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THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF THE RUSSIAN WOMEN IN THE GREAT WAR

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THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF THE RUSSIAN WOMEN IN THE GREAT WAR

A Master's Thesis

by

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To the memory of my father, A. Cemal akır

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IN THE GREAT WAR

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ABSTRACT

THE ACTIVE ROLES OF THE RUSSIAN WOMEN IN THE GREAT WAR

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This thesis attempts to inquire the active participation of the Russian women in the war effort during the First War World War. Its origins can be traced back in the Sisters of Mercy which had been established during the Crimean War in 1854-1856 as well as in the general movements of women's rights in Russia. An examination of the activities of pioneer women who worked as volunteer nurses and soldiers in the battlefronts, not to mention their critical role in the economy, clearly demonstrates that Russian women were by no means passive bystanders during the First World War. While the Sisters of Mercy did contribute to the medical treatment of the wounded and sick soldiers, the Women's Battalion of Death constituted an unprecedented example of a female combat unit in the Russian military history. Apart from a number of secondary sources and monographs, the diaries and letters of several Russian and English women have been utilized in order to inquire their motives and experiences.

Keywords: Battalion of Death, First World War, Russian Women, Sisters of Mercy,
Women Movements

ÖZET

BÜYÜK SAVAŞTA AKTİF ROL ALAN RUS KADINLARI

Çakır, Cansu

Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Hakan Kırımlı

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Bu tez, Birinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında Rus kadınlarının savaş seferberliğine olan aktif katılımını ele almaktadır. Kökenleri, 1854-1856 yıllarında Kırım Savaşı esnasında kurulan ‘Merhametin Kızkardeşleri’yle (*Sisters of Mercy*) bağdaştırılacağı gibi Rusya’daki genel kadın hareketlerinde de izlenebilir. Savaş cephelerinde gönüllü hemşire ve asker olarak çalışan öncü kadınların faaliyetlerinden ve ekonomideki kritik rollerinden anlaşılacağı üzere, Rus kadınlarının Birinci Dünya Savaşına seyirci olarak kalmadığı açıkça görülmektedir. Merhametin Kızkardeşleri yaralı ve hasta askerlerin tıbbi tedavisine katkıda bulunurken, Kadın Ölüm Taburu (*Women’s Battalion of Death*), Rus askeri tarihinde eşî görülmemiş bir kadın savaş birimi örneği oluşturmuştur. Birçok ikincil kaynak ve monografinin yanı sıra, kadın hareketlerinin gerekçeleri ve deneyimlerini araştırmak için birkaç Rus ve İngiliz kadının günlükleri ve mektupları kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Kadın Hareketleri, Kadın Ölüm Taburu
Merhametin Kızkardeşleri, Rus Kadınları

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*“I am fond of history.”
“I wish I were too. I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that
does not vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars and
pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any
women at all.”¹*

1.1.The Objective of the Thesis

On 20 July 1914, the Russian Empire had declared war on Germany. The war that was supposed to end all wars, the Great War, was the outset of the destruction to come. Having begun by an assassination, it was the outcome of a long struggle between the Great Powers. Being one of the most gigantic and catastrophic wars of the humankind, over sixty million men were mobilized for the war, where up to twenty million lives were lost altogether. In three and a half years, the Russian

¹ From Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* ; Mark Llewellyn and Ann Heilmann, “Women Writing History” *Women’s Writing* 12, no.1 (2005): 3.

Empire was devastated with a humiliating defeat, eventually ending with a revolution and civil war. However, despite the vast literature of the era, the place of women in the Great War has been largely overlooked in the related discussions. Attempting to inquire about the place of the Russian women in the First World War, this thesis argues that Russian women's participation in the war effort, unknowingly or not, became the precursor for women's involvement in the public life, whether it was being a nurse or a soldier.

No longer than fifty years ago, many scholars devoted their studies to inspect the lives of the women in numerous historical periods from urban women's lives in the cities, women in political parties, to working women in the factories. In this new era, the history of Russian women has been exclusively studied as many biographies and books have been published along with academic journals that were explicitly devoted to the Women Studies. Making women the subject of historical narrative, the scholarship has evolved by looking at the political movements and wars through a gendered perspective. According to Scott, with the powerful opposition coming from the history discipline itself², rewriting and recovering the women's history has not been an easy task.

On the discussions of why women were as not visible as men in history, it is considered that as the historical writing monopolized by the all-male universities, women were essentially excluded from the professionalization of the discipline. Presented in showing their differences or likeness to men or only in family structures, the 19th century's inattention towards women in diplomacy, war, and high politics has only changed within the last decades. After a long era of neglect, women

² Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 18.

appeared in the field being a focus of a significant historical investigation. While the feminist movements were not central to the women's history in the 19th century, the presence of the feminists in the women's movements created a huge transformation. Therefore, as a 19th century-originated ideology, it would be appropriate to formulate the thesis within a feminist approach as with the explanation on the matter:

A feminist approach to anything means paying attention to women. It means paying attention when women appear as characters and noticing when they do not. It means making some 'invisible' mechanisms visible and pointing out, when necessary, that while the emperor has no clothes, the empress has no body. It means paying attention to women as writers and as readers or audience members. It means taking nothing for granted because the things we take for granted are usually those that were constructed from the most powerful point of view in the culture, and that is not the point of view of women.³

This exclusive focus on the female agency, the allegations that women had no history or significant place in the past, has been refuted with the pieces of evidence coming from the roles played by women. Instigating the profoundly gendered nature of historical writing, this thesis will aim to change the standards of the historical significance by using women's personal experiences to prove their involvement in public and political activities.

In doing so, there will not be a flawless and positive approach towards women or isolation of their participation from the historical events. Instead, the women's movement will be considered within the conventional history but through a different perspective. Using the term gender as the relation between the sexes, and the terms of femininity and masculinity as culturally determined norms, this thesis wishes to demonstrate the distinct histories of women and men. Addressing the forgotten history of the women, the research revolves around the advancement of Russian

³ Katie Normington, *Gender and Medieval Drama* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 35.

women as the primary purpose. Asking where the women are, the historical narrative reflects on the whereabouts of the Russian women and shaped around individuals while showing the general essence.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, more scholars directed their research and publications towards Russian women's history, not only in Russia but also in the former Soviet republics and the Western countries. This research had also started in part of an outgrowth interest in the growing literature of women in Soviet and Russian studies. However, usually described in the Marxist paradigm or during Soviet times, the women issue in the Tsarist era had been under-researched.

1.2. Historiography

Inspecting the history of women in the wars with the guidance of gender approaches, the conventional aspects of the war image has shifted. In the past three decades, many groundbreaking publications emerged in the general historiography of the war. A fundamental piece for the gender studies, Stephen Smith's *Gender Thinking* identifies two kinds of gender thinking with a positive and critical approach. Delving into Homer's works, the first dimension of gender and socially attributed characteristics to it has been the primary focus. According to Smith, the femininity and masculinity traits in a person's identity should be reexamined :

...because men have done most of the writing, because we could expect men to sit more comfortably in a gender system that confirms the social restriction of women, and possibly because of something about the structure of gender itself-it is not surprising that the pioneers of critical gender thinking are mainly women...⁴

⁴ Stephen G. Smith, *Gender Thinking* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 13.

As the basic understanding of the sexes and the attributed characteristics is extremely important in conducting research on the place of women in the warzones, Smith's work has been crucial for laying out the groundwork. Since the development of the feminine ideals is not independent or isolated within the history of war, the writings of these scholars carry the utmost importance in the understanding of the idea behind the woman image.

As wars had been traditionally perceived as men's world, Michael Adams' book titled *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I*⁵ hold an exciting and upside-down approach to the scholarship. Using the masculinities and manhood in explaining the World War I, the thoughts and perceptions of men of the era towards women created an eye-opening base in order to understand the how the men in the society perceived women. In the separation of the sexes, Adams gives a quote that was popular among men, showing how women would not give lasting comfort to men, *a woman is a woman, but a pipe is a smoke*.⁶ The place of masculinity and study of manhood is not a new phenomenon in the war studies, though as the gender's expansion to history became more prominent, several studies had been started to publish. Using manhood in examining the battlefields, Adam's book gave a great understanding of how men received the influx of women in the warzones.

Stefan Dudink and Karen Hagemann's *Masculinities in Politics and War*⁷ starts with Carl von Clausewitz's *Vom Kriege* (On War) and aristocratic womanhood in the

⁵ Michael C. Adams, *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

⁶ Michael C. Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 24.

⁷ Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, eds. *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (The UK : Manchester University Press, 2004).

manly nature of the politics. Apart from other publications, Dudink and Hagemann's approach to masculinity is somewhat different and very much aligned with the thesis' claims. Inspecting the discourse of the gender through historical events as in the Restoration of Prussia or the American Revolution, the differences between men and women directed towards their involvement with their states align with military and citizenship.

Coming to the 20th-century wars, a new integration of women into the states had been vivid in the works of Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via's *Gender, War and Militarism*, Barton Hacker and Margaret Vining's *A companion to Women's Military History*, Alison Fell's *The Women's Movement in Wartime*.⁸ Looking at the claims of the authors, a clear line has been drawn in the women's experiences when the First World War had begun. According to Fell, the war forced women to choose between their country and remaining true to the natural pacifism. Although the statement could be valid for the other belligerent nations, Russian women's ideals have differed from others. Most of them followed the path of patriotism, and unknowingly or not, pacifism stood as a faint idea. These new publications that emphasized the stories of women in the war had some drawbacks. Most of the 20th century, gender-oriented history books dived into the experiences of those women intending to restore women's history. However, the conceptualization of gender and focusing too much on the characteristic of such sex furthered the real discourse on the matter.

⁸ Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via, *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2010). ; Margaret Vining and Barton C. Hacker, eds. *A Companion to Women's Military History* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012). ; Alison S. Fell and Ingrid Sharp, eds. *The Women's Movement in Wartime: International Perspectives, 1914–19* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

At this point, the horrors of the First World War and the wartime nurses had significantly been researched through the British, Australian, and Canadian nurses and organizations. Finding bits and parts about the Russian nurses in the literature, Christine Hallett, is one of the scholars who dominated the nursing literature. In both of her work, *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War* and *One Hundred Years of Wartime Nursing Practices, 1854-1953*,⁹ Hallett does an outstanding job of presenting the strict environment of the nurses, the situation of the warzones through the stories of the volunteer nurses. Looking at the nursing organizations, Red Cross, or sisterhoods, her work also depicts the adaption process of female nurses into a heavily dominated masculine sphere. Much of the information on the British nurses and their experiences in the trenches had been compared with the Russian nurses through her books.

Given the enormous literature on western nurses', Susan Grant's book titled *Russian and Soviet Health Care from an International Perspective*¹⁰ is one the most essential book on the history of Russian nurses and the development of medicine as a profession and nursing organizations. Turning back to the gender discussions, in one of the chapters in *Gendered Health Care*, Anchrum, Pochon, and Fairman argue that gender is used as a powerful argument in both creating barriers and opportunities in the nursing profession. As John Wallach Scott stated, *gender has been a useful category of historical analysis*,¹¹ and using the same analogy, in this thesis, the

⁹ Jane Brooks and Christine E. Hallett, eds. *One Hundred Years of Wartime Nursing Practices, 1854-1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015). ; Christine E. Hallett, *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Susan Grant, *Russian and Soviet Health Care from an International Perspective Comparing Professions, Practice and Gender, 1880-1960* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹¹ Susan Grant, *Russian and Soviet Health Care from an International Perspective Comparing Professions*, 123.

explanations on the development of the nursing profession through the lenses of gender created a solid base.

However, the literature on the Russian women soldiers,¹² in languages other than Russian, is in a dire need. One English book in the whole study, Laurie Stoff's *They Fought for the Motherland: Russia's Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution*,¹³ had been the basis of this thesis' information in the creation of all-female units. Introducing to the Russian women soldiers to the Western world, it is considered to be the first full-length scholarly study of the subject. Being more of an encyclopedia with full-on information of every female unit, one of the authors of other fundamental books examining the Russian women is no one other than Richard Stites and his book titled *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism*.¹⁴

Stites' contribution towards the Russian women's movements was a significant achievement that opened the discussion around the 'Woman Question.' Identifying the different responses of feminists, nihilists to radicalists, Stites gave his full attention to the Russian women's movements. Examining Maria Bochkareva's battalions within the feminist movements and organizations such as *the League for Women's Equality*, it gives not only the battalion's history but how they were perceived by other women, too. Therefore, both Stoff and Stites structures the

¹² It should be noted that the first official all-female units had been established in the Russia with the First World War. However, other countries such as the US, Great Britain and Germany had already allowed women to serve in the battlefields though most of them served as civilians and did not carry the military status or any training.

¹³ Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland: Russia's Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

¹⁴ Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

backbone of the history of the women soldiers and the women movement that was evolving at the same time.

1.3. Methodology

The primary sources in this thesis are derived from the autobiographical books, monographs, letters, and diaries of the Russian and English women that were actively involved in the war effort. While Elizabeth Davis' *A Balaclava Nurse: An Autobiography of Elizabeth Davis*,¹⁵ shows how the nurses were doing in the Crimean War, she often wrote about Florence Nightingale in a critical note. Being the only paid nurse of the Crimean war to publish her memories, Davis' book created a milestone for being a witness to the creation of the nursing history. As for the famous British nurse who initiated the professionalized nursing, Florence Nightingale's notes and diaries have been published and edited in several books. The book called *Florence Nightingale on Women, Medicine, Midwifery, and Prostitution*,¹⁶ edited by Lynn McDonald, has one of the best edited books regarding Nightingale's notes on nursing and hospitals.

Other primary sources published from the diaries, Vera Brittain, a warzone nurse, authored the *Testament of Youth*¹⁷. It was regarded as one of the classics in depicting the women's lives in the Great War. Brittain worked in Voluntary Aid Detachment in London as well as in the Russian front. Brittain's personal notes and experiences with the Red Cross nurses were a massive contributor to the thesis, as well. In Anne

¹⁵ Elizabeth Davis, *Betsy Cadwaladyr: A Balaclava Nurse: An Autobiography of Elizabeth Davis*, edited by Jane Williams (Dinas Powys: Honno Classics, 1987).

¹⁶ Florence Nightingale, *Florence Nightingale on Women, Medicine, Midwifery and Prostitution*, edited by Lynn McDonald (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (London: The Camelot Press, 1935).

Powell's book *Women in the War Zone: Hospital Service in the First World War*,¹⁸ she presents several nurses from Western and Eastern Fronts and their first-hand accounts of what happened in the trenches. Published as a book with collective memories, it serves a spectacular source for honoring the contributions of the female nurses.

In Violetta Thurstan's *Field Hospital and Flying Column: Being the Journal of an English Nursing Sister in Belgium & Russia* and Mary Britnieva's *One Woman's Story*¹⁹, two other British nurses shared their experiences under the British and Russian Red Cross. However, the bulk of the information comes from the published diary of the Florence Farmborough's *Nurse at the Russian Front: A Diary, 1914-18*.²⁰ Although she never intended to publish her diary, her book shed light on the Russian retreat of 1915, the Russian Revolution, and the whole continuity of the war. Transformed of her writings on scraps of papers to an actual book, she added her commentary on the previously written notes. Also, being a war photographer, Farmborough's book is easily the most essential books on nursing in the Great War.

As there are several publications on the nurses, the examination of the female soldiers' lives in the front was more challenging. Thanks to Maria Bochkareva's book *Yashka: My life As Peasant, Exile, and Soldier*,²¹ the first Russian women commander of the Women's Battalion of Death, the story of the female soldiers had not been forgotten entirely. Dictated to Isaac Don Levine, a Russian émigré,

¹⁸ Anne Powell, *Women in the War Zone: Hospital Service in the First World War* (Gloucestershire: History Press, 2009).

¹⁹ Violetta Thurstan, *Field Hospital and Flying Column: Being the Journal of an English Nursing Sister in Belgium & Russia* (London and New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915). ; Mary Britnieva, *One Woman's Story* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018).

²⁰ Florence Farmborough, *Nurse at the Russian Front: A Diary, 1914-18* (London: Constable, 1974).

²¹ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka: My Life as Peasant, Exile and Soldier*, set down by Issac Don Levine (London: Constable and Company, 1919).

Bochkareva led with her troubling youth and the road that started her involvement in the First World War as she had several meetings with the most influential men in the world from Aleksandr Kerensky, Aleksei Brusilov to Woodrow Wilson. Her memories were not just the experiences of a woman commander, but Bochkareva told the tale of the Russian women soldiers that otherwise will never be surfaced. After the Bolshevik victory, the actions of the Russian women in the Death Battalions were buried under the classified documents only to be resurfaced after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, a special thanks should be presented to the works of the Laurie Stoff, as the knowledge of the women battalions' and other volunteer female soldiers had been examined with her scholarly work in the Russian archives.

