“FEMALE WORKERS ARE STILL WAITING FOR YOUR ANSWER, COMRADE NOVOSELOV!”: SOVIET WOMEN’S AGENCY IN THE *RABOTNITSA* MAGAZINE, 1953-1964

By

Dina Omanova

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Supervisor: Professor Francisca de Haan

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the functioning of women's press during the Khrushchev era (1953-1964), and in particular it analyzes the *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker*)* magazine for the entire period of Khrushchev's rule. By focusing on women-readers' letters as well as on the editorial board's engagement with those letters, my research explores the functioning of the women's press and acknowledges the readers' participation in its content production.

My research questions are: How did readers participate in and contribute to the media during Khrushchev's rule? What kinds of questions did women-readers and the magazine's editorial board raise? In what way were the letters published in the magazine expressions of women's exercise of agency?

The main argument of this research is that readers' roles in the press went beyond that of passive receivers of the Party messages – the role taken for granted in virtually all of the scholarly literature on this topic, in the vein of traditional, top-down Sovietology. By analyzing readers' letters in the *Rabotnitsa* magazine, I demonstrate a multitude of active roles that women as letter-writers undertook in *Rabotnitsa*. The problems addressed by women included but were not limited to: the shortage of kindergartens, their slow construction, and unsatisfactory conditions, work-related problems, such as unequal treatment, illegal dismissals, poor labor conditions and lack of mechanization. By raising these concerns in their letters, women acted as claimants, initiators, and critics.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 18,766 words

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Signed _____ (Dina Omanova)

(Signature appears on the hard copy submitted to the library)

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis reconsiders women readers' participation and contribution to the Soviet women's press as writers both of articles and of letters by examination of letters in the *Rabotnitsa* magazine during Khrushchev's rule (1953-1964). The key issue that my thesis aims to address revolves around the dominant scholarly vision of the Soviet women's press as being the (top-down) Party's communication and propaganda channel that broadcasted certain messages to the masses of women. These scholars disregard that the women's press also functioned as a space where women could place their concerns and demands, influence legislation and reach the higher authorities.

I consider addressing the roles of women readers in the press significant for several reasons. Firstly, the historical literature that no longer regards Soviet Union as a completely top-down entity complicates the totalitarian view of the Soviet Union and demands the incorporation of a more complex vision of the Soviet Union into current scholarly works. Secondly, scholars have conceptualized Soviet journalism less univocal as well, therefore taking the Soviet press solely as propaganda instrument can no longer be adequate for a comprehensive analysis of the functioning of the Soviet press. Thirdly, in light of these scholarly developments that created a more complex, less categorical vision of the Soviet Union, the analysis of the functioning of the Soviet women's press needs reconsideration from the bottom-up perspective, emphasizing the active roles of women readers who were more than simply passive recipients of the state's propaganda.

It is crucial to underline the limitations of this study: I analyze only the issues of the *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker) magazine for the period of 1953 to 1964, 144 journal issues in total. In addition, historian Melanie Ilic, referring to Susie Reid and Natasha Tolstikova as

informants, wrote that *Rabotnitsa*'s archives were "destroyed".[1] Yet, historian Matthew Lenoe in his 1999 work on letter-writing in the Soviet Union claimed that *Rabotnitsa*'s archives were available in Moscow archives in Rossiiskii Tsentr Khraneniia i Izucheniia Dokumenov Noveishei Istorii (RTsKhlDNI), *fond* 610, and the *Gudok* archive in Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), *fond* 9613.[2] Since Ilic does not mention when, according to her information, *Rabotnitsa*'s archives were destroyed, it remains unclear if these archives are still available and if not, when they were destroyed and by whom.

My key research questions are: How did the women readers participate and contribute to *Rabotnitsa* during Khrushchev's rule? What kinds of roles did women undertake as readers of R*abotnitsa*? Which questions did women-readers and the magazine's editorial board raise about life in the Soviet Union? In what way can we consider the letters published in the magazine expressions of women's exercise of agency? How did political developments under Khrushchev's rule contribute to the possibility of women's exercise of agency in *Rabotnitsa*?

To answer my thesis questions, I structure my thesis in the following way. In the first chapter I conduct an overview of scholarly works on the women's press in the Soviet Union. I demonstrate that almost all the scholars whose works I discuss in this chapter disregard readers' contributions to the Soviet press. I adhere to the "bottom-up" approach of the Soviet Union proposed by Sheila Fitzpatrick as well as to Thomas Wolfe's conceptualization of Soviet journalism as not "just an instrument for the consolidation of Soviet power".[3] Moreover, I stick to Khristen Ghodsee's vision of agency, that is, regarding it as not limited only to "liberal,

[1] Melanie Ilič, Jeremy Smith, and Melanie Ilic, eds., "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies: 57 (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 105, 138.
[2] Matthew E. Lenoe, "Letter-Writing and the State [Reader Correspondence with Newspapers as a Source for Early Soviet History]," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 40, no. 1 (1999): 139, https://doi.org/10.3406/cmr.1999.996.
[3] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History & Theory* 46, no. 4 (December 2007): 80, https://ceuedu.sharepoint.com/sites/itservices/SitePages/vpn.aspx; Thomas C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism : The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, c2005, n.d.), 2.

Western" contexts.[4] I regard this approach to the Soviet Union as helpful in an attempt to re-consider women readers' roles in *Rabotnitsa*: expanding them beyond the single role of passive recipients of the Party's messages.

In the second chapter I explore the historical context for the period of Khrushchev's rule, focusing on the political transformations that he implemented and on their impact on women's lives. This chapter helps me to situate my analytical chapter in a broader historical context and to make relevant connections with the contents of *Rabotnitsa*.

In the third chapter I provide an analysis of women readers' letters as well as the editorial board's engagement with those letters in the *Rabotnitsa* magazine. In this chapter I show that readers and editors had a variety of roles in *Rabotnitsa* and argue that their engagement with the magazine went beyond the roles of passive readers and editors-transmitters of Party's messages. Taking into consideration the literature that no longer regards Soviet Union as simply top-down entity, as well as Wolfe's re-conceptualization of Soviet journalism, I formulate my research questions in this chapter as follows: How did these developments play out in the case of *Rabotnitsa*? How did *Rabotnitsa* provide space for women readers' exercise of agency? To what extent did *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board follow the official Party line? Was there space for expressing views that differed from the Party line? Did Khrushchev's relatively liberal rule contribute to *Rabotnitsa* functioning with less constraints? In this chapter I analyze readers' letters and editors' comments on those letters in the *Rabotnitsa* magazine. I argue that even though *Rabotnitsa* was a state-owned magazine, it had a space for women-readers' and editorial board's exercise of agency during Khrushchev era, allowing Soviet women to express their concerns and demands both as workers and as mothers, to ask for concrete measures both from the relevant state actors and the editorial board.

[4] Kristen Ghodsee, "Untangling the Knot: A Response to Nanette Funk," *EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF WOMENS STUDIES* 22, no. 2 (May 2015): 251, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506815571264.

I hope to contribute to acknowledgment of women readers' active roles in the women's press. Through my analysis of their letters in *Rabotnitsa* I aim to reconsider the single role of women readers as passive recipients of the Party messages that traditional Sovietologists have long attributed to them, by demonstrating the complexity of their engagement with *Rabotnitsa* and multitude of active roles they had as its readers. In the thesis Conclusion I reiterate my main questions and findings and answer my research questions.

CHAPTER I: THE SOVIET PRESS – NOT JUST A COMMUNICATOR OF THE PARTY'S MESSAGES TO THE MASSES: SCHOLARLY DISREGARD OF READERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

1.1. Introduction

In this chapter I first present the theoretical framework that I adhere to during my analysis of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine in the Khrushchev era. My aim in this thesis is to answer the following questions: how did readers participate in and contribute to the media during Khrushchev's rule? What kinds of questions did women-readers and the magazine's editorial board raise? In what way were the letters published in the magazine expressions of women's exercise of agency? To answer these questions, I will use the work of Sheila Fitzpatrick and Thomas Wolfe, as well as Kristen Ghodsee's vision of women's agency as not being limited to "liberal, Western" contexts (1.2).[5] Then, in the literature review section of this chapter, I survey the literature on the Soviet women's press, looking at how scholars have analyzed the Soviet women's press and what were their arguments (1.3). Lastly, in the methods section I describe the process of my work with the *Rabotnitsa* magazine for the period from 1953 to 1964 and list the limitations of my work (1.4). In the concluding section I sum up this chapter's main points (1.5).

1.2. Theoretical Framework

I focus on the functioning of women's press during Khrushchev's era, emphasizing in particular the availability of space for women's exercise of agency in the Soviet Union. Therefore, an important starting point for my analysis is Sheila Fitzpatrick's vision of historical exegesis as being done by "shaking the kaleidoscope to get a different pattern, not a movement

[5] Ghodsee, 251.

toward a final truth."[6] In addition, I adhere to the "bottom-up" approach of the Soviet Union mentioned by Sheila Fitzpatrick in her well-known 2007 article about "Revisionism in Soviet History." In this article, Fitzpatrick describes what she calls traditional Sovietology and its approach of the Soviet Union as a monolithic totalitarian state, reigned from above. She discusses how this dominant approach began to change from the 1980s, with scholars arguing for more complexity and more active involvement as well as resistance from the side of Soviet citizens.[7] With this theoretical framework, I aspire to explore a different, "bottom-up" vision of the process of functioning of the Soviet women's periodical press.

Regarding journalism, I follow Thomas Wolfe's conceptualization of journalism in the Soviet Union as not "just an instrument for the consolidation of Soviet power or a weapon in the class struggle", but also as the very "means by which the Soviet project envisioned itself as ongoing, relentless succession of moments made possible by the rhythmic pulse of newspapers across the endless thresholds of everyday life".[8]

Moreover, according to Wolfe, Soviet journalism was able to "generate pressures that contributed to the collapse" of the Soviet Union in 1991.[9] With this argument, Wolfe emphasizes the agency of Soviet journalism, underlining its function as not only being influenced but also as being an influencer. This interconnection between the Soviet state and journalism demonstrates the complexity of the operation of Soviet journalism, emphasizing its role not just as a communicator of the state's messages but also as an influential body able to impact the state and influence its politics from the bottom up. Wolfe discusses the Khrushchev era where "a kind of collective governmental reinvention was not only permitted but demanded by the party", accentuating the central role of journalists who were engaged in "positing new

[6] Golfo Alexopoulos et al., *Writing the Stalin Era : Sheila Fitzpatrick and Soviet Historiography* (New York, NY : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 31.
[7] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History & Theory* 46, no. 4 (December 2007): 80, 90.
[8] Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism*, 2.
[9] Wolfe, 3.

forms of subjectivity and using new discourses and styles of representation, so that the society might re-experience the cultural project of socialism."[10] In addition, Wolfe underlines a shift in power dynamics during Khrushchev, where "it was no longer a matter of the party leading the people; the people would lead themselves."[11] By pointing out these developments of the Khrushchev era, Wolfe demonstrates that the Communist Party was no longer the sole possessor of power; rather it attempted to distribute power and in this way journalists acquired influence as well.

Analyzing the contents of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine for the period between 1953-1964, I hope to provide a bottom-up account of the functioning of a part of the Soviet women's press by focusing on the agency of the *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board and that of the women readers in shaping this process. It is important to note that *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board members enabled the magazine's women readers to express their views, which the editors could do because of their position as paid editors; therefore, the way they exercised agency differs from that of the women who wrote letters to the magazine. Yet, their different positions do not necessarily preclude them from cooperation in trying to resolve issues the women readers addressed in their letters. In addition, the editors' active participation in resolving women readers' concerns serves as a vivid demonstration of the availability of space for the exercise of agency for women who worked for the state. Such a combination of activities by *Rabotnitsa*'s editors emphasizes that working in the state-owned magazine did not exclude the possibility of exercising agency, though obviously with certain limitations.

The idea of availability of space for exercising one's agency under Socialism is not uncontested among scholars. Nanette Funk, Professor Emerita at Brooklyn College, CUNY, in her article called "A very tangled knot: Official state socialist women's organizations, women's

[10] Wolfe, 34.
[11] Wolfe, 37.

agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism" discerns four types of agency: reactive, proactive, active and passive.[12] Funk defines proactive agency as "acting because of one's own will, policies, commitments or initiatives", contrasting it with reactive agency which she defines as "acting because of the will of another, including authorities' directives".[13] Funk only accepts proactive agency as a valid form of agency and argues that, since women's organizations in socialist countries only had reactive agency, they were not "agents" "but instruments".[14] Yet, Kristen Ghodsee, an American ethnographer and Professor of Russian and East European Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, in her response article to Funk argues that "the *right kind* of agency"[15] that Funk accepts as the only meaningful one displays a "philosophical bias" that disregards the fact that women can have "political commitments that are aliberal".[16] Therefore, agency that does not fall into the narrow framework of "liberal, Western, political goals" provided by Funk still remains a "*meaningful*"[17] form of agency.[18] Clearly, Kristen Ghodsee's view of agency fits with Sheila Fitzpatrick's non-top-down approach of Soviet history.

Along similar lines, Alexandra Talaver in her recent MA thesis "Samizdat Magazines of the Soviet Dissident Women's Groups, 1979-1982: A Critical Analysis" argues that the presence of "limitations for individual actions under state socialism…should not lead to the denial of the possibility of women to act out of their own initiatives and commitments."[19] I will apply these theoretical insights in my analysis of *Rabotnitsa*'s contents and functioning during

[12] Nanette Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 4 (November 2014): 349, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506814539929.
[13] Funk, 349.
[14] Funk, 349–50.
[15] Italicized by the author, Kristen Ghodsee.
[16] Ghodsee, "Untangling the Knot," 248, 251.
[17] Italicized by the author, Kristen Ghodsee.
[18] Ghodsee, "Untangling the Knot," 251.
[19] Alexandra Vladimirovna Talaver, *Samizdat Magazines of the Soviet Dissident Women's Group, 1979-1982 : A Critical Analysis*, CEU Gender Studies Department Master Theses: 2017/30 (Budapest : Central European University, 2017, n.d.), 10.

the period of Khrushchev's rule, hoping to contribute to acknowledgement of the readers' participation in the content production of the press. Contrary to representations by adherents of traditional Sovietology, readers, women readers in case of *Rabotnitsa* magazine, actively engaged in letter writing and in openly raising their concerns rather than simply being passive recipients of the Party's messages.

1.3. Literature review

In this section I am going to survey the literature on journalism in the Soviet Union. My main focus lies on works that analyzed the Soviet women's press, except for Wolfe's book that analyzes journalism in the Soviet Union in general and does not discuss the women's press.

Thomas Wolfe, whose conceptualization of journalism in the Soviet Union as not just a means for the "consolidation of Soviet power" I have discussed above, is an American anthropologist and historian of Soviet Union, European Union and media and communication. In his book *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin,* Thomas Wolfe reexamines the turbulent relations between "the press and the party", arguing for the possibility of identifying the crucial role of the press "to sustaining the idea of the possibility of socialism"; his work implies that the Soviet press was not only executing the Party's directives but was also shaping and influencing the Party and its politics by maintaining the belief in the achievability of socialism.[20] He mainly analyzes Soviet newspapers, such as *Izvestiia, Chastnaia zhizn', Den' mira*, *Skandaly, Sovetskaia Rossiia, Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, *Kommersant*, *Kommunist*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, etc.

