

Sex and Soviet Power in the Gulag of Western Siberia

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Love and sex were common in the Gulag camps.¹ This was due to the structure of individual camps, which had difficulty separating men from women prisoners; to the unwillingness or inability of the regime to punish every disciplinary infraction on the part of camp personnel, thus encouraging arbitrary and abusive behavior towards prisoners; and to an ambiguous relationship towards sexual activity in the camps, despite clear concern about high pregnancy rates, the difficulty of using pregnant women and nursing mothers in camp economic activity, and concern about the upkeep of children born in the camps themselves. The issues surrounding heterosexual sex in the camps ultimately underscore the Gulag’s inefficient day-to-day operations and serve to highlight a key difference between the Soviet and the Nazi camps, as the care for children and mothers—however minimal and, in many instances, cruel—stands in stark contrast to Nazi policies of forced abortions and/or summary death sentences.

¹ Although GULAG (*Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei*), or Main Administration of Camps, was technically in charge of running the special settlements until 1944, the present paper does not discuss the settlements, focusing instead on the labor camps and colonies.

The issues of sex in the camps in particular and women in the camps more generally have received little attention in the archive-based historiography.² Anne Applebaum's Pulitzer-prize-winning *Gulag: A History* includes a chapter on "Women and Children," but this chapter is based primarily on memoirs and interviews.³ The document collection *Deti GULAGa*, masterfully re-worked and re-edited into an English-language version as *Children of the Gulag*, contains useful documents the camps, but most of the focus is on repressive legislation that affected children, children of arrested parents, and special-settler children, as opposed to the experiences of women and children in the camps themselves.⁴ Other document collections contain helpful documents, but without analysis.⁵ Golfo Alexopoulos' growing body of work on the Gulag includes an article that examines the regime's relative leniency towards women with regards to release and pardons.⁶ The geographer Judith Pallot's analysis of the Gulag in the northern part of Perm' province notes that "marriages" between prisoners and locals were common, but

² Some unpublished archival-based work touches upon the issue of sexual relations in the camps. See, for example, Steven A. Barnes, "Soviet Society Confined: The Gulag in the Karaganda Region of Kazakhstan" (PhD dissertation, Department of History, Stanford University, 2003) 119-124; and Alan Barenberg, "From Prison Camp to Mining Town: The Gulag and Its Legacy in Vorkuta, 1938-65" (PhD dissertation, Department of History, University of Chicago, 2007) esp. 128-134, 208-211.

³ See Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Random House, 2003) 307-333. Of the 115 footnotes for this chapter, 33 refer to published and unpublished documents; the remaining footnotes cite memoirs, interviews, or Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. Nineteen of the 33 document citations, moreover, come from the last six pages of the chapter, which deals mostly with regulations surrounding children in the camps.

⁴ S. S. Vilenskii, A. I. Kokurin, G. V. Atmashkina and I. Iu. Novichenko, eds., *Deti GULAGa 1918-1956* (Moscow: MFD, 2002); and Cathy Frierson and Semyon Vilensky, ed., *Children of the Gulag* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁵ Of the seven-volume document collection, *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga*, ed. V. P. Kozlov et al. (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004-2005), volume one (on repressive policies), volume four (on the prisoner population), and volume five (on the special settlements, beyond the scope of the present paper) in particular contain helpful documents on women in the Gulag. See S. V. Mironenko and N. Werth, eds., *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga Tom 1: Massovye repressii v SSSR* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004); and A. B. Bezbodov, I. V. Bezbodova, V. M. Khrustalev, eds., *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga Tom 4: Naselenie Gulaga* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004). The A. I. Kokurin and N. V. Petrov, eds., *GULAG (Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei) 1918-1960* (Moscow: Materik, 2002) also contains several useful documents for understanding the experiences of women prisoners.

⁶ Golfo Alexopoulos, "Exiting the Gulag after War: Women, Invalids, and the Family," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 57.4 (2009): 563-579.

this is one small part of a larger argument concerning the interrelationship between free and forced labor in that area.⁷ Other archival-based studies have mentioned women prisoners, but usually only briefly.⁸

The dearth of archive-based scholarship on women in the camps exists despite the relatively large number of women prisoners in the camps, as well as the significant number of Gulag memoirs by women, available even in English translation.⁹ Indeed, studies that have relied primarily on Gulag memoirs have had a lot to say about women's experiences.¹⁰ While it is important to allow the prisoners to speak for themselves—perhaps even *more* important in the case of Soviet women ex-prisoners, whose voices were surely about as marginalized in Soviet society as possible—the archives reveal a considerable amount of material useful for understanding the experience of women in the camps.

⁷ Judith Pallot, "Forced Labor for Forestry: The Twentieth Century History of Colonisation and Settlement in the North of Perm' Oblast'," *Europe-Asia Studies* 54, no. 7 (2002): 1055-1083.

⁸ See, for example, J. Otto Pohl, *The Stalinist Penal System: A Statistical History of Soviet Repression and Terror, 1930-1953* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997), 30-31. Pohl's study includes a chapter on women, but this chapter is only two pages long. His purpose is to provide a brief overview, rather than in-depth analysis. See also V. I. Il'in, "Gorod-kontslager': sotsial'naia stratifikatsiia gulagovskoi vorkuty (1930-50-e gody)," in *Stratifikatsiia v Rossii: istoriia i sovremennost'*, ed. Iu. M. Rapaport (Syktyvkar: izd-vo SyktGU, 1999).

⁹ Arguably the best-known Gulag memoir is Evgeniia [Eugenia] Ginzburg's two-volume *Journey Into the Whirlwind* trans. Paul Stevenson and Max Hayward (New York: HBJ, 1967) and *Within the Whirlwind*, trans. Ian Boland (New York: Harvest/HBJ, 1982). There have been two volumes of women's memoirs published in English translation: Simeon Vilensky, ed., *Till My Tale Is Told: Women's Memoirs of the Gulag*, trans. John Crowfoot et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) (itself an abridged version of volume one of the two-volume *Dodnes' tiagoteet*, ed. Semen Vilenskii [Simeon Vilensky] (Moscow: Vozvrashchenie, 2004), the first volume of which originally appeared in 1989); and Veronica Shapovalov, ed., *Remembering the Darkness: Women in Soviet Prisons* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001). Many other important memoirs that deal with the Gulag and/or Stalin-era repression were written by women, including Margarete Buber's *Under Two Dictators*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (London: Victor Gollanz, 1949); Nadezhda Mandelshtam's *Hope Against Hope: A Memoir*, trans. Max Hayward (New York: Atheneum, 1970) and Anna Larina's *This I Cannot Not Forget: The Memoirs of Nikolai Bukharin's Widow*, trans. Gary Kern (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993).

¹⁰ See, for example, Leona Toker, *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

Without completely abandoning the memoir literature, this paper will examine issues surrounding heterosexual sex—or *sozhitel'stvo*¹¹, “cohabitation,” as it is often termed in the documentation—in the prison camps of Western Siberia, roughly present-day Novosibirsk, Tomsk and Kemerovo Provinces (*Oblasti*). Numerous types of documents—from operational orders to Communist Party meeting minutes of the camp Party organizations to camp procurator reports—reveal the prevalence of sex in the camps, and the authorities’ inability to control sexual behavior.

