have special features? To what extent could the female residents of the “steel heart of Russia” afford to live everyday life like in Moscow and Leningrad in the years of the Khrushchev thaw in the period of the 1950–1960s marked by increased number of household appliances (refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, polishers, and a little later, televisions), a clear cultural and spiritual upsurge, the creation of new magazines, theaters, literary disputes, and hopes for a quick change in life for the better?

The sources used can be divided into three groups. The first includes private documents – namely, records of the memories of female residents of Magnitogorsk which were made by the authors of the article in the 2010s and captured the memory of older female respondents who spent childhood (rarely youth) in this city. Also, the authors of the article used Internet websites that contain the memories of female old-timers, which facilitates the search for reference data and acts as a triangulator, a “verification resource.” This is important in the case of summarizing materials specifically on the problems of social historical memory. The second group of sources is represented by the local and central press of the 1950–1960s. The third group includes works of fiction written

⁵ Z.N. Nesterova, *Magnitogorsk* (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo literatury po stroitel'stvu i arkhitekture Publ., 1951), 6; “Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1959 goda. Chislennost' gorodskogo naseleniya RSFSR [All-Union Population Census of 1959. Urban population of the RSFSR],” in Demoskop Weekly, 25.09. 2013, July 10, 2023, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus59_reg2.php .

⁶ “Magnitogorsk, 1967,” *Moi gorod*, July 10, 2023, http://www.mojgorod.ru/cheljab_obl/magnitogorsk/index.html

⁷ A.O. Bumazhnyy, M.G. Morozov, *Magnitogorsk* (Moscow: Gosstroizdat Publ., 1958); V.I. Kazarina, *Magnitogorsk* (Magnitogorsk: Gosstroizdat, 1961); S. Kotkin, *Magnetic* (Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); V.P. Bakanov, *Ispytanie Magnitkoi* [Experienceby Magnitogorsk] (Magnitogorsk: [N.s.], 2001).

in the years under study and aimed to emphasize the uniqueness of Magnitogorsk, to reveal the life of its inhabitants in the first post-war decades (the city was often glorified by writers and poets, and the enthusiastic attitude of those years is necessary for researchers of the origins of the social optimism of Soviet people and modern “nostalgia for the Soviet Union”).

In the described complex, the role of ego-documents is primary. “Magnitogorsk” was a typical working-class city, so there are few published personal testimonies, especially women's ones; they are supplemented by oral stories of women and those fragmentary records that are posted on the city's website.

“Architectural variety” of Magnitogorsk: “female town planners”

Starting their study, the authors suggested that the everyday life of the female residents of the new districts of Magnitogorsk is unlikely to have been similar to the living conditions and practices of those who happened to live in the city before the war. From this point of view, it seems interesting to study the peculiarities of life of those who lived in the center of the industrial giant and those who developed new parts of the city that began to appear on the right bank of the Ural River. The idea of developing these areas and creating a new urban environment there emerged in the second post-war decade: in 1954, on the “new” right bank there lived 35% of the inhabitants, and by the end of 1957 – more than 55%⁸. Unlike the cities that arose during the thaw years in the course of implementing plans for an even distribution of labor in the undeveloped parts of the country (Almetyevsk, Salavat, Angarsk, Volzhsky, Dubna, etc.), Magnitogorsk was among the cities of pre-war industrialization. During this period, on the left bank of the Ural River there was urban cultural and historical space which was formed in the 1930–1940s. Women who lived in it for a long time, as well as those evacuated, remembered well the hardships of the rearward city life⁹. Speaking about the first post-war years, one of the female respondents (who was evacuated from Smolensk with her mother and graduated from the Magnitogorsk Mining and Metallurgical Institute in 1946) recalled 400 grams of bread that she was given as a student:

You pinch off pieces of bread at lectures, and then you have nothing to bring home. My mother who worked at the school as a commandant would bring pottage from work, in the evening you would eat this pottage. What did my mother eat? I don't know¹⁰.

The 1946–1947 famine was a common misfortune throughout the country and people survived it together. Families of settlers from other parts of the USSR arrived in Magnitogorsk: here it was easier to get a job at a growing enterprise and housing in the Right Bank district that was being built. Like in the pre-war period, the local press presented as the heroes of those days male workers – operators of open-hearth furnaces, steelworkers, metallurgists, best foremen who “provided production in excess of the plan” and “worked highly productively.”¹¹

⁸ T.U. Nurimova “Sokhranit' by to, chto ostalos [Let's save what's left],” *Vechernii Magnitogorsk*, January 5, 2017.

⁹ A.V. Shinkevich, “Povsednevnaia zhizn' Magnitogorska v gody 1941–1945 gg. [Everyday life in Magnitogorsk in the years 1941–1945],” in *Russkii istoricheskii sbornik*, no. 9 (2015): 344–366.

