

The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies

Numéro Issue 1 (2004)

Dedovshchina : From Military to Society

Julie Elkner

***Dedovshchina* and the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers under Gorbachev**

Avertissement

Le contenu de ce site relève de la législation française sur la propriété intellectuelle et est la propriété exclusive de l'éditeur.

Les œuvres figurant sur ce site peuvent être consultées et reproduites sur un support papier ou numérique sous réserve qu'elles soient strictement réservées à un usage soit personnel, soit scientifique ou pédagogique excluant toute exploitation commerciale. La reproduction devra obligatoirement mentionner l'éditeur, le nom de la revue, l'auteur et la référence du document.

Toute autre reproduction est interdite sauf accord préalable de l'éditeur, en dehors des cas prévus par la législation en vigueur en France.

revues.org

Revues.org est un portail de revues en sciences humaines et sociales développé par le CLEO, Centre pour l'édition électronique ouverte (CNRS, EHESS, UP, UAPV).

Electronic reference

Julie Elkner, « *Dedovshchina* and the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers under Gorbachev », *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* [Online], Issue 1 | 2004, Online since 11 juillet 2004. URL : <http://pipss.revues.org/index243.html>

DOI : en cours d'attribution

Éditeur : Centre d'études et de recherche sur les sociétés et les institutions post-soviétiques (CERSIPS)

<http://pipss.revues.org>

<http://www.revues.org>

Document accessible en ligne à l'adresse suivante : <http://pipss.revues.org/index243.html>

Document généré automatiquement le 24 mars 2010.

Creative Commons License

Julie Elkner

***Dedovshchina* and the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers under Gorbachev**

Hundreds, thousands of lead coffins are soldered annually in every large army—a phenomenon so normal that in America at least, the press is silent about it, and the chatterbox-orators, who do nothing but wait for sensations, are silent. — Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil, November 1990¹

[Military service] is a compulsory state service. And [dedovshchina] is in actual fact a crime against the individual ... It's exactly the same as if someone were attacked on the street, or beaten up, or tortured. So there is no such thing as a separate crime of 'non-statutory relations.'² That's a mask, a lie. And for long decades this lie concealed the fact that mass crimes were being committed. — Valentina D. Mel'nikova, Committee of Soldiers' Mothers³

For the military establishment, which is unquestionably implicated in the crimes committed behind the impenetrable green fences, the movement of soldiers' mothers represents no small danger. The fact is that ... the overwhelming majority of the country's citizens are in solidarity with the movement ... This means that the movement's potential strength is huge. And, realising this, the USSR Defence Ministry and the Military Procurator's Office dependent upon it ... have organised a mighty counter-action against the soldiers' mothers. — Rossiiskaia gazeta, August 1991⁴

- 1 The culture of the Soviet military was imbued with and sustained by a distinctive sentimentalism. Nowhere was this more evident than in the official rhetoric surrounding universal military service. Read the Soviet military press, or the Soviet mainstream conservative press for that matter, from the spring or autumn of any year, when the twice-yearly call-up of new conscripts was conducted, and you will find a series of standard articles containing a set of standard images: the romance of the young conscript serving in far-flung sections of the country, fulfilling his sacred duty to the Motherland, attaining manhood by facing hardship, sustained by the memory of his home and most importantly his mother. A key moment in such narratives was the conscript's separation from his mother. Such separations paid tribute to the sublimation of maternal instincts and the poignancy of the mixed feelings of the mother, sad but proud to see her son become a man and fulfil his mission of defending the Soviet state, and ultimately happy to entrust him to the care of the Soviet military.
- 2 Cracks in this idealised image of military service were already beginning to become visible by the time Gorbachev came to power in 1985; by the end of his rule, the image was on the point of shattering altogether. In the erosion of the legitimacy of the universal military service and of the Soviet military itself, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers [henceforth the CSM]⁵ played a crucial role. Under Gorbachev, the Committee emerged as a mass movement aimed at exposing and eradicating the violence endemic in Soviet military barracks, violence which had hitherto been masked by sentimentalism and taboo.⁶ In particular, the Committee played an important role in drawing public attention to *dedovshchina* — the widespread systems of informal power hierarchies that operated in Soviet barracks, and the associated violence in which senior conscripts bullied and victimised new recruits.⁷
- 3 Controversy over *dedovshchina* played a significant role in eroding the Soviet military's authority from 1988 onwards.⁸ Claims that the military was incapable of maintaining order in its own barracks in peacetime cast doubt on its overall defence-capability and efficiency. At the same time, revelations about *dedovshchina* ushered in a dramatic shift in public perceptions of military service. Official rhetoric on the beneficial nature of military service for young men's physical and moral development was displaced by the widespread acknowledgement that for

many conscripts, military service was in fact a profoundly damaging and traumatic experience. By the same token, the validity of the hitherto unquestioned notion that it was every male Soviet citizen's 'sacred duty' to undergo military service was eroded, as the controversy over *dedovshchina* brought into question the legitimacy of the state's claim to exact military service from its male citizens. For many, in fact, *dedovshchina* provided a reasonable justification for draft evasion, and was one of the causes of the conscription crisis of the late 1980s-early 1990s. The Soviet military put up staunch resistance to what the prominent pro-military conservative writer Prokhanov described as 'the myth of the degradation of the individual in the army.'⁹ This article traces the military's attempts to control and to set limits upon debate over barracks violence in the face of the CSM's campaign to increase public scrutiny of the previously hidden sides of military life.

Soldiers' Mothers' Strategies

There isn't anybody who knows this problem better than the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. Because we come into contact with this problem every day. We live and breathe these military units, we know their routines, we know what goes on there behind the fence, because the boys tell us much more than they tell their own parents. — CSM member Liudmila N. Zinchenko¹⁰

One of the CSM's main objectives was to raise public awareness of violence and peacetime deaths in the barracks. Soldiers' mothers' press conferences and demonstrations were an important counterweight to military attempts to deny or downplay barracks violence. In particular, the participation in these demonstrations of grieving mothers whose sons had been killed in peacetime provided eloquent proof of the problem's existence, greatly weakening the military's position. Grieving mothers threw into relief the disjuncture between the mothers' pain over the deaths of their sons on the one hand, and the regime's treatment of conscripts as so much expendable manpower on the other. Public representations of maternal grief were a key aspect of soldiers' mothers' demonstrations during this period, and will be examined in more detail below.

Organised soldiers' mothers' activism on barracks violence took on mass proportions in the spring and summer of 1990, after the CSM widely publicised claims that fifteen thousand peacetime or non-combat deaths had occurred in the Soviet armed forces during the preceding four-year period, and that the military was actively engaged in covering up these deaths.¹¹ Mass soldiers' mothers' demonstrations over this issue were held in Moscow and elsewhere in early summer 1990.¹²

The fifteen thousand figure would mean that non-combat deaths over the preceding four years exceeded the official number of Soviet deaths in almost a decade of fighting in Afghanistan, an irony which was not lost on democratic commentators.¹³ In August 1990 a spokesman for the General Staff declared that the widely cited fifteen thousand figure did not 'correspond to reality'; he refused, however, to provide alternative figures, on the grounds that this was classified information.¹⁴ By the same token, the military refuted claims that 75-80 per cent of peacetime deaths were attributable to *dedovshchina*, maintaining that only just over 1 per cent of deaths in the army fell into this category.¹⁵ Accidents arising out of conscripts' lack of discipline, carelessness, and drunkenness were cited as by far the most common cause of peacetime deaths.¹⁶

Whatever the real figures may have been, for my purposes it is public perceptions of barracks violence that are of interest. Public opinion was obviously a matter of great concern to the military, too, whose attempts to shape perceptions of barracks life will be examined below.

In addition to raising public awareness of the plight of victimised conscripts, the CSM lobbied for various concrete mechanisms to be put in place to protect conscripts and to prevent barracks violence. These demands were summarised in the Committee's official address to the USSR

Supreme Soviet in April 1990, in which the mothers called for a number of measures to be taken with a view to improving the procedures governing investigation and prosecution of cases of barracks violence. In particular, they proposed that the Military Procurator's Office be abolished and replaced by an independent civilian body,¹⁷ and that an independent commission on peacetime deaths be established. The mothers also insisted that the practice of drafting ex-criminals be discontinued¹⁸ and that statistics on peacetime deaths be de-classified.¹⁹

10 Later that year the Committee addressed the Supreme Soviet again, expanding its list of demands to include public access to barracks, compulsory state insurance for servicemen, legislation decriminalising desertion on self-defence grounds, abolition of the *stroibar*²⁰, and new medical examination regulations and procedures preventing the drafting of conscripts in poor health.²¹

11 Meanwhile, pending the institution of legislative measures "from above" to remedy the situation, the Committee developed practical strategies aimed at preventing and counteracting barracks violence from below.