Although the present paper will not focus on the memoir literature, it is worth noting that love and sex are common themes in women’s memoirs. Often the sex is coerced, whether it is guards or other officials offering women better rations in exchange for sex, camp “marriages” in which the “husband” protects the “wife” in exchange for sex, or the sexual abuse and rape of prisoners by other prisoners or camp personnel. However, clearly sexual relationships were frequently consensual. The best-known woman memoirist, Evgeniia Ginzburg, met her second husband while they were both Gulag prisoners.¹² Anna Larina, Bukharin’s widow, also met her second husband while in the camps (in Larina’s case this happened in Western Siberia).¹³ In a heartbreaking memoir, Hava Volovich describes *wanting* to become pregnant as a way to feel more human, and

¹¹ The Ozhegov and Shvedova Russian dictionary defines *sozhitel'stvo* as follows: “1. *Sovmestnaia zhizn', prozhivanie (ustar.)*. 2. *Intimnye otnosheniia mezhd u muzhch inoi i zhenshch inoi*”.

¹² Ginzburg actually has a lot to say about love in the camps, noting that “true love” existed in the camps (Ginzburg, *Within the Whirlwind*, 15) and indicating some of the logistical difficulties in having intimate relations: “In the Kolyma camps love meant hasty, perilous meetings in some sketchy shelter at your place of work in the taiga or behind a soiled curtain in some ‘free’ hut. There was always the fear of being caught, exposed to public shame, and assigned to a penal labor brigade, i.e., posted to some lethal spot; you might end up paying for your date with nothing less than your life” (*Within the Whirlwind*, 11-12). She also mentions several instances of genuine relationships, including, of course, her own with a doctor in the camp, also a prisoner, who later became her second husband (see *Within the Whirlwind*, esp. 113-116, describing the beginning of their relationship).

¹³ Because of Larina’s focus on her first husband, she says little directly in her memoir, *This I Cannot Forget*, about her second husband. For more information, see Paul R. Gregory, *Politics, Murder, and Love in Stalin’s Kremlin: The Story of Nikolai Bukharin and Anna Larina* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2010), 150-151.

writes that the sex drive was "[t]he only thing that these stock-breeders from hell could not exterminate".¹⁴ Margarete Buber-Neumann's memoir contains numerous references to camp relationships and she herself received several proposals for intimate relations, which she politely (and successfully) refused.¹⁵ What these and other memoirists collectively reveal is that women could have a variety of complex motivations for sexual behavior in the camps, from seeking to fulfil sexual desires to establishing relationships to using sex to gain certain privileges, such as better rations or protection.

Solzhenitsyn, too, admits that love was possible in the Gulag.¹⁶ He, however, generally felt that the hard labor and the harsh conditions were more difficult for women prisoners than for men, although this partially reflects Solzhenitsyn's own opinion about men and women's abilities to face various hardships.¹⁷ Much of Solzhenitsyn's information concerning women in the camps comes from the experiences of women at the Krivoshchekovsk brickyard, part of a Gulag subdivision in Western Siberia's largest city, Novosibirsk. Here, Solzhenitsyn stresses the coerced nature of sexual relations, noting that "[a]t this camp there were thieves, non-political offenders, juveniles, invalids, women and nursing mothers, all mixed up together," and that many men sexually abused the women there, leading to major problems with venereal diseases.¹⁸ Venereal diseases could spread quickly through the camps and even cross the camp borders. According to Sibltag prisoner Evsei L'vov, de-convoyed prisoners (that is, those prisoners permitted to move outside of the camps without guard) "established relationships [*zavodili*

¹⁴ Hava Volovich, "My Past," in Vilensky, ed., *Till My Tale Is Told*, 241-276, quotation 260.

¹⁵ See Buber, *Under Two Dictators*, esp. 68-82.

¹⁶ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The GULAG Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, vols. III-IV, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 468.

¹⁷ For example, he seems to belittle women's concerns with their appearances. See Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago III-IV*, 228-229.

¹⁸ Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago III-IV*, 233.

sozhitel'nikh] in the nearby villages" and there "were instances when this ended tragically, that is, [with] venereal [diseases]".¹⁹

Work was so difficult at the Krivoshchekovsk brickyard and the conditions so terrible, that, according to Solzhenitsyn, everything "that is feminine in a woman, whether it be constant or whether it be monthly, ceases to be".²⁰ Yet Solzhenitsyn partially contradicts himself in this regard, noting that the "girls of Krivoshchekovo barracks also pinned flowers in their hair" to signify a camp marriage, and that illicit visits between men and women's barracks were quite common both here and all over the Gulag.²¹

The Gulag, of course, was predominantly male. The high proportion of male prisoners highlights a similarity between the Gulag and most other penal systems, where the prisoner population is usually overwhelmingly young and male.²² Yet, comparatively speaking, the Gulag held a large number of women prisoners, particularly during the war and the post-war periods. For the Gulag as a whole, women made up just under 6 percent of prisoners in 1934 and 13 percent of prisoners in 1942; this figure rose to 30 percent in 1945 due to high numbers of released male prisoners sent to the front. By 1948 the number was down to 22 percent and 1951, 17 percent.²³ In comparison, the prisoner population of England and Wales in 2003 was 94 percent male, even after a period during

¹⁹ Memorial Archive fond 2, opis' 1, delo 84, list 46 (L'vov, Evsei Moiseevich). Henceforth citations from Russian archives will abbreviate *fond* as f., *opis'* as op., *delo* as d. and *list* as l. (singular) or ll. (plural).

²⁰ Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago III-IV*, 235-36.

²¹ Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago III-IV*, 237-38.

²² To cite one example, in 1988 women made up only about five percent of those incarcerated in federal prisons in the United States. See [<http://www.prisonactivist.org/archive/women/women-and-imprisonment.html>] (last accessed 24 July 2010).

²³ For this information, see Pohl, *The Stalinist Penal System* 30; and Applebaum, *Gulag: A History*, 315-316.

which the female prisoner population increased more rapidly than the male prisoner population.²⁴

Although it is beyond the scope of the present paper to answer the question *why* there was a relatively high number of women prisoners in the Gulag, a few points are worth making. Perhaps most importantly, as Donald Filtzer has noted, the Soviet system of criminal justice during the Stalin era increasingly criminalized "ordinary activity" (such as showing up late to work in certain industries, leaving a job without authorization, speculation, or petty theft).²⁵ These "crimes," unlike violent crimes, included large numbers of women "perpetrators." Various campaigns against marginalized groups, from the *lishentsy* to the kulaks, moreover, also targeted many women victims.²⁶ Golfo Alexopoulos has noted the tendency to target "clans" or "lineages" during various repressive campaigns.²⁷ For example, family members of those sentenced for so-called "counter-revolutionary" crimes frequently themselves came under suspicion, and were often also the subject of criminal proceedings, arrest and incarceration. Tomsk, in Western Siberia, was briefly home to camp specifically for wives of "enemies of the people."²⁸ Finally, the Gulag's hybrid state—sharing characteristics of both the "concentration camp" and the modern prison system—partially explains the high number of women in the camps, as concentration camps have traditionally held many women due

²⁴ See <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1101> [last accessed 18 September 2010]

²⁵ Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism: Labor and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 27. For more on Soviet criminal justice, see Peter H. Solomon, Jr., *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

²⁶ See, for example, Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926-1936* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Sergei Krasil'nikov, *Serp i molokh: krest'ianskaia ssylka v Zapadnoi Sibiri v 1930-e gody* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2003).