¹⁰ M.A. Bresler, *Istoriia MGTU im. G.I. Nosova v vospominaniakh* [History of Moscow State Technical University named after G. I. Nosov in memories] (Magnitogorsk: Izd-va MGTU im. G.I. Nosova Publ., 2014), 20.

¹¹ “V pervye dni Novogo goda [In The first days of the New Year], in *Cheliabinskii rabochii*, no. 3, 1954.

The life of the city in the second post-war decade was in an urban environment unusual for the province. The peculiarity was the significant involvement of female architects of the Leningrad architectural school in the design of the urban environment. Suffice it to recall that the chief architect of this industrial giant after the war was I.N. Rozhkova. Having survived the siege of Leningrad, in 1947 she graduated from the Faculty of Architecture of the Leningrad Institute of Municipal Construction Engineers, worked as a district architect in Chelyabinsk and from there she was promoted to the position of chief architect of Magnitogorsk (this was at the age of 30). The female colleagues who developed the city together with her remember her unfeminine firmness in defending her decisions (which depended heavily on the change in ideology and style – from Stalinist pomposity to the fight against excesses in the Khrushchev era). The interview with I.N. Rozhkova in 2006 reveals the following:

The state ideology left no room for creativity for architects, hindered the implementation of their plans and ideas; but even within those rigid limits, Irina Nikolaevna insisted on architectural variety¹².

She insisted on the quick moving of the Magnitogorsk families from temporary barrack-type houses to four-story and five-story new buildings. In 1957 I.N. Rozhkova was sent to China for exchanges of experience (at that time trips abroad were extremely rare); women's magazines, especially "Rabotnitsa," often interviewed her trying to contrast the expectation of the meeting with a "venerable city planner" and her feminine appearance ("she had blond hair"), shy smile ("her eyes searchingly asked, 'How much of my time will you take?' ") and the breadth of architectural thinking. The eyewitnesses described the splendor of the city center as follows:

Wide streets with 5–6-storey buildings fan out from the semicircular square, there are endless regular rectangles of the quarters¹³.

Certainly, the possibility of planning not only solemn housing (as was typical for the Stalin-era buildings), but also houses comfortable for life was the achievement of the new housing policy throughout the USSR in the late 1950s. However, it is hard to overestimate the role of women in the planning of the city and in the choice of types of houses under construction, in which (not inferior to those in the capital) there were planned spacious rooms, central heating, hot water baths, pantries, closets, garbage chutes in the apartments. In 1963, 12,000 apartments in Magnitogorsk received gas from the Bukhara-Ural gas pipeline. During the years of mass construction of panel houses, later called "khrushchoba," about 2 thousand families received new apartments with a changed layout. Women's practicality, in conformity with the new architectural standards, forced architects to abandon useless apartment corridors and to increase the number of one- and two-room apartments. The architectural appearance of Magnitogorsk was created by female architects of the Leningrad State Institute for Urban Design (Lengiprogor). In the early 1950s, architect T. Butaeva designed most of the facades of the ensembles of the residential area with the elements of Russian architecture of the classicism period¹⁴; she made drafts of courtyards with large arched openings through which there was seen the interior of the quarter with lawns, flower beds and ornamental shrubs. Architect

¹² Message of A.V. Bespalova in: M. Skuridin, "Zhiznennyy proyekt Iriny Rozhkovoi [Life project of Irina Rozhkova]," *Magnitogorskii metal*, May 13, 2006, accessed July 10, 2023, <https://magmetall.ru/news/deystvuyuschie-lica/ziznennyj-proekt-iriny-rozkovoj/>.

¹³ M. Buzhkevich, "Ural, Magnitnaya gora: Na pravom beregu [Ural, Magnetic Mountain: On the right bank]," *Rabotnitsa*, no. 1 (1957): 4-5.

¹⁴ E.K. Kazaneva, O.M. Shentsova, and D.D. Khismatullina, "Razvitie sotsialisticheskogo klassitsizma v formoobrazovanii arhitekturnogo oblika Magnitogorska [The development of socialist classicism in the shaping of the architectural appearance of Magnitogorsk]," *Novye idei novogo veka* 1, no. 1 (2018): 153.

Z.N. Nesterova (later she was the author of the first generalizing work on the architecture of Magnitogorsk) developed a project for large-panel residential buildings; when planning apartments she wished to take into account the “needs of women's [everyday] life.”¹⁵

The history of creating a comfortable urban environment in the non-capital city in the mid-1950s was preserved in the architectural design of new quarters within Metallurgists Avenue and Zhdanov Street, 20 schools, 2 theaters, 5 cinemas, 5 clubs, 2 libraries, dozens of shops, canteens, two markets, which was provided by a group of architects (including many women). In each residential building, it was planned to build a “household block” which could contain pram storage rooms, laundries, and “consumer services.” For the first time in the history of this city, in each new quarter, it was planned to have premises for house management workshops, place for garbage collection and garages. Landscaped yards and squares were appreciated by young mothers with children. On their way to school schoolchildren did not have to cross streets with heavy traffic. In the city there began the construction of the Palace of Metallurgists with an auditorium for 1200 seats; there were built a television center, the House of Pioneers, hotels, and a new railway station¹⁶.