Knocking Down the Military's Potemkin Villages

12 In the late 1980s, the Soviet military came under growing pressure to open up its barracks to public scrutiny. The Defence Ministry responded by stepping up construction of "show military settlements", Potemkin villages which bore little resemblance to the overcrowded and delapidated military barracks in which most conscripts were housed²². As of 1989, as the Committee's criticism over *dedovshchina* mounted, the focus of this public relations campaign shifted to target soldiers' mothers in particular. A series of 'gatherings' of soldiers' mothers were organised by the Defence Ministry, whereby soldiers' mothers from across the country were invited to visit individual units.²³

13 Such events lasted several days at a time amidst a frenzy of highly-orchestrated Soviet-style hospitality and gallantry. The mothers were greeted at the stations and airports with bouquets of crimson carnations and military bands. They would then witness training displays and be taken on guided tours of the units, and in the evenings concerts and banquets were held in their honour.²⁴

14 In spring 1989, one such attempt to woo the mothers backfired disastrously. The Moscow Military District's Political Administration had invited soldiers' mothers to view training demonstrations by the famous Taman Guards Division, followed by a concert and a special banquet honouring the mothers. Subsequent anonymous tip-offs informed the media that several soldiers had been killed during the training display when a shell exploded. The organisers had made no mention of these deaths, and next day the soldiers' mothers' programme had continued in a festive atmosphere.²⁵ Obviously this debacle only reinforced the impression of the military's callous attitude towards conscripts which such events were designed to dispel.

15 Even when these events ran smoothly, however, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers remained unconvinced that the model units which the mothers were permitted to visit were in any way representative. Indeed, most Soviet citizens would surely have been familiar with this sort of window-dressing (*pokazukha*). *Krasnaia zvezda*, however, went to considerable effort to advertise the relief experienced by concerned soldiers' mothers after such visits. Throughout the late Gorbachev period, *Krasnaia zvezda* published numerous letters from soldiers' mothers in this vein. These letters were remarkably consistent in format and content. They all began by describing the mothers' initial anxieties over the media reports on *dedovshchina*, which were subsequently allayed upon visiting the units in person. The letters invariably ended with glowing descriptions of the barracks and the commanders, often with a word of advice to other mothers not to listen to those spreading rumours about the state of affairs in the barracks.²⁶

16 The Committee was not satisfied by the formal soldiers' mothers' visits organised and controlled by the military. It demanded genuinely open access to military units, and developed tactics aimed at breaking through the façade of the military's Potemkin villages. Committee member Liudmila Zinchenko relates:

The first time we went to a military unit, we were told 'Oh, now we'll show you this, and we'll show you that ...' And then we started to implement 'dispersion' tactics—that is, we would arrive at the unit, two or three of us would engage the commander in conversation, and the rest would scatter throughout the unit. And then when we came together again, we'd ask one another 'What did you see? And what did you see? I saw a bruise. I saw a boy crying. I saw such and such.' And this general information, as it happened, gave us a complete picture of what was going on in the unit. Because otherwise, previously, all this was veiled, it was concealed from outside view.²⁷

17 Such practices enabled the Committee to build up profiles on individual units, instituting an alternative monitoring system and sharing this information with other Committee branches. The physical presence of the mothers in the units also combated the isolation of conscripts and acted as a deterrent against violence.

The Dangers of *Glasnost*'

*Her eyes were burning with rage. She rose up above the crowd and hurled down ... scathing, merciless words, exposing the army: 'They're carving tridents on our sons' chests! They're burning the words "Glory to Ukraine!" on our sons' backs with cigarettes!'*²⁸
They're mocking our sons!'

*And she also spoke of how the soldiers should go home, and mothers should take their sons away from the army, and should picket the voenkomaty [military commissariats] ... Ah, how appealing Natal'ia Nikolaevna Kovalenko found herself at that moment.*²⁹

'Give us facts, concrete names, addresses,' the military men from the Ivano-Frankovskii garrison rejoined.

*But what do names have to do with it? The most important thing is the rush of the rally, the roar of the crowd and the tears of the mothers... —from a 1991 Krasnaia zvezda article 'If Your Son is a Deserter...'*³⁰

18 The military was unhappy about mothers intruding into the barracks, and argued that this often led to problems, undermining discipline and thwarting commanders' efforts to transform the conscripts into men.³¹ It was difficult, however, to ban the mothers from entering the barracks without creating the impression that the military had something to hide.

19 The mothers' spontaneous inspections of military units were just one aspect of their incursion into the military sphere. Even more alarmingly for the military, the mothers were transgressing other boundaries governing the acceptable limits of public debate on military affairs by commenting on barracks violence in the media. In its struggle to reinforce the old boundaries cordoning off the military from the civilian world, the military employed a number of methods aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the mothers' commentary on the military.

20 One favoured line was to depict protesting soldiers' mothers as fuelled by female hysteria.³² Women's propensity to hysteria and over-reaction was cited as necessitating restrictions on *glasnost*' in media coverage of military affairs. In 1990 the prominent military figure Colonel General Rodionov asserted that media coverage of *dedovshchina* was 'sowing panic amongst mothers whose sons are going to the army.'³³ Military spokesmen frequently argued that issues like *dedovshchina* should not be discussed publicly, and that information on such internal military problems should be restricted to the military itself. For example, one officer conceded that *dedovshchina* should be discussed, but argued that 'only military people should read this, they understand it and are in a position to draw the correct conclusions; but there's no need to frighten the mammas and grandmothers.'³⁴

21 The idea of women presuming to comment on military affairs was viewed as particularly disturbing, and was ridiculed by many commentators.³⁵ One broadside on non-specialist

meddling in military affairs referred contemptuously to 'unbalanced ladies [*baryshni*],' who demanded the abolition of conscription on the 'democratic' model but who were uninformed and failed to realise that so-called democratic armies in the west also contained 'baseness'.³⁶ Media representations of the soldiers' mothers generally portrayed them as ignorant, politically illiterate and concerned only with their personal, emotional interests.³⁷

22 The potential dangers of *glasnost* in introducing new concepts and sensitive material to the public were illustrated by a November 1989 *Krasnaia zvezda* article entitled 'The Boomerang: How a Mother Got Her Son out of Military Service.'³⁸ The article recounts a mother's cynical attempt to exploit the *dedovshchina* controversy in order to obtain her son's discharge, by attributing wounds sustained by her son in an accident to beatings by his fellow servicemen, thereby casting a slur on an innocent commander's reputation.³⁹

23 'The Boomerang' typified the general slant put on the issue of barracks violence by the military press. Numerous articles recounting cases of "fake" *dedovshchina* charges laid by soldiers' mothers were published in *Krasnaia zvezda* in the late Gorbachev period.⁴⁰ Such narratives reinforced ideas of women's emotions, particularly maternal instincts, as 'out of control' and having no place in a military environment. Furthermore, 'The Boomerang' demonstrated that mothers should not be exposed to information on barracks violence and other internal military problems. Finally, *Krasnaia zvezda*'s repeated publication of such stories cast doubt on the integrity of the CSM's claims regarding barracks violence.

24 What the author of 'The Boomerang' finds most reprehensible is the fact that in her attempt to keep her son at home, the mother took shelter behind 'the eternal trust in sacred maternal feelings'.⁴¹ This comment highlights the difficulties faced by the military in responding to protesting soldiers' mothers. In its campaign, the Committee played on the Soviet cult of motherhood. The semi-sacred status of the soldier's mother ruled out open attacks on the Committee, since this would undermine the foundations of the Soviet military ethos.

25 There were also more strictly pragmatic reasons why it made sense for women rather than men to organise such a movement. As Karklins points out with regard to the Latvian equivalent of the CSM, the League of Women,

« men were seen as being more vulnerable to retaliation. Most men in Latvia had served in the Soviet armed forces and could be recalled to active service or otherwise harassed more easily than women. The women activists also felt that they had the psychological and moral upper hand when dealing with Soviet military authorities. Many officers did not know how to react to assertive women confronting them in such unexpected ways »⁴².

26 For the most part, then, the military press avoided direct criticism of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. As we might expect, it was also conspicuously silent with regard to the concrete services offered by the Committee. The sole occasion on which *Krasnaia Zvezda* mentioned the Committee's provision of assistance and advice to conscripts and their parents appears to have been the January 1991 article 'Fantasies on the Theme of "*Dedovshchina*".'⁴³

27 The article recounts the story of a mother who was anxious about *dedovshchina* and visited her local Committee branch seeking advice on obtaining her son's transfer to a unit closer to home. The author asserts that the Committee pressured the mother into falsely declaring that all sorts of horrific tortures were being inflicted on the conscripts in her son's unit. A Committee member is cited as having told the mother,

"Here's a sample [declaration] for you, write a declaration ! ... This never happened ? No matter. Your situation is different? Never mind. Write it. That's how it's done »⁴⁴.