1.4. Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into six chapters including the Introduction. In the second chapter, the war system that was historically relied on masculinities had been criticized through the examples of ancient women warriors and leaders from the Amazons to Olga of Kyiv. Presenting the interactions between the war and women, in the other part, Florence Nightingale was demonstrated in her pioneering and groundbreaking service in the women movement starting with the Crimean War. Delving into more traditional, support roles with nursing, how women found themselves a place in the trenches has been inspected.

In the third chapter, Russian women before the Great War has been researched with the initiation of the *women question* in the 19th century. As each class of women had experienced different attitudes in Russian society, from peasant to high nobility, the ideals of the women movement have been examined towards that distinction.

Focusing on the Russian side of the Crimean War, this chapter starts with the brief history of the *Sisters of Mercy*, the nursing organization, and other war-relief establishments founded by the Tsarist authorities and Grand Duchesses. Other sections followed the Russian movement and Russian feminism through the activists, philanthropists, and feminists of the Tsarist era that was heavily influenced by the Suffrage Movement.

In the fourth chapter, following the *Sisters of Mercy*, the Russian women in the Great War (1914-1917) has been explored within the Russian Red Cross Society (ROKK) while the bulk of the information relied on the individuals such as Florence Farmborough, Violetta Thurstan, and Mary Britnieva. In the following parts, the Royal Sisters of Mercy in the Tsarskoye Selo Palace, Empress Aleksandra Fedorovna, and Grand Duchesses had been studied through their contribution to the war effort as the Imperial Family.

The last chapter chronologically starts right after the March (February) Revolution and Provisional Government's last hope in order to save the government from collapsing. This chapter revolves around the first Russian Woman Commander Maria Bochkareva and her book titled *Yashka: My Life as Peasant, Exile, and Soldier*,²² as it is one of the most important sources in knowing the reality behind the Women Battalions in 1917. The research focuses on the Bochkareva's Women Battalion of Death though there some parts mentioning the 1st Petrograd or 2nd Moscow Women Death Battalions. The chapter ends with a brief look at the Bolshevik women that was emerged after 1918, and the faith of the battalions also ends rather abruptly with the Bochkareva's death as there are no reliable sources of the later events.

²² Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka: My Life as Peasant, Exile and Soldier*.

Also, throughout the thesis, Library of Congress transliterations for Cyrillic alphabet has been employed. Although Russia followed the Julian calendar until February 1918, the dates has given in accordance with Gregorian calendar and with Julian version in the parenthesis.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN AND WAR

*“It was the best of times and,
it was the worst of times.”*²³

2.1. War and Masculinities²⁴

How the Great War revolutionized women and the concepts of womanhood requires the understanding of the complicated relationship between women and war. The discourse around gender and how gender roles were constructed would kindle the conversation of how women participated in the war by looking at both to the public presence and living experiences. One might say the changes in the notion of ideal

²³ According to Adams, Charles Dickens in his *A Tale of Two Cities* were describing the eve of the French Revolution though he could easily mention his own time, the late 19th century. Dickens' words were by far the most explanatory for the women movement in wars with its achievements and misery. Dickens continued : *“It was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.”* For more information see : Michael C. Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 5.

²⁴ Masculinity as a term refers to the position of men in the gender relations, it could be defined as the patterns of behavior, attributes and roles associated with boys and men.

femininity were not instant occurrences, but rather it was rooted in the daily lives of the women.

Depictions of tenacious men and naive women, Homer's *Iliad* possesses the first aspect of gender, a division by sex. According to Homer, there were separate fates of the sexes in war, for a man to be woman-like was a shame whereas, a woman who acts independently would have been praised with having a *masculine mind*.²⁵ With the Enlightenment period and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, the prejudices that bestow sex a character had been criticized, though the nested preconceptions towards masculinity and femininity have not changed.²⁶

As it said, a man should have to be manly and gallant, to be flimsy like a woman was equal to being a coward. The war itself has considered to be an all-male world of force and physical power, and to be masculine implied to being unemotional and cold.²⁷ Argued by feminists, traditional masculinity was related to vigor, aggression, domination, and authority, whereas fragility, emotion, and submission were associated with femininity.²⁸ The very definition of the war that is based on the Hegelian idealism determined the politics and war as a constant struggle for power.²⁹ The females were supposed to mourn and pray as it was no coincide that women who were actively involved within the war effort had seen as the anomaly. Often, the explanations of wars were portrayed as for the protection of women and children back home.

²⁵ Stephen G. Smith, *Gender Thinking*, 9.

²⁶ Stephen G. Smith, *Gender Thinking*, 15.

²⁷ Michael C. Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 25.

²⁸ Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via, "Introduction" in *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives*, 3.

²⁹ Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via, "Introduction" in *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives*, 5.

The idea of being a woman in any type of army, almost always carried a negative undertone in it, with a feeling of displacement. In a full circle, the women of the ancient world had undergone the same attitude, that *war was men's business*.³⁰ Those women who engaged in conflicts in the shape of pirates, warriors, or swordswomen marked their names in history, such as the famous Queen of Halicarnassos, Artemisia I, and the Empress Jingu in Japan. Known as a myth of the ancient world, the Amazon fighters or simply the *Amazons* were the representative of one of the oldest and fiercest traditions of the 'warrior women image.' Being an archer or a fighter, Amazons were fearsome opponents in the battlefields; they would roam from the steppes to the mountains in the Caucasus, living in a matriarchy. In Herodotus's writing, the Amazons in Scythian lands had already rejected the cultural and gendered norms of their day, declaring:

We are riders; our business is with the bow and spear and we know nothing of women's work; but in your country (sc. Scythia) no woman had anything to do with such things and your women stay at home in their wagons occupied with feminine tasks and never go out to hunt or for any other purpose.³¹

The further provenance of the warrior women image could also be traced back to Grand Princess Olga of Kyiv, who was called *the mother of the all-Russian princes*,³² despite there is little evidence of her partaking in the combat. However, being the spouse of the Grand Prince Igor, she would engage in the preparations or carry on military policies, even after his death. Initiating one of the first reforms in

³⁰ In addition of having mentioned in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, Homer also wrote one of the first mentions of the Amazon fighters in Iliad claiming the Amazons were the equals of men. For more information see: Adrienne Mayor, *Lives and Legends of Warrior Women across the Ancient World* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 19.

³¹ Lorna Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons - Heroes, Outsiders or Women?" *Greece & Rome, Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Classical Association* 37, no.1 (1990): 17.

³² Viktor G. Abashin, A.N. Bel'skikh, A.A. Shmidt, "Zhenshchiny v Armii i Meditsine" *Klin. med.* 95, no.10 (2017): 956.

the financial administration, Olga was able to rule and strengthen her power as she was regarded as an *atypical* example of a hero.³³ In 1380, in the Battle of Kulikovo that was fought between some of the Rus' principalities and a faction of the Golden Horde, the legend had it, the Rus' women would disguise themselves in male clothing to sneak into the war. In one of the tales, the daughter of the Prince Andrei Fedorovich, Daria Andreevna Rostovskaia, escaped from her hometown to aid the fight as a foot soldier. Like Daria, other Rostov Princesses concealed their identity in combat and were severely wounded on the battlefield.³⁴

As with others, the heroic examples of women in history, Jeanne D'arc or Mary Stuart, used to be recognized as the extent of the male valor and sacrifice. Within the same thought, empires had seen their male citizens as citizen-soldiers, where the power struggle and masculinity were displayed together.³⁵ Opening a road of involuntary integration of male citizens into the empires, the women left out of the question with having no right to citizenship. In the late 19th century, when women who followed the revolutionary activism demanded full citizenship, their involvement with the politics and military perceived as irrational and against the nature.³⁶

There was no denying how the examples of such women affected the latter by rejecting the traditional roles that were deemed to be suited for women. Being in a constant battle with the conformist society, one of the examples of it was Nadezhda

³³ Natalia Pushkareva, *Women in Russian History: From the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*, translated and edited by Eve Levin (London: Sharpe, 1997), 10.

³⁴ Abashin, Bel'skikh, Shmidt, "Zhenshchiny v Armii i Meditsine", 956.

³⁵ Stefan Dudink and Karen Hagemann, "Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Democratic Revolutions, 1750-1850" in *Masculinities in Politics and War*, 10.

³⁶ John Horne, "Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Nation-States and World Wars, 1850-1950" in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, edited by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (The UK : Manchester University Press, 2004) , 24.

Durova. Nicknamed the *Cavalry Maiden*, Durova hid under a Cossack uniform and ran away from her home to join the Russian cavalry. Using the name of Aleksandr Vasilevich,³⁷ a so-called nobleman, she fought nine whole years during the Napoleonic Wars of 1807 and 1812-14. When it was revealed that Durova was actually a woman, she cried and begged in front of the Emperor Aleksandr I, "I want to be a warrior! To wear a uniform and bear arms! ... I was born in an army camp. The sound of trumpets was my lullaby."³⁸ Only to remain in the shadows, she was able to keep the name of the Aleksandr Vasilevich and fight. Buried with military honors, Nadezhda Durova was the first known *woman* officer in the Russian Empire.³⁹

Being a combatant had still been seen as an anomaly as women in the war effort were expected to serve in more traditional jobs, in charities or fundraisers working as social workers or nurses. Shedding light to the women's experiences in the war that remained hidden in the footnotes of history, the writings of the female nurses and caregivers surfaced many new practices and insights by showing the atrocities of the wars. While empires were crumbling down, and many were drowned into the destruction of the war, women of the era were not only staying at home, taking care of their fatherless children, but they were also seeking ways to be an active participant in the war mobilization. One of the pioneers was a British nurse who changed the discourse around women and war in the whole world.

³⁷ Nadezhda Durova, *The Cavalry Maiden: Journals of a female Russian Officers in the Napoleonic Wars*, translated and edited by Mary Fleming Zirin (London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1988), 21.

³⁸ Nadezhda Durova, *The Cavalry Maiden*, 63.

³⁹ Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 19-20.

2.2. 'The Lady with the Lamp' and the Outbreak of the Crimean War

One of the oldest and long-lasting occupations, nursing has been in the origin of humankind, contumacy to the survival of the fittest. It was not an odd sight to see the nurses working in hospitals in the 6th century under religious authorities, or seeing Rufaidah bint Sa'ad as the first Muslim woman nurse served in the Prophet Muhammad's Army.⁴⁰ In Russia, worked as healers for centuries, *znakharka*⁴¹ was the equivalent of what could be the start of the caregiving in the rural regions. Counting on folk medicine and practices, these women would operate as abortionists, midwives, and nurses, allegedly being the only medical staff that could be encountered.⁴²

However, professional nursing is said to be initiated with the famous Florence Nightingale, a woman who had been born into a wealthy family in Florence, hence the name. She was a radiant soul with strong moral codes even from the early ages where she would voice, God himself has asked for her services.⁴³ Before the pivotal moment, she would spend her time with her grandmother, taking care of her, eventually forming a passion for becoming a nurse. Nevertheless, her family did not

⁴⁰ There are many different transliterations of her name as Rufaida Al-Asalmiya or Rufayda Bint Sa'ad Al Aslamiyya. For more detailed information see: Gail Tumulty, "Professional Development of Nursing in Saudi Arabia" *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 33, no.3 (2001): 285.

⁴¹ Until the 20th century, most of the peasants would still believe in magic and witchcraft where they could claim any mishap and illness to the act of the witches. As the *znakharka* mean witch or witch doctor, these healers would be perceived as magical practitioners. It was a very ancient type of nursing and healing practice in Russia. For detailed information see: Daniel C. Ryan, "Witchcraft Denunciations in Late Imperial Russia: Peasant Reactions to the *Koldun*" *Folklore*, no.9 (1998): 41.

⁴² Rose L. Glickman, "The Peasant Woman as Healer" in *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, edited by Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel, and Christine D. Worobec (Berkeley, Los Angeles and California: University of California Press, 1991), 149.

⁴³ In her talk with her *madre*, she confided that she heard the voice of the God, and she said: "*He asked me to surrender my will, to all that is upon the earth.*"; For detailed information see: Gillian Gill, *Nightingales: The Extraordinary Upbringing and Curious Life of Miss Florence Nightingale* (Random House, 2007), 220.

welcome the idea to become one, as the nursing was not seen as a profession that would suit a woman, at least not to an upper class one. After the trips with her family to countless countries, she found a way to be able to spend a few months in the Kaiserswerth, the nursing school founded by Pastor Fliedner. After months here and there, working in the Roman Catholic nursing school in Paris, she became one of the nurses who were sent to the war in 1854.

Being one of the biggest battles coming up to the Great War, the Crimean War (1853-56) was fought between Ottoman Empire, Britain, France, and Sardinia against the Russian Empire, starting with the Russian occupation of Moldavia and Wallachia, which were the Ottoman lands. While Nikolai I believed the Ottoman Empire had become 'the sick man of Europe,' the British and French were getting alarmed by the Russian expansion due to fright of what would happen to their trade routes. William Howard Russell from the '*The Times*' was frequent in the field working as the war correspondent, where his reports and comments appalled the British society by presenting how the army was struggling in reality.

Russell not only uncovered the position of the army, but he also became aware of how the soldiers were getting treated as most of the medicine or tools were not available. When the news reached Britain, it set up a public break down. Only then, Sidney Herbert, the Secretary of the State of War, requested from Nightingale to be the head nurse of the leaving expedition to Üsküdar (*Scutari*). In November 1854, Nightingale and the team of nurses arrived in the field hospital that was used as a base infirmary for the British troops to engage with Russia. Served as the Chief nurse, she selected many of her nurse friends to work with her; Mary Stanley, the Norwich Bishop's daughter, and Elizabeth Herbert, the wife of the Sidney Herbert,

the secretary of the State for War. Herbert informed Nightingale that they were going to be in the same hospitals as the other nurses, and they would not be treated as privileged.⁴⁴

Before Nightingale, the British Army had male medics who had little knowledge of medicine, sanitation, and overall, not very kind. In general, the hospital wards were not in a good place, the bedsheets would not be changed for days, or the medicine would not be available for all the patients as poor people got treated in the hospitals where the rich treated in their homes. In the case of the war, the situation was the same. There were not enough beds to begin with, soldiers had to lay beside each other even though they had open wounds and in huge pain. What the nurses saw in the Üsküdar Selimiye Barrack Hospital was the worst of any as they had no nurses until the Nightingale's team had arrived.

It should not be forgotten that the female nurses were not accepted by the doctors, as well. They were not much sympathetic towards them, so that they did not permit nurses to go to the wards, at first. If it were not for the nurses' coordination and patience where they would do cleaning, cooking, and sewing the soldier's clothes on top of their duties, the acceptance might never come. At a time when nurses were not allowed in the wards at night, Nightingale would wander, examining, and spending some time with the wounded soldiers. While doing so, she always carried a lamp, hence the '*Lady with the Lamp*.'⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Anne Summers, "Pride and Prejudice: Ladies and Nurses in the Crimean War" *History Workshop Journal* 16, no. 1 (1983): 33.

⁴⁵ Christine E. Hallett, *Nurse Writers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 39. ; Patricia D'Antonio, "Nurses in war" *The Lancet* 360, (2002): 7-8.

Among the nurses, there was also some sort of hierarchy as in the military. There were head nurses or sisters who were overseeing the others like Nightingale; and nurses that would take care of the mildly wounded soldiers and watch the wards at nights. Two nursing shifts had to be initiated as only a few could sleep during the day with the ongoing war and supervision. In the hospitals of London and others, these nurses were getting £10 minimum as under-nurses, and if promoted, it could be up to £30 *per annum*. In that way, the condition and morality of the nurses could be maintained, as well as the training and experience they get.⁴⁶ By the same token, nursing was considered as something exciting, even an adventure in its core. When the Crimean War broke out, Elizabeth Davis was sixty years old as she summarized the thought of the many:

After having been abroad, I always liked to know what was going on in the world, and this curiosity made me an eager reader of the newspapers. Sitting one evening with my sister, I read in one of them an account of the Battle of Alma. ‘Oh!’ said I, ‘if I had wings, would not I go?’⁴⁷

She worked in Üsküdar Field Hospital and Balıklava (Balaclava) General Hospital as she was a former servant and a hospital nurse. She was the only paid nurse of the Crimean war to publish her memories.⁴⁸ After the days she spent in Crimea and went back to England, she wrote that in Üsküdar, the nurses were waiting to be employed as the wards were overly filled with sick and wounded men. The clothing and food, according to her, were not given to the patients as it should be, and the food was

⁴⁶ “Report on the Nursing Arrangements of the London Hospitals,” *British Medical Journal* 1, no. 689 (February 28, 1874): 285.