Magnitogorsk of the late 1950s – early 1960s had a special supply of food and manufactured goods. L.F. Salmina, a resident of Bashkir town of Ishimbay recalled that in 1959 when she was a schoolgirl, during an excursion she visited such cities as Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinsk, Sverdlovsk, but it was Magnitogorsk that struck her the most:

...cleanliness, beauty, shop windows, wide avenues; for the first time I tasted chocolate glazed curd bars there, which at that time one could buy neither in Ishimbay, nor in Chelyabinsk, nor even in Sverdlovsk¹⁷.

Women's names and images were present in the elements of the urban space: the “Swan” laundry, ateliers “Svetlana,” “Lyudmila,” “Uralochka,” “Fashionista;”¹⁸ shrubs of specially bred varieties “Ural Beauty,” “Bashkir Beauty” were planted around the city¹⁹.

A strict look at the listed achievements will probably force one to deny the “female influence” on the planning and development of the city, its improvement and socio-cultural space. Probably the decisive role was played by the general social demand of the thaw period rather than by the gender identity of the chief architect, and the tough managerial decisions of the administrative-command system were replaced by more flexible forms of management, and “architectural excesses” were replaced by rationality. Yet, it was in the post-war period that women began to hold many representative positions in different parts of the country (including among the chief architects). They got higher education before and during the war years, and sometimes they had administrative experience passed on by their senior mentors who in 1941–1945 replaced men who had gone off to war.

During the thaw years, the image of “new women” in the media changed; it became emphatically feminine: instead of masculine shock workers in red headscarves, like it was during the years of Stalin's industrialization, there were intelligent, feminine leaders capable of both tough decisions and a creative approach to work. Thus, on the cover

¹⁵ Z.N. Nesterova, *Magnitogorsk*, 50, 59.

¹⁶ “Arkhiteturnaia letopis' Magnitki [Architectural chronicle of Magnitka],” in *Soiuz arkhitektorov Rossii*, July 9, 2018, accessed July 10, 2023, <https://uar.ru/news/arkhiteturnaya-letopis-magnitki/>

¹⁷ “Memoirs of Salmina L.F., 1944 year of birth,” in Author's archive.

¹⁸ I.M. Bosenko, “Nastoiashchee i budushchee Magnitogorska [The present and future of Magnitogorsk],” in *Stanovlenie i razvitie Magnitogorska: Gorodskaiia nauchno-tekhnicheskaiia konferentsiya* (Magnitogorsk: Znanie, 1968), 30.

¹⁹ T.A. Nikiforova, *Magnitogorsk vchera segodnya, zavtra* [Magnitogorsk yesterday today, tomorrow] (Chelyabinsk: Yuzhno-Ural'skoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo Publ., 1978), 4–5. 46–50.

of “Ogonek” magazine for 1967 there was a portrait of Inessa Bikchentaeva, the chief architect of the new town of Oktyabrsky built in 1945 (180 km from Ufa) at the oil field²⁰.

“Working selflessly”: female social activists

The “Women's History” of Magnitogorsk has also been preserved by the memory of social activism during the Khrushchev thaw. According to the stories, it was women that most often joined public associations popular in the new districts, i.e. house committees; on a voluntary basis, women oversaw order in the yards, repairs of entrances, and the work of public utilities. A number of publications in the local press confirm that from January 1959, about 2,000 female activists from the Stalinsky district of Magnitogorsk participated in the work of housing commissions and street committees. “Women have to attend to many things,” the local press wrote²¹. Women's councils revived during the years of the Khrushchev thaw at enterprises and at house administrations were created to help to raise children, to introduce new standards of sanitary culture – they provided a “healthy life” including the fight against drunkenness. The women's councils also controlled the accelerated construction of children's institutions, the opening hours of shops, canteens, baths, hospitals, and personal service shops²².

Half a century later, there were analyzed the reasons for the weakness of women's councils; as a result, it was noted that the agenda of these organizations, the priority of the tasks to be solved were determined not by ordinary female residents of cities or workers of enterprises, but by those party or state organizations under which they operated²³. The authorities supervising women's councils strictly channeled the work of women towards culture and leisure activities and distracted them from criticizing political decisions. Under women's councils, there were sectors of mass cultural and circle work; for housewives there were organized circles of sewing, decorative needlework, house-keeping, gardening, etc. However, out of 17 thousand women who lived in the Kirovsky district of Magnitogorsk in 1959, almost 2 thousand were activists who were ready to participate in the election of their women's council, which was usually headed by communist women with a long record of party work. Among them were A.I. Nikolaeva, A.N. Bezdenezhnykh, P.P. Seryakova. More than 500 female activists of the district joined the councils at 12 house administrations, maintained active correspondence with the women's councils of other districts and cities of the RSFSR²⁴. The names of the female activists were constantly mentioned in the local press, there were listed the forms of introducing women to extrafamilial life – joint visits to film shows, theater premieres, collective purchases of books for private libraries in the Bookstore²⁵.