²⁷ Alexopoulos, "Stalin and the Politics of Kinship: Practices of Collective Punishment, 1920s-1940s," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50.1 (2008): 91-117.

²⁸ For more on this Tomsk camp, see Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, esp. 42-51.

to the group nature of punishment.²⁹ Together these measures probably account for the comparatively high proportion of women in the camps, while the predominance of men attests to similar attitudes towards males and crime in the Soviet Union as elsewhere: the authorities simply saw men as more threatening than women.³⁰

Western Siberia stands out even within the Gulag due to the particularly high percentage of women in the area's camps. For example, in the spring of 1952 of the approximately 32,000 prisoners in Siblag's eleven camp subdivisions, roughly 13,000 were women, or 40.6 percent.³¹ While not always the case, work in the Gulag was often "gendered," in the sense that the authorities frequently assigned women prisoners lighter work or work that would have traditionally been in the woman's sphere, such as sewing or agricultural fieldwork.³² Siblag, along with Karlag in Kazakhstan, was the Gulag's main agricultural camp, and thus "naturally" held a high proportion of women prisoners. At Siblag, all three camp stations identified as "non-convoyed"—that is, where prisoners lived without guard—were for women prisoners only, illustrating the tendency to place women under lighter regimen.³³ The region also held several corrective labor colonies for minors, including one exclusively for girls located three kilometres from the city of

²⁹ The first time the term "concentration camp" was used in English was to describe the internment camps set up for Boer women and children during the 1899-1902 South African war. The term was itself borrowed from the *reconcentrado* camps set up by the Spanish during the Cuban war just a few years earlier; the so-called "pro-Boer" faction of the British Parliament used the term to criticize British policy.

³⁰ For more on Soviet authorities' tendency to view women as less threatening than men, see Viola, "Bab'i Bunty and Peasant Women's Protest during Collectivization," *Russian Review* 45.1 (1986): 23-42.

³¹ These stats come from compiling information within reports on individual camp subdivisions for the spring of 1952, and are contained in Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. 9414, op. 1, d. 581 [*Liternoe delo po ob'ektu Siblaga za 1952 g.*].

³² Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation III-IV*, trans. Thomas Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 234. Here Solzhenitsyn states that if men and women were assigned to similar work, the men would do the heavier work.

³³ See GARF f. 9414, op. 1, d. 581. This is the *Liternoe delo: Sibirskii ITL* and contains 175 pages with detailed statistical information on each of the camp's subdivisions.

Tomsk.³⁴ The locally run Novosibirsk Province Camp and Colony Administration,³⁵ moreover, held a somewhat higher proportion of women prisoners than the overall Gulag (as was likely the case with most local camp administrations), because this was technically a camp for those with relatively light sentences. Thus in 1948, when the Gulag as a whole was 22 percent women, women made up 27 percent of the prisoners at the Novosibirsk Province Camp and Colony Administration (4,269 of 15,761 prisoners as of 1 April 1948).³⁶ Other camps in the region, such as Sevkuzbasslag, a forestry camp in northern Kemerovo Province that housed a large garment factory, held many women. Sevkuzbasslag's 1 January 1950 prisoner population of 18,168 included 4,639 women, just over 25 percent of the total.³⁷

The structure of Gulag camps contributed to the possibility of sexual relations. While men and women prisoners were supposed to be held in separate camp subdivisions, stations (*punkty*) or zones, women's zones frequently housed at least some male prisoners, not to mention male civilian employees and camp officials. Even some men's zones occasionally included women prisoners. Many women's camp stations or zones were also located in close proximity to men's zones.

³⁴ Tsentr dokumentatsii noveishei istorii Tomskoi oblasti (TsDNITO) f. 607, op. 1, d. 465, ll. 153-157 is a letter from April 1947 discussing this colony, which at the time held 1200 "*nesovershenno-letnich prestupnikov-devochek*".

³⁵ The Russian is *Upravlenie ispravitel'no-trudovykh lagerei i kolonii upavleniia NKVD Novosibirskoi oblasti* (UITLiK UNKVD NSO), or the "Administration for corrective labor camps and colonies of the NKVD administration of Novosibirsk Province". Most territorial units in the Soviet Union held at least one camp that was technically locally administered, while many other camps—such as Siblag—were administered from the central GULAG, under the direction of the All-Union NKVD. In practice, jurisdictions changed frequently, and the locally administered camps also regularly received direct operational orders from the All-Union NKVD or GULAG.

³⁶ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Novosibirskoi oblasti (GANO) f. R-20, op. 1, d. 404, l. 10b (part of a report of the procurator for the UITLiK UMVD for Novosibirsk Province for 1948).

³⁷ GARF f. 8360, op. 1, d. 5, l. 53 (a report from Sevkuzbasslag to Timofeev, the head of the Main Administration of Forestry Camps, dated February 1950)

A brief illustration of the structure of three of the area's subdivisions, chosen randomly, illustrates the possibility for interaction.³⁸ Siblrag's Antibess subdivision, which local authorities considered a model camp, on 20 April 1952 held 2,430 prisoners (1,517 men and 913 women), most of whom worked in agricultural production, including animal husbandry. The subdivision consisted of four camp stations: a men's strengthened regimen station; a women's general regimen "non-convoyed" station, meaning that the prisoners were unguarded; a "convoyed" women's general regimen station; and a penalty camp station for women. The men's station held men, exclusively. The "non-convoyed" women's station held 190 prisoners, all women. Although there were not any men prisoners at this camp station, it was located only one kilometer from the large men's camp station, and was unguarded, relying on guards from the men's station when necessary. Clearly interaction would have been possible. The "convoyed" women's camp station held 641 prisoners, forty-five of whom were men, while the penalty camp station consisted of women only.³⁹ Siblrag's Arliuk subdivision held 915 men and 1,100 women in three camp stations, working in fieldwork, animal husbandry and construction. The men's camp station held 873 men and seventy-six women, while the two women's camp stations held, respectively, 724 women and thirty-four men and 334 women and eight

³⁸ These three were chosen "randomly" in the sense that the author did not pick the subdivisions that best suited his argument, but instead chose the first ones in the files. Thus, the paper examines the 1952 "spravka-kharakteristika," or the "report on characteristics" for the first two of the Siblrag subdivisions included in the Siblrag file (sorted alphabetically) and the first of the Administration of Camps and Colonies of Novosibirsk Province subdivisions included in the file for that camp (sorted numerically, by subdivision number). The author maintains copies of the entire 1952 reports for both of these camps, which include information on all subdivisions in operation at that time. For specific archival citations, consult footnotes 36-38.