⁴⁷ Anne Summers, “Pride and Prejudice”, 39.

⁴⁸ Anne Summers, “Pride and Prejudice”, 40.

waiting to be rotten. However, in Balaclava hospital, the quantities of the food and clothing were smaller, yet the distribution was more reasonable.⁴⁹

What Nightingale accomplished was not only a reform because of the advancements in nursing institutions, hygiene, and medicine but also in the social status of the nurses. Affiliated with the poor or middle-class profession before, the wartime nursing for females was not even thought to be appropriate at least to the half of the 20th century. Coming from a wealthy family and insisting on being on the warzone by lobbying the war office, Nightingale helped women to assert their claim of working on the field.

Meanwhile, in the Crimean Peninsula, thousands of people were killed or wounded on the battlefield as many died in the hospitals from wounds or diseases. For that reason, she demanded that the conditions to be improved, pointing out the unsanitary environment of the battleground was killing as much as the enemy.⁵⁰ Within the same thought, not only was she supporting the idea of a more professionalized hospitals with sanitary conditions, but she also published a book in 1859 called '*Notes on Hospitals*' and '*Notes on Nursing*' where she provided a groundwork of how the wartime hospitals should work, as later used in the American civil war.⁵¹ Eventually, she established the '*Nightingale Training School for Nurses*' in St. Thomas.⁵² She was also writing support letters to gather funds for women's entry into the hospitals where in 1888, she contributed to the *New Hospital for Women*.⁵³

⁴⁹ Often times she would criticize Nightingale and her decisions; Elizabeth Davis, *Betsy Cadwaladyr: A Balaclava Nurse*, 202.

⁵⁰ I. Bernard Cohen, "Florence Nightingale", *Scientific American* 250, no. 3 (1984):128.

⁵¹ Patricia D'Antonio, "Nurses in war", 7-8.

⁵² Anne Marie Rafferty, *The Politics of Nursing Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002), 34.

⁵³ Florence Nightingale, *Florence Nightingale on Women, Medicine, Midwifery and Prostitution*, 16.

2.3. Women in the Great War: Replacing Men's Work

About sixty years later than the Crimean War, a serious turning point for the progression of women, the paradox of the Great War had changed everything – including the area of male activity, the war. When all able-bodied men went to the front to serve in the army, women from all social backgrounds were required to replace the absent men. During the First World War, the homeland had started to be referred to as the home front, where in the total war, the distinction between the home and front eroded. Now, both of the civilians, women or men, had to support the war effort by not only participating in the war but also working in the war-relevant industries.⁵⁴ With that, the notion of war become obscure to define as a sole male exercise.

In this new era, women had to endure their lives in the home front and shoulder a range of jobs that intended to keep the society functioning, while the men were off the fighting. Alongside nursing, communications, and service-related jobs, female participation in the war had increased rapidly while women cherished their new opportunities, just like a young man departing to the adventure of war. In a wartime nursery rhyme book, Nina MacDonald wrote a poem called the *Sing a Song of Wartime*, showing the new roles of the women to the children⁵⁵. The female writers of the era touched upon the broader implications for women in their war support by

⁵⁴ Karen Hagemann, "Home/Front: The Military, Violence and Gender Relations in the Age of the World Wars" in *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany*, edited by Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 8.

⁵⁵ In Nina MacDonald's 'Wartime Nursery Rhymes' that first published in 1918 with a collection of patriotic nursery rhymes to instruct children about wartime conditions and bravery of soldiers, it followed as this "Everybody doing, something for the war. Girls are doing things; they have never done before. Go as bus conductors, drive a car or van. All the World is topsy-turvy since the war began." Nina MacDonald, "Sing a Song of War-time" in *Her War Story: Twentieth Century Women Write About War*, edited by Sayre P. Sheldon (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 12.

writing a series of newspaper articles regarding women munition workers. Same with those women, many others were dealing with harmful chemical materials that could end their lives. As working-class women did the war work despite having low wages, the upper and middle-class women volunteered or set up charities to help soldiers and their families. Assumed inferior to men, women with newly learned skills become propaganda objects for their states as for women living at or near the front, the militarization of their daily life was inevitable.⁵⁶ However, not all women were peacemakers, nor all feminists were pacifists.⁵⁷

Since women that joined the combats covered up their identity, it was impossible to determine the real number of female combatants, where countless soldiers' names have never been surfaced. Among the discovered, one of them was the daughter of a Cossack military foreman from the Ural village of Nazarovka. Grew up to become an excellent horse rider, Natalia Komarova was already familiar with weapons and the general military environment. Once her father and brother departed for the war, Natalia disguised in Cossack clothes and went after their detachment. Having saved her brother on the battlefield, the Cossack *cavalryman*, Komarova, was awarded the highest military award, St. George's Cross.⁵⁸ In a few years later, under the first women Russian Commander Maria Bochkareva, Russian women from all grounds started to serve in the military officially, without hiding their gender.

However, the war brought only a short-lived pleasure for the women as the costs were far too extreme. *The lost generation* of men, if not physically impaired, were

⁵⁶ Allison Scardino Belzer, *Women and the Great War: Femininity under Fire in Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 8.

⁵⁷ Lynne Segal, "Gender, War and Militarism: Making and Questioning the Links", *Feminist Review*, no.88 (2018): 22.

⁵⁸ Yu.N. Ivanova, "Prekrasneishie iz khrabrykh" *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no.3 (1996): 96.

often psychologically damaged. Many women also faced the struggle of finding a place for themselves in the postwar world.⁵⁹ Vera Brittain, a warzone nurse in her *Testament of Youth*, said, “I am nothing but a piece of wartime wreckage, living on ingloriously in a world that does not want me!”. Brittain was sure that it was not favored to have been close to the war, especially women were as much discredited in the postwar era as in 1914.⁶⁰ Yet, not grouped under one thought, various ideas had driven women in every nation from feminists to pacifists, humanitarian to a patriot. With that every belief, thousands of women devoted themselves and put their lives on hold, just for the war.

⁵⁹ Sayre P. Sheldon, “The Great War” in *Her War Story: Twentieth Century Women Write About War*, edited by Sayre P. Sheldon (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 8.

⁶⁰ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, 490.

CHAPTER III

RUSSIAN WOMEN AT WAR PRIOR TO WWI:

THE WOMAN QUESTION

In traditional Russian society, there were various groups of women in the Empire from serfs to peasants, urban women to upper nobility. Settled their lives around the housework, women would do spinning and sewing, cook for their family, wash their children and feed the livestock as older women would nurse the sick people and aid with childbirth. In the middle of the 19th century, the peasants formed 85 percent of the Russian population and half of them were women. Although peasant women were in the bottom line of their community, 55 percent of the urban women were also regarded within the poorest section in the city.⁶¹ They would trade their food and crafts in the markets, work in taverns and support male artisans in textile businesses.

⁶¹ Barbara Evans Clements, *A History of Women in Russia: From Earliest Times to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 134, epub.

On the other hand, the elite women of the 19th century Russia were counted on helping the unfortunate ones through philanthropy, making donations to the church, assisting homeless people and offering money to the beggars. Along with the philanthropists, the intelligentsia of the 19th century had aided the women's involvement in society more than any group. With a surge of revolutionist ideals, Russian women from the educated classes were launching initiatives against their suppressive, patriarchal society and pursue the education denied to them by the Tsarist authorities. Although a disastrous decade for the Empire being on the losing side of the Crimean war, 'the woman question' started to emerge in Russia within a decade following the war.⁶² With the help of the intelligentsia, high nobility and philanthropists; the establishment of nursing organizations such as Sisters of Mercy, women began to assert themselves in the social and political life.

3.1. The Origins of 'Sisters of Mercy' and Russian Side of the Crimean War

The adoption of the name '*Sisters of Mercy*' did not solely belong to the Russian organization, as in 1633, a Catholic priest, St. Vincent Paul, developed the first community in France called '*Les Sœurs de la Charité*.'⁶³ Taking notice of his poor and sick neighbours, he decided to establish a community with a charter, stating that showing mercy to one's neighbour would be the surest sign of a Christian.⁶⁴ The early organizations of Sisters of Mercy, including the Russian ones, were really demanding to be a part of it as the agreement stated that the sisters could not even have their own clothes or money where everything they own would belong to the

⁶² Judy Cox, *The Women's Revolution: Russia 1905-1917* (Great Britain: Counterfire, 2017), 16, epub.; Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, 29.

⁶³ E. V. Petrova, "Katolicheskie Obshchiny Sester Miloserdii na Territorii Rossiiskoi Imperii" *Vestnik PSTGU, Serii II: Istorii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* 74, no.2 (2017): 121.

⁶⁴ Sergei Filimonov, *Uchebnik dlia Sester Miloserdii* (Sankt-Peterburg: Satis, 2007), 12.

community. Since it had a deeper understanding of the work that the sisters do, there would be no earthly rewards for their services.

The Lutheran pastor Fliedner and his wife, Frederike chartered one of the vital organizations called the '*Institution of Deaconesses*' in Kaiserswerth in 1836. It was one of the institutes that would spread the nursing profession into the Western world as a respectable job. Stating her vocation was a call from God; Florence Nightingale also visited the Kaiserswerth, which was built on religious ties, and she spent months of study there before going to the Crimean War.⁶⁵ Before the Great War, the nursing occupation for women remained limited in their own homes or care facilities, in a time that wartime nursing has belonged explicitly to the male orderlies where they would escort the soldiers in their mobile hospitals. It was perceived that the female nurses would mostly do cleaning and cooking, on top of the duties of taking care of the patients. They would have no training or a real hospital experience but worked as more of a housekeeper before the nursing organizations had founded in places such as Russia, Britain, and the US.⁶⁶

Despite the newly founded institutions for the Great War, such as *Sestry Miloserdiia*, the roots of the nursing communities in Russia could be traced way back to the establishment of the '*Compassionate Widows of the Empress*' in 1803. Mariia Fedorovna (*Duchess Sophie Dorothea of Württemberg*), the dowager empress, established widow houses where the women would feed, clean, and look after a patient. In return for their services, they would be taken care of in the widow houses. In a time, most of the nursing work consisted of volunteers or being paid a little; the

⁶⁵ Barton C. Hacker, "Reformers, Nurses, and Ladies in Uniform: The Changing Status of Military Women (c. 1815–c. 1914)," in *A Companion to Women's Military History*, edited by Margaret Vining and Barton C. Hacker (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012), 141.

⁶⁶ Carol Helmstadter, "Class, gender and professional expertise", 23.

Empress was giving the widows allowances up to five rubles in every two weeks, as an incentive. Called *khozhatii* or *sidel'nitsa*, the synonyms of the word 'nurse' many of the widows were working in the Moscow and St. Petersburg hospitals, treating 200 patients in each.⁶⁷ Eventually, the institute of the Compassionate Widows abolished in 1892 though their work led as a future model for the other Russian nursing organizations.

During peacetime, the Russian Army had no immobile medical groups; instead, every unit had a small number of practitioners with a small hospital consisting of sixteen beds. These regiments, which were the amount to four battalions together, had hospital orderlies and sergeants called *nadziratel bolnikh* classified as the non-combatants of the war effort. With the ongoing war, these medical units changed into the regiment hospitals, sanitary divisions, and field hospitals. While in the divisions, the transportation relied on rails or horse carriages, for the field hospitals, it could not be done until it is a necessity.⁶⁸

Focusing on the 19th century, Russian the upper nobility had assembled volunteers under the Imperial Order, encouraging newly founded nursing communities.

Honoring the tradition of Mariia Fedorovna's Compassionate Widows; in 1844, the Order of the Holy Trinity (*Holy Trinity Community of Sisters of Charity*) was established with the influence of the Grand Duchess Aleksandra Nikolaevna and Princess Theresa of Oldenburg.⁶⁹ Aleksandra Nikolaevna was the fourth child of

⁶⁷Natalia Nikolaevna Blokhina, "K istorii deiatel'nosti i professional'noi podgotovki «Serdobol'nyh vdov» v bol'nitsakh dlia bednykh Sankt-Peterburga i Moskv v tsarstvovanie Imperatora Aleksandra I" *Kazanskii meditsinskii zhurnal* 97, no.2 (2016): 307.

⁶⁸ "Notes Upon Russian Military Medical Organization," *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 1758 (Sep. 8, 1894): 554-5.

⁶⁹ Vera Aleksandrovna Sokolova, "Rossiiskoe Obshchestvo Krasnogo Kresta (1867-1918 gg.)" PhD Diss. (Sankt-Peterburgskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, 2014): 55.

Tsar Nikolai I Pavlovich and the Princess Charlotte of Prussia. When Grand Duchess Aleksandra died months after the foundation of the community, it was taken under her parent's protection. Later, the organization continued to take care after the widows, orphans, and the sick.

In the 1850s, Dr. Nikolai Ivanovich Pirogov was aware that the military hospitals were in desperate situation. The eminent surgeon called for the immediate recruitment of the female nurses, only to be mocked by the military officials stating that the presence of these women would lead to mass rape.⁷⁰ When Grand Duchess Yelena Pavlovna (before conversion to Orthodoxy, Princess Charlotte of Württemberg and the wife of Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich)⁷¹, received the call, she was more than welcome despite knowing that the government was inept of such a help. With the news coming from Crimea and the siege of the Sevastopol showing the lack of medical atmosphere led Yelena Pavlovna to turn her hope to the Russian woman. Dr. Pirogov had already explained the incompetency of the Compassionate Widows that was established during the Napoleonic wars. Finally, with the influence of Nikolai I, they established the *Order of the Exaltation of the Cross (Holy Cross Exaltation Community of Sisters of Mercy)* in 1854, in the course of the Crimean War.

Out of 163 members, 110 of them were in the privileged groups, including the daughters, widows or wives of the officials and 25 of them belonged to the petty bourgeoisie (*meshchanstvo*).⁷² Without receiving any payment, these women were

⁷⁰ Evelyn R. Benson, "On the Other Side of the Battle: Russian Nurses in the Crimean War" *The Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 24, no. 1 (1992): 66.

⁷¹ Tatiana S. Sorokina, "Russian nursing in the Crimean war" *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London* 29, no. 1 (1995): 55.

⁷² Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, 30.

expected to serve their countries and fulfill their patriotic duty. Not surprisingly, from impoverished women to the upper class received the call. The daughter of the former governor of St. Petersburg, Yekaterina Mikhailovna Bakunina, belonged to the privileged, and if Florence Nightingale was the leader that led the way, she was the Russian equivalent. According to Bakunina, they were working not only under such harsh conditions, but almost all of the sisters had diseases as she got typhus.

Unknown to the situation of the sisters, Pirogov stated that:

The General Staff Doctor is a cipher and knows only how to say yes and to praise what is bad. In the hospital there is not one spare mattress, no good wine or quinine bark, nor acid, in case the typhus spreads. Almost half the doctors lie sick, and the only thing that is really fine is the sisters of mercy.⁷³

On the other side of the Crimean War, Russian Sisters of Mercy took part in all of the military operations. With Russell's articles in *The Times*, the supply and the money to help the nurses were quick to raise. Russell wrote in *the Times* about the Sisters of Mercy asking the question of "...why we have no sisters of charity, these women are excellent nurses!"⁷⁴ One hundred twenty sisters of mercy from the Holy Cross Community were going to be the first female units that were going to assist the wounded soldiers.⁷⁵ In 1855, following the same steps, ten sisters of mercy from the St. Nicholas Community and Compassionate Widows of Moscow and St. Petersburg found their way in Crimea.⁷⁶

⁷³ John Shelton Curtiss, "Russian Nightingale", *The American Journal of Nursing* 68, no. 5 (1968) :1029-1031.

⁷⁴ John Shelton Curtiss, "Russian Sisters of Mercy in the Crimea, 1854-1855," *Slavic Review* 25, no. 1 (1966): 84.

⁷⁵ Irina Mikhailovna Buhtoyarova- Anna Vladimirovna Panova, "Istoricheskie Predposylki Skladyvaniia Instituta Miloserdiia V Rossii" *Sova* 28, no.1 (2016): 7.

⁷⁶ E.N. Kozlovtseva, "Deiael'nost' Moskovskikh Obshchin Sester Miloserdiia vo Vtoroi Polovine XIX - Nachale XX vekov" *Vestnik PSTGU*, no.3 (2004) : 146.

