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# THE PALGRAVE HANDBOOK OF WOMEN AND GENDER IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY RUSSIA AND THE SOVIET UNION

Edited by Melanie Ilic



The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender  
in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union

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Editor

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Handbook of Women  
and Gender  
in Twentieth-Century  
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# GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Alzhir	Akmolinskii lager' zhen izmennikov rodiny; Akmola camp for the wives of enemies of the homeland
<i>Anekdot/y</i>	anecdote/s; joke/s
<i>Baba</i>	woman (sometimes used pejoratively)
<i>Babushka</i>	old woman; grandmother
<i>Barshchina</i>	feudal labour service ( <i>corvée</i> )
<i>Batrachki</i>	day labourers
<i>Bibiotun</i>	female religious instructor
<i>Blagorodstvo</i>	nobility
<i>Bogatyř</i>	knight; warrior
<i>Bortsestra</i>	flight nurse
<i>Byt</i>	everyday life
CC	Central Committee (of the CPSU)
<i>Centner</i>	unit of weight equal to 100 kg
<i>Chapanchi</i>	horsehair veil covering the face
Chsir	<i>chleny semei izmennikov rodiny</i> ; family members of traitors of the motherland
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
<i>Dekabristka</i>	Decembrist wife
<i>Delegatki</i>	women delegates
<i>Derevenshchiki</i>	'village prose' writers
<i>Domashnaya rabotnitsa</i> ( <i>domrabotnitsa</i> )	domestic worker
EU	European Union
<i>Feudal-bey</i>	patriarchy
<i>Foidal</i>	patriarch
FZO	[ <i>shkola</i> ] <i>fabrichno-zavodskogo obucheniya</i> ; factory-work school
<i>Gastarbaitery</i>	migrant workers
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GKO	<i>Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony</i> ; State Committee of Defence
<i>Glasnost'</i>	openness

GOIN	State Oceanography Institute
<i>Gomoseksualisty</i>	homosexuals
<i>Gosstroï</i>	State Committee for Construction
Guberniya	province
Gulag	(state administration of the) labour camp network
IGY	International Geophysical Year
<i>Inorodtsy</i>	members of a national minority
IOM	International Organisation of Migration (Moscow)
IPY	International Polar Year
<i>Jadidism</i>	Muslim national enlightenment
<i>Kalym</i>	bride price
<i>kamzol</i>	laced bodice
KGB	<i>Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti</i> ; Committee of State Security
<i>Khudzhum/budjum</i>	women's liberation process in Central Asia (literally 'advance')
<i>Kolkhoz/kolkhozes</i>	collective farm/s
Komsomol	Kommunisticheskii soyuz molodezhi; Young Communist League
<i>Komsomolka</i>	female member of the Komsomol
<i>Korenizatsiya</i>	nativisation
<i>Kormilets</i>	breadwinner
<i>Krai</i>	territory
<i>Kul'turnost'</i>	cultured; politeness
KUTBZh	<i>Kommissia po uluchsheniyu truda i byta zhenshchin</i> ; Commission for the Improvement of the Work and the Everyday Life of Women
KUTV	<i>Kommunisticheskii universitet trudyashchikhsya Vostoka</i> ; Communist University of the Workers of the East
<i>Lazaret</i>	infirmary
LCP	Lithuanian Communist Party
<i>Lenfilial</i>	Leningrad branch of the USSR Academy of Architecture
LenZNIIEP	Leningrad Zonal Scientific Research Institute of Experimental Planning
LNK	<i>Latvijas Neatkarības Kustība</i> ; Latvian Independence Movement
<i>Mahalla</i>	(Uzbek) neighbourhood
<i>Mat'-rodina</i>	motherland
<i>Medsestry</i>	medical nursing sisters
MGU	Moscow State University
<i>Modernizatsiya</i>	modernisation
MOPR	International Red Aid
MTS	Machine Tractor Station
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs
Narkomsnab	People's Commissariat of Supply
Narkomtrud	People's Commissariat of Labour
Narkomzdrav	People's Commissariat of Health

Narpit	( <i>Profsoyuz rabochikh</i> ) <i>Narodnogo pitaniya i obshezhitiya</i> ; (Trade Union for workers in) Public Catering and Dormitory Workers
<i>Natsionalka</i>	woman from a national minority
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NKVD	Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del; People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
<i>Nomenklatura</i>	list of important posts and offices
<i>Oblast'</i>	region; province
<i>Obshchestvennitsy</i>	women activists
OMON	<i>Otryad mobil'nyi osobogo naznacheniya</i> ; Militia Regiments for Special Purposes
Osoaviakhim	Society for Assistance to Defence, Aviation and the Chemical Industry
<i>Paranja/paranji</i>	veiling equivalent to a burqa
<i>Partizanka/partizanki</i>	(female) partisan/s
<i>Pereselenets</i>	re-settler; migrant
<i>Pivnushki</i>	pubs
<i>Plavmornin</i>	Floating Marine Research Institute (Murmansk)
<i>Politodel'y</i>	political department/s
PPZh	<i>pokhodno-polevaya zhena</i> ; field wife
PRC	People's Republic of China
<i>Prisluga</i>	servant
<i>Rabfak</i>	<i>rabochii fakultet</i> ; workers' faculty
<i>Rabstvo</i>	slavery
<i>Raikom</i>	district party committee
<i>Raion</i>	district
ROSTA	Russian Telegraph Agency
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
(R)UBOP	(District) Directorate for Combating Organised Crime
<i>Samorealizatsiya</i>	self-realisation
<i>Sandruzhbiny</i>	sanitary brigades
<i>Sel'sovet</i>	village council
<i>Sledstvennyi komitet</i>	Investigative Committee
<i>Sluzhashchie</i>	white-collar workers
<i>Soslovie</i>	rank
Sovinformburo	Soviet Information Bureau (news agency)
Sovnarkom	Soviet narodnykh kommissarov; Council of People's Commissars
SR	Socialist Revolutionary (party)
<i>Stazh</i>	length of service
<i>Stiliaga/stiliagi</i>	'style-hound/s'; post-1945 fashion-conscious youth
<i>Strel'tsy</i>	guardsmen
TASS	Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union
Thaw	process of de-Stalinisation and liberalisation initiated after 1953 (from the 1954 novel by Il'ya Ehrenburg, <i>Ottepel'</i> )
TiP	Trafficking in Persons (US State Department Report)
<i>Torgovlya lyud'mi</i>	human trafficking (trafficking in persons)

<i>Troika</i>	three person panel
TsIK	<i>Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet</i> ; Central Executive Committee
TUCWDS	<i>Profsoyuz rabochikh gorodskikh predpriyatii i domashnikh rabotnits</i> ; Trade Union of City Workers and Domestic Servants
<i>Tyazhost'</i>	gravity
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UBOP	<i>see</i> (R)UBOP
UK	United Kingdom
<i>Ukaz</i>	edict
UN	United Nations
US	United States (of America)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UzTAG	Uzbek Telegraph Agency
<i>Vostochnitsa</i>	woman of the Orient
<i>Vsevobuch</i>	universal military training
VTsIK	<i>Vserossiiskii tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet</i> ; All-Russian Central Executive Committee
<i>Vydvizhenie</i>	promotion
<i>Vydvizhenki</i>	those who had been promoted
YeGE	<i>Yedinyi Gosudarstvennyi Eksamen</i> ; Unified State Examination
<i>Zaochnitsa</i>	correspondence wife
<i>Zek</i>	prisoner
<i>Zhena</i>	wife
<i>Zhenotdel</i>	<i>zhenskii otdel</i> ; Women's Department (of the Communist Party Central Committee)
<i>Zhensovet/y</i>	women's council/s
<i>Zhertvy</i>	victims
<i>Znanie</i>	knowledge
<i>Zona</i>	prison camp

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## Introduction

*Melanie Ilic*

This volume brings together a collection of exciting new essays that exemplify some of the ‘state of the art’ research currently being conducted in the field of Russian and Soviet women’s and gender studies. Taken in their broadest contexts, it is more than evident that Russian and Soviet Studies are well embedded in twenty-first-century academia in the West and that they also now have a global reach in higher education. A good number of specialist Russian research centres, libraries and archives exist in universities around the globe. Books and journals in Russian and Soviet Studies constitute significant entries on the lists of university and academic publishers, as well as in the popular press, around the world and they have a prominent place in wider ‘area studies’. It is also worth noting that the beginning of the twenty-first century has witnessed a tendency in academia in many countries to reduce the number of defined women’s and gender studies undergraduate courses and to confine these areas of study and scholarship to taught postgraduate and research degree programmes. Nevertheless, teaching about women and gender and feminist theoretical approaches are now much more embedded in the core disciplines of academia, and publishing on issues relating to women and gender is currently flourishing.

The Russian and Soviet Studies field has seen the emergence and growth of research and publication specifically on issues relating to women and gender, and this particular area of scholarship has expanded considerably since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Like its base field, Russian and Soviet women’s and gender studies have a global reach, as exemplified by the contributions to this volume. Chapters are included here by researchers currently based in the following countries (in alphabetical order): Australia, Canada,

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Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Mexico, the Russian Federation, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The context in which research is now being conducted and the types of scholar who undertake the research have had a significant impact on the development of the Russian Studies field. The collapse of the Soviet Union in itself provided (to some extent) greater and easier access to primary source materials within and relating to the former Soviet Union, with scholars now undertaking archival research not only in the major metropolitan centres, but also increasingly more often in the former Soviet republics, Russian regions and in local collections. In addition, the collapse opened up the possibility for Western scholars to talk to and work with former Soviet citizens in the conduct of their research, and to collaborate with new young Russian scholars who are unencumbered by the constraints that the former Soviet system imposed in scholarly research training, academic outlook and, moreover, in the publication of research findings (though there remain significant financial constraints on collaboration, research and publication). These changes in themselves have given a new vitality to the field. The collapse also resulted in an expansion of 'acceptable', 'doable' and possible research topics on which postgraduate students and established academics could conduct their research, no longer so constrained as they once were by Soviet bureaucratic oversight, the need for formal approval of the research topic and the restrictions imposed, bureaucratically, logistically and geographically, in the access to source materials.

The years since 1991 have seen a growing number of younger scholars, women in particular, entering the academic research field and university-level teaching in Russian and Soviet Studies, an area that has traditionally been dominated by men; this factor alone will also inevitably influence the future direction of the field. In addition, the quarter century since 1991 has seen many more scholars not only in post-Soviet Russia and the former Soviet republics, but also in the former Soviet-dominated Eastern bloc more broadly undertaking research in women's and gender studies and finding outlets for publishing English-language translations of their works, thus making them more generally accessible to non-Russian readers in the West.<sup>1</sup> There is now considerable scope for researchers in the West and in Russia to work and publish collaboratively on projects of shared interest. These factors have all culminated in a lively and exciting research field and, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new dynamic in research output and publications.

In its early developmental stages, and for some time after the initial take-off of research and publication specifically in Russian and Soviet women's history, the field was served by two foundational survey texts, by Gail Lapidus and Richard Stites, the ongoing importance of which is demonstrated by regular citations indicating their continued use following their first appearance.<sup>2</sup> At the time of their original publication in the late 1970s, these works were supplemented by a small range of studies that focused on such issues as women's role in the Russian revolutionary movement and biographies of prominent Russian and Soviet women. A small number of English-language textbooks, primary

source extracts and documents collections have also become available to support research and teaching about women and gender in Russian and Soviet history, literature and cultural studies.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these, a whole array of academic publications—monographs, edited collections, biographies, book chapters, journal articles, and sometimes whole journals—have been made available dedicated to the study and exploration of women and gender in Russia and the Soviet Union. Many of these works are listed in the bibliography to this volume. Today, papers relating to the broad field of Russian and Soviet women's and gender studies are regularly presented at academic conferences and, indeed, whole conferences, symposia, workshops and seminar series are sometimes dedicated to the subject.

In addition, the Russian and Soviet women's and gender studies field now benefits from a range of first-hand written narratives—autobiographies, memoirs, reminiscences and similar testimonial literatures, for example—many of which have been published and made available also in English language translation. Similarly, first-hand written and oral testimonies are now increasingly being archived and made accessible to academic researchers. These are further supplemented by a growing number of publications arising from research projects that have involved conducting surveys and interviews with women and men, many of whom lived through the Soviet period and are now able to speak more openly and freely in post-Soviet Russia about their experiences.

Often arising from oral history interviews or public calls for submissions of testimonials, such writings sometimes examine specific experiences of different facets of Soviet and post-Soviet life (such as life course events, survival in the labour camps, and living in a communal apartment, for example), and they have given rise to critical considerations of their methodology and research ethics.<sup>4</sup> These first-hand commentaries can provide a window into, for example, how Soviet policies on sexual equality were formulated and received, how they worked in practice and the extent to which they are reflected (or rejected) in the present-day Russian gender regime. Such publications are now regularly being further supplemented by materials and dedicated websites that are becoming available to researchers online. All of these materials now provide increasing scope for explorations of the gendered aspects of Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet everyday life.

As is evident from the reading of the field's varied publications, academic approaches in Russian and Soviet Studies are intrinsically multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary (as, too, are women's and gender studies). Underpinned by a desire to understand and explain 'Russia' and its place in the world, the Russian Studies field draws on a broad range of methodological approaches and academic disciplines (mostly in, but not limited to, the arts, humanities and social sciences) to examine its core subject. This is reflected in the contributions to this volume, which have been presented here not only by historians, but also by sociologists, political scientists, geographers, visual and cultural theorists, economists and scholars of Russian literature and linguistics. All of the contributors are interested, in one way or another, in the interplay of women's and

gender studies with their core subject disciplines and the broader Russian Studies field.

There are too many chapters in this volume to provide a summary of each individually in this brief overall introduction to the book. As reflected on the Contents pages, the ordering of the chapters follows a loose chronological structure, with a nod along the way to providing some thematic continuity: the studies start at the critical turning point of the late nineteenth century moving into the final years of Imperial Russia; they progress through the Soviet period from the revolutionary foundations of the Bolshevik and Stalinist state, onto the Second World War, to the 'thaw' and into the years of late socialism; and, finally, they examine the transition period of post-Soviet Russia as it moves into the twenty-first century.

In terms of thematic and subject content, the collection includes a broad variety of topics and approaches interlinking and interconnected with historical and contemporary studies: bibliographic and biographic studies; research based on visual and cultural analyses of a variety of Russian and Soviet art forms and communicative and propagandistic output; social and cultural studies that explore different facets of life in Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, focusing on both the everyday and the extraordinary; literary studies that contribute to understandings and explanations of the construction of femininity and masculinity in Russia; explorations of particularly Soviet attitudes to sexuality and changing post-Soviet norms; women's working lives and the struggle for equality in the Soviet Union and since 1991; humour and satire as sources for gender analyses; the framing of women's life chances, opportunities and choices as reflected in legal enactments, media reporting and online discussion forums.

The individual studies included in this collection draw on topics and issues that can be linked across and between chapters, as will become clear as readers make their way through the volume or as they dip in and out of separate chapters. This is perhaps most obvious in such areas as women's experiences in the workplace or of warfare, as supporters of the Russian revolutionary movement and activists in post-revolutionary Soviet organisations or as dissenters in opposition to the various impositions of the Soviet state. It is seen in the ways in which women and men were constructed by, conformed to, contended against and came into conflict with both state-imposed expectations (from above) and Russian and Soviet social and cultural norms (from below) about how they should situate themselves in society, how they should view themselves and how they should live their lives.

Furthermore, as some of the chapters make clear, Soviet citizens were both the subjects and agents of change: some enthusiastically embraced the opportunities presented to them by the Soviet socialist regime, whilst others resisted the peculiar form of twentieth-century modernisation that was being presented to them and imposed upon them; others found themselves, for at least some part of their lives, with little or no choice whatsoever as they were drawn into the whirlwind of Soviet policies and practices. It is important to point out also

that the chapters included in this volume move beyond a purely ‘Russian’ focus to take on board other areas of the vast former Soviet empire, not least the ways in which the policies of the Soviet regime played out in Central Asia and in the Baltic Republics. It goes without saying that ethnic and national identity, religious belief and cultural practice (and their interplay with gender) played very significant roles in the vast Soviet empire and that they remain significant in the post-Soviet policies and practices of the Russian Federation today.

Before finishing, it is important to include a final word on contemporary professional practice: at the national and international level in Russia and the West, it is pleasing to see that the academic field of Russian women’s and gender studies is currently underpinned and supported by a number of important professional organisations. These include: the Russian Association for Research in Women’s History (RAIZhI: <http://www.rarwh.ru>) (affiliated to the International Federation for Research on Women’s and Gender History: IFRWH); the Association for Women in Slavic Studies (<http://www.awsshome.org>) (affiliated to ASEES, the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies in the United States), which publishes the *Women East-West Newsletter* that includes regular bibliographic updates and is now available online; and the more recently established Women’s Forum of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (<http://www.basees.org>) (representing members mainly in the United Kingdom and Europe). These organisations promote scholarship, publication and teaching in the field of Russian women’s and gender studies and support women in their research and academic careers. They showcase, recognise and celebrate individual achievements and contributions to the profession, via publication and beyond, through a variety of awards and prizes. Readers of this volume are invited and encouraged to sign up, join in and get involved!

## NOTES

1. For just one recent example of an edited collection bringing together scholarship from across the Russian Federation, see Marianna Muravyeva and Natalia Novikova (eds.), *Women’s History in Russia: (Re)Establishing the Field*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.
2. For the ‘classic’ women’s history texts on the late Imperial and early Soviet periods, see: Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development and Social Change*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978; and Richard Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism, 1860–1930*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978.
3. On changing ideological attitudes to women in the Soviet Union, see Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990. For primary source readings, see, for example: Robin Bisha, Jehanne M. Gheith, Christine Worobec and William G. Wagner (eds.), *Russian Women, 1698–1917: Experience and Expression. An Anthology of Sources*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002; and Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine (eds.), *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women, from 1917 to the Second*

- World War*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. For textbooks, see: Barbara Evans Clements, *A History of Women in Russia: From Earliest Times to the Present*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012; Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700–2000*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Natalia Pushkareva, *Women in Russian History from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*, trans. and ed. by Eve Levin, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997. In literary studies, see Catriona Kelly, *A History of Russian Women's Writing, 1820–1992*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994; Catriona Kelly, *An Anthology of Russian Women's Writing, 1777–1992*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
4. See, for example: Barbara Alpern Engel and Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, *A Revolution of their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998; Jehanne M. Gheith and Katherine R. Jolluck, *Gulag Voices: Oral Histories of Soviet Incarceration and Exile*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011; Melanie Ilic, *Life Stories of Soviet Women: the Interwar Generation*, London: Routledge, 2013; and Paola Messina, *Soviet Communal Living: an Oral History of the Kommunka*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. See also Melanie Ilic and Dalia Leinarte (eds.), *The Soviet Past in the Post-Socialist Present: Methodology and Ethics in Russian, Baltic and Central European Oral History and Memory Studies*, London: Routledge, 2016.

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## Russian Revolutionary as American Celebrity: A Case Study of Yekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya

*Alison Rowley*

In early 1905, American newspapers were reporting on the movements and public appearances of 40 Russians then touring the nation on speaking tours.<sup>1</sup> Most of these exotic foreign visitors were soon forgotten, but one carved out a special niche for herself. She became a sensation whose American friends made sure the media continued to follow her exploits for the next 15 years. The story of how Yekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya became a celebrity—how she became ‘Babushka’ or the ‘Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution’—is the subject of this chapter. Breshkovskaya’s story reminds us both of the central role that women often played in the revolutionary movement and of its transnational aspects. Generations of Russian radicals looked beyond their country’s borders for support. The monies that were raised supported revolutionary activities in Russia and it was assumed that any publicity in the foreign media could shame the tsarist government into changing its policies. Hence, it was important to have sympathetic emissaries; Breshkovskaya wound up being one of the best.

Breshkovskaya, born Yekaterina Verigo in 1844, read a great deal during her childhood and was troubled by the treatment of Russian serfs. In 1863, she left the provinces to study in St Petersburg, but returned home when her mother fell ill. She opened a boarding school for girls, which allowed her to teach peasants for free. In her mid-20s, she married Nikolai Breshko-Breshkovsky, but her outlook was always more radical than his. They separated when Breshkovskaya deepened her engagement in the revolutionary movement. In 1874 she participated in the ‘To the People’ movement, for which she was

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arrested and kept in solitary confinement for many months. She was one of the defendants in the Trial of the 193 in 1877. Unrepentant, she became the first woman in Russia to be sentenced to hard labour in the Siberian mines. After 10 months in the mines, she was exiled. An unsuccessful escape attempt landed Breshkovskaya with further punishment. She was not freed until 1896, after which she travelled around rural Russia to familiarise herself with local conditions. In 1901, she was one of the founding members of the Socialist Revolutionary (SR) Party, the heirs to Russian populism. This chapter focuses on her activities from that point until the early 1920s. On the losing side after 1917, Breshkovskaya lived her final years abroad. She moved to Czechoslovakia in 1924, where she died in relative obscurity in 1934.

During the early years of the twentieth century, Breshkovskaya was a well-known and powerful figure. She differed from other revolutionary heroines in three ways. First, unlike many of her counterparts she did not shun the limelight. Instead, Breshkovskaya sought attention, even when she was in exile. Second, the punishments she received were central to her status. If the regime had executed her, this would have ended her activities; there would have been a public outcry, but this would have passed in time. Instead, her voice was kept alive and her ongoing harsh treatment was referenced in propaganda, thereby turning her into a living martyr. Finally, her trip to the USA distinguished Breshkovskaya from other revolutionary heroines, who did not leave Russia, and she became an international celebrity.

The question of Breshkovskaya's enduring celebrity is approached here by examining her long-term friendships with American supporters who were keen to promote her as a revolutionary icon, by charting her evolution into 'Babushka' in the US print media, and by tracing the creation and use of photographs of her, in other words by looking at the visual side of the persona she created. In this way, we can come to understand how a hardened Russian revolutionary became an American celebrity.

In May 1885, George Kennan left for Russia. After 13 months touring the country, Kennan published a series of scathing articles that proved so shocking that *Century* magazine was banned by the Russian government.<sup>2</sup> The articles were published in book form under the title *Siberia and the Exile System* in December 1891. The book sold out edition after edition and did much to establish Kennan as an authority on Russia and to tarnish American perceptions of the tsarist regime. It also portrayed Russian revolutionaries as heroic figures. So too did Kennan's exhaustive speaking tours; he delivered more than 800 lectures to a total audience of up to a million people.<sup>3</sup>

Kennan's writings introduced Breshkovskaya to the English-speaking world. They met when he arrived in Selenginsk, a village close to the Russian border with Mongolia. He was immediately impressed by what he saw in Breshkovskaya's face. His positive opinion grew stronger as the pair conversed and as Kennan came to know her as a cultivated and educated person. He also grasped that her future was bleak since she was likely to die in exile and to be forgotten. Still, '[t]he unshaken courage with which this unfortunate woman



contemplated her dreary future', he opined, 'and the faith that she manifested in the ultimate triumph of liberty in her native country were as touching as they were heroic'.<sup>4</sup> Decades later, Breshkovskaya teased him in a letter, writing, 'The first time I read your book about Siberia, I laughed much over your saying that I should finish my days in Selenginsk and be buried there.'<sup>5</sup> Even if he was mistaken about her fate, Kennan's opinions mattered and he never forgot the woman he met in this distant hamlet. He reappeared in small roles throughout her life, lending his celebrity to augment Breshkovskaya's.

Two other mainstays of support for Breshkovskaya were American feminists and 'gentlemen socialists'. Many became devoted friends and they made sure that she remained in the limelight. Both groups first met Breshkovskaya during her 1904–1905 speaking tour.<sup>6</sup> The tour was funded and organised by the American Friends of Russian Freedom, a society which had been revived after word of the 1903 Kishinev pogrom outraged the American public. One of its vice-presidents was George Kennan; executive committee members included Isabel Barrows and Lillian Wald. Lyman Abbott, Jane Addams and Alice Stone Blackwell served on its national committee.<sup>7</sup> The New York Branch handled the publicity for Breshkovskaya's trip, while Barrows helped with her English. She also introduced Breshkovskaya to others active in the progressive movement.

Breshkovskaya developed particularly strong ties to the women who founded and ran settlement houses on America's East Coast. She visited the House on Henry Street at the invitation of Wald, who noted in her memoirs that the 'settlement from time to time affords occasions for conference on Russian affairs between influential Americans and visiting Russians who entertain hopes of reform by other than active revolutionary methods'.<sup>8</sup> Breshkovskaya was sufficiently politically astute to downplay her support for political violence as she courted American benefactors, who tended to be more moderate liberals than socialists. The championing of Breshkovskaya by Barrows and Wald opened the doors to Helena Dudley's Denison House in Boston, where she stayed for 6 weeks, and Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago, which she visited in January 1905. These women, as well as Alice Stone Blackwell, often accompanied Breshkovskaya when she spoke to ever-larger crowds. The tour was a success with Breshkovskaya garnering interest wherever she went and raising thousands of dollars. She left the USA in March 1905, but she made sure to keep in touch with the women she had met.

Support was also offered by 'gentlemen socialists', affluent young men attracted to socialism and ideas of social change. They publicised their causes in a host of magazines and newspapers, including *Outlook*. From 1893, *Outlook* specialised in public affairs and the cultural world. Its circulation grew rapidly in the 1890s, with subscribers numbering 30,000 in 1894 and 100,000 by 1902.<sup>9</sup> The magazine regularly covered news from Russia. Kennan was affiliated with it as early as 1898 and spent 3 years as its Washington correspondent. In 1905 he was charged with a new task: covering the Russo-Japanese war. The stories published by the 'gentlemen socialists' about Russian affairs found acceptance at

the magazine because one of its editors, Lyman Abbott, was a member of the Friends of Russian Freedom.<sup>10</sup>

What differentiated men like Arthur Bullard, Kellogg Durland, Ernest Poole and William English Walling from other journalists who wrote about Breshkovskaya was their willingness actively to support the Russian revolutionary movement. They were particularly interested in the fates of the members of the SR party whom they met via the network of settlement houses that Breshkovskaya visited.<sup>11</sup> Poole interviewed Breshkovskaya for 8 hours at the end of 1904. He then related her life story in an influential article published in the 7 January 1905 issue of *Outlook*.<sup>12</sup> That article caught fire since the Bloody Sunday massacre suddenly thrust a strong spotlight on Russian events. The piece was quoted widely and then reprinted as a pamphlet.<sup>13</sup> More than 20,000 copies were sold at Breshkovskaya's remaining public appearances.<sup>14</sup> After meeting her, all four men—Poole, Bullard, Durland and Walling—decided to go to Russia in 1905 so they could see the revolution first hand. Poole even arrived with a letter of introduction from Breshkovskaya to smooth his way into revolutionary circles.<sup>15</sup> These men were the first to refer to Breshkovskaya by her nickname 'Babushka', but it did not immediately catch on.<sup>16</sup> Counter-intuitively, only once she left America did she become the 'Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution'.

Breshkovskaya's arrest and subsequent treatment by tsarist authorities was the turning point; it generated a strong sense of injustice and suspicions that the reforms introduced after 1905 were not truly going to change Russian society. Breshkovskaya returned to Russia in June 1905 and spent the next 18 months living underground. Her luck ran out when she was captured in December 1907. Her case was joined with that of Nikolai Chaikovsky. Within days, her arrest and confinement spurred Breshkovskaya's friends abroad into action. Petitions were sent to the Russian Ambassador in Washington and one reached the desk of Russian Prime Minister Petr Stolypin. Stolypin was forced to acknowledge the outcry. In a statement to the Associate Press, picked up by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* as well as by weekly periodicals, Stolypin assured the world that the pair would receive a fair trial.<sup>17</sup> Yet that did not stop people from agitating on her behalf. Isabel Barrows twice went to Russia to plead personally with the Minister to release Breshkovskaya on bail.<sup>18</sup> While international pressure ultimately failed in this regard, people at the time believed that it did still make a difference to her overall situation. In his memoirs, former leader of the SR party Victor Chernov referred to a 1910 article by an English correspondent when he mentioned Breshkovskaya's trial, suggesting that contemporary revolutionaries themselves understood that international contacts were useful.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Kennan insisted that the sentences Chaikovsky and Breshkovskaya ultimately received were directly influenced by pressure from abroad: 'The result of the trial is a convincing proof that Russian political and penal methods *may* be changed or modified by the pressure of enlightened public opinion in England and the United States'.<sup>20</sup>

At this point, much of the American newspaper coverage devoted more column space to Chaikovsky than to Breshkovskaya, and it was his name that appeared in the headlines when the pair came to trial in March 1910. The *New York Times* referred to it as the 'Tchaykovsky Trial' in all of its articles and, when the verdict was announced, the paper's headline read: 'Tchaykovsky Freed, Woman to be Exiled'.<sup>21</sup> Within days, however, the newspaper reversed its focus. On 13 March, it printed a poem 'Breshkovskaya' by Elsa Barker; that poem spurred both Upton Sinclair and Alice Stone Blackwell to pen letters to the editor praising the piece, although Blackwell tempered her remarks by suggesting Breshkovskaya would have quibbled with one or two lines in the poem.<sup>22</sup> A similar transition can be seen in the coverage of the *Washington Post*. It was not until a 9 March 1910 article discussing the verdict that Breshkovskaya became the primary focus of attention; the paper's headline read 'She Defies Russian Court', with 'Mme. Breshkovskaya Boldly Announces Herself Revolutionist' underneath. Chaikovsky, who had pled not guilty and was acquitted, suddenly seemed less heroic than his aged female counterpart, who was exiled to Siberia in perpetuity after owning up to her revolutionary activities and to membership of the SR party. At that moment, she eclipsed Chaikovsky, and arguably any other Russian revolutionary, in the eyes of the American public.

An article by Rose Strunsky further demonstrates this shift. Published in the August 1910 issue of *Forum*, it coincided with Breshkovskaya's long trek to her new place of exile, Kerensk in Eastern Siberia. 'There is a woman of sixty-eight on her way to Siberia to-day', read the opening line. That was the outcome of what Strunsky calls 'Katherine Breshkovsky's trial'. As for Chaikovsky, 'he was acquitted. He chose to deny facts to the Government, or the Government... wished to appear lenient and did not ask embarrassing questions'. Breshkovskaya, however, 'would not let herself be freed.'<sup>23</sup>

As reactions to her sentence continued to appear, the first signs emerge that her persona as 'Babushka' was finally taking root in American print media. Strunsky referred to her as 'Grandmother of the Revolution' and so too did another August 1910 article simply entitled 'Babushka'.<sup>24</sup> Even earlier, in April, Breshkovskaya's friend Isabel Barrows explained to readers that 'Madame Breshkovsky is called by this familiar term – "little grandmother"'.<sup>25</sup> The following year, *Outlook* updated its readers about Breshkovskaya's living conditions in a piece called 'Babushka in Exile' and suggested that 'To Cheer Babushka's Exile', as another headline called out, readers should send her books and magazines.<sup>26</sup> However, the remaining two articles *Outlook* devoted to her in 1911 used the more familiar 'Madame Breshkovsky'.

This flip-flopping disappeared entirely in 1913. In November, Breshkovskaya embarked on a bold plan to escape from exile. Dressed in men's clothes, she planned to ride to Irkutsk, a distance of about 1000 km. It took the authorities several days to notice she was missing since a fellow prisoner agreed to impersonate Breshkovskaya. She was finally caught close to her destination and, as punishment, spent the next 18 months in solitary confinement. The foiled escape was reported in the American media and it marked the moment when

the media fully embraced the 'Grandmother of the Russian Revolution' title. The *New York Times* made reference to the name twice while the *Washington Post* used it in a subheading and the main text of its article.<sup>27</sup> From this point until Breshkovskaya fell from favour with American audiences in 1919, both newspapers used some form of the nickname in almost every single article that mentioned her. 'Grandmother', 'Babushka' and 'Little Grandmother' were used interchangeably. The same can be said vis-à-vis articles in magazines. When *The Independent* ran a piece reacting to news of her escape, the title was 'The Grandmother of the Russian Revolution'.<sup>28</sup> Roughly three quarters of the articles that referred to Breshkovskaya in *Outlook* between 1913 and 1924, including long features in November 1917 and May 1919, called her by the affectionate nickname.<sup>29</sup> By the end of 1913, it was apparently inconceivable to think of Breshkovskaya other than as 'Babushka'.

Breshkovskaya did not watch impassively as others created this image for her; she influenced the construct as much as possible via her voluminous correspondence with American friends and supporters. For almost 10 years, she exchanged letters with Kennan, Bullard and Poole. She also wrote constantly to Alice Stone Blackwell, Helena Dudley and Isabel Barrows. While she almost never referred to herself directly as 'Babushka', Breshkovskaya did employ familial language in her letters, particularly those she sent to other women. Two letters from 1911 demonstrate this: the first opens 'Dear, dearest and a thousand times dearest friend and sister, Isabel C. Barrows!', while the second begins 'My sister Isabel, my daughter Alice...'<sup>30</sup> That language, as well as the comments she frequently made expressing interest in each woman's family, cast Breshkovskaya directly into a grandmotherly role. In other words, she wrote as if she was actually embedded into their families.

Luckily for Breshkovskaya, her adopted sisters and daughters were also activists keen to keep her in the public eye. Barrows twice informed *Outlook* readers on how to send letters and packages to Breshkovskaya in exile.<sup>31</sup> In August 1915, when her place of exile was changed to Yakutsk and there were concerns about how she would fare in a harsher climate, Blackwell went on the offensive by releasing the contents of one of Breshkovskaya's letters. The story was picked up by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and, of course, *Outlook*.<sup>32</sup> All three publications underscored her advanced age, 71 years, and the fact that she was losing her sight. Via Blackwell's information, they made it appear as if a harmless and blind old lady was being unnecessarily persecuted by the Russian government. Accounts of Breshkovskaya's decrepitude were overstated, however. Her eyesight may have been poor, but that did not stop her from reading an impressive array of books and magazines while in exile. Wald and Blackwell arranged subscriptions with monies given to them by Jacob Schiff. She received *National Geographic*, *Survey* and *McLure's*.<sup>33</sup>

Breshkovskaya's correspondence also contains regular comments on articles in the feminist *Woman's Journal*, edited by Blackwell, and *Outlook*, meaning she was well aware of what magazines in America were saying about her.<sup>34</sup> To give but one example, in October 1916, she told Blackwell, 'I have read your article

about me. It was too much. I feel myself a good soul, nothing more.<sup>35</sup> In other letters, she noted reading Walling's *Russia's Message* as well as books and articles by Bullard and Kennan. As she said, 'It is a great satisfaction to read the writings of people whom you know and loved. It is like a conversation.'<sup>36</sup>

Breshkovskaya's public persona also had a strong visual component. She was believable as 'Babushka' not just because some reporters informed their readers that her revolutionary comrades referred to her that way, or because editors found the name catchy enough to standardise its usage. It fit because photographs of Breshkovskaya showed her looking like a grandmother. From the moment she first met George Kennan in Selenginsk, Breshkovskaya's physical appearance, notably the hardships etched onto her face as well as her advanced age, became a fundamental aspect of her image. For that reason, it is imperative to understand the role that photographs played in creating 'Babushka'.

Breshkovskaya understood the power of photographs. When she was first arrested in 1874, she did all she could to prevent the tsarist authorities from taking a useful mug shot.<sup>37</sup> She would only be photographed on her own terms. This stubborn determination to control her image reappears in her correspondence, even when she was in exile. The Russian government was clearly concerned about what photographs of Breshkovskaya were circulating. In a 1911 letter to Blackwell, she noted that, after a search of her living quarters, police officials 'took the photographs showing me with some of my comrades'.<sup>38</sup> They may have worried because from time to time Breshkovskaya gifted American friends with photographs that she continued to have taken of herself and her surroundings while in exile. The recipients were the very people who wrote about her in the American press, thereby maintaining her celebrity status, and who pressured the Russian government concerning her situation. In August 1912, she noted in a letter to Barrows that 'I have a terrible photograph of myself, very like indeed. I will send it to your son, but he mustn't be afraid'.<sup>39</sup> The following year Breshkovskaya sent a portrait to Bullard and two to Dudley. She could never resist commenting on the images either; usually she underscored her aged appearance. She wrote to Dudley, 'Everyone says I am not so old as the photos make me look. Perhaps it is somehow in speaking and smiling one always seems younger and lively. But when alone and quiet, I must look as old as I do here, though my heart remains always young'.<sup>40</sup> Once the Provisional Government released her from exile, she made sure to send a photograph she liked to Alice Stone Blackwell. It showed her with a floral tribute she had been given. The accompanying letter included a rare reference to her moniker by Breshkovskaya herself: 'The young comrades cherish the grandmother, and have her surrounded with flowers and red ribbons'.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, the need to influence what pictures of her circulated stayed with Breshkovskaya until the very end of her life. When M.A. Novomeysky, who knew her from her time in exile, visited her in Paris in 1932, she gave him a copy of the picture she had taken to commemorate her 80th birthday, but insisted that her long-time friend Alexander Kerensky was behind the portrait. Pointing to him, Breshkovskaya reportedly said: 'Just look at what he's done to me, made

a world exhibition of me, as if I were an icon of the Mother of God, but I've told him straight, I'm having nothing of the sort on my 90th birthday'.<sup>42</sup> Breshkovskaya protests too much. As she well knew, the acquisition of celebrity was a participatory process that involved both written and visual materials; it was one that she had long willingly and actively engaged in.

During her first trip to America, Breshkovskaya was photographed by George Grantham Bain, 'the father of foreign photographic news'. He started the Bain News Photographic Service in New York City in 1895 and by 1905, his archive numbered more than a million images.<sup>43</sup> Bain's photographs were the ones that American authors turned to frequently when they wanted to include a picture of Breshkovskaya in their works. One of the first to do so was Kellogg Durland. His book, *The Red Reign* (1907), contained the portrait in Fig. 2.1.<sup>44</sup> Six years later, British author Rothay Reynolds included the same image in his account of Russian events from 1910 to 1912.<sup>45</sup> Reynolds was deeply influenced by the work of another 'gentleman socialist'. He credited Poole's article on Breshkovskaya, the one originally appearing in *Outlook* and later reprinted in pamphlet form, in his 'Foreword'. Reynolds went on to speak to her in the Peter and Paul Fortress just before she was sent into Siberian exile, and his recounting of her early life and revolutionary activities is clearly a rephrasing of Poole's piece.

The same picture resurfaces in two other places. It appeared on contemporary Russian postcards, like the one reproduced here. Its existence demonstrates how widely the same image could spread. The picture was also used as the frontispiece for *The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*. The volume was rushed into production by its editor Alice Stone Blackwell and appeared in November 1917. Two copies of the book found their way into Babushka's hands and, in a letter to Blackwell, she complained that in the photograph she



Fig. 2.1 Yekaterina Breshkovskaya (Catherine Breshkovsky) (1907)

looked ‘too young and too beautiful’.<sup>46</sup> After another decade of hardship, Breshkovskaya ‘claimed she was now old, ugly, lacked teeth, had no curls, and found it increasingly difficult to get moving’.<sup>47</sup>

Another photograph apparently from the same series shows Breshkovskaya standing at a desk; the image is not among the Bain News Service holdings at the Library of Congress. A fire in 1908 destroyed much of Bain’s archive; the original glass plate for this photograph may have been among the things lost to that fire.<sup>48</sup> She is wearing the same dress and collar as in the previous image and the same inkwell is used as a prop on the desk. It was this second photograph that was included in Lillian Wald’s memoirs.<sup>49</sup>

Bain was not the only photographer to point his lens at Breshkovskaya during her trip to America. The creator of the portrait in Fig. 2.2 is unknown but the image almost certainly stems from that time. Here is a contemporary picture postcard version of it. Note that the caption contains her name only in English, and the language used on the back is the same. This is a US postcard created for the American market; I have never seen this particular photograph on a Russian postcard. The same picture did, however, appear in a feature article, ‘The Women of the Russian Revolution’, in *Outlook* in December 1908.<sup>50</sup> Two years later, the portrait was printed alongside an account of Breshkovskaya’s trial in *The Independent*.<sup>51</sup>

These three photographs are consistent with how Breshkovskaya was usually portrayed. Portraits of her circulated in postcard form during her final period of tsarist imprisonment and exile. Even more were issued to celebrate her release in 1917.<sup>52</sup> The images did nothing to disguise her advanced age since that was part of the revolutionary persona she had honed both in Russia and the USA, and



Fig. 2.2 Yekaterina Breshkovskaya (Catherine Breshkovsky) (1907/8?)



which media stories were always sure to bend to. In them, she was physically non-threatening. The conservative dress that Breshkovskaya favoured did as much as her vagueness of speech to gloss over the fact that her party was responsible for much of the political violence that swept Russia prior to the First World War. Photographs that appeared in the USA were also careful not to include props that might present Breshkovskaya in a politically partisan way. In this, they differed from some Russian materials that made more explicit reference to the revolutionary movement, by showing her holding newspapers with visible headlines or mastheads, for example, or, in the case of one postcard, by incorporating a written appeal from Breshkovskaya, encouraging Russian peasants to vote in upcoming elections, in its composition.<sup>53</sup> Given the image she so carefully crafted for foreign consumption, including via these photographs, Americans would have been hard-pressed to associate Babushka with terror.

Released from exile, Breshkovskaya immediately cabled the news to her American friends, Alice Stone Blackwell and Lillian Wald. Her swift return to Petrograd brought her back into the political limelight. It also ensured that new photographs of her were soon in circulation in Russia (Figs. 2.3 and 2.4). While the caption on the first merely notes that Breshkovskaya is free and the picture shows her innocuously sitting in a car, not all of the photographs were so politically neutral. Figure 2.4, for instance, shows Breshkovskaya supporting Alexander Kerensky on the podium as he gives a speech to the assembled crowd (she is the figure with a shawl over her head just behind him). This image has her in the thick of partisan politicking.



Fig. 2.3 Yekaterina Breshkovskaya (1917)





Fig. 2.4 Yekaterina Breshkovskaya with Aleksander Kerensky (1917)

While American authors, editors and publishers generally shied away from such photographs, they did not disappear entirely from the historical record. A portrait of Breshkovskaya holding a placard covered in slogans connected to the SR party was reprinted in the English-language version of Victor Chernov's memoirs (despite the fact that Breshkovskaya herself is not mentioned at all in the text); and a photograph was included in a collage in Ernest Poole's memoirs.<sup>54</sup> Under the heading 'Pictures taken in Russia in 1917', the one of Breshkovskaya surrounded by soldiers on the Russian front appears at the bottom of the page. Such images, however, seldom found their way into American periodicals. I have only come across two exceptions, both published in *Outlook*. The first, copyrighted by the International Film Service, shows a newly freed Breshkovskaya with a group; the second accompanied a feature article on Breshkovskaya by William T. Ellis.<sup>55</sup> In this portrait, she is holding a copy of *Delo naroda* and readers are told that 'The newspaper which Mme. Breshkovsky is holding in her hands is "The People's Business", a Revolutionary publication'.

Much more passive images found favour with Americans, notably one that showed Breshkovskaya looking into the camera lens as she apparently finishes a meal. She appears as a kindly elderly lady with the smallest hint of a smile gracing her lips. This was the photograph used as the frontispiece for Rheta Childe Dorr's *Inside the Russian Revolution*, published in November 1917.<sup>56</sup> The same portrait was included in war photographer Donald C. Thompson's *Donald Thompson in Russia* (1918).<sup>57</sup> This was despite the fact that Thompson told his wife in a letter dated 23 April 1917 that he had personally

photographed Breshkovskaya that day.<sup>58</sup> For some reason, Thompson's own portrait was not the one published in his book. The photograph used was copyrighted by Underwood and Underwood. Given that my copy (which came from the archives of the *Baltimore Sun* newspaper) has a stamp dating it to February 1917, it means that it was in the paper's hands months before Donald Thompson even met Breshkovskaya. In 1896 Underwood and Underwood began to make stereoscopic pictures but by the 1910s it was a full-fledged picture service. The firm specialised in pictures of remote places and had a network of operators across the globe.<sup>59</sup> Because it was expensive and time-consuming to transmit images across the Atlantic by cable, newspapers and periodicals relied on firms like Underwood and Underwood for their pictures.<sup>60</sup> Hence, it is likely that this portrait of Breshkovskaya was taken in Russia, after an amnesty by the Provisional Government freed all of the country's political prisoners, and that it was distributed in the USA to interested newspapers and periodicals by Underwood and Underwood.

Thompson and Dorr were not the only Americans to seek out Breshkovskaya to get her views on the Russian revolution. Old friends Arthur Bullard and Ernest Poole visited her in the Winter Palace where she was staying after her return from exile. Neither man wrote about their talks at the time, but Poole mentioned them in his memoirs 20 years later.<sup>61</sup> New acquaintances included Bessie Beatty, correspondent for the *San Francisco Bulletin*, who travelled on the Trans-Siberian Railway, arriving in Petrograd in June 1917. She visited Breshkovskaya several times at the Winter Palace and her impressions fit nicely with Babushka's public persona: 'Always I came away with the sense of having been on the heights, close to something big and fine', wrote Beatty, 'with a grandmotherly kiss upon my cheek and the memory of a friendly hand-clasp'.<sup>62</sup> Beatty's book included a photograph and prose passages that emphasised Breshkovskaya's connections to America.<sup>63</sup> She made sure to tell her foreign guests that letters from American friends had sustained her during her last term in exile. Breshkovskaya had similar conversations with Louise Bryant, who arrived in Russia in August 1917. According to Bryant, 'She mentioned many well-known writers here [in the USA], and called them "her children"'.<sup>64</sup> Her desire to befriend the curious younger American woman is evident in the handwritten message on the photograph of Breshkovskaya that was used as the frontispiece in Bryant's book: 'The old Breshkovsky who wishes to be ever a friend of you'. Both Beatty and Bryant respected Breshkovskaya for her stature as a revolutionary heroine and looked to her to contextualise events as they were unfolding in Russia. She was an authority figure, an opinion leader, whose impression mattered in the months leading up to the Bolshevik seizure of power. However, her fortunes were about to take a new turn, one which finally saw events pass her by and the dimming of her celebrity status.

Returning to America after the Bolshevik seizure of power, Breshkovskaya assumed she could slip into the role of expert witness in order to tell Americans what was really going on in Russia. She claimed to still speak accurately for the Russian masses.<sup>65</sup> She arrived in Seattle on 19 January 1919, where she was met

by Helena Dudley and a host of reporters. Her new project sought to raise money for Russian war orphans, but she devoted as much energy to criticising Lenin's regime. On the 26 January, she gave an interview to a *New York Times* correspondent.<sup>66</sup> A follow-up article 4 days later coincided with her arrival in New York, where a crowd of several hundred, including Alice Stone Blackwell, greeted her at Grand Central Station. In her interviews that day, Breshkovskaya again critiqued the Bolshevik government.<sup>67</sup> Her base in New York was the Henry Street Settlement House. Here she was surprised by a visit from George Kennan. The two embraced and exchanged kisses.<sup>68</sup> A very successful evening at Carnegie Hall followed. Kennan was present at Breshkovskaya's lecture, which raised almost \$11,000 for the war orphans.<sup>69</sup> This talk was the highpoint of her trip, but things soured quickly as she moved on to Washington.

On 14 February, she testified before Senator Lee Overman's subcommittee on German propaganda and Bolshevism, warning of the dangers that the latter presented.<sup>70</sup> Breshkovskaya was one of more than two dozen experts—most of whom disagreed with her—called to answer the senators' questions, yet her appearance on Capitol Hill was ignored by mainstream newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. *The Post*, for instance, which had mentioned her expected attendance at a dinner in Washington in mid-February, did not refer to Breshkovskaya again until 1923.<sup>71</sup> *The Times* printed only a short article about her 6 April speech in Providence, Rhode Island—one that was disrupted by protestors and required intervention from the police to quiet the hall—before falling silent.<sup>72</sup> Even such a traditionally sympathetic periodical as *Outlook* paid less attention to Breshkovskaya. After warmly welcoming her to America in an article on 12 February, the magazine ignored her until the end of March.<sup>73</sup>

Undeterred, she penned several articles and a longer appeal to the American people. These items were quickly repackaged into two pamphlets: *A Message to the American People* and *Russia and the World*.<sup>74</sup> They were published by the Russian Information Bureau in the USA, a semi-official mouthpiece of the Russian Provisional Government established in 1917.<sup>75</sup> Under the stewardship of its director, A.J. Sack, the Bureau tried to strengthen economic ties with the USA and, after the October Revolution, sought to block official recognition of the Soviet government. Its stances on key issues matched Breshkovskaya's own but certainly did not reflect the attitudes of many in feminist circles or on the political left in the USA who welcomed the social experiment begun by the Bolsheviks.<sup>76</sup> Few Americans had ever understood how deeply partisan Russian revolutionary politics were, nor could they when emissaries like Breshkovskaya had deliberately downplayed the differences between parties for years.

By the time Breshkovskaya left America for France on 28 June 1919 she had learnt that celebrity was fickle. Her warnings about the Bolsheviks fell on deaf ears and she was now largely ignored by the mainstream media. In socialist quarters she was roundly criticised for her views; it was even openly suggested that she allied herself with American capitalists. An article in *The Liberator*, a monthly magazine edited by Max and Crystal Eastman, was particularly cutting:

The woman whom once all we American lovers of freedom honored as the heroic protagonist of Russia's toiling and suffering millions, is now being exhibited to us, by a propaganda lecture-bureau financed by John D. Rockefeller and Cleveland H. Dodge, as the mouthpiece of the interventionists and reactionaries who are plotting to overthrow Russian liberty.<sup>77</sup>

Albert Rhys Williams, whose writings are typical of American commentators who supported the Soviet government, deemed Breshkovskaya 'hopelessly out of step with the Revolution'.<sup>78</sup> Even old stalwarts such as Lillian Wald and Alice Stone Blackwell disagreed with Breshkovskaya's interpretation of events. While Breshkovskaya's celebrity never totally disappeared—American newspapers and magazines occasionally referred to her activities until her death in 1934—as a political force, she was spent.

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## Vera Zasulich: The Legacy of a Female Terrorist

*Szilvia Nagy*

*Zasulich was not a terrorist. She was the angel of vengeance, and not of terror. She was a victim who voluntarily threw herself into the jaws of the monster in order to cleanse the honour of the party from a moral outrage. ... Yet this occurrence gave to the Terrorism a most powerful impulse. It illuminated it with its divine aureola, and gave it the sanction of sacrifice and of public opinion.<sup>1</sup>*

In January 1878, 28-year-old Vera Ivanovna Zasulich (1851–1919), a woman of noble birth, shot and wounded F.F. Trepov, the Chief of Police in St Petersburg. In 1883, she became one of the founders of the first Russian Marxist group, the Emancipation of Labour, and later corresponded with Marx and Engels. She joined the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and, in 1903, became one of the leaders of the Menshevik faction and Lenin's ardent critic. Despite her important role in twentieth-century Russian history, posterity remembers her primarily as the first female terrorist rather than for her publications, translations or political activities.<sup>2</sup> This study re-examines the stereotypical image of Zasulich to analyse her motivations and the consequences of her actions, especially regarding political terrorism. It also considers Russian women's participation in political terrorism as an extreme form of struggle against tsarism.

This chapter addresses the following questions: was Zasulich really the first female terrorist in Russian history? Why did so many women participate in political terrorism? Is there such a thing as female terrorism? If yes, what are some of its peculiarities? What was Lenin's attitude towards political terrorism in the *Iskra* era? The main primary sources for this study are Zasulich's memoirs,

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her theoretical works, and Lenin's articles and pamphlets. In the secondary literature, the comprehensive biographies by Jay Bergman and Ana Siljak provide a useful starting point and are supplemented here with works examining women's role in Russian political terrorism.

### THE PATH TO POLITICAL TERRORISM

By the end of the 1860s, a radical movement had emerged in Russia with student protests taking place in St Petersburg and other major cities. In 1868, Zasulich moved to St Petersburg with hopes of participating in the radical movement. She enrolled for pedagogical courses at the university, learned French and worked in a book-binding co-operative. In 1869, thanks to her professor who invited her to an illegal reading where Sergei Gennadievich Nechaev was present, she finally met a group of students operating illegally.<sup>3</sup> Nechaev was infamous in the Russian revolutionary movement. He was arrested in January 1869 for his active role in the radicalisation of student demands. He subsequently travelled to Geneva for a short time in March 1869, where he met anarchism's main ideologues, Mikhail Bakunin and Nikolai Orgayev. He wrote *Catechism of a Revolutionary* this same year in Geneva, before returning to Russia and pretending to be a representative of the Global Revolutionary Alliance. He began organising the People's Retribution, a revolutionary unit consisting of strictly centralised five-member cells.

Zasulich became familiar with Nechaev's ideas during these illegal readings. Nechaev's personality left an impression on her and she later described his charisma and hypnotic power over people:

I saw that he spoke of the revolution in the most serious manner, and that it was more than mere babble: he was going to do everything in order to play a leading role among the students to ensure and make possible a future revolution. To serve the revolution – the greatest joy I ever dared to dream of.<sup>4</sup>

At one of these meetings, Nechaev asked Zasulich to provide her address in order to receive illegal letters. She answered, 'Of course. I barely know anything but I sincerely wish to do something for the cause. It doesn't matter to me what I do; I'm happy to help in any way I can'.<sup>5</sup>

After a short while, however, Nechaev's revolutionary activities ended when, in November 1869, Russian society was shaken by a scandal: Nechaev murdered one of the members of his organisation, a student named Ivanov, who allegedly had betrayed his comrades. During the investigation, police quickly found out about Nechaev and other members of the organisation. Zasulich was also arrested. The general public and many of the radicals were outraged at the murder but for those who were capable of making great sacrifices to further the revolutionary cause it was not easy to reject either Nechaev or his worldview. Zasulich considered Nechaev's case alien to the intellectual circles, a unique,

peculiar case, and she believed that nothing like this would happen again in the movement.<sup>6</sup>

Vera Figner (1852–1942), one the leaders of a later terrorist organisation, wrote about the ‘overwhelming effect’ that Nechaev’s letter, which he had written in prison to the Executive Committee, had on her:

Suddenly everything that had stained Nechaev’s name disappeared: the innocent blood spilt, the procurement of compromising papers which could be used for blackmail, the deeds committed in the name of ‘the ends justify the means’ mentality – all the lies surrounding the figure of Nechaev, the revolutionary disappeared. Only the shining of his intellect remained which even the long, terrible solitude of prison could not fade, his relentless will which even the cruel punishment could not break, his energy, which all the failures of life could not slacken.<sup>7</sup>

Zasulich was imprisoned in the Peter and Paul fortress until 1871, and in 1872 she was a witness at Nechaev’s trial, where he was sentenced to 20 years of hard labour. She answered the prosecutor’s questions in short, concise sentences: ‘I don’t remember’; ‘I don’t know’.<sup>8</sup> After this, she began her exile in Siberia, but wrote nothing about this period of her life in her memoirs. She returned to Kharkov in 1873 and subsequently joined a new radical movement.<sup>9</sup> The revolutionary movement temporarily abated and, at the beginning of the 1870s, the ‘going to the people’ movement of the Narodniki began. Zasulich, like so many other young women, believed she had found an alternative to tsarism in this circle. Among others, Vera Figner, who went on to become one of the best-known female terrorists, also started her revolutionary career in the Narodnik movement as a nurse.<sup>10</sup> The movement’s primary goal was to go among the people, and its ideology was founded on the growing socio-cultural and psychological distance between the people and the intelligentsia.

The two main ideologues of the Narodnik movement were Pyotr Lavrov and Mikhail Bakunin.<sup>11</sup> The Lavrovian wing had a significant moral side. Its members were mainly students who considered themselves to be in debt to the people, and believed it to be their moral duty to help further the people’s uprising in any possible way.<sup>12</sup> They endeavoured to explain to people the meaning and context of their situation, and to mobilise the peasantry for a future revolution. A radical anarchist wing also developed within the Narodnik movement in the 1870s. The anarchists adopted Mikhail Bakunin’s ideas, developed in his book *Statism and Anarchy* (1873). According to Bakunin, there is nothing to teach the people; what is more, they should not be provided with any kind of ideology as they need to work out their own. He believed, in addition, that the Russian people already had an ideology since they hated the state and insisted on shared ownership of the land. Bakunin considered the revolutionary youth’s main task to be:

We must contact and connect not only the most enlightened peasants in the villages, the districts, and the regions but also the most forwardlooking revolutionary individuals naturally emerging from the rural Russian environment; and above all, wherever possible, we must establish the same vital connections between the factory workers and the peasants.<sup>13</sup>

Even though most Russian youths were attracted more to Bakunin's ideas, Zasulich found Lavrov's wing more to her sentiments, at least until 1875. Going amongst the people started in 1874 when young intellectuals went to villages in their hundreds. However, the peasants were not particularly open to the students' ideas and considered them agitators. Sergei Kravchinsky observed:

I was walking along the road with a comrade when we were overtaken by a peasant in a sleigh. I began to tell the peasant that he must not pay taxes, that the functionaries plunder the people, and I tried to convince him by quotations from the Bible that they must revolt. The peasant whipped up his horse, but we followed rapidly, he made his horse trot, and we began to run behind him, all the time I continued to talk to him about taxes and revolt. Finally, he made his horse gallop, but the animal was not worth much—an underfed peasant pony—so my comrade and I did not fall behind, but we kept up our propaganda until we were quite out of breath.<sup>14</sup>

Soon after, in 1875, Zasulich moved to Kiev, where she made contact with a revolutionary group known as the Southern Rebels (*Yuzhnie buntari*), an earlier Bakuninist organisation. At the time, the organisation had fifteen members, more than half of whom were women.<sup>15</sup> This is when Zasulich started to play an active role in the revolutionary movement. She read Bakunin's works, which had a powerful impact on her. Starting from 1874, however, mass arrests put a halt to the 'going to the people' movement. Many people were arrested in a very short period of time, and most were later taken to court. The Southern Rebels (SR) in Kiev still adhered to Narodnik ideologies in 1875–1876. The members procured weapons and started learning how to shoot for self-defence, preparing for possible later arrest. Zasulich learnt how to use a weapon. Police investigations soon started against the group's members. In order to avoid being arrested again, Zasulich moved to St Petersburg with one of her comrades, Maria (Masha) Aleksandrovna Kolenkina (1850–1926).<sup>16</sup>

Up to 1877, 1610 propagandists were arrested, 15% of whom were women.<sup>17</sup> One group was taken to court in 1877 during the 'Trial of the 50',<sup>18</sup> and the 'Trial of the 193' started in October.<sup>19</sup> After assessing the reasons for their failure, the Narodniki returned to the idea that a centralised party needed to be organised, and that it should strictly follow the rules of conspiracy. They did not see any other way to express resistance against the government's violent actions. This is how the organisation unifying revolutionary propagandistic circles was born: *Zemlya i Volya* (Land and Liberty), for the time being, considered the use of political terrorism as acceptable under certain conditions in the fight against tsarism. However, the persistent lack of success in their

propaganda efforts amongst the people led more and more supporters towards the foregrounding of terrorism.<sup>20</sup>

Vera Zasulich's attempt to assassinate Trepov was an important step in this process. Zasulich and Masha Kolenkina originally planned to shoot the much-hated lead prosecutor of the 'Trial of the 193', Zhelekovsky, and Senator Zhikharev, who had both declared war on the Narodniki. The plan later changed. Instead of Zhikharev, they chose F.F. Trepov, St Petersburg's Chief of Police, who was not popular among the wider circles of Russian society either. Their decision was linked to events in 1877 in St Petersburg when a political prisoner, A.P. Bogolyubov, was whipped on the orders of Trepov because he did not remove his hat in his presence.<sup>21</sup> On 24 January 1878, Zasulich went to Trepov's office and shot him at point blank range.<sup>22</sup> After the assassination attempt, she uttered: 'For Bogolyubov'.

Zasulich was apprehended and taken to court. This was the first time in Russian judicial history that a woman was taken to court on a charge of terrorism. Her trial, on 31 March 1878, has been dubbed the 'lawsuit of the century'.<sup>23</sup> To the delight of their readers, European and American newspapers published the details of the young Russian female terrorist's trial and acquittal. After hearing about her acquittal, crowds went to neighbouring streets and chanted 'Long live Zasulich'. The newly released Zasulich was seated in a carriage and there were more than 1500 people present to greet her. This was the largest political demonstration of the 1870s. The police clashed with the protesters, several were wounded and one student lost his life. Meanwhile, Zasulich managed to escape to her comrades in an illegal flat. On 31 March, Tsar Alexander II assembled the Special Council of Ministers in order to strengthen the safety of the state and to debate urgent measures aimed at circumventing cases like Zasulich's. That same day, a second warrant for Zasulich's arrest was issued. A few days later, the acquittal was nullified, but Zasulich was already in Geneva.<sup>24</sup>

Following the acquittal, A.F. Koni, who presided over the hearing, and Lev Tolstoy both expressed their unease. Tolstoy wrote in one of his April letters:

Zasulich and Trepov are harmful animals who can and should be killed like dogs. And this is not outrage, this is war. Everyone who acquitted the murderer and agreed with the sentence knows very well that for their own safety, it is forbidden to acquit a murderer. However, for them, the real question is not who is right and who wins. This is the beginning of a series of events the meaning of which we do not yet understand.<sup>25</sup>

Tolstoy's concerns proved to be correct. Following Zasulich's acquittal, several years of terror followed, reaching their peak in 1881. In April 1879, Aleksandr Soloviev shot at the Tsar. On 4 August 1879, Sergei Kravchinsky killed the Chief of Police, Mezentssev, in St Petersburg. Assassination attempts against high-ranking officials and the police grew in number.

In August 1879, the Narodniki held a secret congress in Voronezh. Zasulich returned to Russia using a fake passport in order to support Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov, who was now an acknowledged spokesperson of the Narodniki. She also wanted to reorganise *Zemlya i Volya* because, following a series of arrests, the Narodnik movement's tactics were proving to be a failure.<sup>26</sup> In August 1879, however, a significant rupture occurred in the organisation. As a consequence, the People's Will (*Narodnaya volya*) was formed; governed by an Executive Committee, it attracted those who continued to believe in the use of terror. A second organisation was also formed: Black Repartition (*Chernyi peredel*).

Vera Figner, one of the leaders of the People's Will Executive Committee, summarised the main tactical difference between the two organisations:

By mutual agreement, neither one of the two factions into which Land and Freedom had divided, was to use its former name, which had already won renown and sympathy in revolutionary circles. Both sides disputed this right, and neither one wished to yield to the other all the privileges of the continuer and heir of the previously active organisation. The supporters of the old tendency, who had concentrated their attention on the agrarian question and the economic interests of the peasantry, took as their name, the Black Repartition, while we, who had aspired first of all to the overthrow of autocracy, and the substitution of the will of the people for the will of one man, took as our name, the Will of the People.<sup>27</sup>

The division of *Zemlya i Volya* was testimony to the crisis in the radical movement and was the direct trigger of the move towards the use of political terror. On 26 August 1879, the People's Will Executive Committee 'officially' sentenced Tsar Alexander II to death. The Tsar realised that in the crisis situation he needed to make allowances but he had no time to implement them: he was murdered by a bomb on 1 March 1881. The five organisers of Alexander II's assassination were executed, including Sophia Perovskaya (1853–1881); 200 members of the organisation were arrested in the summer of 1883. Vera Figner was also arrested. These mass arrests proved a huge blow to the revolutionary group.

After the failure of the Narodnik movement, the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the SRs, later came into being. It represented peasant interests, and was formed in the last years of the nineteenth century by the unification of Narodnik groups in Russia and in emigration. The SRs considered political terror a justified means of political struggle and, in this regard, they followed in the footsteps of the People's Will. The Combat Division, which attracted those who believed in terrorism, started to organise itself separately in 1902. The group's composition was in constant flux and during certain periods between 1901 and 1911 it had more than 90 members. According to some estimates, during the period of terror, the SRs carried out more than 263 terrorist acts, 11 of which can be linked directly to the Combat Division.<sup>28</sup>

### WOMEN'S ROLE IN RUSSIAN TERRORISM

Zasulich can be considered one of the initiators of this new era of the Russian revolutionary movement. There were 10 women amongst the 29 members of the People's Will Executive Committee. Between 1902 and 1910, the SR's Combat Division numbered 78 people, including 25 women. Between 1905 and 1908, 11 assassinations were carried out by women terrorists.<sup>29</sup> It should also be noted, however, that women rarely took leading roles in the preparation and implementation of terrorist assassinations, but they were significant participants in them.

Researchers dealing with the fate of women terrorists sooner or later face the stereotypical assumption that their decisions were dictated by higher moral norms, and that they were being heroic when participating in terrorist actions that involved risking their own lives. They became the self-sacrificing part of the revolutionary movement and with this the 'terrorist-martyr' model was born. Manfred Hildermeier rightly notes that it is not only with political reasons that terrorists explain political murders but also with reference to self-sacrifice and the necessity of a justified vengeance; this is what can be considered the moral justification of terrorism.<sup>30</sup> The reason for this is self-evident: violence, assassination and murder were in sharp contrast with moral norms generally accepted in civilised societies and, therefore, they needed justification. Such ideas gave rise to understanding and compassion in broader society, resulting in Vera Zasulich's acquittal. Even the novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky, who did not support the radicals and was extremely critical of the terrorist movement, believed in advance of her sentencing that Zasulich should be acquitted: 'you're free but don't do anything like this again'.<sup>31</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Vera Zasulich, Sophia Perovskaya and Vera Figner became heroines of the Russian revolutionary movement. Their sacrifice further points to the deeper structure that influenced these women's decisions: society's mentality and a new construction of womanhood that was emerging in the radical movement.

Amongst the revolutionaries, principles of equality had already appeared by the 1870s and they were the practical embodiment of the universal prescriptions of democracy apparent in the Russian radical movement. Russian radical underground movements made women's participation possible and this was first manifested in the *Narodniki*.<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon extended beyond the European norms of equality. Women's position in Russia had moved away from the stereotype of passive oppression, which still influenced historical consciousness in the broad sense. Surveying this process is necessary in order to understand what motivations underpinned women's decisions to choose the path of revolution and, within that, the path of terrorism.

Amy Knight, who has analysed the biographies of 44 SR women terrorists based on the *Biographical Lexicon* published in 1934, noted that the vast majority of women who joined the terrorist movement were of noble birth. Of the 40 terrorist women whose birth she identified: 15 (38%) came from the

nobility or were daughters of merchants; four (10%) came from the gentry; 11 (27%) from the lower middle class; one (2%) was the daughter of a priest; and nine (22%) were born in peasant families. She concluded that most of the women belonged to the intelligentsia, amongst whom high birth and high culture were characteristic.

Looking at their nationalities, Knight noted that 22 (50%) were Russian, 13 (30%) were Jewish, four (9%) were Ukrainian and five (11%) were of other origins. The high number of Jewish female participants in the radical movement cannot be explained simply by the high number of Jewish participants in the wider movement. Knight and Oleg Budnitskii both explain Jewish women's tendency to favour terrorism by the fact that they desired to break away from their family circle and their cultural traditions by positioning themselves in opposition to their family's patriarchal structure. They did not want to become mothers or remain daughters; they demanded equal rights and individuality, all of which was made possible by the radical movement.<sup>35</sup> Yet it remains unclear in this particular explanation why these women should choose specifically the most extreme form of resistance: terrorism.

This requires an exploration of the female terrorists' psychological state of mind. According to Knight and Anna Geifman, it is possible that several female terrorists suffered from psychological problems, and the fact that they participated in terrorism was a clear sign of their propensity to commit suicide. Psychological illnesses among female terrorists appear to have been common. A large number of active terrorist women made at least one suicide attempt by 1905. Was their psychological instability really the reason why they chose terrorism? As Knight points out, 'In a sense, suicidal tendencies were part of the terrorists' mentality, for a terrorist act was often a suicidal mission'.<sup>34</sup> Budnitskii does not deny the relevance of the claim, but he also adds that no serious research has been undertaken regarding this matter.<sup>35</sup> The example of Tatyana Leonteva is often raised in this context. Leonteva clearly suffered from serious psychological problems. Boris Savinkov, leader of the Combat Division, forbade her from carrying out terrorist acts. Leonteva accidentally killed a police officer in Switzerland, whom she thought to be Durnovo, the Minister of Internal Affairs. She ended up in a mental hospital, where she later died.<sup>36</sup> Budnitskii asks whether women's emotional or psychological state of mind really was the main motivation for them to engage in terrorism even by sacrificing their own lives.<sup>37</sup> The question remains unanswerable without access to the medical records pertaining to female terrorists' psychological state, if such documents even exist. Furthermore, there is no precise data on the psychological state of the 'healthy' part of society to serve as comparison.

### ZASULICH AND POLITICAL TERRORISM

In the context of women's role in terrorism, it is necessary to investigate Zasulich's attitudes towards political terror, and the moral and political issues associated with it. How did she respond to the fact that it was her specific act

that initiated the shift towards political terrorism in the tsarist empire and that, as a result, many more women were attracted to the Russian revolutionary movement?