³⁹ Interestingly, eighty-seven of the women at the non-convoyed camp station had been sentenced under Article 58 for "counter-revolutionary" activity. For the Antibess "spravka-kharakteristika" see GARF f. 9414, op. 1, d. 581, ll. 18-27 *s ob*.

men.⁴⁰ Subdivision no. 1 of the local Administration of Camps and Colonies of Novosibirsk Province, located in the city of Novosibirsk, held 636 men and 869 women in two zones as of 1 March 1952. The prisoners of this camp worked mostly in construction, garment production, and carpentry, largely under contract from the Ministry of Aviation. Although the documentation does not indicate whether women lived in the men's zone and vice versa, Subdivision no. 1 lists a nursery (*dom mladentsa*) with two hundred spaces, a children's isolator with thirty spaces, and a maternity ward with thirty spaces as part of the camp.⁴¹ Thus clearly there was little about the camps, structurally, to prevent interaction between men and women.

Intrepid and determined prisoners also found ways to negotiate internal camp borders. One Sibltag memoirist recalls that prisoners frequently bribed guards in order to move between zones of the camp.⁴² The black market in camp goods also attests to the porous nature of the Gulag's borders.⁴³ Fences between zones were sometimes of poor quality, making it easy for prisoners to slip through the internal borders.⁴⁴ Some light regimen camps and colonies even lacked a fence or a wall altogether.⁴⁵ More to the point,

⁴⁰ For the Arliuk "spravka-kharakteristika" see GARF f. 9414, op. 1, d. 581, ll. 28-35 *s ob*. Note that the numbers in the report do not match, as the total of 915 men and 1,100 women becomes 915 men and 1,134 women when adding the numbers for the individual camp stations. The reason for the discrepancy is not clear.

⁴¹ GARF f. 9414, op. 1, d. 539, ll. 7-8 *s ob*.

⁴² See Aleksandr Klein, *Kleimenye, ili, Odin sredi odinokikh: Zapiski katorzhnika* (Syktyvkar, 1995), esp. 147, 168, 174.

⁴³ The black market is a recurring topic in my dissertation, which I will defend, soon. For a good example of black market activity, see the 1942 directive from Sibltag's Political Department that complained that camp civilian employees and the Militarized Guard (VOKhR) often traded goods with both prisoners and the surrounding population, thus facilitating a black market in camp supplies. TsDNITO f. 356 op. 1 d. 15 ll. 152-153.

⁴⁴ A 1951 letter from Sevkuzbasslag to the director of the Main Administration of Forestry Camps complained, for example, that the wooden fence in the transit station was not sufficient enough to prevent prisoners from passing into other zones, including the women's zone, which resulted in "cases of banditry and *sozhitel'stvo*". GARF f. 8360, op. 1, d. 31, l. 132.

⁴⁵ See GARF f. 9401, op. 1a, d. 50, l. 7 for an NKVD operational order complaining about the lack of discernable borders at some camps.

however, women and men prisoners often worked at the same worksite and shared some camp medical and cultural facilities. Endemic personnel shortages combined with certain types of work (tree felling or even fieldwork, for example) meant that continuous, direct surveillance of each prisoner was impossible.⁴⁶ Thus a 1952 report on conditions in Sibltag noted that,

in the majority of camp subdivisions prisoner men live at women's camp stations, and women at men's, and they work together; so for example, at Suslovo division 191 [male] prisoners live in women's camp stations and work together with women. The uncontrollability of prisoners' behaviour [and] the lack of isolation of men from women prisoners engenders mass cohabitation [*sozhitel'stvo*], infractions of the camp regimen and the squandering of goods [*promoty veshchdovol'stviia*]. On the 1952 inspection day [*den' proverki*] there were 377 pregnancies registered.⁴⁷

If the structure of the camps allowed for considerable contact and sexual relations (forced and consensual) between men and women prisoners, the documentary evidence is frequently opaque concerning the precise nature of *sozhitel'stvo*, the most commonly used euphemism for sex. We know from the memoir literature that gang rape was common in many camps.⁴⁸ While the terms for rape (*nasilovat'*, *iznasilovanie*) appear infrequently in the documentation under review for this paper, it is clear that *sozhitel'stvo* sometimes meant rape or some form of coerced sexual relations. For example, the 1940 NKVD Operational Order no. 00607, directly from Levrentii Beriia, complained of regimen infractions at the Krasnoiarsk camp, including drunkenness, the playing of cards, and the "*sozhitel'stvo* of men with prisoner women," as well as large-scale refusals to work. The description of these infractions reveals that *sozhitel'stvo* was far from

⁴⁶ According to Donald Filtzer, the number of guards remained "perpetually below" the goal of nine percent of the prisoner population. See Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism*, 26-27.

⁴⁷ GARF f. 9414, op. 1, d. 739, ll. 3-4.

⁴⁸ Literary critic Leona Toker even notes that there was a slang term—"in chorus"—for gang rape in the camps. For her discussion, see Toker, *Return from the Archipelago*, 80.

benign: "those sentenced for criminal activity in the camp and the bandit element from all camp stations terrorize the camp population: looting, beating prisoners, raping [*nasiluiut*] women, etc."⁴⁹ In a case where a camp official was punished for having sex with prisoners, discussed in greater detail below, the official is described as having "forced [*ponuzhdal*]" women into *sozhitel'stvo*, although in these cases the meaning is somewhat ambiguous, as the relationships were clearly long-term and involved "cohabitation," as the term itself implies.⁵⁰ Usually, the term simply implied sexual activity, and whether that activity was forced or consensual is impossible to determine in the documentation. For example, at a December 1940 meeting of the Communist Party organization of Siblag's Corrective Labor Colony no. 6 (Tomsk), a report mentioned that "in our colony there is open *sozhitel'stvo* of women with men" and later noted that "the struggle against those who violate camp regimen ([work] refusal, waste, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity [*polovaia raspushchennost'*]) has not yet taken on an intensified character".⁵¹

Camp authorities clearly worried about *sozhitel'stvo*. When discussing prisoner behavior, *sozhitel'stvo* usually appears prominently on the lists of regimen infractions. A 1947 report by procurator in charge of inspecting the Administration of Camps and Colonies for Novosibirsk Province noted that in the first half of the year there were 4,361 cases of regimen infractions in the camp. These were listed as follows: work refusal (659 cases), camp banditry (5), hooliganism [*khuliganstvo*] (365), waste [*promoty*] (729), *sozhitel'stvo* (242), drunkenness (63), playing of cards (367), theft (412), hiding

⁴⁹ GARF f. 9401, op. 1a, d. 56, ll. 209-210 *s ob.*

⁵⁰ See the discussion of Kotliarevskii, below.

