

Ievgen DZHUMYGA*

THE HOME FRONT IN ODESSA DURING THE GREAT WAR (JULY 1914 – FEBRUARY 1917): THE GENDER ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM

-Abstract-

The soviet historiography and, more recently, the Ukrainian one have showed little consideration for the situation and the role of the civilian population in the First World War. The “Great War” mobilized, due to its proportions, all categories of population, generating profound mutations within the society. There was a real «front behind the front» (the home front), where the women played an extremely important role, by replacing the male working force in factories and by getting massively involved in the sanitary activities. Moreover, some women joined the army, participating in battles as regular soldiers. All these aspects contributed to the significant growth of women’s importance within society.

The present study analyses the status of the women in Odessa during the First World War, their involvement in the war economy, the support they gave to charitable activities and the difficulties the mothers had to experience in order to ensure the survival of their families while their husbands were mobilized.

Keywords: Odessa, World War I, everyday life, women, home front.

„FRONTUL DIN SPATELE FRONTULUI” ÎN ODESSA ÎN TIMPUL „MARELUI RĂZBOI” (IULIE 1914-FEBRUARIE 1917): PROBLEME DE GEN

-Rezumat-

Istoriografia sovietică și, mai recent, cea ucraineană, au acordat o importanță redusă situației și rolului populației civile în cadrul Primului Război Mondial. “Marele Război” a mobilizat, datorită amplitudinii sale, toate categoriile de populație, producând mutații profunde în societate. A existat un adevărat « front din spatele frontului », în care femeile au jucat un rol extrem de important, prin înlocuirea în fabrici a forței de muncă masculine și prin implicarea masivă în activitățile sanitare. Mai mult, unele femei s-au înrolat în armată, participând în lupte ca soldați. Toate aceste lucruri au contribuit la creșterea considerabilă a importanței femeii în cadrul societății.

Studiul de față analizează statutul femeilor din Odessa în perioada Primului Război Mondial, implicarea lor în economia de război, sprijinirea activităților caritabile și dificultățile prin care au trecut mamele pentru a asigura supraviețuirea familiilor pe durata mobilizării soților.

Keywords: Odessa, World War I, everyday life, women, home front.

* “I.I.Mechnikov” National University of Odessa, Ukraine (man_il@ukr.net).

World War I, known as the “Total War”, had a great influence on whole groups of population in the belligerent countries. Hunger, cold, lack of food, products and fuel, charity activity, patriotism, mobilization became a part of the civilian dwellers’ life. Women were involved in the Great War equally with men. The history of previous wars clearly made a clear distinction between the male experience on the battlefield and the experience of women who were passively waiting for their husbands in their cities and villages. But the modern wars, including World War I, destroyed this binary opposition¹. While men were defending their Motherland in the front lines, women were serving on the home front. This changed not only the conditions of women’s work, daily life, family relationships, but also their status and role in the society. That is why the historiography of this problem has a huge number of books and scientific articles. Some of them are dedicated to such questions of the female history during the First World War as mobilization of women to the “home front”, family relations, problems of women’s patriotism and charity and many others². A lot of the scientific works cover the history of women from the working class³. The everyday life of women during the war is analysed in some special chapters of the books written by Neil Hayman and Marine Haley⁴. The problem of women’s movement for their rights during the war is considered in western historiography, too⁵.

However, it should be noted that most of these studies are usually devoted to the history of the United States of America and Western and Central Europe – the

¹ П. Гетрелл. *Беженцы и проблема пола в России во время Первой мировой войны*, «Россия и Первая мировая война (материалы международного научного colloquium)», Санкт-Петербург., 1999, с.113.

² M. H. Darrow. *French Women and the First World War: War stories of the Home Front*, Oxford-New York: Berg Publishers, 2000, 341 p.; Susan R. Grayzel. *Women and the First World War*, New York and London, Longman, 2002, 193 p.

³ G. Braybon. *Women workers in the First World War*, London-Totowa, 1989, 255 p.; T. Deborah. *Nice girls and rude girls: Women Workers in World War I*, London, I. B. Tauris, 1998, 256 p.; M. W. Greenwald. *Women, War, and Work. The impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990, 309 p.; A. Woollacott. *On her their lives depend: munitions workers in the Great War*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994, 241 p.

⁴ M. Healy. *Vienna and the fall of Habsburg Empire. Total war and everyday life in World War I*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 333 p.; N. Heyman, M. *Daily life during World War I*, Westport-London, Greenwood Press, 2002, 304 p.

⁵ J. D. Fair. *The Political Aspects of Women’s Suffrage during the First World War*, «Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies», Vol. 8, № 3, 1976, pp. 274 – 295; A. K. Smith. *Suffrage Discourse in Britain during the First World War*, Ashgate Publishing, 2005, 153 p.

United Kingdom, the Austrian Empire, France and others. The history of women in the Russian Empire during the First World War is not investigated in detail. But we can mark out some research papers. Alfred Meyer explored the impact of the war on women's life in the Russian Empire⁶. The question of women's patriotism is analysed in the article of Melissa Stokdeyl⁷, and the problem of female refugees is analysed in detail⁸ in Peter Gatrell's monograph.

The methodology of this study is based on the approaches of social history and women's history. I researched those spheres of women's life, which were changed because of the First World War: housekeeping in the terms of inflation and deficit; child education and its complications caused by the War; women's help for the front (nurses, women volunteers, gathering of the gifts and products for the soldiers); economical mobilization and the terms of labour. This article is based on the concept of interpretation of nature and determinants of adaptation and material wealth in the cities during World War I, which was used in the book of «Capital cities at war. Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919», edited by Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert. The main determinants of Odessa women's adaptation were charity and state relief (different types of aid – financial assistance, providing food and fuel, shelters etc) and employment. The adaptation of women to the war changed their status in the “male” world and helped them enter the public sphere. The question of the women refugees needs additional research. Therefore, it is not described in this article.