After the Crimean War, those who belonged to the St. Nicholas Community, exactly thirty sisters, with the Princess Natalia Borisovna Shakhovskaya, founded another successful nursing organization called *Satisfy My Sorrows* in 1871⁷⁷. Funding the community with the Shakhovskaya's savings, exactly 150 thousand rubles, the organization had its own charter and a hospital of 200 people, including an orphanage.⁷⁸ This community served in the fronts of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877, the Balkan War of 1912, and the Great War.⁷⁹ The previous establishments had undoubtedly affected the creation of the Russian Red Cross, bringing most of the sister communities together after the realization of the existent 150 nursing organizations did not meet the needs.⁸⁰ Decades later, in the Great War, not only working alone but with the help of the Allied powers, hospitals were going to be built on the Russian soil to develop the ties against the Central powers, where Russian nurses could also work in Anglo-Russian hospitals in Petrograd.⁸¹ Both in, Britain or Russia, the Crimean war itself was a revolution both in the nursing humanities and women's movement for all the nations involved.

3.2. The Russian Women Movements Prior to WWI

The woman question in the Russian Empire embarked on the transformation of the social problems associated with women in the mid-19th century. While the female consciousness formed around in a protest of traditional concepts, remodeling the

⁷⁷ The community's Russian name is '*Utoli moia pechali*' which roughly translated as Satisfy, Quench or Extinguish my sorrows. It also states the sacred image of the Virgin Mary.

⁷⁸ Liudmila Borisovna Maksimova, "Kniaginia Natal'ia Borisovna Shakhovskaia i osnovannaia eiu obshchina «Utoli moia pechali»" *Vestnik Tserkovnoi Istorii: Pravoslavnaia religioznaia organizatsiia Tserkovno-nauchnyi tsentr*, (2006): 237.

⁷⁹ Kozlovitseva, "Deial'nost' Moskovskikh Obshchin Sester Miloserdiia", 148.

⁸⁰ E. N. Pravdikovskaia, "'Obshchiny Sester Miloserdiia' V Kul'ture Rossii" *Istoricheskie nauki*, No.4 (2010): 292.; Susan Grant, *Russian and Soviet Health Care from an International Perspective Comparing Professions*, 11.

⁸¹ Christine E. Hallett, *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War*, 109.

Russian women held a very long process. The demand was evident; women desired freedom and recognition to obtain educational rights. However, the women question had not met with the larger circles nor given attention at all. Every era had a different aspiration in the movement, where the 19th century activism revolved around solving the troubles of the working women. In 1858, M. Vernadskaya stated the thought of the many activists:

Women would be waiting for men to arrange their positions in society. This will never happen as long as women are not able to take care of themselves; they will be no more than children. Isn't it time to take the position in society that they deserve?⁸²

In a very light term, Russian women could have said to enjoy more privileges than their European counterparts in the Tsarist era. The state would allow women to have occupations in the educational and medical professions because it was not overpopulated. Although women were paid less than men, they were able to enter the lower ranks of the local governments and become more self-reliant than the European women at the time. Those included in the upper or middle classes, could obtain lands, govern their properties after marriage and vote in provincial elections under the Tsar Aleksandr II. However, women could not attend universities though some were able to earn certain teaching certificates. Most of the daughters of the noble families were taught in secondary schools or have higher education whereas only 30 percent of girls in merchants' families went to elementary schools and less than 10 percent of the female peasants could read.⁸³ Therefore, it could be said, the Russian Code of Laws applied only a small percentage of women as in every social

⁸² Irina Yukina, *Russkii Feminizm kak vyzov Sovremennosti* (Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteiia, 2007), 33.

⁸³ Marcelline Hutton, "Women in Russian Society from the Tsars to Yeltsin" in *Russian Women in Politics and Society*, edited by Norma Corigliano Noonan and Wilma Rule (The United States : Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996), 64.

status had a distinct view of the women's rights.⁸⁴ Despite having these obstacles, in the 19th century, women education prevailed to be fundamental in Russian women's progress.

According to Yukina, the Russian women movement had two stages where the first one ended in 1905 with the adoption of the law that made women the outsiders of the institutional politics, and the second stage which was inherently feminist, had completed in 1918.⁸⁵ In 1905, Tsar Nikolai II, awarded the suffrage to millions of illiterate peasant men to vote in the Duma elections but disregarded to enfranchise the educated and upper-class women. Around 1905, women from all grounds, teachers, journalists, writers were ordering participation in the social restoration with full equality. By doing so, the women organizations created their journals from *Mir Zhenshchiny (World of Women)* in Moscow to the *Pervyi Zhenskii Kalendar (First Women Calendar)* in St. Petersburg.⁸⁶ Not supported by the mainstream newspapers, their opinions would reach to Russian women in these journals, eventually aiming the women liberation. Within this transitional period, it was realized, the new resources as with the journals, books and newspapers; the political opportunities had emerged with pushing the suffrage movement.

The feminist organizations that emerged before the Great War were a total triumph.

The League for Women's Equal Rights was organized, where in 1908, Anna Filosofova⁸⁷ and Anna Shabanova of the Women's Mutual Philanthropic Society

⁸⁴ Natalia Pushkareva, *Women in Russian History*, 233-234.

⁸⁵ Irina Yukina, *Russkii Feminizm*, 8.

⁸⁶ Irina Yukina, *Russkii Feminizm*, 247.

⁸⁷ Anna Filosofova was a pioneer feminist activist and the name behind the first Russian Higher Courses for Women. She would build shelters for abused, abandoned women and children. She also had many projects and initiatives alongside the first all-Russian women's congress. For more information see: Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild, "Anna Pavlovna Filosofova" in *Encyclopedia of*

hold the *First All-Russian Congress of Women* in St. Petersburg. It succeeded in bringing all feminists and other social activists together to develop a consensus, as 1050 delegates from well-educated women, philanthropies, women's clubs appeared.⁸⁸ In one of its rhetoric of the Women's Mutual Philanthropic Society's petition to the Duma, their intention was clear:

We work as equals in the fields and factories, in science, literature, and art; in government, public and private organizations, as doctors and teachers, as rearers of the future generation. As taxpayers, workers, and obeyers of the law in the same measure as men, we need the right to make those laws.⁸⁹

As for the League for Women's Equal Rights, their attempts had grown with the war more than ever. Very dedicated to the political and civil rights of the Russian women, they shifted their direction to charities and support groups for the families of the soldiers and aided many Sisters of Mercy along the way. When World War I broke out, the League summoned the *daughters of Russia* for the war effort just like the suffragette Christabel Pankhurst in England. It could be said, although many feminists rallied to the mobilization; as the single most crucial feminist organization in Russia, the League's primary purpose was to earn voting rights for the Russian women. The March 1917 Revolution sparked by the female worker demonstrations revitalized the League's direction where the Soviets supported the urgent enactment of woman suffragette.⁹⁰

Russian Movements, edited by Norma Corigliano Noonan and Carol Nechemias (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 23.

⁸⁸ Barbara Evans Clements, *A History of Women in Russia*, 198, epub.

⁸⁹ Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, 215.

⁹⁰ Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild, "Liga Ravnopraviia Zhenshchin (League for Women's Equal Rights)" in *Encyclopedia of Russian Movements*, edited by Norma Corigliano Noonan and Carol Nechemias (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 40.

Following Yukina's statement, while the first stage completed by women attaining a place for themselves in society, the second part of the movement was characterized by gender priorities and dissolving the gender inequality. The fear of an unfeminine woman that would eradicate the tradition of the society had still present as with the idea of: "*a woman needs to be a woman, when she armed with a pen and starts thinking, all feminine disappears in her, we reckon her to the category of monsters.*"⁹¹ Rejecting these beliefs that come from the male ideologists; the Russian women wanted to be perceived as a free, independent person who has the rights of their own and not determined by customs and prejudices. This brand-new feminine ideal had also affected the women to analyze their role in the social and political movements. The conversations around women's issues in the press, followed a few questions to be able to understand the aim of these women:

1. Who are the women? A mother, wife, educator?
2. What is the meaning of woman for society? What is women's opinion on society?
3. What are the problems of the woman herself which are of public importance?
4. What are the perspectives of women?
5. Is it possible and necessary to modify traditional models of feminine with the ideal of a Russian woman with characteristics of obedience, sacrifice, silence and social passivity?
6. What should be the attitude of a man as a subject of social actions towards a woman? How to educate a woman?
7. What should be the system of a women's education, and how can the capabilities of women benefit society?⁹²

There were also sketches and caricatures in the newspapers depicting images of a woman in the first years of the war, a well-dressed, feminine figure where in the after

⁹¹ Irina Yukina, *Russkii Feminizm*, 77.

⁹² Irina Yukina, *Russkii Feminizm*, 95.

one, the woman changes into a soldier, bearing arms.⁹³ Along with that, the propaganda around the women were highly popular, like a poem written in the war expressing gratefulness to the heroines, *you are the fires of fate, the mother who loves and suffers*.⁹⁴

Thus, the First World War had presented numerous opportunities for women to be a patriot but in the context of a wife or mother. It should not be forgotten, from 1855 to 1914, the Russian cities had grown rapidly as the peasants migrated into the cities to work in factories. The standards of living for the urban women also rose with the new entertainments such as opera houses or theatres. Those women who belong to the nobility, were forming women organizations and had the chance of influencing the government in pursuing educational rights for women. Although newly instituted progression had been enjoyed by the upper-class women at first, later urban women had also the chance to have an higher education, especially from the schools of medicine. However, the peasant women had still left behind, despite the fact that they were forming 80 percent of the Russian women population.⁹⁵ These poor women that played a huge part in the industrialization period, had still live in the conditions as would they in serfdom.

In 1914, sixty-three women were working in the labour force for every hundred men, and in two years, it rose to seventy-eight.⁹⁶ Women had a predominance in agriculture and service rather than the heavy industry as in 1897, there were 17

⁹³ For more information see : Olga Shnyrova, "Feminism and Suffrage in Russia: Women, War and Revolution 1914–1917" in *The Women's Movement in Wartime: International Perspectives, 1914–19*, edited by Alison S. Fell and Ingrid Sharp (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 125.

⁹⁴ Olga Shnyrova, "Feminism and Suffrage in Russia", 126.

⁹⁵ Barbara Evans Clements, *A History of Women in Russia*, 138, epub.

⁹⁶ Olga Shnyrova, "Feminism and Suffrage in Russia", 127.

million of women workers.⁹⁷ With high numbers of women in the agriculture, the female peasants were working long hours on the field and those women who worked outside of their home were doing domestic services as nurses, cooks or maids. In some industries, women formed 50 to 80 percent of the workforce, and because businesses lacked specialist men, many women earned access to the professions of engineers, lawyers and officers. It was no doubt that female workers had faced sexual harassment, managed their household and work at the same time while earning low wages. Although the number of working women in the labour had changed through the late 19th century to the early 20th, most women continued to be stuck in low status and low paying occupations.

⁹⁷ Marcelline Hutton, "Women in Russian Society", 67.

CHAPTER IV

RUSSIAN WOMEN DURING THE WAR (1914-1917): SISTERS OF MERCY

*As I pondered on all that had happened,
in that great suffering Russia,
my heart contracted with pain,
and I felt that I could weep . . . and weep. . .*⁹⁸

In a position, their presence was not welcomed nor appreciated; being a nurse in the warzone was as troublesome as being a soldier in the field. Had to survive the extreme cold, hunger, and diseases on top of the sounds of the war machines, bombs, and guns; the nurses had to carry their practices on nearly three miles from the actual

⁹⁸ It was one of the last sentences in the Florence Farmborough's diary when she was departing from Russia in 1918, in her last spot, Vladivostok. She was proud, compassionate, and bittersweet while remembering the wartime struggles she had to endure. For detailed information see: Florence Farmborough, *Nurse at the Russian Front: A Diary*, 408.

war. The image of the *Sisters of Mercy* might have seemed peaceful from afar in their white clothes and religious ornaments, though the reality was not the same. To guarantee their roles in the battlefields and to perform their craft as the legal participants of the war effort, the nurses were required to know how to execute small medical procedures. Working in the *letuchka*⁹⁹, the flying column, they followed the moving troops on the back of the horses. These nurses had to suppress their emotions while working with the soldiers where they had to continuously work on an amputated leg or a beating open heart. Seeing the horrors of WWI, the Eastern Front nurses had to live through much more difficult experiences than their Western European counterparts, as it was more dynamic than any other fronts. Lady Muriel Paget working in the Russian Red Cross Field Hospital placed the real horrors of the war in her diary, as:

the casualties lay in their hundreds... There was the raw and featureless mass of flesh that had once been a face... their faces black with flies; waiting, hour after hour, till the nurse or the surgeon could come to them.¹⁰⁰

Although there were several improvements attained with the Crimean War in acknowledging the female nurses, their companionship had still not respected as the nursing profession transformed from the domestic sphere to the war, a predominantly masculine place. Stepping foot into the realm, some treated the war as a way to exhibit their expertise as for the others, it was humanitarian or a patriotic endeavor. The divine and self-sacrificing image of these women also reflected on their motives as the wartime nurses' obligations did not only come from the duty requirements but

⁹⁹ Called *letuchka*, the flying columns, the nurses of the Eastern Front had served as medical groups in these highly mobile and fast units.

¹⁰⁰ Anne Powell, *Women in the War Zone: Hospital Service in the First World War*, 296.

also religious and charitable causes on their part.¹⁰¹ Now with that lead, the Sisters of Mercy could find a place for themselves in the front while cleaning, taking care of the sick, feeding, and operating in the wards. It was the only way for a woman to be on the front¹⁰², where Violetta Thurstan said:

I was helping at the Red Cross Centre in Vincent Square, and all day long there came to an endless procession of women wanting to help, some trained nurses, many—far too many—half-trained women; and a great many raw recruits, some anxious for adventure and clamoring “to go to the front at once,” others willing and anxious to do the humblest service that would be of use in this time of crisis¹⁰³.

Dr. Poliksena Shishkina-lavein, one of the editors in the journal of *League for Women's Equality*, said that it was the Russian women's obligation to defend their fatherland as she assumed this road would lead to the equal rights of men and women in the new, victorious Russia.¹⁰⁴ It was creating a way to reach a bigger struggle for modernity and eventually full citizenship. However, their experiences were so intense that in order to become useful, they needed to become emotionless. Surrounded by the vast male population, they could not show any weakness, as in the case for them, their femininity. On becoming this anti-feminine formation, one of the sisters said: “With

¹⁰¹ Although it was true for many of the empires at the time, this one refers specifically to the Russian nurses where the line of professionalism had differed from the western societies as nursing profession had more or less seen as part of the charity. For detailed information see: Laurie Stoff, *Russia's Sisters of Mercy, and the Great War: More Than Binding Men's Wounds* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 5-6.

¹⁰² V. A. Shalamov, “Irkutskaiia Mariinskaia obshchina sester miloserdiia Krasnogo Kresta v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny,” *Izvestiia Irkutskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta: Serii «Istoriia»*, no.16 (2016): 163-164.

¹⁰³ Violetta Thurstan, *Field Hospital and Flying Column: Being the Journal of an English Nursing Sister in Belgium & Russia*, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Laurie Stoff, “The ‘Myth of the War Experience’ and Russian Wartime Nursing during World War I” *Aspasia* 6, (2012): 100.

God's help my transformation went well, the feminine in me decreased more and more, and I did not know whether to be glad or sad about this."¹⁰⁵

Writing anonymously in the Red Cross Herald, one of the Sisters of Mercy commented on her acceptance into the Red Cross in that she and her fellow nurses were told to "*forget that you are women, forget that you have personal desires, sorrows or joys.*"¹⁰⁶ Only with forgetting their identity, they could be a substantial use for their country. Likewise, it was evident that the female nurses had grown into political actors, a diplomatic instrument of their states. They were commissioned overseas to support their allies or worked as morale boosters for the troops. However, they were the same ones who got exposed to destructive weapons, toxic gases, and epidemic diseases firsthand. Especially, the Crimean War had the worst cholera pandemic of the century so that bodies were simply thrown into the pits; the frostbite was so dreadful that soldier's flesh and their clothes would freeze together.¹⁰⁷ Because there was no nursing care or solid transportation, most men would die on the road to the hospital. As wartime nurses had been forgotten by a whole century over the emphasis on militarization, war, and the politics of the era; even the slightest reference to the nurses of the Great War would bring the British and Canadian nurses to mind where the Russian Sisters of Mercy stayed under the waters.

¹⁰⁵ Alfred G. Meyer, "The Impact of World War I on Russian Women's Lives" in *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, edited by Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel, and Christine D. Worobec (Berkeley, Los Angeles and California: University of California Press, 1991), 209.

