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## There are no Foodstuffs in Grocery Stores, Everything is Very Difficult to Obtain: Women’s Everyday Life in the Provincial Soviet City in the 1950–1960s

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**Abstract:** The authors have explored alimentary practices (obtaining, preparing, cooking, consuming foodstuffs) in the context of gender relations, social history of women and everyday life of women in non-capital cities of the USSR in the late 1950s – early 1960s. The main sources of their work are: personal documents (unpublished diaries and memoirs), materials from recipe books that were in almost every home at that time, information from periodicals (magazines), archival materials from the funds of the State Archives of the Volgograd Region and the Center for Documentation of the Contemporary History of the Volgograd Region, and specific office documents – reports of inspections of district committees of people's control and confirming facts of abuse in the sphere of public catering. The main source is unstructured oral biographical stories or “women's oral story,” which preserved an emotional assessment of the difficulties experienced at that time. In the anthropology of Soviet everyday life, the gender aspect plays an especially significant role, since the ordinary and inconspicuous things in everyday life are better captured and preserved by women's memory; women's everyday life differed significantly from men's due to the greater burden of household chores. The authors conclude that despite the social policy of the Soviet state aimed at freeing women from household chores, the patriarchal idea of the role of women in the family turned out to be stable phenomena and can be traced throughout the Soviet period, including the “thaw.” Moreover, across the period there was the formation of a special type of Soviet gastronomic culture, simplified in terms of recipes, a form simplicity which provided time and energy for women's activities outside the home.

**Keywords:** women's history, urban women, anthropology of urban everyday life, gender asymmetries, alimentary practices

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## В магазине ничего нет, все очень трудно достать: из истории женской нестоличной повседневности советского города в 1950–1960-е гг.

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**Аннотация:** Предмет изучения авторов статьи – алиментарные практики (добывание, подготовка, приготовление, потребление продуктов питания) в контексте гендерных отношений, социальной истории женщин и женской повседневности в нестоличных городах СССР в конце 1950-х – начале 1960-х гг. Источниками послужили документы личного происхождения (неопубликованные дневники и воспоминания), материалы кулинарных книг, которые имелись в то время почти в каждом доме, сведения периодической печати (журналы), архивные материалы из фондов Государственного архива Волгоградской области и Центра документации новейшей истории Волгоградской области, представленные делопроизводственными документами – отчетами проверок районных комитетов народного контроля, подтверждавших факты злоупотреблений в сфере общественного питания. Главным источником послужили неструктурированные устные биографические рассказы, «устная женская история», сохранившие эмоциональную оценку пережитых тогда трудностей. В антропологии советской повседневности гендерный аспект играет особую роль, поскольку обыденное и малоприметное в быту лучше схватывается и сохраняется женской памятью, да и сама женская повседневность существенно отличалась от мужской в силу большей загруженности бытовыми заботами. Общий вывод авторов сводится к утверждению о том, что, несмотря на социальную политику Советского государства, направленную на освобождение женщин от домашнего труда, патриархальное представление о роли женщины в семейном хозяйстве оказалось устойчивым и прослеживается на протяжении всего советского периода, в том числе и в период «Оттепели». Продолжилось формирование особого типа советской гастрономической культуры, весьма упрощенной в плане рецептов, но в силу этого сохранявшей хотя бы отчасти время и силы для внедомашней женской активности.

**Ключевые слова:** женская история, горожанки, антропология городской повседневности, гендерные асимметрии, алиментарные практики

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### Introduction

*Relevance.* “Humanity begins with the kitchen, rather than with labor relations,” Claude Lévi-Strauss, the founder of structural anthropology wittily noted (implicitly arguing with Marxists)<sup>1</sup>. If there is even a grain of truth in this judgment<sup>2</sup>, then when referring to the events of Russian women's history we will formulate a task: to study typical Soviet everyday life from the perspective of alimentary practices

<sup>1</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss, “The Culinary Triangle,” in *Food and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 37.

<sup>2</sup> M.Yu. Martynova, and O.D. Fais-Leutskaya, *Vkus Evropy. Antropologicheskoe issledovanie kultury pitaniia* [The Taste of Europe. An Anthropological Study of Food Culture: Collective] (Moscow: Kuchkovo pole Muzeon Publ., 2020).

are embraced by the concept of foraging. It includes the entire cycle of activities for the kitchen (from searching for necessary foodstuffs in grocery stores and bringing them home to actually feeding the family, including the traditions of seating at the table, food preferences, serving dishes, and washing dishes after the meal and cleaning the premises). When referring to this concept, we prefer to use the general term *alimentary* (from the Latin *alimentarius* – associated with nutrition).

While studying with particular attention everyday practices in the framework of projects related to the anthropology of women's everyday life, we could not ignore the alimentary practices of the Soviet Union's provincial towns – after all, life there was a priori different from that in the capital. As an example, we chose the largest industrial center of the Lower Volga region – Stalingrad (since 1961 Volgograd). Its special position in the post-war years was determined by the rapid population growth: from 500 thousand people in the early 1950s to more than 700 thousand in the mid-1960s<sup>3</sup>. The large industrial city devastated by the war needed workforce and young people from all over the country came to restore it; therefore, the issue of food was acute<sup>4</sup> – and it is this side of everyday life that becomes especially significant in biographical stories when analysts try to ask local female residents about the past.