The chronological frameworks of the article include the period from the beginning of World War I to the February revolution of 1917, because the revolution dramatically changed not only the political but also the social and the economical situation in the Russian Empire. The conditions of women's life were changed too.

In all historical epochs the least protected groups of population during the war were the children and the women. The famous Ukrainian writer Olga Kobylanskaya (1863-1942) says in despair, in the essay dated 1917, that the war hadn't divided humanity into irreconcilable countries, but into the “island of men” and the “island of women, children and old men”⁹. Women had to adapt to wartime

⁶ A. G. Meyer. *The impact of World War I on Russian Women's Lives*, «Russia's Women. Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation», Berkely, University of California Press, 1991, pp. 208–224.

⁷ M. K. Stockdale. «*My death for Motherland Is Happiness*»: Women, Patriotism, and Soldiering in Russia's Great War, 1914–1917, «The American Historical Review», Vol. 109, № 109, 2004, pp. 78 – 116.

⁸ P. Gatrell. *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during the First World War*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999, 336 p.

⁹ М. Богачевська-Хомяк. *Білим по білому. Жінки в громадському житті України 1884-1939*, Київ, 1995, с. 172–173.

conditions, especially to the lack of men and necessity to maintain their own families in the circumstances of constant rise of price of products and goods. On the other hand, women were mobilized at the home front. It caused not only the changes in their daily lives, but also gave them an opportunity to enter the public sphere and, to a certain extent, changed their status in the “male world”.

With the mobilization of the 17th of July, 1914 a lot of men were taken to the army. Their families were put in a difficult financial situation because men often were the only breadwinners. In early August of 1914 one of the Odessa newspapers wrote that many homeowners in the city sued the military families who had not paid the rent on time. A lot of these cases occurred in the outskirts of the city, especially in *Moldavanka*¹⁰, where the major part of the men had been mobilized¹¹. Moreover, since the end of 1914 the prices of products, clothing, household and other goods began to rise significantly. Thus, the women were forced to take care of themselves and to search for additional sources of funding.

Monthly cash benefit for soldiers' families was provided by the state. It consisted of 3 roubles 56 kopecks per person and 1 rouble 78 kopecks per child up to five years¹². However, this aid was not enough for normal living during the war, but it was rather important for poor families.

Distribution of the rations started only on the 30th of August, almost six weeks after mobilization. This delay caused excitement among the wives of soldiers who organized a demonstration in the centre of the city on the 11th of August. They began to gather near the city board in the afternoon and demanded financial assistance from the authorities. Despite the explanations of the officials, the crowd of women (approximately 1000) did not disperse, but instead they began to throw stones at the building of administration and the police (they got bruises and scratches). Even the fire fighters, who had been called to stop the crowd with the help of fire hose, got injuries. In a short time the gradonachalnik¹³ of Odessa, I. Sosnovskii, who promised to provide assistance for the women, managed to calm the crowd. On his order, four tables and chairs for writing claims from the women were put in front of the building. But as soon as the gradonachalnik had left, the women began to show aggression again and broke the tables and the chairs. At 4 p.m. a part of the crowd (approximately 300 women) went to Nicholas Avenue to the restaurants of Petersburg hotel, where they demanded to be given financial assistance. For two hours the women had been visiting cafes, restaurants and

¹⁰ Moldavanka – is the oldest historical part of Odessa, where particularly poor people and families of workers lived.

¹¹ *Одесский листок*, 1914, 11 августа.

¹² *Ibidem*, 26 августа.

¹³ Gradonachalnik – the official with the rights of governor in some cities (Moscow, Odessa, Nikolaev, etc.).

shops, where they received money from the owners or visitors. Only after this the crowd dispersed. All this time, the women were accompanied by the police detachment but none of them was arrested (according to the soviet historian A. Koshik the crowd of women was broken up by policemen who used weapons)¹⁴. It is noteworthy that this case did not reach the pages of the local press. And no reports of unrests or disorders of women during the period of July 1914 – February 1917 were found in Odessa newspapers. However, after the February Revolution of 1917, the local press was full of similar messages. Obviously, this situation was related to the introduction of stricter censorship during the war. Also in 1917, the food issue was more acute than during the 1914-1916 interval.

The distribution of the rations in the city was held in special districts (the number of women was different in every district). In some places it was completed till 12 p.m. but in others it lasted all day long. Some women tried to swindle. For example, in some district a woman took her girlfriend's baby to avoid the queue. Some women tried to get money for the unborn children. Women did not understand all rules of distribution. So, there were other incidents. For example, some woman began to resent the fact that she had received less money than her neighbour with the same number of children. She did not take into account the fact that their children were different ages, so they had to get different sums of money¹⁵.

A great problem for many soldiers' wives was the rule that only women married to men mobilized in the army could receive those aids. Some of these families understood the possibility to remain without state aid; that is why these couples began to register their marriages quickly. From the second half of July to the beginning of August in the office of rabbinate around 1500 of such marriages were recorded¹⁶. However, many couples did not have time to register their relationship and were left without state aid. Such families were given little help from charity funds. But women had to prove their relationships with the mobilized men with the help of witnesses or appropriate authorization¹⁷.

The organization of free meals was another type of help given to the families of the military men during the war. It should be noted that it was not planned well as the shelters for children younger than 5, the dining rooms for adults and children from 5 to 12 years were located in different regions of the city, and this situation was inconvenient for mothers who had many children. So one of them complained

¹⁴ Державний архів Одеської області (ДАОО), ф. 634, оп. 1, спр. 992, арк. 4–5; А. К. Кошик. *Рабочее движение на Украине в годы первой мировой войны и Февральской революции*, Киев, 1965, с. 77.