⁵¹ TsDNITO f. 356, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 3ob, 6.

forbidden items (88), connections with locals (15), other infractions (1,356).⁵² The same report noted that the women's barracks and sections were in separate zones, but that women and men worked together in the production areas. A similar report from the following year, moreover, pointed out that not only were men and women together at the worksites, but that the camp's cultural facilities were in the men's zones, thus helping to promote contact.⁵³

Yet it is not clear how widespread *sozhitel'stvo* actually was. At the time of the 1947 procurator report, there were approximately 12,000 prisoners in the camp, around a quarter of whom were women. In this light, 242 cases of *sozhitel'stvo* over a six-month period is not outrageous, although clearly this number represents only a fraction of the total, as most instances were likely hidden from camp authorities. Other statistics on *sozhitel'stvo* show similar patterns. Thus, in 1950 in Sevkuzbasslag, authorities uncovered 484 instances of *sozhitel'stvo* with the camp population averaging around 18,000 prisoners, 25 percent women.⁵⁴

Sozhitel'stvo between prisoners was not the authorities' only concern. One can find numerous complaints about guards and other personnel having sexual relations with prisoners.⁵⁵ There were also cases of high-ranking officials who used prisoner women as mistresses or concubines.⁵⁶ Camp authorities punished this sort of behavior, although the extent to which punishment occurred is unclear. To cite one interesting example, in May 1947, the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) for Tomsk Province wrote to

⁵² Note that adding these together produces a total of 4,301, not 4,361. The reason for the discrepancy is unclear. GANO f. R-20, op. 1, d. 378, ll. 4-5.

⁵³ GANO f. R-20, op. 1, d. 404, l. 11.

⁵⁴ GARF f. 8360, op. 1, d. 31, l. 57.

⁵⁵ For some examples, see GARF f. 9401, op. 1a, d. 50, l. 7; TsDNITO f. 607, op. 1, d. 465, ll. 155-156; GANO f. P-260, op. 1a, d. 6, l. 58.

⁵⁶ Pohl, *Stalinist Penal System*, 30; Barnes, "Soviet Society Confined," 120-121.

the Province's Party Committee (Obkom) concerning the deputy-director of Corrective Labor Colony no. 8, Leonid Arkad'evich Kotliarevskii. According to the letter, Kotliarevskii had abused his position by forcing (*ponuzhdal*) women prisoners into *sozhitel'stvo*, which in these instances meant long-term sexual relations. He forced (*ponudil*) a woman prisoner, N. E. Murav'eva to live with him from 1941 until her release under the amnesty of 1945.⁵⁷ Then from what must have been immediately after Murav'eva's release, he lived with another prisoner, G. I. Zhurba, from July 1945 to January 1946. Zhurba gave birth to their child in July 1946. At the time of the letter, Zhurba was living with her child at Corrective Labor Colony no. 6 of the Tomsk Province Labor Colony Department.⁵⁸ Brovchenko, head of the Tomsk Province MVD, asked the Provincial Party Committee to sanction the arrest of Kotliarevskii.

Action against Kotliarevskii at this point is curious. If forced cohabitation was such a problem, why did the NKVD/MVD wait until the middle of 1947 to take action, considering that Kotliarevskii had been living with women prisoners continually since December 1941? While perhaps the birth of the child made the issue more visible, Brovchenko sent his letter to the Party Committee a full year after the baby's birth. Early 1947 meetings of the Primary Party Organization for Corrective Labor Colony no. 8, moreover, do not indicate that Kotliarevskii's position was in jeopardy. At a general meeting from February 1947, for example, Kotliarevskii discussed difficulties the labor

⁵⁷ The July 1945 amnesty freed roughly 40 percent of Gulag prisoners. See Alexopoulos, "Amnesty 1945: The Revolving Door of Stalin's Gulag," *Slavic Review* 64.2 (2005): 274-306, esp. 274.

⁵⁸ For the letter, see TsDNITO f. 607, op. 1, d. 465 [*perepiski s organami ministerstva vnutrennikh del SSSR po Soiuzu i Tomskoi oblasti*], ll. 175-176. The letter is dated 17 July 1947.

colony was having due to insufficient fuel and other issues, but there is no indication that he was facing any trouble.⁵⁹

Without further information it is impossible to say definitively why authorities chose to prosecute Kotliarevskii at this time. Interestingly, however, Brovchenko's letter to the Party Committee noted that Kotliarevskii was Jewish, originally from Odessa.⁶⁰ Kotliarevskii was not the only Jew to face the wrath of Siberian camp authorities at this time. A report to the Party Committee dated January 1948 recommended the removal of I. B. Monarkh, a Jew, from his position as the director of Corrective-Labor Camp "A" of the Tomsk Province Colony Department. The report, signed by the director of the special inspection (*osoboi inspeksii*) for the Tomsk Province MVD, suggested that Monarkh—a decorated war veteran and a member of the NKVD/MVD since 1924—had stolen money from the camp in connection with the 1947 monetary reforms.⁶¹ While it is difficult to say what motivated the cases against Kotliarevskii and Monarkh, 1946 had seen the beginning of campaigns against "Jewish nationalism," particularly against Jewish cultural figures seen as insufficiently Soviet.⁶² Any form of "national deviation" was a problem at this time; over the next couple of years the cultural campaign—or the Zhdanovshchina, named after the Central Committee's architect of the attacks, Andrei Zhdanov—would

⁵⁹ For the meeting protocol, see TsDNITO f. 1076, op. 1, d. 7 [*Protokolov zakrytogo partsobraniia pervichnoi partorganizatsii ITK no. 8*], l. 6-7 [*Protokol no. 7 Obshchego part.sobraniia ITK no. 8 ot 25 fevralia 1947 goda*]. It is not entirely clear whether or not Kotliarevskii's case was discussed at a later date. The file does not contain a complete set of party meeting protocols for 1947.

⁶⁰ TsDNITO f. 607, op. 1, d. 465, l. 175.

⁶¹ TsDNITO f. 607, op. 1, d. 729 [*O perepiske s organami MVD SSSR i oblasti*], l. 49. Unfortunately, the report (*spravka*) offers few details. The December 1947 monetary reforms were an attempt to stabilize the monetary situation in Russia following the war, when emphasis had naturally been placed on the war effort. Part of the problem was that because of the war, there was a reduced supply of goods, leading to an increase in money holdings (particularly in the countryside) and an increase in prices, especially for agricultural goods. The state opted to reduce the value of money holdings by an exchange of "several old rubles for one of a new type". For more see Joseph S. Berliner, "Monetary Planning in the USSR," *American Slavic and East European Review* 9, no. 4 (Dec, 1950), 237-254, especially 248-250.