Zasulich's several years of emigration started in Switzerland. In 1878, she was greatly distressed by the lack of a clear perspective in revolutionary activities, which was linked to the Narodniki movement's weak organisation and the general political chaos. The situation changed when Lev Deutsch escaped from prison in Kiev, and A.V. Stefanovich, one of the members of the Southern Rebels, arrived in Geneva. After this, the members of the local revolutionary movement held meetings several times a week and shared their thoughts.<sup>38</sup> It was as an outcome of these meetings that Zasulich first formulated her own conception of terrorism. She was disheartened by the terrorist acts that followed her trial. She felt guilt and partly blamed herself for the dramatic impact that her own example had had on Soloviev's actions, as expressed in these desperate lines written to Deutsch: 'it's impossible for me to endure a terrorist movement which my case had such influence in initiating'.<sup>39</sup>

Olga Lyubatovich (1854–1917), who lived close to Zasulich in Switzerland, confirmed in the newspaper *Byloe* that Zasulich was saddened by the assassination:

As a result of Soloviev's attempt, V.I. Zasulich refused to see anyone for three entire days, and was beset by a severe depression; she saw no justification for such a thing. It seemed to me at the time that every violent act... affected her nerves because she consciously and perhaps subconsciously tending towards an active struggle with the government.<sup>40</sup>

In the following decades, Zasulich consistently argued against all kinds of terrorist acts. She believed that terrorism had a negative impact on the revolutionary movement since a small group of conspirators would not be able to attract the public's attention and prepare them for a self-conscious fight against the system. She did not consider terrorism a useful tool of political struggle.<sup>41</sup> In the third issue of *Iskra* (*The Spark*), Zasulich later explained her attempted assassination of Trepov by claiming that the terrorist actions of the 1880s, and her attempt on Trepov's life, were not conscious acts, but were instead the result of sudden impulses arising from psychological disappointment and pain. She also claimed that terrorism was the weapon of hopelessness, rather than an act of revolutionary struggle.<sup>42</sup> She wrote:

The example of terrorist exploits can impress only those already possessing revolutionary spirit [...] But terrorist acts cannot make a movement more powerful, no matter how popular they may be. However great the delight it sometimes arouses in order to carry out terrorist acts all of one's energies must be expended, and a particular frame of mind almost always results: either one of great vanity or one in which life has lost all its attractiveness.<sup>43</sup>



In her article in *Iskra*, she further claimed that terrorism incites political passivism among the vast majority of people who cannot participate in the preparation or implementation of such acts. This was explained by the fact that terrorism, due to its conspiratorial nature:

is effective in inverse proportion to the number of people who practise it; its use as a political tactic effectively *nullifies* the potential power of both the masses and the revolutionaries who would otherwise be actively participating in political struggle against autocracy.<sup>44</sup>

Zasulich viewed terrorism through the prism of the principles of *noblesse oblige* and societal selflessness. In her explanation, terrorism defended human dignity and honour. When she shot Trepov, she was outraged at seeing such a morally debased man and she was outraged at Trepov for flogging a defenceless prisoner. This conception formed the legitimising ideology according to which Zasulich's act of terrorism was, in fact, reinterpreted as an act of *self-sacrifice*, with Zasulich positioned as a kind-hearted criminal fighting against injustice. This can also be considered a dangerous definition of terrorism since the terrorists' self-sacrifice is used as a means to justify the murder committed by them, which, in turn, can lead to the justification also of the *terrorist-martyr* model. This conception came to form an integral part of Russian late nineteenth and early twentieth-century terrorism's ideology.<sup>45</sup>

Zasulich came to reject political terrorism, and according to her political standpoint she was not a terrorist. When she later explained her attempted assassination of Trepov, terrorism was constructed not as a guiding principle, but as a singular act. Despite this, Zasulich undoubtedly became a role model for Russian terrorists, but it was not easy for Zasulich to resolve this dilemma, either from a political or a moral point of view. This was made even more difficult for Zasulich by the criticism of her actions raised by Lenin, amongst others, who rebuked her following the shooting and after her acquittal, claiming that this was the 'worst kind of revolutionary self-indulgence', as can be read in his letter to Plekhanov, dated 2 June 1902.<sup>46</sup>

## LENIN AND POLITICAL TERRORISM

Lenin wholeheartedly participated in arguments about terrorism as a method of political struggle. In his writings, reviews, articles and lectures in the 1890s, he criticised Narodnikism's economic and political views.<sup>47</sup> In 1897, in his pamphlet *The Tasks of the Russian Social Democrats*, whilst reflecting on a debate in the Russian press about terrorism's place in the political struggle, Lenin suggested that terrorist acts carried out by the predecessors of the SRs, the Narodniki, were characterised by a lack of ideology and worthlessness.<sup>48</sup> This is what drove the Narodniki to the 'revolutionary adventurism' that resulted in the spread of regular terrorist activities. In 1899, in *A Draft of Our Party Programme*, Lenin characterised terrorism as an ineffective method of war,

which the [Social Democratic] party should reject since it should focus all of its power instead on strengthening the party organisation and disseminating appropriate literature.<sup>49</sup>

In particular, the *Iskra* era, from 1900 to 1905, played a significant role in establishing the Bolshevik stance against terrorism. With its intellectual language, *Iskra* became both an effective and serious political newspaper among Russian revolutionaries. Between December 1900 and October 1903, *Iskra* appeared regularly with Lenin as the editor-in-chief. Following the party split in 1903, however, it fell into the hands of the Mensheviks.<sup>50</sup>

Zasulich and Plekhanov, as editors, also explained their views on terrorism in *Iskra*. They unanimously declared their beliefs that terrorism served to isolate the revolutionary party, and for this reason terrorism was doomed to failure because it disrupted the party organisation and, consequently, obstructed the political education of the working class. A small group of conspirators, they argued, was unable to attract public attention and to prepare people for a conscious fight against the system because the group's energies would be dissipated by planning and implementing terrorist acts.<sup>51</sup>

In 1902, Lenin argued that by placing terrorism as central to their political programme, the SRs had caused serious harm to their movement by breaking the connection between the people and the revolutionaries. In August and September 1902, Lenin's *Revolutionary Adventurism* was published in two separate instalments in *Iskra*.<sup>52</sup> He argued that certain SRs naively failed to realise that their tendency for terrorism was linked to the fact that, from the very beginning, they had distanced themselves from the workers' movement, and they did not strive to participate or play a leading role in the class struggle alongside other members of their party. In November 1902, again in *Iskra*, Lenin repeated his attack on terrorism. The repetition of the old tactic of individual political murders as part of the political struggle's methodology was, he argued, unnecessary in the present conditions. The SRs' attempt to reinstate the original goals of the People's Will, together with all its tactical and theoretical shortcomings, was, he declared, senseless and damaging.<sup>53</sup>

In the summer of 1903, discussion continued during the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP's) second congress, which was dedicated to the question of terrorism. The congress expressly rejected terrorism as a method of political struggle, saying that it was ineffective, that it diverted attention away from organisational and agitational work, and that it undermined the relationship between the revolutionaries and the masses. Finally, Lenin argued, terrorism projected the wrong image of the revolutionaries to the public in their central tasks in the struggle against autocracy.<sup>54</sup> After he was no longer on the editorial team of *Iskra*, Lenin's views on political terrorism were modified due to changing political circumstances. He later considered the Bolshevik's use of political terrorism at certain times to be proper and effective.

## CONCLUSION

Vera Zasulich's attempted assassination of St Petersburg Chief of Police Trepov and subsequent acquittal following her trial, regardless of her later-formulated subjective aims and purposes, inadvertently encouraged political terrorism and its escalation in Russia. Her acquittal provided an unanticipated and unwilling stimulus to terrorism. The revolutionaries who were following the lawsuit, on the one hand, perceived that much of Russian society supported the fight against tsarist autocracy, and, on the other hand, hoped that they too would be acquitted from the consequences of armed assassinations that otherwise would almost certainly have carried a death sentence. After Zasulich's trial, the ideology of political terrorism gradually started to take shape. The idea that terrorism could be morally justified nestled itself in Russian society's consciousness as, essentially, an act of self-defence and in the desire to take vengeance.

The *terrorist-martyr* model came into being because violence needed to be made acceptable to as broad a cross-section of Russian society as possible. The tactics of Zasulich's lawyer, P.A. Aleksandrov, also played a significant role in this process. During the trial, Aleksandrov attempted to question the notion of crimes against the state, claiming that, 'What was considered yesterday a crime against the state, tomorrow might become an honourable citizen's heroism'.<sup>55</sup> He depicted Zasulich as a kind-hearted criminal, a fighter for the cause, and thereby provided the basis for a moral acquittal. This legitimising argument made it easier for terrorists in practice to prepare and implement assassinations, and subsequently to flee. From different angles, terrorists could thereafter be viewed as freedom fighters and martyrs of a just cause.

Despite this, Zasulich did not consider herself to be a terrorist. Until the very end of her life, she consistently expressed her reservations about all kinds of terrorist activities. She argued that every single terrorist act would provoke an even stronger retaliation on the part of the government and would lead to the deaths of ever more revolutionaries. If the revolutionary party dedicated its intellectual and financial resources to executing terrorist acts, the party would run the risk of becoming such an elite organisation that it would be completely out of touch with the workers and peasants.<sup>56</sup>

Zasulich did not intend to become a role model for the generation of female terrorists that came after her but she undoubtedly became one of the initiators of the new era in the Russian revolutionary movement. More and more women decided to seek an alternative to the tsarist system in the Russian radical movements, and their most extreme wing, terrorism. Women's active participation in history started increasingly to influence Russian history itself, giving rise to the concept of female terrorism. Based on the Russian example, *female terrorism* had a number of specific characteristics.

Researchers dealing with the fate of women terrorists have to acknowledge that, at the turn of the twentieth century, the substantial number of women participating in the Russian revolutionary movement can be partly explained by the fact that they came from higher social classes and were more highly

educated. They adopted atypical gender roles and out-ranked their male comrades in social standing, financial means and education.<sup>57</sup> This is further supported by Amy Knight's statistics on SR women terrorists: between 1902 and 1911, out of the 27 SR women who participated in terrorist assassinations, 20 were from the intelligentsia, whilst out of the 131 SR men, 95 came from either working-class or peasant families.

One might ask whether it was precisely the privileges granted by their noble origins that made it possible for so many Russian women of higher birth to participate in political terrorism. During the early nineteenth century, Russian women from noble families had already started to enter the spheres of education, culture and society that had previously been considered exclusively male preserves. In due course, women were allowed to study abroad, where they came into contact with radical viewpoints. When they returned to Russia, they were allowed to become equal members in the various underground movements. These Russian women made their choices in an age when the gradual beginnings of their emancipation meant that their status approximated that of Western women. Starting from the 1870s, this was even more evident in the radical movements. At the same time, the freedom granted by this choice was almost impossible for a peasant woman. This factor cannot be ignored when investigating the peculiarities of Russian female terrorism.

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## Sophia on the Street: Boulevard Literature Denies the Divine

*Erin Katherine Krafft*

In her 1913 essay ‘Novaya zhenshchina’ (‘The New Woman’), Aleksandra Kollontai (1872–1952) describes a new woman for a new century.<sup>1</sup> The new woman, rejecting familiar restrictions and judgments, would participate in private and public life on her own terms and in her own words, and her determination and action would radically reform and redefine both herself and the nation.<sup>2</sup> Romantic passion, Kollontai allows, would still play a part in the new woman’s life, but she would also study these passions, examining their applications to the self and the society to which she would return when momentary desires ran their course.<sup>3</sup> As Kollontai saw it, this new woman—strong-willed, passionate, intelligent, and defined by herself, not by her gender—was increasingly active in the 1910s, and yet she was only barely beginning to appear in literature. Suffering, colourless girls continued to populate fiction even as their numbers dwindled in real life.<sup>4</sup> In the years leading up to the revolution, however, these long-suffering fictional heroines began to undergo a transformation, and while still often plagued by variations of helplessness and heartache, they inhabited these states with a deepening critical awareness of and resistance to the limits imposed upon them.

Kollontai’s new woman stands diametrically opposed to another powerful figure of the revolutionary era: the Divine Sophia, the female-figured repository of wisdom and utopian dreams of the symbolist movement, a vision with no real subjectivity or desires of her own. Circulating in different but occasionally overlapping segments of the intelligentsia, these two images of women rarely meet; in both historical and contemporary studies, they are treated as entirely separate entities. They represent, however, opposing poles in the pressures felt by women in the heady revolutionary years, and though boulevard literature,

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the name given to the mass-marketed popular literature that flooded the urban boulevards of the growing cities, is not generally associated with either the political or literary vanguard, in the formulations of love, work and self-identity that were set forth by female boulevard writers of the period, both the fate of the new woman and the effects of the imposition of an artistic and spiritual ideal were examined with new tools, in front of a new and enraptured audience. Amidst magazines, journals, and advertisements for all manner of hedonistic products and services, directed at a growing and hungry audience, boulevard literature was more of an era than a genre, encompassing the emergence of new female subjectivities as women writers created their own narratives and their own versions of the *bildungsroman*. Anastasiya Verbitskaya (1861–1928) and Yevdokiya Nagrodskaya (1866–1930), two writers strongly associated with the boulevard not only for their dramatic plots and characters, but also for their engagement with the creation of the new woman, illuminate in their novels the impossibilities of living up to the standards of both the image of woman put forth by revolutionary principles and the ideal of the divine feminine imposed by symbolist visions. On the boulevard, the woman question was acted out in new flourishes, splashed in new colours, and heard in more and different voices, and the literature of the boulevard offers perspectives on popular explorations of feminism, new readers and sensibilities, and the political and literary zeitgeists of the years immediately preceding the Revolution.

As the balance of power and the structure of the nation were shaken in the first years of the twentieth century, so too was the woman question. Between 1904 and 1922, the Russo-Japanese war, the First World War, the Russian Civil War and several revolutions occurred alongside rapid fluctuations in consumption and the market, the creation and growth of new social movements and political parties, and continual debate over every aspect of politics, society and private life. In addition to the extreme irruption of cataclysmic events, there were a variety of different forces at play during this era that allowed for the swift blossoming of a civil society that was increasingly conversant with issues that had previously been considered the domain of the intelligentsia. Crucially, constitutional reforms enacted after 1905 eased censorship laws, which meant that all of a sudden the public was exposed to viewpoints that ran the gamut from conservative to radical, and public concerns were both directed and expressed by the rapid growth of the press.<sup>5</sup> The press became an active and powerful locus of public discourse, both for the intelligentsia and for the new audiences whose very existence was due to the growing availability of printed material. It was in this context that boulevard literature found purchase. Much more than cheap entertainment, it became a dynamic site of exploration and debate.

The mass readership of the novels and the context in which they were produced gave the novels and their writers special access to a public over which the intelligentsia had formerly held sway, much to the chagrin of the intellectual and upper classes.<sup>6</sup> Verbitskaya's and Nagrodskaya's works in particular epitomised the threat seen by the intellectual class, those arbiters of morality and

good taste. Louise McReynolds points out that it was not just the themes and popularity of the books that provoked anxiety within the intelligentsia, but the entire social arena in which the novels grew in popularity. In this milieu, McReynolds writes, readers who were generally unsophisticated consumers of literature and art came into contact with an unfamiliar and incredibly persuasive capitalist and patriarchal market, an intersection which made for incredibly impressionable readers.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, as Laura Engelstein observes, the anonymity and market of the boulevard meant that alternatives to customary behaviours and mores and a new arrangement of wealth and status became possible, representing a threat to the established social order.<sup>8</sup> The boulevard became a space of subjectivity, desire, and pleasure, and it was not discerning; instead, it offered technicolour opportunities for types of fulfilment that were either entirely new or formerly the domain of only the upper classes, such as material opulence or intellectual debate, and women began to see themselves represented in contexts both tantalising and outside of familiar social strictures. These were dangerous developments. Hedonism and explorations of meta-physical and carnal desires as an expression of the individual self became the trend in boulevard literature as it did for the avant-garde, but on the boulevard, anyone was welcome to join.

Sexual taboos were broken open in other novels of the era, such as Mikhail Kuzmin's *Krylya* (*Wings*, 1906) and its exploration of homosexuality, and Mikhail Artsybashev's *Sanin* (1907), whose plain depictions of cold sexual debauchery and incestuous desire elicited censure from peers and reviewers, but critics reserved a particular disdain for women's works on the boulevard. Rosalind Marsh suggests that the attacks on boulevard literature by critics of the era might represent arrogance, envy, a desire to retain control over intellectual culture, and perhaps sexism on the part of male critics who were simply agitated by Russian women's apparent desire for more opportunities in education, society and sexuality.<sup>9</sup> We must note, however, that there was much crossover between readers of boulevard novels and works produced by the intelligentsia, and for this reason Engelstein suggests that we reject these partisan categories; while the boulevard novel and, indeed, the boulevard itself were often dismissed as crude clearing-houses for popular trends and ideas, they represented 'opportunities, not travesties: the best the working person could afford and certainly better than nothing'.<sup>10</sup> Our ability to look closely at the worth of these works is hampered if we allow them to remain pre-classified as a poor man's—or, more accurately, poor woman's—excuse for literature. Echoing historian Joan W. Scott, I would argue that as we look deeper at these historical problems of class and gender, we must also attend to the issues of class and gender that today may continue to cloud our view.<sup>11</sup> Rather than perpetuate the understanding of boulevard literature as second-class, we must illuminate the boulevard and all that it can tell us about the status of women and women's perceptions of their own shifting circumstances.

Most Russian women were neither explicitly seeking engagement with the woman question nor involving themselves in the activities of the feminist groups

that were active at the time; moreover, many women saw these endeavours as unladylike, distasteful or simply futile.<sup>12</sup> The explosively growing readership of women's writing, however, indicates that the debates that raged in public were reaching readers in private, and so boulevard literature tracks the pulse of the woman question, offering a reading that will not be found in the literary or political canons. Further, because of boulevard literature's uses of emerging trends and thoughts of the political and literary vanguard, it offers a vivid illustration of the nuances and fluctuations of power that ultimately made and unmade a whole host of revolutions. Kollontai's vision of the revolutionary new woman, the symbolists' Sophia, and the space between these ideals and reality are shown in bright and dramatic colours, a view of power illuminated from below.

The Decadent and then symbolist movements emerged around the turn of the century, conjoined but fraternal twins, and together they were marked by death, rebirth and dreams of utopianism. John Bowlt refers to this era as having a 'crepuscular mood', and certainly the writers and artists of the time were trying to tease out a dawn even as they were revelling in and exploring the twilight.<sup>13</sup> Decadence, with its focus on the decay of the old both physically and spiritually, gave way to the symbolist urge for creation, and the mystical underpinnings of the symbolist visions of the divine offered new treatments of and implications for understandings of gender not only within avant-garde artistic formulations but within the spaces of daily life. The writings and teachings of Vladimir Solov'ev (1853–1900) provided a mystical basis for the symbolists' projects, both lived and artistic; Solov'ev's devotion to the image of the Divine Sophia, the embodiment of wisdom and the Eternal Feminine, led prominent symbolist writers, most notably Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921), Andrei Belyi (1880–1934) and Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), to idolise and seek out this intangible superwoman, or at least her earthly counterpart. Sophia, a figure embodying wisdom in early Christian writing and iconography, was not an invention of Solov'ev's, but her new symbolist uses were largely based on Solov'ev's formulations. In his five-part essay 'Smysl lyubvi' ('The Meaning of Love', 1892–93), Solov'ev presents the idea that real love is realised on two levels: the divine/spiritual and the earthly/material.<sup>14</sup> This relationship between the divine and the material planes was explored further by Solov'ev in his unfinished 1877 manuscript *Filosofskie nachala tsel'nogo znaniya* (*Philosophical bases of integral knowledge*), in which he pseudo-scientifically divides human existence into three levels: the material, the formal and the absolute, with the latter being the highest and therefore closest to divinity.<sup>15</sup> In his framework, actions on the material level may correspond to actions on the absolute level, and through conscious actions in the material world, the absolute may be realised.<sup>16</sup> As Olga Matich explains, this effort to create and express the divine in the material sphere ironically results in the fetishisation of artifice and the devaluation of nature, which pairs in an unfortunate way with the vision that the symbolists held of Woman as the natural and powerful embodiment of Sophia and the Divine Feminine—the material and biological reality of woman

became secondary to the artistic vision of her.<sup>17</sup> This phenomenon, as we shall see, was acidly deconstructed by boulevard novelists.

Further, the symbolists envisioned what Matich characterises as a ‘decadent utopianism’, in which destruction was positioned as the key to creation, and both destruction and creation could be cataclysmically realised by a sort of divine carnal activity between man and woman that would result in one perfect androgyne. This vision necessarily entailed creating new formulations of gender and sexual relations, to which end the symbolists expounded the virtues of both celibacy/asceticism and coitus/liberation, either of which would, if done rightly and reverently, store and also harness their sexual energy and power. As Matich writes, this contradictory project problematically ‘enlisted the body to perform its own repression, to police itself’.<sup>18</sup> This reverence for asceticism, resistance against temptations of the flesh, and rejection of the biological and material was seen by the symbolists as noble and even natural, but one can only ascertain that they did not give much thought to the way that women might figure into this formulation; women, after all, were in this framework positioned as living vectors of the divine and therefore unable to escape their bodily tangibility, and, further and perhaps more crucially, the possibility of pregnancy precluded women from rejecting the biological and material to a far greater extent than it did men. In addition, as the symbolists envisioned an androgynous state of being as a release from societal strictures, one must wonder who may consciously enter this sphere of androgyny, and by what mechanism. How were women, locked into their gender roles by the image of the divine, the desire of men to commune with them physically and their biological ability to reproduce, to make themselves androgynous? Women were the objects, rather than the subjects, of these utopian visions.

Matich reminds us that women had long been put into the position of metonym for both creation and destruction, and that this symbolist vision simply continued this trend in new dressing.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, superwomen of lore, particularly the *rusalka*, Baba Yaga, and Mother Earth, had long been yokes that tied Russian women to not only modes of behaviour but the fate of their nation. As Joanna Hubbs has extensively demonstrated, the *rusalka*, in her position as a spinner, a controller of fertility, and a *sirin*, represents uncontrolled nature and the feminine power contained in the generative and reproductive creation inherent in motherhood, while Baba Yaga stands for the full life cycle of Woman, simultaneously containing virginity, motherhood and old age, in both their natural and social incarnations.<sup>20</sup> She is larger than life, a feminine figure that contains all the power of the earth and its mothers, feared and respected, everywhere all at once, a constant possibility. While these two figures weave the world, Mother Earth, as Hubbs so evocatively describes, is ‘the loom itself in all its solidity ... the maternal breast and womb: the black and fruitful soil’.<sup>21</sup> Finally, a fourth but no less powerful figure needs mention: Mary, Mother of God. Mary in her Russian context has not been marked as much by her status as a Virgin as she has been in the West; as G.P. Fedotov has noted, she is more Mother than Virgin in the Russian church, and Mary and Sophia have often

been partnered images representing justice, wisdom, protection and victory.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, the symbolists' Sophia was of a piece with a cultural and religious tradition of otherworldly and ultra-powerful feminine figures.

Alongside this continuity, however, I would add that there is an equally salient continuity in elements that were peripheral to symbolist exploration: the prosaic, the quotidian, the domestic—in short, the material realm in which women found themselves in spite of any attempt to press them into service as icon, as symbol or as soul. Boulevard writing offers a strong response to this symbolist treatment of the feminine, one which indicates that no highbrow utopian project could excise the social and political restrictions placed on women as mothers, lovers and wives. Kollontai's new woman is the figure most given to deconstructing the confines of these restrictive identities, but in boulevard literature, it is clear to see that, from Sophia to the new woman, all of these extremely powerful images of woman and their different uses for both nation and state came together to create a system of multiple masters, a multivalent bind that gave women both incredible power and a nearly unnavigable set of restrictions within which to use it. In the mass-marketed literature of the 1910s, female novelists protested against all of these formulations, and their protests gathered quite an audience.

While the prominent female Decadent writers Zinaida Gippius (1869–1945) and Lidiya Zinov'eva-Annibal (1866–1907) found their own methods for navigating the position of muse—Gippius through a self-styled dandyish androgyny, Zinov'eva-Annibal through writings that centred the passions of women rather than the desires of men—the boulevard novel's particular power lay in the fact that it brought these issues and ideals to the public in ways that were not only available and intelligible to a mass audience, but often steamy and provocative. In Verbitskaya's and Nagrodskaya's stories one may find all that was worrying to the intelligentsia: heroines unhampered by guilt or judgment when engaged with issues of romance, sexuality, non-traditional approaches to motherhood and questions of psychological and spiritual liberation—a dangerous combination, and their detractors feared that they would convince their dedicated readers to follow suit.

Verbitskaya's *Klyuchi schast'ya* (*The Keys to Happiness*), published in six instalments between 1909 and 1913, embodied the chaos of the boulevard, and its popularity cannot be disputed; it spawned many imitations, and a stage play, a film, and even a waltz were based on the novel.<sup>23</sup> The narrative centres around Manya Yeltsova, an orphan and innately talented dancer, and in Manya's romantic and artistic exploits, Verbitskaya engages in explorations of gender, sexuality and changing cultural norms; add to this the explicit nature of the sex scenes in the book, and all the ingredients are right for a literary sensation. Verbitskaya, a self-proclaimed feminist, explores gendered cultural mandates in direct and challenging ways, but even a cursory reading of the novel will indicate that Manya is no role model for the new woman who may have collective emancipation as her end goal; her strong will and intelligence are countered by her ultimately self-defeating vanity and egotism. The novel itself is sprawling,

and a close reading of its trajectory and events is both impossible in the scope of this study and unnecessary, as the novel is comprised, for the most part, of those unrequited loves, dramatic speeches, political intrigues and interpersonal conflicts that are the hallmark of potboilers and romance novels, and these sensationalistic elements only serve to provide a backdrop for the personal journey of the protagonist. Additionally, clear declarations undisguised as parables or metaphors hold the central thread of the novel's philosophy, preventing any misreading of the writer's message. For example, the words spoken to Manya by her doomed first love, in which he gives her the proverbial keys to happiness, stand as the blueprint on which Manya bases all her subsequent decisions, up to and including her choice to commit suicide:

I will give you the keys to happiness (...) All that is most valuable in us – our passions, our dreams. Miserable is the person who denies them! Out of fear of public opinion, the opinion of far and foreign people; out of a sense of duty and love for children and family, we trample on and destroy our souls, eternally young and transforming, where a mysterious and beckoning voice calls out. We must listen only to these voices. We must believe only them. *We must be ourselves.*<sup>24</sup>

It is significant that this blueprint, much like the image of Sophia, is drawn and delivered by a man, and though with his death, Manya becomes the holder of these keys to happiness and heeds his words well, she does so at the expense of her own physical well-being and the energies of those who care for her; the desires that she allows to act as her guide are fraught with a fickle indecision that often leaves others at the mercy of her selfish whims. Further, her attempts at self-definition often appear to entail styling herself into either a manic and unreal dream girl with whom men can fall in love or a forgetful and distant lover and mother who gives no thought to the welfare of others.

This latter state gives way to a recurrent problem within the novel, a problem which is not, unfortunately, specific to Verbitskaya's work: the conflation of independence with masculinity. Manya's most devoted lover tells her, for instance, that she does not have the soul of an ordinary woman, but rather that of a man, complete with a desire to dominate and for others to submit.<sup>25</sup> On one hand, this reductive and categorical definition of the feminine is plainly misogynistic in its diminution of the capabilities of and traits of women; on the other, despite Manya's physical beauty and captivating spirit, her supposed masculinity allows her to shuffle off the constraints that would be placed on her by society or by the image of Sophia or any other idealised and unattainable figure. Labelling her as deeply masculine internally, while elegantly feminine externally, imbues her with an androgyny that allows her to sidestep these binds. She cannot, however, avoid them forever. By the end of the novel, two of her lovers are dead, and Manya too is compelled to take her own life, unable to reconcile a love which destroys her and her desire to destroy. The question remains, then: once the keys to happiness are found, what may truly be done with them, particularly by women? Is happiness, however vaguely defined, an

attainable end, or do the possibilities of women's emancipation and sexual freedom opened up by modernism and revolution, bisected by uneradicated social and private pressures, create complicated and unavoidable conflicts that actually preclude the possibility of individual fulfilment?

Temira Pachmuss writes that Verbitskaya's ethical code was one of 'egotistical hedonism' and that her view of individualism was one in which there could be no equality between men and women in marriage; one or the other would be dominant, with true harmony an impossibility.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, McReynolds argues that the keys to happiness actually opened a box that was full of 'sexism, repressed individualism, the perils of consumerism, and the anxieties generated by the pace of change in modern life', as well as a fruitless attempt at 'complete mastery of the self'.<sup>27</sup> The pertinent question, then, is not so much about who holds the keys, but about the contents of the box itself, and the types of happiness that are valorised, marked as desirable, and allowed legitimacy, and by whom. In asking this question, boulevard literature undercut both political and literary utopian visions by shaking foundations even deeper than those that the high-flown avant-garde and revolutionaries claimed to be deconstructing and re-imagining.

Though Nagrodskaya's novel, *Gnev Dionisa* (*The Wrath of Dionysus*), published in 1910, did not attain the same acclaim as Verbitskaya's, the substance of the novel has much more to offer regarding the woman question and the development of the discussion about a woman's decisions in the areas of sex, love and motherhood. It opens with the protagonist, Tanya Kuznetsova, on a journey to the Caucasus, where she is to recover from an illness and meet the family of her partner, Ilya, who is, significantly, married to another woman who has not yet granted him a divorce; we see already a disregard for orthodoxy. During the train ride, Tanya muses on what she perceives to be her own masculine characteristics—her love for living independently and for the beauty of scientific achievement and mathematics, her devotion to her profession and her lack of concern with trifles and domestic affairs, and her admiration for and occasional desire to kiss the faces of beautiful women—and though again it is arguable that the feminine is demeaned by marking many of these positive characteristics as masculine, the novel goes on to address exactly this phenomenon in a variety of ways.<sup>28</sup> Gender roles, and particularly the difficulties that arise when they are reversed and the areas in which they cannot be reversed at all, are at the centre of Nagrodskaya's exploration.

A painter, Tanya is a member of the intellectual class and appreciates feminine beauty as an art object, but it is both with her painter's eye and suddenly with a lascivious eye as well that she first sees Edgar Stark, a fellow traveller and soon the handsome and delicate object of her affections and the centrepiece of her painting, 'The Wrath of Dionysus'. Her descriptions of him are stereotypically feminine throughout the novel, and equally as notable is the private and critical attention that she gives to her own passions:



When I return to my studio or I'm walking somewhere, I go within myself and I can think. And I think: what is it about him, precisely, that makes me so crazy? Now I clearly see that it is his femininity. Feminine movements, smooth coquetry, careless and loose laziness, with a childish spirit and joy. As an artist, I am in ecstasy over his body. This gentle and strong body with a slim build, unblemished arms and legs, also somewhat feminine, but it is exactly what I need for my Dionysus.<sup>29</sup>

Note that Stark is not only feminine, but also childlike; the sense of power that Tanya has over him is part of her attraction to him, but her attraction is so strong that it, in turn, has power over her. The connection between Tanya and Ilya is quite different; their relationship is more fraternal than carnal, perhaps explained by the fact that Ilya is tall and classically masculine, a physical type which repels Tanya sexually; she prefers to be more commanding than her lover, never diminished, even wielding a physical power strong enough to make him suffer.<sup>30</sup> These feelings are classified by Tanya as distinctly masculine, and she counterposes them against the femininity of her own frame and aesthetic. Like Manya, Tanya, through this bend of gender, is able to mark out her own path.

The relationship between Stark and Dionysus is crucial in understanding Nagrods kaya's use of particularly the symbolist use of androgyny. To the symbolists, Dionysus embodied chaos, ecstasy, the feminine principle and the wild and timeless aspects of human nature, as opposed to Apollo, who represented logic and the masculine principle.<sup>31</sup> Nagrods kaya, in creating a female protagonist who is subject rather than object and captures her own Dionysus, negotiates a position for Tanya in the sphere of androgyny; as the Apollonian creator and master of Dionysus, Tanya's domain is both halves of the whole, a reversal of the action in which a man finds—or more likely creates—his own Sophia, using her as a path to divine transcendence. Stark begins to resent being objectified in this way, and though Tanya does feel remorse for bringing him this unhappiness, she does not put her painting aside to spare him. Again, gender roles are clearly reversed, and in this reversal, the confinement of the position generally given to women is cleverly highlighted.

Unfortunately, though Tanya may have found this balance of spirit, the material world's laws and social mores do not offer her a comparable liberation. Just as Tanya realises that her attraction to Stark is creative, rather than romantic, she becomes pregnant with his child, and he realises that he has found a way to keep her from leaving him. Their two reactions to her pregnancy underscore not only the differences in their temperaments, but also the social and legal implications of their new roles as parents. Dual failures conspire to confine Tanya, as she realises that Stark is the more maternal of the two—understood by her as a failure on her part to embody and perform femininity—and that he has more legal claim on her child than she does—a failure of the legal system.<sup>32</sup> No reversal of gendered behaviour can protect Tanya from these blows. The impossibility of true autonomy for Tanya is addressed even more sharply after the baby is born; Stark, knowing that Tanya has grown tired of him, uses the child as a form of blackmail, keeping Tanya with him by



threatening to take the child from her—a right that, as the father, is legally his—and to tell Ilya of their affair. Tanya's despair over the inescapable situation brings her a guilt that she fears will poison the milk with which she feeds her baby, again clearly symbolising Tanya's failure to embody the nurturing mother.<sup>33</sup> Nagrodskaya presents Tanya's conundrum in clear terms that reveal exactly the bind that is faced by women and, in the end, Tanya continues to act as a mother to the child and as wife to both Ilya and Stark. The lofty ideals of androgyny and non-procreation are exposed as ridiculous when tested against the facts of everyday life; procreation, a natural and often unavoidable result of heterosexual intercourse, cannot but bring woman from a utopian plane down to the biological, legal and social restrictions of material existence.

Resigned to her double life, Tanya travels between her two partners, and a conversation between Tanya and a close friend, Latchinov, in the final pages of the novel casts an even brighter light on the social and moral message of the story, recalling Kollontai's hope that momentary passions will at least offer the new woman material with which to understand herself and her place in society. Latchinov, revealing to Tanya that he is gay, tells her bluntly that she is most likely a lesbian, and that as he sees it, her situation would be utterly unremarkable were she a man, in which case keeping a mistress and even a secret child and leading a surreptitiously split existence would not be out of the ordinary at all. In the course of this conversation, Latchinov suggests that Tanya is lucky, in some ways, that things have turned out as they did, and that his position as a mostly closeted gay man in society has been suffocatingly lonely, perhaps because sexual love between two women is more acceptable than that between two men.<sup>34</sup> Nagrodskaya demonstrates in their short conversation the understanding that rigid formulations of gender affect men as well as women, and that even in the artistic milieu, where the ideas of androgyny, sexual freedom and individual liberation are tossed about, puritanical and conservative rules of behaviour still reign, and still do damage to the individual, whether male or female. In this short conversation between friends at the end of a romance novel, readers, whether feminist or not, were exposed to a clear critique of patriarchal gender norms, a critique made clearer rather than overshadowed by the sympathies developed for the characters at hand.

Though Nagrodskaya did not label herself a feminist, her novel certainly illustrates what Catriona Kelly describes as 'the importance of a sophisticated and ramified tradition of political feminism as a *background*, if not necessarily an inspiration, to a positive sense of women's writing as gender-explicit, but not necessarily limited by gender'.<sup>35</sup> Had the feminist movements not been providing writers with an environment in which their novels could engage with these issues, the novels themselves would not have existed, and the existence of the novels no doubt fostered an environment where feminist thought could develop further. Tanya, in fact, embodies the type of new woman that Kollontai so admires. While Manya, she feels, is only a vulgar copy of the real thing, Kollontai writes that 'Tanya is too human, not enough of a docile wife, to be satisfied by normal passions; she herself knows that her passion for Stark does

not nourish her, but takes from her, dries her out', and praises Nagrodskaya's depiction of the relief that Tanya felt when she could shake off the bonds of carnal or romantic appetite and get back to work.<sup>36</sup> Willpower, level-headedness, an absorption in intellectual pursuits, a desire for respect and equal treatment by men, a search for inner freedom and self-knowledge, a personality defined not by gender but by a liberated sexual impulse, economic and social independence—all of these traits of Kollontai's new woman are present in Tanya.

However, though the types of emancipation sought by the new woman increased in clarity and intensity in the women's literature of the 1910s, it was ultimately non-fictional events that were to carry more weight when it came to the making and unmaking of gender equality. The opulent commercialism of boulevard literature disappeared after the Bolshevik rise to power, but many of the issues addressed on the boulevard remained, dressed in different clothes but no less urgent, and no less controversial. After 1917, with the demands of feminism supposedly met, it began to appear as an unnecessary or redundant movement, and the focus on collectivity and anti-individualism meant that broad theorisations of gender supplanted deeper explorations of equality, expression, and the individual. The relationship between the individual and society transformed into the relationship between the citizen and the state; the distinction is crucial. The female citizen became a topic of discussion, rather than Woman writ large. Under these circumstances, with the fate of the state still uncertain, devising and depicting positive models of femininity took on a political dimension that calls to mind again the central question of Verbitskaya's novel: who determines what types of happiness and fulfilment are allowed legitimacy? Discussions of sexuality and individual fulfilment continued, but as Eric Naiman shrewdly observes, public discussions about private sexualities had the ability to draw people in and covertly involve them in politics, and sex became the focal point in 'a national polemic concerned with eliminating differences – not sexual differences but the difference between public and private life'.<sup>37</sup> As the discussion grew larger, so too did the collective. The fervour around new sexualities and new forms of individual fulfilment and expression could therefore ironically be transformed into a homogenisation of thought.

Kollontai's own writings, both fictional and non-, consistently indicate her awareness of the fact that no sudden new ideologies could instantaneously reverse the social dynamics and internalised behaviours and beliefs that had dominated for centuries.<sup>38</sup> Much like the works of the boulevard, Kollontai's own fiction has often been dismissed out of hand over charges of simplicity and sensationalism. A former colleague of Kollontai's, Polina Vinogradskaya, even called Kollontai the 'Verbitskaya of communist journalism'.<sup>39</sup> This was a clear indication that Kollontai's work was, like the literature of the boulevard, perceived as unforgivably low-brow—too blindly idealistic at best, and, at worst, nothing more than a potboiler. Political scientist Jinee Lokaneeta has suggested that it is Kollontai's 'unorthodox writings on the realm of the personal' that

both threatened her contemporaries and dimmed her reputation.<sup>40</sup> It is particularly poignant that Kollontai wrote most of her fiction in the mid-1920s while on diplomatic assignment in Oslo; the separation between her—the new woman—and the nation in which she hoped the new woman would flourish is indication of the new woman's dis-invitation from the table. It had been only a decade since boulevard writers had filled the streets with their defiant protagonists and radical revisions of gender, sexual and cultural norms, but the keys to happiness had been recut by the Revolution, and a new box was selected, with a new future in mind.

Sophia, the new woman of the literary avant-garde, stood on fresh ground alongside the new woman of the political avant-garde, and though neither figure proved to be the perfect role model for the new women who emerged on the boulevard, both offered productive templates against which new understandings of femininity and a woman's status in society could be tested. Perhaps most crucially, Sophia offered something to resist, and in their clear denial of her, the boulevard writers did bear out one tenet of symbolism: in Sophia's destruction, they found a path to their own creation, and the broad boulevard housed an empty space whose edges they could begin to define themselves. It is a space which calls for more exploration.

## NOTES

1. Kollontai's essay was first published in *Sovremennyi mir*, no. 9, 1913, pp. 151–85, and was subsequently included as a chapter in *Novaya moral' i rabochii klass*, Moscow: Izd. Vserossiiskogo Tsentral'nogo Iсполnitel'nogo Komiteta Sovetov, 1919. Available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1918/new-morality.htm> (accessed August 2015).
2. Kollontai, *Novaya moral'*, p. 8.
3. Kollontai, *Novaya moral'*, p. 24.
4. Kollontai, *Novaya moral'*, p. 4.
5. Caspar Ferenczi, 'Freedom of the Press under the Old Regime, 1905–1914', in Olga Crisp and Linda Edmondson (eds), *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 191.
6. Catriona Kelly, *A History of Russian Women's Writing, 1820–1992*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 151.
7. Louise McReynolds, 'Reading the Russian Romance: What Did the Keys to Happiness Unlock?', *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 4, no. 31, 1998, p. 95.
8. Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 359.
9. Rosalind Marsh, 'Travel and the Image of the West in Russian Women's Popular Novels of the Silver Age', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, no. 38, 2004, pp. 21–2.
10. Engelstein, *Keys to Happiness*, pp. 387, 403.
11. Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 2–9.
12. Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 231.

13. John E. Bowlt, *Moscow and St Petersburg 1900–1920: Art, Life and Culture of the Russian Silver Age*, New York: Vendome Press, 2008, p. 94.
14. Vladimir Solov'ev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 7, Brussels: Zhizn' s bogom, 1966–1970, p. 46.
15. Vladimir Solov'ev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, Moscow: Nauka, 2000–2001, p. 196.
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22. G.P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, vol. 2, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966, p. 103; G.P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946, pp. 295–6.
23. McReynolds, 'Reading the Russian Romance', p. 99.
24. Anastasiya Verbitskaya, *Klyuchi schast'ya*, vol. 1, SPb: Izdatel'stvo 'severo-zapad', 1993, p. 67. All translations here are by the author. For an English translation of the work, see Beth Holmgren (trans.), *Keys to Happiness: a Novel by Anastasya Verbitskaya*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999.
25. Verbitskaya, *Klyuchi schast'ya*, vol. 2, p. 254.
26. Temira Pachmuss, 'Women Writers in Russian Decadence', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 1, no. 17, 1982, p. 125.
27. McReynolds, 'Reading the Russian Romance', p. 104.
28. Yevdokiya Nagrodskaya, *Gnev Dionisa*, Moscow: 'Pokolenie', 1996, p. 600. For an English translation of the novel, see Louise McReynolds (trans.), *The Wrath of Dionysus: a Novel by Evdokia Nagrodskaya*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997.
29. Nagrodskaya, *Gnev Dionisa*, pp. 674–5.
30. Nagrodskaya, *Gnev Dionisa*, p. 644.
31. Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 239.
32. Nagrodskaya, *Gnev Dionisa*, p. 708.
33. Nagrodskaya, *Gnev Dionisa*, p. 739.
34. Nagrodskaya, *Gnev Dionisa*, pp. 777–80.
35. Kelly, *History*, p. 180.
36. Kollontai, *Novaya moral'*, pp. 14 and 17.
37. Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: the Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 102–3.
38. Particularly see Kollontai's essay 'Otnoshenie mezhdru polami i klassovaya bor'ba' ('Relations between the sexes and class struggle'), also included in *Novaya moral' i rabochii klass*, and her works of fiction *Lyubov' pchel trudovykh* (*Love of Worker Bees*)

and *Bol'shaya lyubov* (*A Great Love*), both written in Oslo in 1922 and published in 1923.

39. Polina Vinogradskaya, *Pamyatnye vstrechi*, Moscow: Sovetskaya Rossiia, 1972, p. 53. Quoted in Gregory Carleton, *Sexual Revolution in Bolshevik Russia*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005, p. 46.
40. Jinee Lokaneeta, 'Alexandra Kollontai and Marxist Feminism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 17, no. 36, 2001, p. 1412.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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## On the Eve: Gender, Historiography and the Prelude to Revolution

*Barbara Alpern Engel*

The experience of researching and writing Russian women's history has changed dramatically since I first began working in the field many decades ago. My own lifelong involvement was inspired in part by the thrilling experience of marching down Fifth Avenue in Manhattan on 26 August 1970, together with tens of thousands of other women, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Women's Suffrage Amendment to the US Constitution. Then a graduate student at Columbia University, I took part in what became the rebirth of a discipline. Neither at Columbia University nor, to my knowledge, anywhere else were there courses specifically on Russian women's history (or, for that matter, on the history of women in other places). Although pioneering pre-revolutionary scholars had made important contributions to Russian women's history, in 1970 there existed neither current academic scholarship nor the possibility of presenting women's history as a field in one's comprehensive examinations.<sup>1</sup> When I first undertook the study of female radicalism in the nineteenth century, it was with the approval of my supervisors, but with knowledge neither of Russian women's history nor of women's history more generally. Since then, the field has burgeoned, and so much so that to cover the entire range of Russian women's history before the revolution would be impossible in so short a space. This chapter limits itself to the evolution of the history of Russia's women from 1861 to 1917 and, in the bibliographic notes, offers a guide to its seminal texts and further reading.<sup>2</sup>

My situation in 1970 was not so very different from that of others in the second wave generation of feminist academics. Like many, I undertook the study of women together with others of my cohort. In those days, women's studies was so new it was possible to read everything, not only history but

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anthropology, sociology, psychology, theory, anything that shed light on the situation of women. I participated in several of the informal and interdisciplinary feminist study circles, many with a Marxist orientation, which flourished in New York City, where I had the great good fortune to live at that time. Like others who undertook the study of Russia's women at that time, I benefited immensely from the informal but invaluable mentorship of Richard Stites. Stites generously shared his still unpublished thesis on the women's liberation movement in Russia, which he had defended at Harvard in 1968, and provided bibliographical suggestions and research guidance.

I soaked up information and methods at the Berkshire Conferences on women's history, the first of which took place in 1973 at Douglass College of Rutgers University. In those days, the Berks, as they have come to be called, were relatively small, and as much like a pyjama party as a scholarly conference. Then as now, they were held at colleges, but at that time, women's colleges. Scholarly papers were presented during the day; at night, we chatted in our rooms (only dormitory rooms in those years), sat on the lawns and sang folk songs, and attended women's dances. I also took part in intense and fruitful conversations with other colleagues in Russian and Soviet history, most particularly with Rochelle Ruthchild in the United States.<sup>3</sup> I also maintained a lively correspondence with women's historians in England, including Linda Edmondson,<sup>4</sup> whom I had met in Helsinki in 1977, with Elizabeth Waters (who initially published under the name Alix Holt),<sup>5</sup> with whom I exchanged letters long before we met face-to-face in Moscow in 1977, and with Cathy Porter,<sup>6</sup> to whom I was introduced during a visit to London around that time.

For me, and for many of the historians of women I knew in the 1970s, exploring women's history was as much a political as an academic project. This was the time when we began to say: 'the personal is political', by which we meant that larger political structures and women's own experiences were intricately interconnected. Thus the excitement of exploring women's past. We were certain that our work would contribute to a better future, not only for women, but also in many of our minds for all oppressed peoples. That sense of a larger purpose animated our research, our conversations, and our writing. It was enormously exhilarating,

At the same time, historians of Russia's women laboured under restrictions that the current generation of scholars would have difficulty imagining. The Soviet Union was off-limits to US scholars in the Stalinist era, and began to allow academic exchanges with the United States only in 1958. For those who participated, research and living conditions were notoriously difficult. Access to Soviet archives was restricted, not only by political considerations (what you were permitted to see, what was off limits), but also by the lack of access to lists of archival holdings (*opisi*). To know what documents to request, one scoured the footnotes of Soviet scholars or depended upon the choices of one's assigned research assistant.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, those who studied women and gender could and did make use of the rich holdings of libraries in Moscow and Leningrad (after 1991, St Petersburg), where most foreign researchers were located. Many,

however, preferred the Helsinki University Slavonic Library in Finland, where copying was relatively straightforward, by contrast with the onerous process in the Soviet Union, where certain materials—statistics, even pre-revolutionary statistics, for example—could not be copied at all, or at least not by me as late as 1985.

The consequences of these restrictions were evident in the scholarship published through to the mid-1980s if not later, which tended to focus on public, not private life, and women who led highly visible lives. The prominence of women in Russia's pre-revolutionary movements for political change facilitated this focus, too. They offered rich subject matter to historians just embarking on their careers. Richard Stites' pioneering survey *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, my own early work, the various biographies of Alexandra Kollontai and the early studies of Soviet women all belong to this genre. Almost all of our research drew primarily on published documents or on archives housed in Europe and/or in the United States, using Soviet archives to a limited degree or not at all.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, at least in the US, the prevailing Cold War historiographic consensus also affected the work that we did, at least initially. The revolutionary events of 1917 and Bolshevik seizure of power prompted a more or less teleological approach to the imperial period. Historians of imperial Russia tended to study either the autocracy and its institutions and policies, or the movements and individuals that opposed them. Historians of women followed the same path. Concerned as we were with the activities of women in public rather than their experiences in private, some of us also strove to broaden the understanding of 'the political' by exploring the private experiences that helped to shape women's consciousness and the underlying social and cultural forces that enabled them to assume a public role.<sup>9</sup>

The political questions loomed large even for the few of us who studied working-class women in those early days. The Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 in the name of 'conscious workers' made the categories of 'consciousness' or 'backwardness' central to the work of historians in the field, who tended to privilege the 'conscious' worker, invariably young, single and generically male. The difficulties this posed for historians of women were vividly reflected in the title, "'Backward' Workers in Skirts?" of a paper on women factory workers that Rose Glickman presented at a 1982 Russian Labour History Conference. Those difficulties also shaped the key arguments of her full-length study. Demonstrating the substantial proportion of women in the paid labour force, and their extended work experience (*stazh*, in Russian), Glickman challenged the prevalent dismissal of them as 'backward', by exploring the circumstances that retarded working women's activism as well as highlighting the activism that others had overlooked.<sup>10</sup>

In my own study of the working and family lives of peasant women as they moved between village and city, I built on the foundation Glickman provided and struggled against the same conceptual categories. However, instead of trying to adapt women's experience to them, I sought to problematise the



categories themselves by demonstrating their gendered nature, whilst also exploring the history they concealed, in particular, the family economy and family relations that were so significant to the development of Russia's working class.<sup>11</sup>

### THE COLLAPSE OF OLD PARADIGMS

As the Soviet Union became more open and archival restrictions eased, the trickle of scholarship that sidestepped the political orientation of earlier studies of imperial Russia gradually became a stream. From 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union transformed that stream into a river. The lifting of archival restrictions allowed historians, myself included, for the first time to pursue their research in comparative freedom and in far-flung locations that had hitherto been off-limits to them.<sup>12</sup>

It now became possible to consider the past virtually anew. Although scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s had already begun to challenge the implicitly teleological approach to Russia's past, that is, primarily as a forerunner to the revolution to come, the collapse of the Soviet Union gave the challenge fresh impetus. The collapse also called into question the notion of Russian exceptionalism often implicit in the teleological approach, with its assumption that Russia was somehow inherently different from other societies that had avoided its revolutionary upheavals. If the communist era was only a temporary phenomenon, however long-lived, perhaps the revolution was not the inevitable outcome of Russia's historical development but an aberration, a response to the particular circumstances of war and failures of leadership. Perhaps the Russian past was not so dissimilar to that of other European nations, and much the same questions might be addressed to it.<sup>13</sup> The remainder of this discussion examines scholarship that focuses on the decades leading up to the collapse of the Old Regime in 1917.

The end of the Cold War, coinciding as it did with the intensification of globalisation, post-colonial challenges to Eurocentrism, and a growing interest in transnational processes, also brought fresh attention to Russia's relationship with the rest of the world, Western Europe in particular, and to Russia's imperial character and relations with the myriad peoples who composed its empire. Russian history, including women's and gender history, came into its own, and not only for scholars in Western Europe and the United States, but also for our colleagues in Russia. As Russian women's history has become more thoroughly professionalised, however, for better or for worse, that earlier sense of a higher purpose has largely disappeared. Many institutions of higher education now offer courses on Russian women's history. Surveys are now available to assist in the teaching and study of Russian women's history.<sup>14</sup> So too are accessible collections of documents and other primary source materials.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the burgeoning of Russian-language scholarship has also been noteworthy. During the Soviet era, a hardy few had undertaken the study of women and the 'woman question' within the highly politicised parameters of

Soviet historiography.<sup>16</sup> After 1991, the number of historians of women and gender steadily increased, despite the formidable obstacles they face. These include a paucity of outlets for their work and the absence of any centralised database from which scholars in Russia or elsewhere might learn of the work of others; their difficulty in accessing work in foreign languages, especially severe for the many scholars who work outside of Moscow and St Petersburg; the general lack of institutional support for, or even interest in women and/or gender (with several important exceptions); and finally, the conservatism of the historical profession, or at least, of its old guard, who were trained during, and practiced much of their life, within the Soviet system.<sup>17</sup> The work is now sufficiently sophisticated and varied that it is impossible to identify its key themes or approaches in a chapter of this length.<sup>18</sup>

The result has been very close to a rebirth of scholarship, as older questions concerning, for example, feminism and radicalism were reframed, and new avenues of inquiry opened.<sup>19</sup> The state, or those violently opposed to the state, ceased to dominate historians' work. Instead, attention shifted to other subject matter, among them Russia's various social groups, either alone or in interaction with each other and/or state agents. Studies of women of the peasantry, the overwhelming majority of Russia's population, serve as one vivid example. Peasant women were and remain an elusive group: romanticised by some as the 'true Russia', they were regarded by others as emblematic of Russia's backwardness.<sup>20</sup> Peasant women's illiteracy made unmediated access to their experiences and worldview exceptionally difficult, although a few educated women endeavoured to shed sympathetic light on both.<sup>21</sup>

One initial approach was demographic, reconstructing family patterns and the place of women within the peasant household, which yielded concrete results but also no sense of individual experience. Virtually all such studies focussed on peasant serfs, and were based on the records of manorial estates. Another approach was to draw on ethnographic and folkloric sources, occasionally buttressed by the remains of cases from the peasants' own cantonal courts, which were established following the emancipation. Bringing the researcher far closer to the peasants' own values and worldview, and enabling her to recreate the world from a peasant perspective, such sources had the disadvantage of a kind of timeless quality that minimised the impact of economic and other sources of change on peasant life.<sup>22</sup> A third approach has been to draw critically on sources that reflect such women's interaction with the outsiders with whom they came into contact: professionals, reformers, agents and institutions of the tsarist state. Pioneering this approach in his study of the abandonment and fosterage of infants over the course of more than a century, David Ransel's account of the impact on peasant women of the elites' modernising agendas suggested peasant women's agency as well as victimisation.<sup>23</sup> Studies of deviant women, who derived primarily or entirely from the peasantry, including prostitutes,<sup>24</sup> criminals,<sup>25</sup> witches and hysterics,<sup>26</sup> for example, adopted a similar approach, although the linguistic turn has encouraged greater attention to discourse in recent years.

Laura Engelstein's path-breaking *The Keys to Happiness* provided a model for discursive analysis. Offering new ways to think about power and its exercise, her work breathed new and exciting life into the largely neglected subject of Russian pre-revolutionary liberalism. Initially in a series of articles and then in a rich and multi-faceted full-length study, Engelstein explored how sexual ideology shaped the efforts of liberal professionals to wrest political and cultural authority from a recalcitrant autocratic state, while also illuminating how Russia's liberal reformers differed from their counterparts in the Western countries that served them as models, at least until 1905. Hers is gender, not women's, history. Although women occasionally figure in her work as activists and intellectuals, it is their bodies as objects of disciplinary control, and their powerlessness and the identification with it by male professionals that are most salient to the arguments of her book.<sup>27</sup>

Russia's middling classes—like liberals, a group to whom historians had paid little or no attention—also became objects of enquiry, as did their gendered practices, which, as in the capitalist West, played an important role in affirming social place and defining gender norms.<sup>28</sup> Studies of consumption drew attention to the impact on women of modernisation and the proliferation of public venues such as stores, theatre, dance halls and mass entertainments that offered new ways of conceiving and displaying the female self.<sup>29</sup>

For the first time, historians began to explore masculinity, not only as social construct and experience, but also, significantly, as an important element in men's self-presentation and social authority.<sup>30</sup> In its presentation of an aspirational bourgeoisie, if not always an actually-existing one, the resulting work suggested ways that Russia resembled, rather than differed from, its neighbours to the West.

Scholars also turned their attention to elite and/or educated women who participated in public life not as revolutionaries, but as reformers, some but by no means all feminist in orientation. This work offered new detail about such women's lives and the institutions they helped to build, at the same time serving to challenge the ways in which historians interpreted Russia's past. For example, studies of women's struggle for higher education and the students who benefitted from it,<sup>31</sup> of female physicians, teachers and journalists,<sup>32</sup> of female philanthropy, including philanthropy by religious women,<sup>33</sup> all provided a more expansive view of the possibilities for civic action in the imperial period, if not of the existence of a genuine civil society, which remains a subject of controversy.<sup>34</sup>

Even as women seized new opportunities in public life, the law continued to constrain them in multiple and gendered ways. Certain posts, like those that awarded rank, or secondary school teaching, were closed to women. Unhappily married women faced formidable obstacles to divorce, which remained the monopoly of religious rather than civil institutions. Regarding marriage as a holy sacrament, to be dissolved only under exceptional circumstances, the

Russian Orthodox Church permitted divorce only very reluctantly, after a cumbersome and expensive process. Abandonment, one of the few grounds that might earn Orthodox women a divorce, did not do the same for Jewish women, for whom divorce even then required a husband's approval. Russia's laws also barred marital separation. This weighed more heavily on women than men because a husband held the power to deny his wife the separate internal passport she needed to find a job, enrol in school or live more than roughly 20 miles from her husband's place of residence. Wives gained the right to their own passport on request only in 1914, thanks largely to the efforts of reforming jurists and of feminists.<sup>35</sup> Laws tended to deny women agency, as criminals and as sexual beings.<sup>36</sup>

Work on the Russian empire has flourished since the fall of the Soviet Union; work on its gendered character, to a far lesser degree. Thus far, gendered analyses have concentrated almost exclusively on the regions to the south, east and north-east of the Russian heartland, rather than on areas to Russia's west and south-west—Finland, say, or Poland or the Baltic states—whose stages of economic and social development were more or less similar to Russia's or even more advanced. The few works that treat gender in the latter regions focus either on movements for political autonomy or on Russia's Jewish minority, and frame them in terms other than gender and imperial policies.<sup>37</sup> Regions inhabited by peoples whom Russians deemed 'backward' clearly remain more amenable to existing interpretive paradigms.

In those regions, a gendered civilising mission that greatly resembled that of other colonising empires provided a key rationale for Russian hegemony and interference in native affairs, starting in the late eighteenth century. As elsewhere, it was based upon the alleged superiority of Russians, as reflected, in part, in their treatment of women.<sup>38</sup> This shaped the ways that the colonial project was realised in practice. Following the conquest of more 'backward' regions, Russians assumed responsibility for improving native women's status as part of a broader effort to alter problematic native customs. Russian law served as an important means to that end, especially in the Muslim regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Newly created state courts offered Muslim women enhanced leverage in their relations with men. They defended women from abuse, helped them to safeguard their honour, and even eased their escape from unhappy marriages, while also extending state control into everyday life. Russians also sought to end a range of customs they viewed as 'backward', in particular the betrothal of widows to male in-laws, the payment of *kalym* or bride-price, and the marriage of female children and adolescents, which in the Russians' view infringed on the human rights of women.<sup>39</sup> These policies foreshadowed those that the Soviet leadership would adopt following the revolution.

Work on the First World War has similarly suggested significant continuity across the revolutionary divide of 1917. The war offered vast new opportunities for women to participate in public life and, as historians have shown, substantial

numbers of women embraced them, some eagerly, some out of dire economic need. Women flooded into the factories, raising the proportion of women in Russian industry from 26.6% in 1914 to 43.2 in 1917. They broke into occupations formerly closed to them, such as the postal service and transport.<sup>40</sup> Women also sought to take up arms themselves and could do so openly by February 1917, when the Provisional Government authorised female combat units.<sup>41</sup>

Plebeian women's activism acquired a new dimension. Peasant women had often been at the forefront of village resistance, taking advantage of the authorities' hesitancy to adopt violent methods to quell peasant unrest. During the war, working-class and peasant women made new claims on the state in their capacity as soldiers' wives, driven by economic desperation as well as a new sense of entitlement. As L.A. Bulgakova has shown, discussing in the process the factors that might impede a peasant couple's ability to wed, even common law wives might press claims as soldiers' wives.<sup>42</sup> It was as soldiers' wives as well as workers that women initiated the actions that led to the collapse of autocracy in February 1917. Thereafter, both as wives and as workers they continued to press their demands.<sup>43</sup>

During the war, women of the middling classes, too, entered public life to an unprecedented extent, partly because the state became more dependent than ever on the services they offered. Their numbers expanded in white-collar positions, such as accountancy, office work and telegraph operation. Women teachers, hitherto barred from secondary schools, gained the right to teach in them. The refugee crisis added a new, and far larger, dimension to women's public role. All over Russia, 'ladies committees' mobilised to deal with the millions of refugees, mainly women and children, fleeing the Western borderlands. The women who collected money to support refugees, set up kitchens and canteens to feed them and the like substantially expanded their role in the public sphere.<sup>44</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Freed from the Cold War paradigms that shaped the field in the early years, the pre-revolutionary history of Russia's women and of its gender relations underwent a remarkable efflorescence following the collapse of the Soviet Union. So diverse has that scholarship become that it is literally impossible to do it justice in a brief chapter such as this. In the United States and Europe, if not yet in Russia itself, it has increasingly come to influence studies of other subjects—although as yet, rarely of Russia's empire—and is often now incorporated into broader syntheses and textbooks, taught in graduate courses and the like. Beneath these dramatic changes continuities remain, even if they are not so obvious. Historians of the imperial period continue to grapple with the question of Russia's exceptionalism, in which gender now offers a crucial variable.

## NOTES

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3. Rochelle Ruthchild has published widely in the field of pre-revolutionary Russian women’s history. See, for example, *Equality and Revolution: Women’s Rights in the Russian Empire, 1905–1917*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010.
4. Linda Edmondson, *Feminism in Russia, 1900–1917*, London: Heinemann, 1984.
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6. Cathy Porter, *Fathers and Daughters: Russian Women in Revolution*, London: Virago, 1976, and *Alexandra Kollontai: a Biography*, London: Virago, 1980.
7. For a lively account of early experiences of conducting research in the Soviet Union, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *A Spy in the Archives: a Memoir of Cold War Russia*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2014.
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10. Rose L. Glickman, *Russian Factory Women: Workplace and Society, 1880–1914*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.
11. Barbara Alpern Engel, *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family in Russia, 1861–1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. See also Anne Bobroff-Hajal, *Working Women in Russia under the Hunger Tsars: Political Activism and Daily Life*, New York: Carlson, 1994.
12. To take a personal example of the new freedom: in spring, 1991, I gained access to files on prostitution that had been denied to Laurie Bernstein only a year or so earlier.
13. See, for example, Marcelline J. Hutton, *Russian and West European Women, 1860–1939: Dreams, Struggles and Nightmares*, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001.
14. Surveys include Natalia Pushkareva, *Women in Russian History: From the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. and trans. by Eve Levin, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997; Jane McDermid and Anna Hillyer, *Women and Work in Russia, 1880–1930*, London: Longman, 1998; Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russian History: 1700–2000*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; and Barbara Evans Clements,

- A History of Women in Russia from Earliest Times to the Present*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012. See also Barbara Alpern Engel, 'Women, the Family and Public Life' and Michelle Lamarche Marresse, 'Gender and the Legal Order in Imperial Russia', both in Dominic Lieven (ed.), *Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 2: *Imperial Russia, 1689–1917*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, chs 15 and 16.
15. Useful collections of primary sources are Toby Clyman and Judith Vowles (eds.), *Russia Through Women's Eyes: Autobiographies from Tsarist Russia*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996; and Robin Bisha, Jehanne M. Gheith, Christine Worobec and William G. Wagner (eds.), *Russian Women, 1698–1917: Experience and Expression, an Anthology of Sources*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002. See also Anna Horsbrugh-Porter (ed.), *Memories of Revolution: Russian Women Remember*, London: Routledge, 1993.
  16. Z.V. Grishina, 'Dvizhenie za politicheskoe ravnopravie zhenshchin v gody pervoi russkoi revoliutsii', *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta*, seriya 8, Istoriya, 1982; G. A. Tishkin, *Zhenskii vopros v Rossii: 50-e—60-e gody XIX veka*, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1984.
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## Gender and Family in the Russian Revolutionary Movement

*Katy Turton*

Shortly before 17 October 1917, in his search for a place to meet with the leaders of the Petrograd Military-Revolutionary Committee, Lenin found himself standing on a stairwell, negotiating access to a safe house with a 10-year-old girl. Valeriya was the daughter of Mariya Georgievna and Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Pavlov, who were both members of the Bolshevik party and closely involved in the work of the Russian Bureau of the Central Committee. Mariya had been brought into the movement by her father, Yegor Afanas'evich Klimanov, a Putilov worker who had been a member of the Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, while her husband was a friend of Maxim Gorky. Their flat had long been used as a party base. On this particular day, unaware that Lenin was planning to visit their flat, the Pavlovs had left Valeriya and her 8-year-old brother, Vyacheslav, home alone with instructions not to allow anyone in but acquaintances. Faced with a stranger, Valeriya advised Lenin first to go for a walk until her parents returned, then allowed him to sit on the stairwell, and eventually directed him to her mother's workplace. It was only when Lenin mentioned his sister and fellow Bolshevik, Mariya Il'inichna, whom Valeriya knew, that he was allowed in.<sup>1</sup>

Lenin was visiting the flat to assess its suitability as a place to meet with the Petrograd Military-Revolutionary Committee in order to plan the Bolshevik seizure of power. Regardless of the mishap on his arrival, the apartment fitted the bill. It had been used successfully since the autumn of 1916 for meetings of the Russian Bureau of the Central Committee, whose members included Mariya Il'inichna. It had two entrances, which was always useful in a safe house, and it was on the same street as Margarita Vasil'evna Fofanova's flat, where Lenin was living in secret. That it was a family home was also possibly viewed as

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a positive factor, since domestic settings had long been used in the underground to disguise conspiratorial activity. Earlier that year, Lenin had seen that children of revolutionaries could be relied on not to give him away, and on finally meeting the Pavlovs, he remarked how 'disciplined' their daughter had been in minding the door.<sup>2</sup>

This snapshot of the revolutionary underground highlights one of its critical aspects: domestic family life and the highest levels of revolutionary conspiracy were closely intertwined. Whilst socialist theorists discussed family life, its role in the oppression of women and the need for its transformation, and revolutionaries argued that individuals should cut personal ties in order to dedicate themselves to the political struggle, family life amongst revolutionaries continued regardless.<sup>3</sup> As the above case highlights, revolutionaries maintained contact with their parents and siblings, who were often involved in the underground movement as well, and they became romantically involved and had children. Certainly combining family life with revolutionary activity presented challenges. Domestic duties and childcare at times interfered with women's participation in party circles, and occasionally took men from their underground work too. The persistence of traditional gender roles in the family was also reflected in the division of labour within the revolutionary movement, with women expected to take on supportive roles. Yet being part of a family also brought advantages to the revolutionary, male or female, and arguably the fact that conditions in Russia forced much underground work to be conducted in private homes actually facilitated women's involvement as party activists.

Much of the writing on the revolutionary movement includes only a limited acknowledgement of women's contributions to it. Soviet memorial literature celebrating women's political work 'makes clear that their activities were nearly invisible', while histories of the movement note only the role of exceptional individuals, without properly acknowledging the contribution of rank-and-file women, or they disregard the daily cooperation between men and women in revolutionary circles by discussing exceptional women or the general role played by women in separate sections or chapters.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the relationships between men and women are rarely mentioned, their family lives are ignored and the value of domestic support to revolutionaries is not taken into account. Women's histories have successfully documented the deeds of radical women of all political persuasions and have acknowledged the significance of family relationships to women, but they have also been quick to point out the ways in which domestic duties created obstacles to women's full participation in the movement.<sup>5</sup> Barbara Clements discusses the support which family members gave to their Bolshevik daughters, wives and sisters, and how these women dealt with combining motherhood and revolutionary work, but it is essentially a side-bar in her larger work which concentrates on the careers of Bolshevik women.<sup>6</sup> Anna Hillyar and Jane McDermid stress the 'ordinariness' of revolutionary women's family lives and the persistence of traditional gender roles.<sup>7</sup> Understandably in these works there is virtually no discussion of how men benefitted from familial support in the underground revolutionary movement or

the role which men played in domestic life. Beate Fieseler, in particular, is sceptical about any suggestion that male revolutionaries might have assisted in household work.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the autobiographies and memoirs of revolutionaries suggest that, even as the traditional structure of family life was maintained, families functioned as effective revolutionary cells in which the sexes cooperated harmoniously, gender roles could be subverted and political activities supported. Many revolutionaries, men included, are explicit about their dependence on their family and their use of their personal ties and resources to support their political work.<sup>9</sup> It is also worth noting that histories of other struggles have stressed the importance of family networks in supporting and sustaining resistance to state oppression.<sup>10</sup> In addition, there is an emerging literature which discusses 'activist mothering', where women expand their traditional caring roles to support protestors and revolutionaries in their political struggles, which is instructive for understanding the importance of the types of roles Russian female party workers performed.<sup>11</sup>

This chapter explores the ways in which revolutionaries theorised about family life and how they arranged it in reality, concentrating in the main on the 'nuclear family'.<sup>12</sup> It also sets out the ways in which families functioned on a daily basis within the underground and highlights how the more negative and pessimistic ideas professed by revolutionaries about families often belied their actual experience. Those who believed that women were only suited to traditional roles saw daily evidence to the contrary, while women found ways to minimise their domestic burdens and to participate actively in the movement. In the constant struggle to sustain the revolutionary campaign, the family was an effective contributor.

### FAMILY LIFE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Much theorising about the family in the socialist movement was understandably negative. From a societal perspective, socialists linked the capitalist system with the patriarchal and oppressive structure of the family. Women were kept under the authority of their father, then their husband, and pressured into marriage by the restrictions on their ability to earn money and the other inequalities they faced before the law. Educational opportunities were limited for women and most professions were closed to them. Amongst the working class, women's oppression was intensified as they found themselves having to take on full-time employment for low wages, while also being responsible for the majority of housework and childcare.

The model family life in the new society would allow true equality through numerous measures. Women would be entitled to full access to education and employment, thereby freeing them from the need to marry for financial security. They would be equal to men before the law and in terms of access to divorce. Their burdens of housework and childcare would be taken over by the state, which would provide communal kitchens and crèches, as well as education.<sup>13</sup> However, until then, women's position would not change and, it was feared,

they would remain selfishly interested only in the improvement of their own lot and thus less likely to support a proletarian revolution for all exploited workers. This logic had the effect of reinforcing traditional notions of women as lesser than men and allowed women to be demoted to a secondary place in the movement. As Beatrice Farnsworth puts it, 'The Russian working woman, the *baba* so backward an element in society, seemed an unlikely recruit to a secret political party, an inappropriate comrade.'<sup>14</sup>

More specifically, revolutionaries attempted to develop their own code about how family ties were to be dealt with in the underground movement. From a purely practical perspective, revolutionaries, especially terrorists, were encouraged to minimise or cease contact with their family. The 'sole purpose' of this policy was, as Marie Sukloff remembered, 'to safeguard innocent people against governmental persecution in the event of arrest of a member of the organization'.<sup>15</sup> Sergei Nechaev went further in his work *The Revolutionary Catechism* (1869), and argued that 'all the gentle and enervating sentiments of kinship, love, friendship, gratitude, and even honour, must be suppressed in [the revolutionary] and give place to the cold and single-minded passion for revolution'.<sup>16</sup>

In some quarters, attempts were made to implement these ideas, if imperfectly. For a number of radical women the idea of avoiding romantic relationships with men and thereby emancipating themselves from patriarchy was attractive.<sup>17</sup> Later, as Clements has discussed, Bolshevik women embraced the concept of revolutionary 'hardness' as a way of demonstrating their equality with their male comrades.<sup>18</sup> Dave Pretty has written convincingly of the development of 'an almost institutionalised misogyny or gynophobia' amongst male worker activists of the 1890s in Ivanovo-Voznesensk who became determined to avoid romantic entanglements and exclude women from their circles.<sup>19</sup> Lenin himself admitted having mixed feelings towards the opposite sex, writing that he felt the '*fullest* friendship, *absolute* esteem and confidence (sic)' towards 'only 2–3 women'.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, regardless of the theories and conspiratorial rules, family life continued amongst revolutionaries, partly because their bonds of love and blood pre-dated any involvement in radical activities and it was hard not to entangle family members in some aspect of the movement, partly because revolutionaries formed romantic attachments with each other, and lastly because many revolutionaries consciously and deliberately recruited their spouses and wider kin. According to Vera Zasulich, Nechaev's notion of ending emotional attachments was met with 'laughter and anger' since it did not 'correspond to what actually happened'.<sup>21</sup> Among the hard-line Ivanovo-Vosnesensk workers, the commitment to celibacy proved impossible to keep, and, once called out on his statement, Lenin was quick to concede that there were other women he esteemed in a more general sense.<sup>22</sup> Even those who remained single maintained contact with other members of their family. Getzler puts forward the fact that Martov never married as evidence of his utter commitment to the

movement, but does not recognise that the hours he spent with his siblings and their kin constituted a family life too.<sup>23</sup>

Many memoirs reveal positive attitudes towards women revolutionaries, even those outside immediate family. Men may have subscribed to general notions of female inferiority, but they readily found women worthy of respect, trust and love in their own circles. This behaviour pattern has been observed in other traditionally male settings, including the Russian army during the First World War.<sup>24</sup> Women were often revered for their extra sacrifice and dedication in joining the movement, and treated in a chivalric manner as a result. Nechaev in fact argued that women who were truly committed to the cause should be seen as 'treasures', and numerous memoirs by male revolutionaries contain glowing descriptions of their female comrades.<sup>25</sup> Such perceptions were often expressed in daily gestures of gallantry with women given better accommodation and more privacy where possible, and male prisoners and exiles doing what they could to defend and protect females in their group.<sup>26</sup>

It is unsurprising that out of these heady emotions and in the harsh circumstances of the revolutionary underground many romantic partnerships were formed. Clusters of married couples can be found in the People's Will, the Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, the Menshevik and Bolshevik parties and so on.<sup>27</sup> It is also clear that if party members found love outside of the movement, they tended to recruit their partners as comrades.<sup>28</sup> Bolshevik activist Ya.M. Sverdlov, himself happily married, went so far as to turn Nechaev's *Catechism* on its head, advising one young couple that it was acceptable to marry and that marriage would not interfere in revolutionary activities.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, if spouses shared the same political outlook and commitment to the cause, they regularly proved themselves to be assets to their political party. Most historians recognise the value of Lenin and Krupskaya's partnership to the Social Democratic and especially the Bolshevik cause.<sup>30</sup> They were a constant source of support to each other and formed an unbreakable unit of reliable conspiracy. The same could be said of many more couples at all levels of the movement. M. Natanson and O. Shleissner worked together first in the Chaikovsky circle of the early 1870s, and then helped establish The Northern Revolutionary People's Group, which was supplanted the following year by Land and Liberty.<sup>31</sup> S.M. Bushstev, a worker and party member based in Lys'va, Perm, remembered that with the arrival of the Bolsheviks Nikolai Ivanovich and Mariya Nikolaevna Ufimtsev, local work 'livened up' and a new 'revolutionary headquarters' was established in place of the hospital fund that they had been running until that point.<sup>32</sup> Amongst the Mensheviks, Mark and Eva Broido were prominent figures whose partnership endured throughout the underground period. Okhrana agents were also well aware of the importance of husband and wife teams in the revolutionary movement, with their reports on active agents regularly noting both names.<sup>33</sup>



## HOUSEWORK AND CHILDCARE

These couples worked together effectively though not necessarily as equal partners. Despite the theoretical ideas about women's future emancipation from domestic duties, in practice inequalities persisted in revolutionary households, which were organised along traditional lines. Cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping and childcare were all viewed as the responsibility of the wife. Even the fake wives in the fictitious marriages set up to disguise conspiratorial cells were expected to keep up appearances and do the housework.<sup>34</sup> Thus, while Sverdlov optimistically asserted that marriage would not interfere with revolutionary work, inevitably, the domestic chores associated with it took up time that could otherwise have been spent on party work. They were also a cause of irritation to the women who had to continue doing them while they tried to assert their equal place amongst revolutionaries.<sup>35</sup>

Yet there is also enough evidence to suggest that while notions of what was a proper division of labour between men and women were set, the practical experience of daily life differed. Thus, whilst it was common for men, many of whom had been used to doing their own housework when living in all male groups in exile, to cease such work immediately on returning home or joining a mixed sex group, it was also not unheard of for them to put their experience into practice when circumstances demanded it or even out of a desire to help.<sup>36</sup> S. Ivanova remembered one comrade assisting in the kitchen of the first People's Will printing press, while in the Bukharin household in 1913, Nikolai Ivanovich took over the cooking because his wife Nadezhda Mikhailova was unwell.<sup>37</sup> When Lenin was in hiding in Finland, he impressed his landlady by doing his own washing—and this is not the only example of revolutionary men doing the laundry.<sup>38</sup>

In particularly committed revolutionary families, there seems to have been a sense that all family resources had to be deployed to fulfil party work. Thus, every member was expected to contribute to household duties to minimise their impact on daily life. The seven Yemel'yanov children had to do household chores while their Bolshevik parents carried out party work. Their eldest points out that the children 'did not avoid women's work' for 'there were no daughters, you see, only sons'.<sup>39</sup> The same pattern was followed in the Bolshevik Alliluyev family, though since they had daughters as well as sons, it was on the girls' shoulders that these responsibilities mainly fell.<sup>40</sup> Other ways were also found to free up time for party work. Earlier revolutionaries of the 1870s may have shunned the trappings of a privileged lifestyle, but later it was not unusual for those with even a modest income to employ a servant to help with domestic tasks. Eva Broido had a maid while in exile, as did Lenin and Krupskaya.<sup>41</sup> Another alternative was to seek the help of mothers or mothers-in-law.<sup>42</sup> Obviously, most of these solutions upheld the assumption that domestic chores were to be done by women, but at least there were efforts to share the load.

