

BRITISH AND SOVIET WOMEN IN THE ARMY AND AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS DURING WWII

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Despite the well-established ideas about the “male face” of war and gender stereotypes concerning women (particularly their weakness and peace-orientation), a large number of them were involved in military activities of 1939–1945. Moreover, some women participated in military engagements directly and demonstrated themselves as brave and keen soldiers. For a long time, women’s services to their countries were underestimated in societies. The grounds of this in most cases were predetermined by gender stereotypes.

The goal is to investigate the women’s participation in the Second World War in two countries, which had differences not only in political regime and state structure, but had different social traditions. These are Great Britain and the USSR. British society was more or less homogeneous, it was conservative by its nature, and tended to centuries-long traditions. The Soviet Union, being young country, was characterized by multi-nationality, and its society was far from monolithic. The norms of public morality were constructed in accordance with the “interests of the proletariat”, which were outlined by authorities and had been reinforced by the propaganda system.

Materials and methods. The research methodology is based on the principles of historicism and interdisciplinarity. The general scientific (induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis, generalization) and specially-historical (retrospective, critical analysis of sources, historical-comparative) methods were applied in the study, as well as gender approach.

Results and its discussion. In the first half of the XX century, British women were actively struggling for their rights. In spite of substantial positive changes in the status of women in society and adoption of a number of legislative acts, which extended their rights, there was a great deal of unsolved problems, connected with implementation of legislative provisions, inequality of labour payment, existence of gender stereotypes in the society, etc.

Soviet authorities, on the contrary, were promoting slogans on gender equality from the very beginning of their ruling. According to the Article 122 of the USSR Constitution of 1936, women obtained rights, equal with male rights in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, public and political life [1]. It’s unlikely that the USSR authorities, implementing steps for gender equality, were aimed at promoting democracy. It was done for the economic needs of the country. The Soviet emancipation was prompted by the operational reasons [4, c.77]. Nevertheless, in the USSR women officially could do more things than in Great Britain, especially in wartime.

Activities of British women in WWII were limited with the auxiliary roles; special auxiliary female organizations were formed for them. In addition, some women served in divisions of the anti-aircraft defence, Women's Royal Naval Service; the Special Operations Executive had a small amount of female members.

In comparison to WWI, the list of appropriate for the British women tasks in the auxiliary services officially grew longer. That particularly concerns the service in anti-aircraft defence, detecting detachment, etc. Despite this, there was a prohibition for women to use arms. For example, they could not serve as combat pilots and shoot the enemy planes down. But sometimes the prohibition was violated. According to the researchers’ data, women, serving in anti-aircraft defence, sometimes shot the enemies, as well some of female SOE agents did it [7, p. 11-18]. It’s worth noting that the call-up for women was a forced step for the British government, predetermined by the lack of human resources. Therefore these actions cannot be considered as a step for gender equality.

Unlike British, Soviet women had no restrictions for participation in military actions and there was no taboo concerning use of arms. They performed auxiliary roles as well as took part in hostilities on the same terms as men did. In the USSR, exclusively female operational units were organized, but at the same time, a lot of women were members of mixed operational units. Many Soviet women on the wave of the patriotic upturn voluntarily entered the Red Army de-

tachments, willing to be at the front. Although their large-scale entry into the army was also a forced measure for the USSR, connected with the lack of men

It is worthy of note that both countries' governments were actively substituting man with women in the administrative areas; and men, released from such works went to the front.

The common feature for both Soviet and British societies were accusations of the improper moral behaviour, brought against females-combatants.

In addition, there were similar beliefs that women had no tendency toward aggression. In wartime, these beliefs were negated, but both societies for long time after WWII refused to substantially reconsider their beliefs. Even nowadays debate concerning the issue is still ongoing.

There were 470,000 women in British Women's Auxiliary Services and nursery organizations. The same number of women was occupied in Civil Defence, Home Guard, Royal Observer Corps or Women's Land Army [6, c. 318]. According to the Soviet official statistics, the total number of women in the USSR Armed Forces amounted 800,000. But according to the modern historians' data, the number of women in uniform was not less than 2–3 millions [3, c. 138-139]. The indices of the Soviet female participation in the military campaign substantially exceeded the analogous indices of British women. But in this case the total amounts of population in both countries must be taken into account: 170.6 million people in the USSR (in 1939) [2, c.8] versus 46 million people in Great Britain (in 1931) [5, c.3]. Thus, the Soviet Union population was about 3.5 times larger. So, women's service in the military campaign during 1939–1945 was a typical phenomenon.

To some extent, the war allowed women to prove themselves in those spheres, which were inaccessible for them in the interwar period. Borders between "male" and "female" occupations were partially removed.

Both British and Soviet combatants faced the problem of social adaptation. Return to the peaceful life meant also a return to those gender stereotypes, which had been partially and temporarily forgotten because of war. Moreover, a lot of demobilized women, being the product of society and its culture, also were striving to return to the pre-war gender practices.

Conclusions. Democratic and totalitarian regimes had many common features in their policies toward women's conscription in war years and in their general interpretation of female service during that time. What is common is that the governments of both countries called up women into the military because of the lack of men; authorities actively replaced men by women in non-combat positions; accusation of women in debauchery in the army; the desire to return to the old gender regime after the war, where women keep the home fire burning, and men are the breadwinners and defenders, etc. The most important difference between two countries' policies toward women's involvement in the military during the Second World War was the use of arms.

Thus, given the wide range of similarities between the totalitarian and democratic countries toward women in military, it can be concluded that in this case the differences between their political regimes were placed in the background, giving way to their patriarchal essence.

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