*Elaboration of the problem.* The topic of the interrelation between supply of goods and women's everyday life in the USSR was first raised in Soviet historiography by sociologists who wrote about time-consuming non-production women's duties<sup>5</sup>, and that the question of “eliminating the remnants of women's inequality in everyday life” remained open<sup>6</sup>. In recent years, detailed studies have appeared on the commodity shortage in the economy of Soviet towns located far from the metropolises<sup>7</sup>, on the difficulties with food delivery and the dependence of the food structure on it<sup>8</sup>, and on its valeological assessment<sup>9</sup>. But the question of everyday household practices, how food-

<sup>3</sup> People's Encyclopedia “My City.” Volgograd, accessed March 8, 2023. [http://www.mojgorod.ru/volgograd\\_obl/volgograd](http://www.mojgorod.ru/volgograd_obl/volgograd)

<sup>4</sup> Yu.V. Aksyutin, *Khrushchevskaia ‘ottepel’ i obshchestvennye nastroyeniia v SSSR v 1953–1964 gg.* [Khrushchev's ‘Thaw’ and Social Attitudes in the USSR in 1953–1964] (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publ., 2010), 431.

<sup>5</sup> B.A. Grushin, *Svobodnoe vremia: Aktualnye problemy* [Free Time: Current Issues]. Moscow: Mysl Publ., 1967; L.A. Gordon, and N.M. Rimashevskaiia, *Piatidnevnaia rabochaia nedelia i svobodnoe vremia trudishchikhsia* [The Five-Day Workweek and Workers' Free Time] (Moscow: Mysl Publ., 1972).

<sup>6</sup> V.S. Belova, *Podlinnoe ravnopravie* [Genuine Equality] (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1965), 25–26; E.M. Zuykova, *Sovershenstvovanie byta v usloviyakh sotsializma* [Perfection of everyday life in the conditions of socialism] (Moscow: Znanie Publ., 1974).

<sup>7</sup> V.A. Shestakov, “Social and Economic Policy of the Soviet State in the 1950s – Mid 1960s,” PhD thesis, Institute of Russian History RAS, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> O.Yu. Yeremina, *Snabzhenie i potreblenie produktov pitaniia v SSSR* [Food Supply and Consumption in the USSR], in *Rol i znachenie sovetskikh pyatiletok v razvitiu strany (k 90-letiiu pervogo piatiletnogo plana)* [The Role and Significance of Soviet Five-Year Plans in the Country's Development (90th Anniversary of the First Five-Year Plan)] (Kursk: [N.s.], 2019), 37–41; V.N. Mamyachenkov, “Potreblenie produktov pitaniia meditsynskimi rabotnikami i chlenami ikh semei v 1965 g. (po materialam budzhetnykh obsledovaniu, provodivshikhsia v Sverdlovskoi oblasti) [Food consumption by medical workers and their families in 1965 (based on budget surveys conducted in the Sverdlovsk Region)],” *Manuskript*, no. 12 (2019): 61–65, <https://doi.org/10.24224/2227-1295-2018-5-218-233>; V.N. Tomilin, “Nutritional structure of the main categories of the urban and rural population of the USSR during the political leadership of Khrushchev,” *Humanities Researches of the Central Russia*, no. 1 (2016): 43–53, <https://doi.org/10.24411/2541-9056-2016-00007>

<sup>9</sup> O.A. Taranova, “‘Zdorovaia pishcha’ v SSSR. Transformatsiia sovetskikh praktik zdorovogo i pravilnogo pitaniia [‘Healthy food’ in the USSR. Transformation of the Soviet practices of healthy and proper nutrition],” in *Globalnye sotsialnye transformatsii XX – nachala XXI vv. (k 100-letiyu russkoi revolyucii). Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii ‘XI Kovalevskie chteniya’* (St. Petersburg: Skifiya-Print Publ., 2017), 1556–1557.

stuffs bought with difficulty in queues were “obtained” and then used, how culinary masterpieces were sometimes made from them, that is, the topic of women's domestic workload in the 1950–1960s remained almost unrepresented in historiography. It was the authors of the collection “Seasonal Socialism” published in the USA who were the first to draw attention to the “close link between the concepts of nutrition and gender.”<sup>10</sup> Over the past five years, there have also appeared other works by Russian scientists<sup>11</sup>.

*The purpose of the study* is to determine the ways of women's adaptation to everyday hardships, and to identify the gender component of everyday practices of purchasing and consuming foodstuffs.

The object of the study is the female population of the large Volga regional center that had recently survived the war and was faced with the need to “build a new way of life.” The subject of the study is the everyday household (and specifically culinary-related) practices of female residents of Stalingrad/Volgograd, and their imprinting in women's family memory.

We considered it heuristically important to understand to what extent provincial female residents did or did not agree with the fact that in those years it was possible to implement the “resolution of the women's issue” promised by ideologists.

*Source base.* Turning to the period of Khrushchev's thaw of the 1950–1960s, which interested us with its turning point (the years of strong belief in the correctness of the direction of the socio-political and economic development of the country, the time of cultural transformations and scientific breakthroughs – the first nuclear icebreaker, the first flights into space), we formulated the following as a working hypothesis: women are more informative about that time more accurately than men. After all, it was they (by tradition) who were engaged in matters related to the kitchen. In addition, women's memorization is peculiar: women remember the details of episodes and describe them better than men, agree to conversations faster<sup>12</sup>, and they speak more emotionally and vividly<sup>13</sup>.