Contrary to Wolfe, Maggie McAndrew in her work focuses only on Soviet women's magazines, such as *Rabotnitsa*, *Krest'yanka* and *Sovietskaya Zhenshchina*. McAndrew received her MA on a thesis on women in the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) at

[20] Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism*, 2.

Essex University, and did research on Soviet women's magazines at the University of Birmingham.[21] McAndrew came to the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1980s to the Faculty of Journalism at Moscow University for a year.[22] In her 1985 article on "Soviet Women's Magazines" she mainly analyzed the *Rabotnitsa* magazine from different years between 1917 to 1983. McAndrew expresses her vision of the Soviet women's magazines as sites of indoctrination through her interest in discerning "the model of the world" that the magazines aimed "to plant in women's consciousnesses."[23]

Moreover, McAndrew defines the aims of the women's press as to be informative and propagating on the decrees about women's "new legal rights and status" that aimed to create "a new type of woman – active and aware, socially, professionally and politically, a conscious participant and supporter of the new society".[24] The goal of *Rabotnitsa*, according to the journalist's handbook McAndrew cited, "is the cultural and political education of working women and housewives, mobilizing them to fulfill tasks established by the CPSU" (Communist Party of the Soviet Union).[25] Yet, *Rabotnitsa* editor Zoya Timofyevna in an interview with McAndrew at the beginning of the 1980s described the *Rabotnitsa* magazine as a "tribune" for its readers, where their "interests at national level" were represented and "problems…aired."[26] The editor also shared how women could use the magazine to get help with issues at their work, they could either write to *Rabotnitsa*'s letters department or invite journalists to their work places.[27] Despite the fact that the editor's vision of the magazine definitely points to possibilities for women of exercising agency, McAndrew seems reluctant to acknowledge this, emphasizing the authority of the Bolshevik Party under which, according to her views, neither independent

[21] Barbara Holland, *Soviet Sisterhood* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, c1985), 7.
[22] Holland, 7.
[23] Maggie McAndrew, "Soviet Women's Magazines," in *Soviet Sisterhood*, ed. Barbara Holland (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, c1985), 79.
[24] McAndrew, 92–93.
[25] McAndrew, 97.
[26] McAndrew, 98.
[27] McAndrew, 98.

women's organization nor independent women's press could exist.[28] In this way she echoed traditional Sovietologists, who regarded the Soviet Union as a top-down body without space for influences from the bottom. Yet more recent work challenges such an approach. In her MA Thesis Alexandra Talaver states that even if restrictions on one's autonomous actions could be more intense in the Soviet Union as compared to Western democracies, this "should not lead to the denial of the possibility of women to act out their own initiatives and commitments."[29]

Similar to McAndrew, Lynne Attwood – a senior lecturer in Russian Studies at Manchester University – in her 1999 book *Creating the new Soviet woman: women's magazines as engineers of female identity, 1922-53* emphasizes the prevalence of propagandistic goals in the Soviet press. Attwood analyzed such magazines as *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'yanka*. She states that the 1920's women's magazines promoted "an erosion of gender difference".[30] The magazines were calling for women to get out from their homes, to enter the public sphere and to turn into both "producers as well as consumers".[31] In addition, the 1920's magazines were also fostering "communal living" and "simplified divorce procedures."[32] Furthermore, in the 1920's, before Stalin came to power in 1922, the Soviet woman was portrayed as a "full, valuable citizen of the new society."[33] Once Stalin was in power, woman acquired a new role that was a combination of her being a worker and a "homemaker", creating a female identity that had to consist of both male and female "traditional…qualities and traits."[34] Soviet magazines praised woman for her ability to work "like a man" while being simultaneously exalted for her qualities of being caregiving and readily sacrificial.[35] According to Attwood,

[28] McAndrew, 93–94.
[29] Talaver, *Samizdat Magazines of the Soviet Dissident Women's Group, 1979-1982*, 10.
[30] Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman : Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53*, Studies in Russian and East European History and Society (New York : St. Martin's Press in association with Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, c1999., 1999), 12.
[31] Attwood, 12.
[32] Attwood, 12.
[33] Attwood, 13.
[34] Attwood, 13.
[35] Attwood, 13.

starting from the Stalin era, even readers' letters were selected "because they expressed appropriate opinions" regarding certain transformations in state policy or because they invited attention to a specific issue that the Party intended to underline.[36]

While Attwood described the period under Stalin's rule as consistent and without contradictions, the historian Anna Krylova in her 2010 book *Soviet Women in Combat* provides a reconsideration of the "long-held" vision of Stalinism as "a social and ideological formation, the core values of which were coherent, free of contradiction, and…amendable to social transformations."[37] Changes in the texts produced by journalists at different periods communicate not only the restrictions inflicted upon them by the Party but also "the shifting scales of values" that designated a "good conduct" at a certain period.[38] Krylova discusses this shifting nature of gender roles, showing that the notion of "open-endedness" was inherent to the ideas about "appropriate, socialist womanhood and manhood."[39] One of the examples that Krylova mentions is the newspapers' use of several "language[s] of gender".[40] This multiplicity of languages of gender in the press, Krylova argues, demonstrated coexistence of discussion on such themes as women preoccupied with unregulated "maternal urges" with perceptions of motherhood as a "plannable 'state regulation'", as well as pronouncing women ineligible at "traditionally male pursuits" with openly promoting women's interests "to become engineers, scientists and soldiers."[41]

Professor of Russian and Soviet History with the focus on Soviet Women's History, Melanie Ilic in a 2004 book chapter on "Women in the Khrushchev Era: an Overview" provides

[36] Attwood, 17; "Dr Lynne Attwood Research Profile - Personal Details | The University of Manchester," accessed March 21, 2019, https://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/lynne.attwood/personaldetails.
[37] Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat : A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2010., n.d.), 24.
[38] Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism*, 2.
[39] Anna Krylova, "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism," in *The Cambridge History of Communism*, in Sylvio Pons edition, vol. 1: World Revolution and Socialism in One Country 1917-1941 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 443.
[40] Krylova, 445.
[41] Krylova, 445.

a survey of the transforming "roles and status" of women in the Soviet Union during Khrushchev's rule.[42] Examining such magazines as *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'yanka* during Khrushchev's rule (1953-1964), Ilic does not discuss the agency of Soviet women per se. Yet she demonstrates how in the Khrushchev era various issues that women faced in their attempts to combine "motherhood, household responsibilities, and professional commitments" came under serious consideration in the political arena and were broadly discussed in the press, often with *Literaturnaya gazeta* leading these discussions.[43] Ilic asserts that "the press led the call for changes", calling for enhancements in various spheres that had direct consequences on women as workers, mothers, activists.[44] The magazines and newspapers that Ilic mentions include not just *Rabotnitsa* and *Soviet Woman* but also *Izvesitiya*, and *Pravda*. Examples of issues raised in the press include, but were not limited to, the absence of "proper bathroom facilities" and laundries at women's workplaces, inconvenient locations of shops and stores, women's working conditions, quality of services at work, trade unions' operation in "protecting women's interests at work", "equal pay for equal work", lack of work for women in places "dominated by mining and metallurgical industries".[45] Apart from leading a call for changes, the newspapers and the women's press also indicated the limitations of the governmentally conducted reforms at their different stages of development and implementation. Continuous complaints would reveal that certain issues remained unsolved. As, for instance, working women's complaints about "not enough" done to "ease their situation", despite government's assurances about "increases and improvements in state-funded childcare."[46] All of these issues demonstrate

[42] Melanie Ilič, Susan Emily Reid, and Lynne Attwood, eds., *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, Studies in Russian and East European History and Society (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire : Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 5.
[43] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, 10.
[44] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, 17.
[45] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, 17.
[46] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, 9.

historian Mary Buckley's point that the "woman question" was revitalized but not resolved under Khrushchev's rule.[47]

In addition, other recent works that analyze of the Soviet women's press often focus on such themes as the construction of femininity, the relation of gender and femininity to nation-building, consumption, women's triple burden, and femininity, body care, and the construction of age.[48] Discussing a wide variety of themes, these recent works rarely mention readers' contributions to the mass media. Almost all of the authors regard readers as recipients of mass media's propaganda, not addressing the possibilities for their active contribution to the press, as I will illustrate with a range of examples below.

Alexandra Zvonareva, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Sociology and Psychology, Candidate of Sociological Sciences, Associate Professor of the Department of Sociology and Personnel Management, member of the Russian Society of Sociologists, in her 2009 article "An image of father in the late Soviet press" discusses how "propaganda" during the 1950s-1980s was attempting to create an image of father who was "responsible to the state for the upbringing of the new generation".[49] Zvonareva does a content analysis of 700 issues of such magazines as *Rabotnitsa*, *Krest'yanka* and *Sem'ya I shkola* (School and Family). Zvonareva concludes that the aim of the mass propaganda in the 1950s-1980s was to "make fathers involved in family matters".[50] This involvement included not only fathers' participation in the upbringing of their

[47] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, 22.
[48] Saara Ratilainen, "Old Title, New Traditions," *Feminist Media Studies* 15, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 92–112, https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2015.988394; Alexis Peri, "New Soviet Woman: The Post-World War II Feminine Ideal at Home and Abroad," *RUSSIAN REVIEW* 77, no. 4 (October 2018): 621–44, https://doi.org/10.1111/russ.12202; Maria Davidenko, "Multiple Femininities in Two Russian Women's Magazines, 1970s-1990s," *JOURNAL OF GENDER STUDIES* 27, no. 4 (2018): 445–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2016.1233864; Смирнова Валентина Юрьевна, "Конструирование Возраста в Журнале «Работница» в Советское Время," *Женщина в Российском Обществе*, no. 1 (78) (2016), https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/konstruirovanie-vozrasta-v-zhurnale-rabotnitsa-v-sovetskoe-vremya.
[49] Александра Звонарёва, "Образ Отца в Позднесоветской Журнальной Периодике (Вторая Половина 50-х - 80-е Годы XX Века)," *Женщина в Российском Обществе*, no. 1 (2009): 2, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/obraz-ottsa-v-pozdnesovetskoy-zhurnalnoy-periodike-vtoraya-polovina-50-h-80-e-gody-xx-veka.
[50] Звонарёва, 7.

children, but also helping wives/mothers of their children around the house.[51] Zvonareva accentuates the notion of propaganda when discussing the functioning of the magazines that she analyzed; therefore the fact that she does not consider readers' contributions is not unexpected, she seems to view the readers solely as (passive) recipients of this propaganda.

Irina Alferova, Associate Professor at St. Petersburg State University, in her 2010 article "The Bolsheviks' female press in 1920s as mechanism of social construction of the 'new Soviet woman'" defines the role of the Soviet periodical press as being "one of the effective means of communicative impact on various population groups" and focuses on the formation process of the ideal "Soviet woman".[52] Analyzing the contents of the *Kommunistka* and *Rabotnitsa* magazines during the 1920's, Alferova concludes that this ideal included the following characteristics: supporting communist ideology, being socially active (*obshchestvennitsa*) as well as being a qualified worker.[53] Alferova regards these journals as Party's instruments and does not consider readers' roles.[54]

A.A. Dneprovskaya, Professor at Omsk State University. F.M. Dostoevsky, in her article "An image of the Soviet woman worker in the first postwar decade"[55] from 2011 discusses the specifics of the construction of the image of the Soviet woman presented in such magazines as *Rabotnitsa*, *Krest'yanka* and *Soviet Woman*, predominantly focusing on the contents of *Rabotnitsa* in her content analysis.[56] Dneprovskaya underlines heroism and readiness for sacrifices as key characteristics in the portrayal of woman during the post-World

[51] Звонарёва, 7–8.
[52] Ирина Алферова, "Женская Большевистская Печать: Обстоятельства Зарождения (1913-1914 Гг.)," *Научные Ведомости Белгородского Государственного Университета. Серия: История. Политология* 15, no. 13 (84) (2010): 106, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/zhenskaya-bolshevistskaya-pechat-obstoyatelstva-zarozhdeniya-1913-1914-gg.
[53] Алферова, 109.
[54] Алферова, 174, 176, 180.
[55] Dneprovskaya states that she focuses on the post-World War II period between 1945-1955
[56] А. Днепровская, "Образ Советской Труженицы в Первое Послевоенное Десятилетие (По Материалам Специальных Женских Изданий)," *Вестник Омского Университета*, no. 1 (2011): 91, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/obraz-sovetskoy-truzhenitsy-v-pervoe-poslevoennoe-desyatiletie-po-materialam-spetsialnyh-zhenskih-izdaniy.

War II decade.[57] Moreover, Dneprovskaya states that such characteristics as a sense of moderation, simplicity and modesty were defined as aesthetic criteria of Soviet fashion for a woman worker.[58] Dneprovskaya briefly discusses readers' letters, mentioning the types of letters that were published and the ones that were not, emphasizing "purposeful work of the editors" who presented to the readers only those letters that were acceptable in the Soviet system.[59] Yet, the way that she reaches this conclusion by only briefly discussing three examples from *Sovietskaya Zhenshina* and *Krest'yanka* and presenting three alternative extracts from letters that were not published to me is unconvincing and demanding more elaborated analysis.[60]

Irina Vinichenko, Associate Professor at Omsk State University, in her 2011 article "The concept of Soviet taste in fashion and consumer culture during the period of the 'Thaw'" addresses attempts by the state to regulate the fashion preferences of the Soviet people by doing a content analysis of *Rabotnitsa* magazine and movies for the period from the 1950s to the 1960s, demonstrating how transformations in women's roles contributed to changes in women's style.[61] She analyzes the most often recurring phrases related to women's clothing style and concludes that in the 1960's such characteristics as modesty, simplicity and sense of moderation were promoted in the official discourse of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine.[62] Vinichenko focuses solely on how the magazine shaped Soviet women's taste in clothing in the 1950's-1960's, she does not include readers' letters in her analysis.

[57] Днепровская, 94.
[58] Днепровская, 96.
[59] Днепровская, 96.
[60] Днепровская, 96.
[61] Ирина Виниченко, "Концепция Советского Вкуса в Моде и Потребительской Культуре Периода «Оттепели» – Тема Научной Статьи По Культуре и Культурологии Читайте Бесплатно Текст Научно-Исследовательской Работы в Электронной Библиотеке КиберЛенинка," *Омский Вестник* 5, no. 101 (2011): 237, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/kontseptsiya-sovetskogo-vkusa-v-mode-i-potrebitelskoy-kulture-perioda-ottepeli.
[62] Виниченко, 239.