¹⁵ *Одесский листок*, 1914, 1 сентября.

¹⁶ *Южная мысль*, 1914, 5 августа.

¹⁷ *Одесские новости*, 1914, 30 сентября.

that she had lunch in a certain canteen, then she had to bring one of her children to another one, and the other children had to be in the shelter¹⁸. The issue of assistance was accompanied by rumours. Soldiers' wives had spread gossip that those women who received free lunches and left their children in day shelters would get less money. Therefore, not all women used the services of free canteens and shelters¹⁹. Standing in the queues that occurred in the beginning of the war near the shops, mobilization station, and distribution points intensified the spreading of these rumours. The American historian Neil Hayman notes that during the World War I crowds of people who gathered in lines created favourable conditions for rumours to spread at lightning speed²⁰.

It should be noted that the war promoted the assimilation of national minorities of the Russian Empire. For example, 13 of the 280 wives of Jewish soldiers agreed to get free but not kosher food in the canteens²¹. And at the beginning of 1915 after the resolution of Odessa gradonachalnik about eviction of citizens of hostile countries from Odessa, the wives of Germans began to negotiate with the government to leave them in the city. Some of them cursed Germany and called Russia their true homeland²².

The soldiers' families had got not only official state aid, but benevolence became the additional source of their maintenance. The beginning of the war caused the arising of a lot of different charitable organizations in Odessa, as in other cities of the Russian Empire.

One of the most powerful charitable institutions was the Committee of Her Imperial Majesty Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fedorovna on providing aid to families of persons taken by the war. Its action extended to the entire territory of the Russian Empire. A branch of this organization was found in Odessa as well. The principal activities of the Committee in the city were issuing free lunches to the poorest families, keeping children in orphanages, the distribution of additional financial aid, providing families with cheap and free apartments, fuel and food. Employment was another type of assistance. For example, the Committee created special sewing workshops, where women from military families, mostly wives, sewed clothes and underwear for the army. This organization had provided work for about 2,000 women, only mothers, wives and daughters of the military men²³.

¹⁸ *Одесский листок*, 1914, 21 августа.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 1, 4 сентября.

²⁰ *N. Heuman, op. cit.*, p. 164.

²¹ *Одесский листок*, 1914, 6 августа, 28 ноября.

²² *Ibidem*, 1915, 11 февраля.

²³ *Ежемесячник комитета ее императорского величества Великой княжны Елизаветы Федоровны по оказанию благотворительной помощи семьям лиц, призванных на войну*, № 4, 1915, с. 25–26; № 5, с. 178.

The other charitable organizations created similar workshops. The head of the Odessa Central Committee of the Red Cross, Nikitina, founded the workshop where about 500 women were working. The sewing of underclothes (shirt and long johns) cost 16 kopecks²⁴. Approximately 700 women were working in the workshop of the Care Organization for Homeless and Poor Children at the end of 1914. They earned about 50-60 kopecks per day²⁵. Therefore, the assistance for mobilized men's wives became also a fulfilment of military orders. That is to say mobilization of female population assumed the view of assistance for them.

The Protecting Women Association was different from other organizations. In 1915 its work was aimed mainly at supporting women from families of mobilized men. 1371 women got assistance during the year from this organization. The shelter for 10 girls was opened by the Protecting Women Association. Notably, this association helped women of different nationalities and religions: Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, Jew, Karaite, Lutheran, etc²⁶.

Sometimes, female committees were created around existing male ones. Thus, the lady committee, headed by an engineer's wife, Vera Leonidovna, was founded under the Railway Association of Assistance to Military Families. Its main duty was the distribution of money, fuel and food²⁷. There was a lady committee under the "Falcon" organization. It made underwear for the wounded soldiers²⁸.

The war had a major impact on such traditionally female areas as housekeeping. The main problem was the constant rise of the prices of products. Only in 1915 the price of potatoes rose by 119%, buckwheat – 73%, salt – 72%, butter – 64%, pasta – 52% in Odessa. The prices for such products as beef (21%), flour (10%), tea (9%), and cabbage (7%) went up not so noticeable²⁹.

The prices rose more significantly in 1916. It should be noted that the 1916-1917 interval represented an ordeal not only for the Russian Empire, but also for other countries that participated in the First World War. At this time the food problem in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Germany exacerbated significantly, and the number of unrests and strikes among the population increased³⁰. On the eve of the February Revolution some products in Odessa cost several times more than in early 1915. Prices of cereals, salt, and lard

²⁴ Иванова. *Нужда и общественная помощь*, «Женский вестник», № 5–6, 1915, с. 111.

²⁵ *Одесский листок*, 1914, 12 декабря.

²⁶ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1916, 27 марта.

²⁷ *Отблески русской мысли*, № 5, 1915, с. 39.

²⁸ *Одесский листок*, 1914, 22 августа.

²⁹ ДАОО, ф. 16, оп. 91, спр. 51, арк. 1–3, 56–58.

³⁰ T. Bonzon, B. Davis. Feeding the cities, «*Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914–1919*», University of Cambridge, p. 323; L. Taylor. Food Riots Revisited, «*Journal of social history*», Vol. 30, № 2, 1996, p. 484.

increased 3-4 times, sunflower oil – 8 times, vegetables such as cabbage and potatoes became 9-10 times more expensive³¹.

Different feuilletons and jokes about the food problem were often published in Odessa newspapers. For example, in one of them the man's wife demanded more money for housekeeping, because all products rose significantly in price:

“Hear, husband, tell the wife –
All prices are growing...
Five roubles is now too little:
It is not enough to rate!
All products rise in price:
Coal, sugar, firewood,
Eggs, butter, meat, fruit ...
List all barely...”³².