¹⁰⁶ Laurie Stoff, *Russia's Sisters of Mercy and the Great War*, 145.

¹⁰⁷ Carol Helmstadter, "Class, gender and professional expertise: British military nursing in the Crimean War" in *One Hundred Years of Wartime Nursing Practices, 1854-1953*, edited by Jane Brooks and Christine E. Hallett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 25-26.

4.1. The Russian Red Cross Society (ROKK) and the Nursing Pioneers in the Great War

The first Geneva Convention of 1864 described the guidelines around caring for sick and wounded soldiers, the practitioners and facilities in the war by also founding the modern humanitarian law. The medical staff was considered as a component outside of the conflict, as well as an injured soldier who ceased to be an enemy. The ‘*Society for the Care of the Wounded and Sick Warriors*’ had been established within the imperial court by Aleksandr II and his wife Empress Mariia Aleksandrovna, in 1867. They would educate the personnel, organize the hospitals, collect donations, and help the wounded and sick people. After the convention, on 3 May 1879, the Emperor Aleksandr II approved the charter of the ‘*Society for the Care of the Wounded and Sick Warriors*’ and renamed it as the Russian Red Cross Society (ROKK).¹⁰⁸ ROKK was one of the most important organizations in Russia that it was also part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, later bringing many organizations under its wings such as the community of ‘*Satisfy my Sorrows*.’¹⁰⁹

The Red Cross’ contribution to the Great War could not be easily ignored as by the end of 1914, there were 318 institutions, and in 1917, there were 2500 doctors, 20,000 nurses, and 50,000 orderlies working under the Red Cross.¹¹⁰ After months of training, they would be enrolled under the ROKK and received their certificates as Sisters of Mercy, selected from 18 to 40 years old, healthy females that would

¹⁰⁸ Kira Fedorovna Piatakova, “Vizual’noe soprovozhdenie informatsionnykh izdaniĭ proekta «Sestry miloserdiia»” PhD Diss., *Sankt-Peterburgskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet* (2018),36. ; E. E. Koloskova, “Deiatel’nost’ Obshchestvennykh i Blagotvoritel’nykh Organizatsii v Period Russko-Iaponskoi i Pervoi Mirovoi Voiny.” *Vestnik Arkhivista*, no.6 (2006): 164.

¹⁰⁹ Vera Sokolova, “Rossiiskoe Obshchestvo Krasnogo”, 58.

¹¹⁰ Kira Piatakova, “Vizual’noe soprovozhdenie informatsionnykh izdaniĭ proekta «Sestry miloserdiia»”, 36-37.

abandon their right to marry.¹¹¹ The mobilization of women for the war was so various in its chapters that some were working in relief organizations for soldier's families, some were helping refugees, and other women who wanted to be official nurses were taking lessons to join the Sisters of Mercy. There were not only Russian women in service, but many British, Canadian, and American women found themselves in Russian hospitals working under the Red Cross.

Florence Farmborough was an English woman who worked as a nurse on the Russian front through the whole WWI, where when she was asked which land was her favorite from her travels, she answered: "*Russia, because she taught me the meaning of the word, suffering.*"¹¹² Farmborough was born in 1887 in Buckinghamshire, close to the Nightingale's brother-in-law, Sir Verney. Not surprisingly, she was named after *the* Florence Nightingale herself.¹¹³ Farmborough's first destination was in Kyiv, but after two years, she moved to Moscow to the famous heart surgeon, Dr. Pavel Sergeyeovich Usov's house, as an English teacher. Teaching to his two daughters, Asya and Nadya for several years, she found herself in Russia when the war broke out in August 1914. Instead of going back to Great Britain, she searched a way to help the Russian people by undergoing intense training under the Red Cross. In her acceptance speech waiting anxiously, the priest got close to her:

To thee, Floronz, child of God, servant of the Most High, is given this token of faith, of hope, of charity. With faith shalt thou follow Christ the Master, with hope shalt thou look towards Christ for thy salvation, with charity shalt thou fulfil thy duties. Thou shalt tend the sick, the wounded, the needy: with words of comfort shalt thou cheer them.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ A.V. Sribnaia, "Organizatsiia Deiatel'nosti Sester Miloserdiia v Gody Pervoi Mirovoi Voyny" *Vestnik PSTGU II: Istoriia. Istoriia Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* 5, vol.60, (2014): 72.

¹¹² Florence Farmborough, *Nurse at the Russian Front*, 15.

¹¹³ Christine E. Hallett, *Nurse Writers of the Great War*, 216.

¹¹⁴ Yvonne M. Klein, ed. *Beyond the Home Front: Women's Autobiographical Writing of the Two World Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 46.

Under the Red Cross and the authority of Princess Golitsyna, Farmborough has been offered a job as a nursing sister in Moscow. Since the Crimean War, the Russian Army was deploying the nurses to the battlefield¹¹⁵ rather than only positioning them at the base hospitals where she thought that her expertise in nursing could be useful in the front line. Enrolled in the 10th surgical unit, she found herself in a *letuchka* that was going to the Carpathian mountains.¹¹⁶ Before she was sent to the front, her Russian *mother* Anna Ivanovna kissed her three times *for the father, the son and holy spirit*, and wished her godspeed as if she was a soldier going to war where all Russian mothers once did it to their sons.¹¹⁷

Her memories under the Red Cross, following the *letuchki* to a journey of an unknown front, it would be correct to say that nurses had experienced the reality of the horrendous war, more than anyone else. In her art and writings, it was not easy to escape from the aura of the destroyed villages, the torn places, and trenches as she was not only a war nurse, but she also had an extensive collection of war photography. She wrote in her diary (1914 to 1918) with shocking pictures, words from a man who had all the flesh of his back torn away. In one memory, she claims that she was coward and disobedient when helping a soldier who had just been in surgery:

His cries for water were insistent; he was beseeching, imploring; his thirst must have been agonizing... I reasoned with myself: if I give no water, he will die tormented by his great thirst; if I give him water, he will die, but his torment will be lessened. I reached for the mug; his burning eyes were watching me; they held suspense and gratitude. But, before I could replace the mug, a strange gurgling sound came from him, and out of his mouth, there poured a stream of thick,

¹¹⁵ Claire M. Tylee, "The spectacle of war: Photographs of the Russian front by Florence Farmborough" *Women: A Cultural Review* 8, no.1, (1997): 67.

¹¹⁶ Christine E. Hallett, *Nurse Writers of the Great War*, 217.

¹¹⁷ Yvonne M. Klein, ed. *Beyond the Home Front*, 47.

greenish fluid; it spread over the stretcher-bed and flowed on to the floor. His eyes were closed and ... he had stopped breathing.¹¹⁸

As with the Farmborough, two other British women wrote their memories and shared the experiences of flying columns as their days went by in the tents and wagons.

Violetta Thurstan, a professional nurse, was an exception to the other nurses in the field where her whole life has been spent in the hospitals and getting an education in London where one of the most influential nursing schools are. Worked in over five countries, she could perfectly speak several European languages. Having left the London Hospital, Thurstan pursued further education in fine arts at the St. Andrews University. However, her connections within the nursing community had not vanished as she held hospital appointments until the war. Nevertheless, within 1914, her thoughts have been changed. A war romantic and enthusiast, her life was filled with wild thoughts:

I have had the most exciting time I have ever had in my life. I must tell you about it ... Shells were coming at the rate of ten a minute. There were aeroplanes just over us dropping bombs every minute. We got out without anyone being hurt. I never enjoyed anything so much in my life ... I can't describe what it was like, but it was splendid.¹¹⁹

Joined to the British Red Cross Society in 1913, Thurstan was sent to Brussels to a hospital in Marcelline, in August 1914. When Germans advanced into the city in October, all English doctors and nurses were ordered to leave and transported with armed guards to the Copenhagen. Having decided to join the Russian Red Cross with the influence of Princess Volkonskaya, she moved to Moscow with her flying

¹¹⁸ Christine E. Hallett, *Nurse Writers of the Great War*, 216.

¹¹⁹ Christine E. Hallett, *Nurse Writers of the Great War*, 157.

column. When she went to Petrograd, she wanted to visit the front and be useful in infectious hospitals, due to being vaccinated. However, the community of the Russian sisters who were staying in cell-like houses said that they were not allowed on the front as only trained sisters could be on the front, because they had to take special war courses and training.¹²⁰ Experiencing the German bombardment of Lodz, the Russian withdrawal to Warsaw, or staying in the trenches at Radzivilow, she had one of the most lively experiences of one can grasp. Her success won her the Military Medal for “*bravery in the Field to the undermentioned Ladies, Non-Commissioned-Officers and Men*”¹²¹ In her diary, she also mentioned how the nursing community in Russia worked:

There are a great many similar communities in Russia—all nursing orders. They are called Sisters of Mercy, but are not nuns in any sense, as they take no vows and are free to leave whenever they like. The course of training varies from two to three years and is very complete, comprising courses in dispensing and other useful subjects. The pity of it is that there are comparatively few of these trained Sisters at the front; the vast majority of those working there have only been through a special “War Course” of two months’ training, and are apt to think that bandaging is the beginning and the end of the art of nursing.¹²²

In the case of Mary Britnieva, she was an Anglo-Russian woman that came from a wealthy and privileged family, writing her tragic life story from the days of Eastern Front within her *letuchka* to the Stalinist purge of the 1930s. Written in the late 30s, she had an almost nostalgic view of the war as she said the Russian people were sleepwalking to their destruction.¹²³ She was surged by patriotism, eventually leading her to train as a war nurse. After the Order of the Exaltation of the Cross

¹²⁰ Violetta Thurstan, *Field Hospital and Flying Column*, 48.

¹²¹ London gazette, “His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of then Military Medal for bravery in the Field to the undermentioned Ladies, Non- Commissioned-Officers and Men” 19 November 1917.

¹²² Violetta Thurstan, *Field Hospital and Flying Column*, 109.

¹²³ Christine E. Hallett, *Nurse Writers of the Great War*, 221.

merged into the Russian Society of Red Cross, she joined in the ranks in order to serve as a nurse while marrying the Chief doctor. In her memoir *One Woman's Story*, she described being on the front as:

I am quite certain that not one of us young women had ever before experienced such profound feelings of reverence, patriotism and enthusiasm, all in perfect harmony, as were evoked in us by this memorable service.¹²⁴

4.2. The Royal Sisters of Mercy in the Tsarskoye Selo Palace

The Imperial court had always seen charity necessary in preserving the authority and prestige of the Russian Empire. The Empress Aleksandra Fedorovna, the wife of Emperor Nikolai II, had spent her whole life from organizing workhouses, and clinics to being a guardian of the institutes about the protection of motherhood or the education of underprivileged children. When the Great War broke out in 1914, she directed her compassion to the care of the wounded and sick soldiers. Having courses and training in the Palace with her daughters Olga and Tatiana Nikolaevna, they were awarded the title of *Sisters of Mercy* under the authority of the Russian Red Cross Society. In September 1914, the Empress, the Grand Duchesses, and other sisters received their certificates in the ROKK quarters. Having called the *Queen Mother, Mother Mercy*, the Empress, worked for three years as a quite simple nurse.

On 10 August 1914, the Palace Infirmary was opened in the Tsarskoye Selo. Within one week, the number of hospitals had reached nine, and, with the Empress' undertaking, 85 hospitals have been established in Tsarskoye Selo, Pavlovsk, Peterhof, and others.¹²⁵ The largest of these hospitals, the Palace Infirmary, had been

¹²⁴ Mary Britnieva, *One Woman's Story*, 10.

¹²⁵ E.K. Evdokimova - S.A. Shirshova, "Miloserdnye sestry avgusteishei sem'i" *Biulleten' meditsinskikh Internet-konferentsiĭ* 3, no.2 (2013): 300.

set up with 1000 beds, and it lasted until November 1917.¹²⁶ Being present at the most gruesome operations, the Empress Aleksandra Fedorovna and the Grand Duchesses Olga and Tatiana worked in this infirmary during the war as Empress thanked God for having the opportunity to bring some relief to the soldiers.¹²⁷

After moving to the Alexander's Palace in Tsarskoye Selo, the work has been started, and the latest equipment was set up in the infirmaries. The main rooms of the Winter Palace, the concert halls and reception rooms, even the throne room were converted into hospital wards.¹²⁸ With the Red Cross, they organized two hospitals, ambulance trains for the transportation of the wounded soldiers. On 30 October, the Grand Catherine's Palace has opened¹²⁹ in the name of Grand Duchesses Maria and Anastasia Nikolaevna, where it has been mostly used as a storeroom for the linens and dressings. The younger Grand Duchesses did not entirely work in the hospitals, but they were also helping the wounded. When it comes to Tatiana and Olga Nikolaevna, they were working in hospitals every day. The Empress in her usual sisters' clothes was taking trips to nearby cities visiting other infirmaries where one of the first trips marked November 1914 as she visited the Vilna and Kovno.¹³⁰ As Countess Kleinmichel observed:

When a soldier saw his Empress dressed in a nurse's uniform, just like any other nurse, he was disappointed. Looking at the Tsarina, whom he had pictured as a princess in a fairy tale, he thought: "And that is Tsarina? But there is no difference between us."¹³¹

¹²⁶ A. M. Krasilnikova, "Deiatel'nost' Chlenov Rossiiskoi Imperatorskoi Sem'i v Blagotvoritel'nykh Meropriiatiakh po Okazaniu Pomoshchi Ranennym i Bol'nym Voinam v Gody Pervoi Mirovoi Voyny" *Korpus* 10, no.3 (2017): 46.

¹²⁷ Evdokimova -Shirshova, "Miloserdnye sestry avgusteishei sem'i", 299.

¹²⁸ Helen Rappaport, *The Romanov Sisters: The Lost Lives of the Daughters of Nicholas and Alexandra* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2014), 112.

¹²⁹ A. M. Krasilnikova, "Deiatel'nost' Chlenov Rossiiskoi Imperatorskoi Sem'i", 47.

¹³⁰ A. M. Krasilnikova, "Deiatel'nost' Chlenov Rossiiskoi Imperatorskoi Sem'i", 48.

¹³¹ Helen Rappaport, *The Romanov Sisters*, 115.

In the memoirs of a close friend to Empress, Anna Vyubova stated that waking up at 7 am every day, the Empress and her daughters did not become wary from any procedures. Thanks to the eminent surgeon Giedroit's classes, the four Romanov sisters also worked as surgical sisters. Dr. Vera Ignatievna Gedroits was a Lithuanian aristocrat and a senior physician at the court hospital and one of the first women to qualify as a doctor in Russia.¹³² With the surgeon, they would take part in amputations or a whole operation. Once she saw the Empress was bandaging some gangrenous parts, Vyubova thought that she was an inborn *Sister of Mercy*.¹³³ Anna Vyubova recalled their first bloodstained memory:

“I have seen the empress of Russia assisting in the most difficult operations, taking from the hands of the busy surgeons amputated legs and arms, removing bloody and vermin-ridden field dressings, enduring all the sights and smells and agonies of the most dreadful of all places, a military hospital in the midst of a war.”¹³⁴

Every morning Olga and Tatiana would change the dressing of the three to four patients and tackling many small errands, including rolling bandages or boiling silk for the wounds. They would eat at one o'clock and return to the hospital to spend time with the wounded soldiers. Meanwhile, Grand Duchess Olga Aleksandrovna, the sister of the Tsar Nikolai II, went to the front in 1914 and became the head of the hospital in Kyiv, which was equipped entirely by her donations. She was working as equals with everyone, where it has been seen that she was doing minor operations in her spare time working on mutilated legs. However, she was worrying deadly for

¹³² Helen Rappaport, *The Romanov Sisters*, 113.

¹³³ Natalia Nikolaevna Blokhina, "Deiatel'nost' Sester Miloserdiia Doma Romanovykh v Gody Pervoi Mirovoi Voiny (K 100-Letiiu Nachala Pervoi Mirovoi Voiny)" *Rossiiskii meditsinskii zhurnal* 21, vol.1 (2015):55.