A similar picture emerges from the sources regarding the raising of children and the regular need for childcare.<sup>43</sup> While there was a general assumption that it was the mother's responsibility to care for the children, some fathers played a role too and most parents used different forms of childcare over the years, depending on their particular circumstances. Women, and some men, gave up party work because of their need to care for their children, while other women gave their child or children over to relatives to be cared for.<sup>44</sup> It was rare for either of these arrangements to be permanent. In good times, some couples were able to employ a nanny, while others relied on daily help from a mother or mother-in-law, or simply had to keep their child or children with them during revolutionary work.<sup>45</sup> The latter may in fact have been the norm. It is striking, then, that there are no examples of attempts by revolutionaries to establish crèches, even in the relatively stable and sizeable communities of émigré radicals. Communal kitchens were occasionally set up, both in Russian exile and abroad, yet childcare arrangements never seem to have been dealt with in a formal collective way, even by those who would later be ardent supporters of state sponsored childcare.<sup>46</sup> Instead, the mother did the majority of caring, but the father often took over if the mother was away on party business, was in prison or was otherwise unable to look after the children.<sup>47</sup> Childcare was also arranged informally amongst revolutionaries and sometimes at very short notice, if one parent was away and the other was suddenly arrested or if the parents had urgent party tasks to attend to.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the best description available of this type of childcare arrangements is to be found in the memoirs of Vera Broido, daughter of Eva and Mark mentioned above, where she deals with the period from February to October 1917:

We were no longer living near the Obvodny Canal. I have no idea what happened to [my half-sister] Sanya and [younger brother] Danya, but I was living with Mother somewhere else. That is, I was not exactly living with her – most days I was dumped with whatever Menshevik family had children of my age, while Mother rushed away on party business. I remember best of all the Chkheidzes. Their father, a Georgian Menshevik, was chairman of the Petrograd Soviet and was seldom at home. Mrs Chkheidze was a busy but friendly woman and made me welcome [...] Another family where I was occasionally dumped was that of Martov's brother Sergey and his wife Konkordia. Both were prominent Mensheviks and there was much coming and going at their house.<sup>49</sup>

### ACTIVIST MOTHERING AND REVOLUTIONARY WORK

It is worth noting the strong suggestion in the above reminiscence that even in the houses where children were being left, party work continued regardless. Indeed, women regularly combined household and underground duties, with their domestic tasks assuming a political significance as they took on responsibility not only for feeding, clothing and sheltering their own family, but also

other revolutionary comrades, especially if their home was a known safe house. Many Social Democratic women extended this work by volunteering in various charitable organisations as well, such as the Political Red Cross which provided material support to revolutionaries. As Fieseler has argued, women 'did not strictly separate charitable and political activity' seeing both as serving the cause.<sup>50</sup>

It is important not to under-value this type of 'activist mothering'.<sup>51</sup> As McDermid and Hillyar have persuasively argued, the daily operations of the revolution could hardly have been carried out without them.<sup>52</sup> Besides this, such work was usually done alongside other tasks as a matter of course. When Ol'ga Lyubatovich and her husband hid from the police in the house where the People's Will organisation's printing press operated, Ol'ga helped the other two women present to do the cooking. She remembered that the meals were enjoyed by all as they provided light relief from the serious work of printing party literature. However, she also stressed that she and the other women took part in the work of the press too.<sup>53</sup> In Siberian exile during the war, Eva Broido became the regular host of about a dozen male exiles, for whom she cooked with the help of her maid, Marfa. She chose to take on this role, not least it seems because the dinners were a 'pleasant distraction in the drab life of exiles', but also presumably because it enabled her to participate in political discussions with her male comrades.<sup>54</sup>

Besides printing illegal literature, many other tasks were conducted in domestic settings. Given the oppressive nature of the tsarist regime it was difficult for any non-state body to organise and function publicly and impossible for revolutionary organisations.<sup>55</sup> Thus, party headquarters were often apartments rented out by revolutionaries who were either a married couple or posing as one and the majority of meetings took place in private flats and houses, often under the cover of some form of familial or friendly gathering.<sup>56</sup> They were also used as sites for conducting correspondence, storing illegal literature, hiding revolutionaries on the run from the police, and making and/or stockpiling weapons and bombs, all of which women participated in.

Revolutionaries who were parents also found that their children could prove useful to their illegal work. Most went beyond the basic practical task of training their children not to give away what was going on in the house. They educated them in the ideas of the movement and were ingenious in involving children in their activities.<sup>57</sup> Children's toys and beds were used regularly to hide illicit materials and even weapons.<sup>58</sup> Aleksandr Yemel'yanov remembered his mother getting him to hide rifle cartridge clips in the fences around their courtyard. Adults could not do it as there was snow on the ground and their footprints might raise the suspicions of the gendarmes, but children's footprints were far less noticeable and seemed more innocent.<sup>59</sup> The Menshevik Vera Vasil'evna Kozhevnikova used her status as a widow with a son to apply successfully to the City Governor of St Petersburg for permission to purchase a typewriter, which would, she argued, help her to earn an income. Instead the typewriter was used to reproduce party literature.<sup>60</sup>

Of course, women conducted party work outside of the home too. They attended meetings, travelled between party committees, transported illegal literature and weapons, carried out agitation and propaganda work, and, in small numbers, participated in party conferences and congresses. In such activities, they were skilled at using the appearance of innocent domesticity as a cover, well aware that in general the police were more likely to overlook women as a suspect. When Ol'ga Lyubatovich volunteered to return to Russia from Geneva to arrange her husband's escape from prison, she pointed out: 'A woman can get around more easily than a man in this situation.'<sup>61</sup> If women were transporting illegal materials it was common for them to be disguised as or hidden underneath domestic items or household utensils.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, women (and occasionally men) found that they were less likely to be harassed by the police if they travelled with their children, especially if there was an infant in the group.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, it seems that for women the domestic setting was a space in which they were supremely confident and capable, where they could 'play' the housewife and mother, but subvert the expectations associated with those identities. While many balked at the prospect of participating in male dominated discussion groups, speaking in public or writing for publication, they were at the same time sure of their abilities in activist mothering and supporting roles.<sup>64</sup> In explaining the decline of women from prominent positions in the party as the Bolsheviks seized power, Clements points to revolutionary women's failure to 'insert themselves in the politics of the men' in the underground and their attitude that the 'party's political arena' was, after 1917, more than ever 'alien territory'.<sup>65</sup> This belief was no doubt intensified by the end of the use of the home as the site of political activities in which women could assert themselves.

## CONCLUSION

'Family life sucks the energy of a revolutionary—it can't help it', asserts Nikolai in Maxim Gorky's novel *Mother* (1906). He continues:

Children, insecurity, the necessity of working to feed the family. A revolutionary should store up energy, so as to expand his activities. The times demand it. We must always march ahead of everybody else, because we are the workers chosen by history to destroy the old world and build a new one. If we lag behind, giving into our weariness or to the distraction of some little triumph, we are guilty of a wrong almost as great as betrayal of the cause. There is no one with whom we could march side by side without damaging our cause, and we must never forget that our task is not some little triumph, but complete victory.<sup>66</sup>

This chapter has argued that Nikolai's bleak assessment of the impact of family life on a revolutionary's commitment to and participation in the 'cause' is not entirely correct. The revolutionary movement had a strong element of cottage industry about it, running alongside or perhaps more accurately underpinning the more recognisably public sphere activities of agitation, propaganda, speech

making, congresses and conferences, mass meetings, strikes and finally armed uprising. In the domestic setting more than anywhere else, women and men were affectionate partners as well as loyal comrades, united in the battle to overcome the many challenges of revolutionary life, including unstable employment, the drudge of housework, parental responsibilities, police oppression, prison, exile and the crises and triumphs of the movement itself. In this context, gender roles were subverted: women expanded their roles beyond the traditionally female, while men at times did not object to doing ‘women’s work’ if circumstances demanded it, not least because such chores in some ways served the political cause. A range of underground duties were carried out in the home as well: pamphlets were written and reproduced for distribution, correspondence was conducted with other party members and cells, illegal literature and bombs were hidden, meetings were held and comrades sheltered. Thus, the family home often functioned as a safe haven and site of resistance in which all members worked together as, if not equal partners, then mutually respectful comrades in arms.

## NOTES

1. M.G. Pavlova, ‘Dom na Serdobol’skoi’, in S.F. Vinogradova, E.A. Gilyarova and M. Ya. Razumova (eds), *Leningradki: vospominaniya, ocherki, dokumenty*, Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1967, pp. 38–9. For reference to the meeting, see V. Nevskii’s, *Istoriya RKP(b): Kratkii ocherk*, Sankt-Peterburg: Novyi Prometei, 2009, pp. 38–9.
2. Pavlova, ‘Dom na Serdobol’skoi’, pp. 34, 40; ‘Vospominaniya S.Ya. Allilueva i N. A. Yemel’yanova o prebyvanii V.I. Lenina i G.E. Zinov’eva v podpol’e (v Raslive) v 1917 g. v Rossii i ob iul’skikh sobytiyakh v Rossii’, RGASPI 324/1/8/5.
3. August Bebel, *Women under Socialism*, trans. by Daniel De Leon, New York: New York Labor News Press, 1904; *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, trans. and intro. by Alix Holt, Westport, CT: L. Hill, 1977; Sergei Nechaev, ‘The Revolutionary Catechism’, 1869, available online: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/nechaev/catechism.htm> (accessed July 2015).
4. Elizabeth Jones Hemeny, ‘Mothers of Communists: Women Revolutionaries and the Construction of Soviet Identity’, in Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux (eds), *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture*, Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006, p. 84. For histories with references to exceptional women, see, for example, Marc Ferro, *October 1917: a Social History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. by Norman Stone, London: Routledge, 1980; Alan Wood, *The Origins of the Russian Revolution, 1861–1917*, 3rd edn, London: Routledge, 2003; and most recently Abraham Ascher, *The Russian Revolution: a Beginner’s Guide*, London: Oneworld Publications, 2014. For works with separate chapters on women, see, for example, E. Acton, *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution*, London: Hodder Headline, 1997, Vladimir N. Brovkin, *The Bolsheviks in Russian Society*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997, and Ian D. Thatcher (ed.), *Reinterpreting Revolutionary Russia: Essays in Honour of James D. White*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006. Rex A. Wade’s *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, discusses women’s role in the revolutionary parties but in a separate short Section.

5. See also Sally A. Boniece, 'The "Shesterka" of 1905–06: Terrorist Heroines of Revolutionary Russia', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2010, p. 175, and Beate Fieseler, 'The Making of Russian Female Social Democrats, 1890–1917', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1989, p. 225.
6. Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
7. Anna Hillyar and Jane McDermid, *Revolutionary Women in Russia, 1870–1917: a Study in Collective Biography*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988.
8. Fieseler, 'Russian Female Social Democrats', p. 225.
9. See, for example, Leon Trotsky, *My Life: the Rise and Fall of a Dictator*, London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1930, p. 200, and Ye.L. Anan'in, 'Iz vospominanii revolyutsionera, 1905–1923 gg.', in Yu.G. Fel'shtinskii (ed.), *Men'sheviki*, Benson, VT: Chalidze publications, 1990, available online: <http://socialist.memo.ru/books/memoires.htm> (accessed October 2015).
10. Katherine Hollander, 'At Home with the Marxes', *Journal of the Historical Society*, vol. 1, no. 10, 2010, pp. 75–111; on p. 78, Hollander discusses the practical and emotional support which the extended Marx family offered to its members as they worked together in their political struggle.
11. The term 'activist mothering' was coined by Nancy Naples in her book, *Grassroots Warriors: Activist Mothering, Community Work and the War on Poverty*, London: Routledge, 1998. Naples' work discusses how women view their duties as a mother on a continuum with their work as civic or political activists. The term has also been applied by Alexandra Hrycak in her study of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine to highlight the way that women chose to take on this particular role, regardless of their high level of education and experience of political activism: Alexandra Hrycak, 'Seeing Orange: Women's Activism and Ukraine's Orange Revolution', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 35, nos. 3/4, 2007, pp. 208–25.
12. Revolutionary family connections were by no means limited to spouses and children and usually extended to include the parents of revolutionaries as well as their siblings. Constraints of space here, however, mean that this chapter focuses on the more limited grouping of husbands, wives and offspring.
13. See, for example, Alexandra Kollontai, 'Women's Day', February 1913, available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1913/womens-day.htm> (accessed July 2015); Alexandra Kollontai, 'The Social Basis of the Woman Question', 1909, available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1909/social-basis.htm> (accessed July 2015).
14. Beatrice Brodsky Farnsworth, 'Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai', *American Historical Review*, vol. 81, no. 2, 1976, pp. 292–3.
15. Marie Sukloff, *The Life Story of a Russian Exile*, New York: Century Co., 1914, pp. 126–7.
16. Nechaev, 'Revolutionary Catechism'.
17. Lynne Ann Hartnett, *The Defiant Life of Veraigner: Surviving the Russian Revolution*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014, p. 56.
18. Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, pp. 59–64.
19. Dave Pretty, 'The Saints of the Revolution: Political Activists in 1890s Ivanovo-Voznesensk and the Path of Most Resistance', *Slavic Review*, vol. 54, no. 2, 1995, p. 294.

20. Letter, V.I. Lenin to Armand, prior to 23 June (6 July) 1914, in Richard Pipes (ed.), *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive*, trans. by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996, p. 27.
21. 'Vera Zasulich', in Barbara Alpern Engel and Clifford N. Rosenthal (eds and trans), *Five Sisters: Women Against the Tsar*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975, p. 75.
22. Pretty, 'The Saints', p. 297. On p. 295, Pretty notes that Bagaev had a romance with one woman and married another while also feeling it was 'shameful' to have 'love affairs'.
23. Israel Getzler, *Martov: a Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967, p. vii. See also, N.K. Krupskaya, *Vospominaniya o Lenine*, Moscow: Partiinoe izdatel'stvo, 1932, p. 48.
24. Laurie S. Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland: Russia's Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006.
25. Nechaev, 'Revolutionary Catechism'; Sergei Stepniak, *Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life*, Preface by Peter Lavroff, London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1890, p. 139; Hemeny, 'Mothers of Communists', p. 82.
26. See, for example, O. Pyatnitsky, *Memoirs of a Bolshevik*, London: Martin Lawrence Ltd., 1927, p. 27, and O.S. Minor, *Eto bylo davno.... (Vospominaniya soldata revolyutsii)*, Paris: Politicheskii Krasnyi Krest, 1933, pp. 27–8, available online: [http://thelibrary.ru/books/minor\\_o/eto\\_bylo\\_davno-read.html](http://thelibrary.ru/books/minor_o/eto_bylo_davno-read.html) (accessed August 2015).
27. Claudia Verhoeven, 'Adventures in Terrorism: Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinsky and the Literary Lives of the Russian Revolutionary Community (1860s–80s)', in Jason Coy, Benjamin Marschke, Jared Poley and Claudia Verho (eds), *Kinship, Community, and Self: Essays in Honor of David Warren*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, p. 163. McNeal somewhat scathingly called the Union of Struggle a 'lonely hearts club': see Richard Stites, 'Kollontai, Inessa and Krupskaya: a Review of Recent Literature', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1975, p. 92.
28. B.I. Gorev, *Iz partiinogo proshlogo: vospominaniya, 1895–1905*, Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1924, p. 35; Ol'ga Yevgen'evna Allilueva, 'Avtobiografiya', RGASPI 124/1/40; Yelizaveta Alekseevna Yelagina, 'Avtobiografiya', RGASPI 124/1/633/4 ob.
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30. See, for example, Robert H. McNeal, *Bride of the Revolution: Krupskaya and Lenin*, Worthing: Littlehampton Books, 1973.
31. Hillyar and McDermid, *Revolutionary Women*, p. 42. See also, Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 129, and Aleksandr Dmitrievich Mikhailov, 'Avtobiograficheskiya zametki', *Byloe*, no. 2, 1906, p. 160.
32. Stepan Markelovich Bushtsev, 'Avtobiografiya', RGASPI 124/1/287/9.
33. I.Ye. Gorelov, *Bol'sheviki: dokumenty po istorii bol'shevizma s 1903 g. po 1916 god byvshego Moskovskogo Okhrannogo Otdeleniya*, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1990, pp. 104, 123, 129, 132 and 156. See also Eva L'vovna Broido, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, ed. and trans. by Vera Broido, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.
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35. Cecelia Bobrovskaya, *Twenty Years in Underground Russia*, London: Martin Lawrence Ltd., 1934, p. 150; Krupskaya, *Vospominaniya*, p. 118.



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37. S. Ivanova, quoted in Engel, 'Emergence', p. 99; Krupskaya, *Vospominaniya*, pp. 201 and 239.
38. Mary Hamilton-Dann, *Vladimir and Nadya*, New York: International Publishers, 1998, p. 218. See also Krupskaya, *Vospominaniya*, p. 239.
39. A.N. Yemel'yanova, 'Rasskaz o moei materi', *Leningradki*, p. 74.
40. 'Anna', *Alliluyev Memoirs*, pp. 146–7.
41. Vera Broido, *Daughter of Revolution: a Russian Girlhood Remembered*, London: Constable, 1998, p. 60; Krupskaya, *Vospominaniya*, p. 27.
42. Bobrovskaya, *Twenty Years*, p. 94; 'Anna', *Alliluyev Memoirs*, p. 139.
43. For a longer discussion of these issues, see Katy Turtton 'Children of the Revolution: Parents, Children and the Revolutionary Struggle in Late Imperial Russia', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2012, pp. 52–86.
44. Bobrovskaya, *Twenty Years*, p. 150; P.A. Garvi, *Zapiski sotsial-demokrata (1906–1921)*, Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1982, p. 90; Lubov Krassin, *Leonid Krassin: His Life and Work*, London: Skeffington and Son, Ltd., 1929, pp. 39–40; Alice Stone Blackwell (ed.), *The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution: Reminiscences and Letters of Catherine Breshkovsky*, Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1973, p. 39; Eva Broido, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p. 14; Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist: the Life of Aleksandra Kollontai*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979, p. 22.
45. Krupskaya, *Vospominaniya*, p. 182; Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 200; Yelagina, 'Avtobiografiya', ll. 4–6; Vera Broido, *Daughter of Revolution*, p. 28.
46. Hamilton-Dann, *Vladimir and Nadya*, p. 42; Krupskaya, *Vospominaniya*, p. 167; Becky L. Glass and Margaret K. Steele, 'Family Law in Soviet Russia, 1917–1945', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 49, no. 4, 1987, p. 894.
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48. 'Anna', *Alliluyev Memoirs*, p. 73; Natal'ya Aleksandrova, 'Sil'naya dukhom (E.S. Shlikhter)', L.P. Zhak and A.M. Itkina (eds), *Zhenshchiny russkoi revoliutsii*, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1968, p. 543.
49. Vera Broido, *Daughter of Revolution*, p. 82.
50. Fieseler, 'Russian Female Social Democrats', p. 224.
51. Naples, *Grassroots Warriors*.
52. Hillyar and McDermid, *Revolutionary Women*, p. 178.
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56. Elwood, *Russian Social Democracy*, pp. 94 and 154.
57. Yelena Loskutova, 'Dorogoi nepokorennikh (E.F. Rozmirovich)', in S. Kulikova (ed.), *Zhenshchiny russkoi revoliutsii*, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1968, pp. 388–9; 'Vospominaniya S.Ya. Alliluyeva i N.A. Yemel'yanova o prebyvanii



- V.I. Lenina i G.E. Zinov'eva v podpol'e (v Raslive) v 1917 g. v Rossii i ob iul'skikh sobytiyakh v Rossii', RGASPI 324/1/8/5; 'Anna', *Alliluyev Memoirs*, p. 38.
58. Elena Loskutova, 'Dorogoi nepokorennnykh (E.F. Rozmirovich)', in Zhak and Itkina, *Zhenshchiny russkoi revoliutsiya*, pp. 388–9; E. Golubeva, 'Mariya Petrovna Golubeva', in Ignat'eva, *Slavnye bol'shevichki*, p. 128.
  59. A.N. Yemel'yanov, *Leningradki*, p. 70.
  60. 'Interview with Lydia Dan', in Leopold Haimson, *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries: Voices of the Menshevik Past*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 85.
  61. 'Lyubatovich', *Five Sisters*, p. 182.
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  63. R.C. Elwood, *Inessa Armand: Revolutionary and Feminist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 44; Sukloff, *Life Story*, pp. 121–2; 'Anna', *Alliluyev Memoirs*, pp. 76–81.
  64. See for example, Katy Turton, *Forgotten Lives: the Role of Lenin's Sisters in the Russian Revolution, 1864–1937*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007, p. 21; Hartnett, *Vera Figner*, pp. 42 and 47; Sofia Bardina quoted in 'Vera Figner', *Five Sisters*, p. 8; Krupskaya, *Vospominaniya*, p. 172; Valeriu Marcu, 'Lenin in Zurich: a Memoir', in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1943, p. 552; R.C. Elwood, 'Lenin and the Brussels "Unity" Conference of July 1914', *Russian Review*, vol. 39, 1980, p. 44; Bobrovskaya, *Twenty Years*, p.120; Vera Broido, *Daughter of Revolution*, p. 25.
  65. Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, p. 160.
  66. Maxim Gorky, *Mother*, trans. by Margaret Wettlin, Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1985 (orig. 1906), pt. 2, ch. 22, p. 369. My thanks to Melanie Ilic for bringing this to my attention.

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## The Kitchen Maid as Revolutionary Symbol: Paid Domestic Labour and the Emancipation of Soviet Women, 1917–1941

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‘No, the Soviet woman is not yet free’, wrote Stalin’s archenemy Leon Trotsky in his famous critique of Stalin’s rule in the Soviet Union, *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936). In his chapter entitled ‘Thermidor in the Family’ Trotsky explains: ‘So long as society is incapable of taking upon itself the material concern for the family, the mother can successfully fulfil a social function only on condition that she has in her service a white slave: nurse, servant, cook, etc.’<sup>1</sup> Here Trotsky follows Marx, who argues that domestic service is a form of ancient domestic slavery, unproductive employment of segments of the working class intrinsic to capitalism.<sup>2</sup> Trotsky was not concerned, however, with the lives of female servants. He instead used them as a rhetorical device to contrast the privileged position of ‘women of the upper strata, representatives of bureaucratic, technical, pedagogical and, in general, intellectual work’, with the degraded position of the ‘working woman’, ‘who is compelled to run to the shops, prepare dinner herself, and carry her children on foot from the kindergarten — if, indeed, a kindergarten is available’.<sup>3</sup> To the extent that the domestic servant mattered to Trotsky, she mattered only as a symbol of Stalin’s failure to fulfil the revolutionary promise of women’s liberation; a symbol of the revolution betrayed.

For other Soviet commentators, domestic workers also served as a potent symbol. ‘Every kitchen maid can govern the state’ was a slogan constantly reproduced in articles, posters, works of fiction and film.<sup>4</sup> A famous 1925 poster ‘Every Kitchen Maid Should Learn to Rule the State’ depicts a working-class woman wearing a red kerchief pointing to a government building (Fig. 7.1). The caption reads: ‘Don’t sit in the kitchen at home / Go to the elections to the

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Fig. 7.1 Poster 'Every Kitchen Maid Should Learn to Rule the State', Ilya P. Makarychev, 1925

soviet / the female worker used to be in the dark / now she's in the soviet deciding things'. Here the kitchen maid represents all Soviet women. She is both the addresser and the addressee of the message, the 'conscious female worker' and the one who is still hiding in darkness. Participation in the elections is both an obligation and a privilege she has as a worker in the workers' state. While for Trotsky the employment of household help signalled a retreat from revolutionary values, in the Soviet Union the kitchen maid stood for the transformative powers of the Soviet regime and the promise of empowerment and self-transformation for citizens of the lower classes as well as for women whom the Soviet state cast as victims of Tsarist oppression. As such, the image of the kitchen maid appealed doubly as a revolutionary symbol, in terms of both class and gender. Thus, the domestic worker, which for the exiled Trotsky symbolised the failure to liberate women and build a socialist society, in official Soviet discourse stood for women's emancipation.

This chapter analyses the shifts in how the Soviet state treated domestic workers in order to shed light on some of the bigger questions of women's labour during the first two decades of Soviet power. At the discursive and policy level, there were four distinct periods in the treatment of paid domestic labour by the Soviet state. Immediately after the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 there was little discussion about paid domestic labour. The new leadership had a vision for the country's future without domestic service. It anticipated the withering away of the family and socialisation of housework. For the time being, domestic workers were to be mobilised for 'productive' labour under War Communism. With the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921, liberation for domestic servants meant developing proletarian consciousness and defending their rights as workers through unionisation. They were to remain in their employers' kitchens during the day but once they had completed their chores they were to participate actively in governance by voting in elections and getting involved with their trade union. The state-run trade union would stand by them and protect them from exploitation. From 1928, forced industrialisation created a new path to emancipation: domestics were encouraged to take factory jobs and become 'real' workers. Official statistics show a dramatic decrease in the number of women employed as household help. It seemed that the industrialisation drive that brought about not only employment opportunities for both men and women but also active construction of house-communes and factory-kitchens would eliminate paid domestic labour in the foreseeable future.

The saturation of the labour market during the Second Five-Year Plan (1933–1937) and the growing concern with women's procreative function made the Soviet state reconsider its approach to paid domestic labour. During this period, the state sent contradictory messages about the place of domestic service in the country of 'victorious socialism'. While still sounding Lenin's promise that the kitchen maid should learn to rule the state, it encouraged domestic workers to become professional helpers, responsible for their employers' leisure and state property.<sup>5</sup> Building on the arguments of Anna Krylova and Elena Shulman, who both challenge the concept of the 'patriarchal 1930s', this chapter suggests that

the spectrum of models of Soviet womanhood in this period was a sign of an intensified conflict between the emancipatory thrust of the revolution and the traditional view of gender roles in the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup>

The shifts in how the Soviet state approached paid domestic labour did not resolve the fundamental tension between the desire for the emancipation of women from household drudgery and the gendering of housework that structured Bolshevik policies. Existing historiography has emphasised the centrality of the woman question to the Soviet revolutionary project. The foundational principles of early Soviet policy on women were emancipation through wage labour and the socialisation of housework.<sup>7</sup> The Bolsheviks presented the liberation of women from kitchen drudgery by providing families with communal services such as public cafeterias, crèches and laundries as one of the regime's main tasks and major achievements. They did not, however, argue for the re-division of labour within the household.<sup>8</sup> As this chapter shows, in both official rhetoric and the realities of Soviet everyday life, it was quite the opposite: women would remain responsible for household chores until the advent of better times. Anticipation of those better times intensified or weakened, depending on the period. Regardless of the period, though, it was women who were to do all domestic labour, paid or unpaid. The kitchen maid as a symbol of women's emancipation embodied these contradictions of Bolshevik understanding of women's place in the Soviet society. Public discussions about domestic service, cultural representation of domestic workers and their employers and state policies regarding paid domestic labour reflected the construction of class and gender hierarchies under socialism.

#### BETWEEN WORK AND NON-WORK: PAID DOMESTIC LABOUR UNDER WAR COMMUNISM

After assuming power, the Bolsheviks sped to implement radical changes in all spheres of life. The conditions of the Civil War that required extraordinary measures to manage the country's material and human resources plus ideological fervour led to the introduction of the system of War Communism (1918–1921). Among other things, this included labour mobilisation for all Soviet citizens. The amount and kind of tasks to be performed for the state depended on class and gender. The confusion in determining the status of paid domestic labour during these first years after the revolution testifies to the ambiguity of the position of domestic work. According to the decree on the labour conscription of servants issued in August 1920, only members of the domestic workers' union who were taking care of children under three years of age or those employed by a workers' commune of no fewer than ten people were included into the category of 'labouring elements' (*trudovie elementy*).<sup>9</sup> This implied that all other domestic servants were not engaged in 'socially beneficial labour' and were to be mobilised for public works.

Certain groups of employers were able to challenge the category of 'socially beneficial labour' imposed by the state and prove that their servants were,

in fact, engaged in productive labour and should not be conscripted. In a lengthy correspondence with the Committee for Labour Conscription, the Administration of State Academic Theatres managed to prove that actors and actresses could not perform their professional duties in the theatre without hired help. The original argument made by theatre administration stated that because of their professional obligations actors spent little time at home and could not take proper care of their apartments and children, but this did not convince the Committee. Finally, the Committee agreed that servants working for theatre employees were to be excluded from labour conscription but only if they helped with performing 'artistic duties': 'sewed costumes, helped the actors dress for the performance, etc.' and only if the performer 'absolutely needed a servant'.<sup>10</sup> Only in these cases were servants' labour deemed 'socially beneficial' and hence they were entitled to food rationing cards like other 'labourers'.

Those domestic servants whom the state considered to be engaged in publicly beneficial labour were included in the group defined as those 'working at factories and offices' (*rabotayushchikh v predpriyatiyakh i uchrezhdeniyakh*) and were to provide additional services for the state after fulfilling their work obligations. According to the 'Instructions on the implementation of sewing conscription' they were required to sew a quarter of an item of clothing per day. Housewives who were managing their house without a servant were expected to sew one half, and those who had a servant were equated to 'non-labouring elements' and were to sew a full item of clothing per day.<sup>11</sup>

Decrees on labour conscription allow us to identify the important trends that continued to shape policies regarding paid domestic labour and women's emancipation more broadly. First, from the outset of the Soviet state, domestic work was viewed as women's responsibility. If a housewife had a maid she was not fulfilling her duties as a homemaker and thus she 'owed' her labour to the state. Secondly, the labour performed by servants was more 'socially beneficial' than the same kind of work done by homemakers: a housewife had to provide twice as much additional labour for the state as did a domestic servant. Waged labour had a privileged position over non-waged labour because, in keeping with Marxist ideology, the former was the only path to developing class-consciousness and, therefore, was one of the central components of women's emancipation. Thirdly, the decree on the conscription of servants emphasises the privileged position of motherhood and communal living. Only mothers with young children and workers' communes could legally hire domestic help. While there was little further discussion about paid domestic labour and communal living, the needs of Soviet mothers were continually used to justify paid domestic labour in Soviet society.

### SERVANTS INTO WORKERS, NEP

During the years of War Communism 'state rationing, public dining halls, free food for children, and wages in kind all supported the optimistic assessment that household labour would still vanish'.<sup>12</sup> However, instead of leaping into

communist paradise, the country's leadership and citizens had to adjust to the conditions of the NEP. On the one hand, there was still a good deal of optimism about the socialisation of housework and communal living in the 1920s, which manifested itself in the debates about New Everyday Life. On the other hand, the restoration of certain elements of the market economy under NEP called for increased attention to the rights of its potential victims.<sup>13</sup> Hoping for the disappearance of paid domestic labour in the future, the Bolshevik leadership was aware that this would not happen under NEP. Therefore, there had to be a new approach to domestic service. The period witnessed unprecedented attention to the issue of paid domestic labour and the most progressive legislation to regulate this sphere. At the same time, these achievements were based on a deeply gendered vision of the home and the labour market. As a result, in the 1920s household labour became even more feminised, intensifying the paradoxes of the Bolshevik approach to the woman question.

In order to emphasise the proletarian nature of paid domestic labour, in 1922 the Bolshevik leadership started a campaign to replace the old-fashioned term *prisluga* (servant/servants) with the more ideologically correct *domashnaya rabotnitsa* (domestic worker). The new name signified a change of social status. In fact, they were not servants anymore, but workers living in the workers' state. At the same time, their position became much more gendered. Even though the Russian word *prisluga* is grammatically feminine, it is a collective noun that can be used to refer to both women and men. The new term *domashnaya rabotnitsa*, shortened to *domrabotnitsa* (female domestic worker), was strictly feminine. Thus the occupation became proletarian but at the same time explicitly feminised. The term *domashnii rabotnik* (male domestic worker) also existed but it was mostly used to describe state-employed men working to maintain apartment buildings.

In contrast to female domestic workers, which were the norm, male domestic workers were perceived as an aberration. In 1927 the journal *Rabochii narodnoĭ pitaniya* (*Worker of Public Catering*) published an article entitled 'Domrabotnitsa–Uzbek'. Readers could immediately sense the discrepancy: the word *domrabotnitsa* was feminine, while the word *Uzbek* (Uzbek man) was masculine. For those who missed the pun, the author makes the message clear:

This title, *domrabotnitsa–Uzbek* was sure to shock comrades. We're accustomed to the idea that it's women who work in domestic service, not men. True, in old Russia there were rare cases when men replaced women in doing housework, but that happened only in households of despotic landlords, inveterate woman-haters or officers, whose batmen substituted for nannies. That was a long time ago and is long gone.<sup>14</sup>

The article described male domestic servants in the Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan and sent a clear message: men working as domestics are backward. In the Soviet state housework was for women only. Men should be doing productive work outside the home. Thus, whilst before the revolution domestic



service was an occupation for those of inferior class as well as those of inferior sex, in Soviet society domestic labour was women's lot.

Hiring a servant was often interpreted as a sign of woman's rejection of her obligations out of laziness. In the public trial of exploiters of domestic servants described by trade union newspaper, there were two groups of delinquent employers: 'big and small NEPmen' and 'high-ranking officials' (administrators, accountants, etc.) who hired domestic servants because of the 'lordly inclinations of their wives' (Fig. 7.2).<sup>15</sup> From the position of the worker-correspondent, hired help in the homes of Soviet *sluzhashchiye* (white-collar workers) was a deviation and happened in those families in which women failed to perform their role in the household. A court could reject a housewife's property claim in a divorce if she had a domestic servant.<sup>16</sup> A domestic's status as a female worker was determined by the fact that she, unlike the housewife who performed the same tasks, worked for a wage. In the eyes of the state it was only employment outside the home that was productive and gave women a right to see themselves as 'labourers'. For women working as hired help, household labour was the only justification for their claim for membership in the Soviet working class.

As female workers, domestics were objects of Soviet labour policies. Initially, domestic workers were covered by the Soviet Labour Code (1918, 1922) that

### Союз, вывали зазнавшегося седока.



Fig. 7.2 'Union, get rid of the purse-proud passenger', *Rabochii narodnogo pitaniya*, 1926, no. 2, p. 13



## КАК ФАБРИКУЮТСЯ СКЕЛЕТЫ.



Fig. 7.3 'How They Make Skeletons', *Rabochii narodnogo pitaniya*, 1925, no. 8, p. 12

had no special provisions for paid domestic labour. By the mid-1920s it became clear that the Labour Code, written mostly for factory workers, was not applicable to the sphere of paid household work (Fig. 7.3). On 8 February 1926, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and Council of People's Commissars issued a special order 'On the Working Conditions of Workers Hired to Fulfil Housework (domestic workers) and Personal Service for the Employer and his Immediate Family'. The law set a monthly limit of 192 hours that could be distributed during the day according to the will of the employer. Thus, the worker's day could last from dawn until dusk. At the same time, the domestic got weekly days-off, paid vacation time and at least two nights a week off for evening classes. The employer had to provide the servant with working clothes, adequate food and housing, and pay insurance fees. A separate order gave priority to live-in domestics over other women in admission to hospitals and maternity homes. Of course, as Rebecca Spagnolo argues, for many domestics 'these achievements – ground-breaking though they were – remained honoured more in theory than in practice'.<sup>17</sup> Still, these laws gave servants the legal basis and the language to speak up for themselves.

Domestics were encouraged to seek help from the trade union of Workers of Public Catering and Dormitory Workers, Narpit (*Profsoyuz rabochikh narodnogo pitaniya i obshezhitiya*). The union tried hard to keep track of everyone

employed in private households. Special delegates were sent to check on their living and working conditions and were to inform the union in cases where there was any violation of labour laws. They were also responsible for informing domestics about union meetings and recruitment to the union.<sup>18</sup> Many employers objected to the state's intrusion into their relationship with servants and tried to resist the union's efforts to recruit domestics. At the same time, certain women, especially those from disenfranchised families, saw membership in the union as an advantage: only union members could register with the labour exchange and receive unemployment benefits.<sup>19</sup> Since unemployment among women was especially high in the 1920s, this was a serious motivation to join. Narpit leadership and activists in local cells had two major tasks: detecting 'non-labouring elements' who were trying to get a union card, and to recruit 'real' domestic workers.

Educating domestic servants about their rights as workers was just one aspect of the union's activity. Soviet activists conceived of the emancipation of women not only in terms of employment opportunities and lessening the burden of household chores, but as a profound identity change, a transformation of the 'baba' (peasant woman) into a 'comrade', a conscious Soviet citizen.<sup>20</sup> The Bolshevik leadership was highly suspicious of women, especially peasant women, on account of what they perceived as their backward tendencies. Domestic servants who were, for the most part, recent migrants from the countryside became the symbol of the greatest backwardness in Soviet cities. Narpit's major



**Fig. 7.4** Nanny and child reading a magazine, *Rabochii narodnogo pitaniya*, 1927, no. 9, p. 3

task, along with protecting the labour rights of domestic workers, was to develop their 'proletarian consciousness' through education and political mobilisation. Literacy training, lectures, group readings, concerts and the celebration of Soviet holidays were all activities quite similar to those conducted by other trade unions and were part and parcel of the greater Bolshevik project of creating a new and perfect modern subject, the New Soviet Person (Fig. 7.4). However, Narpit activists believed that their task was special since servants' 'working conditions, the dependency on the employer create a special psyche' and 'because of their dispersion their class consciousness is either totally absent or embryonic'.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the type of labour they performed was, in Lenin's words, 'the most unproductive, the most barbarous and the most arduous work a woman can do' and did not 'include anything that would in any way promote the development of the woman'.<sup>22</sup>

### DOMESTIC WORKERS INTO 'REAL' WORKERS: MOBILISATION DURING THE FIVE-YEAR PLANS

In the 1920s, the main concern of the Soviet state regarding paid domestic labour was to protect domestic workers from exploitation in the process of making them into conscious Soviet subjects. There were no attempts to help women leave domestic service for other kinds of employment. The situation began to change with Soviet industrialisation. The ambitious First Five-Year plan (1928–1932) required hundreds of thousands of new labourers to work on construction sites and in factories. By 1930, the state had exhausted the supply of unemployed men and turned to untapped labour resources such as women.<sup>23</sup> Domestic workers, along with housewives from proletarian families, became the 'labour reserve for the industry'.<sup>24</sup> In the materials of the campaign for the introduction of women's labour into the industry, housewives and domestic workers were often mentioned side by side, as a unified object of the state programme. This implied that both categories were not yet part of the construction of socialism, even though domestics were officially 'workers'.

The goal of the domestic workers' section in the newly created Trade Union of City Workers and Domestic Servants (TUCWDS) (*Profsoyuz rabochikh gorodskikh predpriyatii i domashnikh rabotnits*) was to retrain domestics and recruit them for positions in industry or the public service sector.<sup>25</sup> The training included, primarily, literacy classes, but also political education, general education and vocational training for particular careers. The choice of these careers, however, was quite limited. The union was to provide retrained domestics for those enterprises that required an additional 'female labour force'.<sup>26</sup> Judging by the statistics that regional union organisations submitted to the Central Committee in their annual reports, the majority of former domestic workers ended up in the public service sector (public dining, city maintenance services), textile and clothing industries, or as semi-qualified workers at construction sites. This recruitment pattern was a manifestation of what Wendy Goldman calls the

re-gendering of the labour force; the re-segregation of the socialist economy by gender and from above.<sup>27</sup>

It is difficult to enumerate the number of domestic workers 'transferred to [industrial] production' (*peredany na proizvodstvo*) as the statistical data is not clear. The Central Committee reported that, in 1931, out of 96,703 women registered by the union, 12,912 were transferred, while regional organisations claimed to have sent over to the public service sector or to industry from one tenth to a quarter of their domestics.<sup>28</sup> It seems plausible that many more independently found jobs outside of domestic service. A report from Nizhnii Novgorod, for instance, stated that while the union sent 263 domestics to industry 'in an organised manner', 648 women 'left individually'.<sup>29</sup> According to official data published by Gosplan, the number of women employed in domestic service decreased dramatically in the early 1930s, from 527,000 in 1929 to 206,000 in 1936.<sup>30</sup> The editors of the statistical volume that published these numbers commented that this decrease in the proportion of labouring women in domestic service (from 16 to 2.4%) was a move of female workers from a less productive to a more productive sphere.<sup>31</sup> However, these numbers remain questionable when one considers the results of the 1937 population census that estimated the number of domestic workers in the Soviet Union to be 512,761.<sup>32</sup> Even though hundreds of thousands of women left domestic service for employment in the public sector, they were immediately replaced by newcomers from the countryside. As one regional organisation from Bashkiria reported, the transfer of domestics had no 'negative effect' on working families because of a constant flow of female collective farmers and day labourers (*batrachki*) from the village.<sup>33</sup>

This special note on the 'negative effects' of the recruitment of domestics 'on the working family' was not accidental. Instructions sent out by the union's Central Committee required local cells to report on the 'negative effects' of domestics' recruitment to industry on the 'working family'. 'Negative effects' meant here situations when the female employer had to quit her job and become a housewife after her maid had left.<sup>34</sup> To avoid these 'negative effects', one Leningrad union cell, for example, arranged for priority transfer to industry of those domestics whose employers did not have high professional qualifications or were unemployed.<sup>35</sup> Under the conditions of forced industrialisation the old paradox intensified: the more women were drawn into the industrial labour force the more acute the need for household services became. Even though there was significant state investment into factory canteens and crèches, public services did not meet the demand. The solution was to emancipate urban women with professional qualifications at the expense of migrants from the villages, who constituted the majority of household help. The latter had to 'serve their time' as domestic workers and then move up on the social ladder to become 'real' workers.

In official rhetoric, the step 'from the kitchen to the factory bench' represented the final stage of domestics' emancipation by making them 'real' workers. The story of Olga Myasnikova, a former domestic worker and now a

driller and factory shock worker, published in 1932, ends with triumphant statement: 'There's no Olga – a domestic worker – anymore. There's Myasnikova – the female worker, Myasnikova – the shock worker, Myasnikova – the fighter.'<sup>36</sup> The path from domestic service to the factory became a cultural cliché of the epoch. In Aleksei Arbuzov's classical Soviet drama *Tanya* (1938), a young domestic worker, Dusya, leaves her employers for a factory job. She also plans to go to an evening technical school and dreams of becoming an engineer. When she briefly appears before the end of the first act, she is a university student.<sup>37</sup> The most famous domestic turned worker was, of course, Tanya Morozova, the heroine of the Soviet hit movie *The Shining Path* (1940) played by Stalin's favourite Lyubov Orlova.<sup>38</sup> After having endured exploitation and sexual harassment while working as a nanny, Tanya starts attending literacy courses and takes up a factory job with the help of a secretary of a local party cell. She breaks a production record and becomes a Supreme Soviet deputy. Tanya's path from a nanny to a Stakhanovite and Supreme Soviet deputy is the fulfilment of Lenin's promise that in the land of Soviets even a kitchen maid will be able to rule the state.

Stories like these appeared in the press throughout the 1930s and presented domestic service as tedious and debilitating: 'Olga had been a domestic worker for three year but even if she'd worked for a century, her prospects wouldn't have changed'.<sup>39</sup> Former domestics told readers how meaningful their life had become once they took on factory jobs.<sup>40</sup> Their stories embodied the promise of emancipation and self-transformation through labour. At the same time, however, they degraded the work of those women who were still minding other people's children and washing other people's dishes. This form of labour was rendered insignificant for the country's success in building socialism. 'As a member of Narpit, I ask the editors to explain if a domestic worker can be useful for the Soviet state', wrote domestic servant Maria Ivanova to the union newspaper. She complained that everyone was participating in socialist competition but 'who am I going to compete with?' 'What will it do for the Soviet state?' She also had other questions: 'Can I join the brigades [to go to the village or to clean institutions from the enemies of the Soviet state]? What do I understand in the work of an institution or a Soviet? In what way can I be useful for the club or the Komsomol?' Ivanova could not find a place for herself in the new projects of industrialisation and collectivisation. She felt that all the future held for her was marriage to 'the first man' she came across.<sup>41</sup>

The union tried to fight this frustration by finding ways to get those domestics who were still working for individual families involved in socialist competition. They were to be mobilised for campaigns such as subscription to the state loans or utility waste collection and to join volunteer organisations such as International Red Aid (MOPR), the Society for Assistance to Defence, Aviation and the Chemical Industry (Osoaviakhim) or the Down with Illiteracy Society. In the summer, local cells organised brigades of domestic workers to be sent to the countryside to help collective farms with agricultural work. Illiterate and semi-literate domestics signed 'socialist agreements' to attend evening

school. All these activities were not, however, directly connected with domestic service as an occupation. The centrality of these 'extra' activities to the work of the union among domestics made clear that domestic labour as such was not valuable to the Soviet state.

### DOMESTIC SERVICE IN THE LAND OF VICTORIOUS SOCIALISM

In 1934 a series of publications designed to emphasise the importance of paid domestic labour on the road to socialism appeared in the trade union journal *Rabochii gorodskogo khozyaistva*. 'The domestic worker is an equal builder of the new society, just like workers in any other profession', argued one of the contributors.<sup>42</sup> 'Big, important state responsibilities rest on the shoulders of modest domestic workers who participate on an equal basis with all other proletarians in state building, in building socialism in our country', stated another.<sup>43</sup> Domestic workers were responsible not only for children and the homes of their employers, but also, of crucial importance, for 'creating the best conditions for their leisure and comfort...the basis for their labour productivity in industry and Soviet services'. By including 'the kitchen maid' in the ranks of builders of socialism, the Bolsheviks legitimised the private employment of household help in the Soviet state. This was, however, not unproblematic. For instance, the editors of a 1936 statistical volume found it necessary to include a footnote for the table entitled 'blue-collar workers and white-collar employees employed in socialist economy' that stated that 'domestic workers working for white-collar employees and collective farmers are included in the number of workers employed in the socialist economy'.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, they felt that their readers would need an explanation for the fact that 99.96% of blue-collar and white-collar workers were employed in the 'socialist economy', while the private employment of household help was a well-known practice.

To counterbalance the message of the publications that glorified the transfer from the kitchen to factory bench, *Rabochii gorodskogo khozyaistva* explained that those who believed that domestic service was 'a dying kind of labour' and that all domestics should seek the first opportunity to secure a job in the public sector were guilty of 'oversimplification that smelled of leftism'. While in the 'historical perspective' paid domestic labour would indeed disappear, it would not disappear 'today or tomorrow'. Moreover, 'the labour of domestic workers under the conditions of increasing cultural needs would become more and more important and significant'.<sup>45</sup> The significance of paid domestic labour for the socialist economy meant that the quality of this kind of work had to be increased. The domestic worker was to 'master the technique of her job'. The pro-natalist thrust of the 1930s manifested itself in the increased attention to the child-rearing functions of the domestic worker, who was refigured as a nanny.<sup>46</sup> In his speech at the First All-Union meeting of TUCWDS in April 1931, a representative of the Friend of Children Society warned the meeting that 'backward' domestic workers from villages lead children 'in the opposite direction' to where Soviet school is going.<sup>47</sup> In an article entitled 'Do you know



what your child is doing?', the author complained that nannies raised children as they pleased without any knowledge about 'how to deal with a child, how to instil cultural skills in him'.<sup>48</sup> To improve the situation the union organised lectures and seminars on childcare and child nutrition for nannies. Another important field was cooking. Local union organisations invited lecturers to develop special educational programmes in order to improve domestics' culinary skills. It is impossible to say how many seminars were actually taught, how many women attended them and how useful they were, but the intention to improve domestics' professional skill indicated the growing interest in well-trained household help.

Moreover, some families were entitled to household services of exceptional quality. For domestics working in the homes of shock workers, the union organised separate socialist competitions to provide 'exemplary service'. Domestic workers of those special families were to compete for 'the cleanest apartment', 'best care for children' or simply for 'exemplary service'.<sup>49</sup> Domestic workers were to become invisible helpers who created conditions for the superhuman production feats of shock workers in industry. Ideally, in return, these special employers were to help domestics become better Soviet citizens. An article entitled 'Exemplary service for shock worker!' describes a family in which even children joined in socialist competition: the Vogizbakh brothers took on the obligations 'to keep clean and wash our hands before meals, do homework assigned at school, obey our nanny (comrade Chernousova) and help her liquidate her illiteracy'.<sup>50</sup>

In June 1941, the leading women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* (*Woman Worker*) published a full-page article entitled 'The Domestic Worker'.<sup>51</sup> Unlike the above-mentioned articles in union journals which spoke to domestics and union activists, this article was aimed at a much wider audience: women of the Soviet Union. The author started with a question: 'What business is it of the state how well a domestic worker works for a private employer?' Her answer was straightforward: 'Bad work by a domestic worker can do much damage to the state'. Domestics are to take good care of 'socialist property', look after small children and make the homes of their employers comfortable so that the latter could go to work fully rested. A good Soviet domestic worker should be respectful and dedicated to work, sincere and modest in her behaviour. Briefly mentioning the need to protect the rights of domestic workers, the article concentrated on their responsibilities to their employers and the state.<sup>52</sup> The author said nothing about former domestics who found jobs in the public sector. On the contrary, the article praised those maids and nannies who had been working in the same families for 10 or 15 years. Their activities outside the home were limited to cross-country running and choir singing. The only way out of domestic service the article mentioned was marriage. After two decades of revolutionary politics, it seemed the Soviet domestic worker had once again become a domestic servant, both of their employer's family and of the Soviet state.

## CONCLUSION

The state sent contradictory messages about the place of domestic service in the country of 'victorious socialism'. On the one hand, it continued to sound Lenin's promise that after the revolution every kitchen maid would be able to rule the state. Its most famous manifestation was in the hit film *The Shining Path*. Domestic service was only the first step in a woman's career that had to lead to 'real' work in the public sector. On the other hand, numerous publications argued that paid domestic labour was an important component of the socialist economy. This new trend appeared alongside other changes in family policies that constituted a 'conservative turn' in the 1930s. These new policies reemphasised women's role as mothers and home keepers.

This, however, did not mean that there was only one single vision of Soviet womanhood.<sup>53</sup> Based on the analysis of the state's ambiguous treatment of paid domestic labour, I suggest that the spectrum of Soviet femininity was a manifestation of a paradox that became especially acute by the mid-1930s: the contradiction between the belief in the need to emancipate women from their traditional roles in the household in order to make them into conscious Soviet subjects and a deeply gendered vision of society. The emancipatory thrust of the revolution continued to promise women the realisation of any of their ambitions, be it the shining path from kitchen maid to Supreme Soviet deputy or the transformation of a Komsomol girl into a combat pilot. At the same time, the conservative turn of the mid-1930s increased the pressure to maintain a 'cultured' Soviet home with well-tended children and impeccable white sheets, and this responsibility fell entirely on women. Professional household help, though doomed to disappear in the distant communist future, became an integral part of the socialist economy. This contradiction, which did not go unnoticed by contemporary critics—witness Trotsky's acerbic statement in *The Revolution Betrayed*—led to the decreasing presence of the issue of paid domestic labour in public discussions about the Soviet household and women's labour in the late 1930s and to its near complete disappearance altogether in the post-war decades.

## NOTES

1. Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?* (1936), available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/revbet/ch07.htm#ch07-1> (accessed June 2016).
2. Karl Marx, *Capital: a Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., Ltd, 1906, p. 448.
3. Trotsky, *Revolution Betrayed*.
4. The slogan stems from Lenin's 1917 article 'Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?' available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/oct/01.htm> (accessed June 2016). Demanding inclusion of conscious workers and soldiers into the government after the February Revolution, Lenin wrote: 'We are not utopians. We know that an unskilled labourer or a cook cannot immediately get on with the job of state administration'. Some scholars believe that the inclusion of



- 'immediately' indicates that cooks' participation in running the state appears unlikely: see, for example, Tricia Starks, *Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008, p. 256. I argue, however, that Lenin's statement contains a promise of future opportunities and that such interpretation is, in fact, more consistent with Lenin's other writings on the question of educating the masses. In 'The Alarm Signal' (1933), Trotsky also interpreted these lines in Lenin's statement as a call for the democratisation of state governance: 'Lenin saw the democratisation of the administration as the most important task of the dictatorship: "Every cook must learn how to manage the government"'. The process that has taken place is quite the reverse. The number of the administrators did not grow to include "every cook", it constricted instead to a solitary chef, and thereto only a specialist in peppery courses': available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1933/xx/alarm2.htm> (accessed June 2016).
5. These four phases correspond to the periodisation suggested by Wendy Goldman's studies of Soviet family policies and women's employment: *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
  6. Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: a History of Violence of the Eastern Front*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011; Elena Shulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Women and State Formation in the Soviet Far East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
  7. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution*, p. 12.
  8. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution*, p. 6.
  9. Decree of Narkomtrud, 31 August 1920, 'O poryadke privilecheniya k trudovoi povinnosti prislugi i o vospreshchenii zameny grazhdan, privilekaemykh k ispolneniyu trudovoi povinnosti drugimi litsami', in *Sobranie zakonov i rasporiazhenii pravitel'stva za 1920 g.*, Moscow: Upravlenie ispolnitel'nogo komiteta sovetov, 1943, p. 527.
  10. RGALI 649/1/136/10, 18: *perepiska*.
  11. Postanovleniye Glavnogo Komiteta po vseobshchei trudovoi povinnosti, 'O poryadke provedeniya trudovoi povinnosti po poshivke bel'ya ot 16 dekabrya 1920 g. (Instruktsiya)', in *Sobranie zakonov i rasporiazhenii*, pp. 772–3. Mobilisation of housewives and servants for sewing, of course, itself testifies to the Bolsheviks' gendered vision of labour.
  12. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution*, p. 6.
  13. On these two trends in discussions of the new Family Code, see Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution*, pp. 185–253.
  14. 'Domrabortnitsa–Uzbek', *Rabochii narodnogo pitaniya*, no. 5, 1927, p. 8.
  15. 'Sud nad ekspluatatorami domashnei prislugi', *Rabochii narodnogo pitaniya*, nos. 8–12, 1923, p. 22.
  16. See the case described in Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution*, p. 196.
  17. Rebecca Spagnolo, 'When Private Home Meets Public Workplace: Service, Space, and the Urban Domestic in 1920s Russia', in Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman (eds), *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 238.
  18. GARF 5452/9/110/10: *Instruktsia delegatki domrabortnits*.

19. For example, former Princess Obolenskaya was a member of Narpit in Moscow. *Protokoly obshikh sobranii domrabotnits*: GARF 5452/3/110/1.
20. Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000.
21. 'Organizatsiya domashnei prislugi', *Rabochii narodnogo pitaniya*, no. 3, p. 18.
22. Lenin, 'Tasks of the Working Women's Movement in the Soviet Republic' (1919), available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/sep/23a.htm> (accessed June 2016).
23. On the 'Five-Year Plan for Women', see Goldman, *Women at the Gates*.
24. 'Za novyye kadry dlya sotsialisticheskoi promyshlennosti', *Rabochii gorodskogo khozyaistva*, no. 1, 1931, p. 16.
25. GARF 5456/20/1/42: *Polozheniye o sektsii domrabotnits v soyuze rabochikh gorodskikh predpriyatii i domrabotnits*.
26. GARF 5456/20/1, l. 40: *Polozheniye i struktura sektora massovoi raboty TsK soyuza rabochikh gorodskikh predpriyatii i domrabotnits*.
27. Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, p. 144.
28. GARF 5456/20/23/59: *V VTsSPS dokladniya zapiska*. The numbers for 1932 are about the same: 10,593 women transferred: GARF 5456/20/53/42.
29. GARF 5456/20/23/18: *Otchetnyi doklad Nizhegorodskogo krayevogo komiteta soyuza RGPiDR*.
30. *Zhenshchiny v SSSR: statisticheskii sbornik*, Moscow: TsUNKhU, 1937, p. 52.
31. *Zhenshchiny v SSSR*, p. 11.
32. *Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1937 goda: obschiye itogi. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, Moscow: Rosspen, 2007, p. 136.
33. GARF 5456/20/67/52: *Bashkiria*.
34. GARF 5456/20/67/57: *Sektor kadrov TsK soyuza SRGi DR*.
35. GARF 5456/20/67/29: *V TsK soyuza SRG iDR*.
36. Bernikova, 'Sverlovshitsa Myasnikova', *Rabochii gorodskogo khozyaistva*, no. 2, 1932, p. 32.
37. Aleksei Arbutov, 'Tanya', in *Zhestokie igry*, Moscow: AST, 2007, pp. 19–98.
38. Russian-language version available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcU8n729qEY> (accessed June 2016).
39. Bernikova, 'Sverlovshitsa Myasnikova'.
40. 'Obyazatel'stvo vypolneno s chestyu', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 34, 1937, p. 7.
41. GARF 5452/14/136/101: *Kak mne stat' poleznoi obshchestvu*.
42. 'Stranitsa rabotnitsy', *Rabochii gorodskogo khozyaistva*, no. 2, 1934, p. 7.
43. 'Kukharka v ryadakh stroitelei sotsialism', *Rabochii gorodskogo khozyaistva*, no. 1, 1934, p. 17.
44. *SSSR: strana sotsialism (statisticheskii sbornik)*, Moscow: TsUNKhU, 1936, p. 201.
45. 'Im nado pomogat', *Rabochii gorodskogo khozyaistva*, no. 7, 1934, p. 14.
46. On Soviet pro-natalism, see David L. Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: the Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917–1941*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003, pp. 97–105.
47. GARF 5456/20/3/158: *Pervvyi vsesoyuznyi s"ezd RGPiDR: vecherneye zasedaniye*, 14 aprelya 1931.
48. 'Znayete li vy, chto delayet vash rebyenok?', *Rabochii gorodskogo khozyaistva*, no. 6, 1934, p. 7.
49. TsAGM 2633/3/21/50: 'Itogi massovogo pokhoda im. 17go parts"ezda po Dzerzhinskomu raionu SRGP'.

50. 'Udarniku—obraztsovoye obsluzhivaniye', *Rabochii gorodskogo khozyastva*, no. 2, 1934, p. 17.
51. A. Ashmarina, 'Domashnaya rabotnitsa', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 8, 1941, p. 19.
52. The article was part of the larger late 1930s campaign to improve labour discipline that introduced a number of punitive laws meant to combat lateness, absenteeism and quitting.
53. See, for example, Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, and Shulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire*.

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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## ‘Equal Pay for Equal Work’: Women’s Wages in Soviet Russia

*Melanie Ilic*

This chapter evaluates the impact of Bolshevik policy on ‘equal pay for equal work’ in the interwar period with specific reference to women’s wages. Russian socialist thought identified concerns relating to the causes and consequences of women’s low pay in the pre-revolutionary period. The Bolsheviks introduced legislative initiatives after the October revolution that provided the foundation for Soviet wages policy and included the concept of ‘equal pay for equal work’. The idealistic vision of social levelling and wage equalisation contained in the original statutes, however, was soon abandoned. Thereafter, acceptable levels of pay differentials were set within a framework determined by an overall wages strategy. The officially acceptable levels of inequality in pay, therefore, varied over time.

The classic western studies of Soviet labour and wages policy in this period pay little attention to the inequalities of earnings between women and men.<sup>1</sup> Other commentaries, including those of contemporary observers, uncritically accept the policy of ‘equal pay for equal work’ as an accomplished fact in the Soviet Union in the interwar years. Margaret Dewar’s study of post-revolutionary labour policy, for example, states in parentheses that ‘there was, of course, equal pay for equal work’, whilst Peter Francis, in his account of working in a Soviet factory in the 1930s, noted that ‘rates of pay for the same work by men and women are identical’.<sup>2</sup> Women’s relative wage rates did improve during the interwar period, but whether this was the direct result of the policy of ‘equal pay for equal work’ has yet to be determined.

In western countries under the impact of industrialisation only a small proportion of women were the household’s sole wage earner or main breadwinner. Women’s secondary status in contributing to household income was used, in

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part, to justify their lower wages, and has been identified by historians as evidence of discrimination against women. Whilst the minimum wage was introduced in an attempt to combat low pay and the worst excesses of industrial exploitation, 'family wage' debates presupposed an ideal of a non-working wife and the removal of married women from the labour force. The work which women performed within the household and in child care, needless to say, was not assigned a monetary value in either the West or the Soviet Union.

In an article investigating female-male wage ratios during the industrial revolution in Britain, Joyce Burnette argued contrary to the view that women received a 'customary wage' (that is, one which reflected their secondary status in the industrial labour force) and that women were, in fact, paid a 'market wage', which reflected their true economic contribution in a competitive labour market.<sup>3</sup> Burnette suggests that women workers paid on time-rates received lower wages because they worked fewer hours, and female piece-rate workers earned lower wages because they produced less. Her findings suggest that women, on the whole, were paid a wage, albeit lower than men's, which related directly to their levels of productivity, output and hours of work. She concluded that, 'there was no obvious incongruence between wages and productivity. Women seem to have been paid market wages, and the assertion that women were paid customary wages needs to be revised'.<sup>4</sup>

### WOMEN'S WAGES IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA

In her study of women's industrial employment in pre-revolutionary Russia, Rose Glickman notes that, despite a closer parity of wages in female dominated industries, generally, 'women were paid less because they would accept less', and in examining structural factors, 'women earned less because they were women'.<sup>5</sup> The consequences of women's low pay were evident to contemporary observers, and particularly to the socialist critics of the capitalist economy. Many women were forced to supplement meagre wages by resorting to prostitution, seeking charitable relief or by entering into unsatisfactory marriages as a source of economic security. On a more basic level, as Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, observed, women who earned lower wages were under nourished in comparison with their male colleagues. Krupskaya identified women's wage earning capacity as a possible means of securing their economic independence.<sup>6</sup> Low wages also meant that most working women had insufficient money or time to join trade unions or to participate in their activities. It was virtually impossible, therefore, for women to campaign collectively for improvements in their own conditions of employment, and they often had to rely on sympathetic male colleagues for this.

The plentiful supply of cheap female labour, however, also served to depress wages for male workers and gave rise to tensions in the workers' movement. Many male workers, faced with competition from cheaper female labour, were hostile to the very idea of women working for wages. If women had to work for wages, men resented the challenge to their patriarchal status posed by the idea that women could possibly earn as much as men were paid.<sup>7</sup> There was also

some concern amongst more conservative thinkers that women's independent wage earning capacity may encourage wives to leave their husbands.

Although it did not directly address the issue of women's low pay, the Labour Programme of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, adopted at their 1903 congress, looked to ways of protecting the working class from 'physical and moral degeneration' by calling for restrictions on the hours and conditions of work, the introduction of statutory maternity leave, provisions for child care and the regulation of procedures for the payment of wages.<sup>8</sup> Despite such concerns and the vociferous championing of the minimum wage, the concept of 'equal pay for equal work' was conspicuously absent from the demands of the 1905 'revolutionaries' and, with one or two exceptions, from the programmes of the Russian trade unions which emerged in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> It was absent too from the 'bourgeois feminist' programme of the All-Russian Union of Equal Rights for Women and the agenda of the 1908 First All-Russian Women's Congress.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of 'equal pay for equal work' had emerged as part of the socialist reform agenda by 1917, though it was far from a universal demand amongst workers.<sup>11</sup> Initially, the political debates were framed rather cautiously and were formulated within the remit of a general concern to combat poverty and improve overall living standards. The mass expansion of female employment during the First World War had depressed the overall level of wages and had given rise to calls for the introduction of a minimum wage as a means of securing higher rates of pay for both women and men.<sup>12</sup> The concentration of the female workers in specific areas of production and in particular industries (primarily in unskilled jobs paying the lowest wages) allowed only limited scope for comparisons with men of wage payments by identified tasks.<sup>13</sup> The Bolshevik-sponsored women's magazine, *Rabotnitsa* (*Woman Worker*), however, was quick to realise that the minimum wage would only be of real benefit to women if it was combined with 'equal pay for equal work', a policy which was recognised as problematic because of the reception it would receive from male workers and factory committees. Where it was in evidence, the support of male workers for 'equal pay for equal work' can be viewed in two different ways, as Diane Koenker has highlighted:

When we read that striking workers demanded equal pay for men and women, this could mean several things: the strikers were idealists and thought women deserved equal pay for equal work, or else strikers hoped that by raising the cost to an employer of hiring women, these workers would no longer be a bargain, and their jobs would return to men.<sup>14</sup>

Campaigners for improvements in conditions of employment for women workers continued to include the principle of 'equal pay for equal work', alongside pressure for the introduction of a minimum wage, and they called on the male-dominated trade unions to support them.<sup>15</sup> Despite these efforts, women remained concentrated in jobs rewarded with the lowest pay.

## EARLY BOLSHEVIK POLICY ON WAGES

The principle of 'equal pay for equal work' (as distinct from the minimum wage) was included in a number of legislative initiatives introduced by the Bolsheviks after the October revolution. On 19 January 1918 a decree that set out the norms of wages for Petrograd metal workers included the provision that, 'women workers employed in the same tasks as men in quality and quantity shall receive the same wage'.<sup>16</sup> On 22 September 1918 minimum pay rates were introduced for adult workers 'without distinction by sex'.<sup>17</sup> The 1918 Labour Code stipulated the payment of a minimum wage and set out restrictions on the employment of female labour, but did not specifically require 'equal pay for equal work'.<sup>18</sup> The principle found further legislative enactment in a June 1920 decree on wage tariffs that stipulated, 'women undertaking the same quantity and quality of work as male workers shall be paid the same as men'.<sup>19</sup>

In its early formulations, Soviet wages policy was not only concerned with the principles and procedures for the correct payment of wages, but it also embodied concerns for social justice by raising overall living standards and reducing levels of social inequality. There were attempts to set down a 'maximum' as well as a minimum wage and to determine wage differentials within predetermined parameters. A grading system setting out the various tariffs for wage payments, supplemented by a complex system of grade coefficients, was introduced for all waged workers and salaried employees. The grade coefficients were designed to reduce the discrepancy in payments between the most lowly and highly paid workers.

The social justice and welfare foundations of levelling and equalisation embodied in early Soviet wages policy soon came under attack. The minimisation of pay differentials was seen to have a number of negative consequences. Low wages were a major cause of worker dissatisfaction, but wage increases tended to outstrip increases in productivity.<sup>20</sup> In practice, wage levelling reduced the differentiation between unskilled and skilled workers in such a way that it acted as a disincentive for workers to improve their level of skill. Workers also had little incentive to raise output or increase their rates of productivity as a means of increasing their earnings.<sup>21</sup> Insufficient differential in wages also contributed towards the high levels of labour turnover as workers changed jobs in the hope of securing a higher wage.<sup>22</sup>

With the transition to the New Economic Policy (NEP) from 1921 and the restoration of market relations, the principle of wage levelling was effectively undermined. Wage levelling was now criticised for having had a negative impact on industrial productivity. A 10 September 1921 decree determined that, henceforth, wages were to be directly related to levels of output and any increases in payments were only to be permitted in relation to increases in productivity.<sup>23</sup> The grading system for the payment of wages and salaries was simplified to a seventeen-point scale with a system of coefficients to determine differentials between unskilled and skilled workers as well as between waged

workers and salaried employees. The bottom nine grades provided the scale for waged workers, differentiated on a ratio of roughly 1:3.5. Including salaried employees, the overall level of differentiation on the seventeen-point scale was 1:8. The system was designed to encourage workers to acquire more skills, but the incentives diminished as workers improved their level of qualifications.<sup>24</sup> The system of grades and coefficients was subject to modifications throughout the interwar period.

In November 1921, People's Commissar for Labour, V.V. Shmidt, spoke at the *Zhenotdel* national congress about the need to improve labour protection measures for women and, more generally, on wages policy. He acknowledged the wide variation in wages paid to women, and that female workers, especially working girls, were often paid extremely low wages. This had allowed employers, including those in state industries, to exploit young women in particular by hiring them in place of more expensive male workers. Women were hired more readily because they were cheaper, not because they were more productive. Historical experience, Shmidt claimed, had shown men to be more productive workers than women in view of their physical strength.<sup>25</sup>

On 'equal pay for equal work', Shmidt claimed that if the policy was operative in reality employers would employ men rather than women because men were believed to be more productive. Current conditions of production, he claimed, required high levels of physical strength and men were more capable of providing this.<sup>26</sup> He argued, therefore, that the proper implementation of 'equal pay for equal work' would lead to a displacement of women from production, but that this would be a temporary phenomenon lasting until women achieved equivalent levels of productivity. He argued further that it was not in the interests of the trade unions to allow the replacement of one group of workers by another and that the labour organisations should protect the right to work of all women and men. It was not in women's long term interests for their labour to be devalued in relation to men's and their wages needed to be supported by the policy of 'equal pay for equal work'.<sup>27</sup>

It is clear from this example that, despite Bolshevik rhetoric, age old prejudices against the employment of women remained in the interwar period. Employers looked to ways of minimising expenditure on wages by employing the cheapest sources of labour. It was commonly believed that men were more productive workers than women, despite the fact that individual studies did not always substantiate this. A study conducted at the 'Dinamo' factory in 1932, for example, concluded that there was no indication the women were less productive than men employed in the same job.<sup>28</sup>

The protective labour laws introduced by the Bolsheviks after October 1917 also had negative consequences for women's pay and employment prospects in the interwar period, as well as differentials in wages. Speaking at a *Zhenotdel* meeting in 1923, Bolshevik activist Aleksandra Kollontai argued that employers preferred to hire older women and girls because they were less likely to become pregnant and, thereby, make claims on the enterprise for maternity entitlements.<sup>29</sup> In contrast to the pre-revolutionary period, women were now



sometimes regarded as *more* costly because of the demands placed on their time by their domestic and child care responsibilities.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the Soviet government introduced legislation around this time that made the dismissal of women who were pregnant or with dependent children illegal.<sup>31</sup>

Workers' incomes in Soviet Russia were composed of more than a monetary wage, and a number of factors need to be taken into account when considering rates of pay. Maternity payments were one of a range of social insurance and welfare benefits available to workers. The government also sponsored a network of 'mother and child welfare centres' and nurseries, although these remained underdeveloped throughout the interwar period. Other supplementary payments included sickness and disability benefits as well as pensions. Those in paid employment were given access to cheap accommodation, rest homes and sanatoria, to education and health facilities and vocational training, as well as to supplies of scarce and rationed goods. Such provisions were more readily available in urban rather than rural areas and contributed to the inequalities of income between industrial and agricultural workers.