Since the Third Program of the CPSU of 1961 declared that “the formation of a new person is not only a consequence, but also a condition for the successful construction of communism,”²⁶ the women's councils were also required to constantly promote

²⁰ Chief architect of Oktyabrsky Inessa Bikchentaeva; M. Kerim, “Nosyashchiy imya revolyutsii [Bearing the name of revolution],” *Ogonek*, no. 45 (1967): 21–22.

²¹ “Massovoe dvizhenie zhenshchin-obshchestvennits [Mass movement of female social activists],” in *Chelyabinskii rabochii*, no. 20 (1959).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ L. Racioppi, See K. O'Sullivan, “Organizing Women before and after the Fall: Women's Politics in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia,” *Signs* 20, no. 4 (1995): 818–850.

²⁴ G. Bralgin, “Zhensoviet deystvuet [Women's Council is active],” *Chelyabinskii rabochii*, no. 56 (1959).

²⁵ V. Tyazhel'nikova “Oni iz brigady kommunisticheskogo truda [They are from the communist labor brigade],” *Chelyabinskii rabochii*, no. 77 (1959).

²⁶ “Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. [1961],” in *XXII Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. October 17–31, 1961. Verbatim report*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Politizdat Publ., 1962), 229–335.

the success of the female activists of the Komsomol brigades. Rewards for success were usually non-financial, but they helped build self-respect and pride in one's accomplishments. Female residents of the city remember the “welcome posters” on the streets of the city with photos of the female shock workers and indications of the result area, which could be seen on trams, buses, on newspaper stands, in clubs and palaces of culture²⁷. In fact, it was the programming of the female personality for “achievement,” “out-of-home activity,” “self-development.”²⁸

On billboards Soviet women propagated patterns of social behavior expected from working women. Information about their production success embodied the ideological practices of the times of building the “communist tomorrow.” Female vigilantes, auditors, communal workers performed the social roles offered to them by women's councils as public assignments, which later transformed into special forms of social work in the years of Brezhnev's stagnation.

“Cement is around me”: female production workers

The everyday life of the female inhabitants (housewives) of Magnitogorsk, as depicted by A.A. Fadeev in his novel “Ferrous Metallurgy,” consisted of a woman's housework, childcare, reflections on herself and relations with her husband, which was very far from the hopes of those women who came to Magnitogorsk in search of a hard, but well-paid job and housing. Suffice it to recall that it was at the pre-war Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works that the first woman steelworker in history appeared. It was Tatyana Ippolitova; on January 2, 1940 she carried out the first independent smelting. The result of such an experiment was sad: already in 1944, she had to quit her job due to disability, but only in the 1960s she got a one-room apartment in a new district, where she worked for a while as a railway transport controller²⁹.

By the end of the Khrushchev thaw, thousands of women still worked at the enterprises of the city (no longer in hot shops or in smelting), at the Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works – 23 thousand, including in hot shops. In 1965 alone, 2,137 women were hired, 1,103 women quit motivating it by the birth of a child, retirement, illness, disability, delay in solving the housing problem, and dissatisfaction with wages³⁰.

At the same time, there still remained the appeal of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 1939 “Women of Magnitogorsk, come to production! We will provide the factory and the construction of the plant with thousands of new workers!” Despite all the attempts of the state to limit or prohibit the use of female labor in hazardous production, the number of female workers willing to risk life and health did not decrease. In the photographs of those years there are many female grinders, engine mechanics, drillers, laborers. Local historians could hardly find their names: P. Bakhtiyarova

²⁷ V.S. Shamrayev, “Iz opyta organizatsii raboty komsomola Magnitki na udarnykh stroykakh semiletki [From the experience of organizing the work of the Magnitogorsk Komsomol at the shock construction projects of the seven-year period],” in *Chelovek. Trud. Kommunizm (iz istorii rabochego klassa Magnitki). Sb. nauchnykh trudov*, issue 66 (Magnitogorsk: Magnitogorskiy gornometallurgicheskiy institut imeni G.I. Nosova Publ., 1970), 70.

²⁸ H. Gyunter, “Arkhetipy sovetskoï kul'tury [Archetypes of Soviet culture],” in *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon: sbornik statei* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt Publ., 2000), 743–784.

