
HISTORICAL PHENOMENON OF ‘ROLE REVERSAL’ PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT OF THE GENDER IDENTITY IN HISTORY

**Inga Vladimirovna Maslova^{*}, Irina Evgenevna Krapotkina,
Nasyrova Liliy Gabdelvalievna and Kotlova Lyubov Aleksandrovna**

Kazan Federal University, st. Kazanskaya 84, Elabuga, 423600, Russia

(Received 28 March 2015, revised 16 June 2015)

Abstract

The article studies the historical phenomenon of the change of gender identity by means of studying the life of the Russian female officer N.A. Durova, who took part in Patriotic War of 1812. The existential crisis situation of her childhood has become the dominant idea of N.A. Durova's life, who has overcome the conflict, the gender role reversal, acceptance of the male identity. It has become the sense-making factor of her life, provided her professional success and military career.

Keywords: gender, identity, historical psychology, Nadezhda Durova

1. Introduction

The publications, which refer to the analysis of the modern historical science state, have acquired positive symptoms in recent years: the state of crisis was replaced by the uplift which was expressed in the interdisciplinarity of historical investigations.

The concept of interdisciplinarity came into scientific use in the second half of the 20th century [1]. Until recently Russian scientists have used the term ‘cross-disciplinarity’. Under the term they understood the borrowing of theories and methods of other sciences, aimed for solving intradisciplinary problems. Interdisciplinarity means a collaborative work of specialists who study different aspects of the common problem, while each of them uses one's own methodological disciplinary basis [2]. In this case, disciplinary fields can be omitted while solving a definite scientific problem. Being a new direction of the scientific search in History, historical psychology means interdisciplinary communication with different Social and Humanitarian sciences, but first with Psychology.

^{*}E-mail: saveli3@yandex.ru

The concept of history suffers a methodological crisis at macro-level; this crisis is connected with the process of restructuring social and humanitarian knowledge. New conceptual approaches to the historical investigations are available through the study of micro-history, which studies last social reality on the basis of micro-analytical approaches which were formed in modern Social sciences and first of all in Psychology [3].

Historical psychology is aimed at reconstruction of history spirit, analysis of lifestyles, system of value, morals, living scenarios and ideals of different social layers in different historical periods. N.A. Durova is a perfect example for revealing gender identity of the historical era of the first half of the 19th century. N.A. Durova was a cavalry maiden, who launched a challenge against the social principles, committed herself to the role of male warrior. We think that the study of this historical phenomenon is reasonable with the use of the psychological analysis methods.

2. Discussion

The implementation of the idea of psychologation of N.A. Durova's life should be considered both from the point of view of the integral interconnection with certain historical period and psychic development of a person under its influence and deep analysis of the person itself. A special attention in this work is paid to the psycho-analytical tradition: the source of person's difficulties should be traced in the past, in the early experience of communication with the family. The main reason for the change of Durova's gender identity can be her needs, which had been satisfied by her father, and not by her mother. That's why, being an adult, N. Durova chose the social role of a man, she chose such partners for communication with whom it was easy to reproduce a situation familiar and solved in her childhood.

Nadezhda Andreevna Durova is the hero of the Patriotic war of 1812, she was the first Russian female officer, she was decorated with the insignia of distinction - Saint George's Cross - for her deed of arms. She took and perceived the life of a military man as the most attractive one for herself. She loved this life, which was very unusual for a woman of that time.

Nadezhda Durova excited, astonished, puzzled her contemporaries who had the ideological pattern of woman's subordination: "woman is a daughter, sister, wife and mother, a sort of appendix of the human race" [4]. Such a pattern corresponded to the normative model of a family for that period, in which the part of a woman was not free (in the sense of imposing certain rules of life).

At the beginning of the 19th century the Russian Empire became gradually filled with the ideas of the women activity role, who expressed themselves, for example, in the sphere of charity and social activity. But a woman who committed oneself to a social role of a man was an extraordinary event for the studied period. The analysis of the Russian historical phenomenon of a 'female warrior' becomes more interesting. And it is not about a simple warrior among the equal ones as in the case of famous Amazons, not about a 'symbol' of rescue

as in the case of Joan of Arc, gender status which was the indicator of the divine choice, but it is about the equal among men who did not know that all the difficulties of a military life were shared with a woman. The example of Nadezhda Durova is also exceptional because she became the author of the prominent fiction work 'Notes of a cavalry maiden' in which she described not only some real moments, but also expressed her thoughts which gives us an opportunity to make an excursion to the sphere of historical psychology.