¹³⁴ Candace Fleming, *The family Romanov: murder, rebellion, and the fall of imperial Russia* (United States: Schwartz & Wade Books, 2015), 156.

everyone. Seeing ten people died in her hands, she cried many times as being a nurse had become dreadful.¹³⁵ Valentina Ivanovna Chebotaryova was a volunteer nurse who worked in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904 that, in the end, she found herself working with the Empress and her daughters in the Palace Hospital at Tsarskoye Selo. She was appointed into the operating room as a senior nurse with Princess Vera Gedroits, as well.¹³⁶

With the memory of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904, Bloody Sunday in 1905, and the crushing defeats of the Russian Army in the Great War, the pressure on the royal family was getting heightened. The gossips surrounding the Empress Aleksandra Fedorovna and Rasputin, a self-proclaimed holy man and a peasant healer, had a toll on the Empire. After the death of Rasputin in 1916, the weight of the Great War, the gossips and intrigues in the royal court, the regime has never been so fragile where the society has been deeply divided.¹³⁷ On International Women's Day, 8 March 1917 (23 February O.S.), the strikes of the workers had started as they shouted, *down with the autocracy, down with the war!*¹³⁸ On 15 March, the Emperor of All Russia, Nikolai II, had signed the abdication statement leaving the power to the Provisional Government.

On 19 March, Chebotaryova said: "*I learned about abdication only on the 17th morning, I will never forget this minute*". In her words, the infirmary was dead silent with everyone shocked, and Dr. Vera was crying in a corner. Under house arrest in

¹³⁵ Evdokimova -Shirshova," *Miloserdnye sestry avgusteishei sem'i*", 300.

¹³⁶ Chebotaryova's son Gregory Chebotaryov (Tschebotarioff), wrote a book about recalling his memories of Russia including parts of her mother's diary. For detailed information, see: Gregory P. Tschebotarioff, *Russia, my native land: A US Engineer Reminisces and Looks at the Present* (United States: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 53.

¹³⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (United States: Oxford University Press, 1984), 32-33.

¹³⁸ Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (Knopf, 1995), 77.

Alexander's Palace, Tsarskoye Selo, on 3 April, the infirmary went into full chaos and destruction. In her notes in April, she saw that Grand Duchess Olga had a temperature of 39.9, and Grand Prince Aleksei had a bruised arm because of his hemorrhage,¹³⁹ and because of his hemophilia, his cuts and bleeding would hardly stop. Having prevented to work in the infirmary since the March (February) Revolution, they still exchanged letters. A letter from Tatiana Nikolaevna said: "*It's so strange to sit in the morning at home, to be in good health and not to go the change of bandages.*"¹⁴⁰ Chebotaryova hastily wrote in her diary, asking the question of what will await them in Tobolsk, where they have been exiled in Siberia in early August of 1917.¹⁴¹

4.3. The Great Divide: All-Russian Union of the Sisters of Mercy

The Sisters of Mercy that was originated with the Tsarist era, had seen the end with the March (February) Revolution in 1917. Perceived as part of the bourgeoisie, these nurses became outcasted when Bolsheviks seized power with the October Revolution on 7 November (25 October), in the same year. During the civil war which ensued in the war-weary Russia, the sisters would also be divided between the White and Red Armies. Some sisters in the White movement tried to form a union of All-Russian Union of the Sisters of Mercy in 1917, though it was disbanded 18 months later. There

¹³⁹ Elena Pervushina, *Byt' sestroi Miloserdii: Zhenskii lik voiny* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2017), 286.

¹⁴⁰ Gregory P. Tschebotarioff, *Russia, my native land: A US Engineer Reminisces and Looks at the Present*, 191.

¹⁴¹ In April 1918, when the Tsar's family was transferred to Yekaterinburg, the letters had stopped. At midnight with Yakov Yurovsky, the whole family went down into a basement, Aleksei carried by his father Nikolai II. The late Emperor was the first to get executed. The Empress and Olga Nikolaevna left their hands to make a cross, but they did not have the time. All of the Tsar's family have been brutally murdered on 17 July 1918.

were also *Red Sisters* who were working the Red Army units in Bolshevik headquarters of St. Petersburg.

Due to the ongoing famine and epidemic on hand, on 24 July 1918, the ‘People’s Commissariat of Health’ was created with a decree by the Soviet of People’s Commissars of the Russian Federation. These new institutes had to have nurses that were reliable, well-educated with a socialist vision. As the Tsarist Sisters of Mercy had no place in these criteria due to its religious roots, it had to be abolished. With that, a new Soviet nurse, namely a ‘comrade nurse,’ could be created in the new Soviet Union.¹⁴² However, not only the Tsarist nursing organizations were disbanded, but many writings of the Russian sisters were destroyed in the process.¹⁴³ Those who joined the White Army’s medical groups had to flee from Russia after the victory of the Red Army.

¹⁴² Elizabeth Murray, “Russian nurses: from the Tsarist Sister of Mercy to the Soviet comrade nurse: a case study of absence of migration of nursing knowledge and skills” *Nursing Inquiry* 11, vol.3 (2004): 133-134.

¹⁴³Susan Grant, “Nurses in the Soviet Union: Explorations of Gender in State and Society” In *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*, edited by Melanie Ilic (London : Springer Nature, 2018), 251-252.

CHAPTER V

RUSSIAN WOMEN DURING THE 1917 REVOLUTION: WOMEN'S BATTALION OF DEATH

*Arise, brave women!
Take the bayonets from the hands of men,
And show them quickly,
How life must be given for the children.¹⁴⁴*

5.1. The Last Hope of the Provisional Government

Although 1917 marked one of the most chaotic years for Russian history, the country had been in constant disarray since the 1905 Revolution. Transitioning into a constitutional period with the State Duma until then, the 1917 Revolution has resulted in the disruption of the Russian Empire, and the Army was disintegrated

¹⁴⁴ According to Laurie Stoff, this poem was posted around the Novgorod to appeal the Russian women in joining war. For detailed information see: Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 90.

within a few months.¹⁴⁵ As mentioned, the slogans of 1914, ‘*For faith, For Tsar and for fatherland*’ had turned into rallying of ‘*down with the king and down with the war.*’¹⁴⁶ The working women of Petrograd were suppressed more than the men, and they would work under grim conditions with little pay, drowning into poverty. Shouting ‘bread’ on the streets, on 8 March 1917 (23 February O.S.), on the International Women's Day, the crowds of women swarmed into the city.¹⁴⁷ Unable to suppress the protests and strikes that were going on for days, the revolution spread to Moscow on 12 March. On 15 March, the Tsar had no chance but to abdicate.

The new Provisional Government was designed to be short-term and transitional in its core. However, the power play between the Provisional Government, and the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies, had left the country in a haze. While the Provisional Government had the authority on the ministries and executive organizations, the Petrograd Soviets had a massive influence over the troops, railways, and communication systems.¹⁴⁸ Mikhail Rodzianko, the Chairman of the State Duma was an ardent monarchist, and the Provisional Government was seen by most workers as the extent of the old Tsarist Empire, which aimed at restoring the old order.¹⁴⁹

In March, the Petrograd Soviet issued the Order No.1¹⁵⁰ calling for soldiers to set up committees and the capital punishment for desertion and insubordination had been outlawed. The new order in the army was drastic; the soldiers were reluctant to fight

¹⁴⁵ Anton I. Denikin, *The Russian Turmoil: Memoirs, Military Social and Political* (London: Hutchinson, 1923), 13.

¹⁴⁶ Perel'man Irina Vladimirovna, “Vliianie Pervoi Mirovoi Voiny na Razvitie Rossiiskogo Gendernogo Poriadka. Fenomen Marii Bochkarevoi” *Gramota* 83, no.9 (2017): 142.

¹⁴⁷ Neil Faulkner, *A People's History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 113.

¹⁴⁸ Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 55.

¹⁴⁹ Neil Faulkner, *A People's History of the Russian Revolution*, 137.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution, 1900-1927* (London: The Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 55.

and appealed to the idea of peace and having land as there was no fear of a sentence anymore. The soldiers were moody and morose; they could sit and smoke in front of their officers. Already war-weary from the war, Russian soldiers in the front were less willing to attack, and while there was no peace at sight, their patience wore thin. By its unstable nature, the dual regime was tough to endure. In order to prevent the government from collapsing, the Provisional Government had to do something compelling, as the Bolshevik and Revolutionist ideals had already surged in the army. Patriotism should be injected, and Germans had to be defeated.

5.2. Before Being the First Russian Women Commander – Maria Bochkareva

In July 1889, in a small village called Nikolsko in Novgorod, Maria Leontievna Frolkova was born as the third child of Leontiy Semenovitch Frolkov and Olga Eleazarovna Frolkova. When Emperor Aleksandr II emancipated the serfs, her father, Leonti, was only fifteen years old. In time, he would enlist into the Army and earn many medals in the Russo-Turkish Wars of 1877-78.

That being so, Maria had still been raised in a destitute family. Her mother, Olga Frolkova, also had the misfortune of being born into a penniless house as she would meander in the villages and beg for bread and money.¹⁵¹ When the Empire dictated that there would be enormous grants for people who would work in Siberia, the whole family was stationed at Kuskovo near Tomsk. Chasing for a better life, soon they recognized, there was no escape from poverty as Maria was forced from her childhood to work in multiple jobs from being a nanny, domestic servant, or a store clerk. She would do the cooking, cleaning, and at night sleep on the floor. Being in

¹⁵¹ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka: 1-3*.

agonizing pain, Maria tried to take her own life a couple of times and ran away from the house, only to return each time.

When Maria was fifteen years old, she met a soldier returning from the front, and the marriage with Afanasiy Bochkarev¹⁵² happened quickly. One day later, they were working as laborers in asphalt business in Tomsk. Maria did not know that he was an abusive drunkard. Not only would he get drunk all the time, but he would also brutally beat her, leaving Maria with an attempted suicide again. Just like her marriage, in one day, she got her belongings and went to Irkutsk.

In her own words, Maria Bochkareva had no idea that she would meet Yakov Buk, a Jewish man nicknamed as Yashka. Unbeknownst to her again, he was considered as a suspicious man to the local police, a bandit in the disguise of a butcher. When Yakov was arrested and sent to jail, Maria tracked him to the Irkutsk Prison, only to learn he was drafted from there. Walked for seventy miles to Aleksandrovsk, she discovered that her lover was in exile in Yakutsk. Not leaving his side for a minute and opening a new butcher shop for him, Maria knew she was in misery. Surrounded by despicable people, beatings, and rape, in order to survive, she swallowed poison to kill herself. It was another failed attempt, and she had to be fed through a tube for months. Seeing the true identity of her 'savior', it was all clear; Yakov was a terrible man, too. He would beat Maria, drink all the time, and spend her money on gambling. In 1913, Yakov caught on stealing again and ordered to be sent to Amga, a remote Yakut village. When Yakov attempted to hang her with a rope, Maria Bochkareva escaped from his hands and never looked back.

¹⁵² Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 17.

On 1 August 1914, when the First World War arose, she returned to Tomsk.¹⁵³

Seeing soldiers in the streets and people trying to enlist into the Army, it was a frightening scene. There were rumors of a massive conflict, a gigantic war. Although she knew the war had no place for a woman, Maria asked herself anyway:

Marusia, do you know what war is this? Are you strong enough in spirit to face all the trials and dangers of this colossal war? Are you strong enough in body to shed blood and endure the privations of the war?¹⁵⁴

Not long after, she was answering *yes* to all of the questions as the reality struck her; she had to go to the war and fight until death. The Russian Empire was in dire need, and Maria Bochkareva had to help the unfortunate ones. With a surge of patriotism, Maria paid a visit to the headquarters of the 25th Tomsk Reserve Battalion of the Imperial Russian Army in November. Her reasoning and desire to assign in the military only received with humiliation and laughter, *what could a 'Baba' do in the front?*¹⁵⁵ The Empire had no policy towards women soldiers as it was against the law to admit women into the military due to their *weakness*. Even though the Commander advised her to become a Sister of Mercy, Maria knew she could defend her country as well as a man. Wearing the Commander down with endless insisting, he told Maria that she could request the permission of the Emperor. Staying at her ground, she telegraphed Tsar Nikolai II with a wish to enter the military. Against all odds, laughter, and belittling, the Tsar himself authorized her enrollment into the regiment.

Nicknamed herself as Yashka, in the memory of her abusive lover, Maria was enlisted in the 4th Company of the 5th Regiment.¹⁵⁶ She received the same soldier

¹⁵³ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 68.

¹⁵⁴ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 71.

¹⁵⁵ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 71.

¹⁵⁶ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 75.

outfit with men, foot rags, and a pair of boots while cutting her hair short. The acceptance letter from the Emperor meant nothing in the military; she would get harassed, humiliated, and laughed wherever Maria went. After completing the three months of training, in early 1915, she started her frontline duty in Polotsk with the 5th Corps of the 28th Regiment of the 2nd Army.

During the enemy's gas attack on the battlefield, she pulled fifty wounded soldiers from the front despite being heavily wounded. As the attitude around her has changed, Maria, for the first time, felt as if she had a place among men. For her actions in the no man's land, she was awarded two St. George's Cross and a medal for Bravery and Courage.¹⁵⁷ However, suffering from many injuries, including a bullet in her leg and shell in her spine, she became paralyzed and hospitalized for four months. When she reappeared in the front as a senior noncommissioned officer, the March (February) Revolution had already set in motion, and she was determined that the Russian Army was over. There was no fight left with the Germans, and she had to go back home.

5.3. The Establishment of the First Women Battalion of Death

The Feminist movement and progression on woman emancipation had been working its way through the Russian Empire from the 1905 Revolution to 1917. Although the Tsar had ensured to deliver the right to vote for women in the 30 October Manifesto (17 October O.S.), the Duma did not welcome the votes of the *persons of female sex*.¹⁵⁸ In this era of transformation, it was no accident that the Suffrage movement

¹⁵⁷ Not for Bochkareva's one action in the front, but she earned the medals for her merit in a number of battles. In one of them, she was recommended for a St. George's Cross, though it was denied because she was a woman. For more information, see: Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 73.

¹⁵⁸ Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, 203.

affected the women's desire to have equal rights. Sensing a different attitude in Russian society, women were finally introduced as equal members of the nation, especially with the right to vote in the elections, Russian women wanted to be forward and vocal in their engagement with their own country.

However, the exhaustion of the war and revolutions, the Bolshevik propaganda in the Army, the fluctuations in the military command with Order No.1 had caused the soldiers in the front to diverge. The overthrow of the autocracy and strong anti-war sentiments with an intense drop in the discipline convinced many leaders to construct more reliable military formations. It would be wise to say that, even before Bochkareva, there were talks of women involvement in the Army to inspire the war-beaten soldiers, yet it was not followed through.

Maria Bochkareva herself had a firsthand experience of how the revolution and war affected the military as the men whom she fought with were worn out of the war, continually asking when the fight is going to be over. Not knowing whom to fight for on their fourth winter; there was no end to this. Thinking if there is a secret alliance with Germany, the ultimate enemy, they would demand to know *'why millions of people still getting slaughtered each day.'*¹⁵⁹ The talk around the trenches was similar, a delegate from the army committee made a speech that would seem to catch Maria's eyes as he was telling: *"Whose war it was? The Tsar's. He made us fight and perish while he and his associates reveled in wealth and luxury. Now the Tsar is no more. Why, then, comrades, should we continue his war?"*¹⁶⁰

Long before 1917, Maria Bochkareva had already proven her worth in the battle and awarded with the St. George' Cross during the First World War. One of the leaders of

¹⁵⁹ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 133.

¹⁶⁰ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 148.

the February Revolution, Mikhail Vladimirovich Rodzianko, on the field during his trip to the Western Front, meeting her, was seemingly impressed by the story of Bochkareva. Hearing her worries about leaving the army as there was no fight against the Germans now, Rodzianko called her to Petrograd to see if there is anything they can accomplish together.¹⁶¹ Leaving the no man's land, in May 1917, Maria traveled to Petrograd to meet with Rodzianko, who invited her to a dinner at his own home. Calling Maria as a *little heroine*,¹⁶² they have started to talk about the situation in the trenches. The urge for soldiers to leave the trenches and go home was growing, although the Provisional Government gave orders to units to carry on the war. It was the first time when Maria heard about *the Bolsheviks*, a group led by Lenin, who had recently returned from Germany. Recognizing her propaganda value, Rodzianko was brilliant in his actions to advertise Bochkareva as an example.¹⁶³

In the Taurida Palace, in front of the delegates and group of soldiers, Maria gave her commentary of how the discipline was gone, and agitation was increasing; there had to be something done to forestall the army and crumbling of the government. When she was asked to find a solution, the answer was clear ; to establish a Women's Battalion of Death.¹⁶⁴ In order to serve as an example and lead the men back into the battle, Maria was serious in her proposal as she thought men would be ashamed of not fighting while women would be on the front, fighting for them. Rodzianko

¹⁶¹ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 147.

¹⁶² Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 152.

¹⁶³ Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 74.