⁶² Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 147.

take on an increasingly anti-Semitic character. Many prominent Jews lost their jobs and/or were the subject of criminal proceedings.⁶³ Anti-Jewish campaigns grew to such an extent that some have argued that the Jews were the next targets of mass-deportation (or worse), and were saved only by Stalin's death in 1953. Unfortunately, the available statistics on the disciplining of Gulag cadres do not take into account "nationality," and it is difficult to know precisely the extent to which the Western Siberian camp personnel were affected. The above examples, however, indicate that they were probably not immune to these broader currents in the Soviet Union. Importantly, the Kotliarevskii case reveals an ambiguity towards sexual relations between camp officials and prisoners. While Kotliarevskii ostensibly lost his position due to his sexual activity, in reality the MVD was likely searching for a reason to arrest Kotliarevskii because he was Jewish.

Sexual relationships, coerced or consensual, occurred in the camps, both between men and women prisoners and between prisoners and camp personnel. Yet prisoners could also take advantage of the Gulag's sometimes-porous borders to engage in sexual activity outside of the camps, too. At the February 1951 Eighth Party Conference of the Novosibirsk Province Camp and Colony Administration, the Party Control Commission, in charge of disciplinary measures, noted that de-convoyed prisoners went about town in a drunken state, and even discussed a situation in which one camp official rented out a room for sexual relations with prisoners.⁶⁴ And when the Procurator for the Soviet Union

⁶³ Amir Weiner argues that the "legitimizing myth" of the war left little room for the Jews, whose own suffering during the war could not supersede that of the Soviet people. This was compounded by the formation of the state of Israel (despite the USSR's almost immediate diplomatic recognition of Israel), for now the Jews had a "homeland" and their loyalty was therefore, in the eyes of authorities, suspect. See Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), especially Chapter Four: "Memory of Excision, Excisionary Memory," 191-235. For more discussion of the anti-Jewish campaigns of the late-1940s, early 1950s, see also Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 308-315.

⁶⁴ GANO f. P-260, op. 1, d. 95, l. 102.

complained in early 1953 that in the forestry camps, including Sevkuzbasslag and Iuzhkuzbasslag in Western Siberia, de-convoyed prisoners, "[u]sing full freedom due to lack of surveillance [*iz otsutsviem nadzora*], [...] freely use vehicles, trains, visit stores, clubs, movie-houses and other social areas, drink, *take on mistresses*, engage in hooliganism, and so on", he inadvertently exposed the inability of Soviet power to function absolutely.⁶⁵ In one particularly disturbing instance, a de-convoyed prisoner allegedly raped and strangled an underage girl in a town near a camp in southern Kemerovo Province.⁶⁶ In some camps, prisoners managed to carry on relationships with family living nearby.⁶⁷ Sometimes—and with apparent regularity in certain camp stations—locals even ventured *inside* the camps, as a spring 1952 inspection of Sevkuzbasslag and Iuzhkuzbasslag revealed: "Prisoners systematically interact [*obshchait'sia*] with the civilian contingent, which, particularly due to the lack of bathhouses in the villages [*v poselkakh*], uses the bathhouses located in the camp zones with [their] families [...]"⁶⁸

Prisoners were punished for illicit sexual activity, although the nature of punishment likely varied from place to place (and case to case). Evgeniia Ginzburg notes that an assignment to a penalty work brigade, which could mean death due to extremely harsh

⁶⁵ Emphasis added. GARF f. 8360, op. 1, d. 63, l. 8. The author discussed the phenomenon of de-convoyed prisoners in greater detail in Wilson T. Bell, "Was the Gulag an Archipelago: An Examination of De-Convoyed Prisoners in Western Siberia," unpublished paper presented at the Conference on the History and Legacy of the Gulag, Harvard University, 2-5 November 2006, pp. 1-25. See also Alan Barenberg, "Prisoners Without Borders: Zazonniki and the Transformation of Vorkuta after Stalin," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 57. 4 (2009): 513-534.

⁶⁶ GARF f. 8360, op. 1, d. 63, l. 5. The issue of de-convoyed prisoners raping local women or taking on local mistresses was evidently long-standing. A 1940 report on guarding in the Gulag also noted these very issues. See Document no. 66, "Iz doklada zamestitelia nachal'nika GULAG G.P.Dobrynina o rabote Upravleniia okhrany GULAG za 1939 g.," in Bezborodov et al., eds., *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga Tom 4*, 170-177, esp. 174. See also Document no. 70, "Prikaz NKVD SSSR no. 0104 "O rezul'tatakh obsledovaniia Vladivostokskogo ispravitel'no-trydovogo lageria NKVD" from February 1941 in Bezborodov et al., eds., *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga Tom 4*, 181-182.

⁶⁷ Barenberg, "From Prison Camp to Mining Town," 208-211.

⁶⁸ GARF f. 8360, op. 1, d. 44, l. 37.

conditions, was likely if one got caught.⁶⁹ According to official documents, possible punishments for regimen infractions included time in the penalty isolator or penalty camp station, transfer to a tougher work regimen, a reduction in rations or a transfer to a "less well-appointed barrack," or the deprivation of certain rights, such as correspondence, meetings with relatives, and the right to use personal money at the camp commissary. Camp officials apparently had wide discretion as to what types of punishment to impose for infractions.⁷⁰

Naturally, all of this illicit interaction and sexual activity led to many pregnancies and births within the camps themselves. In January 1947, for example, pregnant and nursing mothers made up 2.6 percent (432 persons) of the entire prisoner population under the jurisdiction of the Novosibirsk Province Camp and Colony Administration.⁷¹ Despite warnings against local administrators, pregnancy rates at the area's forestry camps, Sevkuzbasslag and Iuzhkuzbasslag, remained surprisingly high. As a whole for the Main Administration of Forestry Camps (GULLP), women comprised 53,889 out of the total 322,792 prisoners in early 1953 (16.7 percent) and the camps administered thirteen children's homes with a total of 3,569 children under two years of age.⁷²

Women in the final two months of pregnancy and nursing mothers (for nine months after the birth of the child) received increased rations, including dairy products, according

⁶⁹ Ginzburg, *Within the Whirlwind*, 11-12.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of which officials could impose which types of punishments, see GARF f. 9401, op. 1a, d. 35, ll. 24-25 *s ob.* This is the section titled "*Mery vyzskaniia i pooshchreniia*" in the "*Vremennaia instruksiia o rezhime sodержaniia zakliuchennykh v ispravitel'no-trudovykh lageriakh NKVD SSSR*" attached to NKVD Operational Order no. 00889 from 2 August 1939.