Inna Garanina, Associate Professor at the Department of Private Law of Russia and Foreign Countries at Mari State University in Yoshkar-Ola, in her 2012 article "Legalization of abortion or the Bolshevik project 'the new woman'" addresses the theme of abortion in the Soviet Union in the 1930's. Garanina performs a discourse analysis of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine for this period and describes the discourse following the legislative prohibition of abortion in 1936 as "condemnatory of abortions" and "promoting maternity".[63] Garanina states that the discourse in Rabotnitsa in the 1930's emphasized that women's "civil valor" was in maternity.[64] Moreover, Garanina also mentions a campaign of social support for pregnant women that went together with the anti-abortion campaign and emphasized the legitimacy of prohibition of abortion with the statement that "life in the country became better".[65] Even though Garanina cites some readers' letters, she does so only to illustrate that the majority of letters supported the anti-abortion discourse.[66]

Victoria Smeiukha, Associate Professor in the Department of Mass Communications and Applied Linguistics at Rostov State University of Communications, in her 2012 article "USSR's women magazines in 1945-1991" discusses the functioning of women's magazines on the examples of *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'yanka*, and traces the conditions and factors that induced transformations in the women's press during the period between 1945-1991.[67] Soviet government's economic reforms during 1945-1991 were reflected both in the emergence of new topics and in the opening of new rubrics devoted to "the development of the virgin lands, the introduction of scientific technologies in agriculture, the experiences of industry leaders,

[63] Инна Гаранина, "Легализация Аборта Или Большевистский Проект «Новая Женщина»," *Марийский Юридический Вестник*, no. 9 (2012): 63, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/legalizatsiya-aborta-ili-bolshevistskiy-proekt-novaya-zhenschina.
[64] Гаранина, 64.
[65] Гаранина, 65.
[66] Гаранина, 63.
[67] Виктория Смеюха, "Женские Журналы СССР в 1945-1991 Гг. : Типология, Проблематика, Образная Трансформация," 1, accessed May 30, 2019, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/zhenskie-zhurnaly-sssr-v-1945-1991-gg-tipologiya-problematika-obraznaya-transformatsiya.

and teaching of basics of economics".[68] Smeiukha also argues that in the 1950's, the theme of women's "inner world" became a characteristic feature of the magazines.[69] Since the mid-1980s, after the beginning of perestroika, stereotypes about "equal Soviet women" were destroyed and publications about the "overload of women and the reduction of the authority of the family" started appearing.[70]

Tat'yana Dashkova, Associate Professor of the Higher School of European Cultures, in her 2013 article "*Rabotnitsa* to the masses: The policy of social modeling in the Soviet women's magazines of the 1930s" on the example of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine discusses how women's magazines took on the role of "life teachers"; they strived to equalize women with men in labor, management and education, while also preserving for women special social "niches" in areas traditionally marked as female: performing household work, the upbringing of children, culture.[71] Dashkova asserts that *Rabotnitsa* "built a certain hierarchy of values, labor norms, everyday practices and leisure."[72] Since Dashkova regards Rabotnitsa as life teacher, one might assume that the role of readers was probably to be taught, in a passive way. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that Dashkova does not focus on readers' contributions to the magazine.

Ol'ga Popova, Doctor of History, Professor at S. Esenin Ryazan State University, in her 2016 article "The Changing Culinary Mores of Celebratory Life within Soviet Society" analyzes cooking recipes published in *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'yanka* during 1939-1958 as well as cookbooks for the period between 1939-1969, arguing that these magazines served as

[68] Смеюха, 12.
[69] Смеюха, 12.
[70] Смеюха, 12.
[71] Татьяна Дашкова, "'Работницу' - в Массы!»: Политика Социального Моделирования в Советских Женских Журналах 1930-х Годов," 191, accessed March 22, 2019, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/t-dashkova-rabotnitsu-v-massy-politika-sotsialnogo-modelirovaniya-v-sovetskih-zhenskih-zhurnalah-1930-h-godov.
[72] Дашкова, 191.

"mechanisms of mass propaganda" and established a "new social reality" by creating new Soviet holidays.[73]

Alexis Peri, Assistant Professor of History at Boston University, in her 2018 article called "New *Soviet Woman*: The Post-World War II Feminine Ideal at Home and Abroad" discusses the *Soviet Woman* magazine during 1945-1956. Peri writes that *Soviet Woman* served as a "diplomatic space" for women who were "excluded" from politics during the "Truman-Stalin" era, while also serving as a place where a "feminine ideal" was created for both Soviet and foreign audiences as a means of promoting of "Soviet interests at home and abroad".[74] Peri mainly focuses on the work of *Soviet Woman*'s editors and concludes by emphasizing the difficulty of "balancing audiences and objectives, foreign and domestic," stating that this task remained "a constant, perhaps insurmountable, challenge" for the editors of *Soviet Woman*.[75] Peri does not discuss the readers' contributions, as she mainly focuses on the magazine's staff and on its struggles to take into consideration both its local and foreign audiences.[76]

Maria Davidenko, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Higher School of Economics, in her 2018 article "Multiple femininities in two Russian women's magazines, 1970s-1990s" analyzes the representation of the notion of "care for the female body" in *Rabotnitsa* and in *Krest'yanka* (Peasant Woman) magazines, arguing that the "body-politic" of the Soviet government was focused on defining a "heterosexually attractive female figure" and not just on women as productive workers and child bearers.[77] Again, there is no discussion of any input from the readers.

[73] Ольга Попова, "Кулинарный Код Культуры Праздника в Советском Обществе," *Новейшая История Россuи*, no. 2 (2016): 252, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/kulinarnyy-kod-kultury-prazdnika-v-sovetskom-obschestve.
[74] Peri, "New Soviet Woman," 643, 624.
[75] Peri, 644.
[76] Peri, 622.
[77] Davidenko, "Multiple Femininities in Two Russian Women's Magazines, 1970s-1990s," 445, 456.

As I have shown in this literature review, none of these pieces discusses or even considers the possibilities for readers' contributions to the periodical press. They take for granted that the Soviet magazines for women worked as the Party's communication and propaganda channels which broadcasted certain messages to the masses of women, introduced certain ideals of femininity and gave useful advice. They leave aside discussion of the possibilities for readers' participation and contribution to the media as writers both of articles and of letters - an issue that needs further exploration, which my thesis proposes to do through an examination of the letters in the *Rabotnitsa* magazine during Khrushchev's rule.

1.4. Methods

My work is based on an analysis of the January 1953 - December 1964 issues of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine. *Rabotnitsa* has been published since 1914.[78] The magazine was established in response to Vladimir Lenin's call to establish "legal" media for women in order to "protect the interests of the women's labor movement and to promote the views of the labor movement".[79] The idea to establish *Rabotnitsa* was Nadezhda Krupskaya's initiative in response to Vladimir Lenin's call.[80] According to the official web-site of *Rabotnitsa*, there were many other prominent women who took part in the creation of the magazine and who at different periods were members of the its editorial board, namely: A. I. Ul'yanova-Yelizarova, I. F. Armand, A. V. Artyukhina, V. M. Velichkina, F. I. Drabkina, A. M. Kollontay, P. F. Kudelli, Z. I. Lilina, L. R. Menzhinskaya, K. I. Nikolayeva, Ye. F. Rozmirovich, K. N. Samoylova, L. N. Stal', E. A. Alekseyeva and others.[81]

[78] Юрьевна, "Конструирование Возраста в Журнале «Работница» в Советское Время," 93; Davidenko, "Multiple Femininities in Two Russian Women's Magazines, 1970s-1990s," 447.
[79] Davidenko, "Multiple Femininities in Two Russian Women's Magazines, 1970s-1990s," 447; "'Работница'-Журнал Для Женщин и Семьи," accessed February 11, 2019, https://rabotnitsa.su/.
[80] Davidenko, "Multiple Femininities in Two Russian Women's Magazines, 1970s-1990s," 447.
[81] "'Работница'-Журнал Для Женщин и Семьи," sec. О журнале ("About the Magazine").

The journal was widely circulated throughout the Soviet Union, its first issue in 1914 was printed in 12000 copies and after dropping from 425,000 copies to 75,000 during the Second World War, it reached a circulation of 350,000 copies in the 1950s and continued to grow persistently until it reached 23 million copies in 1990.[82]

Since my project focuses on the Khrushchev era, I studied on the magazine for the period from 1953 to 1964. The magazine was issued monthly. In my research I looked at all issues from January 1953 to December 1964, paying particular attention to readers' and editorial board's letters. Overall, I read 144 issues of the magazine. I compiled a 90-page-long document with notes consisting of citations from the readers' and editorial board's letters (in Russian). I put most of the letters that I came across in this document for practical reasons of navigation, because the *Rabotnitsa* magazine issues were saved on my computer as separate documents and it was inconvenient to find something in them due to the high quality of scanning that caused slowness of scrolling pages. I copied short letters' full texts, whereas in case of long letters that were 2-3 pages long and written in columns I summarized contents and wrote down some extracts that were related to the description of the issue that the letter's author(s) wanted to address, proposed solutions as well as editors' responses, if available. Having these letters and letter extracts in one document helped me to reread the necessary parts, when necessary. Moreover, this document was also helpful to trace replies to letters and proposed measures, this helped me to see that some cases were ongoing for several issues. In addition, I used these notes to review the letters again and to identify recurring themes, such as issues with childcare facilities, illegal dismissals of pregnant women, women on the maternity or sick leaves, equality between women and men at work, work conditions, facilitation of women's work etc., for further analysis of the selected letters' language in some letters that exemplified topics the most frequently appearing in the magazine. The method that I used to work with the magazine's

[82] "'Работница'-Журнал Для Женщин и Семьи," sec. О журнале ("About the Magazine").

issues is called content analysis, that is "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text."[83] Context takes an important place in content analysis, as content analysis should involve a clear indication of "the context relative to which data are analyzed".[84] Clear delineation of the "kind of context" that a researcher focuses on helps to put "the boundaries beyond which…analysis does not extend."[85]

I worked with scanned issues of *Rabotnitsa* for the period from 1953 to 1964, which I got from the Novosibirsk State Regional Scientific Library (Novosibirskaya Gosudarstvennaya Oblastnaya Nauchnaya Biblioteka).[86] The library has an original collection of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine, and it provides scanned versions of its materials on a paid basis. I read the *Rabotnitsa* issues in chronological order because I thought this would help me to identify and clarify developments in discourses in letters published in *Rabotnitsa* during Khrushchev's rule. I do critical discourse analysis that focuses on the relation between "the use of language and the social and political contexts in which it occurs."[87] In addition, it is absolutely essential to analyze the letters published in *Rabotnitsa* in their historical context, as without historical context an attempt at tracing shifts in gender politics will be abstract and disembodied.

I envision the limitations of my project as follows: I only read *Rabotnitsa* issues for the period of Khrushchev's rule and focused mainly on readers' and editorial board's letters. Therefore, my findings will relate only to this particular magazine and to the selected years of 1953-1964. Moreover, as I already mentioned in my thesis introduction there are two opposing claims regarding the availability of *Rabotnitsa*'s archives: Ilic claims that they were demolished

[83] Kimberly A. Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook* (Thousand Oaks, Calif. : Sage Publications, c2002, n.d.), 10.
[84] Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis : An Introduction to Its Methodology*, The Sage Commtext Series: 5 (Beverly Hills : Sage Publications, c1980., n.d.), 26.
[85] Krippendorff, 26.
[86] See the Novosibirsk State Regional Scientific Library's website: https://ngonb.ru/
[87] Brian Paltridge, "Discourse Analysis," n.d., 186.

whereas Lenoe states that they are available in Moscow archives.[88] At this point, it remains unclear which of these claims represents accurate information.

1.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have first introduced my theoretical framework, which serves as the basis of my analysis of the contents of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine in the next chapter. I chose to adhere to Sheila Fitzpatrick's "bottom-up" approach to explore readers' participation and contributions to *Rabotnitsa* during Khrushchev's rule.[89] Moreover, I also use Kristen Ghodsee's conceptualization of agency as being possible not only in "Western, liberal" contexts, but also in other political systems.[90] This theoretical framework will allow me to analyze *Rabotnitsa*'s contents acknowledging certain ideological limitations present in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev's rule, while also not denying the possibility of readers' influences. In the second part of this chapter I provided a literature review of Thomas Wolfe's book and publications on the Soviet women's press. I concluded that most of the scholars that I surveyed in the literature review in their analyses adhere to the totalitarian view of the Soviet women's press—a view in which readers' letters are ignored or assumed to be without meaning. It is my hope that my theoretical perspective will allow me to add some complexity here. Lastly, I discussed the methods that I used in my analysis of *Rabotnitsa*, emphasizing my focus on the readers' letters and providing details on the amount of issues that I read and the ways in which I collected my information.

[88] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 105, 138; Lenoe, "Letter-Writing and the State [Reader Correspondence with Newspapers as a Source for Early Soviet History]," 80. See section 1.4 for more details about *Rabotnitsa*'s archives.
[89] Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," 80.
[90] Ghodsee, "Untangling the Knot," 251.

CHAPTER II – HISTORICAL CONTEXT: DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE SOVIET UNION UNDER KHRUSHCHEV AND ITS IMPACT ON SOVIET WOMEN

2.1. Introduction

The period of Khrushchev's rule (1953-1964) is called The Thaw and is notable for the relative liberalization of political and social life in the Soviet Union.[91] At the beginning of his rule, Nikita Khrushchev recognized the importance of "popular consent and participation".[92] Some historians deem Khrushchev's way of ruling during The Thaw "inconsistent" due to his aspirations to conjoin "a genuine…commitment to reviving communist ideals" that involved "socialist democracy and the withering away of the state" with deep-rooted "paternalism, authoritarianism and fear of popular initiative".[93] Yet some interpret his rule as striving for democracy and contributing to the revival of the Marxist vision of the "withering away of the state" that involved endowing "the soviets and other nonstate bodies" with more power.[94] While historians do not have a single agreed vision of Khrushchev's rule, from their works it becomes clear that many controversies coexisted under his rule.

The disagreements during Khrushchev's rule were multiple, yet I am going to focus on those that affected women. Although "gender differences" were somewhat blurred during the Second World War, they began strengthening again during Khrushchev's rule.[95] Moreover, in this period, women's life conditions became better: the funding for "social services and

[91] Susan Reid, "Masters of the Earth: Gender and Destalinisation in Soviet Reformist Painting of the Khrushchev Thaw," *Gender & History* 11, no. 2 (1999): 276, http://it.ceu.hu/vpn.
[92] Susan Reid, 276.
[93] Susan Reid, 276.
[94] Alexander Titov, "The 1961 Party Programme and the Fate of Khrushchev's Reforms," in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilič and Jeremy Smith, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies: 57 (London ; New York : Routledge, 2009), 15; Junbae Jo, "Dismantling Stalin's Fortress: Soviet Trade Unions in the Khrushchev Era," in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilič and Jeremy Smith (London ; New York : Routledge, 2009), 137.
[95] Barbara Evans Clements, *A History of Women in Russia : From Earliest Times to the Present* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2012), 253.

education" went up, salaries across the Soviet Union increased and various goods became more accessible.[96] In addition, it was under Khrushchev's rule when abortion was decriminalized in 1955.[97]

In this chapter, I explore the historical situation in the Soviet Union during Khrushchev's rule, focusing on the political transformations that he implemented and on their impact on women's lives. This chapter will help me to situate my analysis in Chapter 3 in a broader historical context and to make relevant connections with the contents of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine issues that I analyze for the period between January 1953 to December 1964. First, this chapter discusses the woman question under Khrushchev. It explores how, although the woman question officially remained "resolved," existing women's issues were nonetheless addressed and acknowledged (2.2). Next, this chapter addresses what kinds of solutions Khrushchev proposed to women's issues and how more problems were revealed after Khrushchev's expression of his concern regarding women's low political participation (2.3). The section on *Zhensovety* (Women's Councils) discusses their revival and main functions during Khrushchev's era (2.4). The next section on the 1961 Communist Party Programme and Khrushchev's democratization goals addresses major political shifts such as the reintroduction of the idea of the withering away of the state, the involvement of ordinary citizens in discussion of the state's political decisions, and changes in the roles of voluntary organizations (2.5). Furthermore, the section on decision-making under Khrushchev focuses on Khrushchev's attempts to implement a bottom-up approach in decision-making by involving citizens in public discussions as well as communicating with them through letters (2.6). The last section on trade unions, women workers and mechanization discusses trade unions' acquisition of more power during the Khrushchev era, their unequal treatment of male and female workers and the issue

[96] Clements, 253.
[97] Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel, and Christine Worobec, eds., *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 275.

of women workers' access to mechanized equipment (2.7). In the conclusion I will briefly summarize the key developments of the Khrushchev era and their impact on women.