28 On such an account, the Committee was motivated not by a genuine concern for truth and legality, but by an irrational and vindictive anti-army bias which led its members to seek out and if necessary fabricate negative phenomena in the military.⁴⁵

- 29 Another tack was to hint that more sinister political forces were at work, suggesting that the soldiers' mothers movement were part of a wider conspiracy to destroy the military. It was frequently argued that soldiers' mothers' emotionality made them particularly vulnerable to 'certain forces,' who were hinted at here and there in dark tones. In the non-Russian republics, soldiers' mothers' activism was generally presented as being masterminded by nationalist-separatist extremists,⁴⁶ while in Russia, it was the democrats, or, as they were commonly referred to in the military press, the 'loudmouths,' who were seen as the main culprits. Conservative military writer Prokhanov later claimed, for example, that the soldiers' mothers' movement had been 'created by the "democrats"' who were intent on 'setting the [soldiers' mothers] against the army.'⁴⁷
- 30 The positing of a democratic/nationalist conspiracy to destroy the Soviet Union by attacking the army's reputation meant that criticism of *dedovshchina* could be dismissed as nothing more than a ploy in this campaign.⁴⁸ Thus one 1990 *Krasnaia zvezda* article described the military's enemies as 'hiding behind the screen of "dedovshchina"'.⁴⁹ Soviet Defence Minister Yazov also argued that the issue of *dedovshchina* was being used 'to conceal both unlawful actions and far-reaching political goals.'⁵⁰

The 'Feminisation' of Soviet Society

- 31 Another method commonly employed to undermine the legitimacy of the claims of soldiers' mothers protesting barracks violence was to present these women as 'bad' mothers who were unwilling to separate from their sons. This strategy allowed the military press to shift the blame for *dedovshchina* onto overprotective mothers who had raised infantilised sons incapable of meeting the demands of military service and of attaining manhood.
- 32 In 1988 military sociologist Deriugin claimed somewhat enigmatically that *dedovshchina* should be attributed at least in part to 'the feminisation of men' in contemporary Soviet society.⁵¹ Precisely how or why the 'feminisation' of conscripts should lead to barracks violence remains unclear; in any event, questioning the masculinity of conscripts who reported instances of *dedovshchina* conveniently enabled the military to sidestep the issue of the violence itself.
- 33 After the first fictional account of *dedovshchina* was published in late 1987, the military press dismissed it as 'the flight of imagination of a mamma's boy.'⁵² The epithet 'mama's boy' (*mamen'kii synok*) was to become a catchphrase in military commentary on *dedovshchina*. Yazov himself stated in 1989 that many conscripts were 'mama's boys,' who 'don't know how to do anything.'⁵³ Similarly, a letter published on the front page of *Krasnaia zvezda* in 1990 entitled 'I Don't Understand Those Parents,' asserted that young men complaining about the hardships of military service had been raised as 'mama's boys'.⁵⁴ The prevalence of this phrase in military accounts of *dedovshchina* takes on added significance in light of the Committee's campaign with its focus on the protective function of the mother.
- 34 Mothers were heavily implicated in the process of 'feminisation' of Soviet men.⁵⁵ The dominant role played by mothers in raising sons had, it was commonly argued, rendered many young men ill-equipped to adjust to life away from home.⁵⁶ In 1989 Colonel Soluianov, Hero of the Soviet Union and veteran of Afghanistan, noted that 'no few young men come to the army today with a "lady's" upbringing.'⁵⁷ These sentiments were echoed a month later by Kovalev who argued that:

Among conscripts there are more and more youths who have received ... as we say, a 'lady's' upbringing, who are not accustomed to labour and physical loads ... To an infantile young man [who is] not prepared for all this, the unavoidable and generally ordinary difficulties of [military] service seem perfectly intolerable, and he, forgetting about duty and honour, rushes to flee from this 'penal servitude,' from this 'horror,' to under the warm parental wing.⁵⁸

35 This juxtaposition of 'duty' and 'honour' to weakness and self-interest was a recurring motif in attempts to defend the principle of universal military service as the draft system moved into crisis. Contemptuous references to conscripts who hid behind their mothers' skirts can be read as oblique responses to the growing power of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers.

Glasnost' and Grief

*They brandished photographs of their sons and [their] black headscarves, saying 'Here is our mandate!'*⁵⁹

36 This was the response of a group of soldiers' mothers asked for their credentials by doormen at the October 1991 Congress of Servicemen's Parents in Moscow. In a sense, their grief, as signified by their black headscarves and the photographs of their dead sons, can also be viewed as their license to enter the public sphere. Maternal grief was the source of the mothers' legitimacy—their right to speak and to be heard; it was also arguably their most powerful weapon. A mother who refused to give up her son for military service was one thing; a mother who had trustingly fulfilled her duty only to be betrayed was quite another.

37 Portraits of their dead sons in black mourning-frames provided the main visual focus of this and other soldiers' mothers' protests under Gorbachev. The public display of maternal grief and loss was a method that had been used very effectively by other mothers' activists groups, most notably by Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.⁶⁰ These public performances of mourning were not only symbolically powerful, but disarming—there could be no justifiable response to this grief other than respect and sympathy. The discussion below examines the ways in which maternal grief escaped state strictures under Gorbachev and came to acquire new political valency.

Soldiers' Mothers' Grief and the War in Afghanistan

38 The immensity and significance of the outpouring of soldiers' mothers' grief under Gorbachev becomes clear if we compare it to the experience of mothers whose sons were killed in Afghanistan before *glasnost'*, at a time when public expressions of maternal grief were repressed and controlled by the state.

39 Consider for example the case of Zinaida Chivileva, a Russian mother whose son was killed in Afghanistan in 1982. After receiving notification of her son's death, Chivileva visited the local military authorities to obtain further information. Chivileva says that the commander told her briefly the date and location of her son's death, and then attempted to cut the meeting short, asking, 'Now, is there anything else I can help you with?' At this point Chivileva became angry, and retorted, 'Give me back my son!' The commander responded by committing Chivileva to a psychiatric hospital, a place where, he informed her, ways would be found to 'moderate [her] ardour'.⁶¹

40 Nor was this attitude restricted to the military—Chivileva's subsequent experience in her workplace, where she was subjected to a disciplinary campaign by colleagues who declared her too-visible mourning to be selfish, abnormal and detrimental to the collective, indicates that entrenched social mechanisms of controlling inappropriate responses to Afghan war losses operated in wider civilian society, too.⁶²

41 Chivileva's case would appear to be an extreme example of the way that the Soviet regime dealt with maternal grief during the Afghan War. The underlying principle of rendering invisible the losses incurred in Afghanistan, however, also governed more widespread practices during that war. Bereaved mothers were frequently bullied into keeping silent about their sons' deaths. For example, one mother has recounted how, like Chivileva, she visited the local *voenkomat* and asked for information on the circumstances of her son's death only to be shouted at by the military commandant: 'That [information] cannot be divulged. And you're going around and telling everyone that your son has been killed. You must not advertise this.'⁶³

42 Other aspects of grieving and remembrance were also tightly controlled. In the early years of the war, for example, the headstones of the graves of soldiers killed in Afghanistan bore only the dates of birth and death.⁶⁴ As of 1984 the inscriptions read 'Died heroically in the performance of his internationalist duty,' but still did not state the place of death.⁶⁵

Harnessing Maternal Grief: The Regime Changes Tack

43 Clearly, the grief of soldiers' mothers was viewed by the late Soviet regime as something dangerous, which needed to be hidden and contained. This was in stark contrast to the official veneration of maternal sacrifice and loss that was so central to the Soviet World War Two iconography.

44 But there were limits to the extent to which deaths in Afghanistan could be concealed. Attempts to do so ran the obvious risk of alienating the relatives and friends of the dead. Furthermore, official security-related reasons for censoring information on the war notwithstanding, this silence could be interpreted as an admission of the illegitimacy of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. This was particularly so after Gorbachev came to power, as grieving mothers sought out and received the attention of the democratic media. Eventually, the military press appears to have arrived at the realisation that if it did not mention the grieving mothers, the democratic press certainly would, and that the plight of these mothers was a potentially damaging weapon able to be used to discredit the regime.

45 The first sign of the change in the official line on maternal opposition to the Afghan war was handed down by Gorbachev in 1985. According to Cherniaev, a 'flood' of letters (mostly from women) opposing the use of conscripts in Afghanistan had come into the Central Committee and to *Pravda* as soon as Gorbachev became General Secretary.⁶⁶ At a Politburo session in October 1985 when Gorbachev declared that a decision had to be taken on Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, he illustrated his point by reading aloud from a number of bereaved soldiers' mothers' letters which questioned the validity of 'internationalist duty' and criticised the Soviet leadership harshly for using untrained new recruits in the conflict.⁶⁷

46 As Afghanistan came to be discussed more openly in the late 1980s, the regime made attempts to control and harness maternal grief for official state propaganda purposes. Expressions of concern for the plight of mothers whose sons had been killed, wounded or were missing in Afghanistan became a commonplace in the military press.⁶⁸ In October 1989 the USSR Defence Ministry officially endorsed the new Council of Mothers and Widows and Warrior-Internationalists Killed while Fulfilling their Military Duty in Afghanistan, thanking them publicly for their sacrifices and for 'raising worthy sons of the fatherland.'⁶⁹

47 The regime manipulated the mothers' desire to keep their sons' memories alive and to make sense of their deaths by mobilising bereaved mothers to give lectures on their sons' heroism at local schools and other institutions. These ritualised public performances aimed to reactivate the figure of the stoic soldier's mother of World War Two, transforming maternal grief and despair into pride.

48 One Afghan mother has told of her initial collusion in such a scheme and subsequent realisation of her own complicity and blindness:

"What did he die for ? Why him ? ... I force myself to be with people, I take Sasha with me, I talk about him. Once I gave a talk at the Polytechnic and afterwards a student came up to me. 'If you'd stuffed less patriotism into him he'd be alive today,' she told me. When I heard that I felt ill and fainted. I gave that talk for Sasha's sake. He can't be allowed to just disappear like that ... Now they say it was all a dreadful mistake—for us and for the Afghan people. I used to hate Sasha's killers ... now I hate the State which sent him there. Don't mention my son's name. He belongs to us now. I won't give him, even his name, to anyone".⁷⁰

49 This woman's response was to retreat into private grief again; many others opted instead to bring their grief into the public sphere on their own terms.