In the State Archives of the Volgograd Region there is a detailed diary of a female surgeon (F. R-6880. Personal collection of Zinaida Sergeevna Sedelnikova) who lived 86 years (1920–2006)<sup>14</sup>; it consists of 179 notebooks for the period from 1933 to 2004, which formed many archival files. Zinaida Sedelnikova arrived in Stalingrad in 1951 and lived there until her death in 2006. She described what she noticed and considered important, and to this evidence we added a dozen and a half of unstructured leitmotif oral interviews collected in 2019–2020 from female residents of Volgograd who recalled their childhood and youth. From these texts, we sequenced those that mentioned everyday difficulties associated with alimentary practices. They formed a special “author's ar-

<sup>10</sup> A. Lakhtikova, A. Brintlinger, and I. Glushchenko, eds. *Seasoned socialism: gender and food in late Soviet everyday life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> O. Gromasheva, “Organizatsyia pitaniia v semie: gendernyi aspect [Organization of catering in the family: gender aspect],” in *Praktiki i identichnosti: gendernoe ustroistvo* (St. Petersburg: EUSPb Publ., 2010); N.L. Pushkareva, and A.V. Zhidchenko, “Gender and the culinary basis of culture,” *Ural Historical Journal*, no. 1 (2021): 193–195, [https://doi.org/10.30759/1728-9718-2021-1\(70\)-193-195](https://doi.org/10.30759/1728-9718-2021-1(70)-193-195)

<sup>12</sup> P. Loprinzi, and E. Frith, “The Role of Sex in Memory Function: Considerations and Recommendations in the Context of Exercise,” *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, no. 7 (2018): 132.

<sup>13</sup> J.J. Skowronski, “Social memory in everyday life,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, no. 60 (1991): 831–843; P.J. Davis, “Gender differences in autobiographical memory for childhood emotional experiences,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, no. 76 (1999): 498–510; A. Herlitz, and J.E. Yonker, “Sex differences in episodic memory,” *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology*, no. 24 (2002): 107–114.

<sup>14</sup> N.L. Pushkareva, and I.V. Bogdashina, “Personal provenance sources on the history of provincial daily life of Soviet women in the 1950–1960s,” *Herald of an Archivist*, no. 1 (2021): 93–104, <https://doi.org/10.28995/2073-0101-2021-1-93-104>

chive” that was recently used when defending the dissertation<sup>15</sup>. Along with this unique evidence of the era, there were analyzed media materials (the magazines “Rabotnitsa,” “Krestyanka,” “Sovetskaya Zhenshchina,” “Sluzhba Byta”), manuals on house-keeping and cooking, statistical data, documents of management and record keeping (materials from the inspections of district committees of people's control that confirmed the facts of abuse in the sphere of public catering).

*Research methods.* After finding unpublished women's memoirs in the State Archives of the Volgograd Region, we used comparative content analysis, using materials from periodicals and cookbooks which were read at that time, as well as from little-studied archival materials of the inspections of district committees of people's control that confirmed the facts of abuse in the sphere of public catering. The final and most important stage of the work was the collection of oral biographical stories, unpublished women's stories, collected by us on the condition of anonymity, texts which were an appropriate retreat into a private emotional world in which the burden of personal anxieties and experiences was the greatest great.

### **“We stood in queues and got everything”: women who get the necessary foodstuffs**

By the early 1950s, state trade in Stalingrad had become the main source of food (along with the collective farm-cooperative trade which played a lesser role). Many wholesale depots destroyed by the war were restored; the opening of new grocery stores and canteens became part of the new everyday life and by 1950 had reached the pre-war level. Over ten years (1955–1965), the number of grocery stores in the city increased by 1.5 times and by 1966 had reached 819 (the population was 743.1 thousand people)<sup>16</sup>.

However, it was not easy to fill the depots and retail outlets with vital foodstuffs – butter, milk, sugar, confectionery, and especially the volumes of meat required for such a large number of people. The generation of “shortages and queues” (poet B. Slutsky’s expression) was accustomed to stocking up on everything<sup>17</sup> and these reserves were made, as can be judged from the memoirs, mostly by women. This was a women’s concern both during the war years<sup>18</sup> and afterward. First, it was necessary to “obtain” necessary foodstuffs; in order to find out to which grocery store foodstuffs were delivered, to stand in a queue, or having profitable connections in the trade sphere to arrange for the required item to be secretly purchased.

As a rule, the lower-level employees of the grocery stores were also women: in 1958, there were 578 employees in the network of city department stores in Stalingrad, 497 of them were women (86%); in 1964, 519 out of 580 employees (89%) were women<sup>19</sup>. It was women who made profitable connections among the trade workers; many female residents knew “the right person.” It was also beneficial to the sellers themselves; taking advantage of their position, they put aside higher-quality or scarce commodities for sale to acquaintances, which they could sell at a higher price. Those who

<sup>15</sup> I.V. Bogdashina, “Family and Home Life of Volgograd Woman: Content and Dynamics of Change (1950–1960S),” PhD diss., Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> *Narodnoe khozyaystvo Volgogradskoi oblasti za 50 let* [National Economy of the Volgograd Region for 50 Years] (Volgograd: [N.s.], 1967), 41, 209–211.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>18</sup> M.A. Ryblova, “Children of Stalingrad: wartime food practices,” *Vestnik Volgogradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta. Seriya 4. Istoriya. Regionovedenie. Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, no. 4 (2015): 177, <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu4.2015.4.16>

<sup>19</sup> Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Volgogradskoi oblasti [State Archive of Volgograd Region – GAVO], f. R-6036, op. 3, d. 36, l. 46; d. 90, l. 32.

did not have the necessary connections: often wrote complaints to the city party committee, appealed to the people's control committees, wrote negative comments in books of complaint, and reported that a particular person “sold unaccounted goods and did not indicate them in the expenditure invoices.”<sup>20</sup>

Getting information from neighbors and friends (“word of mouth”) about where fresh/scarcely foodstuffs were sold was commonplace even before the war<sup>21</sup>; home telephones became a common thing two decades later. All housewives spent a lot of time on daily lengthy searches for basic products. Doctor Z.S. Sedelnikova who lived briefly in Leningrad, then in Ulyanovsk, and afterwards came with her father to post-war Stalingrad, wrote in her diary in December 1954:

I received a salary of 538 rubles, went to several grocery stores, bought foodstuffs (it is extremely difficult to get them: there have been no butter, ghee, sugar, cereals for several months)<sup>22</sup>.