¹⁶⁴ The shock or death battalions designed as special combat formations in order to defend the country, usually they were composed of volunteers. These shock battalions had workers, students and even disabled soldiers. They did not have a significant impact on the army, but they were considered to be the last hope of the Provisional Government. See more information: Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, 295. ; Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 154. ; Maksim Viktorovich Vasil'ev, "1-i Petrogradskii zhenskii batal'on v sobytiakh 1917 goda" *Velikaia, Sviashchennaia, Otechestvennaia: Rossiia v Pervoi mirovoi: materialy konferentsii, Kaliningrad*. (2014): 2-3.

approved the suggestion though there were questions on how women would honor the Army. In her famous speech, Maria said:

If I take up the organization of a women's battalion, I will hold myself responsible for every member of it. I will introduce rigid discipline and will allow no speechmaking and no loitering in the streets. When Mother- Russia is drowning, it is not a time to run an army by committees. I am a common peasant myself, and I know that only discipline can save the Russian Army. In the proposed battalion I should exercise absolute authority and insist upon obedience. Otherwise, there would be no use in organizing it.¹⁶⁵

Within a week, as a peasant girl from Novgorod, she was holding audiences with War Minister Aleksandr Kerensky and Commander-in-Chief General Aleksei Brusilov since she was granted the authority to form a unit under the name of the First Russian Women's Battalion of Death.¹⁶⁶ The next day, it was announced all over the city with posters of Maria's face that there would be a gathering in Mariinsky Theatre for the Battalion of Death. On 3 June 1917, Maria gave a speech in the theatre, in front of a crowd:

Men and women citizens! Our mother is perishing. Our mother is Russia. I want to help to save her. I want women whose hearts are loyal, whose souls are pure, whose aims are high. With such women setting an example of self-sacrifice, you men will realize your duty in this grave hour!

It was so moving that on the evening 150 women had already enlisted into the Army. In the Kolomenks Women's Institute, the battalion had officially started to build up as women were given a place to stay. On 15 June, the newspaper *Russkoe Slovo* published an article calling all the Russian women to enroll in the special units.¹⁶⁷ In another newspaper called *Urzhum*, it was written:

¹⁶⁵ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 155.

¹⁶⁶ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 157.

¹⁶⁷ V. N. Parshina, "Sozdanie Zhenskikh Voinskikh Chastei v Rossiiskoi Armii v 1917 g." *Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi 100-letiiu Velikoi rossiisoi revoliutsii* (Penza: Izdatel'stvo PGU, 2017), 193.

The Patriotic impulse of women found a warm response in the hearts of Urzhum citizens: the local Committee of the women's Union received applications from women who want to join the women's Army, warmly welcomed by citizens who are ready to give their lives to save the Motherland.¹⁶⁸

Soon with the publicity, the number of women had reached 2000, and she addressed to the women that were gathering, saying, “Do you know what war is? War! Look into your hearts, examine your souls, and see if you can stand the great test.” Every woman had a different reason for joining the battalion. Rita Dorr, an American journalist, introduced the life stories of the volunteers in one of her publications. One of the girls, a nineteen-year-old Cossack girl, had lost her father and two brothers in battle and her mother during a shell attack on a hospital where she worked. After that, she had no reason not to join the Army as the Bochkareva's battalion seemed the safest.¹⁶⁹ Whether the women in the battalion had a husband or brother in the army or they had the desire to avenge the death of their beloved, they were ready to give their life for the cause. Some of them already had military background as with the female Cossacks, and some of them were looking for adventure and left their homes for the unknown. One of the peasants said she used the opportunity to join the army to escape from his husband and his constant beatings. When she heard the military was taking women soldiers, she ran away and signed up thinking he would not dare to touch her when she goes to the front to fight for Russia.¹⁷⁰

According to a journalist from *Birzhevye Novosti*, nearly 30 percent of the women were students that attended the most prestigious institutions in Russia, where at least 40 percent had secondary education.¹⁷¹ In a volunteer's diary, Bocharnikova also

¹⁶⁸ D. N. Kazakov, “Viatskie Zhenskie Batal'onny 1917 Goda” *Idnakar: metody istoriko-kul'turnoi rekonstruktsii: nauch.-prakt.: Izhevtsy i votkintsy v grazhdanskoi voine* 30, no.1 (2016): 43.

¹⁶⁹ Vasil'ev, “1-i Petrogradskii zhenskii batal'on”, 5.

¹⁷⁰ Vasil'ev, “1-i Petrogradskii zhenskii batal'on”, 4.

¹⁷¹ V. N. Parshina, “Sozdanie Zhenskikh Voinskikh Chastei v Rossiiskoi Armii v 1917 g.”, 193.

mentioned that their battalion in Petrograd was allowing women from 16 to 40 years old, though for girls under the age of eighteen, parental permission was required.¹⁷² They had many different professions or social statuses, from noblewomen, including the daughters of generals or princes to teachers, many Sisters of Mercy, workers, and peasants. Overall, there were 8-9 Estonians and Latvians, 6 Jews, and one British woman, while the rest were Russians.

Women's units were not only established in Petrograd, but there were many in other cities, including Moscow, Kyiv, Minsk, Poltava, and with these initiatives, many women had a chance to attend the battalions. In order to organize the infantry, the Military Council had allowed the establishment of the 1st Petrograd Women's Death Battalion, 2nd Moscow Women's Death Battalion, 3rd Kuban Women's Death Battalion and including communication teams in Petrograd, Moscow, Kyiv, and Saratov reaching nine in total. In these battalions, there were nineteen officers, five military officials, and over one thousand combatants and eighty five noncombatant soldiers.¹⁷³ The members of the battalion not only have to follow the orders of the Provisional Government and the existing military laws, but there were also other conducts they need to follow by the Petrograd Committee for the Organization of Women's Military Detachments.

1. The honor, freedom, and well-being of the motherland is the first priority.
2. Iron discipline
3. Steadfast and unwavering spirit and faith.
4. Courage and valor.
5. Accuracy, neatness, persistence, and quickness in execution of all duties.
6. Irreproachable honesty, and a serious attitude toward work.
7. Cheerfulness, happiness, kindness, hospitality, chastity and fastidiousness.

¹⁷² Maria Bocharnikova was one of the women soldiers in the 1st Petrograd Women's Death Battalion ; Maria Bocharnikova, "V zhenskom batal'one smerti (1917-1918): Dobrovolitsy " *Russkii put'* (2001): 173-236.

¹⁷³ V. N. Parshina, "Sozдание Zhenskikh Voinskikh Chastei v Rossiiskoi Armii v 1917 g.", 195. ; Vasil'ev, "1-i Petrogradskii zhenskii batal'on", 4.

8. Respect for the opinions of others and full faith in one another.
9. Quarrels and personal scores are intolerable, as is the degradation of human dignity.¹⁷⁴

Maria Bochkareva wanted to touch upon the souls of the women to the point of showing men that they have a duty to attend.¹⁷⁵ However, the discipline of Bochkareva was over the top; she did not allow even talking while eating; she ordered all the girls who entered the battalion to cut their hair off. She was severely strict, and any minor offense even to the slightest disobedience should be punished. On the first day, over 30 women were excluded, and 50 women who didn't want to sleep after the lights were out were kicked out on the first night.¹⁷⁶ No flirtation with the opposite sex was allowed, and if so, there would be an arrest. The defeminization process in the battalion with no weakness or bickering, communication, and intimacy with the opposite sex was heavily enforced. This *hegemonic masculinity* coming from the Bochkareva was expected to be followed by the other female soldiers. When women in the army had a problem with her cursing and salty language, especially the women in the upper class, they received with Bochkareva's flame:

Get used to it – the front is the front – you are now soldiers! It is impossible to say anything in Mother Russia without strong words! What do you think, the Tsar never shouted curses? And you've never heard how well Count Lev Tolstoy can swear? And what about Peter the Great? And Suvorov? If I call someone a fool, this cannot possibly offend...you are no longer women, you are soldiers. I'll tell you later how topsy-turvy it was for me when I first joined the ranks...Or the first time I had to battle with the men. But a soldier is a soldier; you cannot make an exception for yourself. It was much worse than the way you have it now – and I withstood it. It's nothing – get used to it. Don't put up your noses!¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 76.

¹⁷⁵ Bochkareva continued: "I appeal to women whose hearts crystal honest; whose souls are pure, whose thoughts are noble. With such women, we will show are example of self-sacrifice, so that men realize their duty and fulfill it on this a hard hour of testing!" For more information, see : Veksler Arkadii Faivishevich, "Petrogradskoe Desiatiletie", *Fontanka: kul'turno-istoricheskii al'manakh* , no.4 (2009) : 8-9.

¹⁷⁶ P.G. Kultyshev, "Zhenskie Batal'ony Russkoi Armii v 1917 Godu Kak Faktor Razmyvaniia Gendernykh Rolei V Usloviiax Voennogo Vremeni" *Seriia Istorii. Politologii* 45, no.1 (2018): 109.

¹⁷⁷ Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 86.

The women who cannot take on the strict hegemony of the Bochkareva wanted to elect a new chief only to receive with push. Most of the volunteers could not stay with Bochkareva and her very strict way of behavior and refused to obey her. Her attitude was firm and rude as dissatisfaction grew in the newly established battalion. With her old-fashioned manners, out of those two thousand women, only three hundred remained with her.¹⁷⁸ When these *rebels* had left, those three hundred remained were mostly peasant and illiterate women but entirely devoted to Mother Russia and very loyal to Bochkareva.¹⁷⁹

On 4 July 1917, in front of the St. Isaac's Cathedral, as a Death Battalion, they received a distinguished insignia, white with red and black stripes and red and black arrowheads on the right-arms.¹⁸⁰ On the new banners, there were also white and light yellow cloth with black silk across the cross, a large orthodox eight, and the writing of the *First Women Death Battalion*.¹⁸¹ Having the honor of being promoted to the rank of officer by the Kerensky himself, the sounds were echoing '*Long Live Bochkareva.*' In the solemn prayer service, it was stated that if anything would happen to Maria Bochkareva, the flag would not be used by another Commander.¹⁸² With the blessing of the battalion, the government was also shouting for any able-bodied men to rise for the defense of Russia, as well as calling the women as heroes.

¹⁷⁸ Evgenii Ivanovich Yurkevich, "Zhenskie Udarnye Batal'ony v Petrograde v 1917 g." *Voennaia Istoriiia Rossii XIX-XX Vekov: Materialy IX Mezhdunarodnoi voenno-istoricheskoi konferentsii* (Sankt-Peterburg: Sankt-Peterburgskii gosudarstvennyi universitet promyshlennykh tekhnologii i dizaina, 2016), 211.

¹⁷⁹ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 174.

¹⁸⁰ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 164.

¹⁸¹ Veksler Arkadii Faivishevich, "Petrogradskoe Desiatiletie", 9.

¹⁸² Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 186.

On 7 July, the battalion left the institute and marched to the Kazan Cathedral on their way to the front to Molodechno.

5.4. The First Battle of the Battalion of Death: Novospassky Forest

Having received the mission, Bochkareva and the battalion was assigned to the 525th Kuryuk-Darinski Infantry Regiment of the 132nd Division of the 1st Siberian corps.¹⁸³

The command was supposed to bolster the soldiers on the front while assisting with the occupation of the Novospassky Forest, near Smorgon, in the north of the city of Molodechno. On their march to the city, Bochkareva had two adjutants beside her; the daughter of an admiral who commanded the Black Sea Fleet, Magdalena Skrydlova, and Princess Tatuyeva, who belonged to a famous Georgian family in Tiflis.¹⁸⁴ On their arrival, it was evident that the male soldiers were not happy with the presence of the battalion, nor their entrance increased the morality. The male soldiers' behavior towards the women was so hostile and extreme that they started to harass the women as soon as they left the train. In their first night at the Molodechno, their barracks' windows were shattered, and walls were hit by a group of men.¹⁸⁵ Leaving the soldiers and other shock battalions in there, on 16 July, they marched to their regiments outside Smorgon.

Bochkareva had thought the 300 women in the no man's land would prove their worth and the male soldiers would drown in shame and embarrassment, rushing to the front, though the reality was not the same. On 19 July 1917, the firing had started, the shells began to fall on the soldiers. One day later, the Death Battalion had

¹⁸³ M. M. Smol'ianinov, "K Voprosu Ob Uchastii Zhenskogo Batal'ona Smerti v Srazheniakh na Belorusskoi Zemle" *Minskii gosudarstvennyi lingvisticheskii universitet*, no.16 (2018): 262.

¹⁸⁴ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 199.

¹⁸⁵ Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 108.

received 8 machine guns and a crew of men to fight with as the idea was to move the men on the first chain following with women in the second one.

In Smorgon, near the town of Krevo, General Valuyev ordered the troops to move at 3 am in the morning to have an advantage over the Germans. However, on 21 July, when the Colonel had given the signal at the exact time, the men did not move. For women's surprise, men on the trenches were disobeying the Commander's orders debating why or whom they would die for. While the talks had continued few hours more, Bochkareva wanted the permission for the officers to enter the ranks and advance in a joint order. On top of the 300 women with 75 officers with rifles, and other soldiers reaching one thousand, the attack on Germans had begun.¹⁸⁶ With Bochkareva, the attacks was assisted with other distinguished soldiers Anna Prokhorova, and Anna Tsenarskaya.¹⁸⁷

While the soldiers in the trenches laughed and mocked them, the soldiers moved forward in the trenches with fires and explosions on each of their sides. Their joint attack alone had won two thousand prisoners and the Battalion was able to overwhelm the first German line. However, with the men in the behind, getting drunk and leaving the war, their whole purpose was destroyed. Although it was the women soldiers and Bochkareva that led them into the attack, the situation against the Germans had not changed as they counterattacked. Some of the girls were killed right there and many of them was wounded. Klipatskaya, a female soldier with

¹⁸⁶ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 209.

¹⁸⁷ M. M. Smol'ianinov, "K Voprosu Ob Uchastii Zhenskogo Batal'ona Smerti v Srazheniiakh na Belorusskoi Zemle ", 265.

Bochkareva, received twelve wounds from bullets and shrapnel said, ‘my dear, it’s no matter’ before she died besides them in a pool of blood.¹⁸⁸

When the sun rose and the army reached to the third line of the German defense, fifty girls were dead and more than a hundred was wounded. Surrounded with the enemy in the middle of the battlefield, a hundred women with officers were in grave danger. At the same time, the 9th corps that were supposed to advance hours ago, was debating whether to advance or not.¹⁸⁹

The offensive had proved to serve no purpose. On the night of the 22 July, Germans fired heavily and made attempts on the trenches, using the advantage of the darkness. At 5 am, on 23 July, Germans launched another attack on the Southwestern edge of the Novospassky Forest, only to be repulsed by the Women’s Battalion of Death.¹⁹⁰ However, during the shell attack one girl was killed instantly, six were injured including the Commander who was heavily shell-shocked during the offensive. Now, the Germans reoccupied all the ground and the trenches that were previously captured by the Women’s Battalion. The battalion was heavily injured where there were only two hundred women left in the ranks. Losing one third of the battalion, women were recalled to Petrograd to regroup into the 1st Petrograd Women’s Death Battalion. On the same day, Bochkareva was sent to the hospital and the battalion command was given to her 1st adjutant, Magdalena Skrydlova.

Although Bochkareva was in the hospital, the battalion did not immediately withdraw from the battle line. With the neighboring 8th company, the battalion was actually holding a very dangerous front line facing the enemy and their departure

¹⁸⁸ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 212.

¹⁸⁹ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 214.

¹⁹⁰ M. M. Smol’ianinov, “K voprosu ob uchastii Zhenskogo Batal’ona Smerti v srazheniiakh na Belorusskoi zemle”, 265.

would mean to lose everything.¹⁹¹ While Commander asked for a replacement of the battalion, they remained in the front. Their involvement in the war had made a huge change in the front. Within two days, Women's Death Battalion had repelled fourteen German attacks. Their work showed an impeccable example of courage and example for the male soldiers. For their example of valor, the female warriors of Anna Prokhorov and Anna Tsenarskaya earned the St. George Crosses of 4th degree for their impeccable execution of responsibilities.¹⁹² The Commander of the 6th company of the 525th regiment, Sub-lieutenant Kervich, praised the battalion:

Despite the heavy fire from the enemy they remained at their posts and carried out their duties on a level equal to the [male] soldiers. The five persons ordered to carry cartridges to the machine guns performed their duties conscientiously, although they were under fire from the enemy. One of them went on reconnaissance and the others set up listening posts. Through their work the women's detachment proved that they deserved the name of warrior in the Russian revolutionary Army.¹⁹³

Even General Denikin, who was very skeptical of the idea of women battalions, admitted that Bochkareva's regiment showed exceptional heroism. Maria was awarded the rank of the second lieutenant upon leaving the hospital. Not long after, on 27 August 1917, General Kornilov banned the creation of the new female death battalions for combat use. Taking this decision on the basis of the heavy losses suffered by the women's battalions, Kornilov concluded that the already created units could be used only in auxiliary areas, despite the desire of women to serve their fatherland.