50 The Afghan war was not an easy war to sell. The World War Two iconography of the soldier's mother bearing her grief stoically was clearly not applicable, primarily because the main rationale for the mother's sacrifice (the need to protect the homeland from an external invader) was absent.

51 The contrast between the two wars was articulated by one mother whose son was killed in Afghanistan:

When my son was taken, it was particularly difficult for me because I had nothing to lean on emotionally. I couldn't say to myself: this is essential, the country needs it, the people [need it]. The Afghan War is not the Great Patriotic War, such as it was for our fathers. That was a people's war, everyone understood it. But in this war I didn't find any logic, [or] commonsense, and so it was doubly hard.⁷¹

Peacetime Deaths under Gorbachev

52 'Internationalism' had been shaky enough as a justification for soldiers' deaths in Afghanistan, but it goes without saying that no even remotely plausible 'meaning' could be found in peacetime deaths. As we have seen, the military press attempted to make sense of this phenomenon by presenting it as a symptom of social decay and the erosion of Soviet values in wider civilian society. But even were this interpretation accepted, it could bring no solace.

53 The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers' widely publicised claims that fifteen thousand conscripts had been killed in peacetime during the past four years lent fresh impetus to the movement. The previous taboo on peacetime deaths had served to isolate mothers in their grief; now they became aware that their situation was part of a large-scale phenomenon, and that they were not alone. The peacetime deaths issue also mobilised many mothers of conscripts currently undergoing military service.

54 The Soviet military, which had felt so threatened by angry outbursts from isolated individual mothers during the Afghanistan war, now found itself faced with a mass outpouring of maternal grief, as thousands of mothers of soldiers took their anger and grief to the streets for the first time in Soviet history—an outpouring which the regime was no longer able to contain. Mass soldiers' mothers' rallies over peacetime deaths were held in Moscow's Gorky Park in early June 1990, with bereaved mothers demanding Yazov's dismissal and the abolition of conscription.⁷² A series of hunger strikes and other protests by grieving soldiers' mothers to draw attention to peacetime deaths continued throughout 1990 and 1991.⁷³ The impact of these public representations of maternal suffering was compounded by the military's ineptitude in managing and responding to the peacetime deaths issue.

Military Responses to Maternal Grief

55 The military proved highly resistant to demands for more *glasnost* in the reporting of peacetime deaths, and revelations of military cover-ups added to public outrage over the deaths themselves. Isolated calls from within the military for de-classification of statistics on peacetime deaths as a means of rebuilding relations with the community appear to have fallen upon deaf ears.⁷⁴

56 An important point of contention was the non-transparency of procedures governing the investigation of peacetime deaths. The CSM expressed its lack of confidence in the Military Procurator's Office on numerous occasions,⁷⁵ and one of its central demands was that this body be replaced by independent civilian investigators.⁷⁶ Many soldiers' mothers were politicised precisely by their exposure to the military procurators' incompetence and sometimes clear corruption, to which they were alerted by discrepancies in the documentation related to their sons' deaths.⁷⁷ Bereaved parents had very few rights when it came to obtaining access to information about their sons' deaths, which was classified, or to their sons' remains, which were usually buried at their place of service.⁷⁸

- 57 The Military Procurator's Office was generally obstructive, and at times resorted to outright intimidation of troublesome soldiers' mothers, most notoriously in the case of Liubov' Lyamar'.⁷⁹ After Lyamar' demanded that her son's body be exhumed in order to ascertain the cause of death, the Military Procurator's Office had her son's corpse decapitated before returning it to her for burial. Upon demanding that the head be returned to her, Lyamar' was reportedly told, 'You yourself wanted an exhumation, and the head has been added to the criminal case as material evidence.'⁸⁰
- 58 Publicly grieving mothers were a loud reminder to the military of something that it would much rather forget. Public sympathies were clearly on the side of the mothers and there was no way in which the old methods of idealising the soldiers' deaths or suppressing the protests could comfortably be employed.
- 59 The military thus found itself backed into a corner, and occasions inevitably arose in which it came into open conflict with the protesting mothers. In September 1990, for example, troops were sent in to disperse a soldiers' mothers' picket at the Defence Ministry building in Moscow. Moscow Military Commandant Major General Smirnov, who led the operation, reportedly tore up one of the dead soldiers' portraits, saying: 'You yourselves brought up such mongrels, [that's why] they get killed.'⁸¹ Obviously, occasional outbursts and retaliations in this vein could not be reconciled with the military's traditional image as a benevolent and paternal force.
- 60 Such cases were rare, however; for the most part the military appeared to follow a course of avoiding direct mention of these protests.⁸² Instead, the military press aimed to discredit publicly grieving mothers obliquely, challenging their claim to moral authority by running profiles of exemplary bereaved soldiers' mothers. Such mothers kept their grief private, and were not seduced by what was generally presented as a 'fashion' for showy protests and general troublemaking.⁸³
- 61 As we have seen, one of the military's standard moves was to deflect responsibility for the mothers' suffering by attributing peacetime deaths to the 'poor quality' of the conscripts (who were undisciplined, foolish, drunken, and so on). Occasionally the military press blamed peacetime deaths on the soldiers' mothers themselves. For example, one article related the case of a soldier's mother who had publicly implicated the military in the suicide of her son. The article maintained that the soldier's suicide had in fact been prompted by his receiving a letter from his mother in which she threatened suicide herself. The mother was said to be 'speculating' on her son's death, and salving her conscience by shifting the blame onto the military.⁸⁴
- 62 Furthermore, it was often implied that the 'real' victims of peacetime deaths in the barracks were the military commanders implicated in these deaths and the reputation of the military in general. Rather than focusing on developing mechanisms to prevent peacetime deaths, military debate on the issue tended to focus on the fact that commanders were being 'persecuted' and 'indiscriminately punished' for crimes committed by their subordinates.⁸⁵
- 63 Finally, the military press attempted to take the sting out of the mounting corruption charges levelled against the military and the Military Procurator's Office by the CSM. Responding to allegations of cover-ups of violent peacetime deaths, the military press argued that the lack of openness regarding the details of conscripts' deaths was in fact motivated by a desire to protect the feelings of bereaved mothers. One article on peacetime deaths thus emphasised that it was a common and accepted practice of commanders to bend the truth in conveying circumstances of soldiers' deaths to their loved ones. The author drew an analogy to the World War Two practice whereby commanders would comfort parents by recasting their sons' deaths as heroic, even if they had in fact died cowardly deaths—missing the point that the current wave of soldiers' deaths was shocking precisely because the deaths had occurred not in the course of a war, but during peacetime.⁸⁶

64 In general, the military seems to have failed to appreciate the fact that what was required was an attempt at an honest appraisal of the situation and an acknowledgement of the military's own responsibility for the welfare of conscripts in its care, followed by a clear undertaking to increase accountability. Instead, military responses showed greater concern for saving face than anything else. Occasional expressions of sympathy extended to the mothers by military spokesmen were always heavily qualified and outweighed by the defensiveness which characterised discussion of this issue.

Conclusion

65 There were good reasons for the late Soviet regime's nervousness regarding the political potential of grieving soldiers' mothers. The deaths of conscripts, both in Afghanistan and at home, was an issue that galvanised anti-military and anti-regime public opinion. Ultimately, by attempting to keep these deaths quiet, the regime succeeded only in alienating further a large sector of the population and unwittingly creating a new class of martyrs with considerable moral and symbolic authority.

66 Grieving soldiers' mothers symbolised the growing rift between the 'people' and the Soviet army, giving the lie to the often repeated slogan that, in contrast to the situation in bourgeois states, 'the Soviet army and the people are one'. In 1988 a screening of the controversial documentary 'Pain' which focused particularly on the suffering of mothers of soldiers killed in Afghanistan, was held at a cinema in Moscow. When speakers in the post-film discussion session praised the film for showing 'the people's truth about the Afghan war,' a general in the audience rose to his feet, declaring, 'Mothers are not the people.'⁸⁷ The general's response seems to me to encapsulate something of the tone colouring military responses to the soldier's mothers' criticism. The military's stubborn refusal to accept or adapt to the changing climate of public opinion under Gorbachev made the prospect of reconciliation between the militarist and maternalist camps a slight one.

67 The military's attempts to deny and downplay the existence of barracks violence were largely counterproductive, only reinforcing the impression of conscripts' vulnerability. For the most part, the Soviet public appears to have been unconvinced by the military's counterattacks on the CSM. A survey of 1,898 people undertaken in early 1991, for example, found that 62 per cent of respondents believed that it was unfair to accuse critics of the army of "insufficient patriotism". Only 8 per cent of respondents accepted the notion that the military's complaints about criticism of the army represented attempts 'to preserve ideals and traditions for young people.' Thirty-one per cent of respondents, on the other hand, viewed the military's attacks on its critics as motivated by the desire "to preserve [the military's] political influence in the country". Crucially, the survey indicated that 60 per cent of respondents believed that 'the army itself, commanders who allow and encourage violence amongst subordinates' were responsible for *dedovshchina*.⁸⁸

68 The ramifications of the *dedovshchina* controversy extended beyond the issue of conscripts' welfare—in a sense this debate was about breaking down the barriers which separated the military from the civilian world. The public outcry over barracks violence illustrates the ways in which the forces of *glasnost*, once unleashed, proved impossible to contain. Independent organisations like the CSM seized the opportunity provided by Gorbachev's reforms to take *glasnost* much further than was acceptable to conservative forces within the Soviet establishment. The military's ultimate failure to quash public debate over barracks violence was in large measure the result of the soldiers' mothers' dogged campaign to raise public awareness of this issue.