⁷¹ GANO f. R-20, op. 1, d. 378, l. 2

⁷² GARF f. 8360, op. 1, d. 63 [*So spravkami po voprosami rezhima sodержaniia, komplektovaniia i trudogogo ispol'zovaniia zakliuchennykh, iav-apr 1953*], ll. 39-40.

to camp regulations.⁷³ As one might imagine, however, this was hardly a route to a more comfortable life within the camps. One of the most chilling accounts of pregnancy in the camps comes from Hava Volovich, who spent time in Ukhta in the far north and whose daughter was born in the camp barrack, rather than any sort of medical facility.⁷⁴ Volovich was able to stay with her daughter for a year, but then was transferred to the "mothers'" camp, where her "pudgy little angel with the golden curls soon turned into a pale ghost with blue shadows under her eyes and sores all over her lips". There authorities placed her daughter in a home for camp children, and Volovich could only see her during visiting hours or by bribing the nurses. Volovich remembers the nurses treating the babies horribly, not feeding them properly, beating them regularly, and so on. There was a huge death rate resulting in "plenty of empty beds [...] even though the birth rate in the camps was relatively high". Poor conditions for babies and children are revealed in statistics, too. In 1952, eighty-four children died in Siblag, many from TB and pneumonia.⁷⁵ During inspection that year, authorities discovered 377 pregnancies in Siblag and 734 cases of cohabitation. This occurred even though Siblag's director, Velikanov, had been given specific instructions to isolate women prisoners from men prisoners, even in production zones and medical facilities.⁷⁶

⁷³ See Kokurin and Petrov, eds., *GULAG*, 476-489, esp. 482. A comparison of ration norms in this document reveals that in most cases (except for rye bread) women in this category received about the same or better rations than Stakhanovites in the camps, who received extra rations on top of the norms for workers fulfilling their quotas. There were certain items (such as animal fats) that women in this category received at a much higher rate; they were also supposed to receive daily rations of milk (400g), a product that was not given to any other category of prisoner.

⁷⁴ Volovich, "My Past".

⁷⁵ GARF f. 9414, op. 1, d. 739 [*Sibirskii ITL: Akty proverok, dokladnye zapiski i perepiska o sostoianii i raboty ITL*], l. 136.

⁷⁶ GARF f. 9414, op. 1, d. 469 [*Akty proverkh, dokladnye zapiski, obsory, plany meropriiatii, spravki i perepiski o rabote i sostoianii Sibirskogo ITL MVD, July 1951-Dec 1952*], l. 1.

Volovich's story, not surprisingly, ended tragically. Her daughter died, and the overall experience was, for Volovich, the most traumatic of her time in the camps: "That is the whole story of how, in giving birth to my only child, I committed the worst crime there is."⁷⁷

Until the age of two, camp children were supposed to be housed at NKVD children's homes inside the camps themselves. As Volovich describes, conditions at these homes were generally horrible. One former doctor at a camp children's home, who was also a prisoner, writes that:⁷⁸

In the children's home there were around 200 children under the age of two. [...] The illness rate amongst the children was incredibly high. I was exhausted from work and did not have one night of normal sleep: 3-4 times per night [I would] awaken to sick children. The bosses interfered all day: then one comes, then another to walk, to look – all for show, of course. They were afraid of liability because the children were [technically] "free" ... Why the illnesses? Why did the child die? [They would ask.] And when I told them about the lack of care—not enough orderlies, nannies, nurses; the disgusting food—the boss would wave his hand and hurry off.

At around the age of two, children born in the camps were usually transferred to orphanages outside of the camps.⁷⁹ But this was not always the case. In mid-1947, for example, forty children were removed from the jurisdiction of the Novosibirsk Province Camp and Colony Administration upon reaching the age of two, and transferred to provincial orphanages *or* relatives.⁸⁰ This practice—the transfer to orphanages or to

⁷⁷ Volovich, "My Past," 264.

⁷⁸ Dr. A. I. Kaufman, *Lagernyi vrach: 16 let v Sovetskom Soiuzе – vospominaniia sionista* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1973) 232.

⁷⁹ A 1949 directive (*ukaz*) of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR stated that women serving sentences could have their children with them until the child reached the age of two. See Doc. no 280 in Vilenskii et al., eds., *Deti GULAGa*, 477.

⁸⁰ GANO f. R-20, op. 1, d. 378, l. 2.

relatives—was made official by a decision (*postanovlenie*) of the Council of Ministers of the USSR in 1949.⁸¹

Occasionally, it seems, in an effort to control the number of children and pregnant women in the camps—who were hardly, after all, productive workers—there would be partial amnesties for prisoner mothers with children in the camps and even for mothers with small children outside of the camps. It is worth noting that these amnesties freed prisoners not because of good behavior in the camps—re-education had little to do with it—but because the prisoners were a burden on the system, and could contribute little to production. This underscores the *economic* function of the Gulag. On the other hand, certain categories of pregnant women and mothers were not allowed to leave at all, suggesting that the Gulag, despite the frequent fluidity of its borders and the “revolving door” of incarceration/release, functioned as a penal institution designed to remove undesirables from Soviet society, rather than solely an economic institution.⁸² Thus in the 1949 amnesty for “pregnant women and women with young children,” authorities ordered freed all prisoners in this category except those serving sentences for “counter-revolutionary crimes, banditry, premeditated murder, robbery [*razboi*], the theft of socialist property, [and members] of organized gangs or groups of large sizes”.⁸³ The

⁸¹ See Doc 281, “Postanovlenie Soveta ministrov SSSR no. 2213 “O sokrashchenii sroka sodержaniia pri osuzhdennykh materiakh detei i peredache detei starshe dvukh let na sodержanie blizkikh rodstvennikov ili v detskie uchrezhdeniia,” in Vilenskii et al., eds., *Deti GULAGa*, 478.

⁸² For more on the Gulag as a “revolving door,” see Alexopoulos, “Amnesty 1945: The Revolving Door of Stalin’s Gulag,” *Slavic Review* 64.2 (2005): 274-306.

⁸³ See Document No. 279, “Ukaz Prezidiuma verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR “Ob osvobozhdenii ot nakazaniia osuzhdennykh beremennykh zhenshchin i zhenshchin, imeiushchikh maloletnykh detei,” in Vilenskii et al., eds., *Deti GULAGa*, 477. In this case, by “young children,” they meant children under 7-years old. This was not the first such instance. Molotov and Stalin, in an attempt apparently to limit the Gulag’s size, issued a directive freeing pregnant women and some other groups, “regardless of length of sentence,” as early as 1933. See Document 26 in Mironenko and Werth, eds., *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga Tom 1*, 175-159. Pregnant women and women with young children (except “counter-revolutionaries”) were released in large numbers in 1940, and at various other times, too. See Document no. 13 in Bezborodov et al., eds., *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulag: Tom 4*, 82-83, which discusses releasing prisoners not deemed dangerous to

frequent release of pregnant women and mothers with small children reveals that authorities nevertheless saw these prisoners as less dangerous than men, gender stereotyping that worked in the favor of camp women.⁸⁴

Authorities saw pregnant and nursing women as a burden both administratively and economically. Rations for pregnant and nursing women were, for most types of food, higher than those of a camp-Stakhanovite worker, meaning that scarce resources went to prisoners who were not significantly helping the camp's economic bottom line.⁸⁵ Pregnant women and nursing mothers were also freed from night work, underground work, tree felling, and several other types of heavy, manual labor.⁸⁶ One interesting local case illustrates the main issues, from an administrative point of view, regarding pregnant and nursing women. Corrective-Labor Colony no. 9 of the Tomsk Province Colony Department held many pregnant and nursing women. In a 1952 report to the Tomsk Provincial Party Committee, Didorenko, the director of the Tomsk Province Colony Department noted that "using the labor of this contingent of women prisoners entails great difficulties and inconveniences," as nursing mothers were supposed to feed their children every two to four hours, depending on the child's age. Corrective-Labor Colony no. 9 was an agricultural colony, and fieldwork was conducted at least half a kilometer away, and often several kilometers from the camp zone. As Didorenko pointed out, "If [we] create work brigades only from the contingent of women prisoners who are breast-feeding, in this case it is necessary to take a break every two hours and convoy the

"state security"; see also Document no. 121 in Mironenko and Werth, eds., *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga Tom 1*, 426-28, which is a November 1941 circular listing categories of prisoners due for release, including, again, pregnant women and mothers with small children". There were other instances, too.