²⁹ O. Ladov, “Muzhskoy kharakter, zhenskaya dusha [Male character, female soul],” in *Vecherniy Magnitogorsk*, January 25, 2018, accessed: July 10, 2023, <https://vecherka74.ru/actual/11494-muzhskoy-harakter-i-zhenskaya-dusha.html>

³⁰ O.F. Mikhaylovskaya, “O sostoianii uslovii truda, byta i meditsinskogo obsluzhivaniia zhenshchin na Magnitogorskom metallurgicheskom kombinatе v 60-e gody XX veka [On the state of working conditions, living conditions and medical care for women at the Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works in the 60s of the twentieth century],” in *Troitskii vestnik. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (Troitsk: ChelGu Publ., 2006), 317–320.

(she lived for 81 years), P. Vyaltseva (a holder of the Order of Lenin, she lived for 75 years), A. Zhavoronkova³¹. At the mixing place of the open-hearth plants (where 80 female crane operators worked) there was a critical dust concentration (4500 mg per cubic meter); 150 women (assistant masons) worked at a temperature of +52 degrees Celsius in summer, and at sub-zero temperatures in winter. 101 women worked on the repair of the tracks of the Magnitogorsk mine, and it was women who dragged two sleepers weighing 80 kg, manually hammered spikes and carried 15–25 tons of cargo per shift in the conditions of low light and increased noise. Women also worked as washers of chemical product tanks in the rectification department³².

The practice of prohibiting professions incompatible with the reproductive function of female workers originated in 1918 in the first Labor Code and found expression in the list of professions prohibited for women (from 1932 to 1978 it was not revised). It was greatly adjusted during the war. Although there was a formal prohibition, in practice much was allowed. Moreover, female shock workers who did the hard work were glorified in the local press. The fate of E.P. Vinnitskaya is known – she was the foreman of the masons of the “Magnitostroy” trust, later she became a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR and the founder of the dynasty: her children and grandchildren became metallurgists. There was preserved the interview with her in the newspaper:

I climb the working scaffold of the sixth floor, I have a trowel and a brick in my hands, and before my eyes there is in full view a new right-bank city, beautiful blocks of residential buildings. I am happy and proud that I am a builder!³³

Poetess R.A. Dyshalenkova who wrote poems about production everyday life also had the working background:

Cement is around me
Bands of steel ding around you
And above the rhythmic pass of shifts
The dispatcher's voice is heard...³⁴

The production daily routine of female workers was far from the standard. The sanitary requirements implied the presence of at least 15 feminine hygiene rooms at the enterprise; in fact, there were 9 of them, but they were also used for other purposes. One “hygiene room” was a health center, another – a technical study room, a third was a locker room. Indifference to the standards and requests of female workers was also shown by the administration of the coke production: over 300 women worked there, but their hygiene room was a kilometer from their workplace. In the shop for metal utensils (where 1,166 women worked) there was no women's room at all; there was no medical supervision either³⁵.

It would seem that all the enterprises of the city were provided with overalls and special footwear, but there was no real control, no special styles for women were provi-

³¹ “Magnitogorskaya zhenshchina – kharakter i stat' [Magnitogorsk woman – character and figure],” in *Vechernii Magnitogorsk*, March 8, 2018.

³² United State Archive of the Chelyabinsk Region (henceforth – OGACHO), f. 136, op. 2, d. 231, l. 13, 14–17; d. 28, l. 46; d. 263, l. 2–3; op. 4, d. 664, l. 2–3.

³³ Y.A. Remennik, “Golosuem za kandidatov bloka kommunistov i bespartiiynkh: Yelizaveta Pavlovna Vinnitskaia [We vote for the candidates of the bloc of communists and non-partisans: Elizaveta Pavlovna Vinnitskaya],” in *Cheliabinskii rabochii*, no. 41 (1959).

³⁴ T. Strgeeva, “Uvlekali menya izumrudnyye zaly Urala [The emerald halls of the Urals fascinated me],” in *Magnitostroi*, August 8, 1998.

³⁵ OGACHO, f. 136, op. 4, d. 664, l. 3; d. 757, l. 8–9; d. 757, l. 11–12.

ded, female operators of open-hearth furnaces were given men's overalls, often off-size³⁶. One of the former female operators of open-hearth furnaces wrote in her memoirs:

A woman is a machine. Her clothes should sparkle like a blade.

Thirty years later she added that a female metallurgist was supposed to be sexually appealing if she is a metal dealer³⁷.

Meanwhile, in the 1960s her contemporaries had no opportunity to be sexually appealing.