69 This article leaves the CSM at a high point. In the wake of the failed coup of August 1991, the CSM's dealings with the authorities took place in a climate of receptivity and sympathy to maternalist thinking. Yeltsin's regime seemed to offer the promise of genuine military

reform, a new approach to military service that took the rights of conscripts into account, and renunciation of the use of coercion against Russian citizens.

70 This promise, however, was not fulfilled; indeed, Yeltsin's relations with the CSM would never be so good again. The period covered in this article was only the first stage in an ongoing struggle against human rights abuses in the Soviet, and now the Russian military. The post-Soviet Russian army has inherited most of the problems which plagued the Soviet army, including *dedovshchina* and the problem of dealing with secessionist regions within the Russian Federation.⁸⁹ Soldiers' mothers continue to fight the same battles over the same issues. Meanwhile, the advances of the Gorbachev era continue to be eroded by the war in Chechnya. Overall, the resurgence of militarist discourses under Putin shows just how fragile the soldiers' mothers' achievements have been.

Notes

1 Vladimir Uspenskii, 'Tainyi sovetnik vozhdia,' *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, no. 21, November 1990, p. 84.

2 The euphemistic term for *dedovshchina* favoured by the military.

3 Valentina D. Mel'nikova, author's interview, Moscow, 21 October 1998.

4 Sergei Kornilov, 'Dvizhenie soldatskikh materei: ne v nogu, no soobshcha,' *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, no. 173, 17 August 1991, 3.

5 Currently the organisation's full title is the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia.

6 The initial impetus for the soldiers' mothers' movement was the issue of deferments from military service for tertiary students, which had been restricted in the early 1980s. After a group of mothers successfully lobbied the USSR Supreme Soviet and attained the re-institution of educational deferments in spring 1989, it was decided to give the movement a concrete organisation base, and the CSM was formally established in April 1989.

7 Strictly speaking *dedovshchina* is a quite specific term referring to the informal power hierarchies governing relations between conscripts based on their length of service. In this article I follow the practice widely adhered to in the Soviet media of using the term more loosely to refer to the associated violence in the barracks, and as shorthand for the tyranny inherent throughout the Soviet military hierarchy. It should be noted that barracks violence also often took the form of *zemliachestvo*, or *gruppovshchina*, whereby conscripts from particular regions or republics banded together and persecuted rival ethnic groups. Levinson makes a convincing case that these ethnic divisions amongst conscripts were drawn as a survival mechanism in response to *dedovshchina* and its associated violence, which indirectly created a sense of ethnic identity between people who may not have felt any commonality in civilian life; Aleksei Levinson, 'Ob estetike nasiliia. Armiia i obshchestvo v SSSR/Rossii za poslednie 10 let,' *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1999).

8 The public controversy over *dedovshchina* can be traced to a July 1988 article in *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, describing an incident in which a conscript who had been the victim of ongoing abuse in the barracks eventually snapped and turned his weapon against his fellow servicemen, killing eight; M. Mel'nik, 'Intsident v spetsvagone', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 20 July 1988, cited Steven L. Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1998, p. 185, and Aleksei Levinson, 'Ob estetike nasiliia. Armiia i obshchestvo v SSSR/Rossii za poslednie 10 let', *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1999. The taboo on mentioning *dedovshchina* had first been broken in works of fiction on the pages of the so-called 'thick' literary journals, despite attempts on the part of the military to prevent their publication. The first of these, a novella by Yurii Poliakov, was published in the journal *Yunost'* in November 1987; Y. Poliakov, 'Sto dnei do prikaza', *Yunost'*, no. 11, 1987, pp. 46-68. *Yunost'* received numerous readers' responses to the story, both positive and negative, a selection of which were published in 'Skol'ko dnei do prikaza?', *Yunost'*, no. 5, 1988, pp. 90-1. For an account of the debate over Poliakov's

work see Sergei Zamascikov, 'Insiders' Views of the Soviet Army', *Problems of Communism*, vol. xxxvii, nos. 3-4, May-August 1988, pp. 110-16. Another highly controversial novella on this theme was Sergei Kaledin's 'Stroibat' which dealt with *dedovshchina* in the military-construction units; Sergei Kaledin, 'Stroibat', *Novyi mir*, no. 4, April 1989, pp. 59-89.

9 A. Prokhanov, 'Zametki konservatora,' *Nash Sovremennik*, no. 5, 1990, reprinted in L. N. Dobrokhotov *et al*, *Nesokrushimaia i legendarnaia: V ogne politicheskikh batalii 1985-1993 gg.*, Terra, Moscow, 1994, p. 211.

10 Liudmila N. Zinchenko, author's interview, Moscow, 20 October 1998.

11 This figure appears to have originally been put forward by Vladimir Lopatin, USSR Supreme Soviet Deputy and one of the most high-profile young reformist officers, who was later to work closely with Yeltsin; see V. Marchenko, 'Pravoporiadok v armii—glazami pravozashchitnikov,' *Za mirnuuu Rossiuu*, vol. 2, no. 20, March 1999.

12 See Stephen Foye, 'Moscow TV: 15,000 Soldiers Dead over Last Four Years,' *RFE/RL Daily Report*, 5 June 1990. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers had a particularly high media profile in summer 1990. For other reports on their public campaign during this period see *RFE/RL Daily Report*, 5 June 1990; 2 July 1990; 17 July 1990; 20 July 1990; and 24 July 1990. See also Gennadii Zhavoronkov, "'Spasi i sokhrani!'"—shepchut soldatskie materi, provozhaia svoikh detei v armiiu,' *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 29, 22 July 1990, p. 11; Stephen Foye, 'Non-Combat Deaths: Latest Gorbachev Decree Reflects Army's Woes,' *RFE/RL Report on the USSR*, 13 September 1990; and Shreeves, 'Mothers against the Draft', pp. 3–8.

13 In August 1989 the General Staff stated that 13,833 Soviet troops had died in Afghanistan from 25 December 1979 to 15 February 1989; cited A. Liakhovskii, 'Na afganskoii vyzhzhennoi zemle,' *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh sil*, no. 22, November 1990, p. 62. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers estimated that thirty-eight thousand noncombat deaths had occurred in the Soviet army during the same period; cited Mark Galeotti, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Last War*, Frank Cass, London, 1995, p. 97. For an example of democratic commentary highlighting the irony inherent in the fact that soldiers were more at risk in peacetime conditions at home than they had been in combat in Afghanistan see A. Demchenko, letter to editor, *Ogonek*, no. 29, July 1989, p. 5.

14 'Zhertvy dedovshchiny?', *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 199, 30 August 1990, p. 4.

15 Ibid. The 75-80 per cent figure appeared in the newspaper *Kuranty* in 1990; cited Galeotti, *Afghanistan*, p. 97.

16 See V. Kaushanskii, 'Osennie pikety,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 258, 10 November 1989, p. 2, and I. Ivaniuk, '...I strakhovoi polis,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 5, 8 January 1991, p. 1. On occasion soldiers' mothers were directly implicated in such deaths by the military press; see Yu. Bychenkov, 'Dve sud'by,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 264, 16 November 1990, p. 4, which recounts the case of a conscript who died in an accident while drunk on vodka sent to him in a parcel by his mother.

17 Formally the Military Procurator's Office was part of the Office of the Procurator-General. Financially, however, and in numerous informal ways, the Military Procurator's Office was dependent upon the Defence Ministry, and military procurators were reportedly frequently willing to register violent deaths as suicides or natural deaths in exchange for housing and other resources; see William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998, p. 366. On the relationship between the Defence Ministry and the Military Procurator's Office see further 'Konets revoliutsionnym tribunalam', *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, no. 172, 10 September 1991, p. 1; 'Femida zhdet resheniia', *Trud*, no. 229, 2 October 1991, p. 3; and Valerii Vyzhutovich, 'V kakom zvanii zakon?', *Izvestiia*, no. 246, 15 October 1991, p. 3. *Krasnaia Zvezda* denied that the Military Procurator's Office was in any way compromised by its links to the Defence Ministry; see for example L. Zaika, 'Na prestupnost' – yedinyim frontom', *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 217, 21 September 1989, p. 2.

18 The practice of drafting youths with criminal records, partly to compensate for falling birth-rates in the Slavic republics and difficulties meeting the draft quotas, was one of several factors contributing to the singular scale and brutality of bullying and initiation rites in the Soviet military. Other such factors include structural features of the Soviet military (such as

the principle of *yedinonachalie*; the entrenched culture of *krugovaia poruka* or 'collective responsibility' at the lower levels; the low number of non-commissioned officers); and other demographic factors.