Whilst the system of social insurance payments and welfare benefits, and the taxation system, may have operated to some extent in such a way as to have a levelling impact on actual incomes, other factors contributed towards inequalities in pay. The monetary wage could be supplemented by the payment of bonuses for production above the basic norm of output, with awards for exemplary work (such as the economic use of materials or the introduction of labour saving production methods), and by payments in kind. Such payments could account for significant disparities in actual incomes, but are not always easy to measure. Even in tasks where women and men were employed at the same grade, men were often more likely to be rewarded with bonuses which boosted their income, as Kingsbury and Fairchild highlighted using examples from Elektrozavod in 1930:

... with payment including a bonus based on output, the difference in the earnings of the sexes within one grade amounted to from three to five per cent. Women in the third grade of work, for example, were receiving an average monthly wage of 98 rubles, men 100 rubles; in the fourth grade, women were averaging 110 rubles, men 118 rubles; in the fifth grade, women 122 rubles, men 128 rubles.<sup>32</sup>

The gendered foundations of Soviet protective laws allowed identified groups of workers to supplement their incomes, whilst restricting the employment potential of others. Male workers were able to supplement their basic wage by overtime work and on night shifts, where the employment of women was restricted. Higher wages were paid to workers employed in dangerous occupations and in underground tasks, where the employment of women was strictly prohibited. Women's overall earning potential, therefore, was constrained in comparison with men's. Women's maximum earnings were, on the whole, 'lower than that of men'.<sup>33</sup> Such factors need to be taken into account when assessing the inequalities in wages between women and men.

Wage variations were not only a function of labour productivity and legal regulations. Actual incomes were subject to variations, not only between urban and rural areas or between different regions of the country, but also between and within the various industrial sectors. In the period immediately following the revolution and during NEP, workers employed in privately owned enterprises were likely to receive higher wages than those in state-run enterprises. Workers employed in the male-dominated heavy industrial sector were likely to be paid more than those in the female-dominated light industrial and service sectors. Full-time and permanent jobs in the industrial sector, where men constituted the majority of the labour force before the Second World War, were often better paid than part-time, seasonal, temporary and casual jobs, which may have been more suited to women's employment needs. On the other hand, white-collar work, where the employment of women expanded significantly in the interwar years, was more highly remunerated than shop-floor jobs in industry.

One of the most significant determinants of income variation was the basic system of payment. Workers were paid by either piece-rates or by time-rates. The official wage scales set out only the minimum level of payment for each grade, but in the 1920s 'actual earnings were far in excess of the wage scales'.<sup>34</sup> Despite official concern over the extensive use of piece-rates, workers employed under these conditions were more easily able to supplement their basic wage by raising levels of output in excess of the established norms.<sup>35</sup> Insofar as 'equal pay for equal work' was concerned, Dewar conceded that, 'thus, workers of the same grade and skill, often working under identical conditions, received totally different wages'.<sup>36</sup> Louis Fischer similarly pointed out that 'men on the same job, on the same kind of machine, earn different incomes. Individual effort and ability determine earning power'.<sup>37</sup> More men were employed on a system of piece-rate payments, leaving women in a disadvantageous position.

The Soviet government and trade unions collected detailed data on the changing structure and composition of the industrial labour force and wage rates during the interwar period. Some of this data has found its way into publications, but much more survives in the archives. These studies took place at the level of individual enterprises and in different regions of the country. In their generalised and summative format they offer an overview of the composition of the Soviet labour force according to levels of skill, and thereby wage differentials, as well as sex, age and even occasionally ethnic origin.

In addition to the studies of labour force composition, the government statistical bureaux undertook the collection of detailed wage data in the mid-1920s and again in 1934. These data set out the actual average basic monetary wage payments made to workers employed in different sectors of industry for the whole month of March in the years from 1924 to 1928, and in October in 1934.<sup>38</sup> Some of the published data give an indication of the proportion of the labour force employed on a system of piece-rate payments, the average level of skill, including grade coefficient, the number of days worked during the month, as well as the proportional breakdown of wage payments to

workers according to a set of cohorts. They also give an indication of the different rates of pay earned by women and men.

Women's wage rates remained substantially lower than men's throughout the interwar period, and this contributed to their general social inequality.<sup>39</sup> It is commonly accepted that this was because women were less skilled (with lower levels of literacy, education and vocational training) than men, and that they worked fewer hours. According to this argument, therefore, women were in receipt of a 'market wage' which reflected their lesser contribution to industrial productivity and output. Kingsbury and Fairchild suggest:

Women, at present, still have less training and education than men; as their lives are now organised it may be that they have less enduring energy. At all events, they do work requiring less skill, on the average, than men do and their output tends to be lower. They earn, therefore, a correspondingly less wage than men earn, but only a correspondingly less wage.<sup>40</sup>

The relative improvement in women's earnings in the 1920s, it has been suggested, can be accounted for by slight changes in the length of the working day (women now worked longer hours than men in some industries) and by the fact that more women were in paid employment, largely at the expense of the jobs of young workers who were being displaced from the labour force.<sup>41</sup> The widening of pay differentials in the 1930s, brought about by Stalin's reforms of wage payments, benefited white-collar employees rather than blue-collar workers, and tended to raise the wages of those in already more highly paid jobs, who tended to be men rather than women.<sup>42</sup> A more detailed study of the available wage data allows us to test these hypotheses.

### WOMEN'S WAGES IN THE 1920s

An investigation of the materials and statistical data about the differences in wage rates between women and men in the 1920s reveals the following trends.<sup>43</sup> On average for all sectors of industry, the relative difference between women and men's daily and monthly earnings in the years 1924–1926 varied insignificantly. Women's wages ranged around 64.3% of men's daily wages and 63% of monthly levels of pay. The gap between women's and men's earnings was far less pronounced in the light industrial sectors, where the majority of women workers were employed, than in the male-dominated heavy industrial sectors, where women were more likely to be employed as semi-skilled, unskilled and auxiliary workers.

Statistical data offer a more detailed breakdown of wages. Women were more likely to be located in the low to middle wage ranges, whilst men were more likely to be found in the middle to high ranges. Only 0.5% of women in industrial employment, compared with 13.4% of men, earned more than one hundred rubles per month in 1926. Yet the differences between women's and men's earnings can only be partly accounted for by the fact that women workers

were concentrated in the unskilled and lesser skilled, and thereby the lower paying, jobs.

A more detailed study of the daily wage rates for women and men employed in the same jobs, that is of 'equal pay for equal work', reveals the extent of the wage gap. Even for skilled and semi-skilled workers in a variety of industries women's pay ranged from a low of 72.2% (lathe operators in the military supply industries in March 1924) to 99.1% (dyers in the cotton textiles industry also in March 1924). Whereas some of the jobs investigated witnessed improvements in women's relative pay rates by March 1926, others saw a decline (including dyers).

Rates of pay were even more differentiated for women and men in unskilled jobs. For example, unskilled women workers in the paper industry earned only 51.6% of the equivalent male monthly wage in 1926. Women in the garment industry fared much better, receiving 94.2% of the equivalent male wage. The official explanation for this discrepancy pointed to women's weaker physical capacity and the ready supply of labour for such jobs. In unskilled jobs requiring less physical strength, in the food and printing industry, for example, the gap between women and men's earnings was significantly less pronounced.

The patterns of wage differentiation found in industry were repeated in the white-collar sector. A study of the earnings of white-collar workers in 1926 revealed a far lower level of differentiation between women and men.<sup>44</sup> Yet even here, where there was a potential to earn higher wages than in industry, women were concentrated in the lower and middle wage ranges, and were significantly less likely to be found in the more highly paid jobs. Only 5.7% of women, compared with 23.7% of men, earned more than one hundred rubles per month.

For white-collar workers, the earnings of women and men employed in the same job could vary greatly: women book-keepers earned only 74.4% of their male counterparts in 1926, although female supervisors earned 96.7% of the wages of their male colleagues. More women were to be found in the lower paying white-collar jobs, and men dominated the professions attracting higher rates of pay.

A study of women workers in the textile industry in March 1927 offers a variety of explanations for women's lower levels of pay.<sup>45</sup> This study suggested that women's monthly earnings were lower than men's, even in comparison with daily earnings, because women were more often absent from work, simply 'resting' or because of leave relating to pregnancy and child birth. (It is important to note here, however, that other studies of absenteeism in industry provide evidence that would challenge this claim, especially if maternity leave is taken into account). As in other sectors of industry, women are found clustered in the lower income groups, with only 15.1% earning more than 60 rubles per month, compared with 50.5% of men in this sector. Women received lower wages, it was argued, because they had fewer qualifications and lower levels of skill than men. The average grade for women workers in the textile industry was 4.1, as compared with 5.7 for men. For the textile industry as a whole, the vast majority of women (almost 90%) were working in grades three to six, with extremely few rising to grade seven or above. As in other sectors of industry,

mostly men were to be found in the higher grades, especially grades nine to thirteen. The absence of women from the higher grades was offered as an explanatory factor accounting for their lower levels of pay.

Wage differences were far less defined *within* individual grades. Yet, even here, men were often assigned a slightly higher grade coefficient than women working on the same job. As a result, women's wages could be as much as 13% lower than men's for the same job. Few of these jobs placed significant physical demands on workers. Male 'strength', therefore, could not in itself explain this difference. Some tasks, it was argued, were slightly more complex than others, and women were often assigned to the less complex tasks within the same grade as male colleagues. Yet, even taking this into account, in most jobs men's wages still exceeded women's by up to 8%. Occasionally, such variations in grading and coefficients sometimes favoured women, who could earn more than their male colleagues for the same, or broadly similar, tasks. Where women were paid less, it was argued, they were marginally less 'qualified' for the job.

A variety of factors accounted for these differences in levels of 'qualifications', most notably age and length of work experience (*stazh*). Women workers in the textile industry were, on the whole, younger and less experienced in industrial employment than their male colleagues. Yet even where women did have a long record of industrial employment, it appears that they were less likely to be promoted to more highly skilled work than men. Despite significant increases in wage payments in the 1920s, there is no evidence of improvement in women's relative wage rates for the textile industry as a whole from 1924 to 1927. In fact, there had been no improvement even over the pre-revolutionary differentials in pay between women and men.

The study of women workers in the textile industry also includes an analysis of the household budgets of textile workers' families using data collected in November 1926. In view of the relatively low wages paid to textile workers, secondary wages made an important contribution to the incomes of families headed by textile workers. In such families, secondary wages constituted 28.3% of household income, compared with only 7% in other households. In these years, the wives and adult daughters of male textile workers were more likely to be in employment than those of married male workers in other sectors. Women in this sector, therefore, unless they themselves were heads of households, were regarded as secondary wage earners. This factor alone, it could be argued, may have been used to justify their lower rates of pay. As may be expected, time budget surveys revealed that women spent marginally less time than men working for wages, but only a matter of a few minutes per day, but they had by far the greater responsibility for unpaid household management.

### CUSTOMARY WAGES

Not all contemporary observers were willing to accept the official explanations for the inequalities of pay between women and men. Two case studies illustrate this point.

In a study of women's labour in the Moscow region, Nefedov argued that women workers had traditionally been paid less than men simply because they were women.<sup>46</sup> Nefedov argued that such factors as the level of productivity, the costs and benefits of employing women instead of men and the impact of labour protection measures had not been adequately studied. For Moscow industries as a whole, by the 1920s women's wages had improved relative to men's in comparison with pre-revolutionary levels of pay (using data for 1908). Women received only 59.9% of the male wage in 1908, but this had increased to 70.1% by 1923. Yet, for some reason, the proportion had declined again to 64.1% by 1925. Individual sectors of industry offered different results, however. What appears to have been the case from the statistical evidence provided by Nefedov can be summarised briefly: the industrial sectors where the discrepancies between women and men's pay had been greatest (metallurgy and printing, for example) witnessed a closing of the pay gap by the 1920s; but where women had received a greater proportion of the male wage than average, the pay gap had increased. The most notable decline in women's relative wages was witnessed in the chemical industry. Women earned 84.7% of the male wage in 1908, but this had declined to 73.1% by 1925.

Nefedov argued that it was no longer acceptable to pay a woman less simply because she was a woman (using the derogatory term *baba* in inverted commas). Workers needed to take 'equal pay for equal work' seriously, and adopt this as practice in their collective and tariff agreements. In future, improvements in women's wages would result from wage rises for all workers.<sup>47</sup> Wage rises could also be the outcome of increases in productivity and, most importantly, improvements in women's qualifications.<sup>48</sup>

A 1929 study by Goltsman focused specifically on the wages of women white-collar workers.<sup>49</sup> Goltsman noted that women were less likely to find employment in the most demanding and complex jobs in the administrative and service sector, but they dominated the more simple and routine tasks, such as typing and cleaning. Many important administrative posts, and even jobs in trade, had been closed to women in tsarist times, meaning that after 1917 women had little experience of professional practice. According to Goltsman, in some areas of work conservative attitudes had survived the revolution, and many still considered women by nature unsuited to professional employment. Such attitudes also hindered women's professional promotion.

In low and middle level administrative and service jobs, where women and men worked alongside each other, Goltsman noted that men received from 10 to 15% higher wages than women. This pay gap increased significantly in the more highly paid areas of white-collar work, where far fewer women were employed. 'Conservative attitudes' on the part of employers and supervisors were blamed for the persistence of wage inequalities. As earlier studies had shown, even where women and men were employed in exactly the same job, men were often paid more than women, by as much as 25–35% in book-keeping, for example. This study also recognised that the relative rates of pay for women and men varied between the major cities and towns, as well as between enterprises.

## WOMEN'S WAGES IN THE 1930s

There is far less data available for the study of women's wages in the 1930s. Despite the continued systematic gathering of wage data by the Soviet statistical agencies, in this decade rates of pay were rarely differentiated by sex. The data used here relate mostly to October 1934, with the addition of a few case studies located in the archives.

In October 1934, the Central Administration of National Economic Records (TsUNKhU) of the State Planning Commission (Gosplan) and the Statistical Sector of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (VTsSPS) gathered wages data from four separate machine-building enterprises.<sup>50</sup> The report, which does not appear to have been published, cautioned that the limited scope of the data provided insufficient evidence to be able to draw any general conclusions about women's wages, but it could be used to illustrate the typical situation in a number of enterprises. The study included only those workers who were employed for the whole month of October 1934 and only those tasks where women and men worked alongside each other.

The report noted that women's level of skill, and consequently their wages, still lagged behind that of men. Women's predominant placement in the lower grades was accounted for by their younger age and shorter work experience. Yet, as was acknowledged, this was not a sufficient explanation. Again, this report complained of conservatism on the part of economic managers, who were reluctant to promote women to skilled work. The report offered details of hourly rates of pay, where, on the whole, women were paid less than men. However, there was significant evidence to suggest that in some of the female-dominated lower grades women's hourly rates of pay exceeded men's, but in the higher grades men were always paid more than women. The wage gap at these grades, it was argued, resulted partly from the different levels of technical know-how and productivity. The report concluded that, 'the discrepancy in wages between men and women is a consequence of women's lower qualifications and their lesser production experience'.<sup>51</sup>

The limited amount of published statistical data on women's wages in this period possibly draws on this data in part.<sup>52</sup> The published data is limited to the machine-building and the textile industries in October 1934, and a small number of occupations on state farms in September 1934. Despite the paucity of statistical data, there is again evidence to suggest that women workers in the lower grades were sometimes paid wages that exceeded those of their male colleagues. However, the wage gap moved rapidly in men's favour as the grade of work became higher.

## CONCLUSION

Even if it could be shown convincingly that women were paid a market wage in the Soviet Union in the interwar period, we would also need to examine the customary practices, sometimes supported by legal enactment, which denied

women access to training and jobs in such a way that they could not improve their levels of skill and increase their earnings. A 'glass ceiling' clearly existed in the interwar Soviet Union, which women workers in industry and women white-collar employees found difficult to move beyond. Training and promotion took them so far, but rarely to the top. Long held prejudices against working women and sex discrimination in the workplace did not disappear overnight after the October revolution. From the evidence examined here, the Bolshevik agenda for the introduction and development of a socialist wages policy in the interwar period was far from dominated by a genuine discussion of the implementation of the principle of 'equal pay for equal work'.

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## Emancipation at the Crossroads Between the ‘Woman Question’ and the ‘National Question’

*Yulia Gradszkova*

The Commission for the Improvement of the Work and the Everyday Life of Women (*Kommissia po uluchsheniyu truda i byta zhenshchin*: KUTBZh) was created by a decision of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) in 1926 and functioned up to mid-1932. In many of the documents preserved in the archive collections it was also referred to as the Commission for UTB (*uluchshenia truda i byta*) for women of ‘culturally backward people’ (*kulturno-otstalykh narodnostei*) or for ‘women of the Orient’ (*zhenshchin vostoka*).<sup>1</sup> The Central Commission in Moscow, working alongside the Commissions in different Soviet Republics and autonomous regions, was (together with the Communist Party Department for Work amongst Women: the *Zhenotdel*) an important Soviet institution responsible for the emancipation of women in the territories of the former Russian Empire. The Commission had a particularly difficult role due to its dual emancipatory task: to organise the emancipation of women within the context of the Bolshevik approach to the ‘emancipation of nations’. Thus, the Commission’s task from the very beginning could be seen as contradictory: it had to implement the project of women’s emancipation initiated in the new Bolshevik centre of Moscow, but the history of national movements at the beginning of the twentieth century revealed enormous levels of discontent amongst the non-Russian population of the empire with the politics of the centre.

This chapter explores the intersection of Soviet policies on women’s emancipation with the politics of emancipation of nations, starting with those who were classified before 1917 as *inorodtsy* (non-Russian and usually non-Christian

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subjects of Imperial Russia).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, at the heart of this study is the work of KUTBZh for the emancipation of women not belonging to the core of the empire, those approached as different and identified as ‘other’ by their religion, language, culture or traditions. How were the goals for emancipation presented? How was the work organised and what problems did it meet? What was the impact of the Commission’s emancipatory project?

In order to answer these questions, this chapter examines the materials of the Commission held at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) in Moscow. Particular attention is paid to the Commission’s organisational structure, management and correspondence. The study also highlights problems and contradictions inherent in the Commission’s work. For a closer exploration of the local and regional context, the chapter examines in more detail the work of the Commissions in the Volga-Urals region (the autonomous republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortan). This closer look at one particular region allows the Soviet emancipation project to be placed into a broader historical perspective of women’s emancipation that predated the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.<sup>3</sup>

The archive of the Central Commission contains more than 220 files that provide a general overview of the Commission’s work, its structure and impact. The documents indicate that the Commission was dealing with a broad geographical territory and addressed many spheres of women’s lives, including work, maternity and health. A large part of the collection consists of official documents written for the purpose of organising emancipation work: reports, protocols and circulars. In addition, personal letters and related documents can also be found in the archive files. The archival sources, however, allow only a limited assessment of how the Commission’s work was perceived by non-Russian women or how well-known it was. For this study, therefore, to the materials of the Central Commission (preserved in GARF) were added some materials from the National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan (NART), in Kazan. On the whole, these documents (at least those available in Russian language) do not differ significantly in style or content from those found in the files of the Central Commission in Moscow.

According to Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, the European Enlightenment and the development of liberalism complicated the organisation of colonial politics in European countries because of Enlightenment thinking’s endorsement of universal principles and inclusive social rights.<sup>4</sup> Even if the Bolshevik policies of forced modernisation and Sovietisation of the territories of the former Russian empire cannot be directly compared to the politics of the more ‘classic European empires’ of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it remains important to note that the Bolsheviks declared, if not liberal but still, universal principles of emancipation based on equality of all working peoples independent of their race, gender or ethnicity. These declarations brought many complexities and conflicts into the Bolshevik governance of the territories that for centuries were marked by their colonial difference.<sup>5</sup> It was difficult to combine keeping territories ‘in the East’ under control with plans for giving

rights to the people of former colonies. The specifics of early Soviet politics can be investigated using the concept of the 'basic tension of the empires' described by Cooper and Stoler as the tension of establishing and re-establishing 'otherness': 'the otherness of colonized persons was neither inherent nor stable; his or her difference had to be defined and maintained', in a new political and historical context of post-revolutionary Russia.<sup>6</sup> Thus, exploration of how differences among women were established and maintained in the process of the Commission's work is an important aim of this chapter.

'Soviet modernity' is a concept provoking much discussion, but many researchers of Soviet history have agreed that Soviet development from the 1920s to the 1950s had many aspects that allow us to compare it with 'developments throughout Europe during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries'.<sup>7</sup> Among these aspects were the 'spread of bureaucracy and state control, efforts to manage and mobilise the population, scientism and attempts to rationalise and categorise society, and the rise of mass politics'. According to Kotsonis, 'Modernity as a conceptual framework does not belittle the coercive boundaries imposed by the party, but it allows us to submerge Bolshevism into larger trajectories, a larger ethos, and a more encompassing analytic rubric.'<sup>8</sup>

This conceptual framework helps in the analysis of Soviet policies on the emancipation of non-Russian women from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s from the perspective of the transformation of colonial politics within the search for modernisation of the country and the universalisation of norms for its inhabitants. The Soviet emancipation of women (including those from former colonies and borderlands) had as its aim the creation of a new subject of Soviet modernity. How this work was implemented and how the otherness of 'Other' women was negotiated and reconstituted in the process of such a transformation provides the focus of this chapter.

### KUTBZH AND SOVIET INSTITUTIONS FOR WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION

KUTBZh was not the first and is not the best known of the Soviet institutions for women's emancipation. Previous scholarship has focused most attention on the *Zhenotdel*: the special Communist Party department for work amongst women created in 1919 on the basis of the commissions for agitation and propaganda amongst women.<sup>9</sup> According to Richard Stites, Aleksandra Kollontai, who was in charge of the *Zhenotdel* for much of the 1920s and preferred to keep a distance from feminism, called on Russian women—seen as mainly passive and lacking revolutionary consciousness—to become more involved in the construction of the new life.<sup>10</sup> Despite the fact that the work of the *Zhenotdel* was primarily conducted amongst urban women, Stites suggested that it was also successful in 'raising the consciousness of poor and backward women'.<sup>11</sup> According to Elizabeth Wood, however, the *Zhenotdel*, up to the moment of its liquidation by the Communist Party in 1930,

experienced many problems, including the 'dependence of women's sections on party largess; the primary attention to women's negative qualities (their backwardness, stagnation, ignorance); the co-optation of women to serve as a force for discipline in the regime'.<sup>12</sup> She noticed also that the financial burden connected with the transformation of everyday life was enormous and women's demands on 'real budgetary commitments' were not met.<sup>13</sup>

It is possible to suppose that problems in the work of the *Zhenotdel* and the need for spreading women's emancipation to the country's peripheries led to the creation of an additional commission, the work of which is the focus of this chapter. The decision to create the Commission was taken on 20 September 1926, but most of the documents about its practical activity date from 1928 to 1930. On 15 July 1930, the Commission was renamed as the 'Committee for the Improvement of the Work and Everyday Life of Working and Peasant Women'. As its delayed start on practical issues, the Commission's later reports and other materials suggest that changes in its functions were also slow to take shape. Indeed, despite the prescribed focus of the Committee on working and peasant women in general, during 1930 and 1931 to a great extent it continued working for the emancipation of women from national minorities (*natsionalka*).

KUTBZh did not have such prominent female leaders as those of the *Zhenotdel* (Inessa Armand and Aleksandra Kollontai) and it seems to have experienced many problems with its accommodation within the system of Soviet institutions, including frequent changes of chairs and secretaries.<sup>14</sup> At the outset, from 1926 the Commission was headed by Sanzhar Asfendiyarov,<sup>15</sup> who was later replaced by Abulhair Dosov.<sup>16</sup> The vice-chair during the first years of its existence was Serafima Lyubimova.<sup>17</sup> A prominent role in the work of the Commission was also played by *Zhenotdel* representative, Antonina Nukhrat.<sup>18</sup> The Commission consisted of representatives from the people's commissariats of education, agriculture, land, welfare, finances, law and nationalities; representatives from the *Zhenotdel* and the central trade unions (VTsSPS) were also included in its membership. The finances of the Commission had to be secured through the respective government bodies taking part in the Commission's work. While this structure seems to be aimed at stability, the documents reveal many problems in the coordination, financing and implementation of its work. The Committee was liquidated by a decision of VTsIK on 10 July 1932.

### (RE)ESTABLISHING 'OTHERNESS'

While KUTBZh's main task was formulated as a need to work with women of the 'culturally backward people/nations' or 'women of the Orient', different documents indicate that members of the Commission experienced particular difficulties in defining and redefining the main object of their concern. Thus, the head of the Central Commission from 1927, Dosov, claimed that differences existed between various national minorities: while some, like Poles or Latvians, were not of concern when speaking about the need to encourage women into paid employment, it was 'the work of women of the backward nationalities' that

had to provide the main focus.<sup>19</sup> The hierarchies between women depending on their ethnic origins were discussed endlessly and addressed at different levels. Together with a more general division between 'the Orient' and the centre of the new Soviet state (which mainly coincided with those of the former empire), some examples of local classifications can be found in the documents. For example, a protocol of a meeting of women-activists (*obshchestvennitsy*) in Ingushetia, stated that comrade Gorchkhakov, head of the local executive committee (TsIK), claimed that an Ingush woman was 'the most backward among women from the mountain region' and that only a Chechen woman lagged 'behind her'.<sup>20</sup>

The titles 'woman of the Orient' (*vostochnitsa*) and 'woman of national minorities' (*natsionalka*) were widely used as bureaucratic terms, indicating the object of the 'work' and the reason for the functioning of the Commission. Following Edward Said's interpretation of the Orient as not simply a geographic name but an indication of an obstacle to development and a problem to be solved, the *vostochnitsa* from the Commission's documents cannot be seen as a simple geographical definition of women living in the Eastern part of the country.<sup>21</sup> On the contrary, *vostochnitsa* obviously constituted a problem, an obstacle to the progress of revolution and the victory of communism in the Soviet state.

'Backward Oriental women' were presented as being in need of special attention on the part of Soviet modernisers, but the documents indicate that, not infrequently, this special attention in itself provoked their further stigmatisation and qualification as 'Other'. A report from Kazakhstan, for example, discussed a failed attempt to recruit local women to factory work in Petropavlovsk. It stated that the food canning factory only managed to employ 17 Kazakh women (out of 600 workers altogether) and that only three continued to work there up to the end of the year. Indeed, the factory administration did not regard Kazakh women as being capable workers. In order to defend the practice of employing Kazakh women and keeping them in the factory, a member of the local KUTBZh appealed to the special education these women had received: 'All these Kazakh women have finished special courses, they gained the necessary knowledge and, when accepted to work at the factory, would not go inside to deal with the meat, and the administration was accused of poor labour protection measures.'<sup>22</sup> This argument, however, made in accordance with the social responsibility thinking of the modernity ethos, together with defending Kazakh women's right to work in the factory, simultaneously produced the object of the Commission's work—in this case Kazakh women—as 'Other', different from mainstream workers, with their backwardness being a characteristic based on belonging to a particular ethnic group. Indeed, even modern knowledge gained from their attendance at courses seems not to change the racialised status assigned to them on the basis of their national belonging and ethnic culture.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, it must be noted that the description of the Commission's activities from different regions includes many examples of civilising projects similar to

those that were applied as a part of colonial policies in other parts of the world, including the Russian Empire.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the local Commissions frequently taught women skills and abilities that were considered universal and that people in the metropolis (read here for Slavic/Russian culture—‘civilised’) were assumed to have. For example, the Commission in Bashkortostan organised courses to teach Bashkir women how to grow vegetables, and red yurts in the Buryat-Mongolian Republic organised special workshops where women learnt housekeeping skills.<sup>25</sup> The report from that region proudly informed the Central Commission that 19 women had learnt how to wash clothes and to perform other elements of housekeeping: ‘all the time they wash them (clothes) at home, wash the floor in yurts and bake bread’.<sup>26</sup>

### ADMINISTRATING CHANGE

Archive documents indicate that the Central Commission as well as Commissions in different regions experienced many problems, including those with finances and employees as well as with the practical implementation of their mission to transforming gender norms. This transformation was administered from the centre and had to be implemented according to the instructions produced under direct party control. As earlier research on KUTBZh shows, however, Commissions in the regions often experienced problems with finding locals willing to work with them and, in particular, to be their chairperson.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in many cases local Commissions were led by men, members of the government and party apparatus, busy with many other responsibilities and not interested in additional work with women’s issues. In Yakut Autonomous Republic, for example, the Commission did not have any paid employees. All of its activity had to be organised by ‘volunteers’, who usually already had other responsibilities in party and government institutions. The report from Yakutia stated that members of the Commission ‘are busy with their duties in one or other office. Thus they do not have experience of working for the Commission’.<sup>28</sup> This most probably indicates lack of experience of work with women’s issues. The report from Autonomous Republic of Crimea stated that the Commission asked the Crimean Executive Committee on many occasions about finding the money for at least one paid employee. Money, however, was not forthcoming and it was ‘a [male] comrade responsible for the recruitment of Tatars into industrial production who was assigned to work on the Commission as well’.<sup>29</sup> The lack of staff and interest were most probably the reasons why the Commissions in many regions (for example, also in Mari Republic) were formed much later than was required by the centre.<sup>30</sup>

The lack of financial support for the practical work of the Commissions was another problem often brought up in the reports as an explanation for the Commissions’ low effectiveness. For example, the report from Buryat-Mongolian Republic (where in contrast to from many other regions, the Commission was organised relatively early, in 1926) stated: ‘The work of the Commission during last year, 1926, did not achieve any results, one of the most



important reasons being the lack of money.<sup>31</sup> Thus, solicitations for financing and complaints about the lack of 'means' were repeated elements in letters and reports to the Central Commission from those working in the regions. During the earlier years of KUTBZh work (before the New Economic Policy was fully abandoned) it seems that regional Commissions were ready to experiment with different kinds of small enterprises in order to generate additional finances. Indeed, in her speech to the meeting of the members of the Central Commission in Moscow on 7 March 1928, *Zhenotdel* representative Antonina Nukhrat implied that different institutions created by the local Commissions in order to secure financial independence—such as houses for homeless mothers, workshops, cafeterias and 'even pubs' (*pivnushki*)—were not viewed positively by the party.<sup>32</sup>

Whilst official KUTBZh documents mostly do not offer scope to explore the relationships between members of the Commissions and the local female population, a few protocols and letters allow at least some glimpses into these issues. Thus, the delegates at a meeting of Ingush women-activists raised questions not only about the slow pace of change in everyday life and the lack of interest by many Soviet organisations in women's problems (such as the lack of protection in cases of wife battering or a former husband's refusal of support his ex-wife following divorce), but also about corruption involving the head of the local executive committee promoting women's emancipation: 'a female relative of your brother received a pension, but why don't we get one?'<sup>33</sup>

It is important to note that the Commission had several control functions and was encouraged to apply to a corresponding ministry 'in cases where there were problems' in the work of state and social organisations dealing with women's everyday lives.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the work of the Commission presupposed broad cooperation with different Soviet and social organisations, such as the Red Cross, the Institution for the Protection of Maternity and Childhood, the Scientific Organisation of Orientalists (*vostokovedy*), film studio Vostokkino and local and central museums. Indeed, archive documents reveal information about expeditions aimed at studying the work and everyday life of working and peasant women organised through such cooperation. Some documents found in the KUTBZh files indicate, however, that a major part of the 'scientific analysis' of the work and everyday life of 'women of the Orient' was produced in accordance with a primordial paradigm and combined classical ethnology with revolutionary rhetoric. Such a combination usually contributed to racialisation of the object of research. For example, a report on women's rights and marriage age in Kazakhstan, signed by medical doctor A. Stusser, indicates Kazakhstan had cases of child-marriage generally deemed very dangerous for woman's health and which often led to childlessness, but it was claimed Kazakh women, on the whole, differed from women in the central regions with respect to their sexuality: sexual maturity in Kazakh women came much earlier than 18. This was explained by a number of factors, including the local climate, early involvement of young girls in work, overcrowded homes and the lack of 'intelligent interests and hobbies'.<sup>35</sup> Such an evaluation could be

seen as a marker of imperial tensions and a way of renegotiating differences rather than erasing them.

Together with the broad political campaigns, both central and local KUTBZh not infrequently had to deal with individual women's problems. For example, the Central Commission was involved in a conflict between a Moscow school administration and a fired female *natsional'ka* teacher, in securing a prosthetic appliance for a female inhabitant of Makhachkala and in finding money for the medical treatment of students (*kursantki-natsional'ki*) on a special course for the future clubs' workers.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it is easy to suppose that the functions of different KUTBZh staff members were not very clear and the work itself was far from well-organised.

### CHANGING 'BYT': SUBVERTING THE 'NATION'?

Even though the title of the Commission had different variations, all contained the words 'work' and 'everyday life' (*byt*). How was the improvement of work and everyday life seen by members of the Commissions? As we know, the Bolshevik modernisation project had many components, from work discipline to new technologies, from hygiene to new gender roles.<sup>37</sup> How was this variety of ideas expressed in the documents dedicated to the transformation of the life and work of women whose 'otherness' was regarded as self-evident?

In reading KUTBZh materials, it appears that the ultimate goal of KUTBZh work could be interpreted as the transformation of women of the 'backward peoples' into 'new Soviet women' able to work for the Soviet state and correspond to its norms. In a clear difference from the Russian (and Slavic, urbanised or 'civilised') woman, the Commission's object of work needed not only literacy and political activity, but, first of all, the transformation of their bodies through separation from their ethnic traditions and norms, the symbols of a collective body of the nations to which the women belonged. In order to do this without reviewing the conflicts of the past provoked by imperial policies of domination, most of the changes in everyday life were advocated with the help of references to the ideals of progress, including higher living standards and better health for women and children. Thus, the traditional garment of Kalmykian female dress—the laced bodice (*kamzol*), which restricted the growth of young women's breasts and impaired their breathing—was declared dangerous, leading to deformations of the female body that resulted in difficulties during childbirth.<sup>38</sup> Mari traditional techniques of producing clothes were presented in the reports by the Mari autonomous region's Commission as dangerous for health due to the particular movements employed during the weaving process.<sup>39</sup> The Commission also placed special emphasis on its work challenging so called 'everyday crimes' (*bytovye prestuplenia*) encompassing polygamy, bride-kidnapping and bride-price.

In order to live a healthy and modern life, the 'woman of Orient' had to be removed from established practices of control over her body (that is, from control by 'her men'), and moved under the control of the Soviet modernising

state. The new woman, deprived of the symbols of her subjugation, was expected to change her behaviour, including her ways of communicating with men. It is important to note here that KUTBZh documents leave an impression that it was mainly women who had to take on the responsibility for the changes of customs and gender roles; men were not expected to make any effort or to be taught too much. Men were punished only in cases of legal violation, such as polygamy, but their potential for participation in housework or childcare was not discussed or promoted by the Commission.

KUTBZh documents do not provide much information about resistance to and sabotage of Soviet policies of emancipation. Following Northrop's research on the unveiling campaign in Uzbekistan, however, it is reasonable to assume that in some cases the work of the Commissions could lead to a strengthening rather than disappearance of 'backward customs' and to more repressive measures being introduced by the Soviet state apparatus.<sup>40</sup> However, the documents examined for this study of the work of KUTBZh do not provide sufficient evidence for this to be explored in further detail. Commission documents imply that resistance to the Soviet emancipation of *natsionalka* could be identified by the small numbers of women activists, students or kindergartens as well as through sabotage of Soviet policies on education. For example, a protocol of the commission of the Buryat Republic of 13 April 1928 notes one of the regions where the local administration took the decision to shorten the school year for girls 'due to agricultural work'.<sup>41</sup> In a few cases, it was the members of the local Commissions themselves who voiced concerns about the policies of 'emancipation' organised by the centre. Indeed, the verbatim report of the meeting of the Central Commission from 7 March 1928 shows that a delegate from Nizhnii Novgorod, Tikhomirova, raised the issue of women's poor health from a new perspective. She stated that in her region young women often 'got sick' with 'female illnesses' while working in those professions to which they were being sent. This speech, however, is incomplete; Tikhomirova was interrupted.<sup>42</sup>

The scarcity of resources and cases of resistance were revealed by special celebratory events, but indicated, not least to the Commission's members themselves, that changes were slowly on the way. An important occasion each year was 8 March, International Women's Day. A report from the Yakut Republic proudly stated that as a part of celebrations for International Women's Day a mill was built in one 'remote backward district' of the Republic in order to show the potential of the new life as 'emancipating' Yakut women from very hard daily work and from 'expending in vain their energy and health'.<sup>43</sup> The demonstrative effect of such an act (and similar acts in other national regions), however, should not be overestimated: indeed it was only one remote district that received such a mill.

In most cases, local KUTBZh work centred on a few initiatives: red yurts serving as clubs for nomadic people, agricultural and sewing courses or houses for working women (*dom truzhenitsy*) functioning as clubs and exhibitions centres in the autonomous republics. Overall, most KUTBZh documents note

the difficulties rather than the successes of such institutions. For example, a school for sewing and designing clothes that was first opened in Buryatiya in 1924 as a part of the fight against prostitution, from 1926 fell under the auspices of KUTBZh. The school had 43 students, but accumulated many problems including unfurnished dormitories, lack of machines and finance as well as low productivity. In addition, the school's products were so expensive that working people could not afford to buy them.<sup>44</sup> Yet the school was presented in the report as one of the important projects of women's emancipation in the republic.

Finally, while modernisation of work and everyday life was guided by a civilising logic, some of the practices of the Commission looked surprisingly different from mainstream Soviet policies. For example, women in several regions were taught skills for improving their individual farm productivity, and Uzbek women were taught to be buyers and consumers (as a way of overcoming female seclusion). Indeed, in agreement with the Commission, a cooperative shop in one region of Uzbekistan once a week served only women.<sup>45</sup>

### THE VOLGA–URALS REGION

The Volga–Urals region's geographic definition changed back and forth from identification as an Oriental or Eastern periphery of the Russian Empire to its placement in the imperial heartland.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it is a location geographically considered to be Central Russia during the late Soviet and post-Soviet period, but it was simultaneously a territory that had been conquered by the Muscovites in the sixteenth century and then colonised.<sup>47</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century the region was known as an area of the Muslim national enlightenment movement (*jadidism*). As a part of *jadidist* ideas, women's education was seen as important for the development of the national culture and for emancipation of the nation by Tatar and Bashkir intellectuals: educated women could guarantee a better upbringing of their children and provide the nation with a better chance of resisting the politics of the imperial centre.<sup>48</sup> Similar movements were characteristic of Central Asia and other Muslim parts of the empire.<sup>49</sup> However, Soviet-era publications about the pre-revolutionary period usually presented emancipation as completely absent. According to Timur Kocaoglu, this was done in order to celebrate later Soviet achievements.<sup>50</sup>

What can KUTBZh documents on work in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan add to our knowledge about the contradictions of the Soviet emancipation of 'other' women? The documents show that Commissions in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan experienced the same financial problems and lack of staff as other Commissions. Indeed, even in those cases when the Central Commission supported regional initiatives, it was local resources that had to be found for their development in the later period. For example, KUTBZh documents from Tatarstan show that the initial phase of establishment of preschools in Tatarstan was supported by the centre: a kindergarten for 20 children was opened in the peasant woman's corner in one of the cantons. However, during the following year the Tatarstan Commission informed the canton administration that from

1928/1929 the kindergarten would have to be financed from the regional budget.<sup>51</sup> Another KUTBZh document, on the organisation of agricultural courses for women, shows that the Tatarstan Commission could not fully finance such a structure: in order to organise a vegetable garden and provide seeds costing 500 rubles it had to apply for a loan from an agrarian union.<sup>52</sup> Similar problems could be observed in Bashkortostan. Indeed, Marina Maksimova, the secretary of the Bashkir Commission in her personal letter to the Central Commission wrote: 'Please, tell me if we could receive some money from the Central Commission? We have a control figure of 65 thousand, but not one canton has allocated a single kopeck [to our work] in their budget.'<sup>53</sup>

As for women's work and its changing patterns, the situation in these two republics was similar to that in many other regions. 'It is only during the re-election of the Soviets and on 8 March that work among women and their promotion (*vydvizhenie*) is remembered', stated a report from Bashkortostan.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, in another letter, Maksimova describes the problems experienced in the development of the House for Bashkir Working Women in Ufa: 'The time for planning budgets is approaching. I feel that we'll have to go through the battle for [the preservation of] the House of Working Women'.<sup>55</sup>

At the same time, as the example of Faizullina, a secretary of the Commission in Tatarstan and a former pupil of the *jadidist* school, indicates, in the earlier period of its development, the Tatarstan Commission was successful in attracting some enthusiastic native Muslim women who had grown up under the influence of the national and anti-colonial project of women's emancipation. Asking to be forgiven for her bad Russian ('I don't write correctly in Russian sometimes, but somehow you'll understand'), Faizullina expressed great interest in the development of Tatar women, and in particular in the protection of maternity and childhood.<sup>56</sup> Her enthusiasm is visible in her letter to the Central Commission: 'I'll definitely come to (Moscow) for the congress on the protection of motherhood and children, I'm still a very active supporter of them. I'm drawn all the time to work more in this sphere. Sometimes I'm afraid that I'll give too much attention to it in my work for the Commission'.<sup>57</sup>

At the same time, two letters from Maksimova from the Bashkortostan Commission expose a rather different attitude. Maksimova seems to see women's emancipation as 'work' that can be performed in different parts of the former empire. In her letters she expressed, among other things, an interest in spending holidays in a sanatorium near Moscow and in her transfer to a new place of work 'more to the south'.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, the letters indicate also that the Commissions aimed to place local women's activism under the control of central authorities (even if some confusion of functions between different Soviet organisations was in evidence). Faizullina, for example, asked the Central Commission for an explanation: 'Comrade Akivis, if you have time, tell me in detail how the commission should work with women-activists (*obschestvennitsy*). I think myself that it's the Commission that should do this work, but our *Zhenotdel* said that I'm wrong and that it's the executive committees who have to work with them'. Similar

problems are discussed by Maksimova with respect to the House of Bashkir Working Women:

There's so much noise around the House of Working Women; there are 146 women; this means a lot of gossiping. And there are many "owners" (*khozyaeva*); issues are discussed with Ivanova (representative of the *Zhenotdel*), with me, with the head of the House, etc. Thus, they get different decisions all the time. And they don't want to solve all the problems directly with the head of the house even if we insist on this and explain it to the pupils and the teachers. Mustafina (the new head) lacks experience and comes to Ivanova or to me with every small problem.<sup>59</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Soviet solution to the 'Woman Question' has for a long time been on the periphery of researchers' attention, noting the contradictions of Soviet policies on changing the status of nations and women, whilst at the same time attempting to preserve their control over the different peoples of the former empire. On the basis of the materials of the main institution created by the Bolsheviks for the emancipation of women of former *inorodtsy*, it is now possible to conclude that KUTBZh held a very unstable position, vacillating between the role of offering choices and new opportunities for women and serving as a state-directed vehicle for forced Sovietisation. As time went by, it was the latter role that dominated.

The materials highlight contradictions in Soviet 'anti-colonialism' through examples of the Commission's (re) creation of the imperial tension in constructing its object of work. Indeed, 'women of the Orient' were considered mainly as 'Other' and thus were racialised, characterised by a lack of modernity and as in need of being civilised. KUTBZh documents suggest that this institution probably did not have enough influence among non-Russian women and directives from the centre were often paralysed by a lack of interest amongst the local Soviet apparat, a lack of finances, and through sabotage by the local population. Bolshevik disinterest in the local histories of emancipation (as in the example of *jadidism*) also contributed to the lack of popularity for their emancipatory project. At the same time, the documents highlight the success of particular activities in some regions (such as establishing kindergartens and the protection of women's rights after divorce) together with a genuine interest from local women to work for emancipation. Thus, the results of the Commissions' activities were contradictory. On the one hand, their work re-established hierarchies between women of the imperial core and 'other' women, which led to the latter's racialisation. On the other hand, KUTBZh contributed somewhat to the development of local initiatives for women (in particularly during the early period). Overall, though, the Commissions experienced only limited success in achieving their emancipatory goals.

## NOTES

1. Commission for the Improvement of the Work and the Everyday Life of Women of the Orient (see, for example, the letter from Nukhrat and Akivis to the Tatarstan Commission: NART 732/1/1266 (27 February 1928); Commission for Improvement of the Work and the Everyday Life of Women of Culturally Backward People (see, for example, GARF 6983/1/141/60–63).
2. For more on the changing meanings of the category *inorodtsy* see, for example, Juliette Cadiot (Kadio in Russian translation), *Laboratoriya imperii, Rossiya/SSSR, 1860–1940*, Moscow: NLO, 2010, pp. 90–1.
3. See also Yulia Gradskaia, 'Svoboda kak prinuzhdenie? Sovetskoe nastuplenie na "zakrepushchenie zhenshchiny" i "nasledie imperii"', *Ab Imperio*, no. 4, 2013, pp. 113–44.
4. Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p. 1.
5. Madina Tlostanova, *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
6. Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*, p. 7.
7. David Hoffman, 'European Modernity and Soviet Socialism', in David Hoffman and Yanni Kotsonis (eds.), *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, p. 245.
8. Yanni Kotsonis, 'Introduction: a Modern Paradox: Subject and Citizen in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Russia', in Hoffman and Kotsonis, *Russian Modernity*, p. 9.
9. Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism, 1860–1930*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 331.
10. Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, p. 332.
11. Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, p. 345.
12. Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 212.
13. Wood, *Baba and the Comrade*, p. 214.
14. The materials prepared for the Commission's 1929 Report, signed by Vice-Chair Lyubimova, indicate that the frequent change of secretaries (three in one year) and the long period without a Chair (after its first chair, Asfendiyarov, stood down), as well as lengthy discussions on the nations that should constitute the main focus of the work, were the main hindrances for its functioning during the first years of its existence: see GARF 6387/1/141/67–9.
15. Sanzhar Asfendiyarov: born 1889 in Tashkent into a well-educated and wealthy Kazakh family; Orientalist and medical doctor; member of VTsIK from 1925 to 1927; executed 1938. For more about Asfendiyarov, see Erk Aubakirov, 'I eto vse o nem', *Ekspress K*, 8 September 2015; available online: [http://old.express-k.kz/show\\_article.php?art\\_id=59693](http://old.express-k.kz/show_article.php?art_id=59693) (accessed July 2016). I am grateful to Didar Kasymova for helping me find information about Asfendiyarov.
16. Abulhair Dosov: born 1899 in Akmolinsk guberniya to a Kazakh family; member of VTsIK from 1927; executed 1938. I am grateful to Galym Jussipbek for helping me find information about Dosov.
17. Serafima Lyubimova: born 1898 in Penza guberniya; worked in different positions in the party and government apparatus from the 1920s to the 1950s; died 1970.



18. Antonina Nukhrat-Matveeva: born 1900 into a Chuvash family in the territory of contemporary Bashkortostan; worked as a teacher; held different posts in the party and government apparat during the 1920s and 1930s; arrested 1938, rehabilitated 1956; died 1983.
19. GARF 6983/1/10/32.
20. GARF 6983/1/38/3. For more on Soviet divisions among women of different nationalities, see also Yulia Gradskaia, 'Kuli semii kuli: "zhenshchiny otstalykh narodov" i sovetskie politiki kulturnosti', in Aleksandr Etkind, Ilia Kukulin and Dirk Uffelmann (eds), *Vnutrennyaya kolonizatsiya Rossii*, Moscow: NLO, 2012, pp. 664–83.
21. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p. 207.
22. GARF 6983/1/10/14.
23. For more on the racialisation of 'other' women through visual images, see Yulia Gradskaia, 'Speaking for Those "Backward": Gender and Ethnic Minorities in Soviet Silent Films', *Region*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2013, pp. 1–20.
24. Jane Burbank and Fredrick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.
25. 'Red yurt' was the name for the village clubs established for the nomadic population.
26. GARF 6983/1/14/4.
27. Gradskaia, 'Svoboda kak prinuzhdenie?'
28. GARF 6983/1/10/87.
29. GARF 6983/1/49/2.
30. GARF 6983/1/10/15.
31. GARF 6983/1/14/14–19.
32. GARF 6983/1/10/15.
33. GARF 6983/1/38/6.
34. GARF 6983/1/8/26–28.
35. GARF 6983/1/26/24–28.
36. GARF 6983/1/9/43 and 44.
37. Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 230–311.
38. In Soviet publications on the emancipation of Kalmykian women this laced bodice was usually compared to *paranja* in Central Asia, and some publications state it should be burned like *paranja* as a symbol for female subordination. For a discussion on the 'kamsoġ', see Fannina Halle, *Women in the Soviet East*, trans. from German by Margaret M. Green, London: Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd., 1938, pp. 176–7. See also online at: [http://kalmyki.narod.ru/projects/kalmykia2005/html/ocherki\\_2/2\\_VI\\_6.htm](http://kalmyki.narod.ru/projects/kalmykia2005/html/ocherki_2/2_VI_6.htm) (accessed June 2016).
39. Documents note that 'strikes by hips' while making cloth on traditional weaving machines negatively affected breathing: GARF 6983/1/12/171, 162.
40. In his study of the hujum campaign in Uzbekistan, Northrop argues that the forced Sovietisation of women led to a reversal of modernisation, for example, by an extension in women's veiling. Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004.
41. GARF 6983/1/12/99.
42. GARF 6983/1/10/17–18.
43. GARF 6983/1/10/87.
44. GARF 6983/1/14/19.



45. GARF 6983/1/10/72.
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47. Helen Faller, *Nation, Language, Islam: Tatarstan's Sovereignty Movement*, Budapest: CEU-Press, 2011.
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## *Babushka*, Harlot, Helper, Joker: Women and Gender in 1930s Political Humour

*Jonathan Waterlow*

Humour holds up a mirror—sometimes warped, sometimes painfully clear—to the norms, conventions and assumptions of every society, reflecting back its foibles, preconceptions and prejudices. During periods of change, it becomes all the more potent, providing a reassuring way to talk about and to navigate the disturbed and sometimes frightening waters of the unknown. The early Stalin period certainly witnessed enormous but often contradictory changes in the status and role of women in society, and this chapter examines changing perceptions and representations of women and gender roles reflected in the everyday political humour shared by ordinary Soviet citizens as they grappled with the changes cascading across the 1930s.

Between 1928 and 1937, 6.6 million women joined the paid workforce and, of the 4,047,000 new workers entering the labour force between 1932 and 1937, a full 85% of them were women.<sup>1</sup> Although this owed a good deal to the drop in real wages since 1928 and the consequent need for both partners in a relationship to work, it was still a major advance for women's representation in the workforce. By 1940, 39% of the Soviet Union's paid labour force was female (a figure unmatched anywhere in the West), and although they rarely made it to the top jobs (and never to Politburo level in the 1930s), women were well-represented in skilled professions. For example, by the late 1930s women constituted 63% of physicians and 42% of economists in the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Alongside these practical developments, the image of a New Soviet Woman emerged in 1920s propaganda: a powerful, strong and forthright individual of equal standing with her male comrades. Yet a series of reforms in the early to mid-1930s soon counteracted these emancipatory developments: the

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*Zhenotdel* ('Women's Section' of the Communist Party) was dissolved in 1930 and, as the tone of official propaganda shifted ever more towards the promotion of traditional family values, in June 1936 a new law banned abortion (except in cases where the woman's health was endangered) and made divorce more difficult and expensive to obtain. Making the new pronatalist thrust of policy clearer still, considerable financial incentives were offered to women who had large numbers of children.<sup>3</sup> The change was also reflected in artistic portrayals: by the 1930s it was rare to see the 'trim and muscular women' who had been so prominent in 1920s representations; instead, a more 'fleshy' and 'soft' figure was deployed.<sup>4</sup> In short, although women were still expected to work alongside men, the state now muted them as a constituency and declared that they must simultaneously return to their traditional roles of diligent housewives and fertile baby-makers.

These years of profound yet inconsistent changes to women's status and gender norms, both on paper and in everyday life, have been studied in depth by various scholars, but it has been a more complex task to assess how these developments were interpreted and responded to by ordinary citizens on the ground. I want to add a little more texture to the debate by comparing official representations of women with those we find in political jokes shared by men; how women's political humour was treated by the regime; and what women's political humour in these years can reveal about their perceptions of life and gender roles in the early Soviet Union.

Ordinary people's political humour provides a rich seam for investigating contemporary attitudes: humour is a genre of comparison and judgement, which often perverts but also thereby reveals social norms, expectations, passive assumptions, and areas of mental and spiritual abrasion. It thereby provides us with considerably more nuanced insight than other forms of everyday speech recorded by the regime (often our principal source for a period of strict censorship), for these were generally split into the crude and airbrushed binary of 'positive' versus 'negative' or 'unhealthy' attitudes. By contrast, contemporaries' political humour was, like their opinions more generally, often of a more complex and ambivalent character, but it was nevertheless diligently (even paranoiacally) recorded by various regime bodies because humour was considered suspicious in itself. This was due in part to many Bolsheviks' own experiences in the revolutionary trenches printing satirical cartoons and tracts, or spreading malicious jokes and tales about the tsarist system. Now that they had gone on to seize political power themselves, they could well imagine that those comic incursions had played a role in their ultimate victory.<sup>5</sup> This chapter draws on a variety of additional sources (criminal case files, diaries, published contemporary accounts, and interviews conducted after the Second World War by the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System) to provide us with a more rounded and reliable window onto this rich element of unofficial contemporary culture in a period of often profound metamorphosis.

## WOMEN AND HUMOUR

During periods of uncomfortable and unstable social and political change, people often turn to humour as an important means by which to tackle and confront those developments. How did men grapple in everyday discourse with the enormous and often confusing changes to women's status and roles in society during these years? Unfortunately for readers hoping for nuanced and introspective reactions, the representation of women in 1930s political humour—when they appear at all, which seems to have been relatively rarely—is crude and one-sided, but this in itself provides some important insights into contemporary male attitudes to, and social portrayals of, women.

In this humour, the figure of the New Soviet Woman is distinctly absent, whether as the 1920s hard-bodied superwoman, or as the 1930s version, grasping a hammer in one hand and a baby (preferably more than one) in the other. Instead, women appear in 1930s *anekdoty* as exclusively sexual beings or as men's faithful helpers cast in secondary roles, or as an aged *babushka* defined principally by her age and folkloric resonance rather than by her gender.<sup>6</sup> This chapter explores each of these representations, beginning with the latter.

### THE *BABUSHKA*

The folkloric character of the *babushka* evokes associations with traditional beliefs and ways of life, an earthy and powerful wisdom, as well as a significant degree of moral authority. This literary-cultural type could spring dramatically to life, too, as the phenomenon of the *bab'i bunt'y* (in which peasant communities resisted Soviet incursions by sending older women out to confront and shame the youthful, intruding activists) vividly demonstrates.<sup>7</sup> When this character appeared in contemporary *anekdoty*, she was likewise portrayed as a mouthpiece for the people's frustrations, but was also a truth-teller, stripping back ideological claims to reveal the often contradictory reality beneath.

This was often done simply—so simply, in fact, that the humorous charge may be all but gone for audiences no longer living in a time where such truth-telling was dangerous and exciting. Take, for example, an *anekdot* in which Stalin visits a collective farm (*kolkhoz*) and, when quizzed by a local *babushka*, has to admit that he has essentially taken over the role of tsar.<sup>8</sup> This was a straightforward enough connection to make, but one that entirely contradicted the Bolsheviks' justification for their rule; in this joke, the *babushka* not only cut through official claims, but even made Stalin come clean about it himself.

Another example was reportedly told by a railway worker on the Kazan line in 1941:

An old woman went to the Commissar of Foreign Affairs and asked for a visa to go abroad. The Commissar asked the reason for the trip. The old woman answered that life is better there, to which the Commissar said, 'It always seem better where we are not'. The old woman replied that 'Ah, but I want to go where *you* are not'.<sup>9</sup>

The Commissar here tries to draw legitimacy from an old proverb—the Russian equivalent of the English ‘the grass is always greener on the other side’—but he has inadvertently stepped into the *babushka*’s territory, and she, using her authority as a mouthpiece of uncomplicated truth and traditional values, easily defeats this attempt by modifying the saying to reflect contemporary reality as ordinary people experienced it.

One V.I. Poltavets recounted another, very similar *anekdot* to some acquaintances in 1937 (the timing was ill-advised; he was soon arrested), which involved an old woman going to Kalinin to request a special kind of passport that specifically allowed one ‘to get away entirely from the Bolsheviks’. Poltavets told this *anekdot* while complaining that he had been excluded from the Communist Party three times already, so in his frustration he was clearly identifying himself very closely with the *babushka* in this brief joke.<sup>10</sup> This was something unimaginable were this character a younger woman, as we shall see.

The character of the *babushka* was, then, a female representation in critical humour that was not only positive, but who even carried a significant degree of authority. On the other hand, although the wise and moral figure of the *babushka* was undoubtedly an important traditional reference point for many citizens, her gender was not actually the most significant aspect at play. Much the same function was fulfilled in other *anekdoty* by the character of a male peasant (often similarly old)—another traditional personage of homely wisdom with zero tolerance for ideological obfuscation—so even if certain *anekdoty*, like the above ‘I want to be where you are not’ example, seem always to have featured a *babushka*, this type of critical joke was never her exclusive preserve. The more gender-specific examples from these years, which were seemingly far more common, were instead those which featured female characters in a crudely sexualised manner.

### THE HARLOT

Whether in humorous form or otherwise, female sexuality and gender roles were an important reference point for articulating broader anxieties about the changing social world after the Revolution. Elizabeth Wood points out, for example, that in various media the subject of prostitution was used ‘as a means to dramatize identity disturbances and changes (positive as well as negative) arising in the revolution’.<sup>11</sup> Political humour generated from below followed suit in this regard: women (and usually their sexuality) were drawn into contemporary *anekdoty* as a means to mock (aspects of) Soviet power and life under the regime, but they invariably suffered collateral degradation. A long-running joke, for which there are many surviving sources, neatly encapsulates the formula: a man is asked how he feels about Soviet power and he promptly answers, ‘Like I do [about] my wife. You bear it, but you wouldn’t mind changing it.’<sup>12</sup> The target is life in the Soviet Union, but a woman is brought in to absorb the blow and enable the mockery to take place. Such jokes may seem tame or playful—and that may well have been their intention and reception in practice—

but their in-built assumptions were also persistent, insidious, and revealing about contemporary (male) attitudes and tensions.

Let's turn to a typical example of this style of representation:

A young lady was sitting on the boulevard, wearing silk stockings. On her right leg hung a portrait of Stalin, and on the left, one of Lenin. A Jew walked by and stopped to bow. He bowed three times, and the young woman asked him, 'Why did you bow three times, you should've bowed twice – once to Lenin, once to Stalin'. But the Jew replied that he bowed once to each of them, and a third time because he'd spotted the beard of Karl Marx.<sup>13</sup>

In an *anekdot* like this, which seeks ultimately to undermine the reverence demanded for the regime's founding fathers, a woman appears solely to enable a smutty allusion. The historian I.I. Shitts, who kept a diary between 1928 and 1931 in which he diligently recorded contemporary jokes, noted another such *anekdot* circulating in 1931. In it, the question is posed: 'Why have women started wearing long skirts?', to which the answer comes, 'It must have something to do with the general transition to closed distribution', thereby, while making a casual jibe at economic reforms, portraying women as just another (sexual) commodity.<sup>14</sup> In such *anekdoty*, women are not just secondary figures; they might as well be wallpaper, for they simply provide a backdrop chosen only to enable a simplistic sexualised punchline.

In similar fashion, women also appeared in various *anekdoty* to create problematic sexual scenarios. For example:

Stalin 'got to know' a woman and caught lice from her. He went to the doctor for help, but it did no good. Stalin then went to Kalinin and Kalinin suggested, 'Write the word "kolkhoz" where the lice are breeding and they'll soon run off'.<sup>15</sup>

We see this pattern again in another crude *anekdot* which this time chooses a specific woman as the problem-maker:

In the theatre in Tbilisi, Georgia, there is a box for Stalin's mother. When she came to one of the performances, she found herself surrounded by some rascals (*zhuliki*). The police came to ask what they were doing. The rascals answered: 'We're afraid in case Stalin's mother is raped and gives birth to another Stalin'.<sup>16</sup>

In both examples, women's sexuality causes a problem which thereby facilitates the political punchline (people hate collectivisation; Stalin is a terrible ruler). In other cases, this was used to humiliate or lampoon the Soviet leaders on a more personal rather than political level. For example, take an *anekdot* which described Kalinin on a visit to the theatre accompanied by a woman. Spotting a loose thread on her dress, he begins to pull at it with increasing fervour, thereby (seemingly inadvertently) removing her knickers.<sup>17</sup> Kalinin was often portrayed as a doddering simpleton in *anekdoty*, but in order to make the point here a preternaturally passive woman is publicly humiliated. A similarly casual

disrespect for Stalin could be evoked by openly hanging his portrait—at this time ubiquitous—just below a picture of a naked woman.<sup>18</sup> Women are not the principal targets in any of these jokes, but their appearance always creates problems for men, from the denial of sex to spreading disease, from birthing a tyrant to rendering political leaders publicly ridiculous; while they thereby provided the means by which to attack Stalin and his regime, they simultaneously suffered casual yet acute disrespect.

Indeed, by defining women through sexuality in these *anekdoty*, the implication was simultaneously that they were not intellectual beings. This was made explicit in a joke more about general social distinctions than politics, recounted by a Harvard Project respondent—a male former soldier of 24, who was unusually forthcoming in discussing sexual matters in the Soviet Union:

A young man and a girl met in the theatre. Between the acts they sat and talked. The young man was from a very good family and was used to intellectual discussion. So he turned to the young lady and said: 'Do you favour platonic love?' She, being a typical Moscow girl, asked: 'Do you mean, do I like it from behind?'<sup>19</sup>

Sexual intercourse was itself usually portrayed in humour as an act of domination and degradation, as this *anekdot*, which is crude in both senses of the word, illustrates:

Sometime while Comrade Andreev was People's Commissar of a [railway] line, he was in Tiflis and visited the [station's] bathhouse. There he saw three buttons. He pressed the first one and a boy appeared. Andreev sent him away. He pressed the second button and a young lady came in, whom he proceeded to use. When he pressed the third button, an Armenian entered the room and raped Andreev. Since then, railway stations feature only two buttons.<sup>20</sup>

Beyond the immediately apparent homophobia and ethnic stereotyping, not only is the female character simply 'used' and dismissed, but the idea of penetration as an act of forceful domination and even humiliation is immediately reinforced by the rape of Andreev. The premise is also deeply contrived, for there is no history of such 'buttons' existing in bathhouses and this clunky scenario simply provides a skeletal framework in which various assumptions can run amok: people assume Communist Party men like boys; women are whores; Armenians practise sodomy; it is amusing to see an authority figure degraded. Physical debasement of such figures was a common thread in political humour at this time, and forceful sex should therefore be understood as a rhetorical trope sitting snugly alongside murder, cannibalism and scatology (of which, more later); whatever contemporaries' actual sexual practices, when evoked in the genre of political humour, sex (and therefore, inevitably, an aspect of gender relations at least at a conceptual level) was always associated with violence and/or degradation.

Given this persistently negative and blatantly disrespectful representation of women, and if the New Soviet Woman is so obviously absent in these jokes, does this mean there was simply no response detectable in male attitudes to women, despite the back-and-forth changes in policy?<sup>21</sup> In fact, it is far more convincing to consider these jokes as, to a greater or lesser extent, part of a broader male resistance to women's changing status—a rhetorical push-back against the political correctness of equality and mutual respect. This hints at a low-level but no less influential counterpart to the more overt backlash faced by women from other sources, such as, for example, those who claimed the status of Stakhanovites and thereby put themselves forward to demand the new freedoms they had been promised. Here, as Mary Buckley notes, while 'there was no uniform pattern' of response at the local level to these women, they were often 'subject to maltreatment because men found female achievements threatening to male superiority, pride and the comfortable gender status quo'.<sup>22</sup> This was likewise apparent within various local Party organisations, where women's sections were mockingly labelled '*Tsentro-baba*' ('broads' section') or '*babkomy*' ('broads' committees').<sup>23</sup> More overtly still, women's entrance into the workforce was frequently met on the shop-floor with 'resentment [expressed] in a sexualised form', which could escalate into sexual harassment and assault.<sup>24</sup> Barbara Engel has written of official propaganda that 'gendered expectations [...] acted as a kind of undertow, restricting and undermining the regime's declared commitment to the emancipation of women', but this evocative metaphor also well describes what we see on the ground in both male behaviour and, in acerbic humour, their everyday speech.<sup>25</sup> Beneath a surface-level of continuity, in contemporary *anekdoty* there also ran a strong current which was trying, often violently, to hold back the undeniable progress women were making.

### WOMEN AS 'HELPERS': THE OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL UNITED

Even when not portrayed through the prism of sex, women were always cast in secondary roles in *anekdoty*, and this brings us to a key area in which—unusually for unofficial, critical speech—male citizens' everyday discourse mirrored, if not explicit regime policy, then certainly aspects of regime practice. Although the official line was to insist on women's equality, the regime's iconography consistently portrayed the ideal 'conscious' worker as male and, as Engel puts it, 'In posters as in life, women fulfilled at best the supporting roles...'<sup>26</sup> Women were cast as men's 'helpers' or were represented as relevant only in terms of their relationship to a man; even the socially influential women who made up the *Obshchestvennitsy* (socially active women) were 'empowered by their status as spouses of the new bosses', rather than through their own identities and achievements.<sup>27</sup> This associative identity could also have dire consequences: during the great purges the NKVD often targeted the wives of arrestees purely due to their assumed complicity.



This unofficially official role as men's 'helpers' played out in various spheres, portraying and promoting distinctly asymmetrical gender relations. Consider, for example, the regime's desire to increase the population's level of *kul'turnost'* ('culturedness'). In this area, women were actually given the lead, but, as we can see in a 1936 speech given by A.M. Polyakova, the wife of a Stakhanovite blacksmith, this was done in a deeply patronising way. Polyakova reflected that, 'if a wife welcomes her husband home with love and tenderness [...] the husband will go back to work in a good mood and will think only about his work. It's obvious that in this case his labor productivity will increase.' She went on to explain how she had also become her husband's personal culture trainer, stopping him from nodding off in the theatre and successfully getting him into reading; she noted proudly that she had now 'trained him to the point where he brings home books himself'.<sup>28</sup>

Condescending and stilted though it was, this gender dynamic was not confined to regime propaganda and carefully screened speeches, but also played out in everyday humour. An emblematic example is a sardonic *anekdot* wherein a man sighs heavily on a tram, only to be berated by his wife: 'How many times [have I] told you not to talk counter-revolution in public!'<sup>29</sup> Even if the intervention was designed to keep the man out of trouble with the authorities rather than pushing him towards *kul'turnost'* and Stakhanovism, the 'woman-as-helper' role remained the same. Few women had any chance of escaping this depiction; even famous and successful women continued to be portrayed solely via their association with men, as we can see here:

Stalin summons Krupskaya: 'So you think you can get away with anything just because you're Lenin's widow? Well, tomorrow I'll declare that Artyukhina is Lenin's widow!'<sup>30</sup>

Here, even so important and genuinely influential a figure as Nadezhda Krupskaya is belittled for the sake of mocking Stalin's arbitrariness, and even if the intention was simply to dramatise the genuine personal antipathy between the pair, in either case Krupskaya is defined solely in terms of her relation to her late husband.

Whilst male citizens were finding a certain affinity with the unofficially official portrayal of women as glorified personal assistants, real Soviet women were also telling political jokes and asserting alternative viewpoints to the Party line, and it is to them we now turn.

### WOMEN TELLING JOKES: OFFICIAL TREATMENTS OF WOMEN'S HUMOUR

Beyond the pleasures and proclivities of 1930s political humour itself, it is important to examine how the women who were caught telling political jokes were treated by the regime. Telling critical or merely pointed *anekdoty* in the 1930s was an increasingly dangerous undertaking as the decade progressed: it

was prosecutable under the notorious Article 58–10 of the Criminal Code as ‘anti-Soviet agitation’,<sup>31</sup> for which 10-year sentences were the norm. The majority of the jokes quoted above resulted in prison sentences for the men who told them, although this was due to their mockery and criticism of the regime and its leaders, not because the joke-tellers used and abused women in the process. However, when it came to prosecution for anti-Soviet humour, the regime’s treatment of women was rather more complicated than for their male counterparts.

In my survey of some 273 criminal case files of individuals arrested in the pre-war decade for crimes of humour, a mere 15 (or 5.49%) of the sample were women.<sup>32</sup> Yet this stark disparity is not reflected in the myriad Party, police and local government reports on ‘the mood of the population’ in workplaces and meetings, in which women joke-tellers appear just as frequently as men. The latter impression is mirrored in various other sources including the Harvard Project, personal diaries and memoirs, so what we see in the criminal files is clearly a regime prejudice rather than a reflection of women’s behaviour. It also echoes a more general trend in the Soviet penal system, which we can see in the make-up of the Gulag population: between 1934 and 1940, women comprised only between 5.9 and 8.4% of the inmates.<sup>33</sup> When it came to the penal system, it seems, women were far less likely to face the same harsh penalties as men.

Yet it would be misleading to interpret the apparent lenience shown to women who told political jokes as a licence for them to speak freely without any repercussion. Although the buck seems usually to have stopped short of criminal prosecution, there were plenty of other damaging sanctions which could be applied at the local level (reduced opportunities; denunciation and shaming in the wall newspaper; or even dismissal), and, moreover, contemporaries would be well aware that there were never any guarantees of immunity from prosecution in the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, we can surmise that local officials or higher justice organs (or both) held a largely consistent view that women were not to be taken as seriously as men when they expressed critical political opinions, or, rather, as Viola puts it, a woman ‘was not held directly responsible for her actions, even in cases when she was subject to reprimand or punishment’.<sup>35</sup>

### HUMOUR ON MARS AND VENUS

Although it is easy for us to label as retrograde the attitudes on display both above and below in Stalin’s 1930s, the Soviet regime was and remains far from unique in considering there to be fundamental differences between men’s and women’s humour. It used to be a staple claim of humour theorists who approached the subject from a social-psychological background that women and men have quite different senses of humour and enjoy and consume it in certain different ways. Various studies in the 1970s claimed that women are more likely to partake in humour as the ‘appreciative audience’ of men

(‘helpers’ yet again), rather than to produce their own, and that women were less likely to enjoy humour involving sexual or aggressive topics.

Later reassessments of these conclusions reveal that they were not only based solely on responses to jokes and cartoons, which are, Rod Martin notes, ‘a relatively minor source of humor in everyday life, compared to spontaneous socially situated humor’, but that the examples of sexual and aggressive jokes employed were ‘frequently disparaging of women’, so it is hardly a surprise that women would find them less amusing than men. Indeed, researchers using non-sexist sexual jokes in their studies ‘generally have not found gender differences in enjoyment ratings’.<sup>36</sup> In other words, those studies which found women to be at best different and at worst deficient in their sense of humour are limited, sexist, or both. All the same, even modern humour research suggests that ‘joke-telling tends to be relatively more characteristic of male humor, whereas women are more likely to relate humorous personal anecdotes’.<sup>37</sup> If true, this is at most, as the careful wording implies, a tendency rather than a rule, and, in the context of the 1930s Soviet Union, women certainly do not seem to have been noticeably less inclined to share jokes as well as more spontaneous expressions of humour (the boundary between joke and humorous story is also rather more blurred in the *anekdot* genre).