2.2. The woman question under Khrushchev

The "woman question" returned to the "official political agenda" under Khrushchev's rule.[98] With Khrushchev's coming to power after Stalin's death in 1953, transformations in the explication of issues occurring both within "the party and the society" entailed "reorientations and redefinitions" in the press.[99] The period of Khrushchev's rule was also the time of facing the large-scale demographic consequences of the Second World War.[100] These demographic consequences included a huge gender imbalance in the population, thereby determining a significant accentuation of women's "health and welfare," especially regarding their "reproductive rights and maternal responsibilities."[101] Ideologically, during Khrushchev's rule, the so-called "woman question" "solved".[102] Yet, the Soviet press presented a different, "often inconsistent", discourse on women that in the same issue of a magazine or a newspaper could simultaneously praise socialist achievements in bringing "liberation, freedom and equal rights" to women, while also having articles that would expose women's insufficient exercise of their legal rights.[103] Despite the evident presence of a conflict between ideological and factual discourses regarding the woman question, the media kept declaring that "[t]he victory of socialism in the USSR ensured the full and factual equality of women".[104] Yet, even though such declarations in the media can be regarded as overly laudatory and divorced from reality,

[98] Helene Carlback, "Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law," in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilič and Jeremy Smith, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies: 57 (London ; New York : Routledge, 2009), 100.
[99] Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism*, 8.
[100] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, 5.
[101] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, 5.
[102] Mary Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," in *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1989), 140.
[103] Buckley, 142.
[104] Buckley, 142.

it is essential to note that the Khrushchev era marked a clearly noticeable increase of attention to "women's political roles, recognition that women's organisations were legitimate under socialism, and a lifting of the ban on abortion," even if the status of the woman question officially remained "solved".[105]

Historian Melanie Ilic defines Khrushchev's attention to the woman question as a "new impetus", noting that substantial changes were brought to various domains of Soviet women's lives.[106] Women's "maternal responsibilities", according to Ilic, were particularly emphasized and the state's efforts to ameliorate Soviet women's position were directed to the creation of favorable conditions for the fulfillment of these "responsibilities".[107] Exploring women's political roles in the Khrushchev era, Mary Buckley notes a different characteristic of this period, stating that even though women were not the main focus of the political agenda Khrushchev proposed during his 1956 speech at the XXth party Congress, they were not ignored.[108] In his 1956 de-Stalinisation speech at the XXth Party Congress Khrushchev noted:

> "It should not be overlooked that many party and state organs put women forward for leadership posts with timidity. Very few women hold leading posts in the party and soviets, particularly among party committee secretaries, chairpersons of Soviet executive committees, and among directors of industrial enterprises, collective farms, machine tractor stations and state farms."[109]

So, the Soviet state under Khrushchev was not only concerned about women as bearers of children, but also needed women as workers. Women were expected to be active in various domains and a number of efforts and reforms would be undertaken to make this more doable for women.[110]

[105] Buckley, 140.
[106] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, 5.
[107] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, 5.
[108] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 140.
[109] Buckley, 140.
[110] Buckley, 145.

2.3. Recognition of women's burdens: proposal of solutions

Khrushchev wanted to "de-Stalinise the Soviet System", to revive the Party and to attract people into engagement in politics.[111] Therefore, as a part of his broader political aims, he called attention to "women's political roles."[112] Moreover, there was a recognition that the success of the Seven-Year Plan (1958-65) was to some extent conditional on calling "more women" in to join paid work as, according to the 1959 All-Union Census, a considerable number of women were "economically inactive" in the Soviet Union.[113] Khrushchev's query about women's political activity served as an initiator of other relevant questions about "domestic roles", the accessibility of kindergartens and the availability of "household appliances".[114] Khrushchev's query seemed to trigger a kind of chain reaction that revealed women's issues one by one, exposing a wider range of issues that were all interconnected and stood in the way of women's active political participation.

An awareness about women's burdens during the beginnings of Khrushchev's rule influenced the goals set at the 1956 XX Party Congress, stating a dedication to the amelioration of women's "working and living conditions" by every possible means as well as provision of "additional benefits" such as prolonged maternity leaves for mother-workers.[115] At the next Party Congress, in 1959, Khrushchev made a comparison of conditions under which women had lived during "tsarist times" as well as in "some capitalist countries" with women's living in the Soviet Union, stating that "women in the Soviet Union were now regarded as active participants in all spheres of the state".[116] Yet, at the same time, despite such proclamations

[111] Buckley, 140.
[112] Buckley, 140.
[113] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 111.
[114] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 159.
[115] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, 9.
[116] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety."

regarding Soviet women's relatively better living conditions in the Soviet Union, shortcomings in women's position were also discussed and recognized.

Especially women's "heavy domestic burden" that consisted of taking care of children, cooking, cleaning and doing laundry was acknowledged along with a shortage of kindergartens.[117] In order to ease women's burdens, Khrushchev proposed "to create a network of childcare facilities, canteens and public welfare services", so that women would acquire an opportunity to "use their rights, knowledge and talents" to perform "productive and socially useful activities."[118] In addition to the acknowledgement of some of shortcomings in women's position in the country, the Khrushchev era is also significant for the "greater attention" that was directed at "women's political roles" compared to the previous 20 years.[119]

2.4. Revival of *Zhensovety*

Zhensovety (Women's Councils) were established in the late 1950s, but "women's committees" like *Zhensovety* existed before in the post-revolutionary years of the Soviet Union.[120] In their activities, *Zhensovety* can be regarded as "the heirs" of *Zhenotdel* (The Communist Party Women's Department)" which was founded "by the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution in 1917" and "abolished" in 1930.[121] Communist leaders abolished *Zhenotdel* by announcing that "women's emancipation was so advanced in the Soviet Union that the department was no longer necessary".[122] It was during Khrushchev's rule that *Zhensovety* were revived as a consequence of his call for a "mobilization" of various "social groups".[123] The work of *Zhensovety* was directed at facilitation of recognition of "the problems

[117] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 144–45.
[118] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 106.
[119] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 141.
[120] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 107.
[121] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, 107; Mary (Mary E. A.) Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor : Iniversity of Michigan Press, 1989, n.d.), 65.
[122] Clements, *A History of Women in Russia*, 202.
[123] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 108.

and interests" of women "as a group" while also providing assistance to the CPSU in the construction of "new women".[124] One of the key tasks in the multidirectional mission of *Zhensovety* was calling "economically inactive women" to join paid workforces and this task was implemented by "extension of material incentives and practical support," especially in care for children to unemployed mothers.[125]

In addition, it is important to note that the work of *Zhensovety* among women was in tune with "official party priorities".[126] Therefore, it is not surprising that the goal earlier set by Khrushchev "to create a network of childcare facilities, canteens and public welfare services" was reflected in *Zhensovety's* activities, whose social functions included such tasks as the "organization of creches, kindergartens and nurseries, both in residential communities and on places of work".[127]

Not all of women's issues were "loudly debated" during Khrushchev era, yet women's issues "began to edge into higher visibility" thanks to *Zhensovety*'s work.[128] This is a crucial achievement, especially taking into consideration the fact that the "woman question" was officially "solved".[129] The extent of *Zhensovety*'s influence on "policy formation" under Khrushchev remains difficult to assess, yet their roles in various "local communities and work places" in safeguarding that "policies" directed at women were "fully and properly" realized contributed to facilitation of "many aspects of Soviet governance" during Khrushchev's rule.[130]

[124] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 149.
[125] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 111.
[126] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 150.
[127] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 106, 113.
[128] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 155.
[129] Buckley, 155, 140.
[130] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 118.

2.5. The 1961 Communist Party Programme and Khrushchevian democratization

Not only *Zhensovety*, but also trade unions acquired more significance during Khrushchev's rule, as Khrushchev's goals to democratize Soviet society and to stimulate people's "voluntary participation in the decision-making process" required structural changes that Khrushchev was willing to make.[131] As a part of these structural changes, Khrushchev aspired to elevate the trade unions both in "status and power" over managers as a means of supporting "workers' interests".[132] All these developments demonstrated Khrushchev's attempts "to gain popular support for his reforms", contrasting with "the top-down decision-making process" that prevailed under Stalin.[133] The enhancement of the roles of trade unions, *Zhensovety* and other organizations was part of the third Party Programme at the XXII Party Congress in 1961.[134] A certain "utopian dimension" was present in the 1961 Programme with the revival of the Marxist idea about the "withering away" of the state when communism would be achieved. In this process the roles of various "voluntary organizations" among which were trade unions were key as they were expected to take control of "some of the functions of the state" and open the ground for the state's withering away.[135] In addition, the 1961 Programme's utopian dimension also included a proclamation about the establishment of communism "during the lifetime of the current generation of Soviet people".[136] Some of the key goals of the 1961 Programme included "mechanization and automation" in factories, and the achievement of a "higher living standard" compared to "any capitalist country" (especially the USA).[137]

Moreover, the 1961 Communist Party Programme contained an important proclamation that emphasized the necessity to turn "legislative work" into a "more public" case, involving

[131] Jo, "Dismantling Stalin's Fortress: Soviet Trade Unions in the Khrushchev Era," 122.
[132] Jo, 127.
[133] Jo, 138.
[134] Titov, "The 1961 Party Programme and the Fate of Khrushchev's Reforms," 8–9.
[135] Titov, 17.
[136] Titov, 12.
[137] Titov, 12.

"ordinary citizens" to contribute.[138] How this proclamation from the 1961 Programme worked can be illustrated through the example of public discourse on marriage and family law, particularly regarding the 1944 decree. This decree annulled the rights of "unmarried mothers" to prove their children's "paternity" in court as well as prohibiting fathers who for some reasons could not marry but wanted to "acknowledge their paternity" to legally do so.[139] The amount of letters received by the authorities regarding this 1944 Family and Marriage law vastly increased during Khrushchev's rule during which "private opinion as a social opinion, an independent public opinion" emerged and started receiving more attention of mass media.[140] These changes should be viewed in connection to the 1961 Party Parogramme that contained a proclamation about the necessity of opening "important draft laws" to public vote, calling "ordinary citizens" to get involved which people took as "signals…to turn to the authorities with their complaints and suggestions".[141] With all these shifts that emerged during Khrushchev's rule, people could actually influence the legislation. The disadvantages of the 1944 Family and Marriage law could not be publicly discussed under Stalin, yet during Khrushchev's rule in the "changed atmosphere" that "promoted the quest for truth and frankness and supported the case of those who wanted to criticize the law" a wide public discourse on this law emerged.[142] Surveys conducted among Soviet citizens revealed that they actually perceived the press as "the most effective means" accessible for them to promote "their interests and resolving their particular problems."[143]

[138] Carlback, "Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law," 97.
[139] Carlback, 86–87. The goal pursued by adoption of the 1944 Family and Marriage law was incitement of birthrate. Unmarried fathers were legally freed from responsibility to take care for children born out of wedlock, only registered marriages were considered 'legal relationships' (see p. 88 in Carlback).
[140] Carlback, 89, 93.
[141] Carlback, 97, 99.
[142] Carlback, 99.
[143] Stephen White, "Political Communications in the USSR: Letters to Party, State and Press," *Political Studies* 31, no. 1 (March 1983): 57, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1983.tb01334.x.

Yet, one should be aware of certain limitations of public expression, despite the relative democratization during Khrushchev's era indicated just now. Khrushchevian democratization brought a lot of changes and allowed more freedom of expression to the Soviet citizens, yet these shifts should not be interpreted as having allowed carte blanche. Obviously, the Soviet state maintained a certain party line that it wanted to maintain. Therefore, there were topics that were not as open to discussion as others. For instance, even though abortion was legalized in 1955 under Khrushchev's rule, this does not mean that the Soviet state gave up on its pro-natalism, therefore there was "little coverage" in the media about this right having been restored to women.[144] *Rabotnitsa* continued to glorify motherhood and ignored the importance of the restored right to abortion.[145] This example about the 1955 legalization of abortion demonstrates the limitations of Khrushchev's democratization and emphasizes on the instance of *Rabotnitsa* how the state-owned press could not go against the official party line. Still, this does not mean that the *Rabotnitsa* editors did not find ways to occasionally deviate from the official party line, which they certainly did in the *Rabotnitsa* magazine, as I will illustrate in the next chapter of this thesis.

If the of legalization of abortion was not widely discussed, this should not diminish the importance of the newly available opportunities that became available to Soviet people in the Khrushchev era. Even though the woman question was not "declared unsolved", the "hardships of the double burden" were tacitly characterized as "problems".[146] Moreover, at the XXII[nd] Party Congress of 1961 it was stated that:

> "Remnants of inequality in the position of women in everyday life must be completely eliminated. Conditions must be created for the harmonious combination of motherhood with a more active participation of women in the labour force, society, science and the arts. Women must be given lighter work, which is at the same time adequately paid."[147]

[144] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 156.
[145] Buckley, 156.
[146] Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*, 146.
[147] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 145–46.

Proclamations like these served as some kind of landmarks for the media and the people, as these official public announcements indicated issues could be openly addressed. Therefore, even though the woman question was not reopened, there was a significant contribution in the direction of "the possibility of reopening the woman question" by bringing women's problems back on the state's "political agenda" and thereby creating an opportunity "of delving further into inequalities between the sexes."[148] Moreover, during Khrushchev's rule issues faced by women "in combining motherhood, household responsibilities and professional commitments (the 'triple burden')" were considered "seriously" by politicians.[149]

2.6. Khrushchev's bottom-up decision-making: citizens' letters and state's calls for their participation in public discussions

It is likely that all these political developments and attention to women's issues shaped the way how women discussed their position and what they demanded from the state. The Khrushchev era is notable for the emergence of "a new social trend", "a new form of public initiative" that people started to undertake by addressing the authorities through "campaigns of letters".[150] In addition, it was during Khrushchev's rule, in the 1960s that the "party-state authorities" put an "increasing emphasis" to "work with letters" and a more "systematic treatment of the citizens' letters" started emerging.[151] According to historian Stephen White, Soviet citizens began sending considerably more letters to the party since the 1950s.[152] Moreover, White suggests that through these letters Soviet citizens could actually influence "public policy" and cases of "maladministration or abuse of position" could be "relatively readily corrected."[153]

[148] Buckley, 159.
[149] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, 10.
[150] Carlback, "Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law," 94.
[151] Carlback, 99; White, "Political Communications in the USSR," 44.
[152] White, "Political Communications in the USSR," 43.
[153] White, 43.