Women at the Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works often got sick. Over 23 thousand workers were served by only 7 doctors. The annual overload of hospitals amounted to 402 days – and sick women were often denied hospitalization, they got medical treatment on an outpatient basis, and they often ignored their disease (at the beginning of 1965, out of 2,956 days of disability only 1,637 days were spent by women in the hospital³⁸). Female workers had not only seasonal diseases; the reasons were also abortions and caring for sick children. As of 1964, 1,036 women under the supervision of the medical unit of the plant gave birth to children, and 4,276 had an abortion. A survey of 90 women in the gynecology department revealed that the main reasons for abortions were unsatisfactory material and living conditions, lack of nurseries³⁹. Children were often born before marriage, and their mothers had to make a choice: to become a single mother and send children to a nursery for most of the day, or to have an abortion. Due to the impossibility of having satisfactory living conditions, potential grandmothers couldn't help to raise children; and there was lack of nurseries and kindergartens. The words of journalists of that time about the “gentle masculinity”⁴⁰ of Magnitogorsk women turn out to be true – but the truth does not fully reveal the difficulties of women's everyday life.

As it was in the years of Stalin's five-year plans, during the years of the thaw the selfless labor of women remained in the focus of reports of the local and central press correspondents. The image of a courageous female comrade-in-arms was replaced by the image of a feminine activist with a pleasant smile. Photography, painting, cinema of the decade under consideration reconstructed the image of female inexhaustible energy, optimism and excluded any signs of sadness and even more so of melancholy and apathy.

“Not a minute of indulgence”: housewives

In addition to hard workdays, the women of Magnitogorsk, as well as throughout the country, were burdened with household chores. At the same time, the media provided little coverage of women's daily domestic work. However, writer A.A. Fadeev who ar-

³⁶ O.F. Mikhaylovskaya, “O sostoianii uslovii truda,” 319.

³⁷ R.A. Dyshalenkova, *Demonstratsiia modelei (rasskaz). Proshchal'noe slovo o znahare* [Demonstration of models (story). Farewell word about the healer] (Magnitogorsk: Magnitog. dom pechati Publ., 2001), 221–222.

³⁸ O.F. Mikhaylovskaya, “Deiatel'nost' profsoiuzov po uluchsheniui uslovii truda i snizheniiu proizvodstvennogo travmatizma na predpriatiiakh Chelyabinskoi oblasti v kontse 50-kh – pervoi polovine 80-kh gg. XX veka. Problemy istorii, filologii, kul'tury [Activities of professors to improve working conditions and reduce industrial injuries at enterprises of the Chelyabinsk region in the late 50s – the first half of the 80s. XX century],” *Problemy istorii, filologii, kul'tury*, no. 19 (2008): 77–84.

³⁹ O.F. Mikhaylovskaya, “Arkhivnye istochniki ob okhrane truda i zdorov'ia trudiashchikhsya Chelyabinskoi oblasti v 60–80-e gody XX veka [Archival sources on labor protection and health of workers of the Chelyabinsk region in the 60–80s of the XX century],” *Arkhivnoe delo v Chelyabinskoi oblasti*, no. 11 (2006): 169–171.

⁴⁰ R. Shneyweiss, “Moy drug Lyudmila [My friend Lyudmila],” in OGACHO, accessed: July 10, 2023, <https://archive74.ru>.

rived in Magnitogorsk in 1952 noticed the numerical superiority of women in the city. Ten years later, statistics confirmed that women outnumbered men (by more than 10%)⁴¹. Fadeev began writing a novel (which he never finished) called “The Housewife,” excerpts from which he published in the “Chelyabinsky Rabochy” newspaper (later published under the title “Ferrous Metallurgy”)⁴².

A.A. Fadeev captured the post-war life in the city which was a heavy burden for women:

with all the heaviness and boredom of the elusive, innumerable worries terrible in their pettiness, determining the lives of millions [of housewives who] due to maternal training <...> from childhood did not give themselves a single moment of indulgence⁴³.

The protagonist of the work was a married woman with a small child, whereas a huge number of female workers of the industrial giant were single mothers. This category of women, normatively fixed by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of July 8, 1944⁴⁴ (as well as the concept “having few children”) was an integral part of Soviet everyday life. Families with one and two children, as well as childless citizens, were taxed⁴⁵.

There was no practice of establishing paternity; therefore according to the aforementioned Decree of 1944, an actual father was exempted from responsibility for the child if he was not married to the child’s mother. Since abortion was banned until 1956, by the late 1950s – early 1960s many women were thus doomed to be single mothers, and sometimes mothers with few children⁴⁶. They were forced to do hard work in order to earn more; they combined physically difficult work with parental responsibilities, since the allowance per child usually did not exceed 50 (after the monetary reform – 5) rubles⁴⁷ – the amount “which is not enough for some people to keep a dog.”⁴⁸

R. Dyshalenkova was a crane operator, later a crusher of the cement plant of the Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works, and then became a part-time student of the M. Gorky Literary Institute⁴⁹. Based on her own experience as a single mother, she recalled later that she had raised the child “with the help of people around” and radio programs, like “Radio-nurse.”⁵⁰ Nurseries and kindergartens played a great role; there was written a lot in the Soviet press about their significance for mothers overloaded with work and household chores. There were published cheerful letters from female workers:

⁴¹ All-Union Population Census of 1970 The size of the urban population of the RSFSR, its territorial units, urban settlements and urban areas by gender, accessed: July 10, 2023, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus70_reg2.php

⁴² “Romance with metallurgy: Alexander Fadeev in the South Urals and in Magnitogorsk,” in *Magnitogorsk*, 2021, accessed: July 10, 2023, <https://www.ogbmagnitka.ru/images/docs/2021/fadeev.pdf>.