But the rising of the prices was not the only problem. The absence of food in the markets of the city and the change for the worse quality of products became a part of Odessa inhabitants' everyday life. Thus, the introduction of taxes for meat in 1916 caused its quality to deteriorate significantly. The market sellers sold meat chiefly to the regular customers³³. The feuilleton printed in the newspaper “Odessa news” brightly illustrated the situation on the food market. One of its characters tells his friend that the servant of his family gets meat because she has an affair with the butcher in the market and he sells her goods freely³⁴. Probably for the purchase of products some women began to use personal dating and relationships.

Food shortages and the introduction of taxing caused a lot of queues (as a rule, women stood in the lines). The feuilleton published in Odessa newspaper “Little Odessa paper” illustrated this clearly.

“The queues in 2-3 versts are
Almost in all places
In a fever of anticipation
We are in lines all day long
And we only are wasting our time”³⁵.

The First World War changed the conditions of parenting considerably. Women, especially from the lower strata of the population, because of the employment and mobilization had hardship in taking care of their children. Children often remained alone and this led to tragic consequences. Heroic and romantic enthusiasm for war caused a veritable “epidemic” of children's war

³¹ ДАОО, ф. 16, оп. 93, спр. 207, арк. 225–225, 150–153.

³² *Маленький одесский листок*, 1915, 18 октября.

³³ *Одесские новости*, 1916, 2 февраля.

³⁴ *Івдет*, 17 февраля.

³⁵ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1916, 9 октября.

entertainment. For example, in Odessa in the area near the refinery of the Olexandrivske Company a lot of workers' children gathered to play in war. They used sticks and stakes instead of guns and swords. On the 16th of March about 200 boys took part in a game. One half of the children depicted the Germans and others were the allies. Ivan Shpachenko who depicted a German Commander got serious injuries during the game. Then he was taken to the hospital³⁶.

Military romance and patriotism captured all strata of the population and caused mass escapes to the battlefield among children. Numerous reports about children who went to the army already appeared on the pages of Odessa newspapers in August 1914³⁷. Their numbers greatly increased in September. Only one day of this month, the police received five applications from parents of children who had escaped to the front³⁸. Friends and even brothers often went to the army together. Some children decided to leave home after the stories of their friends returned from the army³⁹. Not only the boys but the girls as well tried to reach the battlefield. Typically, they wanted to become nurses and to help wounded soldiers⁴⁰. In general, it should be noted a significant increase of escapes in autumn after the starting of school lessons and in spring, before the exams. Thus, in the newspaper "Little Odessa paper" in July and in August 1915 three and five reports of children's runaway were published, but their number increased to fifteen in September⁴¹. Obviously, pupils of schools and gymnasiums wanted not only to take part in the battles, but also to avoid schooling. However, it is necessary to note that not all children tried to get away from school lessons. For some of them it was a very important decision. For example a twelve-year old girl, before going to the front, constantly repeated that she must do it, but only after passing the exam at school⁴².

The beginning of the war caused the banning of the German organizations and newspapers in Odessa and the appearance of the problem of the German language. It was difficult to forbid German at all, because it was taught in schools and gymnasiums. In September 1914 the editorial board of the newspaper "Odessa paper" received a letter in which the mother complained that her children had been offended because they had used German outdoors. She wrote that this case was not unique and requested to stop boycotting German, or replacing it with English.

³⁶ *Одесские новости*, 1916, 17 марта.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 1914, 16 августа.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 26 сентября.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 3 ноября, 13 декабря.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 1914, 18 августа, 1915, 15 мая.

⁴¹ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1915, июль-сентябрь.

⁴² *Одесский листок*, 1915, 5 мая.

Moreover the author of the letter indicated that the children also supported the company against the German language⁴³.

The First World War changed the gender structure of the population in Odessa. Traditionally, the male population dominated the women in the city. It was stipulated by jobs in the port, factories, and mills and presence of a huge number of military men (see table № 1). According to the census in 1873 men accounted for 56.7% of the population, in 1892 - 52.4%, in 1897 - 53.7%⁴⁴. However, in December of 1915 there were 55.1% of women and 44.9% of men respectively⁴⁵. It was caused on the one hand, by the mobilization, and on the other, by the refugees. As a rule, the women and children prevailed among the refugees (see table № 2).

Table № 1. The Gender structure of Odessa in the late 19th – early 20th centuries⁴⁶.

| Data | Men | | Women | |
|------|---------|------|---------|------|
| | Persons | % | Persons | % |
| 1873 | 109,734 | 56.7 | 83,779 | 43.3 |
| 1892 | 178,443 | 52.4 | 162,083 | 47.6 |
| 1897 | 216,792 | 53.7 | 187,023 | 46.3 |
| 1915 | 226,852 | 44.9 | 277,753 | 55.1 |

Table № 2. National and age structure of refugees in Odessa, registered by the Committee of Her Imperial Majesty Tatyjana Nikolaevna (on the 1st of January, 1916)⁴⁷.

| Nationality | The total number of the refugees (%) | Children (%) | Men (%) | Women (%) |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------|-----------|
| Russian | 37.7 | 30.1 | 28.4 | 41.5 |
| Jew | 28.6 | 20.56 | 41 | 38.44 |
| Polish | 23.6 | 23.6 | 37.3 | 39.1 |
| Latvian | 3.5 | 19.7 | 41.2 | 39.1 |
| Lithuanian | 3 | 25 | 33.6 | 41.4 |
| Armenian | 0.1 | - | 93.75 | 6.25 |
| Ukrainian (from Galicia) | 3.5 | - | 33.4 | 66.6 |

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 1914, 20 сентября.