The Soviet press received even more letters compared to the party and state authorities, for instance, daily newspapers such as *Pravda* and *Trud* received approximately 500,000 letters a year, whereas "all Soviet national papers" received the astonishing numbers of around 60 to 70 million of letters a year.[154] These developments in the sphere of public letter-writing in the Khrushchev era could be broadly connected to Khrushchev's attempts to revive the Communist Party as "a mass political organization", as under Stalin's rule the Communist Party had stopped operating as "a means" through which popular opinion could affect "the decision-making process".[155] "Participation from below" had a vast significance for Khrushchev, he definitely tried to emphasize the importance of "popular support" for the changes that he introduced – a completely opposite practice compared with the "top-down decision-making process" that prevailed under his predecessor Stalin.[156] Khrushchev strived to avoid "excessive concentration of power in single hands" and his aspirations resulted in giving more power to some voluntary organizations, such as trade unions, and in "creating mobility and greater accountability" in the "governing institutions" of the Soviet Union.[157] Moreover, various attempts to engage the ordinary citizens in the party-state decision-making processes were undertaken, as in the case of the 1961 Party Programme draft. The Soviet citizens were "invited" to share their opinions on the draft both in the press and in letters to a designated Party committee, so that this invitation resulted in a "grandiose public discussion".[158]

It appears to me that not only the state's open calls were evaluated by people as indicators about the kinds of themes that could be publicly addressed, but also official speeches of the authorities served as such cues. Helene Carlback addresses how citizens interpreted various statements of the authorities that called for their "involvement…in the political and

[154] White, 51.
[155] Jo, "Dismantling Stalin's Fortress: Soviet Trade Unions in the Khrushchev Era," 133.
[156] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 140; Jo, "Dismantling Stalin's Fortress: Soviet Trade Unions in the Khrushchev Era," 138.
[157] Titov, "The 1961 Party Programme and the Fate of Khrushchev's Reforms," 17.
[158] Titov, 18.

social life", stating that people understood those calls as "signals…to turn to the authorities with their complaints and suggestions".[159] In December 1961 Khrushchev delivered a speech to workers in Kiev, stating that:

> "It turns out that it is men who do the managing and women who do the work... Our women are models of self-sacrificing labour, and they need to be promoted as brigade leaders and chairs of collective farms, to party and council work...We need to improve the conditions of work and everyday life for women on collective and state farms, to build more maternity homes, nurseries and crèches, canteens, laundries, bakeries. The better we provide for the daily lives of women, the more we will be able to free them from domestic labour."[160]

His speech seemed to confirm that the authorities were willing to listen to people's complaints and were aware of the problems that the citizens had already shared. Khrushchev further encouraged complaints from women workers, as he acknowledged that women's work conditions should be improved and thereby sanctioned women to continue expressing their concerns. During Khrushchev's rule it was actually *Zhensovety* whose mission included the task "to break down barriers" to women's employment in spheres where "traditional sexual divisions of labour persisted."[161] In the next chapter I will focus more closely on *Rabotnitsa*'s coverage of the work of *Zhensovety*. As for women workers and their work-related complaints, I will also discuss women's complaints in connection with trade unions' acquisition of more power under Khrushchev's reforms.

2.7. Trade Unions, women-workers and mechanization under Khrushchev

Trade unions were endowed with more power so that they would be able to "promote workers' interests".[162] Their increased authority allowed them to "check managers more closely and continually" and to "criticize and argue" with them and "even with ministries".[163] These actions of endowing trade unions with more power were part of Khrushchev's strategy of

[159] Carlback, "Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law," 99.
[160] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 106.
[161] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, 111.
[162] Jo, "Dismantling Stalin's Fortress: Soviet Trade Unions in the Khrushchev Era," 127.
[163] Jo, 127–28.

reviving "political life" and a means of promoting "democratization".[164] The task to look "after workers' welfare" was stated as the trade unions' "most important duty."[165] Obviously the category of workers included both female and male workers. Therefore the question of how trade unions treated women workers arises, as according to historian Wendy Goldman's findings "male prejudice" both among male workers and trade union representatives was quite widespread in the Stalin era.[166] During the All-Union Meeting for Work among Women held on February 1, 1931, the invited women-workers shared their concerns about trade unions' work: "Staffed by men, the unions reflected men's concerns. The relationship between women and their unions was characterized by mutual apathy."[167] Moreover a number of women repeatedly said that "the unions do poor work among women".[168] In light of the reforms that gave more power to trade unions and required them to care for workers' well-being, explaining how women workers' letters in *Rabotnitsa* discussed the trade unions can reveal details about whether trade unions remained as apathetic towards women workers as they were during the Stalin era.

Continuing the topic of unequal treatment of male and female workers, I want to discuss the implementation of mechanization under Khrushchev, since assurances were given that "significant advances in the mechanization of industrial production" as well as enhancements in women's "working conditions" would be made.[169] Yet, according to Melanie Ilic, mechanization "benefited" men and not women, as men were "given priority in access to and use of mechanized equipment".[170] Moreover, enhancements of women's working conditions "were little in evidence", yet the Soviet press promptly reacted to cases of "violations of the

[164] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 149.
[165] Jo, "Dismantling Stalin's Fortress: Soviet Trade Unions in the Khrushchev Era," 131.
[166] Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates : Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge, UK ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2002., n.d.), 207.
[167] Goldman, 220.
[168] Goldman, 221.
[169] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, 16.
[170] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, 14.

labour code, especially as they impacted on women".[171] In addition, according to Ilic, the press "led the call for changes;" I further develop this topic in the next chapter, demonstrating on the case of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine how its editorial board was able to make those changes.

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter has provided some historical context for the period of Khrushchev's rule, and has revealed several major characteristics of the Khrushchev era. Even though the woman question officially remained "resolved", women's issues were brought to the political agenda. Women's burdens were acknowledged and Khrushchev revived *Zhensovety,* which were specifically designated to deal with women's problems. Furthermore, Khrushchev's concern with women's low political participation served as a means of disclosing more of women's issues that were recognized by the state and attempts were made to address them.

Another key development of the Khrushchev era is that in his attempts to democratize the Soviet Union, Khrushchev called for citizens' participation in public discussions. The people interpreted this call as a signal to address the authorities with their concerns and propositions. The practice of letter-writing was highly popular and the attitude towards letter-writing as an instrument to influence legislature and to resolve issues was widespread among Soviet citizens under Khrushchev. In this way, Khrushchev tried to engage more citizens in the party-state decision-making. His top-down approach and emphasis of the significance of public discussions were all part of the de-Stalinisation process begun in 1956. The next chapter will explore how these historical changes worked out in *Rabotnitsa*, one of the main women's magazines in the Soviet Union.

[171] Ilič, Reid, and Attwood, 17.

CHAPTER III: READERS AS NOT JUST RECIPIENTS OF PARTY MESSAGES: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE *RABOTNITSA* MAGAZINE DURING KHRUSHCHEV ERA

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will analyze the *Rabotnitsa* magazine during the period of 1953 to 1964. My research questions in this chapter can be formulated as follows: taking into consideration the literature that no longer regards Soviet Union as simply a top-down entity, as well as Wolfe's re-conceptualization of Soviet journalism, how did these developments play out in the case of *Rabotnitsa*? In what way did *Rabotnitsa* serve as a space for women readers to have their voices and opinions heard? To what extent did *Rabotnitsa'*s editorial board follow the official Party line, was there space for its expression of something differing from the Party line? To what extent did the political context of Khrushchev's rule influence women readers' letters?

This chapter will be structured as follows. First, I will briefly present general information about the *Rabotnitsa* magazine, especially focusing on letter-writing (3.2). In the following section I will analyze women's letters that focus on the theme of childcare facilities, addressing such issues as the slowness or the poor quality of construction of buildings for kindergartens, the shortage of kindergartens and the conditions in them. I will demonstrate how women demanded fulfillment of the promised state care through *Rabotnitsa* that they envisioned as a platform able to provide help in achieving substantial results (3.3). The next section will focus on women workers and on their collaborative work with the magazine's editorial board in their attempts to attain what women were entitled to receive as workers. Furthermore, the process of women's collaboration gets illustrated, revealing *Rabotnitsa'*s function as a stage of Soviet women's collective efforts in similar situations for initiating publicity of the magnitude of certain issues and collectively demanding and seeking solutions (3.4). The section about the woman question and the editorial board asks how a state-owned

magazine, *Rabotnitsa*, managed to indirectly reveal that the woman question was not solved by pointing at various shortcomings and problematic areas in Soviet women's position that still required attention and reconsideration (3.5.). The last three sections explore the themes of equality between women and men at work, facilitation of women's work and activities of women social activists, examining how *Rabotnitsa* served as a platform acting in Soviet women's interests, rather than solely being the Party's informational instrument (3.6, 3.7, 3.9). In the conclusion I will answer the chapter's main questions (3.9).

3.2. General Information on *Rabotnitsa*

Until 1930 *Rabotnitsa* was a *Zhenotdel* publication, it broadcasted "the principles of women's emancipation, Soviet style, and "the difficulties in women's lives."[172] Even when *Zhenotdel* was abolished in 1930 under Stalin's rule, its "feminism remained alive" and *Rabotnitsa* continued to address similar topics.[173] In addition, during Stalin's rule national women's magazines, including *Rabotnitsa*, "bemoaned" women's double burden.[174] Under Khrushchev the women's press was calling for expansion of "social services", for amelioration of working conditions, paying attention to the fact that on average women's salaries were smaller than those of men.[175]

Rabotnitsa did not have mission statement printed in it, except for the phrase: "Proletarians of all countries, unite!" that was printed on the first page of each issue. During the Khrushchev era that I explore, the journal had 32 pages and was issued monthly. Each issue usually contained the Party and country news, short stories, poetry, and life stories shared by working women. There were also regular columns called "Woman worker's diary" (Dnevnik

[172] Clements, *A History of Women in Russia*, 203.
[173] Clements, 203.
[174] Clements, 254.
[175] Clements, 254.

Rabotnitsy), "Woman activist's page" (Stranica Obshestvennicy), "Cooking" (Kulinariya), "In the footsteps of unpublished letters" (Po Sledam Neopublikovannykh Pisem), educational articles from PhD candidates in various areas, book recommendations, medical advice, recommendations related to household chores, fashion. The magazine's tone was often laudatory since the journal included many articles about prominent women workers, biographies of old Bolshevik women activists, world famous women activists from the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) as well as regular working women whose work was presented as a valuable contribution to building the Soviet Union. Moreover, comparison of women's lives in the Soviet Union with women's lives from capitalistic countries was another key theme that was built through a contrast that emphasized the achievements of the Soviet Union and the drawbacks of capitalism.

Though I could not determine whether the archival sources of *Rabotnitsa* are available,[176] we do know that during the Khrushchev era an "increasing emphasis" was put on working with letters.[177] Moreover, Soviet citizens regarded the press as the "best they ha[d] of all official or legal channels for the expression of their opinions and demands".[178] *Rabotnitsa*, for instance, daily received 500-700 letters and almost half of the staff worked with letters – an indicator that illustrates the significance of readers' letters.[179] So, even though we do not know the contents of the letters that *Rabotnitsa* did not publish, we still can acknowledge that the work with letters was taken seriously. I argue that through their letters ordinary Soviet women found in *Rabotnitsa* a platform where they could express their concerns, be heard, with the support from the editorial board initiate a dialogue with the authorities, and encourage the authorities to take the necessary measures.

[176] See Methods section (1.4.) in Chapter I.
[177] Carlback, "Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law," 44.
[178] White, "Political Communications in the USSR," 60.
[179] McAndrew, "Soviet Women's Magazines," 97.

In addition, authors of the letters to the magazine often emphasized their expectations about receiving "real assistance", evincing their beliefs in the editors' and magazine's power to go beyond paperwork and accomplish something more substantial.[180] Not only the editorial board of *Rabotnitsa,* but also women readers themselves participated in various initiatives through the magazine.

During Khrushchev's rule a new mode of "public initiative" that involved addressing the higher authorities through "campaigns of letters" emerged.[181] A typical letter of women initiating some action frequently follows a certain pattern: the letter opens with a reflection on what has been done in other cities in the same situation as the author's, then follows the description of issues and of measures that have already been taken but without achieving the desired results, closing the letter with questions and suggestions of alternative solutions.[182]

3.3. Women about childcare facilities

One of the most frequently addressed topics of the letters published in *Rabotnitsa* relates to childcare facilities. Slow or low-quality construction of the buildings, dissatisfaction with conditions for children in kindergarten, and a continuous shortage of places were common themes in readers' letters. A lot of letters were written in the form of a complaint, stating how things should be and how they deviated from the plan, demanding action from the responsible authorities.[183]

[180] see also *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #2, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa* 1959, #7, p. 15, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #8, p. 19, *Rabotnitsa*, 1963, #3, p. 19 for some examples of readers' letters where they believe that *Rabotnitsa* can provide real help
[181] Carlback, "Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law," 94.
[182] see also *Rabotnitsa* 1954, #8, p. 14, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #4, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #5, p. 30, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #3, p. 13 for more examples of letters on readers' demands or initiatives were based on a comparison with other cities, workplaces etc.
[183] see also *Rabotnitsa* 1953, #3, p. 24, *Rabotnitsa* 1953, #4, p.32, *Rabotnitsa* 1953, #6, p.21, *Rabotnitsa* 1953, #10, p.28, *Rabotnitsa* 1953, #12, p.16, *Rabotnitsa* 1953, #12, p.16, *Rabotnitsa* 1954, #7, p. 12, *Rabotnitsa* 1955, #1, p.31, *Rabotnitsa* 1955, #4, p.31, *Rabotnitsa* 1955, #4, p.31, *Rabotnitsa* 1955, #12, p.29, *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #2, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #3, p. 30, *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #3, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #6, p. 27, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #2, p.32, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #3, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #7, p. 28, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #8, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #2, p. 18, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #6, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #7, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1960, #5, p. 20, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #3, p.