The intention of the gender role reversal started to form in Nadezhda's childhood. Nadezhda's father – the nobleman Andrey Vasilievich - was in charge of a Hussars squadron. He was married to the rich landlord's daughter Nadezhda Aleksandrovna, who ran away from home in order to secretly marry him. For this act her father cursed her. The only hope for forgiveness could be the birth of their son, but in 1783 their daughter Nadezhda was born, who got her mother's dislike at once. Nadezhda felt this dislike for all her life, probably this unconscious inner wish to find favour in her mother's eyes was one of the reasons for Nadezhda's 'gender transformation'. According to the deep psychological 'hypothesis of imitation and reproduction of relationships' a child treats oneself the way his/her parent of the same gender did [5]. Little Nadya unconsciously internalised the ways of her mother's attitude and management of her behaviour. Due to this, the prepotence and shame of her mother transferred into severe self-governing and self-accusation of N. Durova in the future.

Father entrusted the upbringing of the baby to the flank hussar Astakhov, who taught the girl military science. Astakhov carried Nadezhda in his arms, they visited squadron stable, mounted her on horse, allowed playing with his pistol and sword, and the girl clapped her hands and laughed seeing the sparks and shining steel. Initial generalised socialisation of Nadezhda was being formed under the fundamental influence of emotional and psychological closeness of a military man. She imitated the behaviour of her teacher Astakhov, who encouraged her for some acts and punished for the others. Socialization defect has occurred: biological 'female' part was replaced by the opposite social part, which was fixed by the assignment of 'male' norms and values. In the early age she acquired the unconscious gender identity which was based on the unconsciously accepted norms and habits.

The march service became difficult for the big family of the Durovs and the head of the family decided to quit his officer career. After the retirement, the family of Andrey Vasilievich Durov has settled in the small town of Sarapul where Andrey Vasilievich served as a mayor for 35 years.

In Sarapul, Nadezhda was upbrought by her mother, their relationships being very strained. According to the system of family psychology, 'mother-father' dyad is an unstable system of relationships. That's why it formed the triangle 'mother-father-child' in strained situations. The Durov family had the dysfunctional pattern of human relationships in the conflict scenario of which Nadya was involved in the matrimonial conflict. Probably Nadezhda suffered stress under conditions of which the symptoms of a victim was formed. In her autobiography and in 'Notes' Nadezhda Durova continuously comes to the

question of her mother's dislike. "Day by day my military inclinations were being strengthened and day by day my mother felt more dislike to me... It seems that my mother, who disliked me with all her heart, purposely did everything possible to strengthen my passion for freedom and military life: she prohibited my walking in the garden... for all day long I had to sit in the room and needlepoint." [6] Nadezhda also emphasised that her mother doted on the other children. Here we see the style of upbringing (or more likely the anomaly of the upbringing style), based on the emotional denial and attraction by a child. The mother, who considered Nadezhda a burden, expresses the general dissatisfaction by her child and ignores her needs. All the significant achievements of Nadya's development were not appreciated and moreover were unacceptable for her mother. Here again we can see the distortion of psychologically natural mother's attitude to her child, which is an injure factor in the development of personal independence and feel of safety; all these could contribute to the change of gender identity [7].

It was the convert confrontation with her mother that contributed to Nadezhda's strong male-like character. Her relationships with mother were in the state of continuous struggle. Her mother used too violent and non-effective methods to respond to her daughter's rebellious behaviour, which led to her resistance. Without telling her mother Nadezhda continued horse riding and to fire with weapons.

Nadezhda's childish games were full of boy mischief: self-made firework, explosion in the kitchen as the result of testing flammable characteristics of the gunpowder, training of raptorial falcon. Nadezhda Andreevna ironically describes her childish 'heroic deeds' in her book. Often, the second most important character of these stories is her mother. "Though I was terribly afraid of my mother - Nadezhda wrote - I was overcome with the extreme swiftness which captivated me despite all the fears of punishment". [6]

Nadezhda points out one more reason which explains the choice of her lifestyle: "Perhaps I would forget my hussar behaviour and become an ordinary maiden... if my mother hadn't imagined the role of a woman in the most desolate light. She used the most offensive expressions to describe the destiny of the womenkind: to her mind a woman must be born and die as a slave, eternal slavery and dependence on any depression is a woman's fate..." [6, p. 10] Blood relatives were disconnected, which lead to the loss of the necessary mutual support. There appeared a situation of destruction of Nadezhda's upbringing with negatively dominant function of a woman-mother in the structure of family relationships. Mother and Nadya found themselves, voluntarily or not, in the captivity to one another, in the whirl of actions and emotions. Through no fault of her own, the girl passed through some ceremony of psychological initiation and 'moved to' the male group.