19 Gennadii Zhavoronkov, "'Spasi i sokhrani!'"—shepchut soldatskie materi, provozhaia svoikh detei v armiiu,' *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 29, 22 July 1990, p. 11.

20 The popular term for the military-construction units (detachments) (VKOs) located within various Soviet civilian ministries and departments. Mortality and crime rates were especially high in the *stroibat*, which were notorious for their harsh conditions, poor safety record, corruption, and general neglect of the welfare of the conscripts.

21 N. Nikolaev, untitled, *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 46, November 1990, p. 8.

22 Mikhail Tsyppin, 'The Soviet Military: *Glasnost*' against Secrecy,' *Problems of Communism*, vol. xl, no. 3, May–June 1991, p. 59.

23 See N. Polianskaia, 'Slet soldatskikh materei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 230, 6 October 1989, p. 2; 'Mosty doveriia,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 237, 15 October 1989, pp. 1–2; V. Kaushanskii, 'Osennie pikety,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 258, 10 November 1989, p. 2; 'Slet soldatskikh materei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 258, 10 November 1989, p. 4; and N. Gusarov, 'Gotovnost' k dialogu,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 16, 20 January 1990, p. 2.

24 See for example N. Polianskaia, 'Slet soldatskikh materei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 230, 6 October 1989, p. 2, and 'Slet soldatskikh materei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 258, 10 November 1989, p. 4.

25 I. Mamicheva, letter to the editor, *Ogonek*, no. 21, May 1989, p. 7. See also Deputy Military Procurator Nagibin's comments on this incident; V. Nagibin, letter to editor, *Ogonek*, no. 29, July 1989, p. 5.

26 See for example letters to the editor, 'Teper' my spokoiny za synovei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 202, 2 September 1989, p. 3; 'Opaseniia byli naprasny,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 270, 25 November 1989, p. 1; 'Yesli slushat' "znaiushchikh" liudei..., ' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 118, 24 May 1990, p. 5; and 'My spokoiny za Andreiia,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 22, 29 January 1991, p. 2, all of which take the form described above. See also two articles summarising and paraphrasing similar letters received by soldiers' mothers; V. Yermolin, 'Diapazon pluralizma,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 275, 1 December 1989, p. 1, and G. Barnev, 'Neizvestnaia armiiia?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 265, 20 November 1991, p. 3.

27 Committee of Soldiers' Mothers member Liudmila N. Zinchenko, author's interview, Moscow, 20 October 1998.

28 Whether such a slogan would have been used by or against Ukrainian conscripts is unclear. In general, the inclusion of this line seems odd in the given context; this may be a case of creative misquoting on the part of the military press.

29 Protesting soldiers' mothers were frequently depicted as motivated primarily by vanity and exhibitionism; see for example the semi-fictional description of a mother whose son had been killed in Afghanistan and who publicly refused to receive a medal on his behalf. The mother is portrayed as acting purely out of self-interest (the author claims that she had made herself up specially for the TV cameras), seeking attention and 'cheap popularity'. The author berates her, 'so the glory of your hero-son is alien, incomprehensible to you—then return the medal without making a noisy spectacle under the floodlights, without insulting the honour of the dead soldier'; Vladimir Uspenskii, 'Tainyi sovetnik vozhdia,' *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, no. 21, November 1990, p. 84. The mother's action is also attributed to the democrats' campaign to 'whip up anti-Afghan [war] ecstasy'.

30 V. Popov, 'Yesli syn—dezertir..., ' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, nos. 9–10, 12 January 1991, p. 3.

31 On the dangerous effects of parental visits see for example V. Salmin, 'S etim nel'zia ne schitat'sia,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 252, 2 November 1989, p. 2, and the case of private Gelashvili described in V. Usol'tsev, 'Za gran'iu razumnogo,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 269, 24 November 1989, p. 2.

32 See for example *Krasnaia zvezda*'s coverage of the founding All-Union Congress of Servicemen's Parents which states that 'more than once, the fever pitch of emotions drowned out common sense' and describes the women speaking at the congress as 'tearing

the microphones away from one another'; A. Vorob'ev, 'Po antiarmeiskomu stsenariiu?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 208, 9 September 1990, p. 1.

33 I. Rodionov, 'Kogda perestanut glumit'sia nad armiei i derzhavoi?,' *Molodaia gvardiia*, no. 9, 1990, reproduced in Dobrokhotov *et al*, *Nesokrushimaia i legendarnaia*, p. 63.

34 S. Martynov, Soviet army officer, cited N. Andreev, V. Litovkin, 'Tri pis'ma iz armii. 3. Gotovy vypolnit' prikaz', *Izvestiia*, no. 40, 15 February 1991, p. 3.

35 In a 1989 *Krasnaia Zvezda* interview with 'army sports master' Tiurin, for example, entitled 'How to Become a Real Man,' Turin complains about critics of the military, concluding 'But male journalists aren't so bad; I am less able to understand those ... women who are attacking our army'; cited A. Goncharov, 'Kak stat' nastoiashchim muzhchinoi,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 191, 19 August 1989, p. 3. When reformist forces within the military later proposed appointing a woman as Russian Defence Minister, misogynist rhetoric reached new heights of emotional intensity; see Anatolii Lanshchikov, 'Shtrikhi,' *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, no. 43, 23 October 1992, p. 11.

36 A. Fomenko, 'Predannaia armiia,' *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, no. 4, 26 January 1990, p. 9.

37 For example, one article regarding a recent survey of women's attitudes towards military service and other related issues stated, 'It is significant that the number of [respondents] who had difficulty answering questions connected with the service of their own sons in the army was minimal ... although up to 50% of the women were unable to answer a series of current political questions'; Galina Sillaste, 'Zhenshchiny zashchishchaiut svoikh synovei,' *Narodnyi deputat*, no. 18, 1990, p. 56.

38 V. Kaushanskii, 'Bumerang: kak mat' syna ot sluzhby izbavliala,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 259, 11 November 1989, p. 2.

39 Ibid. The 'boomerang' in the title refers to the criminal charges faced by the mother after she was found out in her deception.

40 See for example V. Kovalev, 'Za chto zh ty nas opozoril, synok... Pochemu daleko ne kazhdaia mat' skazhet eti slova sbezhavshemu iz armii soldatu?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 236, 14 October 1989, p. 4; V. Yevgen'ev, 'Nespravedlivye upreki,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 258, 10 November 1989, p. 1; Yu. Gladkevich, 'Za shirmoi "dedovshchina",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 27, 2 February 1990, p. 2; A. Volk, "Derzhis', my dobivaemsia...",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 38, 15 February 1990, p. 2; and 'Fantazii na temu "dedovshchina",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 12, 16 January 1991, p. 2.

41 V. Kaushanskii, 'Bumerang: kak mat' syna ot sluzhby izbavliala,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 259, 11 November 1989, p. 2.

42 Rasma Karklins, *Ethnopolitics and the Transition to Democracy: The Collapse of the USSR and Latvia*, The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, D. C., 1994, p. 73. Parallels could be drawn here with the *bab'i bunty*, Russian and Ukrainian peasant women's protests during collectivisation. Viola's study of these protests argues that the women, conscious of the fact that the authorities were less likely to use force against them than against the men of the village, manipulated stereotypes of women as irrational and hysterical in order to further their own political ends; see Lynne Viola, 'Bab'i Bunty and Peasant Women's Protest during Collectivization,' in Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola, eds., *Russian Peasant Women*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, pp. 189–205.

43 'Fantazii na temu "dedovshchina",' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 12, 16 January 1991, p. 2.

44 Ibid. The mother in question had reportedly since recanted and begged pardon of her son's military collective for offending them.

45 Protesting soldiers' mothers were also frequently represented as being so blinkered and hostile towards the military as to be gratified by any abuses that they uncovered. For example, one military commander was cited in November 1991 as saying that he had the impression that some of the parents visiting his units had in fact been disappointed to find that everything was in order; G. Barnev, 'Neizvestnaia armiia?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 265, 20 November 1991, p. 3. This suggestion that protesting soldiers' mothers were only interested in the negative side of army life was also made on other occasions. See for example Zieminysh's account of a demonstration of Latvian soldiers' mothers. He claims that the mothers responded 'with

restraint, if not coldly' to servicemen speaking at the rally who maintained that they had not come into any contact with *dedovshchina* during their military service, since 'this was not what [the mothers] wanted to hear.' Zieminysh contrasts this to the mothers' enthusiastic applauding of two servicemen who spoke of their harsh treatment in the military and their eventual discharge for health reasons; M. Zieminysh, 'Strannye prizyvy,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 220, 24 September 1989, p. 3.

46 For example, one article about a Latvian soldiers' mothers' demonstration asserted that the demonstration had been secretly organised by Latvian nationalists; *ibid.*

47 Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Pod Argunom,' *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, no. 26, 10 March 1995, p. 3. Publications like *Moskovskie Novosti*, *Moskovskii Komsomolets* and *Ogonek* came in for particular criticism, as the military accused them of printing vastly exaggerated and uninformed articles about army life designed to frighten soldiers' mothers. *Ogonek* was seen by the military as the main villain in the *dedovshchina* controversy, or as one critic put it, the 'guiding spirit' in the campaign to weaken and destroy the Soviet army; I. Dynin, 'Sviatoe delo i krivaia ten', *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil*, no. 22, November 1990, p. 6. *Ogonek's* coverage of *dedovshchina* was the subject of frequent criticism from the military during this period; see for example N. Medvedev, 'S poslednei nadezhdoi na pomoshch', *Pravitel'stvennyi vestnik*, no. 39, September 1990, p. 12, and N. Medvedev, 'Prizyvnik, piketchiki, otkazniki...', *Pravitel'stvennyi vestnik*, no. 48, November 1990, p. 12. (Medvedev was a representative of the Defence Ministry's press service.)