Rabotnitsa's editorial board forwarded these letters to the responsible authorities, joining the letter-writers and stressing the importance of quality childcare in the Soviet Union.[184] Moreover, in some cases, especially when the letter writers complained that their earlier appeals to the authorities had yielded no real results, only empty promises, the editorial board would attach their own messages to readers' letters, urging not only those to whom the letter was addressed but also other responsible authorities and workers to learn from it. For instance, in November 1962 there was a letter from a group of working mothers who expressed their dissatisfaction with the conditions in the kindergarten at their factory. At the end of the mothers' letter, in the section called "From the editors" the following text was added:

> "Our correspondent visited the children's combine[185] ... Now the project is being reworked. Henceforth, for new kindergartens, floors with thermal insulation laying are provided. We have no doubt that everything will be fixed in the kindergarten. Something has already been done: the boiler room was put in order, garbage was removed from the site. But the case of the children's combine number 122 should serve as a good lesson for many other customers, designers, builders, whom society has entrusted with such honorable and responsible work as the creation of institutions for the youngest citizens of our country."[186]

This quote provides a good example of coordinated work between working women and *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board (usually 8 women), of which there are many similar examples.[187] Under Khrushchev, letters to the editors became a prominent means of Soviet citizens' communication with the authorities, as it was during his rule when "private opinion as a social opinion, an independent public opinion" emerged and the mass media started to pay more

13, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #3, p. 13, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #4, p. 20, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #8, p. 20, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #10, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1962, #8, p. 11, *Rabotnitsa* 1962, #11, p. 25, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #4, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #5, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #7, p. 21, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #9, p. 30, *Rabotnitsa* 1964, #5, p. 32 for letters on childcare facilities

[184] see *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #8, p. 18, *Rabotnitsa* 1962, #11, p. 25, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #3, p. 19

[185] Children's combine (detskii kombinat) - kindergarten that implements the basic general educational program of preschool education in general developmental, compensatory, recreational and combined orientation

[186] *Rabotnitsa*, 1962, #11, p. 25

[187] *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #2, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #5, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #7, p. 32, #6, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #12, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa*, 1959, #4, p. 32 *Rabotnitsa*, 1959, #8, p. 28, *Rabotnitsa*, *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #7, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa*, 1961, #10, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa*, 1961, #3, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa*, 1961, #8, p. 18, *Rabotnitsa*, 1961, #9, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa*, 1961, #10, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa*, 1963, #2, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa*, 1963, #4, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa*, 1964, #2, p. 27

attention to this opinion.[188] In this case, for instance, *Rabotnitsa*'s editors assisted readers by visiting the children's combine and providing public media coverage of their concerns as well as tracing how these concerns were addressed and warning other people about the importance of quality work. Of course, it is important to remember about the limitations. I claim that it was possible to solve certain issues through letters to mass media and I demonstrate cases that were addressed by the *Rabotnitsa* magazine, but I am not claiming that all readers' letters were published or all problems mentioned addressed.

Another example that I want to discuss is a collective letter from May 1964 signed by 19 women-workers from a textile factory in Uzbek SSR, addressing an issue with the need for nurseries in the factory they worked in:

> "How many times the head of the nursery…wrote reports to the factory director…everything remained the same. And recently, the nursery was closed for renovation. How long it will last is unknown, and many women do not have anyone to leave their children with at home. What should they do? Leave the job? This is not an option. For a time of renovation another room could be prepared for the nursery and funding for building of a new childcare facility could have been found a long time ago if our village and district authorities cared more about people and were not so heartless to women-mothers."[189]

These women emphasized the importance of their work for them, stating that leaving their job to sit at home with a child was not an option to them, putting an implicit reprimand to the responsible authorities for their carelessness towards women who were both mothers and workers. To some extent, a notion of conditionality can be traced in this letter as well: the women emphasized their work and their willingness to continue working, whereas the responsible authorities should fulfill their part of an unspoken contract and provide the necessary/promised care. During the Khrushchev era, the expectations from women that they should be active in several domains were recognized and reforms were proposed to unburden

[188] Carlback, "Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law," 89, 93.
[189] *Rabotnitsa*, 1964, #5, p. 32

them.[190] During Khrushchev's rule the Party acknowledged the scarcity of kindergartens and women's "heavy domestic burden" that included childcare, cooking, cleaning and doing laundry.[191] At the 1956 XX Party Congress, the goal to improve women's "working and living conditions" was set.[192] In order to ease women's burdens, Khrushchev proposed "to create a network of childcare facilities, canteens and public welfare services".[193] In the context of these recognitions and proposed solutions to ease women's burdens made under Khrushchev, women's demands voiced in their letters to *Rabotnitsa* in tune with those goals became understandable. Women knew what they were officially entitled to and considering that they were working (including both paid work and unpaid domestic work) and did their part of the unspoken contract between them and the state, they felt they had every right to ask the state authorities or employers to provide their part of the contract. *Rabotnitsa* provided space for those demands.

3.4. Women as workers and trade unions

In their letters to the journal, women often demonstrated their knowledge about what kinds of state care they are entitled to as workers or as mothers. Therefore, they openly expressed their criticism and disagreement in situations where they were treated unfairly and not according to the law. One of the most frequent issues in women's letters about work revolved around the theme of dismissals due to pregnancy or maternity leave, when a woman lost her job or got transferred to an easier and much less payed job, even though according to the law, she was entitled to keeping retain her position and her salary.[194]

[190] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 145.
[191] Buckley, 144–45.
[192] Melanie Ilič, Susan Emily Reid, and Lynne Attwood, eds., *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, Studies in Russian and East European History and Society (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire : Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 9.
[193] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 106.
[194] see also *Rabotnitsa* 1955, #1, p. 31, *Rabotnitsa* 1954, #1, p. 24, *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #5, p. 31, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #1, p. 30, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #2, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #3, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #6, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #8, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #2, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #2, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #2, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa* 1958,

With the assistance provided by *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board, some of the women who wrote letters attained what they were legally entitled. Moreover, similarly as in the letters about childcare facilities, some of the authors of the letters regarding injustice at work mentioned their earlier unsuccessful attempts to reach the authorities and to get their issues resolved through them, referring to *Rabotnitsa* as a more effective platform for reaching solutions not only on paper but by inducing real actions and prosecution of perpetrators (i.e. factory managers).[195] For instance, the following extract presents a report of *Rabotnitsa* on the letter of a woman who was transferred to another job while she was on maternity leave.

> "N. Davydova, a worker at the Nalchik Cement Plant, had a child. While Comrade Davydova was still on maternity leave, she was transferred to another, lower paid job. Comrade Davydova wrote about this to the editorial board.
>
> The editors forwarded this letter to the Central Committee of the trade union of workers in the building materials industry. Head of the Department of Labor Protection of the Central Committee of the Trade Union Comrade Kotlyarov writes to the editor: "According to the head of the Kabardian management of industrial construction materials, Comrade Kudaev, Davydova has been restored to her former place of work."
>
> Of course, it is good that truth has triumphed. But why didn't the director of the cement plant bear responsibility for his illegal actions? We would like to receive an answer to this question from Comrade Kudaev."[196]

This case represents a common situation that *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board had to help to solve. Not only were women sometimes reinstated, but through their letters, supplemented with the editorial board's expression of its outrage with such situations, together they could initiate

#5, p. 20, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #5, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #12, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1959, #4, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #3, p. 13, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #3, p. 29 *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #9, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1962, #9, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #4, p. 32 for letters on dismissals due pregnancy, maternity leave, sick leave and transfers on lower paid jobs

[195] see also *Rabotnitsa* 1954, #8, p. 14, *Rabotnitsa* 1955, #12, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #2, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #11, p. 25, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #3, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #4, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #7, p. 28, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #8, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #8, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #2, p. 25, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #2, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #5, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #7, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #10, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #12, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1959, #4, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1959, #7, p. 15, *Rabotnitsa* 1959, #8, p. 28, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #3, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #9, p. 32 *Rabotnitsa* 1962, #3, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #2, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #3, p. 19, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #4, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1964, #2, p. 27 for letters on unsuccessful attempts to reach the authorities, referring to *Rabotnitsa* as a more effective platform for initiating certain processes

[196] *Rabotnitsa*, 1957, #2, p. 32

prosecution or at least ask for punishment of those responsible for the illegal dismissal of pregnant, or of women on maternity and sick leaves.[197]

Other common issues addressed in working women's letters refer to such themes as work conditions, management at the factory, quality of various services at work such as catering, childcare facilities etc., ways to make work easier, and mechanization.[198] Such actions as opening up these issues to the public, demanding a response from the various authorities, tracking and publishing their responses and reporting about progress made in solving certain issues – all made the *Rabotnitsa* magazine a stage where women could find support and collaborate with other women in similar situations, publicizing the magnitude of certain issues, demanding solutions in compliance with labor protection laws and reminding such higher authorities as trade unions about their mission to protect women's rights.

Trade unions played an especially prominent role during the Khrushchev era. I already mentioned in the second chapter that Khrushchev endowed them with more authority that they were expected to direct to "promote workers' interests".[199] Yet, the readers' letters in Rabotnitsa indicate that in some cases trade unions not only did not support women workers' interests, but also sanctioned employers' illegal actions. An example below concerns the case of a woman worker whose dismissal during pregnancy was supported by the regional committee of the trade union of workers and employees in agriculture and harvesting.

[197] see also, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #1, p. 30, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #2, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #3, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #6, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #8, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #2, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #9, p. 32 for some examples of editorial board's engagement with readers' letters and asking for punishment for those responsible for certain injustices

[198] see also *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #6, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #7, p. 28, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #6, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #10, p. 23, *Rabotnitsa* 1960, #7, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1960, #8, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #8, p. 18, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #9, p. 15, *Rabotnitsa* 1961, #10, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1962, #11, p. 28, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #2, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #11, p. 15, *Rabotnitsa* 1964, #11, p. 30, *Rabotnitsa* 1953, #8, p. 12, *Rabotnitsa* 1953, #12, p. 17, *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #2, p. 20, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #6, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #11, p. 25, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #2, p. 25, *Rabotnitsa*, 1959 #7, p. 15, *Rabotnitsa* 1962, #6, p. 22 for letters on work conditions, management at the factory, quality of various services at work such as catering, childcare facilities etc., ways to make work easier, and mechanization

[199] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 111.

> "A worker at the Pilnensky poultry-farming station, comrade T. Kirillova, was dismissed from her job during pregnancy. The Arzamas regional committee of the trade union of workers and employees in agriculture and harvesting supported the illegal actions of the station's administration. Comrade Kirillova wrote about this situation to the editorial board of *Rabotnitsa*. The Presidium of the Central Committee of the trade union of workers and employees of agriculture and harvesting has canceled the resolution of the Arzamas regional committee of the trade union. T. Kirillova is restored to her work."[200]

Kirillova's appeal to *Rabotnitsa* demonstrates that trade unions under Khrushchev were not always operating in women workers' interests. In this case *Rabotnitsa* served as a means of pushing the trade union to follow the law that prohibited dismissals of pregnant women. *Rabotnitsa* repeatedly stated in its replies to pregnant women and to women on maternity leave that they were illegally dismissed.[201] Moreover, the way Kirillova appeals to *Rabotnitsa* after learning that the trade union supported her dismissal emphasizes the influence that the press, *Rabotnitsa* in this case, had for channeling complaints and public opinion under Khrushchev. The numbers of letters "to party and state bodies" considerably increased in the 1950s, but this increase was "far exceeded" by the number of letters directed to the Soviet press.[202] To some extent, this increase in people's appeals through letters can be considered a basis for the "more systematic treatment of the citizens' letters" that started emerging in the beginning of the 1960s during Khrushchev's rule.[203]

Indeed, Soviet people were aware of the press as being the "most effective means" for them to promote "their interests" and solve "their particular problems".[204] Readers of *Rabotnitsa* seemed to be aware of this power of the press too. It is unexpected to see though how trade unions that were intended to be more powerful under Khrushchev and were endowed

[200] *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #5, p. 31
[201] See also *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #3, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1959, #4, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #4, p. 32 for some examples of *Rabotnitsa*'s editors' commenting on illegality of dismissals of pregnant women and women on maternity leave
[202] White, "Political Communications in the USSR," 43, 51.
[203] White, 43; Carlback, "Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law," 99.
[204] White, "Political Communications in the USSR," 57.

with legal rights to perform a broad spectrum of monitoring activities at workplaces, got represented in *Rabotnitsa*'s readers' letters. Particularly, in cases of legal injustice at work, when readers mentioned in their letters that they did not receive help from the trade union – to the contrary even. They often first tried to appeal to the trade unions, seeking their assistance and only when this did not work out they wrote to *Rabotnitsa*. In this way, *Rabotnitsa* served as a means of labor law enforcement, at times performing the work that was the trade unions' responsibility. For instance, in the extract below a group of girls in July 1957 could not obtain their legal vacation and they were also illegally forced to do night work. Their appeal to the trade union did not bring a resolution, therefore they wrote to *Rabotnitsa*. The editors reported the following:

> "…a group of girls graduated from FZO school[205] at the garment factory number 1 in Stalinabad. By law, school graduates are entitled to a one-month-leave. But the factory's directorate did not give them such leave. Moreover, the teenagers were forced to work at night shifts. They appealed to the trade union committee, but no defense was provided by the committee. Then they wrote to [*Rabotnitsa*'s] editorial board. At the request of the editors the Central Committee of the trade union of textile and light industry workers checked the girls' complaint. The factory director was instructed to grant vacation to workers who graduated from FZO school. Night work of adolescents under the age of 18 was stopped."[206]

In this case the workers' appeal to *Rabotnitsa* brings another insight regarding the magazine's ability to convey to a trade union the importance of a certain issue. The fact that *Rabotnitsa*'s editors could request certain actions from trade unions again emphasizes its power in the Khrushchev era and the importance of compliance with labor law for *Rabotnitsa.*

Moreover, considering how some women during the Stalin era described their relations with trade unions as "characterized by mutual apathy", we can assume that this apathy did not

[205] FZO school (Школа фабрично-заводского обучения – Factory training school) - the lowest type of vocational school in the USSR. These schools existed from 1940 to 1963. FZO schools operated on the basis of industrial enterprises and construction sites. They prepared workers of mass professions for construction, coal, mining, metallurgical, oil and other industries. Duration of trainings at FZO schools was 6 months.
[206] *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #7, p. 28

just disappear with Khrushchev's coming into power after Stalin died in 1953.[207] Therefore, it is possible that the cases mentioned above were not exceptional and represented a broader trend of trade unions' "poor work among women".[208]

In this context, it is important to mention that *Rabotnitsa* attempted to call Soviet women to actively engage in trade unions, emphasizing that trade unions were theirs too. Perhaps, this call was part of Khrushchev's attempts to revive the Party and to attract people, particularly women, into more active engagement in politics.[209] So, in January 1958, *Rabotnitsa* published an article "This is your trade union, working woman!" that summarized the December 1957 Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee's discussion the question "On the work of the trade unions of the USSR".[210] The *Rabotnitsa* article mentions the crucial role of trade unions for the working class and lists the responsibilities of trade unions, briefly stating that "there are still serious flaws in the activities of trade union organizations and their governing bodies."[211] The Plenum decided that trade unions should more widely "involve workers in production management" and emphasized that it was necessary to more boldly involve "new, fresh forces from among workers, women and youth."[212] The contents of the *Rabotnitsa* article reflect Khrushchev's emphasis on the "participation from below" – a total reversal of the "top-down decision-making process" under Stalin.[213] *Rabotnitsa*'s article closed with a call for working women to get involved in the trade unions:

> "Women workers! These words of the Central Committee of the Party are addressed to you. Come to the shop with suggestions and demands often! Use

[207] Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates : Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge, UK ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2002), 220.
[208] Goldman, 221.
[209] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 140.
[210] *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #1, p. 6
[211] *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #1, p. 6
[212] *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #1, p. 6. The gendered implications of this language that presents women as a separate category, implicitly recreate a division where men are workers and women are child bearers and domestic caregivers who do not perform paid work.
[213] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 140; Jo, "Dismantling Stalin's Fortress: Soviet Trade Unions in the Khrushchev Era," 138.