⁴³ A. Fadeev, “Domashnyaya khozyayka: Glavy iz Romana [The Housewife: Chapters from a Novel],” in *Cheliabinskii rabochii*, no. 241 (1954): 3; no. 247 (1954): 5.

⁴⁴ On increasing state assistance to pregnant women, mothers with many children and single mothers. Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of 08.07.1944, accessed: July 10, 2023, <http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=ESU&n=507#04863223381935209>.

⁴⁵ M. Nakachi, “Khrushchev and the 1944 Soviet Family Law: Politics, Reproduction, and Language,” *East European Politics and Societies* (2006): 40–68.

⁴⁶ L.N. Denisova, *Politicheskaya spiral' semeinogo zakonodatel'stva. Sud'ba russkoi krest'ianki v XX veke: brak, sem'ia, byt* [The political spiral of family law. The fate of the Russian peasant woman in the XX century: marriage, family, being] (Moscow: ROSPEN Publ., 2007), 19–51.

⁴⁷ State Archive of the Russian Federation (henceforth – GARF), f. 7523, op. 45a, d. 232, l. 72.

⁴⁸ “Letters from readers to Literaturnaya Gazeta. Readers' feedback on the series of articles ‘Silence is not golden’,” in Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (henceforth – RGALI), f. 634, op. 5, d. 488, l. 43–52.

⁴⁹ T. Sergeeva, “Uvlekali menia,” 4.

⁵⁰ Орлова Н. Н. Орлова, “To the 80th anniversary of the birth of Rimma Dyshalenkova,” in *Association of Magnitogorsk City Libraries*, accessed July 19, 2023, <https://www.ogbmagnitka.ru/info/ogb.html>.

How can I be called a single mother! In the factory kindergarten they treat my son well, and there are no financial problems⁵¹.

A. Fadeev paid attention to the female concerns of Magnitogorsk women. The writer lived most of his life in Moscow, and his ideas of the life of housewives in the capital were transferred to the realities of provincial Magnitogorsk. Here is an example of discrepancies: when the child was crying, “mother gave him cranberries in sugar.”⁵² According to female old-timers, there were no such sweets in provincial Magnitogorsk; sometimes children in the city did not eat sweets up to three years old, as mothers took care of their teeth (“they gave their children only natural sweet: carrots, apples, beets”⁵³). Siberian old-timers said that in the 1950s in the markets there were often sold jars of cranberries with sugar, but they did not know about such sweets⁵⁴. Mothers cooked simple food for children; they rarely treated them to sweets, although there was good food supply. One of the women shared the memory that the main sweet for her in the Urals in the early 1960s was gooseberries, and she remembered all her life a small bag of cherries with sugar bought at one of the stations, when she was traveling with her mother to Ukraine⁵⁵.

All the stories of Magnitogorsk female residents are replete with examples of women’s strong dependence in the family life on men in the period under review. It was due to rural upbringing, which focused on the status of a married woman, traditions, people’s condemnation of singleness⁵⁶. Many women had to endure insults, drunkenness of their husbands, their adultery – all this was well shown by A.A. Fadeev in his novel; both respondents and authors of autobiographical texts spoke said the same:

People want to fight and quarrel, women are as meek as a lamb. They have to endure slander⁵⁷.

After the war there was lack of men; women tried to hold on to marriage; they did a lot of daily routine work alone. According to official statistics, in the USSR household work took working men about 1 hour a day, whereas it took women who had children up to 4–5 hours a day⁵⁸. The workload of household chores for all women prevailed in the fiction of that time. The image of a Soviet city woman who was forced to rush between cleaning-cooking-washing, a disgruntled husband, sick children and work, overtime hours spent on “idiotic” political studies was described in N. Baranskaya’s story “A usual week.”⁵⁹ At the same time, in the recollections of the female residents of Magnitogorsk, their aspiration to receive higher education, to study in evening schools and evening faculties is striking. Thus, E.M. Milyukova (Evsina) wrote about this as follows:

⁵¹ “Ot imeni syna [On behalf of the son],” in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, August 28, 1954.

⁵² A. Fadeyev, “Domashniaia khoziaika: Glavy iz Romana [The Housewife: Chapters from a Novel],” in *Cheliabinskii rabochii*, no. 241 (1954).

⁵³ “Memoirs of Petrova I. M., born in 1927, Ivanovo,” in Author’s archive of A.V. Zhidchenko, recorded August 25, 2020.