On the contrary, Nadezhda's relationships with her father were built on the basis of mutual love. Father did not approve his daughter's military habits, but did not consider her interests a crime. Nadezhda's father presented his daughter her "only friend of youth" - Circassian stallion Alkid. But Nadezhda's

beloved father also offended her saying that if he had a son he could rely on him in his old. Her relationships with parents resulted in Nadezhda's having two opposite feelings: "love to her father and disgust to her own gender". Preferential and desired communication with her father on the background of acquiring a definite role has strengthened psychological gender identity, which became the measure for self-conscious, cultural definition of the manliness of N. Durova and all the characteristics of her behaviour.

A peculiar cause for the further development of the 'male part' in the character of Nadezhda was her going to Little Russia, to her grandmother, where she got much more freedom than at her mother's home. Here being far from her family, for the first time in her life, Nadezhda fell in love with her young neighbour, but her feeling was not accepted by her relatives who parted Nadezhda and her young friend.

Nadezhda was depressed by the state of 'dependence' on her parents, social rules and family traditions. She longed for freedom. The state of maidenhood was especially hard. An unmarried girl had the right to leave her estate or home on her own without her relatives, friends or servants. Nadezhda considered such depression more severe than the military service in the Imperial Army. Comparing this depression and military service in her 'Notes' Nadezhda Andreevna wrote: "Though I am very tired after the morning of exercises with a spear - a younger sister of a sword - march and riding, after a half an hour of rest there is no sign of tiredness.... Freedom, this gift of Heaven, becomes my destiny forever! I'm breathing it, admire, I feel it in my soul, in my heart! ...I am over the moon imagining that never in my life will I hear the words: 'You are a maiden, sit here, it is indecent for you to walk alone!'" [8] Practice of gender discrimination which existed at the beginning of the 19th century was secured by the policy and legislation of Russia. It was related to a lot of spheres of activity and was present in interpersonal relationships. In case of failure to comply with these rules a woman was laid a claim to. By that time, N. Durova had already contradictions between personal and social identity, the processes of motivational, emotional, voluntary discordance affected her self-esteem and self-attitude.

There was only one way to get rid of parental care and strict oversight: to get married. In that case a woman became a housewife and though *de jure* the husband was the head of the house, a woman alone could actually run the house. Led by the wish to get rid of parental care Nadezhda Durova married the civil servant of the 14th rank Vasilii Stepanovich Chernov on 25th of October, 1801. This marriage was not successful. Despite the birth of their son Ivan their family life was ruined. At the age of 23 Nadezhda left her husband and together with her son went back to her parents' house in Sarapul.

Nadezhda Andreevna tried to forget this period of her life. She found a literature form for the story of her married life and described it in her novel 'Play of fate...', but she never wrote any word about her son. Gender role reversal led to the fact that a lot of values had lost their meaning. One of such values was marriage. N. Durova turned out to be too independent and able to cope with all

the difficulties on her own, she needed no man's care of security. It is obvious that her female qualities were not developed enough, she lacked girlish elegant manners which attract a man.

After returning to her parents' home Nadezhda abandoned herself to her old devotion - horse riding. Walks in man's saddle together with her father were her favourite pastime. Father admired her natural agility, fearlessness, ability to sit in a saddle. He said that a good horseman should serve in a regiment of horse, that such abilities could help him to become an officer.

Nadezhda's return put her mother into rage again. Nadezhda's soldierly ardour lit up again, she started to search for the ways to fulfil her intention to quit the slavery of a female gender and to become a soldier and a beloved son for her father. The widely used social conscious pattern of 'Real man' motivated Nadezhda to correspond to this pattern and stimulated the reflection of real masculinity. The only way out for such self-assessment and self-reflection was complete identification of oneself with a man. Deeply formed image of 'Self-concept' directly influenced the perception of the environment and the ways of responding in it. That's why N. Durova's conviction of 'Me-man' directly influenced her behaviour.