¹⁹¹ M. M. Smol'ianinov, "K voprosu ob uchastii Zhenskogo Batal'ona Smerti v srazheniakh na Belorusskoi zemle", 266.

¹⁹² M. M. Smol'ianinov, "K voprosu ob uchastii Zhenskogo Batal'ona Smerti v srazheniakh na Belorusskoi zemle", 266.

¹⁹³ Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 111.

5.5. 1st Petrograd Women's Death Battalion and the Defense of the White Palace

In late October 1917, the leading objective of the Bolsheviks was to coordinate the anti-government arms in Petrograd and regulating a defense position from a possible German invasion.¹⁹⁴ It was 30 October, when the Main Directorate of the General Staff stated that the Women Battalion Movement that was exaggerated by the press and individuals did not justify its existence. On 4 November, the Military Revolutionary Committee resolved to veto all military commands coming from Petrograd despite Kerensky's resistance. Calling for the reinforcements of the defense of the Winter Palace, Don Cossack regiments rejected the Kerensky's offer where he eventually turned his interest to the 1st Petrograd Women's Battalion¹⁹⁵

Founded by the Organizing Committee of the Women's Military Union in June 1917, the battalion was stationed in Levashovo, along the Finnish railway.¹⁹⁶ The core of the battalion was actually comprised of the surviving members of the Bochkareva's Death Battalion and despite having organized by the students, teachers or nurses; most of them had little idea about what was happening in the country, as one asked after the October Revolution, *are the Bolsheviks and Red Guard the same?*¹⁹⁷

In the normal order, the Petrograd Women's Battalion was supposed to be deployed on the Romanian front on 6 November. However, they were summoned to Petrograd in a very urgent manner. Leaving their post in Levashovo, the Staff Captain A.V. Loskov entrusted the battalion to attend a military parade before parting for the front.

¹⁹⁴ Evgeniy Vasilievich Yakovkin, "Na Zashchite «Zimnego»: Poslednie Zashchitniki Vremennogo Pravitel'stva. K Istorii Oktiabr'skogo Vooruzhennogo Perevorota 1917 g." *Mezhdunarodnoi voenno-istoricheskoi konferentsii : Voennaia Istorii Rossii XIX-XX Vekov* (Sankt-Peterburg, 2017) : 445.

¹⁹⁵ Evgeniy Vasilievich Yakovkin, "Na Zashchite «Zimnego»", 447.

¹⁹⁶ H.M. Astrakhan, "O zhenskom batal'one, zashchishchavshem Zimnii dvorets" *Istorii SSSR*, no.5 (1965): 93-94.

¹⁹⁷ H.M. Astrakhan, "O zhenskom batal'one", 94-95.

In the turbulent situation of the city, the battalion's deployment in the Palace Square indicated the real expectation of the government: they had to fight against the Bolsheviks. Most of the women, including Loskov, had no intention to get involved in the political struggle in the country, as their sole desire was to support their country on the battlefield. One volunteer said: "I am a woman soldier, and I fight only imperialistic invaders."¹⁹⁸ Thinking in the same vein, Loskov withdrew the battalion to the original station, to Levashovo, though out of 1000 women soldiers, 137 volunteers from the 2nd company decided to fight and remained in the Palace.

The 2nd company was ordered to protect the bridges¹⁹⁹ and the Winter Palace, bound by oath of faith and military duty. However, the forces at the disposal of the Provisional Government was clearly insufficient to suppress the armed uprising. In their inability to formulate a serious defense of the Winter Palace, the government was incompetent to survive the night. The remaining soldiers from the Battalion were guarding the ground floor of the Palace, near to the gate opening to Millionnaya Street. In the evening, with the cadets, women soldiers tried to secure the barricades and shoot against the Bolsheviks though later women had to retreat and hid in the palace until their surrender. The stories of the rape and torture towards these women disregarded as anti-Bolshevik propaganda. After the capture of the Winter Palace, soldiers surrendered to the revolutionary soldiers of the Pavlovsky Reserve Regiment.²⁰⁰

After sending the soldiers to their former deployment in the Levashovo, on 12 November, the camp was raided with the Red Guards. Disarming the 1st Petrograd

¹⁹⁸ Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland*, 153.

¹⁹⁹ Perel'man Irina Vladimirovna, "Vliianie Pervoi Mirovoi Voyny na Razvitie Rossiiskogo Gendernogo Poriadka", 145.

²⁰⁰ V. N. Parshina, "Sozdanie Zhenskikh Voinskiikh Chastei v Rossiiskoi Armii v 1917 g.", 197.

Women's Battalion, 891 rifles, four machine guns and boxes of ammunition were seized by the Bolshevik Army.²⁰¹ After the disarmament, the battalion continued to exist for a little while and dispersed in different paths until December 1917.

5.6. The Ban on Women's Battalions and the Downfall

With the sounds of cherishing among the soldiers '*Hurray for Lenin, Hurray for Trotskiy*', the front was not secure for neither Bochkareva nor the handful of girls that were all left from the battalion. The whole existence of the Death Battalions relied on the Provisional Government; thus the women soldiers came to be victimized at the hands of angry mobs, as twenty girls were lynched in the name of the revolution. Now, wherever Bochkareva went, there were name-callings, laughs, and spits towards her. Although Maria claimed she had no interest or love for tsarism, they had already coded the battalion as a product of the old regime. Decided to go home, Bochkareva had one last talk with her girls:

What had I not hoped from this Battalion! But as I searched my soul I could find little to regret. I have done my duty my country. Perhaps I had been too rash when I had imagined that this handful of women could save the Army from ruin. And yet I was not alone in that expectation.²⁰²

At the end of November 1917, this simple, peasant girl was summoned to Petrograd to have an audience with Lenin and Trotskiy though she refused to work for the Bolsheviks, as she assumed they would be the end of Russia.²⁰³ On 2 December 1917, the Main Directorate of the General Staff submitted a proposal to the Military Council for disbanding any remaining Women's Death Battalions. Accordingly, on

²⁰¹ Vasil'ev, "1-i Petrogradskii zhenskii batal'on", 9.

²⁰² Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 259.

²⁰³ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 261.

13 December, the Bolsheviks disbanded all women battalions in the country.²⁰⁴ The last to surrender was the 3rd Kuban Women's Strike Battalion, which ceased to exist until 11 March 1918. In the Civil War, many former volunteers of the women's battalions joined the ranks of the White Army, and although they fought within men, even commanded to some, they were no special units formed for them.

Although she wanted to distance herself from the Civil War, on 20 January 1918, Maria Bochkareva received a telegram from a General asking her to contact with General Kornilov, who had already formed a volunteer army in Don. Meeting with Kornilov and receiving a mission, under the disguise of a Sister of Mercy, Maria sailed to the USA from Vladivostok on 1 May 1918. With several documents, she was going to spread the situation in Russia and told the story of her captivity under the Bolsheviks. Sent to the US with Kornilov's instructions, Bochkareva was able to meet with Secretary of Defense Becker and the US President Wilson. Asking the allies for help in the fight against the Bolsheviks, Maria intended to agitate Western politicians for aiding the White movement. The American feminists also very much welcomed her. To the Russian émigré journalist Isaac Don Levin, Bochkareva dictated her memories and published a book called *Yashka: My Life As Peasant, Exile, and Soldier* where the bulk of the information about herself and whole formation of the women battalions relied on. In her last words in the book, Maria was adamant in her mission:

Help Russia to release herself from the German yoke and become free—in return for the five million lives that she has sacrificed for your safety, the security of your liberties, the preservation of your own lands and lives!²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Zhanna V. Abasheva, "Moskovskii Zhenskii Batal'on Smerti v Gody Pervoi Mirovoi Voiny: Iz Istorii Sozdaniia" *Pskovskii voenno-istoricheskii vestnik*, no.1 (2015): 140.

²⁰⁵ Maria Botchkareva, *Yashka*, 339.

After the United States, she moved to the UK and met with King George V himself. The British War Office gave her 500 rubles of funding for her return to Russia. On 9 September 1918 Maria came to Arkhangelsk to form a women's unit. However, as no help come from the White unit's Commander, she went back to Tomsk. In the fall of 1919, Admiral A.V. Kolchak had proposed Bochkareva to form a female military unit under his command. Following the collapse of the Kolchak's army, she was captured by the Bolsheviks on 20 January 1920 and sent to Krasnoyarsk to a special department of the 5th Army.²⁰⁶ Interrogated for nearly three months, she was declared to be the worst enemy of the workers and peasants. Maria Bochkareva was shot by Cheka on 29 May 1920 while she was only 31 years old.²⁰⁷

After the Bolshevik takeover, the story of the women battalion buried under the chaotic years of 1917. Often mentioned the units as *Shame Battalions*, it could be said, the Bolsheviks stood their hostility towards the battalions. However, the new woman ideal was born out of the aggression. Women Bolsheviks, started to work as fighters, medical orderlies in the country, in units called Communist Women's Combat Detachment.²⁰⁸ Guaranteeing equality of rights to women with the First Soviet Constitution, the Soviet authorities declared that, *hundred years of the Woman Question had been solved.*²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Evgenii Ivanovich Yurkevich, "Zhenskie Udarnye Batal'ony v Petrograde v 1917 g.", 215.

²⁰⁷ Veksler Arkadii Faivishevich, "Petrogradskoe Desiatiletie", 11-12.

²⁰⁸ Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, 318.

²⁰⁹ Natalia Pushkareva, *Women in Russian History*, 258.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In a highly patriarchal Russian society, how the Russian women's lives shaped by the First World War? One of the questions that were answered throughout the thesis by the responses of the Russian women to the war and revolution; the history of Russian women has seen one of the most challenging years of its time.

Although the patriarchal institutions remained firm against the wishes of the women, the voices against submitting to the sole male authority were getting stronger. Having started with the early 20th century, the First World War had mobilized the Russian woman at an exceptional level. The new jobs opened in the factories, volunteering in nursing organizations, gathering clothing and supplies, even serving in the army had entered the ordinary lives of the Russian women from all classes.

It would be wise to say, many women found themselves in conflict, whether to rally or help out the war effort. However, seeing the national emergency of Russia, Russian women were seemed more sympathetic in assisting the war effort. In a

sense, the war was a challenge to the conventional gender consciousness as the roles of both genders had become blurred. With that, many Russian activists and feminists thought their sacrifice to Russia would not be forgotten and indeed be awarded with equal rights and citizenship.

However, evident in the memories of the volunteer women, the patriotism and self-sacrifice that come with the First World War had become rather faint within the end of the first years of the war. The involvement of women in the war-industry had become a necessity rather than a helping hand. In these instant job opportunities, women were enrolled as Red Cross nurses, medical assistants, or as Sister of Mercy to go to the front.

Placed their faith into the fatherlands, these nurses' stories were way distant of just treating the wounded soldiers in the war-torn battlefields. Started out of an excitement, an adventure for women who never set foot outside of her village, these sisters had attained something that it could not be organized even if they desired to. Even though their sacrifices bore the fruits after and led a snowball effect, their intention was not to create a women's movement in the world. However, the women had left their comfort zones to be on a battlefield generated the spark that led to the revolution both in the feminist and nursing history.

Getting harassed on the hospitals, not respected by their male peers, mocked on behalf of their femininity, these women, rather unintentionally, created a public space for themselves. Although neither the Russian nor British Empire used the female nurses as a way of being progressive, the selfless act of these nursing sisters proved the capabilities of women in the war effort. As Cynthia Enloe once said, women earned their rights to exist and be visible in the public eye, not before or after the wars but

through the war, itself. Once the Great War is over, people continued to mourn for the young soldiers who lost their lives for their countries, though the *Sisters of Mercy* had been buried under the dust of the nurses' diaries.

When it comes to the Russian feminism and women's movement that was started simultaneously with the Crimean War, and the birth of the woman question, their involvement in the First World War brought the most significant achievement. Using their connections, the women organizations not only secured voting rights but also gained many regulations on subjects of prostitution or education while touching upon a wide range of social problems, as well. In the March 1917 revolution, those women who become disenchanted with the regime joined the other disaffected groups to topple the Tsar.

After the March (February) Revolution and the creation of the Women's Death Battalions by the Provisional Government under the first Russian Women Commander Maria Bochkareva, the women's history in the world has changed infinitely. Although started as a desperate attempt from the Provisional Government to defend their power, Russian woman embarked on a worldwide success of having the first official all-female unit. Received hate, harassment, abuse, and rape just because they were seen as one of the reasons why the war has continuing; these women had nothing to lose except their lives. Cutting their hair short and living in the military's strict lifestyle, the Russian woman soldiers built an incomparable case for women to claim such a masculine place, the battlefield.

For most of the Russian women soldiers, the very idea of being on the front had received with the romanticizing of the military or idealizing the image of a defender, a patriot giving her life for the Mother Russia. Escaping from the burden of their

daily lives, over one thousand women responded to the call of their state, though neither army nor the state had considered their existence seriously.

Although the Women's Battalions did not change the situation at the front, the reason behind this failure had to look through. Receiving one to two months of trainings, the battalions were not even ready for a small conflict, let alone a total war. Making soldiers out of young women who had never set a foot outside their homes, their failure was not because they were the weaker sex by nature, but there was not a thoughtful preparation for the military service.

As Richard Stites and Linda Edmonson states, few women wrote about their activities and experiences after the overthrow of the Provisional Government. Therefore, the sources from the transition period from the Provisional Government to the Bolsheviks were almost non-existent to comment on it.

Against all the achievements, the Russian women's participation in World War I did not make the women as the equals of the men, nor the traditional gender roles had reversed. However, the women of the era had initiated one of the most massive women movements of the early 20th century. Although the Tsarist Sisters of Mercy and Battalion of Death disregarded with the Bolsheviks, the continuation of these organizations within the Soviets was the example of how imperative the active participation of Russian women in the Great War.

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FIGURES



Figure 1. Romanov Photograph Album 3, Yale University Library: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Folder 102, Box 3, (1909-15), 37.



Figure 2. Romanov Photograph Album 3, Yale University Library: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Folder 102, Box 3, (1909-15), 45.



Figure 3. Romanov Photograph Album 3, Yale University Library: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Folder 102, Box 3, (1909-15), 38.



Figure 4. Romanov Photograph Album 3, Yale University Library: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Folder 102, Box 3, (1909-15), 51.



Figure 5. Romanov Photograph Album 3, Yale University Library: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Folder 102, Box 3, (1909-15), 45.



Figure 6. Bain News Service, Publisher. Women parade in Russia. , ca. 1915. [Between and Ca. 1920] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014707450/>



Figure 7. Russia War Pictures. Women. Russia, 1917. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016868208/>



Figure 8. Bain News Service, Publisher. Russian Women Hospital Orderlies. , ca. 1915. [Between and 1918]
 Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014706984/>



Figure 9. Members of the Battalion of Death of Russia. First photograph received from Russia of members of the Battalion. Women fighters recuperating in Russian hospital from wounds received while in action on the battlefield. They are aiding the Kerensky government. Russia Russia, None. [Between 1917 and 1920]
 Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017672102/>



Figure 10. "Russian women soldiers, who have cut their hair short, shown in their dormitory." *International Film Service/The New York Times Mid-Week Pictorial*, Aug. 23, 1917



Figure 11. Maria Bochkareva, Emmeline Pankhurst and soldiers of the Women's Battalion. Rheta Dorr, *Inside the Russian Revolution* (New York: The MacMillan, 1917)



Figure 12. Bain News Service, Publisher. Marie Bochkareva. , 1918. May date created or published later by Bain. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014707026/>



Figure 13. 1917, Russia, Moscow, Red Square. Presentation of the Banner of Women's Battalion of Death. Public Domain.



© Underwood and Underwood, N. Y. 1917

THE WOMEN'S "BATTALION OF DEATH" IN NATIONAL DANCE

A unique outgrowth of the Russian revolution was this organization of women, which came into prominence at the beginning of the break-up of the Russian front.

Figure 14. The Women's Battalion of Death in National Dance. Underwood and Underwood, N.Y. 1917.



Figure 15. Women's Death Battalion, summer 1917., taken by Karl Karlovich Bulla.



Figure 16. Bain News Service, Publisher. Com'd'r. Marie Bochkareva. , 1918. date created or published later by Bain. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014707030/>