⁸⁴ See also Viola, "Bab'i Bunty," and Pohl, *The Stalinist Penal System*, 30.

⁸⁵ See the 1939 NKVD Operational Order 00943, on rations in the camps, in Kokurin and Petrov, eds., *GULAG*, 476-489.

⁸⁶ See Document no. 142 in Bezborodov et al., eds., *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga Tom 4*, 285-286, a 1949 document on the labor use of pregnant women and nursing mothers.

prisoners [back] to the living zone, where the children are located. This would mean work would occupy only 50 percent of the time". But, Didorenko continued, it would be impossible to organize work brigades only of breast-feeding mothers, meaning that interruptions would be necessary for regular brigades and there would not be enough guards to convoy the prisoners. Didorenko concluded by arguing that nursing mothers should not be used at all in fieldwork, only for work that could be completed within the zone.⁸⁷

This proposal evidently did not go over well. In early 1953 a Tomsk Province Party Committee commission investigated complaints against Didorenko for "incorrect actions [*nepravil'nykh deistviakh*]"'. The commission found many problems with Didorenko's "actions," including the failure to use nursing mothers at Corrective-Labor Colony no. 9 properly in work:

ITK-9 holds 80 women-mothers, the children of whom are located in a nursery [*v dome mladentsa*] at the ITK. Thirty-three personnel (doctors, nannies, nurses and others) serve these children. Despite this, of the 80 women only 15 are sent to work. In this manner it happens that women, sentenced for grave [*tiazhkie*] crimes and held at the state's expense, don't do anything; and 33 persons are devoted to [the care of] their children, at the state's expense, [and] the children are also held at the state's expense.⁸⁸

The Party Committee commission recommended a strict administrative reprimand for both Didorenko and for the director of Labor Colony no. 9. Interestingly, although the total number of prisoners at Labor Colony no. 9 is unclear, eighty nursing mothers is a significant number, given that the whole of the Tomsk Province Colony Department in

⁸⁷ For Didorenko's letter, see "Pis'mo nachal'nika OITK UMVD po Tomskoi oblasti v Tomskii obkom KPSS Maksimovu ot 19.12.1952 g.," TsDNITO f. 607, op. 1, d. 948, ll. 443-444.

⁸⁸ See "Spravka o proverke zhaloby o nepravil'nykh deistviakh nachal'nika OITK UMVD tov. Didorenko," TsDNITO f. 607, op. 1, d. 1923, l. 138.

1952 averaged around 2,400 prisoners.⁸⁹ Rules supposedly separating men from women prisoners as well as forbidding intimate relations between camp personnel and prisoners clearly were easily subverted.

Like the case against Kotliarevskii, who had taken women prisoners as mistresses, the case against Didorenko highlights the regime's ambiguous relationship towards sexual activity in the camps. While *sozhitel'stvo* technically was not permitted, the regime nevertheless provided structural support, however limited in scope and cruel in practice, for pregnant women prisoners, nursing mothers, and newborns. That "support" came in the form of better rations (at least in theory), an infrastructure to care for newborn babies (although again, in practice, conditions were often unimaginably awful), and even the possibility of early release. This structural support clearly sets the Gulag apart from the camp system to which it is often compared, the Nazi concentration camps and death camps. In Ravensbrück, for example, the Nazis forced women who became pregnant to have abortions; in the death camps pregnancy was itself "a capital crime".⁹⁰ In the Gulag, the presence of nurseries as well as the legal status of camp-born children as technically "free" underscores the Soviet view—challenged at times, but nevertheless persistent—that children did not answer for the crimes of their parents. This understanding was far from the Nazis' biological worldview.

On the other hand, the Gulag nurseries were miserable places, and death was common. This was due at least in part to the inefficiency of the Gulag camps. Love and sex themselves are evidence of this inefficiency, as the central and local camp authorities

⁸⁹ TsDNITO f. 607, op. 1, d. 948, l. 440.

⁹⁰ David M. Patterson, "The Moral Dilemma of Motherhood in the Nazi Death Camps," in Harry James Cargas, ed., *Problems Unique to the Holocaust* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 7-24, esp. 7-8. Buber-Neumann also discusses forced abortion on pregnant women in Ravensbrück in Buber, *Under Two Dictators*, 251-252.

failed to maintain any meaningful boundaries between many men and women prisoners and even between prisoners and locals in certain camps. That the Gulag in its day-to-day operations was anything but a well-ordered system of concentration camps is hardly surprising, but the issues of love and sex in the camps highlight how Soviet power, while pervasive, functioned arbitrarily.

The lack of consistent punishment for personnel who abused their authority no doubt encouraged the creation of individual fiefdoms instead of an orderly, bureaucratic system.⁹¹ One scholar even likens camp directors to the landlords of tsarist-era estates, who often wielded power in an arbitrary manner over their serfs.⁹² Officials, knowing that reprisals were unlikely, ignored many regulations concerning camp operations. Those same officials also lacked the personnel and the resources (proper fencing, duplication of facilities in men women's zones, enough guards for constant surveillance at the worksite) to prevent widespread interaction between men and women prisoners.

The issues surrounding heterosexual sex in the camps are thus complex. Nevertheless, a foray into the archival documents on this issue can highlight several important points about the Gulag. The regime's ambiguous relationship to illicit sexual activity—apparent in the inconsistent punishment of camp officials who engaged in sexual relations with prisoners and in the infrastructure (however minimal) available to pregnant women, nursing mothers, and their children—no doubt contributed to a sense of arbitrary rule in individual camps. The regime's failure to control sexual behavior also underscores the

⁹¹ For more on the power of individual Gulag commanders, see, for example, Barenberg, "From Prison Camp to Mining Town," 95-99. See also Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 104-105, where she notes that the Gulag officials who ran the special settlements, for all practical purposes, "were Soviet power" in a given settlement.

⁹² G. M. Ivanova, "Kadry GULAGa," in I. V. Dobrovol'skii and Ivanova, eds., *GULAG: ego stroiteli, obitateli i geroi: Rossiia po dorogam fanatizma i muchenichestva* (Moscow: Mezhdobshchestvo prav cheloveka, 1998) 40-59, esp. 53.

inability of Soviet power to function in an efficient manner, even in this most repressive of Soviet institutions.