Any candies were like a gift; people could not help feeling joy after obtaining them:

I spent about 2 hours looking for a gift. There are no candies, chocolates or fruits in the grocery shops. Luckily, I found some fresh cakes (March 1955)<sup>23</sup>.

There were difficulties in obtaining: light wines, including champagne (“I could hardly find Moldovan wine – there are only cognac and liqueurs everywhere,” October 1960)<sup>24</sup>; meat, meat products and sausages, and butter (the price of which rose sharply throughout the country in 1962). A diary entry by Z.S. Sedelnikova of September 1964 allowed us to assess the efforts:

I went to the central grocery store, bought Ukrainian sausage, bread, sour cream, sprats, went a second time and bought 14 kg of potatoes for 18 kopecks and 5.5 kg of apples for 70 kopecks<sup>25</sup>.

This is an example of how an unmarried woman had to go to grocery stores several times after work to bring home various foodstuffs weighing almost 20 kg! It was a routine for Soviet women to carry such heavy bags home; there were no wheeled bags in the USSR. One can understand people’s joy when by the mid-1960s new grocery stores were opened within walking distance. In November 1963, a diary entry was made in that regard:

The mansarded store was remodeled; it became twice as wide, bright, with mirrors and daylight. There are 4 or 5 departments... I bought sugar, candies, bread, cheese, wine<sup>26</sup>.

The demand was feverish. The surgeon's diary story reveals the fear of a provincial woman that the listed foodstuffs might no longer be available for sale the next day, and it would be better to stock up on them. One of the women interviewed by the authors spoke about that “Khrushchev” time as follows:

I remember going to buy bread, taking a place in queue, there were problems with buying bread. We took a place in a queue in the evening, at midnight the names were called; the whole family came to buy bread as each person could buy only one loaf<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Volgogradskoi oblasti..., d. 28, l. 10.

<sup>21</sup> GAVO, f. R-6880, op. 6, d. 16, l. 36, 113 ob., 118 ob.; d. 29, l. 157.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., d. 16, l. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., d. 16, l. 67 ob.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., d. 25, l. 123 ob.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., d. 31, l. 35–36.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., d. 29, l. 154.

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous (A.I.), born in 1948 // Author's archive. Recorded on July 26, 2019, Volgograd.

There were usually queues in grocery stores in which women had to spend several hours; they had to queue for meat, vegetables, cereals, butter, bread, sugar<sup>28</sup>, and if they lacked money, they had to think about who to borrow from in order to buy foodstuffs for a long time ahead<sup>29</sup>. Unlike the metropolises, in the regional centers like Stalin-grad/Volgograd, there were no convenient packaging containers. In those years in Moscow or Leningrad one could pour milk and dairy products into bags, pack cottage cheese and butter into packs. There was nothing like that in Volgograd until the mid-1960s.

### **To serve the table “with abundance, variety, and art”: developing women's culinary skills in the age of scarcity**

The almost constant shortage of foodstuffs in the USSR taught people to adapt, first of all by eating less and (wittingly or unwittingly) simplifying taste requirements. In July 1951, Z.S. Sedelnikova wrote in her diary: “We don’t think about delicious food anymore; we mostly eat porridge, meatless soup, potatoes, some vegetables.”<sup>30</sup>

The following things were delicious for her – fruits, candies, cookies, as well as homemade pies with meat, carrots and eggs, pickles, fried potatoes, pea soup, fish soup, fatty cabbage soup. Before the war they were commonplace<sup>31</sup>, during the “Thaw” they turned out to be an impossible dream<sup>32</sup>. Fortunately, there were almost always enough flour and dairy products. One of the interviewed women noted that her mother would make eggnog for the children in the mornings before school: she would beat an egg with sugar and semolina<sup>33</sup> (no one even knew about the true recipe for eggnog with cognac and without semolina).

The demand for more scarce foodstuffs, especially meat, was not satisfied during the period and was often associated with crime, i.e. as a result of various machinations (in which women were also involved), meat disappeared from the warehouses<sup>34</sup>; it was taken out on the sly from food industry enterprises<sup>35</sup>. The workers were driven to do this by the total shortage of foodstuffs, the desire to feed their families as best as possible, and to make money by reselling foodstuffs and changing price tags (“systematic overpricing of meat by changing the categories and types of meat and meat products”)<sup>36</sup>.

Collective farm markets provided people with foodstuffs, but did not solve the problem. There were also queues, high prices, and a poor choice: “I saw pickled cucumbers for 2 rubles each. The price was shocking, I got angry and bought 2 cucumbers” (June 1957); “We went through the new central market. It was huge and empty: there were sorrel and cabbage, and flower seeds on the 1st floor” (May 1964)<sup>37</sup>. Nevertheless, it was the market where city female residents went for meat, eggs, and vegetables: only those living on the outskirts could have their own vegetable garden<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> GAVO, f. R-6880, op. 6, d. 13, l. 68, 76 ob.; d. 15, l. 80; d. 16, l. 51, 113 ob.; d. 25, l. 58 ob.; d. 26, l. 10 ob.; d. 27, l. 168 ob.; d. 28, l. 136; d. 30, l. 38, 127 ob.; d. 31, l. 32, 138.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., d. 13, l. 145, 166 ob.; d. 14, l. 112 ob.; d. 18, l. 147.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., d. 13, l. 70 ob.