These various ideas of difference all rest on the assumption captured neatly by John Gray’s bestselling relationship advice book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, which claims that men and women are in a fundamental sense made differently, or at least that they communicate in significantly different ways.<sup>38</sup> This perspective finds wide and plentiful support today, but when such claims are interrogated systematically, it becomes rapidly apparent that they are little more than culturally sanctioned and then linguistically reinforced constructs, performing and thereby perpetuating existing power relations.<sup>39</sup> Or, to put it another way, while sexist stereotypes may be played out in everyday speech, this reflects socio-cultural assumptions rather than objective (even ‘natural’) facts. The linguist Deborah Cameron points out that various psychological studies have demonstrated ‘that when interpreting situations people typically pay most attention to things that match their expectations, and often fail to register counter-examples’.<sup>40</sup> Taking a modern case, it remains a running joke in many cultures that women are terrible drivers; the expectation generated by the stereotype then prompts men to explain a woman driving poorly by the fact she is a woman, whereas a man driving poorly is explained by the ‘fact’ he is ‘an idiot’ (the vast majority of women driving perfectly well are simply not registered).<sup>41</sup> For our purposes, the equivalent view in the Soviet 1930s was that a woman telling a political joke did not understand what she was doing because she was a woman, whereas a man telling the same joke was held criminally responsible because he was clearly trying to spread anti-Soviet agitation.

Given that I found no evidence to suggest a distinct ‘women’s humour’ in the 1930s Soviet Union, and because any suggestion that such a thing existed has been put to me by male colleagues (by default excluded from the closed

circles of the special ‘women’s humour’ which they are certain exists now as then), I leave it to them to shoulder the burden of proof. In the many examples of political humour which I uncovered in the archives, there was no discernible difference between those jokes uttered by men and those by women; in a blind test, you would never be able to tell the gender of the raconteur. A slight exception would be that, as in the 1970s psychological tests, it was not women sharing jokes which degraded women, but otherwise their *anekdoty* were no less explicit or dark than men’s in either tone or content.

Take, for example, the gallows humour of one P.F. Pomelova, an agronomist working in Vologodskaya *oblast’*, who riffed on the appalling collectivisation famine in Ukraine, noting that the population had been driven to cannibalism (*lyudoedstvo*) before joking that ‘an agronomist travelled to the Ukraine [*sic*] on holiday – they found only a single bone of his skeleton’.<sup>42</sup> Although hardly amusing to us now, this was both told and received as a dark-humoured joke which, like so many others from the period, attempted to create a comforting mental distance from threatening and traumatic realities.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Pomelova was certainly not unique in giving voice to mockery that might, by some, be thought too visceral or crude to be the preserve of women. In the wake of the Kirov assassination (1 December 1934) in Leningrad, various women let loose their vitriol in darkly humorous form. For example, the Leningrad worker A.A. Utkina joked airily with her colleagues that ‘Kirov’s been killed, and it wouldn’t be a shame if Stalin pegged it [too]’.<sup>44</sup> A certain Stepanova of the ‘Krasnyi instrumental’shchik’ factory also turned to a cannibalistic motif when she saw the canteen’s menu on 5 December, joking that ‘We’re going to eat Kirov’s brains’ (some kind of brains were apparently on offer that lunchtime).<sup>45</sup> In similar fashion, though less morbid, one Novikova at the ‘Krasnaya zarya’ factory wryly encouraged her colleagues to go to lunch on the day of Kirov’s funeral, noting ‘They’re burying Kirov today; lunch will be good.’<sup>46</sup> Or, more crudely, take Anna Glebova’s proclamation at a meeting of the Cheromskii *sel’sovet* that, ‘Well if I knew where [Kirov]’s buried, I’d take a shit on his grave.’<sup>47</sup> However unequally women were treated—politically, socially, rhetorically, or judicially—when they spoke for themselves, they were just as ready to break taboos and to employ and enjoy the basest humour possible.

### EQUALITY IN MOCKERY

It was possible for women to join the Soviet pantheon of heroes that developed prior to the purges of the late 1930s, but they were considerably fewer than their male counterparts.<sup>48</sup> Even the story of the woman tractor-driver Pasha Angelina, who became a highly celebrated symbol of women’s equality in the Soviet Union, was still told through the prism of overcoming deeply rooted male prejudice which, it was evident to contemporaries, did not then magically dissipate.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, when celebrating Soviet male heroes, women could even be

seen as an impediment to their success. Take, for example, the rescue in early 1934 of the crew of the *Chelyuskin* (a steamship which failed in its mission to navigate the Northern Sea without using an icebreaker). Soviet aviators were dispatched to save the stranded and freezing crew, producing a thrilling saga for the media, and leading to the pilots receiving the inaugural 'Hero of the Soviet Union' award.

As described in the official account of the rescue, when the pilot S.A. Levanevskii heard of the *Chelyuskin*'s fate, he immediately volunteered to 'fly to [the crew's] assistance', but his courageous selflessness was immediately challenged by the wailing of his fearful wife. As Karen Petrone puts it, 'Levanevskii portrayed his wife as a brake on his development as a hero. The attachment of a woman had to be overcome for Levanevskii to become a hero'. Here and in other portrayals of heroism, Petrone continues, 'women were depicted as incapable of understanding the importance of heroic action. Their love for their men caused them to prevent the enactment of heroic deeds; the men's love for each other, on the other hand, spurred them on to heroic actions'.<sup>50</sup>

Greater equality could be found elsewhere, however. Two women in the Kronstadt *raion* of Leningrad were reported for indulging in a widespread song that mocked the achievements of the pilots who rescued the Chelyuskinites, concluding with the scornful lines:

You're heroes now, like bees in a swarm,  
 Buzzing in your native land.  
 The money's divvied up and you roll off to Crimea  
 But *Chelyuskin* swims in the deep.  
 You're having a great time now,  
 Life is joyous: songs, parties, and revelry.  
 Money in your pocket, your mug on the screen,  
 That's what the expedition gave [you].<sup>51</sup>

However negatively they were portrayed in official narratives of heroism, Soviet women were certainly just as able (and willing) as men to mock that official world, asserting themselves against a status quo which frequently characterised them as secondary or backward elements of Soviet life. In the realm of critical mockery, women could always be the equal of men. This was no small thing in the context of a regime which so prohibited criticism of the status quo that for all citizens, regardless of gender, it was only in the spaces of alterity they carved out themselves with sharp jibes and humorous stabs that most citizens could assert their views and their sense of self in contrast to the official narratives.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although the Stalinist regime was suspicious of humour in general, and although we might likewise expect critical humour in these years to always be to some extent oppositional to Soviet power, when it came to the treatment of women and gender relations, men's humour often closely shadowed what I called the unofficially official line. From posters promoting sexual health which portrayed women as the source of venereal disease, to the consistent portrayal of women as significant only in the role of men's 'helpers', the sexist undercurrent of regime policy was joined by a tributary which flowed beneath the surface of many male citizen's political humour.<sup>52</sup> The latter formed part of a wider and more obvious backlash against women's progress in the workplace and in society more generally, but the very fact these prejudices were so taken for granted that they formed the stock backdrop for many sharp, politically engaged criticisms tells us how entrenched such views remained.

These condescending attitudes often meant that women were treated more leniently for their crimes of humour, but this was a trend rather than a rule to be relied upon; female joke-tellers were still taking a significant risk when they shared political humour too. The humour they shared was just as caustic and complex as men's, contrary not only to Soviet views of Mars and Venus, but also to many groundless yet persistent views today.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, at the important level of everyday discourse, women could and many did find a certain kind of equality with men: in their critical humour, which, if not changing the world around them, could nevertheless change how they understood, responded to and experienced it. In the Soviet 1930s, this was often the best one could hope for.

## NOTES

1. Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 310, 312.
2. Barbara Evans Clements, *A History of Women in Russia: From Earliest Times to the Present*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 213.
3. Goldman, *Women, the State*, pp. 282–4.
4. Karen Petrone, *Life has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 33.
5. For more on official views and treatment of humour in these years, see Jonathan Waterlow, 'Sanctioning Laughter in Stalin's Soviet Union', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 79, 2015, pp. 198–214.
6. *Anekdot* (*anekdoty*) is roughly equivalent to the English 'joke' ('jokes'): a short, humorous tale or question followed by a punchline, although it is more consistently associated with political subject matter.
7. See Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, ch. 6.

8. GARF 8131/31/82045 l. 9 (1936).
9. GARF 8131/31/21326 l. 6. See also, GARF 8131/31/5553 l. 11(ob) (1937). This is more elegant in Russian: '*gde nas net*' and '*gde vas net*'.
10. GARF 8131/31/6058 ll. 84–5.
11. Elizabeth A. Wood, 'Prostitution Unbound: Representations of Sexual and Political Anxieties in Postrevolutionary Russia', in Jane T. Costlow, Stephanie Sandler and Judith Vowles (eds.), *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993, p. 134.
12. HPSSS 610/B/20, p. 3; M. Mel'nichenko, *Sovetskii anekdot (Ukazatel' syuzhetov)*, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2014, p. 390; Eugene Lyons, *Modern Moscow*, London: Hurst and Blackett, 1935, p. 264.
13. GARF 8131/31/80433 l. 6(ob) (1937).
14. I.I. Shitts, *Dnevnik 'Velikogo pereloma' (mart 1928–avgust 1931)*, Paris: YMCA Press, 1991, p. 289.
15. GARF 8131/31/7031 (1936); see also HPSSS 60/A/5, p. 33, 62/A/5, p. 26.
16. GARF 8131/31/86405 l. 4 (1941). This *anekdot* also appears in slightly less vulgar form in HPSSS 11/A/2/, p. 50, 66/A/6, pp. 67–8, 639/A/30, p. 39.
17. GARF 8131/31/80433 l. 7(ob) (1937); HPSSS 56/A/5, pp. 46–7; see also, David Brandenberger, *Political Humor under Stalin: An Anthology of Unofficial Jokes and Anecdotes*, Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2009, p. 149.
18. GARF 8131/31/43623 l. 7 (1940). The image was of 'a sleeping nude woman with cupids', so this was not pornography per se, but was certainly an ill-advised juxtaposition.
19. HPSSS 144/A/11, p. 13 (seq. 113).
20. GARF 8131/31/82045 l. 9(ob) (1936–7).
21. This absence is not simply a source issue; while regime agents perhaps would not have recorded jokes made specifically about women's changing roles, the same absence holds true across the other source bases I examined.
22. Mary Buckley, 'Complex "Realities" of "New" Women of the 1930s: Assertive, Superior, Belittled and Beaten', in Linda Edmondson (ed.), *Gender in Russian History and Culture*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 179, 191.
23. Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 83.
24. Wendy Z. Goldman, 'Babas at the Bench: Gender Conflict in Soviet Industry in the 1930 s', in Melanie Ilic (ed.), *Women in the Stalin Era*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, pp. 84–5.
25. Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700–2000*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 152.
26. Engel, *Women in Russia*, p. 150.
27. Clements, *History of Women*, p. 223.
28. Quoted in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine (eds), *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 362, 363.
29. Lyons, *Modern Moscow*, p. 273; cf. another variant in HPSSS 104/(NY)1492/A, p. 34.

30. GARF 8131/31/64008 l. 9 (no later than 1940); also cf. Mel'nichenko, *Sovetskii anekdot*, pp. 203–4. Aleksandra Artyukhina was head of the *Zhenotdel* from 1925 until its dissolution in 1930.
31. The Article varied across Republics, but is best known as 58-10, which was its designation in the RSFSR.
32. Cases drawn from GARF 8131/31 and GARF 9474/1a; HDA SBU f.6.
33. Emma Mason, 'Women in the Gulag in the 1930 s', in Ilic (ed.), *Women in the Stalin Era*, p. 132.
34. My sources unfortunately do not provide details beyond references to exclusion from the Communist Party or Komsomol, but such treatment would accord with how other critical speech and activities deemed 'anti-Soviet' were treated in the mid- to late 1930s, as described, for example, in Wendy Z. Goldman, *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin: the Social Dynamics of Repression*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; and Wendy Z. Goldman, *Inventing the Enemy: Denunciation and Terror in Stalin's Russia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
35. Viola, *Peasant Rebels*, p. 182.
36. Rod A. Martin, *The Psychology of Humor: an Integrative Approach*, London, ON: Elsevier, 2007, p. 147.
37. Martin, *Psychology of Humor*, p. 147.
38. John Gray, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: a Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want from Your Relationships*, London: Thorsons, 1993.
39. Deborah Cameron, *The Myth of Mars and Venus: Do Men and Women Really Speak Different Languages?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
40. Cameron, *The Myth*, p. 15.
41. Cameron, *The Myth*, pp. 14–17.
42. GARF 8131/31/52823 l. 8 (1934).
43. On this function of humour cf. A. Peter McGraw, Caleb Warren, Lawrence E. Williams and Bridget Leonard, 'Too Close for Comfort, or Too Far to Care? Finding Humor in Distant Tragedies and Close Mishaps', *Psychological Science*, vol. 23, no.10, 2012, pp. 1215–23.
44. TsGAIPD 25/5/52 l. 1.
45. TsGAIPD 24/5/2288 l. 110.
46. TsGAIPD 25/5/47 ll. 5, 42.
47. TsGAIPD 24/5/2291 l.123.
48. I follow David Brandenberger's description of this 'pantheon' and its evolution; see his *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927–1941*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011, ch. 4.
49. On Praskov'ya 'Pasha' Angelina, see Clements, *History of Women*, pp. 218–21.
50. Petrone, *Life has Become More Joyous*, pp.73, 74.
51. TsGAIPD 24/5/2291 l. 21.
52. Frances Lee Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex: Lifestyle Advice for the Soviet Masses*, DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011, pp. 111–19.
53. To be clear, while certain prejudices may prompt behavioural conventions, these conventions are not based on objective realities.



## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**Jonathan Waterlow** was a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow in History at the University of Oxford, UK, from 2013 to 2016. He is completing a book on political humour under Stalin and what jokes can tell us about people's struggles to find their way through the 1930s. He is the author of 'Sanctioning Laughter in Stalin's Soviet Union', *History Workshop Journal* (2015) and 'Speaking more than Bolshevik', in Matthias Neumann and Andy Willimott (eds.), *Rethinking the Russian Revolution as Historical Divide* (Routledge, forthcoming). He is currently working as a researcher for a project based at Bristol University, UK, on late Soviet counterculture and drug prohibition.

## The Daily Life of Russian Peasant Women

*Liubov Denisova*

Russia, as an agrarian country in 1900 with a predominantly rural population and traditional outlook, underwent tremendous social, economic and political upheavals during the twentieth century. The 1917 revolutions brought wide-ranging changes to the lives of millions of Russian peasants, and although the first decrees of Soviet power were largely met with enthusiasm by the rural population, initial hopes in the countryside soon gave way to the tragedy of collectivisation. Despite this, the social changes introduced by the Soviet regime also brought about the emancipation of peasant women, who were brought to the forefront of the rural economy and village public life.<sup>1</sup>

During the collectivisation process in the late 1920s and early 1930s, an estimated 400,000 peasants were shot and millions of families were exiled. By autumn 1930, the situation was so dire that even some local party officials started calling for a new revolution.<sup>2</sup> In 1930–1931 alone, 381,026 kulak (wealthy peasant) families were exiled.<sup>3</sup> Letters sent back to the villages by those who had been deported revealed their desperate situation: ‘Many have already died here, and now more are dying from starvation; as they’re walking along, they fall and die.’<sup>4</sup> Many regarded collectivisation as ‘The End of the World’.<sup>5</sup> Even local workers loyal to the Soviet authorities thought that the peasants, women and children included, were probably being deported in order simply to kill them.<sup>6</sup>

The policies of collectivisation and dekulakisation prompted acts of resistance involving peasant women, who openly argued at meetings, participated in mass anti-Soviet movements and protested against the authorities.<sup>7</sup> These acts included the destruction of village soviet buildings, the beating up of officials and the voicing of anti-Soviet slogans. Women demanded a halt to grain procurements and an end to the closure of churches. In 1930, the number of

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peasant women taking part in anti-government demonstrations rose significantly. In the first half of 1930, over one-third of demonstrations had exclusively female participants, and in others women were either the majority or a significant proportion of the participants. The demonstrations expressed open opposition to the authorities and to Soviet policies, and involved the unauthorised removal of collectivised property.<sup>8</sup> Of 2897 recorded women's protests, 1154 were directed against collectivisation, 778 against the removal of bells and the closure of churches, 422 in support of kulaks and 336 because of food shortages.<sup>9</sup> For example, in winter 1929, a crowd of rural women robbed a shop where seed was stored, and in spring 1930 a crowd of between three and four hundred women removed two horses and a cow from the *kolkhoz* (collective farm). The horses were returned to their owner and the cow was given to a widow whose husband had been shot for counterrevolutionary activity.<sup>10</sup> In February 1930, during an inventory of kulak property, officials were attacked by a kulak daughter and were forced to flee from the house.<sup>11</sup> In spring 1930, women protected a local peasant threatened with deportation.<sup>12</sup>

In the second half of 1930, in response to the harsh methods employed to implement collectivisation, resistance by rural women increased still further. The authorities, however, treated women more leniently than men, and many believed that 'whatever women do, nothing will happen to them'.<sup>13</sup> Women who were arrested were usually given shorter sentences. In the second half of 1930, of 1352 peasant protests, women constituted the majority in 543 cases, and 464 consisted entirely of women. In the remaining examples, women formed a significant proportion. 'Women's riots' were the most effective form of resistance in the countryside. Peasant women defended their interests, demonstrating a significant level of organisation and conscious political opposition.

More than half of the protests were linked to the grain procurement campaigns, dekulakisation and deportations, and approximately one-fifth were the result of the restriction of religious rights. Armed with pitchforks, stakes and knives, peasant women attacked Soviet institutions. Crowds of women deflected brigades of grain collectors, held up the carts carrying grain confiscated from the village, freed those who had been arrested, watched over houses where property was subject to confiscation, smashed up the offices of the village soviet, burnt documents and even beat up local activists.<sup>14</sup> In some cases, even pro-government women activists suffered assaults and beatings. In response, women activists themselves demanded the introduction of measures against those opposing collectivisation.<sup>15</sup>

Peasant women opposed collectivisation even within the family. Cases were reported of wives beating their husbands for joining the *kolkhoz*. One woman, when she learnt that her husband had applied to join the *kolkhoz*, beat him with a bench and attacked him with an axe. Another woman, learning that her husband had already joined the *kolkhoz*, drowned herself. Yet another woman applied for a separate grant of land for herself after her husband joined the *kolkhoz* and she refused to go with him.<sup>16</sup>

At meetings, women openly declared: 'This is women's business; you've no reason to interfere.'<sup>17</sup> Meetings which discussed grain deliveries and taxation were often attended only by women with men's approval: 'They're more persistent, a bit more vociferous.'<sup>18</sup> One agent noted in January 1930, 'When we call a meeting, it's mainly women who come and they try to disrupt it'. According to further reports:

At previous village meetings, the front seats were occupied by bearded men, and women stood right at the back by the door, now it's the other way round – women sit in front, actively speaking against collectivisation and the men are silent.<sup>19</sup>

The officials who came to subdue the unrest were told:

Even if you shoot at us now, we won't give you any grain; we'll drive all the brigade leaders from the village and you won't do anything to us for this. In spring a detachment of 26 people came here and we drummed them out of the village.<sup>20</sup>

Although the majority of conflicts were resolved peacefully, one in six peasant women's protests ended with an armed clash and the arrest of participants.<sup>21</sup>

It soon became clear that the Soviet authorities would not be able to implement collectivisation without appeasing village women. The village poor, including women, were specifically targeted: those who were eager to get rich at someone else's expense, who wanted to move into the homes of those driven out of the village, to make use of the land, seeds and equipment taken from them. Committees of Poor Peasants were established to requisition grain from wealthier peasants.<sup>22</sup> The Communist Party adopted this method. Peasant women activists thus became a counterweight to those fellow villagers who protested against collectivisation. In February 1930, women delegates in one region raised a demand:

To strengthen our *kolkhoz* still further, more quickly, the only way of liberating the labourers and the poor from exploitation and poverty, call on our government and party to accelerate dekulakisation and the deportation of our most evil enemies, who are hindering the construction of socialism in our village. ... The means of production, earned by our hands, should then be transferred to the *kolkhoz*.<sup>23</sup>

The delegates were supported by poor peasant women, who criticised kulak behaviour: 'They spend a lot of money on home brew, celebrating weddings and all kinds of religious festivals for which they use several hundred puds (pud = 16.4 kg) of flour; then for the grain collections they say they don't have anything.'<sup>24</sup> Even the most militant, however, requested clarification on two specific questions: 'We're joining the *kolkhoz*, but we're told that the church isn't necessary and wives will be shared. Explain this to us!'<sup>25</sup>

Much political focus was directed towards young village women, who were promoted to senior positions, awarded state honours and publicly praised. Pasha

Angelina and Mariya Demchenko became heroines of the 1930s. The rousing Stalinist slogan 'Women on the collective farm are a great force!' rang out in 1933. This was a timely initiative. As men left the countryside in search of work elsewhere, women's prestige in the village increased and they were supported by the Soviet authorities.

External pressures also threatened village life as the Soviet state and local authorities built for the future and spearheaded rural change. State-led industrialisation required extensive labour resources, and economists calculated that the countryside could provide 10 million workers. Men were prioritised in industrial recruitment, and peasant women took their place in the village. When women became a potential threat to the authorities, the government took measures to promote them and to establish their rights to participate in *kolkhoz* administration, thus placing them on the same footing as men. Since men's opposition to this was considerable, quotas were established for the promotion of women.<sup>26</sup>

During the 1930s, the authorities gave their full support to rural women's demands and tried to meet their expectations. It was in response to the insistent demands of mostly peasant women that high levels of alimony payable by fathers who abandoned their children were introduced. Likewise, the ban on abortion in 1936 was supported by many rural women. Once collectivisation was complete, however, the attitude of the authorities changed fundamentally. Thereafter, it was not until the mid-1960s that peasants received monetary wages. Children born out of wedlock, with no father recorded on their birth certificate, received little material help from the state before the mid-1960s. Social security payments for pensions, sick leave and maternity provision were likewise only introduced for the peasantry in the mid-1960s. Rural inhabitants did not receive an internal passport until the mid-1970s. Thus, before these measures were introduced, peasant women were effectively hostages of the collective farm system.

Peasant women also raised oppositional voices in the countryside. At the beginning of the 1930s, the majority of peasant women opposed the *kolkhoz* and the authorities made some real concessions. By the time of the Great Terror, however, criticism of the regime was limited to domestic conversations between neighbours. In Saratov in 1937, women gathered to exchange news with a peasant woman who expressed doubts about the *kolkhoz*: 'Probably there'll be no end to this *kolkhoz* business. It's astonishing; there's no good anywhere, but people all support Soviet power. Life's so uncertain but everyone remains silent!' Her neighbour replied:

Nowadays you can't say anything – whether you're right or not; as soon as you say something, straightaway you'll be put in prison. Oh, when shall we be free of this regime? ... after all, in their heart everyone's seething but scarcely anyone says anything.<sup>27</sup>

There were also some public protests. On 6 November 1937 at a meeting celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution, Klavdiya Nikiforovna Morozova declared: 'Comrades, why are you sitting and saying nothing? After all, you're cold and hungry and you're forced to work day and night; they drink your blood and you're silent; you need to speak the truth!' The *kolkhoz* workers 'were upset by such a speech and demanded that she should be brought to account for slandering the party and the *kolkhoz*'. Morozova was arrested.<sup>28</sup>

During the 1930s, the Soviet regime attempted to appease rural women, but local bosses often distorted central government policy. Rural inhabitants who trusted the central authorities in Moscow and the Soviet press often had little faith in their local bosses; in their own minds, these two branches of Soviet power were completely separate. The overwhelming majority of peasant women relied on the central authorities to resolve local disputes. However paradoxical this may seem, peasants placed their hopes in a higher Soviet justice, and called for the removal of local leaders who failed to establish order. Appealing for justice on both policy and personal grounds, peasants sent thousands of letters of complaint to Moscow rather than to the local authorities.

For example, Domna Balybina, a heroine mother of 10 children living in a small house, had a husband who was disabled during the Second World War. Over a 2-year period, her local appeals for help with building materials were 'fobbed off with sneers, promises and excuses—either because of poor roads or because there was no timber'. In 1956 she appealed to the USSR Supreme Soviet, which ordered local officials to provide assistance. Still the authorities were slow to carry out the instructions and 'put off any action'. The complaints continued until, finally, she was allocated money and building materials for the extension of their house.<sup>29</sup>

Following the completion of collectivisation, life on the *kolkhoz* continued mostly without the assistance of local officials and without much sign of progress in the countryside. In 1969, the inhabitants of one *kolkhoz* wrote to the rural newspaper *Sel'skaya zhizn'* (*Village Life*):

We'd be better off if *kolkhoz* chairman K. and illiterate, backward and old-fashioned book-keeper F. didn't get drunk and engage in spoiling and stealing *kolkhoz* property. Our land provides a good harvest, and if only you knew what good potatoes we grow, and what good meadows we have for hay and pasture. And the most important thing – what industrious people we have! We can't understand why our noble labour is wiped from the face of the earth by our managers. We write not for our own benefit, but for the common good.<sup>30</sup>

People gradually became reconciled to a *kolkhoz* life of daily grind and heavy labour, with occasional joys and constant worry. Some *kolkhoz* leaders ensured a good life for their villages, but the majority of peasants lived rather poorly. Nevertheless, by the 1950s, a few 'millionaire *kolkhozy*' had emerged.

The arbitrary behaviour of *kolkhoz* leaders was dealt with by the USSR Procurator. Letters were sent to the Supreme Soviet and the Central Committee, but often without result. The *kolkhoz* chairperson was responsible for meeting local plan targets, and did so sometimes by using verbal and physical assaults. In 1937, one chairperson fined a woman 10 roubles for not turning up for work; another chairperson 'beat the dairymaid, who was considered the best shock worker and had a number of prizes ... and swore at her, using obscene language'.<sup>31</sup>

Thirty years later, little had changed. In 1968, a letter to *Sel'skaya zhizn'* complained:

Our woeful chairperson beats the *kolkhoz* workers for the slightest mistake at work, is rude to his subordinates and recently beat his wife and mother. That's the sort of manager we've got! Surely we can't take him as a role model. The *kolkhoz* chairperson shames the honour of our *kolkhoz* with his behaviour!<sup>32</sup>

Physical violence was largely condemned in rural communities, and whilst it was sometimes possible to justify violence in family quarrels, outsiders and especially the local bosses were rarely forgiven. Villagers themselves were not absolutely categorical in this: living in the countryside, villagers often settled things 'with their fists'.

Collectivisation radically changed the structure of peasant life. Work on *kolkhoz* land became the source of survival in the countryside. All able-bodied members were expected to work on the *kolkhoz* and the main source of labour was peasant women. Payment for labour days was based on the level of *kolkhoz* plan fulfilment, but often there was no actual payment for years on end. In order to survive, children were involved in labour, and people resorted to theft.

Village children were supposed to go to school.<sup>33</sup> A considerable proportion, however, could not study because they worked alongside adults on the *kolkhoz*.<sup>34</sup> As the length of the working day was 10–12 hours, young people also worked in the dark, often injuring themselves. By 1939, the practice was so widespread that the issue was taken up by the USSR Procurator.<sup>35</sup> Children, tired and hungry, resorted to petty theft in order to provide food for themselves and their families. Theft could be punished harshly: on 4 August 1948, for the theft of two cabbages by her young son, Dukhovenkova was deprived of the right to receive any cabbages for her labour days.<sup>36</sup> Adults were similarly punished. During the famine in August 1949, two widows, previously without criminal record, 'stole 14kgs of rye' for their starving children. Caught red-handed, they were each sentenced to 8 years in a corrective labour camp.<sup>37</sup> This punishment was far in excess of the crime.

Poverty was a common feature of Soviet rural life. In agriculture before collectivisation, the well-being of the family was dependent on the contribution of all household members. After collectivisation, everyone worked on the *kolkhoz*, but not all were counted towards labour day payments. One desperate woman wrote to the authorities in December 1953:

I've got three children, and I can't support them because I don't have any money. I ask the chairperson of the USSR Supreme Soviet to help. Today I don't have a morsel. I worked on the *kolkhoz* for the whole year and didn't get a gram, and nothing will be provided. I've worked for nine years on my *kolkhoz* but haven't received a gram. I borrow bits and pieces of food to raise my children. ... At least send me some bread.<sup>38</sup>

The majority of rural peasant women worked in the fields planting, weeding and harvesting vegetables by hand or on the livestock farm with daily manual milking of cows, starting at five in the morning and working into the evening. Any problems had to be resolved locally: if equipment broke down, it had to be repaired; manure had to be removed by hand; if there was no fodder, grass had to be cut; if there was no vet, animals were treated with herbs and infusions. Peasants had a strong connection to nature and wildlife, and they traditionally treated their cows as benefactors. In 1976, a dairymaid wrote to *Sel'skaya zhizn'*: 'I'm in my fifth year looking after calves; sometimes I want to give it all up, but I feel sorry for the calves. After all it's not their fault that we're working in terrible conditions.'<sup>39</sup>

Poultry workers laboured under similar conditions. One woman noted:

The hen house is in bad condition and is falling down. They only started to put glass in the windows yesterday; there's absolutely no light, and I heard from speeches that there must, without fail, be light. A chick is like a baby, it needs a lot of care. We should get the conditions right.<sup>40</sup>

The fulfilment of the plan very often depended on women's conscientiousness, empathy and sense of responsibility.

It is clear from many examples that peasant women often worked in poor conditions.<sup>41</sup> Cowsheds, rarely cleaned out, were in a state of disrepair and were falling down, resulting in injuries. There were cuts in the power supply, leaving dairymaids to milk by hand in the dark. Overalls, headscarves and rubber boots were a rarity, and so peasants dressed for work in their domestic clothing. Towels, gauze and soap were in short supply. The same buckets were used for milking, for providing drinking water to the cows and for silage for their feed. The milk was not treated properly, leaving the animals sick and the workers with ringworm. Children played in the cowshed because there was nobody to leave them with.

Many young girls followed the example of Pasha Angelina and became tractor or combine harvester drivers. The establishment of the Pasha Angelina prize for labour glory in 1973 revealed thousands of followers of Angelina's work methods who were now eligible for awards.<sup>42</sup> Over time, rural children began to train for the prestigious agricultural specialities of agronomist, veterinary surgeon and animal specialist, becoming the pride of their parents and earning the respect of their village. Some became doctors and schoolteachers. Peasant women also became *kolkhoz* managers and production organisers. As such, they also became the targets of the village's sharpest criticism and they



were easily removed from their posts, thus undermining women's power in rural communities.

Amidst the routines of everyday life there were joyful events: marriages, births and village festivals with dancing and singing. The isolated nature of rural life generated particular attitudes towards the family, and young people tended to adopt the standards set by the older generation.<sup>43</sup> The majority of village women were in officially registered marriages. Parents and relatives called for patience in marriage: 'without a man, village life is difficult'. Over time, the ideal of a future husband changed: apart from good looks and kindness, young women sought men with a flair for business, who knew how to get ahead in the modern economy.<sup>44</sup> The overwhelming majority of young couples considered it essential to start a family and have children.<sup>45</sup>

Soviet rural women tended to uphold the traditional role of the husband in the family, but in practice women worked more, had less leisure time, slept fewer hours and took on responsibility for themselves and their family. They did not tend to question men's leading role in the economic life of the village. Instead, they often criticised the few leading Komsomol women who were promoted by Soviet authorities, those women who drove tractors and combine harvesters or who set records on the *kolkhoz*. Some of the appointed *kolkhoz* chairwomen had their party documents burnt by their husbands and were even beaten. Villagers were often critical of the idea of women working closely alongside men because this was not always considered acceptable in the countryside. Windows of women's homes were smashed and one Stakhanovite woman's house was set on fire.<sup>46</sup>

Despite government efforts, the number of rural women in paid administrative posts did not increase. The Soviet countryside was never reconciled to the idea that a woman could manage the *kolkhoz* equally with a man. Men were given more opportunities to succeed in rural life despite the rhetoric of equality.<sup>47</sup> There were, however, some very determined rural women who headed farmers' associations and village administrations, contrary to local traditions.<sup>48</sup>

For many village women, a husband represented not only 'family happiness' but also a worker and helper present in the household. Thus, Soviet rural women tended to be fairly tolerant of their husbands; 'to replace' a rural husband was very difficult. Divorce and separation were rare. Chronic alcoholism was the main cause of rural divorce. The pre-revolutionary village limited alcohol consumption and organised societies of sobriety. The Soviet village, however, lost this tradition. Women both spearheaded campaigns for rural sobriety and engaged in making home brew, the main source of drunkenness in the village. Presented with more liberal marriage laws, many couples did not officially register their marriages. The departure of a husband and father, however, was a double blow, to the family and the household economy. The search for an absent father to obtain alimony could last many years.

In 1953, faced with financial difficulties, several village women wrote a pointed letter to the chair of the USSR Supreme Soviet reflecting their general situation:

This letter is from martyr women. So many perish, that is women lay hands on themselves, throw themselves under trains and so on, the majority die from abortions. Why? Because it's difficult to bring up a child on fifty roubles.

We appeal to you: women shouldn't leave their children as orphans; the father of the child should pay.<sup>49</sup>

Soviet rural mothers often encouraged their children, especially their daughters, to leave the village and move elsewhere to find work. Without young women, the villages emptied as young men went after them. One *kolkhoz* chairman, concerned about a declining workforce, tried to prevent people leaving by refusing to issue the form required to obtain an internal passport, explaining his decision by saying: 'Someone has to milk the cows!' He instructed local teachers to give low marks so that the children would not be able to leave with such poor grades.

Young rural women went to the cities hoping to find happiness. Acquaintances were made through letter writing, a widespread phenomenon in the Soviet period. Strangers from various towns and villages wrote letters addressed 'to someone seeking friendship'. In such a way, a naïve villager could find herself open to a chance encounter and end up the mother of an illegitimate child—'the victim of a momentary weakness'. Likewise, some former village girls became unwittingly involved in criminal activities. In November 1953, one rural woman went in search of work to Moscow, where she received a letter and photo from an unknown Georgian. When they met, she found him 'ready to get married'. This so-called fiancé, 'by flattery and threats persuaded her to sell fake railway tickets' because she worked as a station cashier. She received a 3-year prison sentence. She appealed to the USSR Supreme Soviet and the sentence was halved.<sup>50</sup>

One advantage of rural life, reflecting peasant attachment to the land and the possibility of being one's own boss, was the private plot that provided both food and a monetary income. It was peasant women who undertook most of the labour on the family plot.<sup>51</sup> Peasants steadfastly defended their private land. In one documented case from 1952, a vine specialist, having quarrelled with her husband, left with her children and went to a neighbouring farm. Having reconciled, the couple found they had lost half of their private plot after the vineyard was taken over by people known to the *kolkhoz* management. Local authorities ignored their repeated pleas, and only the husband's third appeal to the USSR Supreme Soviet was successful. The *kolkhoz* chair was forced to review his decision and to allow the family to work on their private plot, which contained vines they had cultivated for many years.<sup>52</sup>

Normal daily life for rural women often lacked even the most basic services and supplies. The most pressing problem was access to drinking water, but it was 'simple water' from 'a simple well' which was often missing, as noted in a letter to *Sel'skaya zhizn'* in 1969:

For two years now we've been drinking water the use of which is prohibited. The old well became unfit for use; it's even dangerous to approach. Dirt falls in from ground level, sometimes geese and ducks fall into it. We've got water in the cowshed. There's a reserve tank to which water is pumped, but it's rusty, uncovered and there's a lot of dirt in it; pigeons use it as a birdbath, but we have to use this water.<sup>53</sup>

Hundreds of such letters detailed water extraction from rivers over slippery banks, on hands and knees, tied with ropes and pulling one another, marching several kilometres with buckets on a yoke, and in winter making holes through ice floes.<sup>54</sup>

The electricity supply was patchy in the villages. 'A typical *kolkhoz* story' in the press ran: '*kolkhoz* workers are not benefitting from the wonderful creations of humankind. Everything that was acquired with such joy brings boredom; because of the poor voltage, electrical devices don't work. A kerosene lamp gives better light.'<sup>55</sup> The shortage of electricity poles, poor functioning of the substation, inadequate equipment, unqualified service personnel and other such excuses were made for the poor supply.

Rural medical facilities were a rarity; at best a midwifery post existed. Rural medicine had characteristically low standards. Rural hospitals provided service for a 30–40 km radius and sometimes had access to only one horse.<sup>56</sup> The hospital often was not properly heated.<sup>57</sup> There were few specialist doctors: 'there's one neuropathologist for the whole district'.<sup>58</sup> Village patients often travelled directly to nearby towns or cities: 'It's good if you've got someone to stay with otherwise you have to spend the night outside.'<sup>59</sup>

Rural trade networks were similarly disorganised: shops were unheated, with ceilings where it was possible 'to observe a lunar eclipse'; when it rained, the goods were soaked; with a warped door, shopping was passed through the window. There was a permanent shortage of everything. The main worry for peasant women was providing the family with food. Four to six kilometres was not considered by the local authorities as too great a distance to travel for food supplies. In 1975, a letter in *Sel'skaya zhizn'* noted: 'There's a small shop in the village, but for bread, vegetable oil and salt we have to go 6 km. The shop mainly sells only vodka.'<sup>60</sup> Another complaint in 1979 noted the continued 'March for bread': 'We're without bread for weeks at a time. Sometimes we have to go 14 km to get some.'<sup>61</sup> The quality of the bread gave rise to similar complaints: 'To feed us – the people who grew it – with stale bread, often of poor quality, that, comrades, is insulting!'<sup>62</sup> 'It turns out that unfed cattle is an emergency at all levels, but the lack of bread in the village is a normal event.'<sup>63</sup>

The selection of goods available in village shops was extremely limited. There were shortages of everything, from washing powder, soap, paraffin and matches to warm blouses, scarves, felt boots and galoshes. Life in the countryside requires specialist footwear, clothing and equipment: sheepskin coats, mittens, quilted jackets, fur hats, shawls; buckets, clothes boilers, earthenware pots and jars. Practically none of these items was available in village shops. Thousands of

letters containing requests, complaints and suggestions went unanswered. A 1970 letter to the central press noted: 'Our villages are more than 60 km from the district centre. Village shops haven't stocked even matches for 6 months or more, not to mention other goods. We resort to starting a fire in the primitive way and look for flint.'<sup>64</sup> A mother of eight children asked: 'The shops have no soap or washing powder. Children need to be washed and their clothes laundered, but with what?'<sup>65</sup> Other peasants were equally upset: 'It's a real Russian winter. We're responsible for a large livestock farm and preparation for the spring sowing. We don't have time to sit by the stove, but we want to go to work in warm clothing, which isn't available in our shops.'<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, the lack of pre-school institutions forced mothers to take their young children to work with them. Children ran about and joined in village work. Mothers working in the fields had to run back to the village, sometimes over several kilometres, to feed their children, including those who were breastfeeding. Older children generally looked after younger ones, but both groups were mostly left to themselves. Rural schooling remained a key problem. Some school buildings were not safe. In one example, 60 children were taught in a dilapidated primary school; ceiling beams were propped up and the roof was rusty and in poor condition.<sup>67</sup> The parents of 400 village children complained that they were not confident their children would return home safely from a school that was a shored-up, 100-year-old wooden house.<sup>68</sup>

Local officials were not interested in such trivial problems. The central administration generally considered the rural population 'backward and uncultured'.<sup>69</sup> Many rural children grew up without suitable professional training and education. They walked several kilometres to school in all types of weather and amused themselves in the evenings by playing cards, drinking and fighting. There was no perceived need to provide leisure activities for them. In 1971, *kolkhoz* workers complained to *Sel'skaya zhizn'*:

The club's a dilapidated brick building; it's neither two-storey nor one-storey but somewhere in between. Underneath is the village soviet store-room. Young people want to relax, dance, but in winter the club's cold. There are no hobby groups. Young people wander the streets and meet up in the centre of the village, drink and begin to show off their daring and bravado. The result: hooliganism, court cases and absenteeism.<sup>70</sup>

Everyone had the opportunity to distract themselves 'from gloomy *kolkhoz* life'.<sup>71</sup>

Peasant women went to the local club to watch films or attend concerts. In many villages, the tradition of choral singing and dances was maintained and peasant women shared this with their friends. Village culture was also represented by the 'red corner', but even here 'the walls and ceiling are peeling and the floor is sagging. Benches have missing legs. On the stage one can break a leg. During the harvest the building is filled with grain or potatoes.'<sup>72</sup>

Local *kolkhoz* production meetings were not particularly interesting to most villagers, since there were few realistic possibilities of fulfilling the plans. Leading workers, however, sometimes had the opportunity to visit the district centre on official business, which also allowed them to deal with family and personal business, and to access shops and services. The local situation is revealed in the following speech from 29 December 1967:

Comrades! I was just coming out to speak and was asked, 'Are you going to speak in a headscarf?' I replied, 'Yes. I wanted to buy a comb and a hair-pin but there aren't any in the shops!' I came to this conference in borrowed galoshes because in our shops there aren't any for sale! Our shop has no sweets or toys for the children for New Year.<sup>73</sup>

At one regular district meeting in 1970, of 600 participants, 70 had gone about their own business whilst they should have been delivering their reports, including even those 'who had been invited to speak'.<sup>74</sup>

There were other *kolkhoz* meetings, however, to which ordinary members of the collective were not invited. Communist Party meetings were held, attended by both men and women, where, alongside production plans, personal infringements were considered: someone who had committed an offence, who had lost their party card, had got drunk or split up a family. Being very curious, peasant women often listened outside while the meeting was in progress and immediately went to spread 'the latest news' round the village. Few in the village were Communist Party members, and the remaining community provided advice on how to respond to misdemeanours: whether to punish or acquit a wandering husband, or whether to admonish a female marriage-wrecker.<sup>75</sup>

Another major event for the community was 'the general assembly' in which all residents were involved. The general assembly dealt with serious matters such as crimes, home-brewing and family breakdown. Officials were invited to conduct an investigation, to question the victims and the witnesses. Anyone who wished to speak was given the opportunity to do so. A public prosecutor and public defender were selected. Such meetings could last for hours, and were subsequently discussed for weeks afterwards.

In matters of religion, the 1917 Revolution swept away the customary presence of the Russian Orthodox Church, but threats and bans by the Soviet authorities did not deter village women from practising their faith and upholding their spiritual beliefs. Following the closure and destruction of churches during the interwar years, 1944 brought a long awaited relaxation. Stalin gave permission for churches to be reopened, spurred on by the campaigns of rural women, as this letter demonstrates:

During the Great Patriotic War, we ourselves, some with a weapon in our hands on the battlefield, others in the rear on the *kolkhoz* and in industry, together with our sons and daughters, justified the trust of the Party and the government – we smashed the cunning enemy and now we've moved to peaceful labour. We've

made every effort to fulfil the tasks set before us, but let us old people satisfy our spiritual needs.<sup>76</sup>

Peasant women considered their duty towards the church 'to be a godly and salutary matter, an act of piety'. They walked around several villages, collecting signatures to support the reopening of local churches. In May 1946, one woman visited six villages over a radius of 13 kilometres and 'collected a list of 400 believers', which she handed to the authorities. She recalled how 'an old medical worker burst into tears on seeing the list and signed himself up along with his elderly wife'.<sup>77</sup>

In another example, from 1944 to 1946, 150 believers, mainly rural women, petitioned for the reopening of a village church. They sent three written applications and made personal representations to the authorities 119 times. Likewise, a group of 300 believers, mainly peasant women, petitioned for the transfer to them of the village church building currently being used as a grain store, leaving the nearest working church 12 km away. A group of 12 women took it in turns to visit the authorities.<sup>78</sup>

Peasant women protected their village churches and retrieved church property from ruined buildings. A severe drought in one region in summer 1946 threatened the harvest and prompted local peasant women to pray for rain. The services began on 4 June and on 7 June it rained.<sup>79</sup> Prayers for rain became widespread. The regional authorities reacted by instructing 'all able-bodied residents ... to carry out normal work on the *kolkhoz*' in the hope of distracting people from the 'religious meetings'.<sup>80</sup> This militant atheist position mostly had the opposite effect. In the first half of the 1950s alone, the number of applications for the reopening of churches trebled and the number of 'peasant envoys' visiting the authorities doubled.<sup>81</sup>

The organisers of these campaigns were mainly middle-aged and older women. The local authorities deployed atheist propaganda methods against them. In 1959, to stop pilgrimages to a specific site, one *kolkhoz* planned to set up at its location a pasture for the *kolkhoz* cows, to build a summer shelter for the cattle and accommodation for the livestock workers.<sup>82</sup> In another village, where there were 20 sites to which pilgrimages had been made for over 200 years, it was decided to open a pioneer camp.<sup>83</sup> Peasant women collected signatures, corresponded with the authorities and protected these sacred places. When pension reform was enacted in the mid-1960s, many peasant women donated the money to their church.<sup>84</sup> On religious festivals, village churches were packed with believers, mainly peasant women.

These women, who had lived through collectivisation and the war, did not expect any prosperity from the *kolkhoz* or social assistance. In 1953, a 70-year-old widow summed up her life:

I'm a *kolkhoz* member, but now they've given me only a small piece of land, a kitchen garden, and I'm forgotten because I'm no longer working. My house is old, full of holes, like a sieve. To get firewood – there's nowhere to get a horse, so I

have to drag it on my back from the forest over one and half kilometres. Even the garden – I don't know how I can sow it because I can't hire anyone, and I've no strength to dig. The *kolkhoz* chairman has forgotten that when I was fit I'd work with my husband without stopping but my husband fell ill, he caught a cold and died. And now I'm not needed by anyone.<sup>85</sup>

Life on the Soviet *kolkhoz* certainly did not bring material prosperity. The central authorities were mostly indifferent to *kolkhoz* workers. This was a major blow to those peasants who had voluntarily entered the *kolkhoz*. They had counted on the authorities providing for them: 'We *kolkhoz* workers, as Soviet people, work in the *kolkhoz* honestly and conscientiously. We want to bring to our motherland all that is best and to strengthen it. Yet nobody pays attention to us peasants', a female *kolkhoz* worker wrote to the Supreme Soviet in 1954.<sup>86</sup> Deprived of even the most basic necessities in terms of their living and working conditions, the Soviet peasantry nevertheless dragged the *kolkhoz* economy along. Labour days often went unpaid and peasants were regularly neglected. Few incentives were provided to the villages and *kolkhoz* workers. Even when celebrations took place, the leadership did not always consider it necessary to share in their successes. One organiser of socialist competition in 1955 simply handed over the banner to the wrong *kolkhoz* after he found himself on the wrong road.<sup>87</sup>

Even many years later, after the children of the very first *kolkhoz* workers had grown up, rural problems remained unchanged. Village life revolved around hard work and monotonous labour. The Soviet authorities, on the whole, paid scant attention to the countryside and showed little respect for the peasantry. In 1967, one woman expressed her dissatisfaction: 'Our *kolkhoz* has around 1000 ha of land, and we live on this land, scarcely making ends meet. In the *kolkhoz* everything is to the detriment of the *kolkhoz* worker and the *kolkhoz*.'<sup>88</sup>

In such circumstances, the hard work of the peasantry and the enduring patience of the Soviet countryside evoke deep respect. Most surprising of all is not the long drawn-out collapse of collectivised agriculture and the complete indifference of the Soviet authorities to the problems of village life, but the fact that the peasantry remained patient for so long. Such was the Soviet countryside, where the leading characters were peasant women.

## NOTES

1. For more detailed studies of the everyday lives of Russian peasant women, see L. N. Denisova, *Zhenshchiny russkikh selenii: trudovye budni*, Moscow: 'Mir istorii', 2003, and Liubov Denisova, *Rural Women in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. and trans. by Irina Mukhina, London: Routledge, 2010. This chapter has been translated by Michael Berry and edited by Melanie Ilic.
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3. *Sovetskaya derevnya*, 3/1, p. 771.

4. *Tragediya sovetskoi derevni: kollektivizatsiya i raskulachivanie. Dokumenty i materialy*, tom 2, Moscow: Rosspen, 2000, p. 522.
5. Lynne Viola uses this phrase in a sub-heading in her book *The Unknown Gulag: the Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 33.
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7. *Sovetskaya derevnya*, 3/1, p. 550.
8. *Sovetskaya derevnya*, 3/1, p. 544.
9. *Sovetskaya derevnya*, 3/1, p. 544.
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18. *Sovetskaya derevnya*, 3/1, p. 550.
19. Fedorenko, 'Russian Peasantry', p. 54.
20. *Sovetskaya derevnya*, 3/1, p. 548.
21. *Sovetskaya derevnya*, 3/1, pp. 548–9.
22. Lynne Viola, V.P. Danilov, N.A. Ivinskii and Denis Kozlov (eds.), *The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside*, vol. 1: *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927–1930*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005, p. 10.
23. GAPO/OFOPO, 224/1/25/19.
24. GAPO/OFOPO, 224/1/5/29.
25. GAPO/OFOPO, 224/5/16/50.
26. For example, see VOANPI, 1/160/1452/455–6 (1939).
27. GAPO/OFOPO, 224/1/168/19.
28. GAPO/OFOPO, 224/1/168/36.
29. GARF, 7523/75/121/104–5, 105ob., 107, 110.
30. RGASPI, 591/1/59/42–3.
31. GAPO/OFOPO, 85/1/40/187–8.
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33. Postanovlenie Politburo TsK VKP(b) 'O sostoyanii i zadachakh nizshei i srednei shkoly', 25 August 1931.
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40. GAPO, R-1913/1/4030/65.
41. See, for example, GAPO, 2454/1/213/103–12; GAVO 1300/1/1463/82, 84–6, 87, 89–91.
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53. RGASPI, 591/1/58/10–11.
54. RGASPI, 591/1/88/32.
55. RGASPI, 591/1/87/29–30.
56. RGASPI, 591/1/87/5.
57. RGASPI, 591/1/173/63.
58. RGASPI, 591/1/204/133–4.
59. RGASPI, 591/1/204/160–1.
60. RGASPI, 591/1/198/10.
61. RGASPI, 591/1/198/113.
62. GAPO/OFOPO, 247/33/1/64.
63. GAPO/OFOPO, 247/33/1/67.
64. RGASPI, 591/1/90/66.
65. RGASPI, 591/1/243/86.
66. RGASPI, 591/1/90/7.
67. RGASPI, 591/1/173/38.
68. RGASPI, 591/1/73/40–1.
69. RGASPI, 591/1/38/7.
70. RGASPI, 591/1/100/24–5.
71. RGASPI, 591/1/33/5.
72. RGASPI, 591/1/33/307.
73. GAPO/OFOPO, 247/1/589/11–12.
74. GAPO, R-1913/1/5507/331–2.
75. VOANPI, 6754/1/70/85-6ob.; 3646/1/8/22–4.
76. GAPO, R-2391/1/3/144.
77. GARF, 6991/1/127/182.
78. GARF, 6991/1/126/5ob.
79. GAPO, R-2391/1/3/80.
80. GAPO, R-2391/1/7/120.
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## Memory and History: Korean Women's Experiences of Repression During the Stalin Era

*Junbae Jo*

On the first day of April 1993, the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation announced a decree stating that the political repression that had been enacted against Koreans in the Soviet Union and their forced deportation during the Great Terror under Stalin in 1937 had been illegal. The accusation of Japanese espionage made against them was now considered to have been groundless. Under the terms of this decree, Korean victims, including their families, were soon to be rehabilitated in political, economic and social terms. If they wanted to return to the Far East, from where they had been banished, all necessary assistance would be provided by the authorities for their relocation. Other former constituent republics of the Soviet Union were also encouraged to introduce similar measures so that equivalent acts might be introduced for their Korean populations.<sup>1</sup> More than half a century after the Stalinist terror, an oriental minority in Russia was now finally provided with the opportunity to reveal its hidden history.

This official reinstatement did not just allow for the revelation of the tragic past of the Soviet Korean population as a whole. It also allowed for many individual repressed memories to be released, voiced and translated into a world where the previous ban on such expressions was now completely lifted. Koreans were now able to talk openly and freely about what they had seen, heard and experienced during the Great Terror, but had not been able to make public since then. Survivors and eyewitnesses began to reveal their sad stories of these troubled times. Gulag returnees and ex-prisoners could also now disclose the realities of their difficult lives. The sons and daughters of terror victims now

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deceased also recalled how their parents had endured the hardships of those years. Friends and colleagues of the victims similarly recalled their missing companions with great affection. Memory was brought back to life through this revisiting of Soviet history.

These resurfacing memories, however, gave rise to a number of completely unanticipated conflicts between the various groups of Koreans attempting to tell their stories. Some people provided rather different stories and interpretations about their experiences from those which all the Korean victims were believed universally to have shared. Such discrepancies often developed into serious conflicts, involving critical exchanges and harsh words over the nature of 'truth'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, respondent memories of the Soviet repressions could be grouped according to time and place, and could even be classified into a hierarchy in which each level could be assigned its own status. In addition, it was widely recognised that memory was both relative and imperfect. People could not easily reproduce exactly what they had seen and heard, and thus the potential for distortion and fabrication was inevitable in the process of evoking memory. In this sense, memory served not only the past, but also the present.<sup>3</sup> In short, a new politics of memory was now required in the recording and analyses of these accounts.

With the acceleration of Gorbachev's reforms in the late 1980s, Soviet Koreans had already started to reveal their suppressed memories of their lived adversities. A considerable number of diaries and memoirs detailing the years of the Great Terror were discovered, and some of these were published. Newspapers and journals competed with each other to publish the stories of Gulag returnees and terror victims. A series of interviews was undertaken with the survivors and the descendants of victims of the Great Terror to provide a more vivid picture of how they had lived. Sons and daughters, and even grandchildren, came forward to testify to what they had heard from their parents and relatives. The final collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 turned the initial excavation of these memories into an outpouring, and the subsequent introduction of the reinstatement policy by the Russian government in 1993 turned that outpouring into a deluge.<sup>4</sup>

Women's voices were clearly evident in this avalanche of narratives. Above all else, they had been victims themselves. Some had been sent to the Gulag or exiled to a remote area as the outcome of only the crudest of investigations. Others had been arrested and executed after only a summary trial. Many others found themselves deported to Central Asia in the autumn of 1937.<sup>5</sup> In addition to being direct victims, women also played a supporting role in these tragic events. They witnessed how their parents and husbands were taken away by the security services and they made every effort to find out where they were being held.<sup>6</sup> Women, as mothers, also lost a great number of their sons and daughters during the Great Terror, which was difficult for them to endure. They had to remember, record and transmit all that had happened, not in public but in secret and with silent tears. Women consequently made a significant contribution to the restructuring of the memories and recollections of the Soviet repressions.

The first part of this chapter offers a brief history of Koreans in Tsarist and Soviet Russia from the mid-nineteenth century to 1937, when they were forced to migrate from the Far East to Central Asia. The second section explores the life of a Korean Communist Party leader's daughter, who was abandoned by her parents as a child but was reunited with them after the Great Terror. Her father was the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Korea in 1946 but was executed by Kim Il-sung after the Korean War. The third section examines the sad story of a Gulag returnee, who had been arrested and transferred to the labour camp in Akmolinsk, Kazakhstan, during the Great Terror.<sup>7</sup> She was initially reluctant to talk about her experiences but changed her mind following an unexpected visit to the camps. The fourth section looks at the recollection of a Korean woman whose father was a communist but who nonetheless suffered during the national operations and the forcible deportation of Koreans that took place from 1935 to 1937.

### KOREANS IN THE TSARIST EMPIRE AND SOVIET RUSSIA

Koreans have a long history of settlement in Central Asia, more than 8000 kilometres from their homeland. In the 1860s, a group of peasants in the northern province of the Korean peninsula, no longer prepared to endure famine, poverty and exploitation by the landowners and the authorities in their homeland, crossed the border into Russia with the aim of finding new land to cultivate for their subsistence. The immigrants arrived at the southern part of the Ussuriisk region and established their first community on Russian territory. From that time on, Korean movement to the Far East grew steadily and was given the support of the tsarist government with the expectation that the settlers would develop these wastelands and bolster tax revenues. By 1909, the Korean population in Imperial Russia numbered 51,544.<sup>8</sup>

With the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, the number of people crossing the Tumen River into Russia increased irrespective of their social status. Refugees now sought asylum in Russia in order to escape Japanese rule, and the exiles tried to make use of the neighbouring area to establish a base for their national independence movements. The popular protests in Korea in 1919 and 1926 provided yet another turning point at which more Koreans decided to leave their country. They joined the partisan groups fighting against Japanese troops in Manchuria and the Far East with the aim of liberating colonial Korea. Peasant migration also continued throughout the 1920s, and their numbers rose to as many as 150,795 by 1925 in the Vladivostok district alone.<sup>9</sup>

The October Revolution in 1917 made a strong impression on the elite of the expanding Korean community in the Far East. They began to consider socialism as a means simultaneously to attain national liberation and economic equality, and they expected to achieve their goals with the support of the new Soviet government. Thus, a group of leading political activists formed the Korean Socialist Party in Khabarovsk one year after the revolution and met with Lenin in Moscow to ask for his support of their national liberation movement.

In 1921, in Shanghai, the Korean Socialist Party changed its name to the Korean Communist Party. Another Korean Communist Party, however, had already been established in Irkutsk just one year earlier. These two organisations clashed over control of the Korean military organisation in Soviet Russia. In December 1922, the Comintern intervened directly in the dispute and ordered both parties to dissolve immediately. Despite the groups' dissolution, however, the Korean socialists still had considerable influence over Korean immigrants.<sup>10</sup>

From the mid-1930s, the Koreans in the Soviet Far East were increasingly drawn into the processes of the Great Terror. Between 1935 and 1937, more than 2500 Korean teachers, engineers and intellectuals were arrested and executed with no official declaration of the charges levelled against them. On 21 August 1937, Stalin and Molotov decided to relocate all of the Koreans living in the Far East provinces and sent a draft proposal to the local leadership to carry out the order.<sup>11</sup> A month later, the Central Committee and Sovnarkom jointly resolved to deport all of the Koreans from 23 regions in the Far East to Central Asia; the process was to be completed by the first day of 1938.<sup>12</sup> The NKVD undertook the forcible deportation and ordered Korean residents to pack up and leave within 3 days. The first train carrying Koreans departed on 9 September 1937 and the whole process was to be completed by 25 October 1937. The total number of Koreans forcibly displaced was as many as 171,781.<sup>13</sup>

Everyday life in Soviet Central Asia was harsh and bitter. Koreans were thrown into the wilderness of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and forced to set up home in dugouts or makeshift barracks. A great number of people died during the long train journey as a result of shortages of medicine and food, and many died in their new homes from hunger, cold and epidemics. The local authorities were poorly prepared for receiving the Korean newcomers, despite having been warned in advance by Moscow to arrange for their resettlement. Still worse, the deportees were randomly distributed across the Central Asian republics, regardless of their home town. The original Korean community from the Far East was now thoroughly disjointed and had to be re-established in completely different ways.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, up to 1957, the new arrivals were not allowed to move beyond the designated settlement areas without the permission of the authorities, until a special initiative was introduced by Khrushchev to lift the ban.<sup>15</sup>

#### VIVIANA PAK, DAUGHTER OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF KOREA

Viviana Pak was the daughter of the former General Secretary of the Communist Party of Korea, Hon-yong Pak (Khonyon Pak). She was born on the train on which her parents were travelling to Moscow in 1928 in order to pursue their studies. At that time her parents were revolutionaries working towards the national liberation and the socialist reconstruction of colonial Korea. Yet 3 years later, Viviana was abandoned by her parents, who left Moscow for Shanghai in order to join the communist movement. Viviana grew

up in a Moscow orphanage, and was subsequently transferred to a special home for the children of foreign revolutionaries when her father became a renowned Korean communist leader.<sup>16</sup> According to one nurse at the home, Viviana grew up without knowing what having parents and a family really meant.<sup>17</sup> It was not until the summer of 1946 that she saw her father again.<sup>18</sup>

Viviana's mother, Vera Khan (Joo Se-juk), was born into a peasant family in 1901 and became a member of the Communist Party of Korea in 1925. She joined the 1919 popular protests in colonial Korea but was arrested by the police. Once she was released, Vera left for Shanghai, where she met Hon-yong Pak whom she married in 1921. Seven years later, she travelled with Pak to Moscow to study at the Communist University of the Workers of the East (KUTV: *Kommunisticheskii universitet trudyashchikhsya Vostoka*) and it was during this journey that she gave birth to Viviana. Vera left her baby in Moscow when she returned to Shanghai, only to return to the city once her communist activities had completely failed. In Moscow, Vera married another Korean revolutionary, and began to work as a proofreader in the publication department for foreign workers. A few years later she gave birth to a son, Viviana's stepbrother.<sup>19</sup>

In November 1937, Viviana's mother was arrested by the NKVD, together with other department colleagues and her second husband, on charges of spying for the Japanese. She was sentenced to 5 years of exile in Kazakhstan as 'an anti-Soviet element' and 'a first-class Japanese spy'. In June 1938, she was sent to Almaty by the decision of an NKVD troika. Even once she had served her term, however, she was not released from exile. She consequently wrote an appeal directly to Stalin asking for an immediate return to Korea so that she could join the revolutionary movement. She added that if that was not possible, she would like to remain in Moscow to take care of her daughter. Her petition was turned down, but she was now allowed to start work in a textile factory in Kyzylorda, which she did from July 1946. Theoretically, it was now possible for Viviana to see her mother at any time, but in practice meetings were infrequent because she was in Moscow, a long distance from Kyzylorda, and, moreover, Viviana had little desire to do so.<sup>20</sup>

Viviana had only vague memories of her father. She learned nothing about him from her mother and, after her abandonment, did not meet him again until July 1946, when he made an official visit to Moscow as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Korea together with Kim Il-sung, in charge of the North Korean bureau. When father and daughter met, he did not ask any questions about her mother. Viviana met him again 2 years later in Pyongyang. This time she was invited to the house of Kim Il-sung for dinner and there her father suggested that she should move to live with him in North Korea. Viviana, however, was not able to accept the offer because, first of all, she could not speak Korean and, moreover, she loved her job of folk dancing. After this meeting, she never saw or heard from her father again.<sup>21</sup> In 1957 she had the opportunity to meet North Korean diplomats when she was returning from a local performance in Bulgaria and from them she learnt that her father had been

executed one year earlier on a charge of American espionage. She was shocked and found the news difficult to accept.<sup>22</sup>

On the other side of Viviana's family, Vera Khan came to understand that her daughter did not consider her as a real mother, and was thus greatly disappointed. After completing her period of exile, she visited Moscow to see Viviana from time to time, but it was not easy for a woman at that stage in her life to travel more than 2500 kilometres to the capital city. In 1953, however, Vera travelled to Moscow to tell Viviana the news that her father had been imprisoned on a charge of American espionage. Knowing the implications for family members of purge victims, Vera now feared that her daughter would be arrested on the basis of her father's case. Soon thereafter, Vera contracted tuberculosis and later died. At this time, Viviana was taking part in a local performance and could not be present at her mother's bedside.<sup>23</sup> In March 1989, Vera Khan was rehabilitated by the Soviet prosecutor general's office.<sup>24</sup>

In 2004, Viviana visited South Korea to see her father's house and to visit relatives who had known her parents. She took some soil from South Korea which she divided in two: one part she kept in her own home to remember her father's birthplace and the other part was scattered on her mother's grave. She also met her stepbrother, who had become a monk. He later recalled that the meeting with Viviana had reminded him of the time when he had seen his own father for the first time.<sup>25</sup> In an interview, Viviana blamed her family's tragic history on Stalin and argued that if Stalin had not died in 1953 she would most likely have been punished herself following her father's arrest and execution.<sup>26</sup> Even up to the present day, Hon-yong Pak has not been completely rehabilitated either in South Korea or in North Korea. His name was excluded from the genealogy of his clan in South Korea and his grave remains unidentified in North Korea. Viviana simply stated during the interview that, 'I think my father had his life and I have my own.'<sup>27</sup> Viviana died in November 2013, with her father's life story incomplete and with her memories still sealed off from the public.

#### YEVGENIYA PETROVNA TSOI-OPENKO, GULAG RETURNEE

On 29 June 1990, an old woman's heartbreaking story appeared in *Lenin Kichi* (*Leninist Banner*), the newspaper for Soviet Koreans published in Kazakhstan. She was in her eighties and had three sons but her husband was now dead. In fact, she had initially strongly rejected requests for an interview from the reporter who approached her because she was afraid of being traumatised by her nightmarish memories. The mere thought of her past was enough to make her shudder. Yet after she had visited the Alzhir camp, where she had been locked up for 10 years, she changed her mind and decided to reveal all she had seen, heard and suffered there. She came to the conclusion that the time had come to tell her story. Her name was Yevgeniya Petrovna Tsoi-Openko, and she was a Korean Gulag returnee.<sup>28</sup>



Up to 1934, Yevgeniya lived a happy life in Tomsk with her young mother and brother, Bronislav. Though their father was already dead, Yevgeniya dreamt of studying in Moscow and her brother hoped to become an engineer. A year later, she received a recommendation from the Komsomol Central Committee for her enthusiastic activities and she moved to Moscow with her family to take up a place at an evening college. In Moscow, she was very much impressed by the building of the metro system and by stories of a pilot's non-stop flight to the Arctic. She came to share the mindset of Soviet citizens who enthusiastically wanted to join the national task of socialist construction and she was made intensely indignant by the reports that were beginning to appear about class enemies, spies and wreckers. She and her family had no real idea about what was going to happen to them in the future.

In early 1938, Bronislav was suddenly arrested with no specific reason given and disappeared completely. Yevgeniya and her mother hunted for him, but all in vain. Still worse, in March, a group of unknown people broke into their house at night and tried to take Yevgeniya away by force. Her mother blocked their way, shouting that if they wanted to take her daughter, they would also have to take her. In the end, they were both secretly taken to and confined in a hospital in the Kuntsevo region. There, Yevgeniya was subjected to a thorough investigation and was compelled to confess that her brother had committed a counterrevolutionary act against the Soviet regime. She at first firmly denied the charge but was then tortured and threatened with the death penalty. Her mother was also accused of having committed propaganda activities against the Soviet Union and of delivering suspect materials to the Japanese Embassy in Moscow. This was despite the fact that she did not know how to read and write in Russian at all.

After 8 months of detention in Kuntsevo, Yevgeniya and her mother were transferred via the Lubyanka to Taganka and were now held as political prisoners. At the Taganka prison, Yevgeniya saw a whole array of cases of inhuman treatment, which she was later reluctant to recall. One young woman had been arrested just because she had watched a film with a foreign friend from university. Another woman was brought in because her husband earned a huge income, which was supposedly an obvious violation of socialist ethics in the eyes of the investigating authorities. In December, Yevgeniya was removed to Alzhir, a Gulag camp located in Akmolinsk, then only a city of northern Kazakhstan, and was thus separated from her mother.<sup>29</sup> At Alzhir, she saw a prisoner who was going into the toilet block without permission, but a jailer misunderstood this behaviour and set the dogs loose. The prisoner was chased and bitten to death. Yevgeniya's fate was similarly bleak.

Yevgeniya particularly remembered one fellow inmate who made a special impression on her because of her admirable composure and humanity during her time in the camp. This was Lyubov' Vasil'evna, noted in this account as wife of V.I. Mezhlauk, the former People's Commissar of Heavy Industry, who had been executed during the Stalinist terror. Lyubov' Vasil'evna regularly told Yevgeniya not to lose her humanity and courage whatever the circumstances. One day Yevgeniya was offered the opportunity to escape from the camp by a

young man who had helped her when she became lost gathering firewood during a snowstorm. She asked Lyubov' Vasil'evna for advice and was told not to proceed with the plan. Lyubov' Vasil'evna gently counselled that she should not do that, and encouraged her by saying that there would be other opportunities in the future. Lyubov' Vasil'evna also encouraged her to take care of her health and to look forward to being reunited with her mother. Thanks to this good mentor and close friend, Yevgeniya came to realise how love and humanity could make a person stronger and more courageous and thus able to face any ordeal, even in the harshest of conditions.

After 10 years in the Gulag, however, Yevgeniya had lost nearly everything. Her mother was found in Siberia, but by this time she was seriously weakened by the consequences of her long-term imprisonment. She did not hesitate in blaming Stalin for everything that had happened to her. Yevgeniya clearly remembered that her mother called out for her daughter even when barely conscious on her death bed. She discovered that her brother had committed suicide at the age of 20, disappointed by his own misfortune. One of her close camp inmates suffered from pneumonia and was left to die through fatal neglect. This was Zina Korneva, a former national swimming champion. Yevgeniya was released from Alzhir in 1948, but by this time had spent the most critical years of her life in the Gulag. Following her release, she continued to be monitored by the authorities. Her tainted personal biography became and remained an obstacle both to finding a job and to receiving a pension. In the end, she found it easier to not even try to think about her past life. She stated simply that, 'the more I remember, the more I feel heartbroken'. Like an earthquake, these newly recalled memories shook her to the bone.