⁴⁴ *Всеобщая перепись населения Российской империи 1897 г. Город Одесса*, Т. 47, Санкт-Петербург, 1904, с. VI.

⁴⁵ *Одесский листок*, 1915, 12 декабря.

⁴⁶ *Всеобщая перепись населения Российской империи 1897 г. Город Одесса*, Т. 47, Санкт-Петербург, 1904, р. VI; *Одесский листок*, 1915, 12 декабря.

⁴⁷ *Одесские новости*, 1916, 11 января.

This situation was reflected on the pages of Odessa newspaper where a lot of feuilletons and anecdotes about the lack of men in the city were published. For example, one of them:

“Eligible bachelor! Eligible bachelor! Eligible bachelor!
Squint-eyed, with bandy mouth and body
And on the slightly lame foot ...
The girls are asked not to touch them with hands!”⁴⁸

The lack of the boyfriends led to the additional attention of women to fashionable clothes, especially in summer⁴⁹. It is evident, that we mean women from the well-to-do families, who were able to be in fashion and buy expensive clothes.

The theme of luxury had appeared in the Odessa newspapers during the war. There was a thought in the public opinion that people could not spend money for expensive clothes in the time of crisis, when a lot of people suffered from cold, lack of food and fuel. The journalist of “Odessa paper” called up the women to reject luxury and to write him letters about this problem⁵⁰.

The published letters of Odessa women allow us to analyse their attitude to the problem of luxury. Notably, many letters contained accusations of men. For example, R. Lovshits wrote that the men had been guilty. And her argument was that the men had bought expensive and fashionable dresses for wives by themselves. O. Shidlovskaya and L. Zbor wrote that not only the women but the men liked to wear expensive clothes as well. However, one of the women admitted that buying expensive clothes during the war was wrong. She signed up as “wife of a Russian general” and wrote that she did not want to wear and even think about fashionable clothes. She considered it shameful. In general, women tried to justify themselves. One woman wrote that she would have agreed to give up wearing expensive dresses, but only if other women had done that as well. Obviously, most of the rich women had not thought about the economy of expensive dresses and hats. One letter published in “Odessa paper” said: “It is too hopeless an affair: few will answer and thousands will continue to demonstrate their wealth cynically and criminally in this hard, serious and important period of our life”⁵¹. Probably the majority of the wealthy women could not renounce the fashionable clothes and jewellery during the war.

The mobilization of women to “home front” became an important component of their lives during the First World War. Women began to work in

⁴⁸ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1916, 19 июня.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 1915, 14 июля.

⁵⁰ *Одесский листок*, 1915, 22 февраля.

⁵¹ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1916, 4,12 марта.

factories, plants, mills and other places instead of men; they became nurses and took active part in charitable activities.

Immediately after the war different courses for nurses were opened in Odessa. The number of applicants for the courses considerably exceeded the number of seats available. A lot of these women had husbands and fiancés in the army. This was additional incentive to become a nurse. Most applicants served in offices and institutions. Therefore, they had education and belonged to the middle class mainly⁵².

The selection of nurses had a national (or rather religious) criterion, too. For example, Kasperovskaia fraternity accepted only Orthodox for its nurse courses. However, in July 1914 rumours emerged in the city that people of all religions were acceptable. Then, a lot of Jewish women had tried to enrol. But, the leader of the community said that Jewish could not register⁵³.

Probably, spreading ideas about the unity of all nationalities during the war caused the emergence of these rumours. The beginning of the war was accompanied by calls that everyone must forget national and social differences for the sake of the common struggle. After this idea had been proclaimed in the manifest of Nicholas II, it began to sound in publications and reports of people with very different political views⁵⁴. According to the fact that Jews were the second largest national community of the city after the Russians, the refusal of young Jewish women to enrol to the courses caused outrage among Odessa's population. In the letter published in the newspaper "Odessa paper" this ban was blamed. Its author wrote that the Jewish was found even in the common affair, common challenge: "Where is the justice? Where is the appeal to forget all nationality hostility?"⁵⁵

Some young women did not agree to be only nurses. They wanted to play the roles of the men in the army and to fight with the enemy. The history of the eighteen-year old Bogoliubova was published in the newspaper "Odessa Paper". The young woman was detained when she was trying to get to the front wearing a military uniform. The woman wanted to find her brother, who had been mobilized for the army⁵⁶. However, some Odessa women came to the front under the guise of men. They fought with the enemy and even received awards. For example, Evdokia Chernyavskaya got to the front under the name of Iosiph Glushchenko. The woman was wounded, but she dressed the injury herself and nobody knew that she was a

⁵² *Одесский листок*, 1914, 21 июля.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 23 июля.

⁵⁴ E. Lohr. *Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The campaign against enemy aliens during World War I*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 10.

⁵⁵ *Одесский листок*, 1914, 23 июля.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 1915, 5 мая.

woman. Evdokia received the St. George Cross of fourth degree for that battle. But after the second wound she got to the hospital, and the truth came out. The woman received the St. George Cross of third degree⁵⁷. However, such cases were rather the exceptions than the rules.

A lot of women started looking for a job because of the state and charity aid was not enough for the soldiers' families. According to the soviet historian M. Balabanov in 1914 about 4.9% of all workers in the Russian Empire were female, in 1915 – 10.2% and in 1916 – 16.2%⁵⁸. In Ukraine the number of the female workers increased by 77%⁵⁹. Undoubtedly, in Odessa, which was a large industrial city of South Ukraine, we can observe significant growth of quantity of the working women. They amounted about 40-50% even on the handling metal facilities⁶⁰. The employment became an opportunity to survive during the war.