<sup>31</sup> I.V. Glushchenko, *Obshchepit. Mikoian i sovetskaia kukhnia* [Catering. Mikoyan and Soviet cuisine] (Moscow: Higher School of Economics Publ., 2015).

<sup>32</sup> GAVO, f. R-6880, d. 15, l. 24 ob., 33; d. 19, l. 169.

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous (G.Y.), born in 1951. Author's archive, recorded on August 29, 2019, Volgograd.

<sup>34</sup> Tsentr dokumentatsii noveishei istorii Volgogradskoi oblasti [Center for Documentation of the Modern History of the Volgograd Region], f. 71, op. 28, d. 43, l. 179–181.

<sup>35</sup> GAVO, f. R-6869, op. 1, d. 24, l. 14–15, 35, 38.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., d. 7, l. 14, 31, 48–49.

<sup>37</sup> GAVO, f. R-6880, op. 6, d. 19, l. 168 ob. – 69; d. 30, l. 111.

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous (A.I.), born in 1948. Author's archive, recorded on July 26, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (L.M.), born in 1958. Author's archive, recorded on January 21, 2020, Volgograd; Anonymous

According to recollections, the foodstuffs bought with difficulty had to be processed properly: vegetables were sold dirty, and meat was with sinews. Girls were taught to properly prepare foodstuffs for cooking in labor classes. Housewives relied on the annually reissued book “Housekeeping.”<sup>39</sup> Women knew that tough meat with sinews had to be slightly frozen in order to be ground into mince (otherwise the meat grinders could not cope); carrots bought in the fall had to be stored in sand, and onions were suspended – they were stuffed in old stockings.

The desire to treat children and relatives forced women to share recipes for cooking various dishes; they were copied from the magazines “Rabotnitsa,” “Krestyanka,” “Sovetskaya Zhenshchina,” “Sluzhba byta,” and tear-off calendars. The book “On tasty and healthy food” was reissued annually and immediately sold out<sup>40</sup> – it was a regulator and symbolic educator of needs linked to the taste priorities approved by the authorities<sup>41</sup>. This book was in every family; to this day, editions of different years are kept in the homes of respondents<sup>42</sup>. The cooked dishes did not always correspond to the colorful book images<sup>43</sup>, and the recipes were constantly simplified due to the lack of the necessary foodstuffs<sup>44</sup>. It would be more correct to call such adaptation not a manifestation of culinary skill, but the development of a “taste for necessity.”<sup>45</sup> It can be also noted that there were problems with packaging:

The store workers packaged most of the foodstuffs themselves. Candies, cookies, pieces of cheese, sausages were wrapped in gray stiff recycled paper<sup>46</sup>.

It was always a problem to prepare a festive table: one had to put aside money (“there were a lot of candies, but little money”<sup>47</sup>), to buy necessary foodstuffs, to calculate so that there would be enough food for the invited guests. It was traditional to invite many guests. An entry of January 1954 states:

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(N.P.), born in 1956. Author's archive, recorded on October 14, 2019, Volgograd; GAVO, f. R-6880, op. 6, d. 14, l. 108 ob.; d. 20, l. 12; d. 25, l. 58 ob.; d. 27, l. 179 ob.; d. 31, l. 44; d. 33, l. 216.

<sup>39</sup> *Domovodstvo* [Housekeeping] (Moscow: Selkhozizdat Publ., 1956); *Domovodstvo* [Housekeeping] (Moscow: Selkhozizdat Publ., 1958); *Domovodstvo* [Housekeeping] (Moscow: Selkhozizdat Publ., 1960); *Domovodstvo* [Housekeeping] (Moscow: Selkhozizdat Publ., 1965).

<sup>40</sup> *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* [Book of Tasty and Healthy Food] (Moscow: Pishchepromizdat Publ., 1951); *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoy pishche* (Moscow: Pishchepromizdat Publ., 1952); *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (Moscow: Pishchepromizdat Publ., 1953).

<sup>41</sup> E. Dobrenko, “Gastronomicheskii kommunizm: vkusnoe vs zdorovoe [Gastronomic Communism: Tasty vs. Healthy],” *Neprikosnovenny zapas* 64, no. 2 (2009), <https://magazines.gorky.media/nz/2009/2/gastronomicheskij-kommunizm-vkusnoe-vs-zdorovoe.ht ml>.

<sup>42</sup> Anonymous (E.V.), born in 1944. Author's archive, recorded on March 15, 2020, Volgograd; Anonymous (G.Y.), born in 1951. Author's archive, recorded on August 29, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (O.V.), born in 1953. Author's archive, recorded on October 30, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (T.M.), born in 1950. Author's archive, recorded on October 22, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (L.M.), born in 1958. Author's archive, recorded on January 21, 2020, Volgograd; Anonymous (L.D.), born in 1948. Author's archive, recorded on February 22, 2020, Volgograd; Anonymous (N.P.), born in 1956. Author's archive, recorded on October 14, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (T.V.), born in 1948. Author's archive, recorded on September 2, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (N.P.), born in 1956. Author's archive, recorded on October 14, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (N.P.), born in 1941. Author's archive, recorded on August 31, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (L.L.), born in 1939. Author's archive, recorded on August 26, 2020, Volgograd.