48 See for example a 1989 *Pravda* article which stated that 'anti-Army manifestations often feed parasitically on speculations concerning existing shortcomings in the Army, above all on "hazing" [i.e. *dedovshchina*]; 'The Defense of the Fatherland Permits no Regionalism, Selfishness, or Self-Seeking,' *Pravda*, 13 November 1989, translation in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. xli, no. 6, 1989, p. 3.

49 The author also dismisses talk of people 'becoming aware of their rights' as 'abstract' and all part of the wider plot; Yu. Gladkevich, 'Za shirmoi "dedovshchina",' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 27, 2 February 1990, p. 2. In M. Zieminysh, 'Skol'ko shansov pobedit?', *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 268, 23 November 1989, p. 1, the head of the *politotdel* of the Latvian military commissariat also describes the Latvian League of Women as playing a 'dishonest and dirty game' and 'striving to further ideas alien to socialism under cover of slogans of democratisation [and] *glasnost*'.

50 Cited 'Vesennii prizyv,' *Izvestiia*, no. 71, 12 March 1990, p. 3. One November 1990 article claimed that soldiers' mothers picketing the Moscow *voenkomat* had been paid (the author does not specify by whom) to go there and 'yell'; N. Krivomazov, 'Voенно-polevoi sabotazh,' *Pravda*, no. 321, 17 November 1990, p. 4.

51 From an interview published in *Argumenty i fakty*, 27 August–2 September 1988, reproduced in Dobrokhotov *et al.*, *Nesokrushimaia i legendarnaia*, p. 41. Here Deriugin was engaging in the ongoing public debates on the 'feminisation' of men and 'masculinisation' of women in Soviet society which dated to the 1970s. For more information on these debates see Lynne Attwood, 'The New Soviet Man and Woman—Soviet Views on Psychological Sex Differences,' in Barbara Holland, ed., *Soviet Sisterhood: British Feminists on Women in the USSR*, Fourth Estate, London, 1985, pp. 54–77, and Elizabeth Waters, 'Sex and Semiotic Confusion: Report from Moscow,' *Australian Feminist Studies*, no. 12, Summer 1990, pp. 1–14.

52 Cited Sergei Zamascikov, 'Insiders' Views of the Soviet Army,' *Problems of Communism*, vol. xxxvii, nos. 3-4, May-August 1988, p. 114.

53 Yelena Agapova, 'Vremia stavit voprosy. Kak ikh reshat?', *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 173, 28 July 1989, p. 2. See also Khorev's attack on 'spoiled and pampered' conscripts; Aleksei Khorev, 'Dolg i chest', *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 297, 27 December 1991, p. 2.

54 The writer goes on to conclude that 'I do not understand those parents who strive, using truths and untruths, to protect their offspring from the difficulties of military service'; V. Pankov, 'Ne ponimaiu tekhn roditelei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 73, 29 March 1990, p. 1.

55 Attwood writes that in the late Soviet period inadequate mothers increasingly served as scapegoats for a range of Soviet social problems such as hooliganism and alcoholism. She points out that 'It is easier to blame the mother for not bringing up her children properly than to examine the very fabric of Soviet life for clues to the genesis of antisocial behaviour'; Attwood, 'The New Soviet Man and Woman,' p. 72. The ways in which inadequate Soviet mothers served as scapegoats for Soviet social problems is also addressed in Annie Phizacklea, Hilary Pilkington and Shirin Rai, 'Introduction,' in Shirin Rai, Hilary Pilkington and Annie Phizacklea, eds., *Women in the Face of Change: The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China*, Routledge, London, 1992, pp. 5–6. The predominance of female teachers in the Soviet education system was also seen as having a negative effect on the masculinity of young Soviet males; see Mary Buckley, 'The "Woman Question" in the Contemporary Soviet Union,' in Sonia Kruks, Rayna Rapp, and Marilyn B. Young, *Promissory Notes: Women in the Transition to Socialism*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1989, p. 256.

56 At the same time, the poor quality of conscripts was elsewhere blamed on the lack of maternal attention, as in the case of one soldier whose mother had deserted him at an early age; Aleksei Khorev, 'Chto s nami?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 276, 2 December 1989, p. 3.

57 A. Soluianov, 'Ya protiv "damskogo" vospitaniia,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 214, 17 September 1989, p. 2, in which he argues that conscripts should be put through more rigorous physical training. He goes on: 'I foresee the objection: ... today's conscript is yesterday's schoolboy, often spoilt by excessive attention.' While Soluianov concedes that this is a problem, he argues that it is important to realise that men are not 'born' soldiers. He cites the case of Afghanistan where 'weaklings' were excluded from important missions: 'Cruel? But fair. We couldn't pay in blood for a "lady's" upbringing.'

58 V. Kovalev, 'Za chto zh ty nas opozoril, synok ... Pochemu daleko ne kazhdaia mat' skazhet eti slova sbezhavshemu iz armii soldatu?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 236, 14 October 1989, p. 4.

59 A. Vorob'ev, 'Materinskie nadezhdy,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 236, 15 October 1991, p. 1.

60 For discussion of the ways in which such portraits functioned in Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo's protests, see Andrea Malin, 'Mothers Who Won't Disappear,' *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1987, pp. 187–213, and Sara Ruddick, "'Woman of Peace': A Feminist Construction,' in Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin, eds., *The Women and War Reader*, New York University Press, New York and London, 1998, pp. 216–17.

61 Sh. Zhakhsybaeva, 'Mat' soldata,' *Izvestiia*, no. 217, 4 August 1990, p. 6.

62 Ibid.

63 Cited Ales' Adamovich, 'Spriatannaia voina,' *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 33, 19 August 1990, p. 14. There are many stories of such cases; in a 1990 interview, for example, a mother whose son was killed in Afghanistan describes a 'shadow of secrecy' surrounding information about her son's death; see L. Ovchinnikova, "'Svet lampy vospalennoi...'", *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, no. 157, 11 July 1990, p. 2. Frequently parents were not informed when their sons were sent to Afghanistan; see for example Monakhov's account of an incident in 1980 when a female colleague whose son had been called up to the landing troops was worried because a parcel she had sent to her son had been returned. Monakhov rang his colleagues at the *Krasnaia Zvezda* editorial office to ask for information; they checked the son's details and then told Monakhov: "'You understand... He's THERE...'" "Where's 'there'?" I said, bewildered. "Well, where? ..." — they coughed meaningfully into the receiver. "Where are the landing troops now? Got it?" — V. Monakhov, "'Afganistan v nashei sud'be",' *Narodnyi deputat*, no. 10, 1990, p. 114. Mothers whose sons were taken prisoner in Afghanistan were similarly kept in the dark; see the account of one mother who, upon making an inquiry to the Defence Ministry when her son's letters stopped arriving in the early 1980s, was told "'What POWs? What are you talking about? There is no war in Afghanistan.'" She received notification that he was officially missing only several years later; Irina Lagunina, 'Call from a Mother's Heart,' *New Times*, no. 30, 1989, pp. 36–8.

64 See Galeotti, *Afghanistan*, pp. 85–6.

65 See A. Simurov and P. Studenikin, 'Returning to what was Printed: "There is no Gratitude in their Hearts",' *Pravda*, 25 November 1987, translated in *The Current Digest of the Soviet*

Press, vol. xxxix, no. 48, 1987, p. 7. The controversial documentary about the war in Afghanistan, 'Pain', released in 1988, included an interview with a mother who had lost two sons in Afghanistan and who lost a battle with local bureaucrats who refused to authorise the headstone she had selected for one of her son's graves; see V. Dashkevich, 'Careful! This was Paid for in Blood,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 21 October 1988, translation in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. xl, no. 44, 1988, p. 9. Moscow's first memorial to soldiers killed in Afghanistan was erected (by a group of veterans) as late as 1992; see A. Oliinik, 'Simvol skorbi i pamiati,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 39, 18 February 1992, p. 1.

66 The unprecedented nature of this protest is indicated by Cherniaev's own admission of his amazement at the fact that almost all of the letters were signed rather than anonymous; see A. S. Cherniaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym. Po dnevnikovym zapisiam*, Izdatel'skaia gruppa 'Progress' – 'Kul'tura', Moscow, 1993, p. 37. At the 19th CPSU Conference in summer 1988 the writer Grigorii Baklanov also described the numerous letters he had received from mothers of sons killed in Afghanistan, citing the letters to support his argument that 'We must create a mechanism that will prevent such things happening again'; cited Alexander Pumpyansky, 'Defeat or Victory?,' *New Times*, no. 30, July 1988, p. 13.