On the other hand, the job placement of the women who had children was rather difficult. The authorities and different charity organizations created special shelters where mothers could leave their children for a day. At the beginning of September 1914 the Central Executive Committee of Helping Paupers in Odessa reported that 77 children were sent to the boarding schools, and 5,359 visits of day shelters were recorded⁶¹. Different charity organizations provide shelters. One of them was the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna Committee. The annual report of the Odessa branch of this organization noted that 5,610 children had got assistance (free meals, placement in hospitals and shelters)⁶².

The shelter for 100 children was opened on the 21st of December, 1914 by judge P. Tsurkan. This shelter consisted of seven rooms, where children learned reading and writing, singing, needlework (for girls) and gymnastics. Children could stay in the shelter from 8:00 a.m. till 6:00 p.m. And this allowed their mothers to go to work⁶³.

⁵⁷ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1916, 25 апреля.

⁵⁸ М. Балабанов. *Царская Россия XX века (Накануне революции 1917 года)*, Харьков, Пролетарий, 1927, с. 69.

⁵⁹ Й. Т. Щербина. *Робітничий клас України та його революційна боротьба у 1914 – 1917 роках*, Київ, 1963, с. 50.

⁶⁰ *Отчет Одесского комитета торговли и мануфактуры за 1915 год*, Одесса, 1916, с. 131.

⁶¹ *Ведомости Одесского градоначальства*, 1914, 7 сентября.

⁶² *Ежемесячник комитета ее императорского величества Великой княжны Елизаветы Федоровны по оказанию благотворительной помощи семьям лиц, призванных на войну*, № 4, 1915, с. 26.

⁶³ *Одесский листок*, 1914, 19 декабря; *Известия Верховного Совета по призрению семей лиц, призванных на войну, а также семей раненых и павших воинов*, 1915, Вып. 4, с. 186.

But some mothers could not bring up their children even with the help of the charity organizations. And the number of children in the city orphanage increased greatly during the war. For example in 1914 the number of children increased by 16.22%, in 1915 - by 11.3%. And their number rose only by 76.8%, from 1904 to 1913 (approximately 7.7% per year)⁶⁴. The main reason for this was the inability of soldiers' (sometimes refugees') wives to feed their children because their husbands were dead, got injuries, or remained at the front. The applications of women normally took the form of requests. Women appealed to the authorities "with tears", they requested for "pity" and so on⁶⁵.

Here is one of the typical applications that belonged to Anna Lagan:

«I ask Your Highness humbly not to deny my request about taking my children Ivan (2-year-old) and Alexandra (7-month-old) to an orphanage, because my husband had been serving at the front and on the 28th of August, in 1914 was killed, so I remained without any funds.

With tears in my eyes I ask to have pity of me and save my children and me from hunger, I am not able to work, because there is nobody to look after my kids»⁶⁶.

The impossibility of employment was another significant reason for giving children to the orphanages. It was too hard for women to find a job because their children needed to be taken care of. Women who applied to various charitable organizations complained about corrupt "street" influence on their children when they were working⁶⁷. That was why parents tried to give the youngest children, especially babies, to the orphanages. David Silbi, who investigated the impact of the World War I on the working-class of Britain, noted that the worst for the working families was the time before children finished school, because they could not work⁶⁸. Obviously, there was the same case for the working-class family in Odessa.

Employment of 10-11-year-old children often became additional sources of income for the poor families. We can observe the increase of number of working children in Odessa during the war as well as women. Only in 1914, according to the reports of factory inspectors, the number of working teenagers in the Russian Empire enlarged by 3.8%, and the number of working young children by 3.7%⁶⁹.

⁶⁴ *Известия городской думы*, 1915, № 1-2, с. 201; № 15-16, с. 1024; *Сведения о врачебно-санитарной организации и эпидемических заболеваниях г. Одессы*, 1915, № 3-4, с. 33; № 9-10, с. 135; № 11, с. 166; № 12, с. 232.

⁶⁵ ДАОО, ф. 16, оп. 124, спр. 8226, арк. 5; *Ibidem*, спр. 8215, арк. 138, 149, 154, 373.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, спр. 8215, арк. 149.

⁶⁷ *Одесский листок*, 1915, 12 августа.

⁶⁸ D. Silbey. *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914-1916*, London, 2005, p. 83.

⁶⁹ *Свод отчетов фабричных инспекторов за 1914 год*, Петроград, 1915, с. XXXVIII.

The First World War not only increased the number of working women, but also expanded the scope of their work. The war allowed women to occupy a lot of “male” professions, which had been unavailable for them in pre-war time. However, in the Russian Empire, which was a conservative country with limited democratic freedoms, these processes developed much more slowly than in Western Europe.

Historian Gail Breybon notes that conditions of labour in many companies did not change a lot. However, women who replaced mobilized men began to work in unusual conditions. Basically, they worked in the sphere of transport, trade, and some industry⁷⁰.

The job of a cabman was a traditional male profession which women tried to occupy during the war. Mobilization of cabmen on the one hand, caused shortage of them, and, on the other, left their families without breadwinners. That was why it was logical for the cabmen’s wives to continue the business of their husbands. The first female cabman appeared at the beginning of the war and worked mostly at night in the region called Peresyp⁷¹. But after her cab ran into another cab, the authorities forbade women to work in this sphere. The second time female cabmen appeared only in autumn of 1915 (in Moscow women were allowed to be cabmen at the end of 1914). In November 1915, there were already 12 female cabmen in Odessa. But they worked in the evenings because of the police persecution.