<sup>43</sup> O.D. Popova, “The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food” in the System of Ideological Myths Characteristic of the Transition from the Khrushchev Thaw to the Brezhnevian Stagnation,” *Dialogue with Time*, no. 79 (2022): 236–251, <https://doi.org/10.21267/aquilo.2022.79.79.015>

<sup>44</sup> GABO, f. R-6880, op. 6, d. 15, l. 291.

<sup>45</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>46</sup> N.B. Lebina, *Povsednevnost epokhi kosmosa i kukuruzy* [The Everyday Life of the Age of Space and Corn] (St. Petersburg: Kruga Publ., 2021), 82.

<sup>47</sup> Anonymous (N.V.), b. 1938, author's archive, recording of September 6, 2019, Volgograd.



I handed over my duty... There was a difficulty with purchasing the necessary foodstuffs for the party, which everyone had decided to hold together and had already brought the money the day before. By 6 o'clock we had set the table; unexpectedly there came more people than expected – 21. We could hardly fit around the large extendable table, there was also brought a small table from the kitchen. We drank 6 liters of wine, and 6 bottles of champagne. I was worried but thank God, there was enough food<sup>48</sup>.

There was an implicit competition in women's ability to cook and serve. Here is a description of the feast in October 1962:

The laid table was great; I had never seen anything like that. It was laid with abundance, variety and art (white mushrooms with dill, fried fish sprinkled with some crumbs, jam of several types). The hostess constantly brought dishes<sup>49</sup>.

In conditions of foodstuffs shortages and money, an unexpected visit of guests made a hostess feel awkward and ashamed<sup>50</sup>. In provincial Stalingrad/Volgograd no one heard of any "order department" organized in the metropolises<sup>51</sup>. There they fully felt the comicality of the joke of the 1960s: "Is it true that under communism you can order food by phone? – That's true! And it will be given out on TV!" (By the way, they only read about TV sets then, there were practically none in the city). Z.S. Sidelnikova spent her free time watching TV at her Leningrad friends' home in 1953<sup>52</sup>, but most ordinary city dwellers did not have TV sets. Z.S. Sidelnikova bought a TV set in January 1962; she had to save up money (336 rubles) for several months and eventually "spent on it all her money."<sup>53</sup>

It is women's magazines which partly give an idea of the reality of life, possibilities and demands of housewives. They formed the desired culture of consumption and were intended specifically for women. The culinary sections gave important tips: which foodstuffs to use and how to refresh some of them, how to preserve them in the absence of a cellar, hand over to improve "even the humblest food" and cope with the shortage of basic foodstuffs<sup>54</sup>. The authors of the columns taught housewives to save money, "so that a home-cooked meal would be tasty and inexpensive" – it met the needs of the majority<sup>55</sup>. The quality of food, which was almost entirely homemade, depended on the range of products in grocery stores, since (as in many other cities of the country) the attempts of creating factory kitchens before the war were not a success; no one tried to revive it<sup>56</sup>.

Public canteens were a different matter. Being part of state trade, they were intend-

<sup>48</sup> GAVO, f. R-6880, op. 6, d. 15, l. 121 ob. – 122.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., d. 28, l. 15.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, d. 14, l. 156; d. 17, l. 34; d. 25, l. 64.

<sup>51</sup> N.B. Lebina, *Povsednevnost epokhi kosmoa...*, 71.

<sup>52</sup> GAVO, f. R-6880, op. 6, d. 15, l. 52 ob.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., d. 27, l. 36.

<sup>54</sup> A. Starkov, "Uchityvaya zaprosy potrebitelia [Taking into account consumer demands]," *Sovietskaia zhenshchina* [Peasant Woman], no. 1 (1953): 60–61; *Krestianka* [Peasant Woman], 1953, no. 11, 32; *Krestianka* [Peasant Woman], 1954, no. 3, 32; E. Vetchomova, "Na fabrike 'Krasnoe znamia' [At the 'Krasnoe Znamia factory]," *Rabotnitsa*, no. 1 (1954): 27–28; "Obed v neskolko minut [Lunch in a few minutes]," *Sovietskaia zhenshchina*, no. 2 (1955): 46; A. Cherapakhina, "Vasha domashniaia masterskaia [Your home workshop]," *Rabotnitsa*, no. 10 (1959): 32; *Rabotnitsa*, no. 1 (1957): 31; *Rabotnitsa*, no. 9 (1956): 30–31; O. Shvetsova, "Myaso i miasnye bluda [Meat and meat dishes]," *Krestianka*, no. 1 (1966): 32; *Krestianka*, no. 3 (1966): 32; P. Grigorev, "Kak organizovat domashnee pitaniie [How to organize home meals]," *Rabotnitsa*, no. 1 (1955): 32; *Rabotnitsa*, no. 12 (1960): 30; *Rabotnitsa*, no. 11 (1959): 32; A. Cheklashkov, "Iz chertvogo khleba i sukharei [From stale bread and rusks]," *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3 (1965): 30.

<sup>55</sup> P. Grigoriev, "Ratsionalnoe ispolzovanie produktov [Rational use of products]," *Rabotnitsa*, no. 12 (1955): 32.

<sup>56</sup> *Rabotnitsa*, no. 1 (1955): 28–29; S. Lapteva, and L. Mikhailova, "Domovaia kukhnia g. Moskva [Cafeteria of Moscow]," *Rabotnitsa*, no. 5 (1960): 30.

ed to feed city dwellers with ready-made inexpensive dishes. However, the revival of canteens was slower than the restoration of retail trade enterprises. Their pre-war level in Stalingrad was reached only by the end of the 1950s, and even the 407 canteens in the city at the end of 1966 where a thousand or more people a day went were not enough for the large industrial center<sup>57</sup>.