67 Cherniaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, pp. 57–8.

68 See for example one journalist's comment that 'Every Afghan bullet that killed a Soviet soldier struck in the heart of a mother'; V. Miasnikov, 'Dom na ulitse Sovetskoi,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 159, 11 July 1989, p. 2. For similar articles in this vein see V. Ziubin, "'Zagorsk. Yevdokii Koriavinoi...",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 191, 19 August 1989, p. 3; O. Bar-Biriukov, 'Mozhno li prostit' predatelia?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 20000 (special edition), 16 September 1989, p. 6; and 'Zakon dolzhen "rabotat"'', *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil*, no. 20, October 1990, p. 40.

69 See A. Oliinik, 'V neoplatnom dolgu,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 243, 22 October 1989, p. 1. According to Pinnick, who interviewed members of this group in 1994, many of these mothers and widows later came to 'regret that they acted on requests to make a contribution to the state's military socialisation programme, as they are now sceptical about the authorities' objectives at the time and feel they were exploited in their grief'; Kathryn Pinnick, 'When the Fighting is Over: The Soldiers' Mothers and the Afghan Madonnas,' in M. Buckley, ed., *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 149.

70 Cited Svetlana Alexievich, *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from a Forgotten War*, trans. Julia and Robin Whitby, Chatto and Windus, London, 1992, p. 66. Alexievich's book consists of a series of interviews conducted primarily with Soviet veterans of the Afghan war and their mothers. The interviews focus on the brutality of the war and its effects on participants and their loved ones. Extracts from Alexievich's book were first published in the USSR in *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* and *Druzhiba Narodov* in early 1990. Alexievich was subsequently excoriated in the military and conservative press and accused of having fabricated the interviews. Attacks on Alexievich made on the pages of *Krasnaia Zvezda* included the following letter from a soldier's mother castigating Alexievich: 'I, the mother of an internationalist-soldier ... am outraged to the depths of my soul by those attacks with which Aleksievich is trying to shame our sons ... Misanthropy [and] cruelty have never been inherent in our children ... I consider that those who are trying to shame our soldiers [and] our army, are shaming their own Motherland...'; 'Kto otvetit za klevetu?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 80, 7 April 1990, p. 2. Another critic described Alexievich as a 'lady intellectual' (*intelligentnaia damochka*) who had 'made up stories' about the war; see *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 103, 5 May 1990, p. 2.

71 Cited V. Monakhov, "'Afganistan v nashei sud'be",' *Narodnyi deputat*, no. 10, 1990, pp. 114–15.

72 *RFE/RL Daily Report*, 5 June 1990.

73 See for example *RFE/RL Daily Report*, 22 April 1991, 6 May 1991 and 10 July 1991; 'Kak khotel ya zhit', *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, no. 130, 10 July 1991, p. 1; 'Vopiiushchie ob otmshchenii,' *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, no. 134, 16 July 1991, p. 1; *Express-Chronicle*, no.

31, July 1991; Tamara Ivanova, "'Svoi" i "chuzhie",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 231, 9 October 1991, p. 1; and Yurii Iogov, 'Soldatskie materi uzhe ne golodaiut, a "dedy" vse vyiasniaiut otnosheniia,' *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, no. 197, 16 October 1991, p. 1.

74 In autumn 1989, for example, Zolotukhin pointed out how damaging repression of mortality rates among conscripts was for the army itself, given that this generated rumours regarding the number of deaths, and he argued that the only way to counter such rumours was to begin to publish the relevant statistics; cited V. Kosarev, 'Domysly i real'nost', *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 241, 20 October 1989, p. 1.

75 See for example 'Kak khotel ya zhit', *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, no. 130, 10 July 1991, p. 1.

76 See for example the CSM's April 1990 address to the USSR Supreme Soviet, cited Gennadii Zhavoronkov, "'Spasi i sokhrani!'" —shepchut soldatskie materi, provozhaia svoikh detei v armiiu,' *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 29, 22 July 1990, p. 11.

77 See for example Valerii Vyzhutovich, 'V kakom zvani zakon?,' *Izvestiia*, no. 246, 15 October 1991, p. 3, and V. Zhitarenko, 'Vsego strashno teriat' syna,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 100, 6 May 1992, p. 4.

78 On the withholding of inquest details from parents see Valerii Vyzhutovich, 'V kakom zvani zakon?,' *Izvestiia*, no. 246, 15 October 1991, p. 3. On burials, see P. Poloz, 'V garnizonakh i karaulakh,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 247, 27 October 1989, p. 2.

79 Lyamar' was the leader of the Soldiers' Mothers of Russia group which was established in July 1991.

80 On the Lyamar' case, see "'... And the Head will be Kept as Evidence",' *Express-Chronicle*, no. 23, 1991, and Sergei Kornilov, 'Dvizhenie soldatskikh materei: ne v nogu, no soobshcha,' *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, no. 173, 17 August 1991, p. 3. Note also that one 1991 *Krasnaia Zvezda* article expresses strong disapproval of another mother calling for exhumation of her son's corpse. The author urges the mother not to disturb her son's corpse, and to resist falling prey to those who were 'shamelessly' casting doubt upon the accidental nature of her son's death; V. Usol'tsev, 'Kogda nevmoch' peresilit' bedu,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 196, 29 August 1991, p. 2.

81 *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 39, 23 September 1990, p. 2. Troops were also used to break up another soldiers' mothers' protest outside the Defence Ministry building in December 1990; see V. Zhitarenko, 'Na podnozhke "demokraticeskogo ekspressa",' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 35, 13 February 1991, p. 3.

82 On the rare occasions when such protests were mentioned in *Krasnaia zvezda*, the articles in question focused on the infighting and scandals within the soldiers' mothers' movement; see Tamara Ivanova, "'Svoi" i "chuzhie",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 231, 9 October 1991, p. 1, and A. Vorob'ev, 'Materinskie nadezhdy,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 236, 15 October 1991, p. 1.

83 See for example the portrait of archetypical 'good mother' Yevdokia Koriavina, mother of a Hero of the Soviet Union who was killed in Afghanistan, who is described as 'not one of those people who complain about their fate'; V. Ziubin, "'Zagorsk. Yevdokii Koriavinoi...",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 191, 19 August 1989, p. 3. See also V. Zhitarenko, 'Vsegda strashno teriat' syna,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 100, 6 May 1992, p. 4, in which the author praises a mother whose son was killed in peacetime in suspicious circumstances but who, 'to her honour' is bearing her cross quietly, without organising demonstrations or taking her anger out on her son's commander. Similarly, see the case of a mother whose son was killed in a parachuting accident, but who cannot bear the idea of any of her son's fellow servicemen facing punishment for his death. She sends the following telegram to the fleet: 'I request and beg as a mother to lift the punishment (if any) arising from the death of my son from the unit'; V. Massal'skii, 'Osobym svetom,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 1, 3 January 1991, p. 2.

84 V. Usol'tsev, 'Kogda nevmoch' peresilit' bedu,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 196, 29 August 1991, p. 2.

85 See O. Vladykin, 'Tochku stavit' rano,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 265, 19 November 1989, pp. 1–2.

86 V. Zhitarenko, 'Vsegda strashno teriat' syna,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 100, 6 May 1992, p. 4.

87 Cited Ales' Adamovich, 'Spriatannaia voina,' *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 33, 19 August 1990, p. 14.

88 'Otnoshenie naseleniia k armii,' *Narodnyi Deputat*, no. 3, 1991, p. 87.

89 Indeed, CSM members frequently use the metaphor of the post-Soviet Russian army as the decomposing corpse of the Soviet army. Thus in October 1998 CSM member Ida Kuklina said of the post-Soviet Russian army: 'The situation with ... peacetime deaths has not changed, because the Russian army is the skeleton of the Soviet army in decay. All the processes are continuing'; Ida N. Kuklina, author's interview, Moscow, 29 October 1998. Similarly, CSM member Liudmila Zinchenko stated that, 'we always say that the Russian army is the fragments of the Soviet army, which was dismembered. And this corpse is stinking. That is, it has all the problems that the Soviet army had; it's stayed the same'; Liudmila N. Zinchenko, author's interview, Moscow, 20 October 1998.

References

Electronic reference

Julie Elkner, « *Dedovshchina* and the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers under Gorbachev », *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* [Online], Issue 1 | 2004, Online since 11 juillet 2004. URL : <http://pipss.revues.org/index243.html>

Julie Elkner

Doctoral Student, King's College, University of Cambridge

Copyright

Creative Commons License

This text is under a Creative Commons license : Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 2.0 Generic

Abstract

This article provides an historical account of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers' role in breaking the taboo on *dedovshchina* in the Soviet military in the late 1980s. I argue that soldiers' mothers' activism on this issue played a crucial role in opening up the military to public scrutiny and in influencing public perceptions of military service. The article also traces the military's unsuccessful attempts to counteract the soldiers' mothers' exposure of barracks violence and to reinstate the old boundaries of acceptable public debates on military issues. It also examines the ways in which protesting soldiers' mothers made use of public representations of maternal grief over peacetime deaths. This outpouring of grief is contrasted with the repression of maternal grief during the early years of the war in Afghanistan. I argue that the military's failure to formulate an appropriate response to soldiers' mothers' grief was particularly damaging for the military's public image under Gorbachev.

Keywords : Russia, Russian Armed Forces, Perestroika, NGO, Military Service Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, Glasnost', Dedovshchina, Civil Society

Research Fields : Political Science

Licence portant sur le document : Creative Commons License