Some Odessa newspaper reported that a woman in a coat and a cap of a cabman looks pretty strange, but they were successful in their duties. Women were more polite with their clients than men⁷². At the same time, newspapers wrote about female cabmen sarcastically. The author of a feuilleton asked the following question: Should a woman driver be called “he” or “she”? And the journalist remarked that “she” looked like as a “he” sarcastically⁷³.

In Odessa there was a shortage not only of the cabmen but also of the conductors and tram drivers. During the war the problem of involving women in these professions was discussed by the authorities several times. When this question was discussed in the town council for the first time, tram inspectors came to the conclusion that the specificity of Odessa population made it impossible for women to work as conductors. Finally, in February 1916 the city government allowed Belgian companies of trams to hire women⁷⁴.

⁷⁰ G. Braybon. *Op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁷¹ Peresyp – is the historical part of Odessa near the sea port, where a lot of factories and plants were situated.

⁷² *Одесский листок*, 1915, 17 октября; *Маленький одесский листок*, 1915, 3 ноября; *Одесские новости*, 1914, 23 ноября.

⁷³ *Одесский листок*, 1915, 18 октября.

⁷⁴ *Одесские новости*, 1916, 11, 24 февраля.

In the summer of 1916 it was decided to accept women in the railway service. They could become commuter train conductors or station watchmen. Women had to meet some requirements. The candidate for the job had to be over 21 years old, to finish a 2nd grade college or city college and not to be married⁷⁵. The Committee of South-Western Railway issued the order which established the rules and regulated the behaviour of the passengers in the trains. This document banned any action that could offend the honour and dignity of women, use of foul language, violation of general order and silence. The guilty people were punished (fine of 500 roubles or 3 months imprisonment)⁷⁶. Thereby, the employment of women caused spreading of rules in public transport.

The women worked not only as controllers, but as technical servants too. They interlocked the carriages, oiled the wheels and did other similar work⁷⁷. The women began to work in the telegraphs as couriers⁷⁸.

Working conditions in the area of the defence industry were especially intolerable. Typically, a workday was longer there. In 1915, the women began to work on the lathes at the plant of Gena. They produced shells for the army there⁷⁹. At the beginning of the war 429 of 767 workers were mobilized at the plant. That was why there was a lack of workers⁸⁰.

Although Odessa women did not have any access to many professions officially, they worked illegally or as unskilled labourers. For example, women cleared tramways before the official permission to work as conductors. Women could not be the street cleaners, but usually wives helped their husbands to sweep the yards, to open the gates, etc⁸¹.

Wages and labour conditions of women workers were very bad despite the decree of the 19th of October, 1915, which protected the rights of women and teenagers. Some of its points were broken⁸². There were many small companies in Odessa, where working conditions were particularly unbearable. For example, the canning factory workers (mainly women) got only 40-50 kopecks a day. And a workday lasted from 6 am to 6 pm⁸³.

The city department of insurance determined a minimum wage for unskilled labourers. It was 1 rouble 30 kopecks for men and 90 kopecks for women, 80 and

⁷⁵ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1915, 1 июня.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 1916, 17 декабря.

⁷⁷ *Одесское утро*, 1916, 6 августа.

⁷⁸ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1916, 6 июля.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 1915, 23 июля.

⁸⁰ Э. Г. Плесская-Зебольд. *Одесские немцы 1803-1920.: Научно-популярное издание*, Одесса, издательство «ТЭС», 1999, с. 105.

⁸¹ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1916, 21 января, 12 февраля.

⁸² А. Г. Мейер. *Op. cit.*, p. 215.

⁸³ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1915, 11 августа.

60 kopecks for 15–17 years old teenagers, and 45 and 35 kopecks for 12 - 15-year-old children. Thereby, women got only 69.2% of men's wages, female teenagers – 75% and girls – 77.8% (see table № 3)⁸⁴.

Table № 3. Wages of unskilled labourers in Odessa determined by the city department of insurance for 1916 – 1918.

| Sex Age | Male | | Female | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----|----------|------|
| | Day wage | % | Day wage | % |
| Adult | 1 roub. 30 kop. | 100 | 90 kop. | 69.2 |
| Teenagers (15-17) | 80 kop. | 100 | 60 kop. | 75 |
| Children (12-15) | 45 kop. | 100 | 35 kop. | 77.8 |

*Women continued to work in traditional spheres, such as servants. Babysitters got 8-10 roubles per month. The salaries of slushiers were 8-12 roubles. But, they had to do all the dirty work – washing the dishes, chopping wood, etc*⁸⁵.

The growth of prostitution in the city at the expense of refugees, wives of military men and their children was another negative consequence of the war. On the one hand, the holders of the brothels and pimps who decoyed the young girls and women were blamed. But on the other hand, there was a view in the public opinion that women chose prostitution as a survival way during the war⁸⁶.

Undoubtedly, Odessa, as a big seaport, was famous as a centre of tradesmen and prostitution in the pre-war period. Women were sold to brothels from Turkey, Brazil and other countries⁸⁷. The war stopped people trading with the Ottoman Empire, but it caused the growth of prostitution in Odessa.

Women refugees were a reliable source for brothels. Often they lost ties with their relatives and high cost and lack of funds forced them to become prostitutes. The story of a refugee woman was published in the newspaper “Little Odessa paper”. Seventeen-year-old M. Popova arrived at Odessa as a refugee. She spent all her money and began to look for a job. But she could not find one. New friends of M. Popova invited her to the tavern “Yubilei” where she began to work as a

⁸⁴ *Одесские новости*, 1916, 24 января.

⁸⁵ *Война и мир*, 1916, 1 февраля.

⁸⁶ П. Гетрелл. *Op. cit.*, с. 118-119.