Yet Yevgeniya never gave up on life, neither inside nor outside the Gulag. She did not succumb to the temptation to take her own life, and she tried to revitalise herself in the camp whenever possible. Her fellow inmate, Lyubov' Vasil'evna, demonstrated how a human being could remain dignified in such a barbarous place. After her release, Yevgeniya consciously tried to distance herself from what she had suffered during the years of the Stalinist terror and she never told anyone about anything related to that part of her life. When she visited Alzhir, however, by chance she met some of her fellow inmates and over the course of 30 years she changed her mind and decided to forgive and accept her past as it was. She became sufficiently free from her repressed memories that she was able to disclose what had happened to her grandson. She was finally able to overcome, heal herself of, and adapt herself to her tragic experiences when she received notice of her official rehabilitation under Khrushchev. She argued that, 'the truth shouldn't be forgotten and those years must not be repeated'.<sup>30</sup>

#### SVETLANA INSEBOVNA LI, DAUGHTER OF A KOREAN REVOLUTIONARY

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Svetlana Insebovna Li was a middle-aged Korean woman living and working in Moscow; her elder brother, Anatoly, was in charge of the flight standards division at Tashkent airport and

her elder sister, Raiya, was a director at the national archive of film, photo and sound in Uzbekistan. They were, seemingly, a very ordinary family. Yet when they met a Korean scholar who was seeking to interview them after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they revealed themselves to be descendants of an important figure in Soviet Korean history. In 2005, the scholar visited them to ask about their father, explaining that there was a plan to publish a collection of their father's documents and materials. Anatoly quietly listened to the scholar for a while and began to tell the story of how his father had lived through the tumultuous years of the Stalinist purges. Svetlana, the youngest daughter, had little knowledge of the details of this tragic family history. Yet although she was not born until 1948, she nevertheless clearly remembered what her father had told her about those hard and bitter years, and she was able to talk about how her father had influenced her life.<sup>31</sup>

Their father, Sergeevich Ivan Li (Inseop Li), was a fighter and revolutionary as well as a nationalist and communist. He was born into a poor peasant family in 1888 (d. 1982) and joined the national liberation struggle against Japanese rule at the age of 22. In late 1910, he left Korea for China, where he spent more than 2 years before going to Russia to try to make contact with the leaders of the Korean military organisation for national liberation. With the outbreak of the October Revolution in 1917, he supported the revolution in Khabarovsk. He helped to establish the Korean Socialist Party with his comrades-in-arms and became a member of the party Central Committee. After the revolution, he took part in the Civil War against the White Army in the Far East and joined the Bolshevik Party as a member of the Korean bureau under the Siberian department. When the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1921, he was appointed a plenipotentiary in charge of taxation for the Ussuriisk region and was then transferred to a post in charge of propaganda for Koreans under the Vladivostok oblast party committee. When Stalin's 'revolution from above' was launched in the late 1920s, he was appointed to work for the political department of the border garrison at Grodekov under the auspices of the NKVD. He was an authentic communist.<sup>32</sup>

Svetlana never forgot the story her father told her about his arrest in March 1936. His house was searched and all of his documents, letters and photos were confiscated. The remaining family members were thrown out of their home. In April, he was expelled from the Communist Party and 5 months later he was exiled to Kazakhstan for 5 years on a charge of Japanese espionage. Not long after he had been sent to Almaty in Kazakhstan, the Korean deportations began. Svetlana later discovered that her whole family had been compelled to board a train destined for Central Asia, but the journey was appalling and disastrous. On the way to Kazakhstan they had to combat hunger, cold, epidemics and thieves. After the long trip, the family was finally able to rejoin their father at Kyzylorda, but by this time they had lost their first-born son. This was just the beginning of their tragic story.<sup>33</sup>

Adapting to settlement in Central Asia proved to be the most difficult time of her father's life. Svetlana remembered her father lamenting his new situation

and witnessed him becoming a mere shadow of his former self. The harsh weather and infertile land in Kazakhstan did not allow the deportees to survive easily, and poverty and malnutrition continued to plague them. Two more sons and one daughter died during the process of resettlement. Another three babies were born, including Svetlana. In later life, none of these children was permitted to hold a government post or to enrol at university because of the restrictions imposed on exiles by article 58 of the criminal code.<sup>34</sup> Yet this particular father never gave up, and he remained unswervingly devoted and loyal in his work despite his many misfortunes. Ten years after his deportation he was permitted to rejoin the Communist Party, and he was later awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour during the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1967.<sup>35</sup>

Dauntless and dedicated, Svetlana's father's life story had a great influence on her as she grew up. First and foremost, it bore strong strains of nationalism. He did not allow his children to speak Russian at home and he made them sing traditional Korean folk songs so they would not lose their ethnic identity. He began writing a memoir in 1939, when the Japanese Governor-General of Korea was reported to have put a ban on the use of Korean in educational institutions. According to Svetlana, he argued it was his task to ensure that the history of his comrades who had died during the Civil War became known and was transmitted through subsequent generations.<sup>36</sup> He seemed to have a very strong historical consciousness and used his memoir, as has been argued in other examples, 'as a means to regain the discipline and dedication essential to his vocation'.<sup>37</sup>

Alongside his historical concerns, Svetlana's father also stressed the universal human values of respect for other people's traditions and folklore, and he strove for peaceful coexistence. Svetlana recalled that he placed a very strong emphasis on that point, and he taught her never to ask others for money or for help but to be self-reliant and to do things herself. She also remembered that her father treated her as an equal and that he tried to make her think and find her own solutions in any given situation.<sup>38</sup> He really wanted his children to be able to stand on their own two feet and Svetlana was, thus, able to do this with success. She confessed in her recollections that she was surprised still to be able to recall her parents' love, affection and energy as she was growing up and especially throughout her childhood. In January 2016, Svetlana took part in a ceremony held at the Korean Consulate in St Petersburg. There she said, 'I'm very happy to donate my father's materials which had to be hidden and destroyed in the past for fear of repression.'<sup>39</sup> She was indeed very proud of her father.

## CONCLUSION

The three women's life stories examined in this chapter have several common features. Above everything else, they were all strongly influenced by the Stalinist repressions, both directly and indirectly. Viviana Pak was not able to see either of her parents as she was growing up as a teenager and young adult. Her mother

was arrested and exiled on a charge of Japanese espionage in the late 1930s. Her father was also purged in the mid-1950s under the communist regime in North Korea. Yevgeniya Tsoi was a direct victim of the Great Terror along with other members of her family. She was forcibly taken to a secret jail, where she was harshly interrogated without any clear charge made against her. She was then sent to a Gulag camp for more than ten years. Svetlana Li grew up under the austere teachings of her father, who had suffered greatly during the destruction of the Soviet Korean elite and the deportation of the Soviet Korean population between 1935 and 1937. She learned from him how cruel and tragic those incidents had been.

Moreover, these were all women who went on to play a significant role in the reconstruction of the repressed memories of the history of the Soviet Korean deportations. Viviana was the daughter of Korean elite revolutionaries who had joined the national liberation movement and wanted to construct socialism in their own country. She was witness to the life of her parents, one of whom was amongst the first socialist Korean women to have survived the adversities of Stalin's Great Terror. Yevgeniya Tsoi was a young woman living with her mother and brother when she was unexpectedly arrested and taken to the security agencies. She lost her family and spent the prime years of her life in Soviet hospitals, prisons and camps. She was later able to testify to what she had experienced as a woman during the Stalinist terror. Svetlana Li did not herself experience the tumultuous decade of the 1930s, but she later recalled how she was brought up as the daughter of a Korean nationalist fighter who had endured the Soviet anti-Korean national operation and who had experienced coercive deportation under Stalin.

Whilst these women were attempting to restore their own memories, the process of rehabilitation was also being undertaken first of all on a personal level. All three women appear to have made strenuous efforts to analyse their past from a positive perspective. Viviana Pak tried to understand her parents' life from their point of view when she noted that her father had led his own life separately from hers. She did not lose contact with her mother, despite the fact that Vera had not properly cared for her as an infant. Yevgeniya Tsoi initially steadfastly refused to look back on her own distressing life story but later came to recognise and accept that her past was important not only to her but also to others. She was no longer reluctant to tell her story to the next generation and did so with the aim of preventing any future repetition of the repressions. Svetlana Li expressed her deepest regret over her father's painful life under Stalin but came to remember him as a robust and inspirational figure in her own life. She very much appreciated his strict education and instructions and missed him greatly after he died. The bitter past has gone, but its memory still lives on.

From the late 1980s, a process of official rehabilitation was carried out in the Soviet Union by the central and local authorities, and the process extended to ethnic homelands such as South Korea. In September 1989, at the Communist Party Central Committee plenary meeting, Gorbachev made his first official statement on the repressed national groups, including the Koreans, Germans

and Jews, that had been forcibly deported to Central Asia.<sup>40</sup> On 26 April 1991, the RSFSR introduced a law on the rehabilitation of repressed peoples declaring that all of the actions taken during 1937 against the Koreans had been illegal.<sup>41</sup> On 10 June 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation recommended that the government should organise a commission on the question of the Korean deportations, including also other ethnic minorities, and this was finally adopted into law. The rehabilitation of Soviet Koreans was finally and formally announced on 1 April 1993.<sup>42</sup>

Local authorities and the ethnic homeland also took part in the rehabilitation process. The president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, declared 1997 as a year of reconciliation amongst his peoples as well as for the commemoration of the victims of political repression.<sup>43</sup> On 10 October 1997, whilst marking the 60th anniversary of Korean resettlement in Kazakhstan, Nazarbaev again promised to do his best to resolve any outstanding difficult questions as soon as possible. In turn, the Korean president, Kim Youngsam, sent a congratulatory message stating that he very much appreciated the emergence of the Koreans as a respected minority in Kazakhstan despite the various problems and difficulties they had experienced over the past 60 years.<sup>44</sup> On 27 August 1999, a monument was established in memory of the political victims of Soviet repression in the city park of Ush Tobé, where deported Koreans had arrived for the first time in Kazakhstan.<sup>45</sup>

These restored memories had a variety of functions in the lives of the three women whose stories have been examined in this chapter, and they have significance also for all of the Koreans deported to Central Asia. First and foremost, the rehabilitation process allowed for an outpouring of repressed and forgotten memories, which put new life into Soviet history. It was no longer necessary for Koreans to hesitate when they felt compelled to talk about how they had lived during the years of deportation. The restored memories also allowed people to heal the pain of the past that had plagued them over the course of many decades. Koreans could find relief and consolation for their sorrowful experiences and were now able to commemorate the miserable sacrifices of their compatriots in public. Moreover, the restored memories also enabled Koreans to look at their own history from a different angle and, thus, they could accept, internalise and even sublimate what they had persistently distanced themselves from in the past. The living were finally able to appreciate their existence, to pay respect to the dead and to reassure themselves of a bright future for the next generation. Their individual life stories, including those of Viviana, Yevgeniya and Svetlana, have not yet been completed, but they are now in the process of reconstruction.

## NOTES

1. B.D. Pak and N.F. Bugai, *140 let v Rossii: ocherk istorii rossiiskikh koreitsev*, Moscow: I.V. Ran, 2004, pp. 332–6.
2. See, for example, the Soviet Korean newspaper *Lenin Kichi* (*Leninist Banner*), 25 February, 14 April, 3 May, 14 June, 18 August and 19 August 1989. This

- newspaper began publication on 15 May 1938 in the city of Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan, after the Korean deportation. It changed its name in May 1991 to *Koryo Ilbo* (*Korean Daily*).
3. G.M. Spiegel, 'Memory and History: Liturgical Time and Historical Time', *History and Theory*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2002, pp. 149–62.
  4. A great number of recollections and interviews were published in *Lenin Kichi*, particularly between 1988 and 1989. See also P.G. Kim, *Koreitsy respubliki Uzbekistan*, Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1993; S.G. Nam, *Rossiiskie koreitsy: istoriya i kul'tura (1860–1925 gg.)*, Moscow: I.V. Ran, 1998; V. Kim, *Pravda-polveka spustya*, Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 1999; N.F. Bugai, *Rossiiskie koreitsyi i politika 'sol-nechnogotepla'*, Moscow: Gorika, 2002; Pak and Bugai, *140 let v Rossii*; V. Kim and E. Kim, *Eshelon-58... ushel navsegda*, Tashkent: Turon-Ig'bol, 2007; L.M. Yun (ed.), *Kratkie ocherki o vydayushchikhsya koreitsakh Uzbekinstana*, Tashkent: Istiklo, 2009.
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  13. *Belaya kniga: o deportatsii koreiskogo naseleniya Rossii v 30–40-kh godakh. Kniga pervaya*, Moscow: Interpraks, 1992, pp. 64–72 and pp. 114–15.
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16. *Ijeong Bak Heonyeong Jeonjip* (*The Collection of Hon-yong Pak*), vol. 8, Yeoksa Bipyeong-sa, 2004, p. 255.
17. *Ijeong*, p. 933.
18. *Ijeong*, p. 258.
19. *Ijeong*, pp. 913 and 915.
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21. *Ijeong*, pp. 259 and 266.
22. *Ijeong*, pp. 260 and 265.
23. *Ijeong*, pp. 258 and 934.
24. *Ijeong*, p. 932.
25. *Ijeong*, p. 264.
26. *Ijeong*, p. 261.
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28. 'Ten Years That Shook a Woman's Life: the Story of a Stalinist Gulag Returnee' (original in Korean language), *Lenin Kichi*, 29 and 30 June 1990. The article was reprinted in Russian in *Koryo Ilbo*, 27 April and 18 May 1991. *Koryo Ilbo* is the successor newspaper to *Lenin Kichi*. The following account is taken from this article.
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33. *Mangmyeongjai Sugi*, pp. 423–30.
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42. Pak and Bugai, *140 let v Rossii*, pp. 332 and 334.
43. *Koryo Ilbo*, 31 May 1997.
44. *Koryo Ilbo*, 18 October 1997.
45. *Koryo Ilbo*, 27 August 1999. For a photo of the monument and other images of the local Korean populations, see online: <http://www.michaelvincekim.com/the-koreans-of-kazakhstan/9zaj2grbxwpmcptmrza9dykqa1xv5> (accessed July 2016).



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## Travelling Memory and Memory of Travel in Estonian Women's Deportation Stories

*Leena Kurvet-Käosaar*

This chapter analyses the representation of deportation experience during the Stalinist period in Estonian women's life stories. It employs an interpretive framework arising from recent reconceptualisations of memory that shift the emphasis to processes of travel, migration, multidirectionality and transculturality. Such a focus is far from self-evident. Deportation stories have emerged within a memorial framework with a strong emphasis on national survival. They are narratively anchored in confirmations of the importance of home and homeland as key 'sites of remembrance' and have been interpreted in a similar vein. Yet on a number of levels, travelling (as well as transcultural) memory emerges as an important aspect of the representation of deportation and Gulag experiences, from the extensive geographical relocations of the deportees to the temporal trajectories of the memories of deportation and 'the travel' of memorial records and artefacts that transcend the frame of reference of national remembrance. This chapter widens the interpretational framework of women's deportation experience via a close reading of two individual life narratives. Although they may not diverge from accepted models of representing the deportation experience in radical ways, they make visible more complex and multidirectional pathways of representation than those facilitated by the normative frameworks of remembering.

Life stories from the two waves of mass deportations in the Baltic States, in 1941 and 1949, form the empirical basis of this chapter. They are archived in the Estonian Literary Museum, founded in the late 1980s when different forms of mediation of the Soviet regime became an important public aspect of the

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process of regaining independence and reconceptualising the past. Today, the life story archive contains over 4000 personal narratives accumulated in response to over 20 public requests issued by the Estonian Literary Museum and the Estonian Life Stories Association. Personal experience of the Soviet regime has been one aspect of several life story calls, in particular in the mid-1990s, but other life stories that touch on related topics have also been submitted outside the framework of a specific call.<sup>1</sup>

Deportation does not constitute the only aspect of testifying to the repressive nature of the Soviet regime, yet its mediation has assumed a particular role in the cultural remembrance of the Soviet period. Such narratives highlight the large-scale destructive effects of the regime on a great number of people living in Estonia from different social backgrounds and regions, and they demonstrate a capacity for (national) survival regardless of the authors' harsh deportation experiences. According to Ene Kõresaar, deportation and labour camp experiences can be viewed as symbols of twentieth-century Estonian history, with the stories of Eastern exile representing the fate of the Estonian people during the Soviet period in general.<sup>2</sup> Similar models of interpretation can be detected in other Baltic States, such as in Lithuania, where during the early 1990s 'the very idea of deportation was subject to metaphorical expansion synchronically and diachronically to include ... all Lithuanians [and] all aspects of Lithuanian history'.<sup>3</sup> This attests to the high social significance of the theme of deportation in the processes of identity construction in (early) post-Soviet Baltic States. It transcends the actual experience and is often mediated via the trope of rupture that several Estonian scholars and intellectuals have viewed as one of the central interpretive models of Estonian culture and history in general. According to Kõresaar, 'by the beginning of the 1990s national ruptures of the 1940s (and early 1950s) had become a collective tradition that blended official knowledge of history, popular culture and public knowledge of history into one coherent experiential narrative', resulting in what can be referred to as 'an interpretation by individuals of their lives according to a publicly distributed narrative schema'.<sup>4</sup> As the reception history of the published deportation stories has shown, narratives often blend into one grand, dominant narrative of martyrdom despite the differences in the time and duration of deportation, its cause or the degree of harshness conveyed in the narratives.<sup>5</sup>

However, despite larger interpretive frameworks shaping both the ways in which the deportation experience has been mediated in the life stories as well as the reception of such narratives *en masse*, a research focus on individual variations in the narratives, including those that modify or even contradict the established patterns of representation and popular models of interpretation, may reveal more varied and dynamic vistas of representing that experience that enter into productive dialogues with current paradigms of memory studies. Of particular importance here is a focus on gender. The period of regaining independence, when the life stories assumed an important position testifying to 'the agency of the witness',<sup>6</sup> made it possible for women's voices to enter the public debates about memory and history and thus to gain a grounding in the public

sphere considerably exceeding the gender dynamics evident in more narrowly historical or political discourses. While this can be viewed as a remarkable achievement, it must be kept in mind that in order to be recognised as part of a shared frame of memory, gendered aspects of the repression experience may not have been deliberately highlighted in women's life stories, in particular with regard to experience relating to certain taboo topics, such as repression-related sexual violence.<sup>7</sup>

As I have argued elsewhere, 'deportation was a repressive measure of the Soviet regime directed first and foremost against the most immediate communal contacts, the most important of which was the family'.<sup>8</sup> In the majority of cases, it was only one member of the family, usually the husband, who was charged on the basis of prior affiliations with state institutions, business activities or membership of national organisations, yet the whole family was identified as an 'enemy of the state' and deported as a protective measure. Men were sent to labour camps; women, children and the elderly were sent to special settlements with harsh living and working conditions in remote areas of the Soviet Union. Tiina Kirss has argued that the organisation of deportation 'intensified the gender-differentiation of the experience' by placing women in the role of 'labourers, providers and nurturers' of children and the elderly.<sup>9</sup> Deportation has also been viewed as having a particular effect on women because it involved complete deprivation from the familiar domestic environment that 'critically affected their definition of self and of order in the surrounding world'.<sup>10</sup> Depictions of managing the everyday often acquire a central importance for psychological survival.<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, the actual process of creating the necessary living conditions for the women and their family members, and often also for other deportees in poorer circumstances, was absolutely essential for physical survival. Although many aspects of the representation of this experience are compatible with the dominating memorial frame of the repressive measures of the Soviet regime along the lines of national identity, there are also occasions where the harshness of the experience and survival of it cannot be placed into the framework of national remembrance. Examples include references to the communal networks that were essential for survival: these often crossed the boundaries of (imagined or real) national communities.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes emphasis has also been placed on the process of recall, where the 'journey' of memory itself and its unseverable connection to the place of deportation does not allow for the model of overcoming the rupture caused by deportation upon the return home to take effect.

As the brief overview of some central aspects of the paradigm of travelling and transcultural memory demonstrates, it radically shifts the focus, as Astrid Erll has formulated, from 'the roots of memory' to 'the routes of memory'.<sup>13</sup> Highlighting the 'constant, unceasing motion of the production of cultural memory, people, media, mnemonic forms, contents and practices', the current focus on travelling memory underscores the outdatedness of earlier models of the study of cultural memory, in particular the impact of Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (the sites or realms of memory) that confined the study of cultural memory to what can be referred to as national remembrance.<sup>14</sup> Binding

memory, ethnicity, territory and the nation-state together, Nora's framework is now viewed as instrumental in making the notion of cultural memory synonymous with national remembrance or with a perception of cultures 'constructed upon the assumption of an isomorphy between territory, social formation, mentalities and memories'.<sup>15</sup>

'Should we not, given our mobility, begin to ask different questions of memory, ones that do not attend only to the content of memory, but to the travels that have invoked it?' asks Julia Creet. She proposes a focus on 'the quality of movement that shapes memory', showing that 'the manner in which memory travels is a quality of memory itself, not a flaw ... not a shift in category, but constitutional, of memory, a constant constantly on the move, archiving itself rhizomatically'.<sup>16</sup> Emphasising the extensive reconfigurations of memory in the contemporary globalised world, including the 'spaces of memory and composition of memory communities', Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad exclude the possibility of understanding 'the trajectories of memory outside a global frame of reference'.<sup>17</sup> Attempts to study global memory have made a notable contribution to contemporary debates in memory studies by delineating 'a framework of wider shared morality, a way of identifying with "distant others"', as well as recognising 'small-scale trajectories and memory practices beyond the framework of the nation'.<sup>18</sup> Though the focus on transculturality and movement is largely premised on the demands of the current globalising age, it has also been viewed as 'a perspective on memory that can ... be chosen with respect to all historical periods and with a view to both the synchronic circulation of representations (e.g., of "traumatic pasts") as well as to the diachronic dimension of memory ("afterlives")'.<sup>19</sup>

Yet the shifting emphasis in memory studies has also posed a range of new questions about the located nature of diverse processes, acts and events of memory and forgetting.<sup>20</sup> In theories of trauma that occupy a central position in transnational memory studies, the problematic of locatedness, including the (in)compatibility of universalising claims of trauma, specific cultural contexts and repertoires continue to play an important role. Asserting that 'contemporary cultural theory has disrupted any straightforward association between location and place', Susannah Radstone argues that there nevertheless remain, in the 'intersecting fields of location studies and memory/trauma studies ... issues that render these questions particularly pressing'.<sup>21</sup> By cautioning against universalising the application of deterritorialising tendencies that, in her view, have been characteristic of the development of memory studies in the United Kingdom, United States and (Western) Europe, Radstone outlines the need to continue to keep in circulation also approaches to memory based on locatedness, depending on the cultural contexts concerned, and staying tuned to ways in which 'connectivities forged through memory's vectors of place, family, history and culture continue to resonate in the present'.<sup>22</sup>

This chapter explores the possibilities and limits of analysing Estonian women's deportation narratives within the framework of trauma, engaging with the polemic between considerations of the locatedness of memory and

approaches that give prevalence to travelling and transcultural memory. Though certainly in agreement with the claim made by Davoliūtė and Balkelis about the need to ‘bridge the divide – historical and methodological – that continues to separate studies of Gulag memory from broader developments in international scholarship ... of testimonial studies’,<sup>23</sup> I nevertheless argue for the need for critical discourses and methodologies that would cater for the specificity of traumatic experience in the case of Soviet authoritarianism.<sup>24</sup> With regard to a focus on travelling memory and trauma, of particular importance would be the need for inquiry into ‘the long-term affective states purposefully and masterfully engendered by totalitarianism in its particular historical forms’.<sup>25</sup> Residues of such states can be traced in Estonian women’s deportation stories where the representation of the processes of memory’s movements become, in Creel’s words, ‘a quality of memory itself’ and, as such, an important marker of the traumatic nature of the deportation experience that cannot be neatly tied to the national frame of remembrance.<sup>26</sup> Where present, such processes rarely cancel out the relevance of home and homeland as important sites of remembrance, yet other, equally important sites can be traced that together form distinctive spatio-temporal dynamics.

Emphasis on memory’s movements and variations in the symbolic emphasis on locatedness are conveyed in the life stories via different narrative strategies and thematic emphases. This chapter offers an analysis of two deportation stories where dislocation, movement and the dynamics of place emerge as important underpinnings of narrative texture. Eela Lõhmus’s deportation story was submitted to the Estonian Literary Museum in response to a call issued in 1998. Born in 1929, Eela was 19 when she and her mother were deported from Keeni in southern Estonia on 25 March 1949. Her father had been arrested in February 1945 and died in a labour camp in November 1945. Eela’s story makes a visible effort to stay within the normative frame of mediating the deportation experience by highlighting the destructive effect of the deportations on all Estonians as well as their capacity as a nation successfully to survive even the hardest of ordeals and by strongly thematising the importance of home and homeland. Yet it also makes visible the complexity—in her case, indeed, the impossibility—of returning home and resuming a normal life after deportation that cannot be attributed solely to the Soviet regime. A.M.’s deportation story, nearly 100 pages long, was submitted to the archive in 2015, more than 20 years after the majority of life stories focusing on this topic.<sup>27</sup> Her account focuses only on the deportation experience, starting from 14 June 1941, the date of the first Soviet mass deportations in Estonia, when the author, then 17 years old, was deported with her sister, mother, young brother and father. Following the organisation of mass deportations, A.M.’s father was separated from the rest of the family and sent to a forced labour camp where he died without any further contact with his family. Written from a clearly defined perspective of reminiscing about the experience, A.M.’s narrative offers a

particularly rich perspective on the impact of extended forced dislocation and the ways in which recalling this period in her life raises questions about the ways in which memory deals with hurtful and potentially traumatic experience and how this can be mediated in a life story.

### EELA'S STORY

The introductory remarks of Eela Lõhmus's deportation story offer an excellent example of the application of a frame of remembrance that ties together her own destiny and that of the nation. She encompasses in a single paragraph her years spent in various deportation locations and labour camps in Siberia to place symbolic emphasis on home and homeland as the ultimate site of remembrance and of identity.

I've often wondered, what keeps this tiny fragment of a nation alive. ... Probably it's the extreme stamina, life force, diligence and desire for freedom of the Estonians. Just like a juniper tree on rocky shore does not perish in the storm, no force can render this small nation completely extinct as its roots are too deep to be reached. ... I've lived through persecution at home, deportation to Siberia and forced labour camp in Magadan, but the thought – this is where I'll end up, this is the end – never even crossed my mind.<sup>28</sup>

Eela draws a parallel between her own fate and that of the nation, not only during the Second World War and the period of Soviet rule but one of almost universal scope. She also links her personal will to survive to well-rooted national features of character that, in turn, she outlines through drawing parallels with Estonian nature. As Eela's family lived on a farm in southern Estonia, the comparison with rocky shores and juniper trees has no connection to the actual landscapes of her home region but is used here as a poetic device to emphasise a sense of continuity and survival.

Throughout her narrative, Eela continues to highlight the destructive and repressive nature of the Soviet regime, yet her life story does not entirely fit into the interpretive frame she offers in the introductory section, partly due to her somewhat atypical deportation history but, more importantly, due to the manner in which she relates it. Although she points out bluntly that 'the destruction of our family started when my father was arrested on 14 February 1945', she also states that the reason he was sent to a labour camp was that during the passing of the military front, their homestead was looted by fellow villagers and for fear of being accused of theft, someone denounced their family as 'enemies of the people' to Soviet officials even though they were not at all well off.<sup>29</sup>

Eela and her mother were deported to the Novosibirsk region in Siberia, where they had to undertake different kinds of agricultural work (ploughing the fields, planting potatoes using primitive tools and inefficient techniques, tending the cattle). She does not consider this to have been so hard in itself, but the

deportees were already in extremely poor health due to malnutrition and lack of proper clothing. In order to keep her mind busy and to cheer up her fellow deportees, Eela started composing songs with strong anti-Soviet sentiments. In December 1950, she and some other Estonian women were arrested and sent first to different prisons and finally to a forced labour camp in Magadan. As Eela points out, this happened not because fellow deportees or the local authorities heard the songs, but because the lyrics reached Estonia, quickly catching the ear of the NKVD with the help of 'loyal comrades'.<sup>30</sup> The use of such a phrase implies that she was betrayed by her own compatriots in Estonia.

In Magadan, Eela endured hunger and an extremely heavy workload. 'Work itself', she recounts, 'was such that now I no longer understand how people even survived it. Not for a moment could you forget [that] you're a vicious enemy of this working-class paradise.'<sup>31</sup> When working on construction sites, Eela hoisted cement along narrow scaffolding:

[B]elow there's an abyss five or six storeys deep and two women need to hoist two bags (100 kilograms) of cement on a stretcher ... every time you end up thinking whether ... your life will end in the abyss below.<sup>32</sup>

An important turning point took place on her release: '[a]lready the word freedom made one feel dizzy and over the first few days we were all intoxicated by it', Eela recounts, but 'the "moment of clarity" came after just a few days' as they had nowhere to live, no work or anything else required to start a life.<sup>33</sup> The former camp inmates were given money to return home, but Eela 'no longer had a home' and returning to her mother in the Novosibirsk region would have meant a return to deportee life, 'a lifetime of slavery'.<sup>34</sup> Like many former inmates, Eela found a spouse and settled in Magadan:

I had to start from scratch again. Although I was only 26, for the third time my life started from sleeping on a (bare) floor and all my possessions I had on me, this time, my old camp clothes. This nightmare had at least one positive side: one hardened like steel ... and learned how to value every little ray of light that sometimes cut through this darkness.<sup>35</sup>

This description echoes the opening paragraphs of her life story, highlighting endurance and a will to survive. The reference to a ray of light indicates that she was hoping to build a new life in Magadan. However, soon her health started to decline and, fearing that she was not going to survive living in such conditions, she scraped together enough money to return to Estonia. Although Eela describes her journey back home in an optimistic tone, her hopes soon collapsed as she was unable to find work or a place to live. After only a few months, she returned to her husband in Magadan, this time planning to leave for Estonia together. Soon, however, her husband changed his mind, arguing that 'nobody needs us back there in our homeland; here we at least have somewhere to live and a job; here we're "one of our own", there people may not even dare to say



“hello”.<sup>36</sup> As Eela’s health started deteriorating again she faced a dilemma: ‘either to leave my earthly remains in this permafrost or to separate for good and leave’.<sup>37</sup> Eela describes her decision to leave as an extremely difficult one. She points out that at the age of 34 ‘one hardly wishes to die’, and it is difficult for her to find the words to describe ‘how one can survive such tragedy’ as leaving her husband.<sup>38</sup>

Eela’s conflicted affiliations with Estonia, as her homeland, and Magadan, as the only place during her adulthood where she was able to build a life with which she was content, is visible also in the structure and rhythm of her narrative, where more space is dedicated to detailed descriptions of her journeys from Magadan to Estonia and back than her life in either place. She recounts how, when she first returned to Estonia, her mother told her, ‘Now everything’s in the past; we’re together again and can start our life all over again’.<sup>39</sup> Yet Eela was unable to settle down. Though many authors of deportation stories touch on the difficulties of being accepted in society similar to those Eela had to face, they mostly also recount settling down in a more or less satisfactory manner over time. Eela’s narrative offers no such resolution. She describes her life in Estonia as a series of challenges that never result in what she desires most of all: a place to call home—except for a dilapidated, roofless house in Keeni that she purchases with a loan in 1997, at the age of 68. When she left Magadan for Estonia the first time, she no longer believed in the possibility of settling down in the place that she refers to as ‘a valley of death’.<sup>40</sup> Eela’s ‘path of ordeals’, as she repeatedly refers to her life course, was further complicated by a stroke that her mother suffered in 1971. Without consulting Eela, the authorities placed her mother in a nursing home in north-eastern Estonia that was almost impossible for Eela to reach, and she died there a few years later. Eela recalls her last trip to the nursing home after her mother’s death: ‘as I walked this last night alone through dark, alien woods toward Kilti station, tears frozen on my cheeks, there was such burning pain in my soul that would’ve made a weaker person lose her mind’.<sup>41</sup>

Characteristic of many deportation narratives, Eela’s life story is permeated by a strong sense of rupture and an emphasis on endurance, stamina and survival. However, unlike most deportation stories, hers never completely manages to overcome it and establish a continuity that would tie together in a convincing manner life before deportation and her current life. Although the beginning of the narrative provides the reader with a ‘key’ that conforms to the accepted narrative schema of representing the deportation experience, the life experience that Eela has chosen to mediate does not quite fit into it. This incompatibility becomes visible through the prevalence of movement and the impossibility of settling down. In part, this is inevitable and is prevalent also in other deportation narratives due to the central, life-altering events of loss of home, deportation and/or labour camp that the authors have survived. Eela’s life is further complicated due to her relocation from her deportation location near Novosibirsk to the labour camp in Magadan, separated by nearly 7000 kilometres, and her repeated failed attempts to settle in Estonia, where she is

constantly forced to move from one place to another. As is common to Estonian women's deportation narratives, Eela's life story is reticent rather than outspoken about her emotions, with two notable exceptions: first, when she is forced to part from her husband; and secondly, when she is unable to spend time with her mother during the last years of her life in a remote nursing home. In comparison, she mediates her father's arrest in an ironic manner and her own deportation with an emphasis on stamina and a will to survive. These traumatic dislocations and the pain of being unable to be with the two people closest to her overshadow the narrative frame of Eela's account. The incompatibility of the interpretive frame suggested by her opening paragraph, which ties identity firmly to a (symbolic) place endowed with national value, and the representation of her life experience via constant movement with only a vague resolution in the search for home towards the very end, makes visible the possibly traumatic impact of Eela's experience of deportation. Yet being able to situate her life experience in a firm memorial frame could also be viewed as a way of coping with the past that offers consolation and a sense of closure.

### A.M.'S STORY

Eela Lõhmus tries to accommodate her deportation narrative within the accepted memorial framework of mediating deportation experience with emphasis on survival and homeland, yet its partial incompatibility with such a frame becomes visible via the textual space dedicated to movement and of properly returning home. In a quite different vein, A.M.'s deportation story highlights the process of remembering itself. The title of her narrative—*Seal kaugel ära*—can be roughly translated as 'Far Away over There'; it highlights the movement of memory and the significance of the place of deportation that the return to the homeland, more than half a century ago, has not made irrelevant or easy to cope with. It also poses questions about the accepted memorial framework itself, asking whether an emphasis on successful survival does not harbour the danger of diminishing the harshness of the experience and its long-term impact and to what extent it is possible to mediate that experience to a contemporary reader.

A.M.'s narrative starts by referring to home, with a quotation from Verner von Heideström's novel *The Charles Men* (1897–1898):

Home is something that starts with a small seed and ends up as a powerful tree. It starts with a nursery ... then becomes a house, a village, the whole country and outside this country even air and water lose their invigorative taste.<sup>42</sup>

The manuscript layout places the quotation and title on one page, providing a hint about the focus of the narrative that unravels in the following pages. Like Eela's account, the beginning of A.M.'s life story also highlights rupture, yet it does not provide a means of successfully overcoming it. From the beginning, her life story is left suspended within the space of the unbridgeable gap between

the past and the present, the experience itself and the (im)possibility of mediating it. Unlike the majority of deportation stories, A.M.'s does not provide even a glimpse of her family's life before deportation: the reader is offered only a few hints from details included in the description of the journey to Siberia. As their train approached the Estonian–Russian border near Värskä, A.M. mentions spotting 'the horseman of Värskä': a man on horseback riding alongside the train and waving the Estonian national flag. Though this episode places her narrative firmly within a national frame of remembrance, it also questions that frame. Before mediating the incident, the author mentions how, in the early 1990s, it was argued in Estonia's leading cultural newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar* (*Hammer and Sickle*) that the 'horseman of Värskä' was a 'myth, popular legend or a fairy tale'.<sup>43</sup> By confirming that she, her mother and sister as well as other people in their wagon really saw him, A.M. elevates this symbolic gesture to another level, because by openly riding with the then forbidden national flag, the man similarly risked arrest and persecution. As the manner in which A.M. refers to the horseman emphasises, his solidarity with them is the solidarity of an act, not to be compared with the fiddling about with the newspaper's name, which after regaining independence was changed to *Sirp* (*Sickle*).

A.M.'s narrative details her journey to Siberia, touching on the last time she saw her father when their wagons were separated, people on the train, travelling through the steppe, taking a barge in Novosibirsk, sailing along the River Ob and its tributary and reaching their deportation location. 'We'd been travelling over a month', A.M. sums up the journey; 'It was either 16 or 19 July, either my birthday or [my sister] Ene's, although it hardly mattered anymore.'<sup>44</sup> The sometimes months-long excruciating journey to the deportation location is a common, if not almost compulsory part of each deportation story. However, A.M.'s description does not so much focus on the suffering of the people on the train and the shock of deportation, but delineates a trajectory of their route, a mapping of distance and of passing into a different time frame: 'We'd been thrown into an everyday, where nothing was routine or customary any more. This was a different reality that, from day to day, required determination and bravery', A.M. explains in her preface with reference to a well-known Estonian novelist's comment about the ordinariness of the everyday that often makes it pass by unnoticed.<sup>45</sup>

The textual construction of an 'inhabitable everyday', as I have referred to it in my earlier research,<sup>46</sup> visible in the ways in which women coped with severe malnutrition, excruciating workloads, poor or non-existent medical care, extreme poverty, loss of family members and so forth, is one of the dominating features of women's deportation stories that emerges as proof of strategies of survival and means of 'wresting personal victories, however small, from history'.<sup>47</sup> However, although A.M.'s deportation story outlines managing the everyday in great detail, what dominates the narrative is the quality of the difference of that experience and the question of whether her experience would be comprehensible for a contemporary reader.

A good example is the way in which A.M. discusses food shortages and hunger. Although her account contains many features concerning procuring, preparing and consuming food typical of women's deportation stories, A.M.'s life story constantly shifts from her memories to figurative uses of food and food shortage that result in an ironic distancing from the potential reader. Characteristic of her style, she introduces the topic with a quote, this time from an iconic poem 'Christmas Greeting 1941' by well-known Estonian poet Marie Under:

*we have, they lack food and bed* [,] how simply and succinctly put. Though it's unlikely that she could really imagine how drastic this lack of food and bed could sometimes be.<sup>48</sup>

This reference is preceded by a description of her mother bringing home an unhinged door of a public outhouse that they scoured and used as a bed for all four family members to sleep on when nothing else was available. If the door episode is mediated in a humorous tone, demonstrating resourcefulness in solving an everyday problem, food shortages and hunger receive a more serious treatment where the figurative and the literal meanings are, once more, contrasted with each other, outlining the incomprehensibility of hunger for someone who has never experienced it. During the time of regaining independence, there was a popular saying, 'if necessary, we'll eat potato peelings', sometimes attributed to Lennart Meri, the first president of Estonia after regaining independence. 'We also had experience of eating potato peelings', A.M. writes, 'but not in the symbolic sense':

[These were] real potato peelings, given to us by the mistress of our tiny room, simmering in a small metal bowl on the stove. They boiled there, oozing the smell of boiling potatoes and unfulfilled hopes. The bowl was tiny, but expectations were great.<sup>49</sup>

A.M. also recounts how, after returning home, someone shared her memories of surviving the war years, pointing out that people were starving and ate only fried potatoes. 'Fried potatoes and hunger!', A.M. comments, 'that's how relative everything is'.<sup>50</sup> In her life story, a separate chapter is dedicated to bread, its ingredients, rationing, the 'strategies' she and her sister developed for eating their daily share and so on.<sup>51</sup> 'Some younger Estonians sometimes question this rationing', A.M. comments ironically, 'how can one eat as much as one hundred to one hundred and fifty grams of [black] bread every day?' She concludes how 'right they are; one doesn't need to eat bread at all when there's lots of other food around'.<sup>52</sup> For deportees, procuring food constituted the most important task of their everyday life, and at some point during the war:

it seemed like there was no food left in the world. And the chronic feeling of empty stomach set in ... and stayed with us for years. ... Slowly food became a taboo

topic. That's how life was: there was nothing to eat and nothing could be procured anywhere. Children never asked for food.<sup>53</sup>

Such discussion of food shortages and hunger implies a common code of behaviour and attitude, shared with other deportees as well as with local people.<sup>54</sup> This, alongside numerous other examples, indicates an affiliation with the whole deportee community rather than being based on national identity, in particular across the generational divide. As A.M. emphasises,

today, it's often hard even to imagine the ways in which a country that's built on repressions operates and what the reality of the Stalin era was like. One can't refer to these years in a light informal manner as *nõuka-aeg*.<sup>55</sup>

In many aspects, A.M.'s narrative forms a remarkable contrast with the majority of deportation stories due to its focus on the potential of conveying the experience three-quarters of a century after it took place. On the one hand, it questions the applicability of the recognised frame of remembrance in contemporary Estonia, asking whether these values still hold today and whether the actual experience of real people has not been mythologised and evened out to the extent that it has become devoid of meaning, in particular vis-à-vis the relatively affluent everyday. One the other hand, it also problematises the memorial frame itself, from bringing the experience of the years spent in Siberia neatly 'home' and denying its lasting impact on her life after return. Quite the contrary, A.M.'s life story demonstrates the ways in which the deportee years have shaped her character and the ways in which she is still able to feel a strong sense of community with the people with whom she shared her fate, while questioning the possibility of such affiliation with her fellow Estonians, not least where the way of projecting the past in the present is concerned.

## CONCLUSION

These two deportation narratives highlight in different ways the trajectories of forced dislocation that extend spatially to include the deportation location(s) in the memorial frame in a significant manner as well as temporally to trace the complexity of the process of remembering and mediating memory. These features make it possible to link them with the theoretical framework of travelling memory, the development of which aims to transcend the boundaries of a conceptual frame premised on the centrality of location, which, in turn, has been predominantly associated with a national frame of remembrance. With regard to the memorial culture concerning the repressive impact of the Soviet regime in Estonia, these narratives open up different pathways of remembering that contribute to and sometimes contradict the accepted norms of representation and interpretation of the deportation experience. The impossibility and/or unwillingness to adhere to the recognised modes of representation, in turn, makes visible the possibly traumatic impact of deportation on the authors

that emerges via the (partial) incompatibility of their narratives with the accepted normative framework for mediating it. This becomes evident in Eela's narrative through marked differences between a frame of representation she herself proposes at the beginning of her story and the way in which she narrates her experience, where the trauma of never being able to settle down and be with her loved ones may have motivated her to focus in more detail on various transitory states rather than on the real implications of her failures to settle down. A.M.'s deportation story details her experience in a nearly 100-page manuscript, highlighting the process of remembering, where the question about the comprehensibility of her experience in contemporary Estonian society forms the backbone of her narrative and communal affiliations are formed more strongly in relation to places and people from the past (during deportation) than along national lines, in particular when these are applied in a taken-for-granted manner. In these life narratives, A.M.'s in particular, deviations from the accepted manner of representation of the deportation experience emerge quite strongly. Yet plenty of other examples, conveyed in different narrative and thematic ways, can be found in other Estonian women's deportation narratives. They offer the potential for the further application of the more dynamic theoretical frame of travelling and transcultural memory and advancing a critical discussion where the two models—with a focus on movement and with a focus on location—are subjected to comparative analysis.

## NOTES

1. A number of life story volumes have been published based on the collection, including Rutt Hinrikus (ed.), *Eesti rahva elulood: Sajandi sada elulugu kahes osas* (*Life-Stories of Estonians: One Hundred Life Stories of the Century in Two Volumes*), Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2000, 2003; and Rutt Hinrikus (ed.), *Eesti rahva elulood III: Elu Eesti NSV-s* (*Life-Stories of Estonians: Life in the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic*), Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2003. Other volumes focus on the life stories of deportees, women, love and sexuality, Russian-speaking minorities, prison experience, the period of the German occupation 1941–1944 and teachers' lives. For volumes published in English, see: Tiina Kirss, Ene Koresaar and Marju Lauristin (eds), *She Who Remembers Survives: Interpreting Estonian Women's Post-Soviet Life Stories*, Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2004; Suzanne Stiver Lie, Lynda Malik, Ilvi Joe Cannon and Rutt Hinrikus, *Carrying Linda's Stones: an Anthology of Estonian Women's Life Stories*, Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, 2006; and Tiina Kirss and Rutt Hinrikus, *Estonian Life Stories*, Budapest: Central European Press, 2009.
2. Ene Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad: kollektiivne mälu ja autobiograafiline minevikutõlgendus eestlaste elulugudes*, Tartu: Eesti Rahva Muuseum, 2005, p. 106.
3. Violeta Davoliūtė, 'Multidirectional Memory and the Deportation of Lithuanian Jews', *Ethnicity Studies*, vol. 2, 2015, p. 132.
4. Kõresaar, *Elu*, p. 72.
5. Rutt Hinrikus, 'Deportation, Siberia, Suffering, Love: the Story of Heli', in Kirss et al., *She Who Remembers Survives*, p. 63.

6. Richard Cronshaw and Selma Leydesdorff, 'On Silence and Revision: the Language and Words of the Victims', in Luisa Passerini (ed.), *Memory and Totalitarianism*, London, Transaction Publishers, 2005, p. xiii.
7. See, for example, Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, 'Vulnerable Scriptings: Approaching Hurtfulness of the Repressions of the Stalinist Regime in the Life Writings of Baltic Women', in Fatima Festic (ed.), *Gender and Trauma: Interdisciplinary Dialogues*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, pp. 89–114.
8. Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, 'Imagining a Hospitable Community in the Deportation Narratives of Baltic Women', *Prose Studies*, vol. 26, nos 1–2, 2003, p. 61.
9. Tiina Kirss, 'Survivorship and the Eastern Exile: Estonian Women's Life Narratives of the 1941 and 1949 Deportations', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2005, p. 13.
10. Katherine R. Jolluck, *Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union During World War II*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002, p. xx.
11. See Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, 'Creating a Habitable Everyday in Estonian Women's Diaries of the Repressions of the Stalinist Regime', in Magda Stroińska, Vikki Cecchetto and Kate Szymanski (eds), *Speaking the Unspeakable, Narratives of Trauma*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015, pp. 141–56.
12. See, for example, Kurvet-Käosaar, 'Imagining'; Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, "'Is That Hunger Haunting the Stove?'" Thematization of Food in the Deportation Narratives of Baltic Women', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Special Issue 'Food Cultures in the Baltic Region', ed. Ulrike Plath and Diana Mincyte, vol. 46, no. 3, 2015, pp. 337–52.
13. Astrid Erll, 'Travelling Memory', *Parallax*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2011, p. 11.
14. Erll, 'Travelling', p. 12.
15. Erll, 'Travelling', p. 7.
16. Julia Creet, 'Introduction: the Migration of Memory and Memory of Migration', in Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann (eds), *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011, p. 6.
17. Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad, 'Introduction', in Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (eds), *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 1, 2.
18. John Sundholm, 'Visions of Transnational Memory', *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, vol. 3, 2011, p. 1.
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20. See, for example, Susannah Radstone, 'What Place is This? Transcultural Memory and the Locations of Memory Studies', *Parallax*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2011, pp. 109–23.
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22. Radstone, 'Afterword', p. 353.
23. Violeta Davoliūtė and Tomas Balkelis, 'Introduction', in Davoliūtė and Balkelis (eds), *Maps of Memory: Trauma, Identity and Exile in Deportation Memoirs from the Baltic States*, Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2012, p. 11.

24. See, for example, Catherine Merridale, 'Soviet Memories: Patriotism and Trauma', in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (eds), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2010, pp. 376–89; Maria Tumarkin, 'The Long Life of Stalinism: Reflections on the Aftermath of Totalitarianism and Social Memory', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2011, pp. 1047–61; Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009.
25. Tumarkin, 'The Long Life', p. 1053.
26. Creet, 'Introduction', p. 6.
27. Her real name or initials are not used here.
28. Eela Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks on see kõik ajalugu' ('This is All History Now'), in Rutt Hinrikus (ed.), *Me tulime tagasi*, Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, 1999, pp. 251–2. All translations by the author.
29. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', pp. 252 and 255.
30. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', p. 262.
31. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', p. 270.
32. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', p. 270.
33. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', p. 271.
34. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', p. 271.
35. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', pp. 271–2.
36. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', p. 274.
37. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', p. 274.
38. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', p. 274.
39. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', pp. 272–3.
40. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', p. 272.
41. Lõhmus, 'Tänaseks', p. 275.
42. 'Seal Kaugel ära', F 350: 2645, p. 4.
43. 'Seal kaugel', p. 9.
44. 'Seal kaugel', p. 3.
45. 'Seal kaugel', p. 19.
46. Kurvet-Käosaar, 'Creating', p. 146.
47. Vieda Skultans, *Testimony of Lives: Narrative and Memory in Post-Soviet Latvia*, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 19.
48. 'Seal kaugel', p. 52.
49. 'Seal kaugel', p. 53.
50. 'Seal kaugel', p. 68.
51. Bread has a special role in deportation stories both as a valued and extremely scarce food as well as a symbol of hunger, suffering and survival. See Kurvet-Käosaar, 'Is That Hunger', p. 347, and Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: a History*, New York: Doubleday, 2003, p. 213.
52. 'Seal kaugel', p. 70.
53. 'Seal kaugel', p. 65.
54. Contrasting evidence, however, can be found in other women's deportation stories both with regard to conversations about food and children asking for food. See Kurvet-Käosaar, 'Is That Hunger', pp. 341–2, 347 and 349.
55. 'Seal kaugel', p. 55. *Nõuka-aeg* is a modern term, frequently used colloquially when referring to the Soviet period (in Estonian *Nõukogude aeg*).



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## Heroism in the Frame: Gender, Nationality and Propaganda in Tashkent and Moscow, 1924–1945

*Elizabeth Waters*

Paraded at public events and displayed in rural libraries and on factory walls, posters were an omnipresent element of the Soviet environment, adaptable in format, inexpensive to produce and easily updated, and designed to communicate Bolshevik messages concisely and persuasively to different audiences. The positive protagonists of poster propaganda were ordinary women and men living in extraordinary times, their mundane struggles for revolution, socialist construction and the new life elevated to heroic status and presented as templates for emulation. Politically advanced and proactive beyond the average, these exemplary fictive workers and citizens were still sufficiently realistic and credible to serve as role models. In addition to acting out programmes and campaigns, from industrialisation and collectivisation to sport and hygiene, the women and men portrayed in poster scenarios conveyed information about ideal types through dress and accessories, expression and gesture, position within the poster frame and their role in its story line. Further differentiated by age, class and ethnicity, poster protagonists offer a visual guide to Bolshevik ideas on femininity and masculinity, and to gender-related party policies, priorities and values, both those officially proclaimed and those implicit and taken for granted.

During the communist era, libraries and museums used posters from their collections to create exhibitions and publications that targeted the ‘broad public’ with uplifting visual narratives of the Soviet past as dictated by contemporary propaganda requirements.<sup>1</sup> From the end of the 1980s, Russian, European and North American scholars pioneered analysis and interpretation of

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the Soviet poster and its political, cultural and aesthetic meanings. To date, most research has been based on collections in and outside the Russian Federation that reflect metropolitan poster production disproportionately. As posters and collection catalogues from across the former Soviet Union, the provinces and the republics as well as capital cities, become available, in print and eventually electronically, a more comprehensive and contextualised understanding of their unique visual commentary on the Bolshevik world can emerge.<sup>2</sup> As yet the process is in its early stages, particularly in Central Asia, where collections remain largely unsorted and uncatalogued.

Gender, a significant theme in scholarly writing on Uzbekistan since the mid-1970s, has been explored in relation to society and power, and in the broader context of debates on colonialism, nation-building, identity and subjectivity. Studies have examined the impact of Soviet rule on the lives of Central Asian women and the extent to which the revolution engineered a successful challenge to patriarchal traditions, since 1991 with the aid of previously unavailable archival evidence.<sup>3</sup> In research on the non-Russian regions of the Soviet Union, the investigation of gender inevitably interconnects with nationality, and the visual source material used in this chapter, which puts ethnic as well as gender difference on show, brings these links to the fore.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter takes as its source base currently accessible Uzbek posters from the mid-1920s to 1945, most of them made in Tashkent, the propaganda hub of Soviet Turkestan from 1918 to 1924, and capital of the Uzbek republic and centre of poster production from 1930. The chapter compares the presentation of female and male protagonists in the Soviet Union's southern periphery with metropolitan poster production and investigates gendered Uzbek heroism in its relation to nationality against the changing background of early Soviet reforms, the rise of Stalinism and the republic's role in the Second World War. It identifies three stages in wartime poster production: the summer of 1941 in the immediate aftermath of the Nazi invasion, when Russian heroes predominated; the 12-month period from September 1941 during which local protagonists made their reappearance, though in lacklustre roles that fell short of new Moscow archetypes; and a third and final stage from the end of 1942 to the beginning of 1944 that saw a brief and carefully managed celebration of Uzbek heroism.

## 1924 TO 1941: FROM REVOLUTION TO WAR

Bolshevik modernisation, as implemented over the first two decades of Soviet power, aimed to eliminate both economic and social differences between regions of the former Empire. In the non-Russian republics, the Bolsheviks attempted to win over the population to Soviet rule and secure the loyalty of indigenous elites through *korenizatsiya*, a policy that reversed colonial Russification and promoted titular groups within the republic to pre-eminence in government and the economy, at all levels. Accordingly, the Soviet republic of Uzbekistan, established by delimitation of Turkestan in 1924, received large

investment transfers in production and education to fund the restructuring and development of industry and agriculture and expand the education and training of indigenous cadres, women as well as men.<sup>5</sup> The Soviet Uzbek republic would in theory, and over time, enable all citizens to exercise their rights to equality, a development from which women especially would benefit, gaining liberation from every vestige of oppression and secondary status.

Uzbek women, like women in European Russia, were subordinate in the gender hierarchy, and their rates of participation in education, employment and public life were comparatively lower due to local conventions relating to marriage and family, seclusion and segregation. The Bolsheviks believed these differences were merely a matter of degree—that whatever the social and economic circumstances, a planned economy would generate conditions for sexual equality, and reforms from above and campaign participation from below would accelerate the rate and ease the path of progress. Regarding the liberation of women as largely a matter of granting them the same rights and opportunities already enjoyed by men, the party introduced legislation on work, family and welfare broadly in line with the programme of early twentieth-century European social democracy, supplemented in Central Asia by measures designed to eliminate aspects of marriage and family peculiar to the region (child marriage, bride price, polygamy) that were deemed oppressive. In 1927, the Uzbek party launched a campaign for female emancipation, *khudzhum*, and called on women to claim their new freedoms.

According to V.G. Dolinskaya, author of the only Soviet monograph on the Uzbek poster, the heroes of the republic's visual propaganda in the post-revolutionary period were 'people of the new world' who actively struggled to change the circumstances of their everyday life, including *khudzhum* participants. In visual propaganda produced at the time, women were depicted as agents of their own liberation, who studied and worked in the face of conservative opinions and institutions. Posters focused on transitional processes—on the acquisition of literacy, the moment of unveiling, experimentation with modern forms of space and sociability in clubs and classrooms—and contrasted the traditional lot of female hardship and exclusion with the better life that was now within reach.<sup>6</sup> When *khudzhum* resulted instead in community resistance and a backlash against campaign participants, leading to the deaths of over 2000 women in honour killings, the Bolsheviks reduced the pace of reform. Unable to protect women who opted for the modernity it espoused, the party chose to postpone the attack on tradition until the planned economy created conditions more propitious for emancipatory change. Paradoxically, this policy retreat led to a visual acceleration in the Sovietisation of female poster protagonists. By the 1930s, poster heroines, some of them in headscarves of the type worn by proletarian women in Moscow, were taking charge of factory machines and tractors, notwithstanding the tiny number of Uzbek women who in fact possessed either industrial experience or driving skills. Poster propaganda in this instance conveniently papered over the shortcomings of party strategy for social change with images of future intent, stretching to the limit the association

between representations and reality. The barriers to the engagement of men with modernity were less daunting and the gap between the propaganda image and reality of more manageable proportions. In the 1920s, men in posters learned about Soviet agricultural reforms and joined cooperatives; by the 1930s they were studying Lenin, using machine tools with confidence and taking a lead in the organisation of collective farms. Like female protagonists, their dress became more Soviet in style over time and the posters in which they featured acquired a patina of socialist realism.

Soviet commentators saw the convergence of Central Asian with metropolitan form and content as an uncomplicated case of native propaganda coming of age, of the new republic acquiring political and artistic polish.<sup>7</sup> By the 1930s, the republican authorities were certainly better able to enforce the party's aesthetic and political norms, now that local resistance to Soviet power had been overcome and party institutions were more numerous and entrenched, but the challenge of developing a modern visual propaganda in a region where figurative representation had a short history, and women little public visibility, was far from straightforward. There was no ban in pre-colonial Turkestan on the use of the human form in imagery, but the practice of figurative (and societal) representation was tightly circumscribed by religious teaching and cultural convention, and as a result Soviet Central Asia initially lacked the stock of visual references, available to poster propagandists in Moscow, that could be deployed to evoke and motivate the heroic struggle for social transformation. While the natural world, along with calligraphy and geometry, was a major source for decorative art across Islamic Turkestan, and vegetable and animal motifs were widespread, the human image appeared only in book illustrations and miniatures created for the private pleasure of the court and the wealthy, demand for which by the seventeenth century was already on the wane.<sup>8</sup> Under tsarist rule, cinema and advertisements exposed indigenous populations in the cities to figurative representation *en masse* for the first time, apparently without exciting open religious opposition, and after the revolution images of the human form in propaganda as well as in entertainment and commerce became a commonplace of everyday urban life: visiting foreigners to the Uzbek republic took photos for their travel books without hindrance, and the urban press regularly commissioned visual material. Peripatetic artists reported that as painters of portraits of local notables they were guaranteed a warm reception in the villages too.<sup>9</sup> One post-Soviet Uzbek cultural critic has argued that indigenous Uzbeks adapted without much fuss to figurative representation because of the 'atheistic iron curtain' that separated the country during the Soviet period from the Islamic world community, though he does not explain why other religious regulatory practices survived.<sup>10</sup> Posters were initially displayed in urban areas, where the Communist Party was more established, rather than in the countryside, where most Uzbeks lived, and this may have enabled a gradual process of familiarisation with Soviet visual symbolism.

If Central Asian posters in the pre-war period were approximating in certain ways to metropolitan templates, they exhibited important differences as well.

Heroes far outnumbered heroines, by a ratio that was significantly higher than in European Russia. The soldiers, proletarians and agricultural workers who illustrated state and class celebrations such as the October Revolution and May Day, or personified cooperation between social groups, were invariably male; the allegorical female figures employed in poster production in Moscow to communicate abstract ideals during the revolutionary period, or the alliance between peasantry and proletariat from the late 1920s, were not easily transposed to Central Asia, where women themselves were hidden. Furthermore, whereas Russian posters routinely showed men and women together, in Uzbek posters heroines and heroes were usually confined to different frames, a separation that reflected propaganda's ideological compromise with tradition, a compromise further underscored by inequalities in display: posters featuring male protagonists were put on show in the public domain of tea houses, main streets, bazaars and corridors of power, while poster heroines decorated the women-only clubs and lecture rooms established as halfway houses in the transition from seclusion to social integration. The Uzbek poster, in other words, provided a fairly accurate map of the gendered use of space in society, and the topography of its display echoed and delineated the boundaries of segregation and male privilege.

Posters provide a similar guide to Bolshevik policy on nationality. *Korenizatsiya* applied to visual propaganda just as much as to enrolment and employment policies in education and the economy, and planned targets in this instance were a good deal easier to fulfil. Until the early 1930s, the Uzbek republic implemented the principle of visual pre-eminence for the titular groups with such thoroughness that Russians and other Europeans, though constituting more than 5% of the population in the country as a whole and over 30% in Tashkent, were all but excluded from view in visual propaganda.<sup>11</sup> By the second half of the 1930s, when nationalities policy took a more pragmatic turn and subordinated affirmative action to centralisation, the principle of visual pre-eminence for indigenous groups was relaxed considerably. In the immediate wake of the Nazi invasion in 1941 its hold grew weaker still.

### JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 1941: NEW PATRIOTIC PERSPECTIVES

The war initiated a far-reaching revision of heroic archetypes and their visual presentation. From the mid-1930s, faced with the social dislocations and instability generated by its industrial and agricultural programmes, the party had sought to shore up support for the regime amongst the ethnic Russian population by promoting pride in pre-revolutionary Russia. In a speech at a military parade in Red Square on 7 November 1941, Stalin took a further step in the conflation of Soviet with Russian by naming six 'great ancestors' as worthy inspirational role models for the Soviet Union at war, all of them Russian.<sup>12</sup> In response to this cue, metropolitan posters frequently featured Red Army troops side by side with military leaders of the past, from Alexander Nevsky to Mikhail Kutuzov, as illustration of the ties that bound Soviet soldiers to their glorious

pre-revolutionary forebears, victorious in their defence of Russian territory. Instead of a static tableau of exploitation, posters now staged fast-moving scenes of valour spanning the centuries, and looked forward to an imminent victory against the enemy rather than the distant triumph of communism. Yet while war altered the Soviet measurement of time and put social progress in second place behind national liberation, the new patriotic perspective did not necessarily signal a return to traditional representations of men and women.

If war privileged traits associated with masculinity, it also required that women demonstrate strength and spirit. Moscow propaganda produced a gallery of heroic poster women—nurses and partisans, home front activists and workers in heavy industry—who were, like the heroic military ancestors named by Stalin, all Russian. One of the first and most enduring of wartime posters, ‘The Motherland Calls’ (mother and motherland are hyphenated in the Russian: *matʹ-rodina*), imagined the homeland as a rank-and-file Russian woman in a simple red dress and large red shawl, radiating a civic dignity and moral authority that makes her summons to arms forceful and compelling.<sup>13</sup> The female allegory had found a new shape and purpose. Unlike the Stakhanovite *komsomolka*, epitome of female heroism in the pre-war period, the mother-motherland was an inclusive composite, neither old nor young, neither peasant nor worker. Her image reflected the broader view of the exemplary poster protagonist adopted by Moscow propaganda at the beginning of the war, one that recognised the heroic potential in citizens of diverse age and occupation, social class and status.<sup>14</sup> Thanks to the improved communications between centre and periphery over the 1930s, these new military heroes and female allegorical heroines reached Tashkent in a matter of days but were transferred selectively and without the customary adaptation to the local environment. Under pressure of war, the earlier procedures of propaganda transmission and translation had stalled, and it was more than a year before they were returned to function.

Members of the Tashkent graphics section of the Union of Artists met on 22 June 1941 to plan a visual response to the Nazi invasion. Initially the group painted frescoes on the walls of clubs, tea rooms and the university, changing them on a daily basis to bring the news from the front as speedily and effectively as resources permitted to an expectant public.<sup>15</sup> Allocated studio premises in the centre of the city a couple of weeks into the war, the artists switched to more conventional means of production, initially copying their ‘agit-windows’ by hand, later manufacturing them using the stencil method pioneered in Moscow during the Civil War at ROSTA, the Russian Telegraph Agency, and revived in 1941 at its successor TASS, the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> The graphic artists in Tashkent took their information and inspiration from the same Sovinformburo bulletins as their colleagues in the capital and tackled a similar range of topics. Between June and September 1941 their posters reported famine and terror in fascist-controlled Europe; satirised Hitler’s inferiority complex and Goebbels’ trickery; rejoiced at Nazi setbacks on the Russian front; and celebrated the moral and martial superiority of the Red Army troops.<sup>17</sup> As a result of this focus on international politics and the European fronts, and of a

relative neglect of domestic issues, protagonists were not only overwhelmingly male, they were also overwhelmingly Russian. A major official history of Uzbek applied arts published in the 1950s during the Thaw made veiled reference to this visual Russification when it mentioned the insufficient poster coverage of the home front at the beginning of the war.<sup>18</sup>

The increase in the number of Russian protagonists in Uzbek poster production in the summer and autumn of 1941 does not appear to have been planned from above, though it might draw indirect sanction from Moscow's promotion of Russian themes and heroes that began in the pre-war period and escalated in the wake of the Nazi invasion. In Tashkent, proactive support for the war effort initially came largely from the urban Russian population, who volunteered for the front, organised first aid and firearms training, and made their loyal voices heard at public meetings: an archival photograph shows anti-fascist demonstrators holding aloft a poster-placard of 'The Motherland Calls' with text in Russian.<sup>19</sup> Under pressure from this local patriotism and in the absence of firm guidelines from the centre, the Uzbek party allowed the policy of visual pre-eminence for the titular group to slide further into reverse.<sup>20</sup> Partial correction came relatively quickly, however, as Moscow re-established chains of political command between centre and periphery, and propaganda resumed its role in the top-down communication of policy. Russo-centric perspectives may have been gaining ground in Moscow, but the right of the titular group in the non-Russian republics to domestic ascendancy was never seriously questioned.

#### SEPTEMBER 1941 TO SEPTEMBER 1942: UzTAG AND THE RE-EMERGENCE OF LOCAL PROTAGONISTS

The reassertion of central control marked the first step in the restoration of pre-war procedures for the transfer of visual images between centre and periphery. The launch of the Uzbek Telegraph Agency, UzTAG, in September 1941, and the start of publication of its TASS-style numbered poster series, produced by the studio collective, ushered in a new stage in the evolution of wartime posters, characterised by a return to home front content: by 1942 almost 50% of Uzbek posters, lithographic as well as agit-window production, addressed domestic topics.<sup>21</sup> Though Tashkent poster protagonists lacked the metropolitan sense of urgency in their execution of war-related activities, they emulated Moscow in their diversity. Pioneers helped with the harvest and gathered medicinal plants, young women replaced men in the factory and to a lesser extent in the fields, and older citizens of both sexes advertised state loans, offered help to evacuees and collected warm clothes and gifts for the front.<sup>22</sup> As they switched to domestic themes, posters once more began to reflect the republic's ethnic composition and reaffirm titular group pre-eminence in visual propaganda. According to the authoritative post-Stalinist survey of Uzbek applied arts, change had not gone far enough.<sup>23</sup> An appraisal of poster treatment



of military heroism suggests that, as this criticism implied, propaganda was still failing to make the war comprehensible and relevant to an indigenous audience.

Soviet metropolitan propaganda exemplified the collective courage of the armed forces and the valiant exploits of individuals almost exclusively with images of Russian heroes, even though from the first weeks of the war there were non-Russians, including Uzbeks, fighting at the front. Tashkent poster production, despite the occasional inclusion of local fighters on horseback or on the march, conveyed a similar picture of a Russian war fought by Russians.<sup>24</sup> Apparently, neither the Red Army nor the Uzbek Communist Party had set up channels to send and receive information about the feats of republican troops, and for the first 6 months of the war the local press reprinted Moscow material on Russian heroism. At the end of 1941, Uzbek propaganda picked up on a short item from Red Army publications about the brave deeds of a soldier named Akhmed Aliev, citizen of the republic. A few weeks into the new year a much bigger story broke when a battalion commander on the south-west front broadcast the exploits of a certain Kuchkar Turdiev, who soon afterwards was awarded a Hero of the Soviet Union medal. Though in the months that followed several posters as well as pamphlets, poems and a musical drama fêted his exploits, he was to remain for some time an isolated example.<sup>25</sup> Over the summer of 1942, Tashkent posters continued to present military heroism as a largely Russian phenomenon. In July, UzTAG reproduced a TASS poster featuring a troika of heroic Russian naval guards and later the same month contributed one of its own design in commemoration of five Russian soldiers who had sacrificed their lives in battle against 15 enemy tanks.<sup>26</sup> When, in August 1942, the government announced the introduction of new military medals named after past Russian military leaders—the Orders of Alexander Nevsky, Alexander Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov—UzTAG published three posters to mark the event, one for each commander. The indigenisation of military heroism, historical and contemporary, was given the go-ahead only in the autumn of 1942 as Soviet troops prepared to launch a counteroffensive at Stalingrad. Once under way, celebration expanded in scope, extending beyond representations of martial heroes to include fighters on the home front, women as well as men.

### OCTOBER 1942 TO 1943: UZBEK HEROISM

It was the bad news from domestic and military fronts that precipitated this policy change. The indigenous Uzbek population, far from exhibiting the total support for the war effort that Soviet propaganda held to be axiomatic, was largely unaffected by the wave of patriotism that gripped the republic's Russian population at the outbreak of war and remained detached from a military conflict it did not regard as its own. By the late summer of 1942, Moscow could no longer afford to ignore the gap between the rhetorical friendship of nationalities and the reality of ethnic tensions, simmering discontent and poor economic performance on the southern periphery.<sup>27</sup> The German advances

eastward and southward towards the Volga and Caucasus brought Uzbekistan closer to the front line and increased the importance of the republic's contribution to feeding and clothing the population in the Soviet Union's European territories. Of greatest concern to Moscow was the sharp fall in the volume and yield of the Uzbek cotton harvest, from almost 1.5 million tons in 1941 to under 0.5 million in 1942, and from 21.33 to 7.1 centners per hectare.<sup>28</sup>

Celebration of Uzbek heroism, the third phase in the development of war-time visual propaganda, was thus part of a carefully crafted policy to bring the republic into the war effort. As reports from the countryside confirmed harvest shortfalls, despite an increase earlier in the year in the minimum number of compulsory labour days for members of collective farms, the party launched a new campaign combining calls for increased productivity with concessions to regional sentiment. It commenced with the publication of a remarkable act of collective correspondence. On 31 October 1942, the newspaper *Pravda vostoka* printed an open Letter from the Uzbek People to Uzbek Fighters, allegedly signed by just under two and a half million citizens, close to 50% of the adult civilian population. The Letter, which aimed to impress the 'writers' as much as the recipients with its pride in the courage of fellow countrymen at the front and expressions of unstinting support for the war, served as a starting point for a series of posters on Uzbek military heroes.

In a reference to Stalin's speech on martial ancestors, the Letter had named Rustam, Ravshanbek, Avazkhan and Alpamysh as the 'timeless bogatyrs' of the Uzbek people. The posters imagined these heroes as mighty warriors, fearless defenders of the people's freedom who vanquished every foe. They followed Moscow's example in positioning bogatyrs side by side with Uzbek Red Army troops to inspire a patriotic response to the 'hateful German occupiers'. They also borrowed the metropolitan technique of distinguishing the contemporary from the historical through palette and brushstroke, rendering the Red Army in bold colour and strong lines, and the ancestors in pale tones and shadowy form, to accentuate their mythic and legendary status<sup>29</sup> (Fig. 14.1). Celebration of Uzbek military heroism continued into 1943 in press reports and biographical pamphlets as well as in visual propaganda, and the Red Army began publication of several Uzbek-language newspapers at the front in another effort to make the war relevant to Uzbek fighters.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to belatedly indigenising the trope of Soviet martial heroism and glorious ancestry, propaganda also gave greater weight to Uzbek exploits on the home front. Posters released at harvest time sought to boost the morale of male collective farmers by asserting the equivalence of work in the fields and at the front line. An Uzbek collective farmer, dressed in traditional quilted coat and skullcap, is pictured protecting the cotton harvest, gun in hand,<sup>31</sup> or unloading sacks of cotton that morph into bullets and rockets.<sup>32</sup> In this second example, the male farmer is accompanied in the frame by a woman, less bellicose in mien, but of similar significance to the poster's composition and message (Fig. 14.2). The greater visibility of women in posters produced for a village audience mirrored their increasing contribution to the rural work force, representing 66% in 1943.<sup>33</sup>



**Fig. 14.1** ‘Timeless bogatyrs’ poster (1942), *Plakaty - frontu i tylu, 1941–1945: katalog*, Tashkent: Vneshtorgizdat, 1990

As the number of female tractor drivers reached several thousand, posters on this and similar production themes could begin to claim credibility as markers of emancipation, especially as women were also taking on positions of local responsibility and leadership, and female membership of the Communist Party climbed to approximately 25% of the total.

Accommodations continued to be made to segregation and to other elements of patriarchal tradition, both in practice and in propaganda: collective farms held separate lectures and meetings on war-related themes for women and for men, and posters gave little attention to the topic of female military heroism. Yet if Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya had no Uzbek equivalent, the female allegory of homeland underwent ‘Uzbekification’ in one of the most notable wartime developments in visual propaganda. ‘The Motherland Calls’, reproduced in Tashkent in 1941 and 1942 with Russian text and in a huge print run of hundreds of thousands, was finally, at the end of 1942, reconfigured in Uzbek idiom.<sup>34</sup> Having reproduced a couple of TASS windows of heroic Russian



Fig. 14.2 'Uzbek collective farm' poster (1943), *Plakaty - frontu it tylu, 1941–1945: Katalog*, Tashkent: Vneshtorgizdat, 1990

mothers over the year, in December UzTAG created local heroines to personify and speak in the name of the emergent Uzbek nationality: one of them, in a large shawl not dissimilar to the garment worn by the original mother-motherland and adopting the same commanding posture against a backdrop of public space, issues a stern reminder, echoing the Uzbek Letter, that the homeland can never condone cowardice or desertion.<sup>35</sup> Another female protagonist in traditional robes and headscarf, pointing Lord Kitchener-style at her audience, explains to viewers that the war in Europe is an Uzbek fight: 'Your street begins in Belorussia', her text, another excerpt from the Letter, instructs, 'The houses of Ukraine belong in your neighbourhood (*mahalla*)'.<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 14.3). This second poster affirms as well as subverts conservative expectations, reflecting a conflict between challenging tradition and ensuring loyalty to the state. The heroine breaks new ground as a symbol of national resistance and a source of political directives, but her message depends for effective impact on the visual reference to men's duty to protect women's honour delivered in the poster's background scene of captured Slav women menaced by enemy bayonets. Another poster that both reverses and endorses accepted hierarchies shows the Central Asian periphery coming to the aid of European Russia instead of the other way round, but juxtaposes the images of Uzbek women providing supplies of food and munitions for the besieged city of Leningrad with a text urging them to 'be worthy' of their sisters in the northern Russian capital.<sup>37</sup>



Fig. 14.3 'Uzbek heroines' poster (1942), *Plakaty - frontu i tylu, 1941–1945: katalog*, Tashkent: Vneshtorgizdat, 1990

The celebration of Uzbek heroines was equivocal and patchy. Most poster protagonists were still male, and women were frequently confined to secondary roles in crowd scenes. Nevertheless, the greater wartime prominence of women in public life was acknowledged not only in the increasing number of female poster protagonists but also by a less rigid gender segregation within the poster frame. In the early months of the war, for example, depictions of conscript leave-takings had centred on the emotional farewell between father and son, with the mother relegated to the background to hold her boy's horse, or omitted from the frame altogether. A poster from 1943, commemorating the hero Kamal Palatov, introduces two female figures, presumably wife and mother, into the leave-taking scene alongside the hero and his father, as well as several women in the final of the three frames depicting a public meeting on Kamal's front-line exploits<sup>38</sup> (Fig. 14.4). In addition, posters began to use the mixed pair in allegorical partnerships. One issued for May Day 1942 with the slogan 'Let's launch an all-peoples mission to improve cotton production' followed the pre-war practice of visualising the people as all-male.<sup>39</sup> Another later that year, however, represented the rural workforce by two figures, one of them female.<sup>40</sup> The poster preserves the gender hierarchy through association of the male figure with cotton, the 'white gold' that was Uzbekistan's all-important





**Fig. 14.4** 'Hero Kamal Palatov' triptych poster (1943), *Plakaty - frontu i tylu, 1941–1945: katalog*, Tashkent: Vneshtorgizdat, 1990

commodity, and of the female figure with wheat, a far less significant crop, yet the woman as well as the man acquires heroic status not only through her labour but from proximity to the Uzbek fighters, who advance in silhouette across the middle of the poster frame.