At the same time, the catering workers, taking advantage of their access to foodstuffs, preferred to simplify the recipes, trying to find an opportunity to take home some of the deficit foodstuffs delivered at the state price:

My sister worked in the agricultural department of the regional party committee, everything was brought there, and she gave us foodstuffs: various fish, chicken, goose meat, pineapples<sup>58</sup>.

Customers could only complain about obvious theft of foodstuffs and underweight of dishes in the canteen<sup>59</sup>. People did not like “public catering” often with tasteless and low-quality food, that often underweight and deception on the part of the staff, with unsanitary conditions of the premises – all this forced the city dwellers to prefer dishes cooked by housewives<sup>60</sup> and it certainly meant an additional burden for women.

Family people rarely eat out, in Russia – almost never. I don’t remember either my mother or father going to a restaurant or even a cafeteria – poet I. Brodsky recalled Leningrad realities of the 1950–1960s<sup>61</sup>.

### **Women's ingenuity in storing and cooking foodstuffs. Dreams of having a refrigerator**

60-70 years ago in Stalingrad/Volgograd very few people had refrigerators. Many housewives dreamt to buy a refrigerator; they queued for months to buy one. Those who had their own house (usually on the outskirts) had iceboxes or cellars (they were filled with snow in winter and gradually thawed in summer). In brick houses of Stalin's time, the space under the kitchen window was used to store vegetables, but most people kept food in a net tied to the outside of the window. Many female respondents said that they would have been glad to stock up on foodstuffs – but they did not buy them as there was nowhere to store them<sup>62</sup>. To keep foodstuffs people had to dig wells and put foodstuffs into the cellar<sup>63</sup>.

Women had valuable everyday experience concerning the preservation of purchased foodstuffs in low temperatures in storage areas (filling up an icebox, ventilating a cellar, digging a well). One of the female respondents shared her memories:

In our house, my dad dug a deep well, there was ice-cold water there, and we lowered foodstuffs into it in a bucket<sup>64</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Volgogradskoi oblasti* [People's Economy of Volgograd Region], 209, 211.

<sup>58</sup> Anonymous (N.V.), b. 1938, author's archive, recording of September 6, 2019, Volgograd.

<sup>59</sup> Anonymous (N.E.), b. 1945, author's archive, recording of January 17, 2020, Volgograd; Anonymous (A.I.), b. 1948, author's archive, recording of July 26, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (N.V.), b. 1938, author's archive, recording of September 6, 2019, Volgograd; GAVO, f. R-6869, op. 1, d. 7, l. 14; d. 34, l. 35; d. 24, l. 35; f. R-6820, op. 1, d. 57, l. 29.

<sup>60</sup> GAVO, f. R-6821, op. 1, d. 14, l. 31–33.

<sup>61</sup> I. Brodskii, *Menshe ediniitsy: Izbrannye esse* [Less than one: Selected essays] (Moscow: Lenizdat Publ., 1999), 428–429.

<sup>62</sup> Anonymous (O.V.), b. 1953, author's archive, recording of October 30, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (N.P.), b. 1956, author's archive, recording of October 14, 2019, Volgograd.

<sup>63</sup> Anonymous (N.P.), b. 1941, author's archive, recording of August 31, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (M.P.), b. 1933, author's archive, recording of May 29, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (A.D.), b. 1943, author's archive, recording of May 19, 2019, Volgograd.

<sup>64</sup> Anonymous (N.P.), b. 1941, author's archive, recording of August 31, 2019, Volgograd.

There were tips in magazines too<sup>65</sup>. But Soviet women did dream to buying a refrigerator. The problem was not only the shortage of foodstuffs and their quality, lack of money, having no connections, but also the fact that refrigerators could be unexpectedly delivered to the store. However, quite often few people had money, and refrigerators were sold with defects<sup>66</sup>.

In November 1958 Z.S. Sedelnikova wrote as follows:

The four of us left the theatre and went to the department store and saw a refrigerator “Saratov.” Zhenya had money, but I didn't. I ran to my friends, Lida lent me 1125 rubles, Viktor and Nona lent me another 500 <...> It turned out that all four refrigerators had defects. <...> A technician was called. Next summer we won't have problems with keeping foodstuffs. But I owe more than 1500 rubles<sup>67</sup>.

Most Volgograd women started to buy refrigerators only in the mid-1960s, and at that time women's magazines began publishing tips on their “careful use.”<sup>68</sup> Housewives no longer had to cook every day<sup>69</sup>. Meanwhile, interruptions in foodstuffs supplies were permanent. Sometimes there was no sugar, flour, butter, a certain type of bread for several months<sup>70</sup>, as evidenced by the diary entries about prices, presence/absence of foodstuffs, and the financial and moral state of the narrator after she managed or failed to buy foodstuffs. “Buckwheat appeared in grocery stores only in the 1960s...”<sup>71</sup> —one of the female respondents casually noted, when describing how humble the food was in the days of her youth.

“There are no foodstuffs in grocery stores, everything is very difficult to obtain...,”<sup>72</sup> the author of the diary complained. The constant stress due to searching foodstuffs and thinking about how to establish the necessary contacts to obtain them, what to cook from them (and how much time to spend on cooking) plagued the lives of city female resident be they: a doctor, a teacher, a saleswoman, or a factory worker.

Foodstuffs obtained with great difficulty were cooked and preserved carefully.