⁸⁷ Ф. О. Самойлов, М. О. Скрипник, О. Т. Ярещенко. *Одеса на зламі століть (кінець XIX – XX ст.)*. Історико-краєзнавчий нарис, Одеса, Маяк, с. 44.

prostitute. After a quarrel with a young man the girl was found in the street with stab wounds⁸⁸. Obviously, this was not the only case. Refugees published requests to find work in the local press. Sometimes they received letters with indecent proposals from men who decided to use their difficult material situation. Some men published these proposals themselves⁸⁹.

The Odessa Branch of the Russian Organization for the Protection of women tried to defend young girls from pimps and scammers. The members of the organization began watching the stations and ports at the beginning of the war⁹⁰.

The number of prostitutes among young children and teenagers increased significantly. Mobilization and refugeedom increased the number of orphans significantly. And a lot of them became prostitutes. Odessa judge A. Nikulin noted that in a short period of time the number of girls prostitutes (including 10-11-year-old) increased from 120 to 150⁹¹. One of Odessa's inhabitants described girls prostitutes (he saw them in the Greek market in winter): "Very low lechery and drunkenness were written on the faces. It was frightful and pitiful to look at the children faces..."⁹².

The police made raids on the brothels periodically. The newspaper "Odessa paper" (18th of July, 1915) reported that the police of the Boulevard district arrested 25 prostitutes and most of them were children. Those girls, who had venereal disease, were sent to the hospital⁹³. Lives of the prostitutes in the brothels were unbearable. They got only 30-40 roubles per month. But they had to work from evening to morning, to pay for clothes, laundry, fines for being late, rude treatment with customers or hostess, etc⁹⁴.

The war created favourable conditions for swindlers. They used charitable activity to earn money. For example, women pretended to be nurses or refugees. For instance, some young woman under the guise of a refugee from Warsaw used forged documents to get a job as a maid and stole 575 roubles⁹⁵.

Prohibition that started with the beginning of the war influenced women's lives. On the one hand, the establishment of Prohibition had some positive impact on the family budgets because money that had been previously spent on alcohol remained in the families. However, the banning of alcohol trade not only caused

⁸⁸ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1916, 21 апреля.

⁸⁹ *Ibidet*, 1916, 31 января.

⁹⁰ *Одесский листок*, 1915, 20 июня.

⁹¹ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1916, 9 мая.

⁹² *Ibidet*, 1916, 15 декабря.

⁹³ *Одесский листок*, 1915, 18 июля.

⁹⁴ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1915, 19 августа.

⁹⁵ *Ibidet*, 15 июля, 29 сентября, 21 октября.

great losses of wine industry, but it led to unemployment⁹⁶. The historian Alfred Meyer notes that women were involved in alcohol trade⁹⁷. So, Prohibition deprived those women of their means of living. But they continued selling alcohol illegally. On the 20th of January, 1916 in the newspaper "Odessa news" the notice of administrative penalty of 20 people who had violated the rules of operations with wine was published. Most of them were women (14 people)⁹⁸.

Tradesmen applied to the local authorities with applications to allow them alcohol trade, mainly wine trade. The wife of some soldier wrote in a letter to the Governor-General of the Odessa Military District:

«That's why I ask Your High Excellency with tears in my eyes to have pity of me and my kids and allow me to continue my wine trade equally with other tradesmen⁹⁹.

The changes of the status of the women during the war caused the discussion of the problem of women's high education. One of the Odessa newspapers wrote that the war gave possibilities for women in many areas of labour and for their independence this made more than a several years of political propaganda standing of suffragettes and different women's organizations¹⁰⁰.

The problem of admission of women to the university remained unsolved. It was discussed on the meeting of the Medical Faculty of the Odessa Novorossiysky University. 11 people voted against the admission of women and only 2 participants of the meeting wanted to allow women to study medicine in the university. They argued that there were not enough doctors during the war. Despite the fact that women were not admitted to the university, the pupils of Higher Female Medicine Courses got admission to took part in the clinic lessons with the students of senior courses of the university¹⁰¹. The question of admission of women to the university was considered in law faculty. And women were allowed to study there¹⁰².

The First World War greatly changed the living conditions of women in Odessa. As a result of mobilization of men and moving of refugees to the city, the number of women exceeded the number of men for the first time in the history of Odessa. An important aspect of their lives was mobilization at the "home front". Women got the jobs of the mobilized men. On the one hand, it was necessary to survive for them and their children; on the other hand, the state needed labour

⁹⁶ О. Реєнт, О. Сердюк. *Перша світова війна і Україна*, Київ, Генеза, 2004, с. 77.

⁹⁷ А. Г. Мейер. *Op. cit.*, p. 211.

⁹⁸ *Одесские новости*, 1916, 20 января.

⁹⁹ ДАОО, ф. 2, оп. 1, спр. 3694а, арк. 159.

¹⁰⁰ *Маленький одесский листок*, 1915, 23 июля.

¹⁰¹ *Одесский листок*, 1915, 20 сентября.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, 22 сентября.

force. This expanded the scope of female workers significantly. Women began to work in the steel plants, on the railways, in trams and so on. However, the payment for their work remained lower than that for the men's work. Women from the rich families were engaged in charity activity. They organized assistance for the wounded soldiers and officers, refugees and families of military men. The participation of women in the charitable organizations and occupation of "male" professions led to the changes of their status in society. The war had a great impact on the traditional women's activities - housekeeping and parenting. On the one hand, the high cost and shortage of many goods forced women to get a job and look for additional sources of financing. And, on the other hand, the increase of working women and mobilization caused some problems in the parenting. Hunger, lack of food and low level of public support led to an increase in the number of children in the orphanages. The number of prostitutes in the city increased in the period of wartime as well. In general, World War I changed conditions of Odessa women's lives considerably. Consequently, women adapted for new living conditions and realities of wartime.