These celebrations of local heroism—military and labour, past and present, male and female—became more muted over the course of 1943 and by early 1944 had all but disappeared; in fact, poster production on war-related themes of any description was wound down at this time, as the Red Army reclaimed occupied territory and Uzbekistan headed for a better cotton harvest. With

victory in sight and the local crisis over, Uzbek poster propaganda returned to its pre-war production focus, more narrowly conceived as a series of economic targets.<sup>41</sup> The pantheon of contemporary heroes never found a foothold. Kuchkar Turdiev, of whom it had been forecast that his life and feats would resound down the generations, returned from the war to a life of obscurity as a brigade leader on a collective farm in his native Andizhan, and art historian V. G. Dolinskaya, writing in the mid-1960s, believed him long dead.<sup>42</sup> Nor did Uzbek ancestors gain traction. Apart from Alpamysh, the eponymous hero of an ancient Turkic epic, sponsored intermittently by the Soviet literary establishment before, during and after the war, the heroes mentioned in the Uzbek Letter had disappeared, apparently without trace.

The reasons for the late and brief wartime celebration of Uzbek heroism lie both in the region's pre-revolutionary and Bolshevik histories, and in relations between Soviet centre and periphery. While Moscow had scrutinised elite literary tradition during the 1930s and endorsed Alisher Navoi as Uzbek's literary giant, Soviet mapping of local history was still rudimentary. The republic lacked any extensive pre-colonial legacy of historical writing, and qualified and experienced Soviet-trained local historians or Moscow patrons were in short supply. Uzbek identity was in the early stages of formation and the allegiance of the ethnically diverse native populations was still either transnational or locally restricted, to Islam in the first instance and to village or region in the second, and neither provided usable history or heroes for the new socialist republic. The timeless bogatyr mentioned in the Uzbek Letter were chosen in the first place not for intrinsic relevance but because they met the Bolshevik criterion of never having taken up arms against the Russian state, hence posing no challenge to the new orthodoxy of tsarism's progressive historical role. To fashion these ancestors into a heroic narrative of nationality acceptable to Moscow required considerable cultural investment, and once the tide of war turned, the project lost its urgency. Heroism continued to be celebrated where it mattered most, at the front, and this sustained exposure of troops to a mixed diet of Russian- and Uzbek-oriented propaganda was to accelerate both short-term post-war integration of the republic into the Soviet polity and longer-term local resistance to the process. At the All-Union level, the brief wartime celebration of Uzbek valour hardly registered, in poster art or in other propaganda media.<sup>43</sup> The hero whose memory did receive attention, his story becoming known to many beyond the republic's borders as well as to 'everyone' in Uzbekistan, was Shakhmed Shamakhmudov, the blacksmith foster parent of 15 war orphans, mostly evacuees from European Russia.<sup>44</sup> Such exploits were in accord with the post-war policies of Friendship of the Peoples.<sup>45</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the pre-war period, Soviet poster images were created in the metropolitan centre and adapted for the Uzbek periphery. Moscow templates of male and female poster protagonists were transposed and refashioned in a process that

juggled Bolshevik modernising and emancipatory ideologies with local traditions and patriarchal institutions while simultaneously negotiating the intersections and cross-currents between party policies on gender and nationality. The shock of war in 1941 and the heightened local patriotism of metropolitan propaganda initially disrupted this translation process, and for a time military themes and Russian protagonists predominated in Tashkent poster production. The military and domestic crises of 1942 prompted a dramatic change in direction and an unprecedented though short-lived celebration of indigenous heroism that alluded to history, martial glory and national identity, and created new images of Uzbek fighters and female allegories of the Uzbek nation.

Since independence in 1991 the Republic of Uzbekistan has continued to deploy figurative representation in the public space with vigour. Its policy of replacing Soviet memorials with ones of its own suggests tacit acknowledgement of their potency. Physical removal is not necessarily ideological erasure and certain archetypes of Soviet visual imagery have survived severance from Moscow and the associated socio-economic, political and cultural reorientations in the republic. The heroic triad of ancestor, modern Uzbek warrior and allegorical mother that first made its appearance in poster propaganda during the Great Patriotic War has been re-established since independence at sacred sites across the national capital. A statue of the medieval warrior prince Timur astride his warhorse now occupies Karl Marx's old spot in the main square<sup>46</sup>; in another central location, the Oath to the Homeland Memorial comprises a sculpture of the brave soldier kneeling to the Uzbek flag in front of a bas-relief of the mother-motherland giving her blessing<sup>47</sup>; not far from Independence Square and the parliament building, near the elegant and elegiac war memorial to Uzbeks who fought in the Second World War, is located another female allegory in the form of a mother grieving for her son, part of the Eternal Flame ensemble.<sup>48</sup> Soviet propaganda's figurative representations of heroism and homeland evidently succeeded in making their mark on memory and have not yet outrun their usefulness for the nation-building projects of a secular state in the Eurasian space.

## NOTES

1. Soviet publications on the applied arts, visual propaganda and posters include: *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Sovetskogo Uzbekistana*, Tashkent: Gosizdat, 1957; *Izoizdaniya Uzbekskoi SSR (1926–1964)*, Tashkent: Gosudarstvennaya knizhnaya palata Uzbekskoi SSR, 1987; *Letopis' izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva velikoi otechestvennoi voyny*, Moscow: Vsesoyuznaya knizhnaya palata, nos 1–3, 1942; no. 4, 1942; nos 2–3, 1943; no. 4 1943; nos 1–2, 1944; nos 3–4, 1944; *Plakaty—frontu i tylu 1941–1945: katalog*, Tashkent: Vneshtorgizdat, 1990.
2. Studies of propaganda and political posters include: V. Dolinskaya, *Plakat Uzbekistana*, Tashkent, 1967; R.Kh. Taktash, *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Uzbekistana*, Tashkent: Fan, 1972; Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987; Klaus Vashik and Nina Baburina, *Real'nost' utopii: iskusstvo Russkogo plakata XX veka*,



Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya, 2004; Peter Kort Zegers and Douglas W. Druick (eds), *Windows on the War: Soviet TASS Posters at Home and Abroad, 1941–1945*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013; A.S. Morozov, *Sovetskii politicheskii plakat: bibliograficheskaya ukazatel'*, Moscow: Kontakt-Kul'tura, 2013; *Plakat Sovetskogo Vostoka, 1918–1940*, Moscow: Dom Mardzhani, 2013.

Until the 1930s not all posters carried information on their month or even their year of issue. Most recently published catalogues and albums include full publication information where available, now making it possible better to assess the level of connection between propaganda and party policy and between propaganda at the centre and on the periphery. The State Public (Lenin) Library in Moscow holds a database of key Soviet posters, each item containing poster reproduction, publication details and description: Nina I. Baburina, *Plakat v revolyutsii, elektronnyi resurs*. The National Library of Uzbekistan holds a digital version of the bibliography of posters and other visual material from the Soviet House of Books Collection, *Uzbekiston SSR Tasvirii Nashrlari, 1926–1985*, Tashkent: Uzbekistan SSR Davlat Kitob Palatasi, 1987.

3. Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974; Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004; Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity and Unveiling under Communism*, Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007.
4. Bolshevik policy on religion also intersected closely with gender, but the currently accessible posters do not touch on this topic and it is not discussed here.
5. Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.
6. Dolinskaya, *Plakat Uzbekistana*, pp. 16–17 and unnumbered pages; *Plakat Sovetskogo Vostoka*, nos. 076, 117.
7. Dolinskaya, *Plakat Uzbekistana*, pp. 14–15.
8. J. Kalter and M. Pavaloi (eds), *Heirs of the Silk Road*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1997, p. 108.
9. *Pravda vostoka*, 1926–1945 (organ Sredne-azyatskogo byuro TsK VKP(b) Uz Tsik UzSSR i sredazbyuro VTsSPS); A.L. Strong, *Red Star in Samarkand*, London: Williams and Norgate, pp. 237–8; G.N. Karlov, *Tovarishch zhizn'*, Tashkent: Esh gvardiya, 1987, p. 64.
10. A. Khakimov, 'Istoricheskoe soznanie i khudozhestvennyi protsess (opyt sovremennogo iskusstva Uzbekistana)', in *Znaki vremeni. Kul'turnye konteksty sovremennogo iskusstva Uzbekistana: nasledie i postmodernism*, Tashkent: San'at, 2008, p. 20.
11. *Raiony UzSSR v tsifrax*, Samarkand: Gosudarsvennaya planovaya komissiya UzSSR, 1930, pp. 36–9.
12. Available online: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1941/11/07.htm> (accessed December 2015).
13. Available online: <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/exhibitions/TASS/Motherland-Calls> (accessed September 2016).
14. See *Plakaty voiny i pobeda*, Moscow: Kontakt-kul'tura, 2005, pp. 24, 43, 46–7; *Plakat voennoi Leningrada*, Moscow: Kontakt-kul'tura, 2011, p. 16.
15. Taktash, *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Uzbekistana*, p. 155.

16. *Of Literature and Art of Uzbekistan*, Tashkent: Gozlitizdat, 1958, p. 154; *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Sovetskogo Uzbekistana*, p. 114; Morozov, *Sovetskii politicheskii plakat*, p. 16, distinguishes between 'agit vitriny' produced over the first 3 months of the war and 'agit okna', which began publication in early September 1941.
17. Morozov, *Sovetskii politicheskii plakat*, pp. 16–25.
18. *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Sovetskogo Uzbekistana*, p. 116.
19. *Pravda vostoka*, June–December, 1941; N.V. Mandral'skaya, *Zapetchatlennye obrazy voiny*, Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1987, p. 34.
20. Usman Yusupov, secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, made no public pronouncements until after Stalin broke his silence on 3 July 1941 and his output of speeches and articles only resumed its pre-war level towards the end of the year. Usman Yusupov, *Izbrannye trudy*, vol. 2, Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1983, pp. 369–71, 383.
21. Dolinskaya, *Plakat Uzbekistana*, pp. 58–60; Taktash, *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Sovetskogo Uzbekistana*, p. 156. See, for information available online: <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/exhibitions/TASS/Posters> (accessed September 2016).
22. *Letopis'*, no. 1, pp. 6, 7, 9; nos 2–3, p. 7, 1943.
23. *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Sovetskogo Uzbekistana*, p. 116.
24. *Letopis'* *izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva velikoi otechestvennoi voiny* included a section on 'The Heroic Past of the Russian people', 1942, 1943, 1944.
25. *Pis'mo k Leningradskoi molodezhi ot molodezhi Uzbekistana*, Tashkent: Gosizdat UzSSR, 1942, p. 8; *Istoriya Uzbekskoi sovetskoi muzyki*, Tashkent: Gafur Guliam Izdatel'stvo literatury i iskusstva, 1972, p. 272.
26. *Katalog*, no. 165, no. 168.
27. Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010, pp. 119–22.
28. R.Kh. Aminova, 'Vklad kolkhoznogo krest'yanstva Uzbekistana v pobedu sovetskogo naroda v velikoi otechestvennoi voine', *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane*, no. 5, 1989, p. 19.
29. *Katalog*, nos 265–6; *Letopis'*, 1944, nos 1–2, p. 7.
30. See *Pravda vostoka*, 7 February, 6 March, 1, 7, 19, 22 May, 31 August, 3, 6, 10, 17, 24 October, 26, 28 November 1943; *Kniga Sovetskogo Uzbekistana 1941–1944*, Tashkent, 1974, pp. 57–61. The Uzbek language front newspapers are discussed in *Uzbekskaya SSR v gody velikoi otechestvennoi voiny (1941–1945gg.)*, vol. 2, Tashkent: Fan, 1983, pp. 217–35.
31. *Katalog*, no. 222.
32. *Letopis'*, nos 3–4, 1944, p. 11.
33. T. Sultanova, 'Politiko-massovaya rabota sredi truzhenits polei Uzbekistana v gody voiny', *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane*, no. 5, 1975, p. 46.
34. *Letopis'*, nos 1–3, 1942, p. 17.
35. *Katalog*, no. 267.
36. *Katalog*, no. 262.
37. *Katalog*, no. 206.
38. *Katalog*, no. 352.
39. *Katalog*, no. 130.
40. 'Vse dlya fronta, vse dlya pobedy!' Tashkent: Gosizdat UzSSR, 1942, *Katalog*, unnumbered page.
41. Morozov, *Sovetskii politicheskii plakat*, pp. 321–2.

42. Dolinskaya, *Plakat Uzbekistana*, p. 65.
43. TASS published a single poster on Uzbekistan, in the autumn of 1942 when the republic's contribution to the war effort was most needed; see *Windows on War*, p. 81, fn. 85.
44. See, for a commemorative statue available online: <http://www.yaplakal.com/forum2/topic882351.htm> (accessed December 2015).
45. K. Fazylkhodzhaev, *Detei prínimal Uzbekistan*, Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1991.
46. Available online: <http://ajammc.com/2015/07/07/goodbye-lenin-hello-timur/> (accessed September 2016).
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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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## ‘The Motherland Calls’: Soviet Women in the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945

*Roger D. Markwick*

Women played a pivotal role in the Soviet victory over Nazism in the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945. Not only did the Soviet Union mobilise women for the home front to an unprecedented degree compared to other combatant nations, it uniquely mobilised women to serve in the military. In contrast to most other combatant countries in the Second World War, in particular Nazi Germany, which was reluctant to mobilise women for the home front, even for ‘total war’, Soviet women took on roles in industry, agriculture and the military that elsewhere were generally regarded as the exclusive domain of males. Given the extraordinarily gendered nature of war, especially ‘total war’, this chapter narrates the everyday struggles of the vast reserve army of female labour on the Soviet home and domestic fronts—in factories, farms, hospitals and families—which sustained the sinews of family and social life, and the confronting roles of women on the front lines—as nurses, anti-aircraft gunners, aviators, snipers and partisans.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, it analyses the approach of the Soviet state towards women in wartime. It considers exactly what it was about Soviet state and female society that enabled the draconian Stalinist regime at a critical moment to mobilise millions of women for the war effort. Finally, it asks to what degree, if at all, was mass female participation in the Soviet war effort emancipatory?

### WOMEN, FAMILY AND THE STATE

Motherhood, family and patriotism were three discursive pillars of Stalin’s Soviet motherland: ‘The glorious work of Soviet women, builders of socialist industry, collective farming, socialist culture, will go down in history forever’, he boasted on International Women’s Day, 8 March 1949:

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With every year the role of women in all spheres of life of Soviet society increases. ... Motherhood and the rearing of children in the USSR are honoured and respected. The Soviet State assigns enormous funds to aid mothers with large families and unmarried mothers ... The title 'Mother Heroine' has been conferred on 28,500 women ... The gains of the Soviet system, the equality of rights of Soviet woman, her rapid spiritual and political growth, serve as an inspiring challenge to the women of the whole world in their struggle for the happiness of the working people, for the triumph of the ideas of socialism and democracy.<sup>2</sup>

In reality, in the aftermath of Hitler's 'war of annihilation', far from being emancipated, 'glorious' builders of socialism, Soviet women were burdened with the 'impossible expectations' of simultaneously reconstructing and 're-populating' a shattered Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> A mere four years after the Red Army's victory over Nazism at the cost of 27 million Soviet dead, Stalin's Soviet motherland was economically, socially and psychologically devastated, although the physiological fixations of Soviet psychiatry refused to recognise personal trauma.<sup>4</sup> It fell to women to pick up the pieces and rebuild it: brick by brick, ingot by ingot, veteran by disabled veteran.

In the decade before the Nazi onslaught in June 1941, Stalin's forced march to 'socialism in one country' was accompanied by a growing cult around the great 'Father of the Peoples', Russian patriotism, embrace of the family and pronatalist eulogising of motherhood. In marrying nation, family and motherhood, Soviet populist rhetoric mirrored that of other dictatorial European states, inter alia Francoist Spain, Fascist Italy and not least its mortal enemy: Nazi Germany.<sup>5</sup>

### SOVIET SOCIALISM: WOMEN EMANCIPATED

Nevertheless, Stalinism differed markedly from its fascist opponents in regard to women in one critical respect: it espoused the equality of women, based on the certainty that socio-economic development, not biology, was the key to women's emancipation.<sup>6</sup> Article 122 of the December 1936 'Stalin' Constitution granted women 'equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life'.<sup>7</sup> The explicit assumption was that the Soviet Union was now a socialist state that could provide the material where-withal for women's emancipation from the burdens of domestic labour and motherhood. Bolshevism, like classical Marxism, envisaged the demise of the family with the transition to socialism, but Stalinism gave 'emancipation' a pronatalist twist: the 'triumphal rehabilitation', Trotsky caustically noted, of 'the family' and 'the joys of motherhood',<sup>8</sup> reinforced in July 1936 by the criminalisation of abortion and restriction of divorce.<sup>9</sup> Henceforth, the 'model of womanhood' proselytised in women's magazines 'combined pre-revolutionary traditions, including the Orthodox Church's emphasis on the sanctity of motherhood and the literary trope of the strong, self-sacrificing Russian peasant

woman'.<sup>10</sup> The centrality of the family and motherhood meshed with the discursive reconfiguration in the 1930s of the Soviet Union as Soviet motherland, as *rodina-mat'* (literally: motherland-mother).<sup>11</sup> When war came, *rodina-mat'* resonated with Stalin's call for women on the home front to give their all to the military struggle.

### A TRIPLE BURDEN

The 1936 constitution conferred legal equality with men on Soviet women; all spheres of life, not just family and the home, were supposed to be open to them. In reality, in the context of forced-march industrialisation, urbanisation and militarisation with the growing threat of war, women increasingly found themselves carrying a triple burden: motherhood, work and paramilitary training. In the 1930s a 'regendering' of the workforce occurred as millions of women entered into previously male-dominated occupations, including heavy industry.<sup>12</sup> By 1937, in the wake of breakneck fast industrialisation and collectivisation, women constituted 52.7% of the population—there were eight million more of them than men.<sup>13</sup> In short, there were good demographic reasons, over and above the rhetoric of women's equality, why Soviet women were enjoined to work and prepare to fight. By 1939, in a total population of 167.7 million, women comprised 38 per cent of an 11 million-strong industrial workforce that by 1942, in the midst of wartime, had plummeted to 7.2 million. By 1943–1944 the percentage of women in industry had rocketed to 52%. By 1945 women were an extraordinary 80% of the collective farm workforce in a society that was still two-thirds rural.<sup>14</sup>

Gender equality extended to paramilitary training and service. Increasingly in the 1930s, young women were subjected to a 'barrage of visual propaganda' that depicted women flying, shooting, parachuting, wearing gas masks and excelling at sport and physical culture, 'Ready for Labour and Defence' against alleged enemies, within and without.<sup>15</sup> Such exhortations were accompanied by a cult of the militarised heroine.<sup>16</sup> This reached its crescendo in 1938 with the women's world-record flight of the bomber *Rodina* (Motherland), piloted by three women who were subsequently awarded the highest military honour: 'Hero of the Soviet Union'.<sup>17</sup>

The cult of the heroine peaked precisely as Stalin decapitated the Red Army's male command as his 'Great Purges' terrorised the elites. Yet in Stalin's Potemkin state, the cult of the heroine masked the grim reality of most women's lives and opportunities in civilian and military life. When total war came in June 1941, the overwhelming bulk of women stoically laboured on the home and domestic fronts, fighting for the survival of themselves and their families as much as for their motherland.

### ‘BARBAROSSA’: MOTHERLAND CALLS!

Notwithstanding the dramatic pre-war rhetoric about Soviet women taking up arms, and the evident willingness of thousands of young women to do so, the outbreak of war saw the Communist Party and the Red Army insist that women’s role was on the home front. Patriotic, maternal, quasi-religious iconography and discourse framed the Soviet propaganda war from beginning to end: ‘The motherland calls!’ demanded a resolute, scarf-wearing peasant woman, staring fixedly from the famous Soviet recruiting poster.<sup>18</sup> The religious-patriotic discourse in which Stalin’s nominally atheist state framed the war as a ‘sacred cause’ spoke to the Orthodox religious convictions of the majority of Soviet citizens, not least the majority female population in the countryside.<sup>19</sup> In this ‘sacred war’ against the ‘fascist marauders’, insisted *Pravda*, the ‘primary’, ‘sacred duty of the woman patriot’ was ‘to work on the home front’; ‘women patriots’ were urged to ‘master male professions!’<sup>20</sup> The official expectation, and the reality for the overwhelming majority of women, was that they should carry the primary burden on the home front, in the family, agriculture and industry, thereby freeing up men for the fighting front. The gendered division of labour that in the 1930s had re-consigned women to family and motherhood, as well as work, was consolidated by the wartime spatial division between ‘home’ and ‘front’.<sup>21</sup> But the Soviet state worked overtime to forge home-front identification with the frontlines.

### EVERYTHING FOR THE FRONT!

Under the slogan ‘Everything for the Front, Everything for Victory!’, party newspapers lionised the ‘honoured daughters of the motherland’ who allegedly volunteered for industrial work.<sup>22</sup> In the first year of the war, female workforce participation rocketed by 15.4%, but volunteers alone did not secure it.<sup>23</sup>

The Soviet government’s passionate appeals to patriotic sacrifice, coupled with material rewards and awards for super-productive workers, such as ‘Hero of Soviet Labour’ and access to scarce consumer goods and privileges spurred on by ‘Stakhanovite’, ‘All-Union socialist competition’ from spring 1942 onwards, belied its primary recourse to coercion to maintain wartime production that by 1942 was on the verge of collapse.<sup>24</sup> In a ‘command economy’ governed by ‘coercion’, ‘universal labour conscription’ to “‘guarantee the urgent work of all enterprises”” became the order of the day, resurrecting ‘war communism’ measures from the 1918–1921 Civil War that increasingly shackled women.<sup>25</sup> A series of draconian decrees suspended leave, authorised 11-hour days and imposed compulsory overtime. In December 1941 and February 1942, acute labour shortages in military industries saw the imposition of ‘continual production work’ and the ‘mobilisation’ of all ‘able-bodied city dwellers’, including women aged 16 to 45. In April 1942 mobilisation for work on collective farms and Machine Tractor Stations (MTS) was extended to include all ‘able-bodied’ urban women aged 14–50; in August 1942, mobilisation was extended to class III invalid women<sup>26</sup>: ‘those partially able to

work who could be employed under simplified conditions in low-qualified occupations'.<sup>27</sup> 'The militarisation of labour' meant draconian labour discipline.<sup>28</sup> From 26 June 1940, the day after France surrendered to Germany, absenteeism and changing jobs without management's consent were decreed 'criminal offences', punishable by either 'corrective labour' with reduced pay or imprisonment. On 26 December 1941, three weeks after the *Wehrmacht* offensive was halted outside Moscow, labour law became even more draconian, especially in war industries: changing jobs was deemed 'desertion'; enforced by courts and military tribunals, punishment could be up to eight years' 'deprivation of freedom' in a Gulag labour camp.<sup>29</sup> Execution by firing squad awaited those found guilty of neglect that caused a major industrial accident.<sup>30</sup> Although very few women workers seem to have been subjected to capital punishment, they were certainly charged with 'breaches of labour discipline' under the June 1940 decree, instanced by numerous charges brought in 1943 against Yaroslavl' Automobile Factory workers for 'unauthorised leave' and 'abandonment' of their employment.<sup>31</sup>

Not all women accepted the wartime regime. In August–October 1941, with the *Wehrmacht* threatening Moscow, women textile workers in Ivanovo region went on strike and rioted. They were protesting against the slashing of salaries, lack of quality food and domestic heating, and fear that their enterprises were being evacuated or destroyed. In one instance, protests were triggered by the district party committee, 'without any consultation', mobilising 4000 workers to build defensive installations; among them were '16 year-olds, old people and mothers with children'. Anti-Soviet sentiments were uttered: 'God save us from a Soviet victory; you communists will all be hung.' They paid the price for their views and actions, allegedly organised by 'spies and provocateurs and German fascist agents'. Of the 51 arrested, three were executed and another 15 condemned to eight to ten years' imprisonment. In order to ensure there was no repetition of such upheaval, '127 secret agents and informers' were drafted into the textile mills.<sup>32</sup> Such resistance, however, was extremely rare. Stalin's draconian wartime regime, and a popular sense that the very survival of the motherland and its people was at stake, ensured that.

Women and girls, together with youths too young to conscript, made up the majority of the wartime industrial workforce, which peaked at 9.5 million in 1945. In the main, women were the overwhelming majority of workers 'only in industries that had been "feminized" before the war (food processing, meat and dairy, light industry, and textiles)'; in defence industries they were predominantly 'nonindustrial personnel'.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, women took on occupations in traditionally male-dominated industries, such as railways, mining and heavy metals. In the Novosibirsk defence industries, as many as two-thirds of the workforce were girls and women, aged 13–25. Unable to juggle industrial work and schooling, they had limited education. In one 'Factory-work School' (FZO), 69% had five years or less of schooling.<sup>34</sup> Although women improved



their skills on the job, the mass influx of inexperienced, poorly trained women workers to replace skilled males despatched to the front line was accompanied by a decline in labour productivity.<sup>35</sup>

### TO THE TRACTORS AND PLOUGHS!

While women played a vital role in industry, they were the backbone of wartime agricultural production. Urged to acquire agricultural-technical skills in the 1930s, following the outbreak of war the Soviet press insisted women take the place of ‘husbands, fathers and brothers who have gone to the front! ... Every collective-farm woman tractor driver to the wheel! Every woman collective farmer and housewife in the field!’ demanded the journal *Krest'yanka* (*Peasant Woman*) in July 1941.<sup>36</sup> The countryside became a female domain. Whereas women constituted 52.1% of the rural population in January 1939, exactly 6 years later they were 62.6%. Furthermore, whereas working-age women, 18–54 years, constituted 23.2% of the rural population in January 1939, by January 1945 this had climbed to 27.6%; conversely, the military-age male population, 18–54 years, had plummeted from 21.0 to 8.3%.<sup>37</sup>

Difficult as conditions were in industry, agriculture, still reeling from Stalin's forced collectivisation, suffered even more. The enemy occupied some of the most productive agricultural territories in Belarus, Russia and especially Ukraine. The most experienced and skilled male workers were conscripted together with the best tractors and horses. The average grain output per collective farmer labour day plunged from 1.6 kg in 1940 to 0.7 in 1943.<sup>38</sup> Women, children, the elderly and invalids bore the brunt of agricultural work; de-mechanisation necessitated hard manual labour. Cattle often replaced draught horses, but it was not uncommon for groups of women to be yoked to a plough: ‘I was a horse and a man’, went the refrain.<sup>39</sup>

Draconian wartime regulations clamped down on an already harsh system of agricultural production. In effect, the *kolkhoz* (collective farm) system worked on a ‘*barshchina*’ (*corvée*) system of compulsory annual labour days. In April 1942 the number of compulsory annual labour days was increased from 60 to 100 for farmers aged 16 and above, and to 50 for teenagers under 16; on cotton farms it was raised to an extraordinary 150 days. Those who failed to meet their labour day obligations could be punished as ‘deserters from production’: ‘corrective labour’ and/or imprisonment awaited them. Further, the state imposed additional taxes in kind and cash, as well as ‘voluntary’ war loan subscriptions. The number of working days and tasks were dramatically increased: where once winter was a period of recuperation, farmers were assigned the task of procuring fuel for electric power stations, ‘cutting timber in the frost or digging up frozen turf, then dragging all this on their shoulders to the nearest railway station’. Additional tasks were assigned: constructing defensive installations and roads; reconstructing bombed-out factories; and clearing snow. All this was in exchange for a near-starvation diet; with bread made from potato skins and porridge from weed seeds, malnutrition was rife.<sup>40</sup>

The Soviet people were hungry, especially in 1942; in poorer agricultural regions some 'starved' although, according to Donald Filtzer and Wendy Goldman, women had a 'far lower starvation mortality than men'.<sup>41</sup> In these desperate circumstances, sometimes there was resistance, passive and active. Farmers worked 'at half-pace', 'carelessly' or not at all. Theft of grain occurred on a 'massive scale', especially at harvest time; *kolkhoz* managers hid grain, pleading a "poor harvest" or lack of labour' to avoid the 'wrath of oblast' authorities'. Life was also gruelling for rural women teachers, whose pitiful pay and monthly rations (300 g of meat and fish; 200 g of fat; 400 g of confectioneries) forced them to work on the *kolkhoz*. Notwithstanding 'half-starvation', Soviet agriculture managed 'significant success' in supplying the military and the towns, secured by a combination of coercion, political propaganda and the personal, family ties that existed between men on the front line and women at home.<sup>42</sup>

The Yaroslavl' region was a case in point. The male agricultural workforce was nearly halved by the end of 1941. By 1944, women were responsible for 65% of the labour days. Those who did not meet the minimum could be 'punished by law, and excluded from the *kolkhoz* with loss of all rights'. Such punitive measures had the desired effect: in 1942, Yaroslavl' region exceeded its grain harvest for the first time since 1936. By 1944, 98.9% of a 200,000-strong workforce were meeting their minimum obligations. Coercion was not the only incentive; patriotic propaganda and 'socialist competition' between collective farms played their role. The value of agricultural products, which farmers could sell at the markets, rose sharply. Bonds were forged between the male front line and female home front by the 'public reading of letters from fellow villagers and very often the composing of collective replies'.<sup>43</sup> Connected by fragile epistolary lifelines to the male front line, military victory became a personal investment for millions of women and their families struggling with the extreme austerity of daily life on the home front.

In addition to personal and patriotic stimuli, a strict party regime was also at work. Fearing mass upheaval among the recently collectivised peasantry, in November 1941 a Central Committee resolution established '*Politotdely* [political departments] of MTS and state farms'. Until their abolition in May 1943, after Stalingrad and the realisation that there would not be a peasant revolt, *politotdely* were 'the eye of the party' in the countryside, working alongside the *raikom* (district party committee) to ensure labour discipline and output, and to conduct political propaganda and surveillance of the popular mood.<sup>44</sup> The *politotdely* could refer recalcitrants and miscreants to 'peoples' courts' and the NKVD, often with little or no evidence and even in breach of Soviet law. However, many women farmers were found to have quite legitimate reasons for not meeting their work obligations, for example lack of childcare, sickness or inaccurate accounting. Given the overwhelmingly female workforce, the provision of crèches, schools and canteens also became part of the *politotdel* repertoire when it became apparent that punitive measures alone to motivate work were insufficient or counter productive.<sup>45</sup>

## WOMEN UNDER ARMS

While the overwhelming majority of women were serving on the home and domestic fronts, 22.3 million working in industry and agriculture by 1945, one million Soviet women played a unique role in the annals of modern warfare: serving in the Red Army or as partisans.<sup>46</sup> They were neither welcomed nor fêted, notwithstanding the expectations instilled in the 1930s Stalin generation that women could take up arms equally with men. Within 24 hours of the Axis invasion, thousands of young Soviet women flocked to military recruiting posts ‘begging, demanding and crying’ to be sent to the front, arms in hand. Women volunteers, to their dismay, were rejected by recruiting officers: ‘There are enough men. War is not women’s business’, was the rhetorical excuse used by a patriarchal state to justify the exclusion of women from serving as soldiers with the Red Army.<sup>47</sup>

The unexpected rout of the ‘invincible’ Red Army soon changed government policy, if not attitudes, towards women in the military, including front-line service. On 4 August 1941 *Pravda* rejected as a ‘lie’ accusations by ‘fascist windbags’ that the Red Army was so desperate it was deploying ‘some sort of women’s battalions’. In fact, the State Committee of Defence (GKO) was already undertaking covert preparations for compulsory ‘Universal Military Training’ (*Vsevobuch*), including for women. Yet not until March 1942, when young women began to be mobilised en masse, was their inclusion in *Vsevobuch* made public. Women undertook specialised military training, such as shooting, signalling, heavy vehicle driving and anti-aircraft defence. By war’s end, 222,000 women had received military training through *Vsevobuch*.<sup>48</sup>

Military training notwithstanding, women nurses and doctors were the acceptable feminine face of the Soviet Union at war: the caring mother. Women predominated among the 700,000 military medical personnel; primarily ‘volunteers’ mobilised by the Komsomol, they represented 100% of the nurses (*medsestry*). As the war raged, the image of the heroic woman military nurse, rescuing the wounded Red Army soldier from the field under fire or tending to defenceless, shattered, male bodies in hospitals, dovetailed perfectly with the intensely female gendered discourse and iconography of defending the motherland against the barbaric, misogynist, Nazi enemy.<sup>49</sup>

Nursing was the most common public face of Soviet women at war: 222,000 were targeted for military-medical training in July–August 1941. The pivotal role of women on the home front often drew them into active service, particularly during the battle for Moscow from 30 September to 5 December 1941, when half a million played a vital role in civil defence, fighting fires and building fortifications, and in the ill-fated popular militia. It was in this dire context, with the *Wehrmacht* at Moscow’s gates, that on 8 October 1941 Stalin secretly authorised the formation of three women’s air regiments—the singular exception at that time to the official prohibition on women combatants in the Red Army. A unique phenomenon in the annals of air warfare, these predominantly female regiments totalling a mere 400 women produced an extraordinary 30

out of the 86 women Heroes of the Soviet Union, the highest Soviet military award. Famed for their combat performance was the all-female night bomber regiment, which became known by the contemptuous sobriquet German soldiers gave them: 'night witches'. The bulk of the women who volunteered for air warfare were part of an emerging, upwardly mobile elite (*vydvizhenki*). Students from Moscow State University were conspicuous among them; only 0.3% of women had undertaken higher education in Stalin's Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup>

There was one other field in which women were specifically trained and ordained by the Soviet state to kill: sniping. At the behest of the GKO, a women's sniper 'movement', which began in 1942 with the training of female snipers at the front, was set up on a formal basis. A decree on 21 May 1943 established the Central Women's School for Sniper Training, which over the next 2 years graduated 1061 snipers and 407 instructors.<sup>51</sup>

Snipers and elite women aviators, however, were the exceptions to the far less celebrated roles that the overwhelming majority of military women played. In spring 1942, Soviet authorities, desperate to compensate for massive male casualties, launched the second phase of women's mobilisation. Twice in 1942, the GKO decreed the mobilisation of young women aged 19–25 for active service. Officially, this was not conscription: women 'volunteered', effectively 'self-mobilised', primarily through the Komsomol.<sup>52</sup> At the height of their participation, in 1943, women formed 8% of the Red Army.<sup>53</sup> The bulk of these served on the so-called 'second front', especially in the medical services (nurses and doctors), in supply and logistics (cooks, laundresses), in communications and administration (wireless operators and typists) and in transport (drivers).<sup>54</sup>

Other than in the medical services, the largest number of women was deployed in anti-aircraft defence, including as gunners. In 1942 the GKO decreed the mass recruitment of women for anti-aircraft defence. Under the auspices of the Komsomol, between April 1942 and May 1945, 300,000 women were mobilised. In some cases, women constituted 80–100% of the anti-aircraft detachments, including 8000 who served in the charnel house of Stalingrad.<sup>55</sup>

Only in one other arena did women take up arms from the first phase of the war: as partisans behind enemy lines. A total of 28,500 women became *partizanki*, 2.59% of the partisan forces. The image of the *partizanka* became one of the defining models of the Soviet heroine. The archetypal female hero was an 18-year-old Komsomol *partizanka*, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, who was captured, tortured and hanged in November 1941. Canonised as a 'Soviet saint', her mutilated body 'deeply tied to the maternal archetype', 'Zoya' was celebrated for her martyrdom rather than her military prowess.<sup>56</sup> She became a powerful mobilising icon, disseminated through the appeals of her suffering mother, who urged 'revenge' for the atrocities inflicted on an innocent daughter, emblematic of a ravaged people and nation.<sup>57</sup>

The propaganda focus on a few heroic women such as Kosmodemyanskaya masked 'the fact that hundreds of thousands of women were actually in the front lines ... The Soviet state never considered combat women a desirable mass

movement or an integral part of the Red Army.<sup>58</sup> In fact, Soviet military and partisan women had to fight on a second front: against male contempt, sexual harassment and violence. Women soldiers were acutely aware that they had entered into a predominantly male world. With the exception of the air regiments and some failed women's rifle brigades, women were mostly scattered throughout male units. Often, young women entered into sexual relationships with officers, willingly or otherwise: for many, such relations offered some protection from predatory male soldiers; but officers were often convinced that they had the 'right' to a 'trophy wife'.<sup>59</sup> Such relationships fuelled the home-front moral panic about the so-called 'mobile field wife' (*PPZh: pokhodno-polevaya zhená*), which grew towards war's end: 'In a flash', argues Beate Fieseler, 'brave heroines became despicable whores'. Unlike male veterans, women veterans for decades were shamed into hiding their military service. 'Emancipation' eluded women war veterans, 'forsaken by the state, which cheated them of their rightful share in the victory'. In the 'Cult of the Great Patriotic War' constructed in the Brezhnev era, the 'Generation of Victors' was overwhelmingly 'a male' phenomenon, women's 'momentary' challenge to gender roles thereby safely contained within acceptable Soviet limits. There were no post-war military careers for women veterans. Quickly demobilised, reconstruction, reproduction and, once more, the family were deemed the priorities for Soviet women.<sup>60</sup>

### ALL FOR THE FAMILY!

In Stalin's 'motherland' triptych, family and motherhood were pivotal panels, flanking patriotism. Propaganda images of women and their children being threatened by Nazi bayonets were intended to spur men to arms. Wives and mothers of front-line soldiers were hailed as models of patriotic self-sacrifice and virtue for other women on the home front to emulate. The pages of *Pravda* and *Krasnaya zvezda* frequently depicted mothers bidding their sons farewell, exhorting them to fight the fascists 'to the last drop of blood' on the front line.

The pre-war rise and consolidation of Stalinism had shifted the earlier Bolshevik priority of defending women's rights in favour of defending the family and children. This trend was consolidated by the 27 June 1936 law on the family, which confirmed the centrality of the family and parenthood as permanent pillars of Soviet socialism. It also reinforced male alimony obligations and the ideal of the patriarchal family with a male head of household.<sup>61</sup> As war loomed, the Soviet state 'banked on the strong family with numerous offspring as a bulwark of society', which resonated with social reality and 'consciousness', at least until hostilities began: in 1941, 89.4% of the populace lived primarily in 'nuclear' families.<sup>62</sup>

War took its toll on families, often broken up and reduced in size by distance and time. Marriages crumbled, with separation and divorce rates rising. War saw women de facto displace men as immediately responsible for, if not head of, the family. Desperate to shore up front-line male military morale, Stalin's state

boasted that it was caring for the families the soldiers had left behind. Four days after war broke out the Supreme Soviet decreed 'the payment of benefits to the families of rank and file and junior servicemen', supposedly guaranteeing dedicated cash, tax, food, accommodation and other benefits.

In reality, the Soviet state and society did not have the capacity to care for the vast number of military families needing assistance, especially in desperate military circumstances. Soviet archives provide glimpses of a silent, 'second' front, where the wives and children of Red Army soldiers and officers struggled to survive under a regime of scarce food, clothes, heating and accommodation. Support for working military wives undoubtedly enabled them to survive, but only just. Moreover, the provision of material support through the workplace also tied these women to the enterprise or institution, acting as a mechanism for labour and social discipline: abandonment or loss of employment denied them access to scarce food rations and goods. It made these women vulnerable to the goodwill or otherwise of the largely male management.<sup>63</sup>

The verso of promised, if often undelivered, privileges for families that met their patriotic obligations was penalties and punishments for those who did not. Taxes were imposed on childless and unmarried people and smaller families. Under a series of decrees in 1941–1942, families bore the brunt of punishment for servicemen who became prisoners of war, retreated without authorisation or collaborated with the enemy; for collaborators' families—parents, children, siblings—the penalty was five years' exile.<sup>64</sup>

Despite state efforts to shore up the family, war had devastating consequences for marriages and births, especially in the worst year, 1942, when the occupation of Soviet territory was most extensive. The number of legal marriages fell to a third of those in 1940. By 1943, the ratio of marriageable (aged 18–54) women was at least two to three times the number of men. Millions of women, especially in the countryside, were 'single or widowed'. Likewise, the birth rate plummeted: in 1942–1943 it was half that of 1938–1940. At the same time child mortality rocketed: in August 1942, 61.1% of children died before reaching 12 months; among the causes was a dramatic increase in premature births. In a vain attempt to stem the demographic collapse, authorities waged war on abortion, which by October 1943 had reached 'catastrophic' proportions. Women were the principal victims of abortion—'the dominant cause of maternal death in 1940–1945'. Criminal punishments had been no deterrent, medical authorities acknowledged in August 1945: abortions had 'grown significantly year after year'.<sup>65</sup>

### 'MATERNAL GLORY'

The demographic catastrophe inflicted on the Soviet people, due to devastating war casualties, exponentially increased mortality and plummeting birth rates, was reflected in the 'radical' change in family policy wrought by the Supreme Soviet decree issued 8 July 1944, which provided material incentives for fecund motherhood: improved social benefits and child support to more mothers and

pregnant women, including single mothers. At the same time, the decree 'abolished the previous equality between de facto and legal marriage' by 'reinforcing the rights and obligations of husbands only in registered marriages', thereby reducing disincentives for men to procreate outside legal wedlock. Women who were not legally married were no longer entitled to bring paternity suits or claim alimony from de facto fathers. Divorce was also made more difficult, with internal passports indicating marital status.<sup>66</sup>

On the surface, this decree presented the Soviet state as the 'paternalistic', 'benevolent' guardian of motherhood and the family. Yet as Mie Nakachi has demonstrated, in reality it was a 'pro-natalist' intervention in 'reproductive practices', euphemistically formulated to mask its promotion of 'single-motherhood as the site of reproduction'. As such, 'the legitimisation of single motherhood was one of the most significant outcomes of post-war reproductive politics' implying 'new gendered roles. Women were expected to be mothers, regularly, often and without fail', while men were simultaneously encouraged to be, on the one hand, married, responsible fathers and, on the other, irresponsible adulterers 'impregnating unmarried women'. Effectively, 'reproductive work (childbirth)' became a woman's 'civic responsibility', equivalent to 'productive work'. Disguised as protection of mothers, the *ukaz* was intended to promote 'non-conjugal sexual relations that would result in procreation', an objective that conflicted with the 'strong family' ideal. The post-war result was a proliferation of single mothers, illegitimate births (8.7 million in 1945–1955) and illegal abortions.<sup>67</sup>

It is not clear if the 1944 decree had a direct impact on the birth rate, over and above the increase that might be expected from the end of hostilities and the return of millions of demobilised men. The post-war birth rate rose slowly and erratically, from 28.5 births per 1000 in 1946 to 31.0 in 1949, still well below the 1939 birth rate of 40 per 1000.<sup>68</sup> Registered marriages almost doubled between 1944 and 1945 and divorce rates dived, especially in the countryside. However, in the wake of the return of millions of demobilised soldiers, from 1947 divorce increased again, indicating a gathering 'crisis in marriage–family relations'.<sup>69</sup>

## AFTERMATH

It is often argued that the Second World War contributed to the liberation of women as millions were drawn into working and military life, helping to break down the gender segregation of domestic and family life. Among the Soviet Union's allies, such 'liberation' was short-lived: the return of male veterans saw women driven out of the workforce and back into the home. Yet wartime was no more emancipatory in the Soviet motherland, at least in the short term, where under the most harrowing conditions women were simultaneously driven to work and exhorted to reproduce. In the words of Elena Zubkova, 'total war' inflicted a 'demographic catastrophe' and a distorted gender imbalance that left millions of lonely, 'single women' fighting for 'survival' in an 'overwhelmingly



“female” society’ afflicted by ‘insecurity, hunger, disease and crime’.<sup>70</sup> Stalin’s promise of women’s equality and emancipation was intrinsically hollow, based as it was on resurrection of family and motherhood. Nevertheless, victory over Nazism enabled Soviet women to survive, their varied identification or otherwise with the Stalinist state forged by a combination of patriotism, political conviction, coercion and millions of living linkages between female home front and male front lines confronting a genocidal enemy that left nobody unscathed.

In the course of the war the Soviet economy had been ‘feminised’, but the return of millions of men did not displace women from the workforce, except in the armed forces where women had no future. The Soviet ‘working mother’ remained but was relegated to low-status, poorly paid physical work. But to sustain their family, women had no option but to work.<sup>71</sup> Male veterans resumed supervisory and leadership roles in economic and political life, a situation that remained the case up to the very end of the Soviet Union, even when women had a presence in professions, such as engineering and medicine, to which Western feminism could only aspire.<sup>72</sup> Despite these later achievements, the ultimate victor in the Great Patriotic War was the Soviet state, which consolidated the Stalinist troika of patriotism, motherhood and family, thereby thwarting women’s emancipation.

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## ‘Unstintingly Master Warfare’: Women in the Red Army

*Carmen Scheide*

On 24 June 1945 the Soviet Union celebrated its victory in the Second World War with a 2-hour military parade on Red Square. This was a highly symbolic event, paying tribute to Stalin and his entourage, demonstrating the strength of the Soviet people and the superiority of socialism. Around 40,000 participants from the army were involved—all male, as was normal for military services at the time.<sup>1</sup> There were also women and girls on Red Square, as can be seen in films of the parade.<sup>2</sup> They were present at the parade as civilians: mothers, wives, daughters and ordinary citizens. Marshal Zhukov took the salute and made the official speech at the Lenin Mausoleum. He first addressed the different military ranks: soldiers, sailors, sergeants, officers, generals and admirals. Next, he mentioned working men and women, men and women peasants.<sup>3</sup> Zhukov’s linguistic protocol demonstrated an awareness of gender equality in official discourse. However, this equality was not evident in the Red Army, even though around one million Soviet women served during the war.<sup>4</sup> They were active not only in typical female positions, such as air defence, telecommunications and medical help. They also served in combat roles as snipers, fighter pilots, in marine units or as partisans. Thus, Soviet women received military ranks and honours, unlike women serving in the German *Wehrmacht*, the US forces or the British Army.<sup>5</sup>

The situation in the Soviet Union was unique. In Germany and the USA there were about 500,000 women engaged in military service and in Great Britain about 250,000. Around 250,000 Soviet women served in air defence alone, the sector with the highest proportion of women. In the Soviet Union, the number of women serving in the Red Army was highest from 1942 to 1943, the most critical phase of the war. In total, women constituted only about 3% of

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overall forces, and were thus only a small minority. In absolute numbers, however, these one million women made a significant contribution to the war effort, but this has been a relatively neglected topic in Soviet historiography. It was only in the period of the Thaw after the death of Stalin in 1953 and running in parallel with the founding of a committee of Soviet war veterans in 1956 that former female combatants started to talk about their experiences.<sup>6</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and with the opening of the Russian archives, studies of the role of gender in Soviet history have included explorations of how women served in the Soviet military and what they did during wartime.<sup>7</sup>

A high-ranking and eminent military official, Marshal Rokossovskii, was responsible for staging the victory parade in June 1945. At the beginning of the Second World War, Rokossovskii had strong prejudices against women serving on the front line. However, during the war he met the members of the all-female aviators unit, the 588th night bomber regiment, several times. He honoured these women personally for their contribution to the victory and thus recognised the important role of female combatants.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, these women did not participate in the Moscow parade, nor were they mentioned as an example of the achievement of socialist equality, even though some had been awarded the title 'Hero of the Soviet Union'.<sup>9</sup> It appeared to be a deliberate act to portray the Red Army as a purely male organisation in the June 1945 parade.

Shortly thereafter, on 26 July, Mikhail Kalinin made a speech to the central committee of the communist youth league, the Komsomol.<sup>10</sup> His speech reflected a similar theme and shed light on official Soviet policy towards female soldiers. Many demobilised young women were present. Kalinin spoke very empathically about their contribution to the victory and regarded it as an emancipatory process based on the Soviet constitutional guarantee of equality. He discussed the essential problems women then faced in returning to civilian life, especially those who were still young and had gained no work experience before joining the army. Kalinin talked optimistically about the reliability of combatants, an attractive attribute for future employers. The most important aspect of his speech, however, was the paternalistic advice: 'don't give yourselves airs in your future practical work. Don't talk about the services you've rendered, let others do this for you. That'll be better.'<sup>11</sup>

Women's participation in the armed forces has been subsequently marginalised. Women's wartime military equality with men, based on the principle of women's emancipation in general and stipulated in the 1936 constitution, was politically regarded as an exception, not as a particular success or as a progressive step. A shift in attitudes towards female soldiers took place after 1945 and can be explained by ideas of the gender hierarchies that existed below top-ranking Soviet officials, who were mostly men. Only a few weeks before the victory parade, another prominent demonstration took place in Moscow. The first May Day parade since the beginning of the war was organised as a military event comparable to the June parade. Women wearing uniform skirts took part, thus reflecting the presence of women in the armed forces as communications

personnel.<sup>12</sup> Diplomats, international visitors and journalists participated in both events and reported on them.<sup>13</sup>

If we examine this political shift towards women in 1945 within a broader time frame, it coincided with a utilitarian and instrumental attitude towards women following the closure of the *Zhenotdel* in 1930 and the launch of the first Five-year plan.<sup>14</sup> A Soviet woman was supposed to fulfil her duties as mother, wife and homemaker, whilst also being well integrated into the workforce and assuming societal duties, and taking on extraordinary tasks during wartime. Questions still remain: how were female combatants mobilised? What motivated Soviet girls to become snipers or pilots? How did they experience the male world of the army, violence and a temporary change in gender roles?

### MOBILISATION

The revised conscription law of 1 September 1939 did not envisage a role for women as combatants, but article 13 explicitly allowed the mobilisation of women with medical or special technical training. Women could also be sent on special courses to support the rear services.<sup>15</sup> For all Soviet citizens, the defence of the homeland was a serious obligation, an idea expressed in the popular war song 'Sacred War' (*Svyashchennaya voina*), which was broadcast every morning during the war on the radio.<sup>16</sup> In organisations such as Osoaviakhim, aerobatic clubs and the Komsomol, women received paramilitary training, learnt technical skills, and sometimes shooting and defence strategies. Young Soviet women also learnt to be loyal to the state.<sup>17</sup> They grew up in a militarised society and adapted to competitive practices in public life. Women depicted with guns, even mothers, were integrated into propaganda and mass culture from 1927.<sup>18</sup>

At the beginning of the war, the Soviet Union was unprepared for the German attack and suffered heavy losses. The conscription of men was a logistical duty in itself. Young women, mostly from cities, having grown up in the Soviet system and influenced by official politics, wanted to defend their home country. They identified with the propagated role models of loyal daughters or courageous pilots, the so-called Stalin falcons.<sup>19</sup> During the first weeks of the war, about 20,000 girls in Moscow alone volunteered to join the armed forces, but only 8360 were accepted.<sup>20</sup> In their patriotic and adventurous enthusiasm, some may have underestimated the challenges of warfare as well as its physical and psychological demands.<sup>21</sup> Gender stereotypes about the military as a male domain probably played a role in the initial rejection of female volunteers; men were drafted first.<sup>22</sup> Women had not been trained for combat and had to undergo rudimentary instruction, without which they would not have been useful for defence or rear services.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, they had to replace men in the workforce, which led to an increase in female employment up to 1945. In 1940 women constituted 38.4% of the paid labour force, in 1943–1944 57.4%, and in 1945 55.3%.<sup>24</sup>

The contribution of women to warfare varied both at the front and in the rear.<sup>25</sup> Soviet women served in the air force, especially as so-called 'night

witches', a purely female unit. These women have provided many memoirs and documents; as a rather elite group, they were also more easily integrated later into the cult of war heroism and the victory narrative.<sup>26</sup> Compared to the physical requirements of the infantry or artillery, women were probably more easily deployed in aircraft, which required them to have special technical skills as pilots and navigators. Some women, who were fascinated by Soviet aviation and the related cult of heroes even before the war, volunteered for the Red Army from the outset. Yevdokiya Bershanskaya (1913–1982), born in the north Caucasus to a poor peasant family, was among them. Orphaned in early childhood, she grew up with relatives, received an education and entered the Komsomol at the age of 15. After becoming a member of Osoaviakhim she learned to fly and started to arrange courses for future pilots. Together with Marina Raskova (1912–1943), she was used as an example to promote the mobilisation of women for the army at the beginning of the war. Raskova was a famous pilot and role model for many Soviet girls. In 1938 she was honoured alongside Valentina Grizodubova (1909–1939) and Polina Osipenko (1907–1939) with the title 'Hero of the Soviet Union' for a long-distance flight of almost 6000 km. Raskova heard about the female volunteers and personally asked Stalin to allow female combatants. He agreed and, in a secret decree of 8 October 1941, he allowed Raskova to form three female aircraft units under her command. Together with Bershanskaya, the 586th, 587th and 588th flight regiments, the last of which was designated as a night bomber unit and remained entirely female throughout the war, came into existence.<sup>27</sup>

In the following months the attitude towards women in military services changed from rejection and secrecy to a public mobilisation campaign in 1942, spurred by the rapid advance of the *Wehrmacht* in the western parts of the Soviet Union. An early turning point came with the defence of Moscow in the autumn of 1941 during operation 'Taifun' ('Typhoon'). Women were needed for anti-aircraft groups, medical service and communication units, and the Komsomol offered them specialist training.<sup>28</sup> In autumn 1942, the battle of Stalingrad led to a broad mobilisation campaign of women for the infantry.<sup>29</sup> The Central Committee of Partisan Warfare, founded in May 1942 under the guidance of Panteleimon Ponomarenko, received an order from Stalin in October 1942 to mobilise more women for partisan warfare, following the examples of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya (1923–1941) and Lisa Chaikina (1918–1941).<sup>30</sup> Women were regarded as important and it was stated that they had already learned to fight against the Germans.<sup>31</sup>

During the war the Central Committee of the Communist Party appealed to women in the pages of the women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* (*Woman Worker*), especially on 8 March, International Women's Day. The call for defence was addressed to a wide range of women, including female workers, partisans, communicators, nurses, doctors and those working at the front (*rabotayushchikh na fronte*). The term 'female soldiers' was intentionally avoided; instead, different functions were listed. Readers were given an analysis of the situation: the country was in great danger due to the attack of an external aggressor. It was

argued that German aggressors were intending radically to change the situation of Soviet women, by taking away their independence and making them slaves of German knights and barons. Propaganda suggested that German fascists intended to kill children, rape daughters in front of their mothers and kill whole families.<sup>32</sup>

The Central Committee argued that as Soviet women were now constructing a new life together with and equal to men, they should also fight against the enemy on all fronts. This line of argument served to construct a twofold need for defence: on the one hand, defending the socialist system against imperialism and, on the other, defending against the specific attacks being made on the Soviet people and the threat of further invasion of the country. The articles emphasised the patriotic duty to protect the nation. The general mobilisation of citizens continued based on this rationale.<sup>33</sup> The text from March 1943 proudly highlighted the success of the Red Army and achievements in gender equality:

In the Fatherland war, Soviet woman belongs to the active fighters against the German-fascist monster. Never before in the history of woman has she taken part so sacrificially in the defence of her country [*rodina*], like now, in the great liberation war of our people. ... There is something Soviet woman wants to defend. Soviet power considers the working woman [*trudyashchiesya zhenshchina*] completely and seriously equal [*ravnopravie*] in all fields of life.<sup>34</sup>

Now, for the first time, articles confirmed that some hundred thousand women formed part of the armed forces. Some had already been decorated as Hero of the Soviet Union, but still more female volunteers were needed. All available resources were to be used and mobilised. Contemporary slogans read: 'Learn to shoot accurately' and 'Unstintingly master warfare'.<sup>35</sup> The decrees were kept secret, meaning that many fewer women were mobilised than were actually needed. Alongside volunteers, other women were conscripted who did not meet the requirements of age and other standards.<sup>36</sup>

From 1944 the situation had changed. The Red Army regained the western parts of the Soviet Union and moved further west. In one address on International Women's Day, an unknown author spoke about success and anticipated victory. The equality of Soviet men and women was stressed as being important, and mention was made of how female combatants contributed to the battle against the enemy.<sup>37</sup> Socialism was seen as the basis for this and something which women fought for alongside their country's independence and freedom.<sup>38</sup> To emphasise this point, the article spoke about women's contribution to combat:

Our Soviet daughters fight in the ranks of the successful and victorious Red Army. They fight courageously [*muzhestvenno*] against the enemy as snipers, communicators, in the anti-aircraft auxiliary and as pilots. Many Soviet patriotic women sacrificially work as doctors, doctor's assistants [*fel'dsher*], nurses or medics.



Thousands of fearless women and partisan-girls relentlessly devastate the Hitlerite bandits, trying hard to help the advancing Red Army.<sup>39</sup>

The mobilisation of women was a wartime necessity, but it was also considered an exception to the norm. Towards the end of the war, there was a shift in propaganda back towards traditional gender roles.<sup>40</sup>

There are no exact figures for how many women served in the army, what training they received and in which positions they served.<sup>41</sup> Enlistment took place mostly via the Komsomol, Osoaviakhim or the Red Cross, as these organisations offered specialist training courses for the rear and armed services.<sup>42</sup> Before the mobilisation campaign in 1942, women were only offered training for communications, medical services or transport.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, most women served in sanitary services (300,000), or as operators or drivers (200,000).<sup>44</sup> In 1942, the Komsomol initiated specialist courses for training women as snipers, in which about 222,000 participated.<sup>45</sup> In Vishnyaki near Krasnodar, the Komsomol opened a special school for snipers in 1942 which continued to recruit volunteers up to the beginning of 1945.<sup>46</sup>

Women were demobilised from the Red Army more quickly than men, who sometimes had to serve for a longer period in the armed forces. In general, we know relatively little about Soviet society immediately after the war, the problems many people faced returning from the front, the transition back to everyday life, or dealing with experiences of destruction, violence and loss.<sup>47</sup> Irina Rakobol'skaya (1919–2016), of the night bombers regiment, recalled her return to civilian life:

I wanted to stay in the army; I planned to visit the Zhukov Military Academy. My husband was there at this time, working as an assistant. He should have helped me. I wrote a letter and sent it to the officials. In return they answered: there's no place for women in the army. ... So I returned to the faculty. During the courses I slept, as I was used to sleeping during the day from my wartime experiences. ... Later, I married and returned home crying. As time passed, things became normal. ... In 1949, I finished university and started a career as a physicist. But this was already another life.<sup>48</sup>

Rakobol'skaya's statement demonstrates two different approaches. Like other female combatants, she regarded her role in the Red Army as self-evident due to the propagated idea of equality and she wanted to continue with this professionally. However, for officials in the party, state and military institutions, women in the Red Army were regarded as an exception to the rule. A future career for women in the armed forces was not foreseen; the military remained a male-dominated organisation. Rakobol'skaya was proud of her war experience, but how did other women recall this exceptional period in their personal biographies?

## EXPERIENCES

Articles about female war heroes were rarely published in *Rabotnitsa* in the post-war years. It was only after the death of Stalin in March 1953 and with the beginning of the Thaw that former war participants began to publish their memoirs. The exact number of titles in the genre of Soviet war prose (*voennaya proza*) is difficult to determine. During the Soviet period, all book manuscripts had to pass different stages of censorship and their content had to conform to the party line. Dissenting views could be put forward only in Aesopian speech, if at all. These authors considered themselves as members of the 'generation of victors' or as heroes decorated with medals and thus authorised to provide their testimony. Typical characteristics of such writers were a cult of heroes, loyalty to the socialist system, self-discipline, self-sacrifice for the country and a leading or outstanding position in the military. This pattern of authorship only applied to a small number of female combatants, mostly those from the highly decorated female flight units. They constituted a success story stretching from the record flights of the 1930s to the beginning of space fever in the late 1950s.<sup>49</sup>

As the 588th night bomber regiment was all-female, no inconvenient questions about relationships with male combatants were asked. The majority of combatants had no motivation or ability to write about the war, or their experiences did not conform to contemporary cultural norms, moral codes or the aesthetics of a positive hero. With her groundbreaking book *War's Unwomanly Face*, published in 1984, Nobel Prize-winning author Svetlana Alexiyevich provided insights into the array of female emotions and untold stories. Based on interviews, she raised issues such as violence, sexual harassment, grief and trauma. The collected life stories go beyond dichotomous pairings, such as enemy and friend, heroism and martyrdom, or triumph and trauma; they do not follow the general Soviet interpretation of the glorious victory. Many of the issues raised in the book remain to be explored more fully for all of those who experienced the war, both men and women. The title presumes violence as unwomanly and defines women as pacifist by nature. The question remains if this assumption is too positive.<sup>50</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s military historians began to research the history of Soviet female combatants.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, oral history projects have been initiated since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.<sup>52</sup> We also have to assume that there was a strong oral tradition in veterans' groups that would be difficult to reconstruct. In general, the experience of warfare varied according to individual contexts and specific combat units.

For the women of the three secretly formed flight regiments under the command of Marina Raskova, the march to the front started in autumn 1941. The women were all young, between 18 and 21 years old, and all still unmarried. Their rapid training began in Moscow at the Zhukov Military Academy, but they had to be relocated away from the approaching war front in October 1941. These future women aviators were transported by train to Engels on the Volga River. They all had to have their hair cut short, as hygiene

was very poor in the train wagons. In later memoirs, this was regarded as a rite of passage from civilian to military life.<sup>53</sup> The Red Army had not been prepared for the admission of women into their ranks; hence, uniforms for women did not yet exist. All of the women had to wear men's uniforms and boots, which did not fit well. This became an often repeated topic in later narratives about first experiences in the army.<sup>54</sup> From the outset, women faced considerable prejudice against female combatants. Sarcastically, the night bomber unit was called '*babi-polk*', which implies a crowd of backward, foolish women.<sup>55</sup> They had very poor equipment, including simple aeroplanes made of wood, and almost no technical equipment.

Normally, it took at least 3 years to become an aviator or pilot. The rapid training course for these volunteers lasted from autumn 1941 until May 1942, when they started fighting at the front line. Learning by doing was the motto, working hard and bearing on. Newcomers were instructed by older members of the unit and leisure time was used for taking care of the technical equipment, for instructions, party meetings or political education. They additionally organised cultural activities, such as lectures, dancing or theatre plays.

Although we now have access to many memoirs about the night bombers, the women very seldom mention the three levels of management, differences or conflicts in the group. Besides a military commander, there was a political instructor and a military-technical instructor. Not all women actually flew; others were technicians, ambulance drivers, engineers or navigators. The 588th regiment consisted of about 200 people from different regions and with diverse experiences. Young students met women with less education and staunch Komsomol members met unpolitical girls. The regiment had its own social stratification, but after the war everyone generally talked about the strong comradeship, good discipline and solidarity. What we do not know from the existing sources is what these women thought about Stalin, his terror regime and the great purges of the 1930s.<sup>56</sup> Other taboo subjects, absent in the written testimonies, include traumatic experiences, conflicts, alcoholism, homosexuality and disbelief. Perhaps these issues were only discussed in personal meetings. Young women learned from childhood how to behave in public and how to apply self-censorship.

During the war years, the weight of airplane freight was raised from 150 kg at the beginning to 200 kg. In 1944, Marina Chechneva (1922–1984) set a new record by having bombs weighing a total of 370 kg on board. A mission could last up to 10 hours, mostly during the night. This was a hard physical and psychological test, but again all matters concerning women's individual bodies were subject to strict privacy. In April 1944, the regiment followed the troops of the Red Army towards the west; they were stationed in Belarus and Poland. During the final days of the war, the female regiment was in Germany, where the unit was demobilised in November 1945.<sup>57</sup> After that, they met every year on 2 May at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow to remember their victory.

The example of female aviators is unique and cannot be generalised. Yet prejudices against women in the army remained strong, even after the war. They

were regarded as whores and given the nickname 'PPZh' (*pokhodno-polevaya zhena*, field wife), which resembled the abbreviation for a popular gun, the PPD or PPSH.<sup>58</sup> This pejorative term refers to sexual relations in mixed groups. Sexuality, physical matters or even harassment and rape were taboo subjects in Soviet civilian and military life. If mentioned at all, it was as attributes of the enemy, the cruel and monstrous Germans. German propaganda, in contrast, labelled women in the Soviet Army as '*Flintenweiber*' (riflewomen), for them a sign of the degenerated socialist system. Thus, they were to be killed if captured.<sup>59</sup>

One can argue that sexuality is a basic anthropological need and was also present in wartime. Sexual relationships obviously occurred in the Red Army. Combatants were separated from their families, marriages broke down and there was a risk of not returning home at all or returning severely injured.<sup>60</sup> Warfare was an exceptional situation and evoked special behavioural patterns amongst some participants in the war. Medic Vera Leonteva Gurova (b. 1920) served in Stalingrad and gave an interview on 7 January 1943 about her contribution to the war:

In my opinion, a woman in the army is as useful as a man. ... Sometimes I really feel offended if a woman is treated with contempt: what, a woman, in the army? I know that I joined the army to fulfil my duty. Those who behave improperly are responsible for bad opinions.<sup>61</sup>

She confirms the hypothesis that women were motivated by patriotism and conscientiousness. She also criticises the conduct of other women without providing a reason for this.

In his short story 'Two Women' published in 1948, Yuri Yanovski writes about a middle-aged, childless wife and doctor at the home front in Kiev. She meets the young girlfriend of her soldier husband. The lovers got to know each other at the front and shared the experience of combat. In the story, the fulfilment of their social duties is a high priority for both women. They also seek to cultivate their typical female roles as mother and daughter. They respect each other for their patriotic attitudes, and the young girlfriend excuses herself and terminates her relationship with the married man, who is unhappy without children. Both female characters conduct themselves according to the standards of cultivated Soviet women and thus come to terms with the sexual misconduct.

This atypical text describes a front-line sexual relationship based on romance and emotion. It says nothing about harassment and rape, homosexuality and physical violence in general. Female combatants did not undermine military masculinity, based on notions of male hegemony and virility.<sup>62</sup> We have to assume that there was sexual violence in the Red Army not only at the end of the war towards German women, but also in mixed units. Unfortunately we have no empirical or qualitative data that permits a deeper analysis.<sup>63</sup> In September 1942 and again 2 years later, regulations were introduced for pregnant women in the Red Army.<sup>64</sup> This must be understood as a reaction to

contemporary circumstances and suggests that pregnancy was a regular occurrence in the military.

How did men react when they had to command a mostly female unit, and what happened to their self-perception? Valentin Vasilevich Markov commanded the 125th guard bomber (previously the 587th) regiment following the death of Marina Raskova in January 1943. Even though the women in the unit knew that discipline is essential in warfare, he perceived them as undisciplined. For Markov, the question of military knowledge might have been a distinctive gender characteristic. He initially regarded his posting as a tragedy and a burden.<sup>65</sup> Pilot Mariya Dolina (1922–2010) and others respected him as a teacher and leader, even though they missed the female approach Raskova had provided. Dolina admitted that they all improved their military knowledge thanks to Markov. Thus, indirectly, she confirmed a male hegemony based on professionalism and leadership. The reasoning behind different perceptions can be seen in the motivations of the young women: volunteers often entered military service naïvely and regarded it as some sort of adventure. Markov later married a navigator from his unit, Galina Dzhunkovskaya (1922–1985).

Brothels were installed for soldiers of the German *Wehrmacht*, and German soldiers could visit their families from time to time. Criminal cases reveal that German soldiers were convicted for sexual crimes. Comparable provisions did not exist in the Red Army, which might have led to sexual violence in their groups and towards civilians. This remains an under-researched topic.

Warfare can be understood as a situation of permanent violence, even though there were periods with no particular battles, and there was also leisure time and daily routine.<sup>66</sup> How did female combatants cope with violence, killing their enemies and suffering the loss of their comrades? Antonina Aleksandrovna Kotliarova (b. 1923) stated that:

When I killed my first Fritz, I returned; a reporter approached me and wanted to interview me. I don't know what I told him, but on that day, and the next one, I couldn't eat or sleep. I knew he was a fascist, that they'd attacked our country, they killed, burned, hanged our people, but he was still a human being. It was such a condition ... When I killed the second one, I was in a horrible state again. Why? Because I saw him through my optical sight: a young officer. He seemed to look at me and suddenly I killed him. But he was a human being! Basically, a horrible state. But afterwards I grew somehow desensitised. I killed – it was supposed to be that way.<sup>67</sup>

Aleksandra Medvedeva-Nazarkina also reflects on her wartime experience:

I – an ordinary girl – had a hard time getting accustomed to the front and shooting at people, although I understood I was shooting at the enemy. Soon there was a crisis in my conscience. Seeing people's sorrow, tears and blood of my native land, I understood there could be no pity on the fierce invaders. For the killing of my 10 first Hitlerites I was awarded with the medal 'For Courage'.<sup>68</sup>

There are at least two layers of analysis arising from such quotes: the socio-political framework of war was structural, and physical violence was officially legitimised. Shooting, fighting and hate propaganda were a necessity; then there was a return to normality. On the individual level, we know little about post-traumatic stress disorder, moral doubts or feelings of guilt. Male war participants also recall their first kill. In this example, there is no observable difference between men and women. Patriotism, revenge and duty are motives for applying violence, whereas uncontrolled, non-legitimised violence is a grey area. Beyond violence, there is the question of coping with experiences of different forms of violence in the post-war years or with disability.<sup>69</sup>

In 1944 the satirical Soviet magazine *Krokodil* published a cartoon showing a man in a flat preparing food. Laundry is hanging over him and two children, a girl and a boy, stand next to the front door, which is half-open. A postwoman delivers a letter. The title of the picture is 'Wait for me!', and the subtitle reads 'From mum, from the front'.<sup>70</sup> The contemporary reader now saw a radical change of gender roles based on a public-private duality: man as housekeeper and woman in military service. The picture references the mobilisation of women as a reversal of contemporary norms. However, duties like housekeeping, childrearing or cooking were consistently regarded as traditionally female during the whole Soviet period. Even though Soviet society experienced a unique situation of women fighting and killing during the war, gender roles remained unchanged in public discourse. Housework and childcare were regarded as female tasks; military service, shooting and fighting remained a male domain.

## CONCLUSION

In recent years, the study of women's roles in the Red Army has become an established field of research and the focus of a number of oral history projects. The existence of female combatants in the Soviet Union during the Second World War was unique. Raised in a period of paramilitary education, patriotism, socialist competition and the cult of heroes, young women volunteered at the beginning of the war for the Red Army, which was not initially prepared to take them. Three female aviation regiments were secretly formed under the guidance of Marina Raskova and Yevdokia Bershanskaya. By 1942, the military situation for the Soviet Union was very critical and citizens were mobilised for the front and rear services for the defence of the country. Altogether about one million women served in the Red Army, mostly in the rear services and air force, but also in armed combat units.

In 1945, all female combatants were demobilised as there was no evident possibility for a future career for women in the Soviet military. The experiences of women depended on their form of deployment, positioning in the army and individual or biographical backgrounds. Uniquely, the members of the all-female aviation units were allowed to publish their memoirs as the cult of war heroes emerged from the late 1950s. Others, however, mourned and suffered in silence. Many questions, such as sexual relations at the front, ethnic differences,

disciplinary conflicts or the remembrance of female combatants in popular culture, are still to be researched. Soviet gender norms did not change as a result of wartime experiences, but for individual women, military participation expanded their realm of activity.