On 15th of September 1806, Cossack regiment marched out from Sarapul in order to make a halt in 50 kilometres. Nadezhda decided to catch up with the regiment at halt. On the evening of her name's day, on the 17th of September, Nadezhda cut her hair, put on knee-length coat and a red top head. In order to disorientate everyone she left her woman's cloths on the shore of Kama. "So, I am free! Free! Independent! I took what belongs to me, my freedom! A precious gift of Heaven, an integral part of every human!" [6, p. 20]

There is no doubt that Nadezhda Andreevna Durova was aware of the fact that her deed looks like a rebellion - a bold action of a solitary person against customs, morals and prejudice of the society of her era, against the system of social values in which a woman had only one role - total subordination to the will of others, and only one place of activity - home of a man. There appeared an existential conflict caused by the contradiction between gender concepts about the personality of a woman and inability-unwillingness to comply with these requirements. Existential crisis situation becomes the dominant idea of Durova's life, who had overcome the conflict, solved it with a new quality, found a sense-making factor, provided professional success and career.

Cossack colonel allowed 'the son of the landlord Alexandr Vasilievich Durov', as Nadezhda called herself, to join the first hundred. That was the beginning of the military career of the cavalry maiden. No doubt that Nadezhda Durova takes an important place among the Amazons. Firstly, she participated in three Napoleonic wars (1807 - in Prussia, 1812 - in Russia, 1813-1814 - in Poland and Germany). Second, she was continuously serving in the Russian army for almost 10 years (from March 1807 till March 1816). With all that, the young woman who had devoted herself to the military service managed to be equal to the men in this field and as well as at the battlefield, she proved her bravery. Third, Nadezhda Durova went through all the steps of the corporate

ladder: in spring of 1807 - common soldier, in autumn of 1807 - non-commissioned officer, in December of the same year she was promoted to the officer rank of cornet, in June of 1812 - poruchik, in March of 1816 - stabs-rotmistr.

Incognito of Sokolova (that was the name that Durova had chosen for herself after her enrolling in regular army) was revealed after Alexander the First having learned that there was a woman in his army. In response to Nadezhda's request the emperor allowed her to continue her service in the rank of cornet Alexander Alexandrov and promised her to keep the secret.

After ten years in mounted formation, on the 9th of March 1816, Alexander Alexandrov was retired in the rank of stabs-rotmistr.

It is interesting that after her retirement Nadezhda continued 'playing role' of a man, of the retired stabs-rotmistr Alexandrov. Her autobiography of 1824 is written on behalf of a man. Here one can feel the desperation of a person who has lost the sense of life, military service was such sense for Nadezhda. "After changing ulan jerking with a tail-coat I was almost desperate when the first sentry did not fall into line and sloped as it should have been done when seeing an officer... I couldn't bear such subtraction from the main element of my life." [9]

After the retirement Nadezhda Durova was engaged in literature. Among her literature works one should mention 'Notes of a cavalry maiden', folk tales and legends which were included in her novel 'Numerka', 'Sulphuric spring', 'Play of fate or Unlawful love', novel in which the author described the history of her marriage. Nadezhda did not want to reveal her real name even on the pages of her memoirs. This fact almost led to the quarrel between N.A. Durova and A.S. Pushkin, who was entrusted to publish her 'Notes'. Without asking a permission and without letting her know A.S. Pushkin revealed her real name and added the word 'maiden', which meant a social position of a woman at that time (unmarried woman, alone). Nadezhda was very outraged since Pushkin touched the greatest secret of her life. She became aware of this fact after having read the proof-reading of the second number of 'Sovremennik'. "The name you have used in your foreword, kind sir Alexander Sergeevich, bothers me! Is there any method to solve my problem?" - than there is not even the request, but a plea of N.A. Durova to name her memoirs 'Self-made notes of the Russian Amazon, known under the name of Alexandrov' [9, p.182].

But A.S. Pushkin was adamant: "'Notes of N.A. Durova' - sounds simple, sincere and noble. Be brave - step onto the literature field as bravely as onto that which made you so popular." [9, p. 183].