> your rights as trade union members more! Speak at production meetings, speak frankly about everything that interferes with work, demand elimination of deficiencies! Actively join the work on labor protection! Who, if not women, would lead the struggle for order and cleanliness in workshops, domestic premises, canteens. Mother workers! Do not wait for the builders to complete plans for the construction of kindergartens and nurseries, take matters into your own hands: help, control! Every woman worker should become an active member of the trade union!"[214]

This strong appeal to women perhaps suggests that women were less active in trade unions, which could be the reason why sometimes women received poor assistance or no assistance at all from trade unions. In the context of the 1959 All-Union Census that revealed that a considerable number of women were "economically inactive" in the Soviet Union as well as the Party's realization of the conditionality of the success of the Seven-Year Plan (1958-65) on "more women" joining paid work, women's relative inactivity in trade unions and the Party's interest in having more women joining workforce become understandable.[215] Therefore, this call to women published in *Rabotnitsa* can be interpreted both as communication of the Party's needs as well as an exposure of the possibility that trade unions continuously assisted working women poorly, at least according to the letters published in *Rabotnitsa*. In addition, the call for women to become more active in trade unions, to participate in work on labor protection and to openly speak about work interferences and deficiencies – all reflect Khrushchev's attempts to revive the "dictatorship of the Soviet people" and to avoid "excessive concentration of power in single hands".[216] So, we cannot exclude the continuity of "male prejudice" under Khrushchev that Wendy Goldman found existing among male workers and managers during the Stalin era, but we can claim that women's inactivity in trade unions was acknowledged and attempts to get more women involved in trade unions were made during Khrushchev's rule.[217]

[214] *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #1, p. 6
[215] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 111.
[216] Titov, "The 1961 Party Programme and the Fate of Khrushchev's Reforms," 17.
[217] Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 20.

3.5. The woman question and the Rabotnitsa magazine's editorial board

Since Rabotnitsa was state-owned magazine, an expectation that it would follow the Party line is not unsubstantiated. Yet, at the same time *Rabotnitsa* does not seem to fully adhere to the Party's official proclamation of the woman question as solved, as along with articles full of praise of Soviet women's rights and achievements, the magazine continuously addressed shortcomings or problematic areas in Soviet women's position that still required attention and reconsideration.[218] An example of how the editors wrote about the presence of certain issues can be seen in the extract below:

> "In our country, everything is being done to make it easier for women to participate in the construction of communism, so that they can successfully combine their work in production with the duties of motherhood. The editor receives many letters in which women — workers and employees — tell about their labor successes, about caring, respect for them from fellow workers, foremen, craftsmen, heads of enterprises and institutions. But there are other letters in the editorial mail signaling the heartless attitude of some employers to the mother-workers, employers who abuse the rights of working women."[219]

First, credits were given to the state for what it had already done for women – in this way the editors demonstrated their loyalty to the direction taken by the Soviet Union in regards to women's liberation, though the editors remained careful in their word choice and did not suggest that all women's issues were solved. Secondly, after this opening acknowledging what had already been achieved, the editors shifted to the issues that remained unresolved, as if indirectly restating their position about the resolved status of the woman question. Having such a nuanced position regarding the degree of the resolution of the woman question, *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board was in the position to address many other cases apart from those mentioned above. Moreover, the editorial board not only forwarded some readers' letters to the relevant

[218] see also *Rabotnitsa* 1955, #1, p. 5, *Rabotnitsa* 1955, #10, p. 25, *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #3, p. 30, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #1, p. 15, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #6, p. 29 *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #2, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #10, p. 23, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #12, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1962, #2, p. 19 for some examples of editorial board's coverage of remaining shortcomings in women's position under Khrushchev

[219] *Rabotnitsa*, 1957, #6, p. 29

authorities, but also initiated *reidy*, unannounced inspections, to various locations mentioned in the readers' letters, in addition to sometimes involving the prosecutor's office and the Regional Committee of the Workers' Union to resolve issues.[220]

3.6. Equality between women and men at work

The cases that address the theme of (in)equality between women and men at work can be presented as examples both of the readers' and the editors' openly expressing their vision that equality between women and men had not been fully achieved in practice.[221] A letter by R.F. Kolmogorova who had worked at the Barnaul hardware and mechanical plant for 14 years tells a story of how, returning to work after taking sick leave due to her child's illness, she found that her job was given to a man. The foreman explained to her:

> "You have a child, so you took a vacation at your own expense for twenty days, this can happen again: then you get sick yourself, then your child gets sick. The new brigadier in this respect, as a man, is a safer choice. We can leave him to do overtime, to do something urgent."[222]

In her letter Kolmogorova asks if in the order of her dismissal the reason could be stated as: "Remove Kolmogorova from the post of brigadier for being a woman with a child."[223] *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board takes this case very seriously by sending a correspondent to Kolmogorova's workplace. The correspondent, apart from confirming Kolmogorova's words, revealed how other women were treated at the factory, stating that even though the majority of workers at the factory were women, none of them held a position as foreman or taskmaster («бригадир»), they were still working at the positions at which they started 8-10 years ago.[224]

[220] Reidy (рейды) - unannounced inspections by a group of activists of various objects (construction sites, service sector, childcare facilities etc.) or of functioning of a certain enterprise. In case of *Rabotnitsa* those *reidy* were conducted by a group of 3-8 people: 1-2 correspondents of *Rabotnitsa*, *obshestvennitsa*, inspectors from different ministries, managers. They were called activists because of conducting *reidy.*

[221] see also *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #3, p. 30, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #2, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #10, p. 23, *Rabotnitsa* 1960, #6, p. 21, *Rabotnitsa* 1962, #2, p. 19 for some examples of letters on equality between women and men

[222] *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #2, p. 25

[223] *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #2, p. 25

[224] *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #2, p. 26

This case illustrates the complexity of the *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board's engagement with its readers' letters: sometimes they addressed not just the issues stated in the letter but detected and exposed additional problematic aspects. This often happened when *Rabotnitsa* sent its correspondents out.[225] Here is an extract from correspondent's report after she went from Moscow to Barnaul to visit Kolmogorova:

> "In our country, the equality of women with men has long been a fact. But there are still people who are for equality only in words, for providing a woman a way to all areas of our life, but in practice they act differently. Did not the leaders of the Barnaul hardware and mechanical plant behave in this way?!"[226]

In addition, it is important to emphasize that the editorial board did not just leave the cases as solved after publishing the letters, rather they traced further developments of cases until specific measures were taken. For instance, the case of Kolmogorova that was first published in February 1958 was readdressed in May 1958. The Bureau of the Communist Party District Committee came to the factory with inspection and confirmed gross violation of the labor law. The Bureau offered Kolmogorova to get reinstated at her position, it also reprimanded the plant manager and shop manager for their unlawful actions. The way this case was resolved exemplifies that the *Rabotnitsa* magazine (i.e. its editorial board) was on the side of Soviet women, acting on their behalf rather than simply being "just an instrument for the consolidation" of Soviet authority, as "traditional Sovietology" would suggest.[227]

[225] See also *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #2, p. 18-19, *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #3, p. 9, *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #5, p. 20, *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #8, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa*, 1961, #7, p. 27, *Rabotnitsa*, 1961, #9, p. 15, *Rabotnitsa*, 1961, #10, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa*, 1961, #12, p. 25, for examples of editorial board's sending its correspondents to various locations mentioned in readers' letters

[226] *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #2, p. 26

[227] Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism*, 2; Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," 80.

3.7. Facilitation of women's work

Another theme that was frequently addressed in women's letters was the mechanization of women's work.[228] There were many complaints about the slowness of the process of mechanization, as well as about cases of no mechanization at all. Therefore, by writing to the *Rabotnitsa* magazine, working women frequently pursued the goal of having their working conditions improved.[229] Letters came both from individuals and collectives of women workers. With the assistance of *Rabotnitsa*, these letters were forwarded to those responsible for mechanization. Sometimes those responsible for mechanization would come visit the factories and together with the management they would undertake immediate mechanization measures as well as create a plan for further mechanization that would be gradually introduced. For instance, the extract below illustrates the immediate measures undertaken at a chemical-pharmaceutical plant in response to a letter with complaints on poor mechanization. *Rabotnitsa* reports that complaints from a worker of Kharkov Chemical Pharmaceutical Plant about plant's poor mechanization got confirmed. In its report *Rabotnitsa* communicates that the Head of Production and Technical Department of GLAVK (headquarters department ministry or department) arrived to provide technical assistance to the enterprise. This is *Rabotnitsa*'s description of the immediate measures that he had undertaken upon arrival to the plant:

> "The reconstruction of the ampoule and tablet workshops was undertaken, which will significantly improve the organization of the technological process. The operation of sealing glass ampoules is fully automated. The tests of the new pill dispenser are being finished."[230]

Some letters were from those who learned that similar work processes were mechanized at factories in other cities, so they wrote to *Rabotnitsa* collectively demanding answers to why

[228] see also *Rabotnitsa*, 1956, #11, p. 25, *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #2, p. 25, *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #5, p. 25, *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #8, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa*, 1962, #6, p. 11 for some letters on mechanization

[229] see also *Rabotnitsa*, 1953, #12, p. 8, *Rabotnitsa*, 1953, #12, p. 17, *Rabotnitsa*, 1957, #6, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa*, 1959, #7, p. 15, *Rabotnitsa*, 1961, #10, p. 32 for some examples of working women's letters on work facilitation

[230] *Rabotnitsa*, 1957, #6, p. 32

their work was not mechanized as well, trying to attract the authorities' attention and to accelerate the introduction of mechanization at their workplaces. *Rabotnitsa*'s editors sometimes assisted such collectives by naming those responsible for mechanization and asking them for reports on their current activities related to mechanization. As in this example below, where in response to a letter from women tire workers complaining on poor mechanization, the editors raised an issue of poor communication among several responsible research institutions, emphasizing how their poor work prolonged women's doing manual labor and demanding responses.

> "Some of the questions posed in the letter have not yet been resolved in any of the factories. Therefore, the tire workers of Kirov and Omsk, Yaroslavl and Moscow could join the letter of workers from Voronezh.
>
> The Tire Industry Research Institute and the Rezinoproekt Institute do not develop these topics. The Research Institute of Tire Industry believes that it should deal only with the main technological processes, and the mechanization of loading and auxiliary works is the case of the Rezinoproekt. At the Institute "Rezinoproekt" they say that it is possible to completely mechanize auxiliary work only by radically changing the technology, and that this is the task of the tire scientists. While there are disputes, workers continue to work manually.
>
> By publishing this letter, the editors are awaiting a response from the leaders of the tire industry, factory directors and scientists about what they are doing to speed up the mechanization of labor-intensive work."[231]

As said, *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board also made *reidy* to factories to check the working conditions and the implementation of mechanization.[232] For instance, *Rabotnitsa*'s *reid* in 1960 to the *Krasnoye Sormovo* (Red Sormovo, where Sormovo is a district of Nizhny Novgorod) plant at which many women worked as welders, rodmakers, pickers, and machine operators in poor working conditions that involved carrying heavy loads, working in shops with poor ventilation, and limited mechanization.[233] This *reid* team consisted of two women brigadiers of the plant, a technical inspector and doctor of the Regional Council of Trade Unions, and

[231] *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #5, p. 25
[232] Reidy (рейды) - unannounced inspections of various objects (construction sites, service sector, childcare facilities etc.) or of functioning of a certain enterprise performed by a group of activists
[233] *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #8, p.26

Rabotnitsa's correspondent. Among their findings was the coexistence of various modern mechanisms with manual labor under poor conditions. The report about the *reid* pointed out that women workers had long demanded better ventilation at the plant, the following extract demonstrating what these women workers were able to achieve:

> "The workers complained about the poor ventilation of the core compartment several times. Finally they achieved an inclusion of the following point 'To strengthen ventilation from electric dryers' into the plan of technical measures for 1960. Yet nothing was done yet."[234]

The report went on listing other shortcomings and violations detected at the plant. The common point of these detected shortcomings was that managers were aware of them, yet they either ignored these drawbacks or claimed that someone else were responsible for them, stating that they could not influence things to take immediate measures. As, for instance, in the case mentioned in the report that talks about two women workers carrying fifty-kilo-boxes and the foreman and the shop committee chairman "seeing it and passing by".[235]

Another case was of workers' manually painting washing machines and inhaling harmful fumes even though the automatic line designed for painting the washing machines was available at the plant. The plant's manager commented on this situation, saying the following:

> "What we can do! - helplessly shrugs comrade Myasnikov - The management of the shipbuilding industry of the Gorky Economic Council did not take care of the paint in time."[236]

This extract demonstrates several things. First, that sometimes certain issues at plan could not be solved just by managers, as there were other people involved who were from other industries. Second, the manager says "what we can do" as if when things were in his hands, he would solve the problem. Yet this was not always the case, as I discussed above: managers could be aware

[234] *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #8, p. 26
[235] *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #8, p. 26
[236] *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #8, p. 26

of certain problems and still ignore them. As, for instance, in the case of woman welder who worked in a large metal cistern, where she could not breathe normally. According to work instructions, she had to be provided with a portable fan, yet she worked without it. The foreman claimed that he had no portable fans available, but the deputy head of the preproduction department stated otherwise: "The plant has enough fans!".[237] These examples demonstrate the kinds of detections that were made during *Rabotnitsa*'s *reidy*. Women workers demanded improvements of their working conditions, yet their demands were not always properly addressed by the plant's management. Furthermore, in some cases the management was powerless and could not address certain issues because of dependence on other industries. Lastly, sometimes it happened that the management could resolve the problem at the plant but did not do so, leaving women workers to continue their work in bad unhealthy conditions, even if it was against the law.

Not only did such *reidy* condemn the management in poor care of its women workers' working conditions, but also they tried to encourage the general public and women workers themselves to take initiative in demanding mechanization by controlling the process of its implementation: "It would be good if the public and, above all, the workers themselves took control of the course of mechanization of labor-intensive processes," wrote *Rabotnits*a's correspondent at the end of her report on *Rabotnitsa*'s *reid* to *Krasnoye Sormovo*.[238] Both the examples of editors demanding responses from institutions responsible for mechanization as well as *reidy* demonstrate how readers' letters published in *Rabotnitsa* sometimes launched a chain of activities that eventually brought certain tangible results.

Moreover, if after receiving a reply from the authorities whom readers addressed in their letters the editorial board found this reply unsatisfactory, they did not just close the case.

[237] *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #8, p. 26
[238] *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #8, p. 26

Instead, frequently they continued engaging with a case until satisfactory answers and action plans were received and those responsible for their implementation had been appointed.

> "The authors of the letter 'We need mechanization' addressed a direct question to Minister Comrade Novoselov. The answer sent from the ministry cannot satisfy neither the editors of the magazine nor the authors of the letter, since this answer does not show what is being done to create new machines and units for the integrated mechanization of brick production. Female workers are still waiting for your answer, Comrade Novoselov!"[239]

These examples demonstrate that women workers, as well as the magazine's editorial board, strived to achieve tangible results and *Rabotnitsa* served as a means of pushing certain processes by publicly engaging in a dialogue with those whom the authors of letters addressed until satisfactory replies had been received. Moreover, the editorial board encouraged the workers themselves to control the mechanization processes at their factories, so that *Rabotnitsa* served as a means of inducing initiative in women. An example is the case below, where after conducting a *reid* on a plant, the editors report that "little is being done at this plant regarding labor protection and facilitation", blaming the plant's administration, the committee of the trade union, and public organizations.[240] At the same time, the editors emphasized the importance of workers' taking initiative to have their labor mechanized:

> "It would be good if the public and above all the workers themselves took control of the course of mechanization of labor-intensive processes."[241]

Perhaps this call by *Rabotnitsa* for women workers to take control of mechanization can be connected to the 1961 Party Programme that contained an anticipation of the decline of state's political power that would eventually reform the state, turning it into the "dictatorship of the Soviet people".[242] Calling on women to take certain things in their hands was in line with the

[239] *Rabotnitsa*, 1956, #11, p. 25
[240] *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #8, p. 26
[241] *Rabotnitsa*, 1960, #8, p. 26
[242] Titov, "The 1961 Party Programme and the Fate of Khrushchev's Reforms," 8–9.