⁵⁴ “Memories of Kochetova N.N., born in 1955, Omsk,” in Author’s archive of A.V. Zhidchenko, recorded November 24, 2008.

⁵⁵ “Memoirs of Artyukhova N.N., born in 1960,” in Author’s archive of A.V. Zhidchenko, recorded May 19, 2011.

⁵⁶ A. Fadeev, “Domashnyaya khozyayka: Glavy iz Romana [The Housewife: Chapters from a Novel],” in *Cheliabinskii rabochii*, no. 247 (1954).

⁵⁷ R.A. Dyshalenkova, *Demonstratsiia modelei (rasskaz). Proshchal’noe slovo o znahare* [Demonstration of models (story). Farewell word about the healer] (Magnitogorsk: Magnitog. dom pečati Publ., 2001), 213.

⁵⁸ L. Gordon, and E. Klopov, “Sotsial’nye problemy byta,” *Kommunist*, no. 17 (1974): 49–60.

⁵⁹ N. Baranskaia, “Nedelia kak nedelia [A week is like a week],” *Novyi mir*, no. 11 (1969): 23–55; Ye. Kashkarova, “Zhenskaia tema v proze 60-kh godov [Women’s theme in prose of the 60s],” *Vse liudi sestry*, no. 5 (1996): 57–69.

Prior to entering in 1959, I had worked either as an accountant or as an adjuster. For the first three years we both worked and studied⁶⁰; “we celebrated all holidays, birthdays together, went out to nature together, went to harvest; in the evening instead of classes groups were sent to collective farms⁶⁰.”

There are also L.I. Barsukova’s memories:

We had an incentive to study; a young specialist was paid money; he could be given an apartment, a job; he was sent to practice⁶¹.

Unlike the social roles of the urban female resident of Magnitogorsk (activist, production worker) described above, the role of a housewife was insignificant in the socio-political discourse, nevertheless it was typical of every Soviet woman. During the thaw period, the conventional space of a housewife’s everyday life shifted from the general (the ideas of the socialization of life, the construction of experimental communal houses with factory-kitchen in Magnitogorsk) to the particular (obtaining separate apartments, an increase in the production of consumer goods, including household appliances which facilitated the work of women in the kitchen, in an apartment with a bathroom, pantry, balcony, built-in closet, etc.

Conclusions

Magnitogorsk claimed to be a “capital.” Here people tried to demonstrate that the “women’s issue” had been resolved: a woman as the chief architect, a woman – the Hero of Labor, the founder of the dynasty of metallurgists, even a housewife is presented as a successful woman glorified by the famous writer of the time. But despite the legacy of youth romance of the 1930s and a special supply of food, Magnitogorsk was a hard city for the female part of the population. Bad ecology was one of the greatest problems. In the 1950–1960s new districts of Magnitogorsk were environmentally more prosperous, and to a greater extent carried the trends, atmosphere and innovations of the thaw period, changing life strategies and promising a change in the content of everyday practices – from finding ways to survive to normalizing the life. But still, labor in the open-hearth plants of the Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works which was physically difficult and merciless to women’s health work, the need to do domestic work, male drunkenness, the raising of children alone made the life of Magnitogorsk women much more difficult compared to female residents of Moscow and Leningrad⁶².

Under the influence of the thaw, it was not so much the content that changed, but the meaning of the social roles of women, which is clearly represented by the everyday life of female residents in the 1950–1960s. In this city, in fact, there was only one intellectual social role – “urban planner,” architect – the embodiment of the connection between construction and art, economical efficiency and comfort. Other social female roles glorified by famous writers and the media of the time are embodied by those who had a very difficult life in this city. As representatives of the “capital of Soviet metallurgy,” they had certain fame, relatively large opportunities for social security, but their everyday life was for the most part difficult, and they considered their selfless work as a sacrifice for the sake of their family and children. Analyzing the working and living conditions of women employed at the industrial enterprises of Magnitogorsk, comparing

⁶⁰ E.M. Milyukova, (Evsina), “Vospominaniya [Memories],” in *Istoriya MGTU im. G.I. Nosova v vospominaniyah*, 149–150 (Magnitogorsk: Izd-vo MGTU Publ., 2014), 149–150.

⁶¹ L.I. Barsukova, “Vospominaniia rabotnikov MGTU [Memories of MGTU’s workers],” in *Istoriya MGTU*, 155–156.

⁶² N.A. Aralovets, *Zhenskiy trud v promyshlennosti SSSR [Women’s labor in industry of the USSR]* (Moscow: Profizdat Publ., 1954).

them with statistical data, reports from local staff reporters, and the memories of female workers is the way to understand the anthropology of urban everyday life in its gender dimension. As part of the study of women's history, the solution to the research problem was associated with the identification of a contradiction typical of that time between work harmful to women's health and the impossibility to provide the Soviet women of that era with really high earnings and social guarantees in any other way.

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