The female respondents noted:

Pears and apples were dried, grandmother steamed and mashed these fruits in a cast-iron pot in the stove, dried the puree in the sun and rolled, as a result one got fruit pastille, this was done in every house; nightshade was instead of strawberries, it was a delicacy. Mother made flat cakes from it, dried them, and put them in bags. In winter people poured boiling water over them and baked pies from this mass. Mother started cooking when she got married, learned everything from her mother-in-law: soured apples, pickled cabbage. We didn't wash the fruits, and I don't remember my sister and I being sick with anything<sup>73</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> S. Sergeev, “Sdelayte sami kholodilniki [Make your own refrigerators],” *Rabotnitsa*, no. 5 (1959): 30; “Khranenie produktov [Food storage],” *Rabotnitsa*, no. 7 (1961): 31.

<sup>66</sup> GAVO, f. R-6036, op. 2, d. 89, l. 24.

<sup>67</sup> GAVO, f. R-6880, op. 6, d. 22, l. 71, 75.

<sup>68</sup> “Novinki dlia doma [New items for home],” *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3 (1965): 31; L.V. Baranovskii, “Kholodilnik v dome [Refrigerator in the house],” *Rabotnitsa*, no. 7 (1966): 31.

<sup>69</sup> Anonymous (N.P.), b. 1956, author's archive, recording of October 14, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (A.D.), b. 1943, author's archive, recording of May 19, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (I.V.), b. 1937, author's archive, recording of June 16, 2019, Volgograd.

<sup>70</sup> GAVO, f. R-6880, op. 6, d. 16, l. 15, 15 ob.; d. 15, l. 239 ob.; d. 28, l. 67; d. 30, l. 127 ob.; d. 30, l. 25.

<sup>71</sup> Anonymous (G.Y.), b. 1951, author's archive, recording of August 29, 2019, Volgograd.

<sup>72</sup> GAVO, f. R-6880, op. 6, d. 21, l. 55.

<sup>73</sup> Anonymous (G.Y.), b. 1951, author's archive, recording of August 29, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (N.P.), b. 1941, author's archive, recording of August 31, 2019, Volgograd; Anonymous (N.P.), b. 1956, author's archive, recording of October 14, 2019, Volgograd.

In other words, women's everyday life was the living space in which innovations were outlined and at the same time the continuity of old forms of life remained. Soviet provincial city female residents had hope of brighter future in the circumstances of desperate resistance to the often joyless reality of life. It should be noted that during the years of the “Khrushchev thaw” at the state level, for the first time, they really thought about easing women's household work; purchasing, cooking and consuming of foodstuffs were recognized as “the most time-consuming of household work.”<sup>74</sup> This was the time of opening first in the city center, and then in the working-class districts not only of factory kitchens (which appeared before the war), but also cafes, canteens, new grocery stores, but (unlike the metropolises) the new standards of small packaging (milk in bags, cottage cheese and butter in packs, which had already become the norm in Moscow and Leningrad) had not yet appeared in the province. In the Volga region “cars with a barrel of milk would come to the block.”<sup>75</sup> The Soviet economy was not yet capable of quickly satisfying the demands of city female residents across the country.

### Conclusion

Women's willingness to serve their families, as it had been in Russia for centuries, continued even during the years of “socialist self-government based on the principles of communist morality” and city female residents were forced to resort to various methods of “obtaining” foodstuffs; they were willing to adopt practices of storing and cooking that were shared by more experienced women, and, due to the existing shortages, to endure the skills of obtaining foodstuffs through connections. Hours-long shopping trips, carrying heavy bags, worries about the lack of basic foodstuffs or the impossibility of feeding the family and guests – all these factors together formed a picture of women's everyday life in the “era of space and corn.”

In the study of everyday practices in the historical and anthropological dimension of social processes, it was the subjective truths of everyday life rather than the bare “objective facts” of newspaper articles or regulatory documents which turned out to be the most important piece of evidence. Its variability in different life stories is a valuable resource that can be used to identify the typical and try to generalize individual life cases. They showed that sacrificing leisure and personal interests was not a matter of free choice for Stalingrad/Volgograd women. This necessity was a consequence of: the constant underestimation by the authorities of women's social demands along with: little consideration of institutional factors, indifference to the demands to expand the city's supply, and an overestimation of the range of foodstuffs, their quality, and their quantity. The public, whose mouthpiece were women's magazines, hinted to readers at the eternity of the social duty and gender role of the “homemaker” – this role was practically perceived by women as a given at the time and that there was no point in worrying about it. It is therefore not surprising that during the years of the “thaw” the formation of a special type of Soviet gastronomic culture continued, were very simplified in terms of recipes, but due to this at least it partly saved time and energy for women's activities out of home.

In those years, foodstuffs and nutrition remained (due to the continuing difficulties of foodstuffs supply) a condition for basis for survival for many Soviet provincial city female residents, since it was women who were responsible for providing the family with food. The limited range of foodstuffs and their poor quality gave rise to a host of negative phenomena – queues, connections, rudeness, and selfishness. Not fitting into Soviet ideology and obviously contradicting it, these “relics of the past” nevertheless often became

<sup>74</sup> E. Nikolskaia, “Vremia i domashnii trud [Time and housework],” *Sluzhba byta*, no. 7 (1966): 34–35.

<sup>75</sup> Anonymous (O.V.), b. 1953, author's archive, recording of October 30, 2019, Volgograd.

the object of Soviet satire. But the everyday practices of survival, which did not reduce only to “obtaining” foodstuffs, as well as the reflection of these practices in visual narratives, literature and the media, were still apart of Soviet everyday culture.

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