All the letters to the great poet, as well as to other respondents, were written by Durova on behalf of a man and signed by the name of 'Alexandrov'. During the personal meeting with the poet there was a curious case, which was described by Durova in her novel 'A year of life in Petersburg, or Unfavours of the third visit'. "He took my manuscript and said that would give it now for rewriting, he thanked me for the honour rendered to him by the fact that I had chosen him as a publisher of my notes; when finishing his speech he kissed my

hand. I took it off, blushed and did not know why I had said this: ‘Oh, my God! I fell out of this habit such a long ago!’” [8, p. 399]

Even after the public became aware of the person hiding under the name of Alexandrov, which happened thanks to her ‘Notes’, N.A. Durova continued to use her manlike lifestyle. During the 25 years of her living in the small town Elabuga (Vyatsk governorate) she wore man suit: long black frockcoat, narrow trousers, high black hat and a stick. Despite her public disclosure, keeping herself in the role of a man was dominant, which speaks about the natural process of personal development. The sum of behavioural characteristics and features peculiar for men, which was formed in the process of individual development and as the result of child’s interaction with parents, has acquired the character of chronicity and stuck in the conscious. The life culture of Durova formed the presence and controlled the expression of a stable masculinity.

During her whole life N.A. Durova did not like when someone called her with her woman’s name. City-provost of Elbuga, E. Erlich, used to kindly host stabs-rotmistr Aleksandrov, but when he was unsatisfied with the latter (as a rule, due to Alexandrov’s request to help the people of the town) he used his proved method. “Usually a city provost met stabs-rotmistr with the words: ‘Oh, hi dear Alexander Andreevich!’. But when he was angry he said: ‘Hello, Nadezhda Andreevna, how are you?’. Than he added: ‘Oh, sorry; I took you for one of my friends...’” [10] After such a greeting stabs-rotmist blushed and then paled. For a few weeks after this Alexandrov was not seen at public.

Durova died on the 21th of Mach 1866. She signed away to be buried under the name of Alexadrov, but the priest didn’t made this. The parish register of Nikolsk church contained the following note: “On the 21st of March died and of the 24th was buried stabs-rotmistr, according to the card of retirement of April 24, 1817 No. 2362, a noblewoman by birth and by baptism Nadezhda Andreevna Durova”.

3. Conclusions

Historical psychology, as the display of interdisciplinary interaction of Social and Humanitarian sciences, allows restoring the system of psychological values, life scenarios including the problems of gender identity of a certain historical period.

The main reason for the gender role reversal of the Russian Amazon N.A. Durova was the psychological atmosphere in her family during her childhood. According to the psychological hypothesis of imitation and reproduction of relationships, Nadezhda behaved to herself the way her mother had done in her childhood, i.e. she was ashamed of being a woman. Under the conditions of Nadezhdas upbringing destruction with negatively dominant function of a woman-mother in the structure of family relationships, the girl preferred to take a ‘man’s role’.

Certain influence of gender identity change was made by the historical conditions of 19th century Russian Empire: social and psychological discrimination of a woman was fixed by the Russian traditions and laws.

Gender roles reversal led to the loss of significance of traditional values: marriage, family, children.

Existential crisis situation becomes the dominant idea of N.A. Durova's life who has overcome the conflict, the gender role reversal, acceptance of the male identity. These have become the sense-making factor of her life, provided her professional success and military career.

References

- [1] B.J. Keshen and S. Perrier, *Building New Bridges: Sources, Methods and Interdisciplinarity*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2005.
- [2] D.M. MacRaild and A. Taylor, *Social Theory and Social History*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2004.
- [3] I.V. Maslova, *Nauka I studia*, **12(80)** (2013) 48-52.
- [4] N. Davis and A. Farges, *History of a woman*, Vol. 2, Alateya, St. Petersburg, 2008, 26.
- [5] L.S. Benjamin, *Psychol. Rev.*, **81** (1978) 34.
- [6] N.A. Durova, *My childhood. Notes of a cavalry maiden. Selected works*, Sibirskaya Blagozvonits, Moscow, 2011, 4.
- [7] M. Worden, *Family psychotherapy. Diagnostics, techniques*, 4th edn., Praim-EVROZNAK, St. Petersburg, 2007, 45.
- [8] ***, *Selected stories of a cavalry maiden N.A. Durova*, Moskovskiy rabochiy, Moscow, 1983, 56-57.
- [9] N.A. Durova, *Autobiography of N. Durova. Notes of a cavalry maiden*, Tatar publishing house, Kazan, 1966, 188.
- [10] F.F. Leshmanov, *Russkaya starina*, **67(9)** (1890) 657-666.