Party goals, as well as with women's interests, since they too wanted facilitation of their work. *Zhensovety* (Women's Councils) in many ways exemplified this activity of taking issues in their hands – an activity for which *Rabotnitsa* at times called other women workers' participation too, as we will see below.[243]

3.8. Women's social/community work: *Zhensovet* («Женсовет» - Women's council)

Among other things, *Rabotnitsa* served as a space for women to unite and address certain issues collectively, to initiate inspections and provide help where necessary. *Obshchestvennitsy* (women social activists) often initiated *reidy*[244], performing unannounced checks of workplaces, public services, detecting issues and if necessary, providing assistance for their resolution. The tasks that *Zhensovety* performed ranged from small ones like the cleaning of workshops to writing reports to the heads of the factories about shortcomings in the factories, while also dealing with large-scale issues such as the wide shortage of kindergartens.[245]

The case of *Zhensovety* in 1962 taking up an initiative to assist the state and working mothers with the issue of kindergartens discussed below illustrates how *Zhensovety* of different cities picked up the initiative of one *Zhensovet*, turning this issue into a large-scale project that was run by women activists. *Zhensovety* were revived under Khrushchev in response to his call for "mobilization" of different "social groups".[246] In 1959 the Central Committee under Khrushchev made a decision to apply a "differentiated approach to political agitation" among the citizens – this was the time when "social organisations", *Zhensovety* were one of them,

[243] See, for instance, *Rabotnitsa*, 1957, #4, p. 11 how women activists organized and conducted inspections of various workspaces, public facilities and either provided an immediate assistance at places or handed reports of their inspections to managers
[244] *Zhensovety reidy* were not connected to *reidy* conducted by *Rabotnitsa* in response to its readers' letters
[245] *Rabotnitsa*, 1957, #4, p. 11
[246] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 108.

acquired a "new life".[247] This "differentiated approach to political activity" endowed women's work among women with a "legitimacy" that it did not have during the Stalin era.[248] *Zhensovety*'s work was aimed at facilitating recognition of "the problems and interests" of women "as a group" as well as simultaneously assisting the CPSU in the construction of "new women."[249] Wide coverage in *Rabotnitsa* of *Zhensovety* activities directed at monitoring the construction of kindergartens during Khrushchev's rule can be partly explained by the fact that *Zhensovety* functioned according to "official party priorities."[250] The party was concerned with the 1959 All-Union Census disclosure about a significant number of women being "economically inactive", as women were needed for the successful implementation of the Party's Seven-Year Plan (1958-1965).[251] Therefore, one of the major goals of *Zhensovety* was encouraging those "economically inactive women" to join the paid workforce.[252] They tried to achieve this goal through "extension of material incentives and practical support," in particular in care for children to unemployed mothers.[253] Taking into consideration these goals of the Party and *Zhensovety*, we read some extracts from *Rabotnitsa* on *Zhensovety*'s work. The extract below demonstrates precisely the part of *Zhensovety*'s activities that fall into category of support to women in care of children.

> "The *Zhensovet* of the Bezhitsky district of the city of Bryansk controls the construction of kindergartens and nurseries since the fall of 1960. We are working in two directions: we are looking for additional premises and are seeking funds for the construction of new buildings."[254]

These women were trying to use any possible means to increase the amount of kindergartens, initiating the re-purposing of various rooms at factories that, according to *obshchestvennitsy*,

[247] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 144.
[248] Buckley, 155.
[249] Buckley, 149.
[250] Buckley, 150.
[251] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, "What Did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovety," 111.
[252] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, 111.
[253] Ilič, Smith, and Ilic, 111.
[254] *Rabotnitsa*, 1962, #8, p. 11

were inefficiently used by the factories, into nurseries. At this point I would like to recall the section on childcare facilities, where we saw some examples of how women were demanding more childcare facilities because they wanted to work and needed the State's assistance with childcare.[255] So, sometimes demands of the Party and women workers' needs converged. The fact that *Rabotnitsa* was a state-owned magazine obviously underlines certain limitations, yet in the Khrushchev era, people were encouraged to get involved "in the political and social life" of the state – a gesture that they interpreted as a call "to turn to the authorities with their complaints and suggestions."[256] My acknowledgement of readers' having various roles in the press fits with this context. Moreover, in the case when women and the Party had the same interests, the work of *Zhensovety* can be regarded serving both their interests.

Therefore, *Zhensovety*'s work in monitoring the construction of new buildings for kindergartens as well as their being in touch with the District Committee and the Party Committee both of which demonstrated a constant interest in *Zhensovety*'s work, also benefitted working women, for whom leaving their work to care for their children was not an option. The extract below demonstrates the kind of work *Zhensovety* performed serving both the Party's as well as women's interests. *Zhensovety* reported about their activities in *Rabotnitsa.*

> "All construction sites have our posts, which weekly report to the district *Zhensovet* on the progress of construction, how many workers have been allocated for construction, whether technical documentation is in order, whether construction materials are delivered on time."[257]

Many *Zhensovety* from other cities also began to adopt this initiative by taking control of the construction of kindergartens and nurseries in their cities: "Messages come to the editorial board one after another, informing us that the construction of children's institutions is turning into a public matter."[258] This instance of *Zhensovety* following each other's initiatives illustrates

[255] see, for instance, *Rabotnitsa* 1963, #5, p. 29, *Rabotnitsa*, 1964, #5, p. 32
[256] Carlback, "Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law," 99.
[257] *Rabotnitsa*, 1962, #8, p. 11
[258] *Rabotnitsa*, 1958, #5, p. 30

how the *Rabotnitsa* magazine was more than just a platform for addressing individual or small group issues, it was also a space for taking up larger initiatives and acting collectively.

3.9. Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the multifunctionality of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine and the varying ways through which readers and editors could exercise agency. Contrary to "traditional Sovietology" that regarded the Soviet Union as a "completely top-down entity", by analyzing letters in the *Rabotnitsa* magazine I showed that Soviet women during the Khrushchev era were not just passive recipients of the regime's directives.[259] Rather they were actively participating in shaping various processes of importance to them, being able to advocate for their interests in the space provided to them within the *Rabotnitsa* magazine whose editors, besides working for the government, operated in women's interest as well.

I have analyzed some exemplary extracts from readers' letters on the most recurring themes: issues with childcare facilities, women's work-related concerns about illegal actions of management, labor safety and mechanization, equal treatment with men workers, and activities of women's social organizations. This has revealed the variety of issues and initiatives that Soviet women addressed and undertook. Moreover, I have shown the effectiveness of the coordinated work of the *Rabotnitsa*'s editors with their readers in the achievement of substantial results. Women as workers and as mothers were concerned with a large amount of issues and the *Rabotnitsa* magazine served as an effective platform to attain what women often could not achieve by addressing the relevant authorities directly. One reason for their effectiveness was the publicity that put on display women's issues and concerns in such a way that the authorities who were responsible could not just keep silent and not propose certain solutions. Moreover, the persistence of *Rabotnistsa*'s editorial board also played a crucial role, as the editors did not

[259] Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," 80.

just leave the letters once they were published, but traced the replies and action plans of those whom those letters addressed until tangible result had been attained.

Furthermore, the analysis of letters also reveals how *Rabotnitsa* was functioning as a site for women to find support and collaboration with other women in similar situations, publicizing the scope of certain issues and demanding solutions collectively. *Rabotnitsa*'s functions went beyond just broadcasting the Party's messages to women, during the Khrushchev era it had also demonstrated certain shortcomings and problematic areas in Soviet women's position that still required attention and reconsideration. The magazine's editorial board actively engaged with the readers' letters and sometimes did even more than the readers asked in their letters by sending its staff to various locations. In these cases, not only the issues mentioned in letters, but additional problems were detected and exposed as well.

Lastly, in their letters Soviet women continuously refer to *Rabotnitsa* as being influential enough to achieve real results and this understanding emphasizes that *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board was indeed acting in the interest of Soviet women, rather than being just the Party's informational instrument. It provided space for women to express what they needed and to address what was important to them, serving as a platform that actively contributed to Soviet women's getting together, while also serving as a means of inducing initiative in women.

CONCLUSION

This thesis proposed a bottom-up analysis of the functioning of the Soviet women's press during the Khrushchev era based on the examination of the letters published in 144 issues of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine between January 1953 and December 1964. I analyzed letters that focused on such themes as problems with childcare facilities, illegal dismissals of women from work, equal treatment of women and men at work, facilitation of women's work, women's social activism. My main research questions were: How did the women readers participate and contribute to *Rabotnitsa* during Khrushchev's rule? What kinds of roles did women undertake as readers of R*abotnitsa*? Which questions did women-readers and the magazine's editorial board raise about life in the Soviet Union? In what way can we consider the letters published in the magazine expressions of women's exercise of agency? How did political developments under Khrushchev's rule contribute to the possibility of women's exercise of agency in *Rabotnitsa*?

My analysis has revealed how women readers used *Rabotnitsa* as a space where they could express their concerns and with the help of the magazine's editors reach the higher authorities and demand immediate actions and solutions to their issues. Moreover, with the emergence of a new mode of "public initiative" that involved addressing the higher authorities through a "campaigns of letters" under Khrushchev's rule, women readers participated in different initiatives, independently assessed their status at various domains and in their letters to *Rabotnitsa* demanded relevant authorities' responses and proposed their own solutions.[260] In addition, my analysis of letters also indicated that women readers knew what they were entitled to, therefore they openly criticized authorities for their carelessness towards women, demanding

[260] Carlback, "Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law," 94.

them to fulfill their part of the unspoken contract between women and the state, and to provide the promised care.

Furthermore, Soviet citizens regarded the press as "the most effective means" available to them to promote "their interests and resolving their particular problems."[261] Women readers' appeals to *Rabotnitsa* with emphasis of their expectations to receive real help present *Rabotnitsa* as an effective platform for addressing women's concerns. *Rabotnitsa*'s actions such as making women readers' concerns known to the public, getting in touch with higher authorities and demanding their responses as well as tracing the progress of issues in need of resolution until obtaining substantial results – all these made *Rabotnitsa* a platform through which women could obtain support and collaborate with other women in similar situations. Together with the assistance and support of *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board, by sharing their experiences women readers were able to publicize the magnitude of certain issues, to demand solutions in compliance with the law, often reminding higher authorities of their responsibilities to women as workers, as mothers, as citizens of the Soviet Union.

In part, an "increasing emphasis" to "work with letters" put during the Khrushchev era contributed to the availability of space for women readers' active engagement with *Rabotnitsa*.[262] Moreover, under Khrushchev's rule women's multiple burdens were recognized and their acknowledgement shaped Party's goals and included an aim to ameliorate women's "working and living conditions" at 1956 XX Party Congress.[263] With these developments during the Khrushchev era, women acquired a basis for demanding what was promised to them, especially because most of them performed their parts of the unspoken contract by working

[261] White, "Political Communications in the USSR," 57.
[262] Carlback, "Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law," 44.
[263] Mary Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," in *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1989), 145; Melanie Ilič, Susan Emily Reid, and Lynne Attwood, eds., *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, Studies in Russian and East European History and Society (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire : Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 9.

both at home and outside of it. *Rabotnitsa* was a space through which these women could obtain fulfillment of at least some of their demands.

Not only were women readers able to publicize their concerns and demands in *Rabotnitsa*, but the journal's editors were also able to voice their visions of women's issues. In the case with trade unions, *Rabotnitsa* reprimanded their irresponsible treatment of working women, reminding them about their responsibilities and serving as a means of labor law enforcement, at times performing the work that was in fact part of trade unions' duties. In addition, traces of trade unions' "poor work among women" that existed in the Stalin era could still be found during Khrushchev's rule.[264] Yet, *Rabotnitsa* supported working women and did not leave trade unions' careless treatment of working women unresolved, pushing trade unions to do their work, while also reminding women that trade unions were theirs too and encouraging them to participate in unions' work more actively.

Furthermore, although the woman question officially remained solved during Khrushchev's rule, this did not prevent *Rabotnitsa* from continuously addressing shortcomings and problematic areas in Soviet women's position, emphasizing that these drawbacks still required attention and reconsideration.[265] *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board's role went further than forwarding readers' letters to higher authorities, it also conducted *reidy* to various places mentioned in readers' letters.[266] It is important to note readers' roles in initiating a chain of activities through their letters, as it was due to their letters, sharing their concerns, that *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board took further measures in pursuit of concrete results. To some

[264] Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates : Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge, UK ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2002), 221.

[265] see also *Rabotnitsa* 1955, #1, p. 5, *Rabotnitsa* 1955, #10, p. 25, *Rabotnitsa* 1956, #3, p. 30, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #1, p. 15, *Rabotnitsa* 1957, #6, p. 29 *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #2, p. 26, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #10, p. 23, *Rabotnitsa* 1958, #12, p. 32, *Rabotnitsa* 1962, #2, p. 19 for some examples of editorial board's coverage of remaining shortcomings in women's position under Khrushchev

[266] Reidy (рейды) - unannounced inspections of various objects (construction sites, service sector, childcare facilities etc.) or of functioning of a certain enterprise performed by a group of activists

extent, in the context of Khrushchev's emphasis on the "participation from below," both readers' letters as well as *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board's engagement with those letters were given more freedom to do so compared to the Stalin era that was notable for its "top-down decision making process".[267]

Even though Khrushchev's regime was trying to increase ordinary citizens' participation in the state's decision-making, the state still followed a certain Party line. Yet, often it happened that demands of the Party and women converged, as I showed on the example of construction of kindergartens by *Zhensovety*.

Moreover, women readers were not only just addressees of the Party messages through *Rabotnitsa,* but they also took active roles of claimants, initiators, critics. In addition, *Rabotnitsa* was a platform not only for individual women's concerns, it also a space for their taking up larger initiatives and acting collectively.

My findings acknowledge readers' active roles in the press and go beyond the scholarly literature that regards the readers solely as passive recipients of the Party directives, ignoring their contributions to the press. My research showed that readers' roles included but were not limited to the roles of claimants, initiators, and critics.

I envision future research on this topic as follows. Firstly, a comparative study of Rabotnitsa with more journals during the Khrushchev era can be made to explore how readers' participation was similar or different from that in Rabotnitsa. Secondly, the study of readers' roles in Rabotnitsa in other decades of Soviet history can bring a broader comprehension of the practice of letter-writing in the press. Thirdly, it is important to find out whether *Rabotnitsa*'s

[267] Buckley, "Khrushchev and Women's Political Roles," 140; Jo, "Dismantling Stalin's Fortress: Soviet Trade Unions in the Khrushchev Era," 138.

archives are available and to complement the analysis of published letters with the study of unpublished letters, if the archival materials are available.

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