## NOTES

1. See online [http://mosarchiv.mos.ru/promotion/trudy/virtualnye\\_vystavki/parad.php](http://mosarchiv.mos.ru/promotion/trudy/virtualnye_vystavki/parad.php) (accessed July 2016). There were plans for women pilots to participate, but their flights were cancelled because of rainy weather. Instead, it is possible that some marched with the infantry, but this still has to be officially verified: Mariya Dolina, *Docheri neba: 'dnevnye ved'my' na pikirovshchikakh*, Kiev: Dovira, 2010, pp. 203–4. Women only started to be routinely recruited to the military from the beginning of the 1970s: Helena Carreiras, *Gender and the Military: Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies*, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 1.
2. See, for example, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWx0\\_TmeTMO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWx0_TmeTMO) (accessed July 2016).
3. See *Pravda*, 25 June 1945; and *Moskva poslevoennaya 1945–1947: arkhivnye dokumenty i materialy*, Moscow, 2000, p. 65.
4. Beate Fieseler, 'Patriotinnen, Heldinnen, Huren? Frauen in der Roten Armee, 1941–1945', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, vol. 65, nos 1–2, 2014, p. 38.
5. Roger Markwick and Euridice Cardona Charon, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
6. T. Lil'in, *Ikh slavit rodina*, Moscow: Gos izd pol lit, 1959; Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: a Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941–1991*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
7. *Mascha, Nina, Katjuscha: Frauen in der Roten Armee, 1941–1945*, Berlin: Ch. Links, 2002; Yuliya Nikolaevna Ivanova, *Khrabreishie iz prekrasnikh: zhenshchiny Rossii v voynakh*, Moscow, 2002; Irina Rebrova, 'Russian Women about the War: a Gender Analysis of Ego Documents', in Maren Roger and Ruth Leiserowitz (eds), *Women and Men at War: a Gender Perspective on World War II and its Aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe*, Stuttgart: Fibre Verlag, 2012, pp. 263–80; Lyuba Vinogradova, *Defending the Motherland: the Soviet Women who Fought Hitler's Aces*, London: Maclehorse Press, 2015. See also Fieseler, 'Patriotinnen'; Markwick and Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*.
8. RGASPI-M 7/11/511/174. See also Konstantin Rokossovskii, 'V dognovlyayushchii primer', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 5, 1965, p. 1.
9. They participated in an air parade on 18 August 1945 for the Day of Stalin. For a full list of female heroes, see V.S. Murmantseva, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine*, Moscow, 1974, appendix 1, pp. 264–71.
10. 'Glorious Daughters of the Soviet People', speech at a Meeting with Young Women Demobilized From the Red Army and Navy, Central Committee of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, 26 July 1945, in Mikhail Kalinin, *On Communist Education: Selected Speeches and Articles*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing, 1950, pp. 455–60. The text was also published in *Komsomol'skaya pravda*.
11. Kalinin, 'Glorious Daughters', pp. 459–60.

12. M. Volshanin, 'Strana prazduet pobedu', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 5, 1945, p. 7.
13. The extent to which the June parade served to influence the forthcoming international conferences with the allies and thus had a foreign policy dimension aimed at preventing anti-communist stereotypes has yet to be researched. During the war, the deployment of women in the Soviet army was regarded as a deviation of the system. See Claudia Freytag, 'Kriegsbeute "Flintenweib": Rotarmistinnen in deutscher Gefangenschaft', in *Mascha, Nina, Katjuscha*, pp. 32–6; Bernd Strebel 'Feinbild "Flintenweib": Weibliche Kriegsgefangene der Roten Armee im KZ Ravensbruck', in Johannes Ibel (ed.), *Einvernehmliche Zusammenarbeit? Wehrmacht, Gestapo, SS und sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*, Berlin: Metropolis, 2008, pp. 159–80.
14. Wendy Goldman, *Women the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; Carmen Scheide, "'Born in October": the Life and Thought of Aleksandra Vasil'evna Artyukhina, 1889–1969', in Melanie Ilic (ed.), *Women in the Stalin Era*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001, pp. 9–28.
15. Murmantseva, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny*, p. 119
16. Suzanne Ament, 'Reflecting Individual and Collective Identities: Songs of World War II', in Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux (eds), *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture*, DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006, p. 116.
17. See Yevgeniya Rudneva, *Poka stuchit serdtse: dnevnik i pis'ma Geroya Sovetskogo Soyuza Yevgenii Rudnevoi*, Moscow, 1995. A common issue noted in Soviet memoirs is the social mobility of people from poor families.
18. Adrienne Harris, 'The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Kansas, 2008, p. 33; Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: a History of Violence on the Eastern Front*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 38 et seq.
19. See IrinaRakobol'skaya and Natal'ya Kravtsova, *Nas nazvali nochnymi ved'mami: tak voeval zhenskii 46-i gvardeiskii polk nochnykh bombardirovshchikov*, Moscow, 2005; Mariya Chechneva, *'Lastochki' nad frontom: ocherki*, Moscow: DOSAAF SSSR, 1984. This was an urban phenomenon.
20. Markwick and Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, p. 36.
21. Markwick and Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, p. 48.
22. The situation in Moscow is described in Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Inside the Red Army, 1939–1945*, London: Faber and Faber, 2006, p. 142.
23. Markwick regards the rejection of female volunteers as a gender issue, p. 36. Compulsory military service for men lasted a minimum of two years.
24. Murmantseva, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny*, p. 26. The number for 1945 is lower than 1944 as men were demobilised and returned to work: Susanne Conze, 'Women's Work and Emancipation in the Soviet Union, 1941–50', in Ilic, *Women in the Stalin Era*, pp. 216–34.
25. For Beate Fieseler's study of the Soviet home front, see 'Arme Sieger': *Die Invaliden des 'Großen Vaterländischen Krieges' der Sowjetunion, 1941–1991* (forthcoming, 2017).
26. Markwick and Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*; Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*; Rakobol'skaya and Kravtsova, *Nas nazvali nochnymi ved'mami*.
27. RGASPI – M 7/2/170/1–15: stenogramm Yevdokia Davydovna Bershanskaya; Dolina, *Docheri neba*.



28. Markwick and Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, pp. 45–6.
29. Euridice Charon Cardona and Roger Markwick, “‘Our Brigade will not be sent to the Front’: Soviet Women under Arms in the Great Fatherland War, 1941–45”, *Russian Review*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2009, pp. 240–62.
30. Adrienne M. Harris, ‘The Lives and Deaths of a Soviet Saint in the Post-Soviet Period: the Case of Zoia Kosmodem’ianskaia’, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. 53, nos 2–4, 2011, pp. 273–304.
31. RGASPI-M 1/13/53/2-3.
32. RGASPI-M 1/13/53/3. The orders from the State Committee of Defence (GKO) are published in Ivanova, *Khrabreishie iz prekrasnikh*, see from p. 220.
33. ‘O mezhhdunarodnom kommunisticheskom zhenskom dne—8 marta: postanovlenie TsK VKP(b)’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3, 1943, pp. 6–7.
34. *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3, 1943, p. 6.
35. *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3, 1943, p. 7.
36. Fieseler, ‘Patriotinnen, Heldinnen, Huren?’, p. 45
37. ‘O mezhhdunarodnom zhenskom dne—8 marta: postanovlenie TsK VKP(b)’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3, 1944, pp. 3–4.
38. *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3, 1944, p. 3.
39. *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3, 1944, pp. 3–4.
40. Carmen Scheide, ‘Bild und Gedächtnis: Identitätskonstruktionen sowjetischer Fliegerinnen als Angehörige der Roten Armee im Zweiten Weltkrieg’, in Beate Fieseler and Jörg Ganzenmüller (eds), *Kriegsbilder: Mediale Repräsentationen des “Großen Vaterländischen Krieges”*, Essen: Klartext, 2010, pp. 29–45.
41. Access to the Russian military archive remains limited. See Markwick and Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*. Some figures are included in Murmantseva, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny*, pp. 128–30.
42. The interdependence of the military administration and NKVD has yet to be explored.
43. Murmantseva, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny*, p. 128. Fieseler, ‘Rotarmistsinnen im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Motivationen, Einsatzbereiche und Erfahrungen von Frauen an der Front’, in Klaus Latzel (ed), *Soldatinnen: Gewalt und Geschlecht im Krieg vom Mittelalter bis heute*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011, p. 314, also discusses numbers.
44. Murmantseva, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny*, p. 128, citing the archive MO SSSR f. 57.
45. Murmantseva, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny*, pp. 128–9; Lil’in, *Ikh slavit Rodina*, pp. 80–100.
46. Yuliya Zhukova, *Devushka so snaiperskoi vintovki*, Moscow, 2006.
47. Elena Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions and Disappointments*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998; Catherine Merridale, ‘Masculinity at War: did Gender Matter in the Soviet Army?’, *Journal of War and Cultural Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2012, pp. 307–20.
48. Irina Rakobol’skaya, interview with the author, Moscow, May 2007.
49. Chechneva, ‘*Lastochki’ nad frontom*.
50. For another example, see Wendy Lower, *Hitler’s Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields*, London: Chatto and Windus, 2013.
51. See, for example, Murmantseva, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny*; Reina Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War. Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001; Kazimiera Cottam, ‘Soviet Women in Combat in World War II: the Ground/Air Defense Forces’, in Tova Yedlin (ed), *Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, New York: Praeger, 1980.

52. See the 'iremember' website, available online: <http://iremember.ru/en/> (accessed June 2016); Rebrova, 'Russian Women about the War'.
53. The return to civilian life is depicted in photographs of former pilots as mothers. See Rakobol'skaya and Kravtsova, *Nas nazvali nochnymi ved'mami*.
54. Rakobol'skaya and Kravtsova, *Nas nazvali nochnymi ved'mami*.
55. 'We noticed that the division and army regarded us as a non-battle-tested, reluctantly unexperienced unit, suspecting tears and female whims, and we were astonished about this. ... Pilots from male units close to us regarded the young women with open irony and called us the "shrew (baby)" or "bumpkin (dunkin)" unit': Rakobol'skaya and Kravtsova, *Nas nazvali nochnymi ved'mami*, p. 27.
56. On understandings of patriotism at the front, see the interview with Natalia Peshkova (b. 1924) available online: <http://iremember.ru/en/memoirs/others/natalia-peshkova/> (accessed July 2016).
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58. Svetlana Alexiyevich, *War's Unwomanly Face*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984, p. 254ff.
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## Nurses in the Soviet Union: Explorations of Gender in State and Society

*Susan Grant*

In the 1989 film *Interdevochka*, Tanya Zaitseva is a nurse by day, prostitute by night.<sup>1</sup> Tanya is a good nurse but struggles to make ends meet. Living alone with her mother in Leningrad, she aspires to a better life for both of them. In order to earn more money she becomes an ‘interdevochka’, or an ‘international girl’—a prostitute with foreign clients who provide her with much valued hard currency. Tanya impresses her friends and colleagues with her nice clothes and extra cash. Although her life as a prostitute pays well, Tanya opts for security by marrying a Swedish client and moves to Sweden. Despite her comfortable life in Sweden, Tanya misses her mother and is haunted by her past. When Tanya’s mother learns of her former secret life, she commits suicide. A devastated Tanya, the cheerful, adventurous and kind-hearted nurse we saw at the start of the film, ends up, we are led to believe, taking her own life at the end of the film.

In its portrayal of complex social issues this perestroika-era film is similar to other 1980s films, such as *Little Vera*, where the hardship of everyday life for ordinary Soviet people comes into focus. Released at the very end of the Soviet regime, *Interdevochka* is an appropriate bookend for the ambiguous image of the Russian nurse, an ambiguity that emerged during the First World War when nurses were also associated with prostitution. The film also says much about Soviet society in the 1980s and the struggle of trained nurses expected to survive on meagre salaries. Yet for most of the 70 years between the First World War and the end of the Soviet Union the image of what constituted the ‘Soviet’ nurse was positive and carefully constructed. The Soviet nurse was a far cry from

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Tanya Zaitseva; she was represented as a maternal figure, committed to her patients, family and country.

This chapter considers the changing representation of nurses and women in the Soviet Union. As a traditionally female profession, nursing tells us a great deal about wider attitudes to women. Sue Bridger has written about the rise and fall of women tractor drivers in the Soviet Union, where driving tractors was considered a man's job, largely because it involved mastering technical skills.<sup>2</sup> Yet when women drove tractors they often found it less taxing than other farm work and concluded that it was not really a man's job after all. At the other end of the professional spectrum, nursing is equally as illuminating about the role of women. Did the state need to draw women to the nursing profession or did they flock to it because it was a so-called woman's job? Did state propaganda change over the Soviet period and, if so, in what ways? Here, I draw on a range of magazines, such as *Rabotnitsa*, *Za sanitarnuyu oboronu* and *Meditinskaya sestra*, as well as the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF). By examining the press we get a greater sense of how nurses were represented during the Soviet period.

### RUSSIAN NURSING

Prior to the Bolshevik takeover of power in October 1917, the nursing profession was similar to nursing in other countries in that it was based on Christian values and a religious ethos. Russian nursing was founded by a number of high profile aristocratic figures, including Yekaterina Mikhailovna Bakunina (1812–1894) and Grand Duchess Yelena Pavlovna. Russian nursing also shared similar characteristics with nursing in other countries: it was dominated by women and based on the notion that women were natural caregivers. The first Russian nursing communities (*obshchiny sester miloserdiya*) were established in 1844 and these oversaw living and working conditions. Those women who became nurses, or sisters of mercy, as they were called until 1926, were primarily from the aristocracy, religiously inclined, living in penury or interested in adventure.<sup>3</sup> The women in charge of the communities, their patrons, were primarily aristocratic ladies with an interest in philanthropy. The active involvement of nurses in the Crimean War was crucial to raising the public profile of Russian nurses. The work of nurses in the famine of the 1890s, epidemics and later wars confirmed their important role in Russia.

Life was very hard for those women who entered nursing communities. Their work was physically and emotionally difficult and they received no payment; all monies received went to the community. The nursing communities accepted only women: girls and widows aged 18–40 years, of Christian faith, literate and healthy. In its charter, the Red Cross (which oversaw all communities from 1867) indicated that there was a preference for those entering the communities to be of 'advanced moral and intellectual development'.<sup>4</sup> The strict conditions meant that only the most committed women became and remained nurses. Difficult working conditions led to growing discontent in Russian society,

especially after the 1905 revolution. It was this discontent and the later Russian entry into war in 1914 that led some Russian nurses to question the organisation of nursing in Russia.

The First World War became a catalyst for change, and Russian nursing was no exception. The war dramatically altered the self-perception and public perception of nurses. This was the case for those who went to the front, but also for more prominent nurse leaders in Petrograd communities who saw an opportunity to effect change. Russian nursing was expanding and changing; nurses continued to care for the sick and wounded but under radically new conditions. There were an estimated 150 communities by the outbreak of the First World War. This was not sufficient to meet wartime needs and so short-term Red Cross courses for nurses were established. A massive influx of volunteers meant that Red Cross nurses were broadly divided into two categories of nurse: staff nurses, who had trained prior to the war, and wartime nurses, who had completed short courses immediately prior to or during the war. The experience of caring for soldiers afflicted with horrific injuries took its toll on the nursing staff. The thousands of newly trained nurses—many suffering from exhaustion—needed support and organisation. The increase in the number of women with nurse training had an immediate impact on the profession, with some leading sisters of mercy in Petrograd assuming the responsibility of forming a union to address the needs of all nurses. The changing political and social climate also inspired Petrograd sisters of mercy to reorganise the nursing communities, with union leaders taking the initiative in undertaking and implementing changes in the profession.

After the February Revolution, nurses set up their union for the first time. As a result of the revolution and also as a response to the woeful conditions faced by nurses in the aftermath of three years of war, the All-Russian Union of the Sisters of Mercy (*Vserossiiskii soyuz sester miloserdiya*) was established in 1917. The nurses who formed the union claimed the nursing communities were found wanting during the war. Their zeal to reorganise the nursing communities was not motivated by feminist interests but by a concern for the state of nursing; they sought to make the communities more ‘democratic’ and improve the working conditions of nurses.<sup>5</sup> Despite their commitment to improving nursing, the Union of Sisters of Mercy was never in a strong position and was eventually disbanded some 18 months after its formation. After the October Revolution there was not sufficient room for two authority figures—the Union of Sisters of Mercy and a Bolshevik medical union—in overseeing nursing organisation. The People’s Commissariat of Public Health, Narkomzdrav, established in July 1918, soon began to clear out tsarist personnel and install its own people. Its Section for Medical Schools and Personnel (*Otdel meditsinskikh shkol i personala*) was now the authority responsible for overseeing nursing. The moment for nurses to assume leadership of nursing had passed and such an opportunity did not arise again until the 1990s.

When the Bolsheviks set about consolidating power after the October Revolution, the ‘woman question’ was high on the agenda. Indeed, the matter of greater rights for women had been on the agenda before the revolution, with

Russian feminists fighting for social change long before the Bolsheviks arrived on the scene.<sup>6</sup> Russian women were actively engaged in addressing issues of equality between 1905 and 1917. The First World War witnessed women becoming involved in the war effort, and it showed women that they did not have to follow traditional gender roles. This was especially so for women who worked as nurses at the front. Laurie Stoff's work on women during the First World War shows how gender roles became blurred.<sup>7</sup> Joshua Sanborn's recent work also highlights how war led to changes in women's self-perception.<sup>8</sup> Sanborn's example of Rimma Ivanovna from Stavropol shows how Russian women were not content to stay at the rear but wanted to contribute more directly at the front. Ivanovna journeyed from nurse at the home front to rear regimental infirmary (*lazaret*) nurse and found herself in the heat of battle. The experience of the war transformed Ivanovna and other nurses. War had the effect of liberating women from traditional gender roles and provided them with an experience that often led to personal growth and self-realisation.

For community nurses, the war, but more particularly the Bolshevik Revolution, impacted on their lives on a personal and professional level. Their professional identity was bound up with religion, an identity that was no longer acceptable after October 1917. By 1919 the religious ethos of the nursing communities was omitted from all new nurse training plans and programmes. In May 1920 the People's Commissariat of Public Health published its decree on nursing schools.<sup>9</sup> The word 'mercy' was removed; the communities were to be formally disbanded and replaced by new permanent nursing schools and short-term courses. There were to be no remaining signs of 'bourgeois' or religious elements. Sisters of mercy, with their veils and crosses, did not fit the image of the dynamic revolutionary. Sisters of mercy symbolised religion and aristocracy, which the Bolsheviks hoped to destroy. A new image of the nurse replaced the older, aristocratic and religious one. Visually, the Soviet nurse wore a simple white gown and looked no different from other medical workers. Yet the question of what the Soviet nurse should do—her exact training, duties and role—was one that remained under discussion for most of the Soviet period.

While Narkomzdrav was pushing former tsarist-era nurses out of influential positions and considering how to reform the nursing profession along socialist lines, nurses on the ground were struggling to cope in the awful conditions of Civil War and famine. Of the 50,000–80,000 women who served during the Civil War, 20,000 worked in the medical services.<sup>10</sup> Women who continued their work as nurses during the Civil War were sometimes subject to imprisonment, rape, torture and murder. Madame Romanoff, head of the émigré Paris Union of Nurses, claimed that her organisation possessed a 'long list of tortured, violated and executed nurses', with others 'languishing in prisons and concentration camps'.<sup>11</sup> One example is found in the memoirs of Sister of Mercy Feoktista Nikandrovna Slepchenko, a Siberian nurse who entered the Sevastopol Red Cross community in 1902. During the Civil War she joined other community sisters nursing wounded White soldiers. At this time Slepchenko and another young nurse were raped at the hands of 'communists'

and 'Cossack-chekists'.<sup>12</sup> 'Red sisters' were also targeted. In 1919 near Petrograd three nurses, captured by the Whites, were hanged in bandages from the beams of their field hospital with their Komsomol pins stuck through their tongues.<sup>13</sup> Nurses working during the Civil War, irrespective of whether they were White or Red, were equally exposed to the dangers of war as male soldiers. Women working as nurses during this period were viewed as no less active agents of revolution or counterrevolution than were men.

### MAKING NURSES SOVIET

Despite the dangers they faced, women continued working as nurses whilst new recruits entered the profession. The war placed women in a position where they had to work. For demobilised women who had gained Red Cross training during the war, nursing seemed a logical place to start. In addition to economic circumstances, Soviet policies on labour and attitudes to female emancipation encouraged women to work outside the home. Nursing was not easy, though: the hours were long, the wages were low and the work was often physically strenuous. There was also the added threat of disease and infection, which continued through the early 1920s. Attracting women to such a profession was a constant struggle.

The women entering the newly opening communist nurse training courses were frequently criticised for a lack of interest, failing exams, absenteeism and hooliganism. There were women who entered the schools to avoid labour conscription or to receive board in the dormitories that were often attached to schools or hospitals.<sup>14</sup> Interest in attending nursing courses was so low that it was not unusual for them to close due to a lack of students and resources. Women entering nursing schools could only expect to receive very low wages for a long, hard day's work, with the likelihood of being infected by a patient a constant threat. The high dropout rate at the start of the 1920s reflected the negative attitude towards nursing. One report from Novgorod was condemnatory: the accommodation in which nurse students had to live repelled rather than enticed potential interns from the nearby areas.<sup>15</sup> A further problem was that students who dropped out of nursing school did so because they were not sure what their title or qualification would be after they completed their training. Henry Sigerist, a Swiss doctor with a keen interest in the Soviet Union, noted that young women were more interested in becoming *fel'dsheri* (doctor's assistants). These were medical auxiliaries, important in rural areas, and were both male and female.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, *fel'dshers* did not have past associations with religion or aristocracy, whereas nursing work did. Women without prior medical training saw little attraction in the nursing profession. On the other hand, the difficulties associated with nursing also ensured that those who completed the courses were committed to the profession.

Despite Bolshevik rhetoric about women's equality, professional hierarchies were rigidly maintained, with nurses subordinate to physicians. Nurses were to execute all duties exactly as instructed by the attending doctor. In medicine,



however, professional hierarchies between the physician and the nurse did not necessarily denote gender hierarchies. In the 1920s, the medical profession became increasingly feminised. By 1928 the proportion of women medical students stood at 58%, and by 1934 the figure had risen to 75.1%.<sup>17</sup> The feminisation of the profession was a trend that continued after 1945. Echoing the rhetoric of the day, Sigerist wrote that women began entering the medical profession in the late 1920s because ‘women as a rule make better doctors than engineers’ and they were best qualified to care for mothers and children.<sup>18</sup> Nursing tended to focus on motherhood and infancy. The overwhelming majority of nurses were women; men entering the middle medical professions usually became orderlies or *fel'dshers*. Women entering the medical profession, including at the level of orderly or nurse, had the opportunity to move up the career ladder. It must be noted, however, that medicine remained a low-prestige profession for both doctors and nurses in the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s engineers were the prized workers; they were the ‘builders’ of socialism. Men usually received the best salaries and positions in industry. Likewise in medicine, male doctors rather than women assumed leadership positions. Women dominated the medical profession but men took its most prestigious jobs.

### MOTHERHOOD AND INFANCY

If engineers were the builders of socialism, then nurses and other middle medical workers most definitely assumed the caring and nurturing roles within Soviet society. Narkomzdrav introduced a number of profiles for nurses that reinforced gender roles. Particular attention was paid to motherhood and infancy and in the mid-1920s the focus of nurse training was directed towards showing mothers how to nurse their newborn babies. By the second half of the 1920s nurses were trained to work in kindergartens, as visiting nurses (*patronazhnaya sestra*) to visit new mothers and as *vospitatel'naya* nurses to help raise young children. Nurses were trained to work in Houses for Motherhood and Infancy, in milk kitchens, dispensaries, sanatoria, at first aid stations in factories, and in institutes for children and teenagers. The proliferation of these nurse profiles was to meet the needs of the new Soviet state. American Quaker Anna Haines, who published a book about Soviet healthcare in 1928 and worked in the Clinic for Motherhood and Infancy, did not find Soviet nursing particularly scientific.<sup>20</sup> Haines did not rate Soviet nursing very highly because of its focus on caring for infants, which, she believed, was a ‘matter of keeping them clean and quiet’.<sup>21</sup> Given the high levels of infant mortality, the Soviet government understandably placed much emphasis on instructing new mothers in how to care for their babies. Training women as nurses was the ideal means of achieving this objective.

The end of the 1920s and the 1930s saw continued reform and revision of Soviet nursing, especially in the training of nurses and middle medical workers. The five-year plans and industrialisation drive had an impact on the nursing

profession. Article 122 of the 1936 constitution enshrined women's equality in law but, nonetheless, women had to carry the double burden of working outside and inside the home. Women in nursing differed little from their counterparts in industry in this regard. Nurses, too, worked long hours in difficult conditions and were expected to take care of the family. The 1936 law banning abortion had huge consequences for women and families, and also for nurses. The state anticipated more births and the need to care for children was a pressing one. Newly 'liberated' women would work in the factory, no longer tied to the home. Working mothers were promised that their children would be well cared for in clinics, kindergartens, factory crèches and schools. This promise led to additional training courses for nurses with a focus on paediatric care. The problem was that these plans were often not fully realised, leaving women and their children with an absence of adequate care.

The Soviet state's concern with the birth rate and raising good communist children came to define its attitude to women and nursing. Although nurses were supposed to be technical workers, officially known as 'medical sisters' in 1926, scientific aspects of their work were rarely evident in the 1930s. For much of the Soviet period nurses were portrayed in gendered terms, and on the few occasions when nurses appeared in the pages of the women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* (*Woman Worker*), they were usually photographed with babies in their arms.<sup>22</sup> *Rabotnitsa*, largely directed towards women working in factories, repeated the party line in its unrelenting glorification of motherhood and children. Nurses were deemed important only in relation to caring for babies. By the 1930s, however, there was a change in how nurses and women were represented (Fig. 17.1). Two very different types of nurse were now clearly visible in Soviet society: one was associated with motherhood and the other with militarism.<sup>23</sup> The themes of maternity and militarism seemed to fit with women's fulfilment of all aspects of their patriotic duty.

## DEFENCE AND SANITATION

While magazines such as *Rabotnitsa* emphasised the nurturing, maternal side of nursing, others portrayed a different side. In the Red Cross and Red Crescent publication *Za sanitarnuyu oboronu* nurses were presented as dynamic and brave. The publication of *Za sanitarnuyu oboronu* coincided with the war scare of 1927, and thereafter women were encouraged to participate in civil defence training.<sup>24</sup> By the 1930s, the interest in civil defence expanded and women were encouraged to attend Red Cross nursing courses after work.<sup>25</sup> These were part-time courses of varying duration and quality. It was not enough that women did a day's work in the factory and looked after their children afterwards, now they also had to train in first aid and nursing.

Many women took advantage of the new opportunities to advance professionally, with some continuing their medical education to become doctors. When additional responsibilities were placed on their shoulders, women successfully managed to negotiate the system and make it work for them. By 1935



Сестра Первой советской больницы города Калинин В. А. Игнатъева (слева) со своей дочкой Валей в консультации. Союзфот.

Fig. 17.1 A Soviet nurse in the 1930s, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 33, 1936, p. 11

almost half a million ‘girls and women’ had completed civil defence nursing courses.<sup>26</sup> The Komsomol, spurred on by its leader Aleksandr Kosarev, was tasked with popularising nursing. In Komsomol circles, nursing was considered ‘improper [*neprelichno*] and unimportant’, at least compared with more entertaining aviation and rifle shooting. Whereas in the West the title of nurse had, according to Kosarev, ‘some kind of halo’, the Soviet Union had not been able to ‘create a sense of patriotism’ around nursing. This, he stated, was a task for the Komsomol.<sup>27</sup> Komsomol members were expected to lead the charge for passing the civil defence norms and succeeding in the Red Cross courses. If young women still did not find traditional nursing roles appealing, they could attend the parachuting and in-flight courses for nurses organised by the Red Cross. Women featured in the magazine claimed that they ‘loved aviation’, wore their parachuting badges ‘with pride’ and would devote ‘all their strength to sanitary defence’.<sup>28</sup> Nurses were turned into all-action heroes to attract young women who seemed more interested in parachuting than caring for infants or mothers. Drawing nurses towards aviation was also part of a broader trend to make Soviet women into patriots.<sup>29</sup> Propaganda steering women towards ‘masculine’ forms of patriotism, as Olga Nikonova argues, contributed to the creation of a ‘more complex gender order’ in Soviet society in the 1930s.<sup>30</sup> Importantly, as Melanie Ilic notes, civil defence and increased militarisation were ‘not viewed as rendering women more masculine’.<sup>31</sup>

Nurses were shown to embody the selfless, hard-working and patriotic values of the Soviet hero. Those who attended regular nursing courses were encouraged to continue their studies to become flight-nurses (*bortsestry*). One such young woman had left her village for the city, where she worked as a sanitary worker before being nominated by the Red Cross to attend a nursing course. Because she was ‘not very literate’ she ‘found it hard to work and study’ and so at night she studied instead of sleeping. She succeeded in her studies and was put forward to the nursing Olympiad. She found the Olympiad rewarding and pursued further studies in nursing, including, from February 1935, parachuting.<sup>32</sup> An 18-year-old metalworker, Liza Sosulina, also decided to become a *bortsestra*. Sosulina (Fig. 17.2), described as a ‘girl with wide shoulders’ with a ‘fresh and gentle colour to her face’ and possessing a neck with ‘the muscles of an athlete’ was physically strong and committed to serving her country. Even in peacetime, she could ‘make a drop anywhere’ in her vast country and be of use.<sup>33</sup>

During the 1930s the images of nurses diversified greatly and largely reflected the increasing demands placed upon women. The overall message was that women were to be strong yet feminine, caring yet tough; most importantly, they were to be ready to perform whatever function the state required of them. As Ilic and others have argued, the patriotism drive was to serve the interests of the state above all else.<sup>34</sup> The importance of involving more people in nursing was evidenced by the fact that, by 1939, every major factory was to have a nursing course.<sup>35</sup> Red Cross courses set up in the late 1920s were by now a fundamental part of Soviet nursing. By the late 1930s attention also turned to training nurses to perform blood transfusions. Initially, only doctors were permitted to do this, but by the late 1930s the threat of war meant that nurses were increasingly considered qualified to perform blood transfusions; they were encouraged to attend blood transfusion courses and afterwards perform transfusions (usually in the presence of a doctor). Meanwhile, blood donation drives

**Fig. 17.2** Liza Sosulina, *Za sanitarnuyu oboronu*, no. 3, 1936, p. 11



became a common feature of Soviet society at this time and in many cases it was nurses leading the way as hero donors.

During the Second World War, Soviet women, like women in other countries, played a key role at the home front, and they were also important participants at the battlefield as both nurses and combatants. Gender boundaries were certainly blurred during the war, with many women eager to defend the Soviet Union alongside male soldiers. A total of about 800,000 women fought in the Soviet armed forces during the Second World War, not all of whom volunteered.<sup>36</sup> During the war more than 280,000 nurses, about 500,000 *sandruzhnitsy* (sanitary brigade members) and 36,000 orderlies were trained by the Red Cross.<sup>37</sup> The Red Army consequently had a total of 300,000 nurses and more than 500,000 *sandruzhnitsy* over the course of the war. Much scholarship on women in the Second World War has focused on women who fought in the war. Recent work by Anna Krylova, Roger Markwick and Euridice Cardona, and Roger Reese has examined the experience of women as fighters, but not their equally important role as medical workers.<sup>38</sup> This is likely a result of state valorisation of women who took up arms. As non-combatants, women sanitary workers and nurses typically conform to notions of gender stereotypes, but they were in no less danger than their women soldier comrades.

Discussions of the impact and meaning of women combatants is important for understanding developments in Soviet society in the 1930s and 1940s, but the role of women medics is also important. Many female and male medics died at the front, and their contribution was recognised by the Soviet state. Soviet nurses and medical workers experienced many of the challenges of those men and women who fought in the Second World War: the difficult conditions, the danger, but also the sense that they were playing a crucial role. Klavdia Vasil'evna Butova served in a *fel'dsher* battalion during the war and was awarded the Red Star, followed in 1967 by the Florence Nightingale medal, awarded by the international Red Cross. One of the highest honours, Hero of the Soviet Union, was awarded to 17 women-medics for their contribution to the war effort.<sup>39</sup> The heroism of nurses during the Second War World was later recounted in a 1991 book which provided short biographies of medical workers and their contribution to the war effort.<sup>40</sup> The women are portrayed as Soviet patriots who did their duty when sent to work in hospitals, sanitary trains or elsewhere. Reflecting the general nursing discourse of the 1930s, these women had both 'skilful and caring hands'.<sup>41</sup> Most of those nurses selected and celebrated in the book continued to work in nursing and medicine after the war.

Women's participation as medics in the Second World War enhanced the professional and social esteem of nurses. In a frequently cited passage, former People's Commissar for Health Nikolai Semashko wrote that nurses were invaluable and deserved great respect.<sup>42</sup> As a mark of this respect, nurses were rewarded with their own professional journal: *Meditinskaya sestra* was established in 1942 and Semashko's piece appeared as the first article in its first issue. Another step towards recognising medical workers were material rewards such as pay increases. The salaries of medical workers were raised from 1 December

1942, reflecting the growing importance of medical workers during the war. Physicians working in the largest institutions or those who carried out upwards of 50,000 calls in clinics or factories received the highest salaries, ranging from 750 to 1400 roubles.<sup>43</sup> The maximum a nurse could earn was about 450 roubles for senior nurses and visiting nurses or district nurses with middle medical education. The higher end of the pay scale for middle medical workers was 500 roubles and the lowest 260.

The 1942 Semashko article drew attention to nursing and also highlighted its confusingly gendered nature.<sup>44</sup> "Sister", he wrote, 'such a touching title to be given to this medical profession! "Sister"—not simply a medical worker; "sister"—close, yours, a native person.'<sup>45</sup> Nurses were denoted as sisters (no mention was made of medical brothers here), but Semashko identifies medical sisters with the gender-neutral 'person'.<sup>46</sup> The overwhelming majority of nurses were women—medical sisters—and very little attention was paid to medical brothers, even though they did (and still do) train and work as nurses. Harking back to before the revolution, Semashko carefully differentiated between the 'old' sister of mercy and the Soviet sister, the latter devoid of religious and philanthropic connotations. Instead, the Soviet nurse was patriotic with the 'native human spirit of the fighter' ('*rodnoi po dukhu chelovek nashemu boitsu*').<sup>47</sup> Not only did Soviet nurses care and fight, but they also raised the 'moral spirit' of soldiers. The 'moral' duty of nurses was an aspect of their work that came under increasing scrutiny after the war.<sup>48</sup> Much of the post-war discourse, as we will soon see, discussed the characteristics and qualities of the nurse.

### POST-WAR NARRATIVES

Writing about women working in industry, Suzanne Conze notes that the ideal of the Soviet woman changed in 1943, but that the qualities of patriotism and enthusiasm remained intact. By the 1940s, between 38 and 43% of the labour force was composed of women.<sup>49</sup> The high number of women working in factories raised several issues, one of which was childcare. A crucial social consequence of the Great Patriotic War was the demographic imbalance: millions of women and children were left to carry the burden of rebuilding the Soviet Union. The birth rate once again became a major concern and motherhood was incentivised and glorified. This was made apparent in the press, with *Rabotnitsa* emphasising the importance of motherhood during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>50</sup> The image of the nurse as maternal figure also continued into the 1950s and 1960s, with a nurse and baby featured on the front cover of the second issue of *Rabotnitsa* in February 1955. Nurses' scientific training, as well as their long hours in hospitals and clinics, did not seem worthy of mention. While these aspects of their work featured in medical journals such as *Meditsinskaya sestra* and *Meditsinskii rabotnik*, their non-infant-related



professional qualities do not seem to have been noteworthy to the mainstream media. The message to women readers of *Rabotnitsa* was that nursing work meant taking care of children (Fig. 17.3).



Fig. 17.3 *Rabotnitsa*, no. 2, 1955, front cover

The maternal aspects of nursing also made their way into specialised periodicals such as *Meditsinskaya sestra*. The 'excellent health workers' section featured towards the back of the publication and celebrated nursing heroes, who were more often than not outstanding because of their participation in various wars and their maternal care for the sick.<sup>51</sup> The medical workers—nurses and *fel'dshers*—were invariably women. Their professional success was frequently whittled down to their 'gentle touch' as opposed to their scientific training. Although medicine and technology were discussed, the characteristics of care and nurturing took centre stage. Nursing discourse, with its emphasis on morality, ethics and maternity, reflects the general tenor of Khrushchev-era politics. The concern with family, 'diligent work and activism, and the willingness to sacrifice individual interests for the social good' seemed to meld nursing neatly to the goals of the state.<sup>52</sup> As moral standard-bearers, nurses were to dress tidily, wear their hair neatly and preferably eschew cosmetics.<sup>53</sup> They were to be kind, gentle and sensitive to their patients. Nurses were portrayed as modest, simple and completely devoted to their patients, society and the state.

By the 1970s and 1980s there was a clear nostalgia for the pre-revolutionary traditions of nursing. This fits in with the general historiography of the Brezhnev period. A new 'history of medicine' section was added to *Meditsinskaya sestra*. The women photographed in the *Meditsinskaya sestra* excellent health workers section continued to be veterans, those decorated for their war experience as well as their commitment to their work. Anna Vikent'evna Telesheva was born in 1913.<sup>54</sup> In 1919 she lost both parents to typhus and afterwards in the children's home dreamed of entering a career in medicine. She realised this dream in 1932 when she became a *fel'dsher*-midwife in Minsk oblast. Telesheva then went to the front with her husband, leaving their two young children behind. She was described as loving her work and her patients, and being committed to her profession. She understood that, 'besides medication', a 'gentle word' was necessary. This piece was typical of the general depiction of nurses after 1945. Those nurses reading *Meditsinskaya sestra* knew the kind of characteristics and qualities that were valued in Soviet society. The Bolshevik notion that women should work, albeit in separate spheres to men based on their respective 'distinctive characteristics and qualities', is illustrated through the profession of nursing.<sup>55</sup> It is only when we see Tanya Zaitseva in *Interdevochka* in 1989 that we get a sense of how out of touch professional journals and Soviet media were in relation to the reality experienced by a younger generation of men and women. Tanya longed for a different, more financially rewarding life. A commitment to profession, society and state was no longer appealing.



## CONCLUSION

The 1920s and 1930s saw the role of the nurse change frequently as the Soviet state tried to figure out how nurses could best fit its needs. These roles or profiles characterised nursing during the interwar years. The function of the nurse became gender specific, with a focus on training nurses to care for infants and mothers. By the 1930s, nurses were given a new role as defenders of the motherland, with women encouraged to attend first aid courses. Nursing was packaged as heroic and adventurous for young women interested in a more 'active' role. For women working in nursing and medicine more generally, the 1930s focus on militarism increased their visibility in Soviet society. Red Cross courses also offered women an important entry point into nursing and sometimes medicine. The great sacrifices of medical workers during the war certainly raised their public profile. Enormous population losses during the Second World War meant that Soviet women had to continue working after the war, but also embrace motherhood and family life. Nurses, and women more broadly, again became strongly connected to issues of care and maternity. The dynamic image of nurses in the 1930s did not return after the war and nurses continued to be represented as increasingly conservative and traditional from the 1960s to the 1980s. Despite the initial Bolshevik vision of nurses as scientific workers and the 1930s casting of nurses in an active role, for the majority of the Soviet period nurses in the public eye remained strongly tied to maternity and infancy.

## NOTES

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4. *Normal'nyi Ustav obshchin sester miloserdiiya Rossiskogo Obshchestva Krasnogo Kresta*, Moscow, 1903, p. 66 (article 35).
5. Grant, 'War to Peace', pp. 256–7.
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14. GARF A-1565/7/42/90: *Protokoly zasedanii Yekaterinburskoi gubkomisii po priemu meditsinskii uchebnye zavedenie v 1921*, 15 May 1921.
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17. Sigerist, *Medicine and Health*, p. 65.
18. Sigerist, *Medicine and Health*, p. 66.
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23. See, for example, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 5, 1936, pp. 8–9.
24. For more detail, see Melanie Ilic, 'Soviet Women and Civil Defense Training in the 1930s', *Minerva Journal of Women and War*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2008, pp. 100–13.
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27. 'Komsomolu – tekhniki sanitarnoi oborony', *Za sanitarnuyu oboronu*, nos 2–3, 1934, p. 4: speech by Naida, head of the Ispolkom Administration for Cadres.
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29. See *Minerva Journal of Women and War*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2008, special issue on 'Women and the Defense of the Soviet Union in the 1930s', edited by Melanie Ilic.
30. Olga Nikonova frames this in terms of a sub-discourse about 'Soviet women patriots': 'Soviet Amazons: Soviet Patriots during Prewar Stalinism', *Minerva Journal of Women and War*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2008, p. 85.
31. Ilic, 'Soviet Women and Civil Defense', p. 111.

32. As recounted by sister-parachutist Nastya Yaremenko, 'Ya gotova otdat' zhizn' na zashchitu sovetskoi vlasti', in Godovanets, 'Chetyre otvazhnykh', p. 17.
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42. N.A. Semashko, 'Sestra', *Meditsinskaya sestra*, nos 1–2, 1942, p. 3.
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46. There are interesting discussions of how and when gendered and non-gendered language is officially applied. For example, see Alison Rowley's discussion of *Boevye padrugi*, in 'Masha Grab your Gun: 1930s Images of Soviet Women and the Defense of their Country', *Minerva Journal of Women and War*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2008, p. 67.
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## Soviet Female Experts in the Polar Regions

*E. Kalemeneva and J. Lajus*

The presence of women in Russian science in the late imperial period has been well documented.<sup>1</sup> Although their number was small, their lives were exceptional. The gradual inclusion of women into higher education after 1917 allowed for growth in the number of women scientists under the Soviet regime, when equal rights to education were granted. By the end of the 1920s, almost one-quarter of researchers and graduate students in the Soviet Union were women.<sup>2</sup> There remained, however, predominantly male and female areas of work, with healthcare and education, for example, becoming overwhelmingly women's preserves. Many women scientists began their career as laboratory assistants, but they gradually started to take part in fieldwork observations, in biology and geology, and they conducted research at agricultural stations, sometimes in remote regions.<sup>3</sup>

In the Soviet Union, as in other countries, research conducted in an outdoor environment, as was the case in polar and marine studies, remained dominated by men.<sup>4</sup> Even the small boys pretending to be polar heroes in a popular Soviet cartoon told the girl who wanted to join them: 'we don't take girls to the North Pole'.<sup>5</sup> Despite this image, in reality there were many women whose lives were closely intertwined with the exploration of the polar regions. Some were the wives of polar explorers; others took on professional work and became leading experts in their fields.<sup>6</sup> The participation of women in science in general, and in this type of science in particular, became part of the narrative of Soviet heroism. One of the most popular Soviet journals, *Ogonek*, regularly published articles

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about women scientists alongside profiles of women pilots, sea captains and other professions that were unusual for women.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter examines two emblematic examples. Maria Vasil'evna Klenova (1898–1976) was a leading marine geologist who participated annually in expeditions in the Arctic Ocean between 1925 and 1935 and in 1959 became the first Soviet female scientist to work in Antarctica. Tat'yana Vladimirovna Rimskaya-Korsakova (1915–2006) devoted most of her professional life to the problems of urban planning in Arctic regions. Coming from very different families, they both became acknowledged experts in their fields; they coordinated the work of their colleagues, travelled extensively in harsh environmental climates and difficult social conditions, and both published extensively.

Klenova began her career as a scientist in the 1920s and Rimskaya-Korsakova entered the field of northern studies after 1945. They rose to the peak of their professions in the late 1950s and early 1960s during the Thaw. Although there are similarities in their biographies, their life stories reveal significant differences. Being united by a similar romantic passion for exploration in the severe and almost unknown Soviet North, they came to the field of northern research from different contexts and by diverse paths. Through comparison and juxtaposition of their professional and personal trajectories, this chapter analyses the factors that influenced their careers.

Maria Klenova's personal papers are held in the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow and include her memoirs and correspondence.<sup>8</sup> Tat'yana Rimskaya-Korsakova's papers are held in the Central State Archive of Scientific-Technical Documentation.<sup>9</sup> Their publications and those of their colleagues allow us to reconstruct their research and the context in which their careers developed, as do publications by and about them in journals and newspapers. Semi-structured interviews with Rimskaya-Korsakova's former colleagues and with her daughter provide an invaluable source for the analysis of the intersections of her professional and private life, and they show how she was influenced by her field of northern research. Coming from the family of one of the most well-known Russian composers played an important though contradictory role throughout her life. In later life, she began writing a 'Family Chronicle' based on the letters and diaries of her closest relatives, supplemented by her own memoirs, where she attempted to reconstruct year-by-year the important events of her life.

The analysis of the careers of Soviet women scientists allows us to address important questions relating to the scope and limitations of officially proclaimed Soviet gender equality, to examine how men articulated gender differences when they placed formal, and more often informal, restrictions on women in these professions, and to depict the strategies employed by women scientists to challenge such restrictions.

## BEGINNINGS: KLENOVA

Maria Klenova was born in Irkutsk to a family of a worker and a nurse. She was educated in Yekaterinburg before moving to Moscow during the First World War to serve in a hospital and to study medicine. During the Civil War she returned to Siberia and continued her medical education. By the early 1920s, however, she was back in Moscow studying mineralogy, a change of specialism that remains unexplained. In 1924 she graduated from Moscow State University and remained there to write her dissertation under the supervision of Yakov Samoilov, a close colleague of Vladimir Vernadsky. After Samoilov's death in 1925 she was supervised by Vernadsky. She specialised in marine geology, an innovative discipline which both Samoilov and Vernadsky were keen to develop. She completed her dissertation in 1925 and started to take part in marine expeditions to the Arctic Ocean. For both Samoilov and Vernadsky, to have women in their scientific team was not unusual. Even before the revolution, Vernadsky worked in the Radium Expedition with a female assistant, Yelizaveta Revutskaya (1866–1942). In general, geology attracted many women and it was a rapidly growing field, well supported by the state because of its practical applications.<sup>10</sup>

Samoilov was one of the founders of the Floating Maritime Research Institute (Plavmornin), established in 1921 by a special decree to study the Arctic Ocean. Its main goal was to organise research from aboard the well-known scientific vessel *Persei*. Klenova took part in Plavmornin expeditions for ten years from 1925, and she was not the only woman on board. Tat'yana Gorshkova (1896–1988), geologist and geochemist, was also a former student of Vernadsky. Vera Brotskaya (1903–1962) was a zoologist. Several women were on the staff of the Murman Biological Station, including Tat'yana Dement'eva (1904–1990) and Vera Tanasiichuk (1908–1990).

In 1929 the Murman Biological Station was merged with Plavmornin to form the State Oceanographic Institute (GOIN), which existed until 1933 when it was reorganised following the arrest of some of its staff.<sup>11</sup> In the 1960s, when Klenova drew up a list of the female scientists who had taken part in expeditions on *Persei*, she counted 12 women in addition to herself!<sup>12</sup> This was a unique situation for that time. It came about partly because of Ivan Mesyatsev (1885–1940), 'the Red Professor', director of Plavmornin/GOIN and devoted communist from pre-revolutionary times. As a firm believer in equal rights and abilities in the professions, he attracted female scientists to the institute, allowing them to take an active part in expeditions. Most of his pupils and assistants were women.<sup>13</sup> By the end of the 1920s, Klenova, as the oldest and most experienced of the institute's staff, became Mesyatsev's 'right hand' and official deputy. She regularly served as the actual director of the institute when Mesyatsev was unwell. In 1930 she became head of the newly established Laboratory on Marine Geology at GOIN and remained in post when the institute was reorganised as the All-Union Research Institute of Fisheries and

Oceanography. During the same period, she refocused her research on the southern seas, especially the Caspian Sea.

In 1929 Klenova for the first time headed up one of the expeditions to the Barents Sea, thus becoming the first-ever female scientist to lead a marine expedition.<sup>14</sup> She later recalled that her appointment as head of the expedition caused ‘difficult emotional stress’ to the crew, who did not want to sail under the leadership of a ‘*baba*’; there was a strong prejudice amongst sailors who feared that a woman on ship might cause a disaster. She noted that

on a small vessel without any comfort, with very meagre supplies – often even without warm clothes in polar conditions, when it entered a storm, became stuck on ice, remaining without fresh water or almost without food, female scientists shouldn’t only fulfil their scientific work but should also fight for their right to work equally with men. ... It requires much moderation, delicacy, moral purity and endurance in order to overcome all of these attitudes, but in the circumstances of continuous work, often day-and-night or with only one to two hours of break to sleep, all these attitudes fade away and a real marine friendship is established with the crew and among the members of the expedition.<sup>15</sup>

Another unique achievement was that she became one of the first women scientists to go to the sea bed in a heavy hydrostat (long before Jacques-Yves Cousteau’s innovations). She wanted to see with her own eyes how the geological tubes designed to take sediment samples worked.

### BEGINNINGS: RIMSKAYA-KORSAKOVA

Tat’yana Rimskaya-Korsakova was born in 1915 in Petrograd into a large and well-known family of Russian nobility. Her grandfather, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908), was one of the most influential Russian composers and a professor at St Petersburg Conservatory. He was unquestionably the most famous member of the family, but he was not the only professionally successful one. His older brother was an admiral, hydrographer and reformer of naval education in Russia. Numerous descendants, of both sexes, became acknowledged specialists in different fields of science and the arts: his oldest son, Mikhail (1873–1951), became a zoologist; Andrei was a musical reviewer; his daughter Sofia was an opera singer; Vladimir (1882–1970), Tat’yana’s father, was a lawyer and also a violist. Each had several children, who continued the tradition of pursuing a naval career or followed artistic or scientific paths that presupposed high expectations from other members of the family. As in many noble families, the children were expected to be fluent in a number of foreign languages and to play several musical instruments.

Belonging to a famous noble family with numerous connections to higher artistic communities had a tremendous effect on Tat’yana’s life. On the one hand, holding former noble status in the newly founded Soviet state led to all kinds of problems by the 1930s, from restrictions on educational and career



opportunities to the threat of losing one's job, one's freedom or even one's life. On the other hand, the somewhat apolitical status of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov allowed the Soviet Union to present a profile of him as one of the greatest Russian and world composers, and thus his descendants were able to benefit from their noble origins.

Immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution, restrictions were placed on the former nobility. In the 1920s, the Rimsky-Korsakov family was under threat of losing their family apartment during the expropriation of private accommodation and establishment of communal apartments. They were also in danger of being excluded from access to professional training. In order to access higher education, Tat'yana had to enter a 'workers' faculty' (*rabfak*), which aimed to prepare people, primarily from workers' families, for higher education.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in the 1920s, a *rabfak* also provided the opportunity for many former nobles to 'correct' their social origin and to be classified later as workers. After graduation from the *rabfak* and subsequently from the Architectural Technical College, Tat'yana successfully passed the entrance exams to the Architectural Faculty at the Leningrad Institute for the Engineers of Communal Construction. In her 'Family Chronicle', she mentions that her father wrote to the head of the People's Commissariat of Education, Anatolii Lunacharskii, asking for help with her education. The problem of keeping the family apartment had already been resolved. In order to keep their apartment, the family had to hand over to the state the property rights to the works of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

This large and disparate family had wide-ranging social connections. Tat'yana was aided by a number of respected and important people in the development of her professional career. In her 'Family Chronicle' she frequently mentions the many opportunities afforded to her as the result of personal recommendations by family friends or colleagues. For example, family connections meant that she was able to take part in the construction of the 'Big House' (the NKVD/KGB building) on Liteinyi Prospect in Leningrad in 1931–2 under the leadership of the best Soviet architects. Family connections also assured her of an internship in Sukhumi on the Georgian shore of the Black Sea, where she met her future husband, anthropologist Vsevolod Yakimov, whom she married in 1937.

During the siege of Leningrad, while some of her relatives were evacuated to Kazan and her husband was in the army, Tat'yana decided to stay in the city with her 1-year-old daughter in order to look after the family apartment. Like other people in Leningrad during the siege, they were short of food, suffered from the freezing weather and were faced with the deaths of their relatives and friends, but somehow they both survived.<sup>17</sup> She tried to combine motherhood with her work as an architect, but in 1946 she had to leave the institute. Unofficially, however, she continued to work on architectural projects secretly supplied to her by a former colleague.<sup>18</sup> Finally, in 1948 she was appointed to a post in the newly established Leningrad branch of the USSR Academy of Architecture (Lenfilial).

The Academy was not a practice-based planning organisation; its members saw themselves as researchers rather than as ordinary architects and engineers. They were expected to defend dissertations, participate in conferences and publish journal articles. During its existence, the Academy changed its name and focus, but until her retirement in 1971 Tat'yana's life was closely connected with one of the country's most influential architectural institutions. At the beginning of her career at the Academy, she worked on buildings in the officially sanctioned neoclassical (Stalinist) style, including the planning and construction of Stalin (now Moskovskii) Prospekt, a new thoroughfare in Leningrad.<sup>19</sup> In 1955 she defended her dissertation in architecture. The years that followed, however, brought radical changes to Soviet architectural practice and to Tat'yana's life.

### KLENOVA, THE FAR NORTH AND FAR SOUTH

One of the remarkable achievements of Klenova's career as a polar explorer was her participation in the expedition of 1932 on a small wooden ship, *Nikolai Knipovich*, led by the prominent polar oceanographer Nikolai Zubov (1885–1960), one of the founding fathers of the Plavmornin institute. Based on Zubov's detailed estimates of the favourable ice regime resulting from 'Arctic warming', the expedition was the first in history to circumnavigate Franz Josef Land.<sup>20</sup> This was their contribution to the programme of the Second International Polar Year (IPY 2, 1932–33). The IPY expeditions involved international collaboration and were dominated by men. In the picture of the participants at the first meeting of the Committee for the Preparation of the IPY 2 there are only three women: leader Dan Le Cour's secretary, M. Bruun de Neergaard; daughter of the President of the USSR Academy of Sciences, E. A. Tolmacheva-Karpinskaya, who also served as a translator; and Soviet climatologist Tat'yana Klado.<sup>21</sup> However, a number of women worked in the field, in marine expeditions and on the numerous polar stations established in the Soviet Arctic. The most well known was zoologist Nina Demme, who was appointed leader to establish a new station at the northern tip of the northern Novaya Zemlya island, where she spent two years living in extreme conditions.<sup>22</sup>

Sometimes women went to the Arctic as wives of polar explorers. This was the case with Galina Papanina, who spent several seasons working at the polar stations with her husband, Ivan Papanin, future famous leader of the 'North Pole-1' drifting ice station. Or they went to the Arctic as young specialists and met their future husbands there. Another future member of Papanin's Four, Yevgenii Fedorov, met his wife at the polar station on Franz Josef Land.<sup>23</sup> Many of Klenova's female colleagues married scientists alongside whom they worked in expeditions or at stations. Klenova's personal life, however, was not happy. She fell in love with geologist Leonid Pustovalov, also a pupil of Samoilov at Moscow University. He did not work in the Arctic, but went on long expeditions to other parts of the country. Although in official documentation Pustovalov is named as Klenova's husband, from their correspondence it is

evident that even if a marriage was registered they did not live together. They corresponded throughout their lives, and this unique correspondence spanning half a century is available in the archives.<sup>24</sup>

For Klenova, her intellectual and personal ties to Pustovalov, a leading Soviet geologist by the 1950s, were crucially important. From the late 1940s to the beginning of the 1950s she worked under his leadership at the Caspian Sea on oil geology. Their research formed the basis for the development of the very first Soviet marine oil extraction site, Bakinskies Kamni. In her letters of this period she often addressed him as 'my dear friend', or more ironically as 'my dear friend and boss', but sometimes the letters were very personal: 'My dear sunshine, I so much ask you to write to me about yourself not about this damned expedition, and not to send these bossy telegrams all the time!'<sup>25</sup>

Despite the success of their work on the Caspian Sea, Klenova missed working in the Arctic, especially the long marine expeditions that she loved most of all. The situation began to change from the mid-1950s following the death of Stalin, when work in the Arctic became less secret than it had been at the end of the 1930s with its predominantly military focus.<sup>26</sup> There were now also very few geologists. Many, including former director of the All-Union Arctic Research Institute Rudolf Samoilovich (1881–1939), were repressed in the late 1930s. Another wave of repressions among geologists took place in the late 1940s in connection with pressures on prospecting for uranium for the development of the nuclear industry.<sup>27</sup> Klenova makes no mention of the repressions in her letters or memoirs. In his diaries, Vernadsky refers to his meeting with Klenova in the late 1930s, when she talked to him about accusations of 'wrecking' amongst high-level administrators of the Northern Sea Route, which she seemed to believe.<sup>28</sup>

In 1954, Klenova again made an important contribution to Arctic management. She was the first woman to conduct research on a drifting ice polar station. She spent five days at 'North Pole-4' collecting geological samples from the bottom of the Arctic Ocean.<sup>29</sup> That same year Klenova attempted to establish an institute for marine geology, with herself as its head. She very much wanted to establish marine geology as a discipline and had already published her main textbook on this topic in 1948, mostly written before the war.<sup>30</sup> This new interdisciplinary field sat on the borders between geology and oceanography. She even sent a letter to the head of the Soviet government, Georgy Malenkov, but without success.<sup>31</sup> One of the reasons for her failure (as she indicated in her letter to Pustovalov) was her gender.<sup>32</sup> Instead of becoming the basis for an entirely new institute, the research group she led was transferred from the Institute of Geology to the Institute of Oceanology at the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1955. She continued to work at this institute until the end of her life, but never held a post above head of a research group or laboratory.

Nevertheless, the peak of Maria Klenova's scientific career took place in the late 1950s and was connected with the International Geophysical Year (IGY, 1957–58), when Soviet scientists began research in Antarctica. Klenova's overwhelming ambition was to study Southern Ocean sediments in order to make

comparisons with the Arctic. She had already been thinking about this when she worked in the Arctic before the war. She remembered her encounter with American geologist Laurence ('Larry') McKinley Gould (1896–1995), who went to the Soviet Union in 1937 for an International Geological Congress and took part in a post-congress excursion to Novaya Zemlya in which Klenova also participated. He talked about his experience in Antarctica and in addressing Klenova's question, 'have you had any women in your Antarctic expeditions?', he replied, 'Antarctica awaits you!'<sup>33</sup> In the late 1940s, Klenova made several unsuccessful attempts to be allowed on board one of the Soviet whaling vessels that started to hunt in Antarctic waters. According to her memoirs, she received permission to conduct research from on board one of these ships several times, but the ships' captains sabotaged these plans and would not allow her to join the whaling expeditions.<sup>34</sup>

When preparations for the first Soviet Antarctic expedition began, Klenova immediately sent her geological research proposal to the organisers. Yet whilst it was comparatively straightforward to put forward her plans, she faced difficulties in having them accepted. At her request to become a member of the expedition, she was told that the decision had been made not to take women to Antarctica. She asked to see the relevant documentation relating to the decision but received nothing, only later realising that it was informal. Several officials supported Klenova, amongst them Ivan Papanin, Head of the Department of Marine Expeditions of the Academy of Sciences, the institution that along with the Administration of the Northern Sea Route was responsible for the organisation of the expedition. Yet even his support was not sufficient when the head of the expedition, Mikhail Somov (1908–1973), and the Director of the Institute of Oceanology, Vladimir Kort (1913–1994), opposed the idea. Their stated opposition was based on the fact that there were no separate cabins on ships for women researchers. The women who cleaned or served in the kitchen were treated as part of the crew and this regulation did not affect them.

Klenova devoted 20 pages of her memoirs to this story, beginning with the following:

If I'd a gift for artistic writing, it would be a novel about the life of scientists, showing all the depths and hideousness of the vestiges of capitalism in the consciousness of representatives of the upper levels of the Soviet intelligentsia.<sup>35</sup>

According to her memoirs, Somov openly told her that they did not want to have women in the expedition because this would disturb their male community, where they wanted to walk around in their underwear, have 'male conversations' and drink.

Is that really a good enough reason – male conversations? Would Soviet science be severely damaged if there was one fewer stupid and vulgar anecdote? ... I suppose that ... in the 38 years since the October Revolution, especially articulated by a Hero of the Soviet Union, such a question shouldn't be asked ...<sup>36</sup>

She told him that she was at her best during expeditions because she so loved her work and the sea.

I'm sure that the presence of one woman who knows how to behave on a ship would bring nothing but benefit. ... it's always possible to establish friendly relationships when nobody looks on a female scientist as 'a woman'. I'm not a woman; I'm a professor, I'm 56 years old!

She continued:

Didn't he understand, Somov, with all his vulgar reasoning about women aboard ship, that he insulted not me, but said much more about his own comrades and himself, that his anxiety about me as an unwelcome eyewitness to some behaviour that in male company would remain unremarked, absolutely should not coexist with Soviet style. There'll be a Party organisation on the ship, and both Somov and Kort are members of the Party; there'll be a deputy for political mentoring; and, finally, the large Soviet collective of the crew ...<sup>37</sup>

We cannot fully judge now whether Somov was really serious or just joking because he did not want to take responsibility for an older woman on a ship going in an unknown direction under harsh conditions. What is more interesting is how Klenova rationalised the situation and how easily she was willing to deny her gender in order to gain permission to conduct the research she dreamt of.

After the failure of many applications and conversations made it evident that she could not win this struggle, Klenova decided to approach one of the most high-ranking Soviet officials, Anastas Mikoyan. She had known Mikoyan personally since the 1930s when he helped her to save the Laboratory on Marine Geology when it was transferred to the Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography under the People's Commissariat of Supply (Narkomsnab), which he led. Klenova emphasised that Mikoyan helped her later and she always considered him 'a patron'. The phone conversation with Mikoyan immediately resolved the problem and Klenova finally received permission to take part in the expedition. By this time the *Ob'* had already left Kaliningrad port, so she travelled on the *Lena*. In addition to her work on this ship, Klenova also managed to conduct some research in the area where the first Soviet Antarctic station *Mirnyi* was under construction.

After becoming one of the first Soviet woman scientists to work in Antarctica, Klenova gained international renown. She addressed women in socialist countries by radio on International Women's Day and articles about her were published in many countries. Yet what was most important for her was being able to take part in international congresses and new marine expeditions. She was part of a group of Soviet scientists, amongst whom there were several women, who took part in the First International Oceanographic Congress in New York in 1959, sailing on board the new research vessel *Mikhail Lomonosov*.

'Father of Marine Geology' Francis Shepard has praised the pioneering work done by Klenova, mentioning especially her 'valuable bathymetric maps, particularly those around Antarctica'.<sup>38</sup> A former colleague and biographer recalled how Shepard gained the appellation 'Father': Shepard met 'the venerable Madame Klenova' at the International Geological Congress in Mexico City in 1956, 'when the cold war had first thawed sufficiently for Soviet scientists to attend'. Greeting him, Klenova remarked warmly, 'You're the father of marine geology, and I'm the mother of marine geology'.<sup>39</sup> In textbooks on marine geology their names are usually mentioned together: whenever Shepard's seminal book *Submarine Geology* is cited, it is often noted that in the same year, 1948, Klenova's *Geology of the Sea* was also published.<sup>40</sup>

### RIMSKAYA-KORSAKOVA'S PROFESSIONAL CAREER

Tat'yana Rimskaya-Korsakova came to northern research rather accidentally. The Thaw marked substantial shifts in almost all areas of Soviet life, including architecture and construction. Khrushchev's housing reform called for the industrialisation of mass construction and a rejection of 'excessive decorations' on facades. A 1955 decree 'On the Liquidation of Excesses in Projects and Construction' led to a total reorganisation of Soviet building practice. After this, every Soviet architect had to research standardised construction using concrete blocks. In addition to numerous criticisms of former building practice, one of the symbolic changes that marked this new period in Soviet building practice was the renaming of the USSR Academy of Architecture to the USSR Academy of *Construction* and Architecture, which was intended to highlight the predominance of practical approaches to mass construction over issues of design.

Simultaneously, the need for mass housing in the 1950s and the idea of standardisation of building practices led to further specialisation in different climatic zones. The northern territories were the only region for which the State Committee for Construction (Gosstroï) decided to create special 'Rules and norms of planning and construction'.<sup>41</sup> The Leningrad branch of the Academy of Construction and Architecture now had to include this research topic in its thematic plans. For this research a special Department for Urban Planning in the North was established as part of Lenfilial.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Lenfilial became the main Soviet architectural institute for research into the principles of construction in the Far North.<sup>43</sup> The possibility of conducting research in a new, exotic and almost unexplored field, promising adventurous trips and exciting opportunities, encouraged a number of mostly young members of the institute, including Tat'yana, to move into the newly established department.

The reason behind the increased demand for research in new approaches to construction in the North was the result of another crucial reform of the Thaw. The 1950s marked a substantial shift in the development of the Soviet North. From the early 1930s, numerous industrial sites and settlements in the Far North had been established as part of the Gulag network. The reform and closure of the labour camp system from the late 1950s led to serious changes in

the principles of Arctic development. Without the use of prison labour, a number of new towns were now established close to newly discovered deposits of oil, gas, diamonds and other valuable resources. Thus, the government and research institutions had to find new ways to construct and develop permanent settlements in the Arctic and sub-Arctic, as well as to encourage people to move to northern industrial sites, which were to be developed as 'normal Soviet cities'.

The location in Leningrad of the main institution for research into new methods of urban planning in the Far North had a further impact on the development of the field. Along with Tat'yana Rimskaya-Korsakova, many other members of the department had grown up and received their education in the former imperial capital. Thus, as architects, they had a particular notion of 'necessary urban conditions' as well as ambitions to create new approaches in their field. At the same time, none of them had any prior experience of travel to the Arctic. Such a geographical and intellectual central position led them to form an initial perception of the Far North region as an exceptionally exotic place. This idea was also reinforced by the lack of conceptual research in that field. Thus, the members of the new department began their work by evaluating previous building practices in the North, investigating local natural conditions and writing numerous analytical reviews of the contemporary development of northern architecture in other countries. From 1956, the team organised many expeditions to northern settlements to explore local conditions, to analyse the climatic and geographic specificity for construction and to research local building resources. Groups of architects and engineers spent several weeks in different towns observing building practice, talking with officials and local inhabitants.

Tat'yana participated in these trips to northern towns from the very beginning, often travelling several times a year, researching local conditions for construction work, collaborating with other specialists and inhabitants, developing experimental building projects and planning schemes for those settlements. Her relatives considered the trips to Norilsk and Vorkuta as heroic actions. Her letters to her father demonstrate her fascination with a harsh environment previously totally unknown to her:

Recently the sun was shining almost like in the song of Bayan from 'Ruslan', through fog and without beams. The landscape near the local river with high banks is also pretty. In fog, near and far, huge hills of dump from the mines rise up side by side with little houses, which are covered by snow, sometimes almost to the roof with the only access to the door made by digging through it.<sup>44</sup>

Her first experience of the Far North had a significant influence on her new understanding of both her professional mission and her emotional descriptions of the living conditions:



Of course, the local population living in unspecialised accommodation has to endure the cold, which comes in via numerous chinks in the floor and the walls. Only after returning to a warm and well-protected apartment can one feel protected from the terrible cold outside ...<sup>45</sup>

The way in which towns had been constructed in sub-Arctic regions during the Gulag period was shocking for the young architects from Leningrad. A few larger northern cities had a properly planned urban structure roughly imitating central cities, but the other small industrial towns were constructed without any attention to the impact of nature on the settlements. By the 1960s, the vast majority of the nearly 500 industrial settlements in the Soviet North were very small towns for industrial workers near mineral deposits and without sewage and water supply systems.<sup>46</sup> These settlements were often composed of wooden one- or two-storey houses, and during the winter they were sometimes completely covered by snow.<sup>47</sup> Although such conditions in industrial towns were widespread in the Soviet Union in that period, the use of such building methods in the Arctic made living conditions in these settlements dangerous.<sup>48</sup>

Tat'yana and her colleagues began to develop proposals for how to improve living conditions in northern towns. Every official report, popular article or public speech began with the description of numerous faults in previous building and planning practice.<sup>49</sup> Tat'yana was one of the first people in the Soviet Union clearly to formulate the problem and the necessity to create 'a special microclimate' based on new planning schemes and modern materials. In her report on 'The Specificity of Planning and Construction of Living Sites in Conditions of Northern Climate', she wrote:

the unpleasant living conditions in such a harsh climate create the need for specialist approaches in the organisation of an entire complex with accommodation and communal and cultural services. ... The population should be given fully well-developed apartments, completely designed for the local environment.<sup>50</sup>

The feminisation of the Soviet architectural and engineering professions was more or less a post-war trend, yet this process soon acquired great significance. In the late Soviet period, female architects and engineers became popular heroines in a number of well-known films, including *Lyubit' cheloveka* (*To Love Someone*) (1970; dir. Sergei Gerasimov) and *Samaya obayatel'naya i privlekatel'naya* (*The Most Charming and Attractive*) (1985; dir. Gera'd Bezhanov), where professional communities were represented as almost equally male and female.

The example of the Department of Urban Planning in the North is a similar situation, where the proportion of women on staff reached almost 50%. In the 1960s, Tat'yana became head of the Department of Urban Planning in the North. Due to the hierarchical organisation of Soviet science, as head of the Department for many years she was responsible for the presentation of the results of their numerous collective research projects at conferences and official



scientific meetings, for writing reports and books, and for promoting new principles in construction and urban planning in northern towns.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, she always tried to retain some distance from Soviet ideology. In her memoirs, she points to the decline of a former friendly relationship with a colleague when the latter's points of view became 'too much Soviet' (*slishkom osovetilis'*), and she admired the atmosphere in Tallinn where 'people could preserve the notion of politeness while in our country there was a propensity towards rudeness, especially in the command levels'.

Rimskaya-Korsakova remained one of the most influential members at the institute. References to her as a 'Northern Lioness' and as a 'highly attractive and pleasant woman' illustrate the respectful and admiring opinions of other architects as well as a specific emphasis on gender. She was not the only woman involved with northern architecture in the country, but she remains the most emblematic and most visible. Her large home was the site of regular meetings with colleagues and friends, and her influential position allowed her to support promising local specialists. She actively worked on issues of northern urban planning until her retirement. After that, she devoted the last years of her life to the preservation of the memory of her extensive family, initiating the organisation of the museum dedicated to her grandfather and publishing several books about his life.

## CONCLUSION

The comparison of two Soviet women scientists' biographies reveals similarities in how they saw their mission and provides material for understanding their differences in tracing the diverse paths to successful careers possible in the Soviet Union. Klenova's example is rather more straightforward for Soviet society than is Rimskaya-Korsakova's. Klenova came from an ordinary family but via her outstanding university supervisors she achieved significant results in science. She devoted her entire life to research at the expense of motherhood and a family. Her loyalty to Soviet ideology and membership of the Communist Party allowed her to travel abroad and to meet foreign specialists. Thus, she became an internationally renowned scientist and one of the founders of the discipline of marine geology. Yet even this fame was not sufficient for her to fulfil her dream of organising and leading a research institute. Whilst it was possible for women scientists to occupy leading positions in various centres and departments, the promotion of women into higher-level scientific administration was restricted, even for those who were loyal and well known.

Rimskaya-Korsakova came from a noble family and mostly adjusted to, but never fully supported, the Soviet regime. She, similarly, was not able to reach higher-level posts. She was, however, well suited to middle-level leadership, heading a department with 15–20 colleagues in Leningrad (though this may have been more difficult to achieve in Moscow). Her noble origins and lively character made her one of the most influential and acknowledged architects amongst her—mostly male—professional colleagues. Rimskaya-Korsakova's

biography demonstrates that it was possible for a Soviet female professional to live in harmony with her gender: family life, motherhood and professional success could all be combined.

When a woman like Maria Klenova wanted to do something more unusual—to participate in the expedition to the Antarctic or to found and lead an institute—gender became an obstacle, and the only way for her to succeed was to deny her gender, to stress that it did not matter, to prove that one could survive in hard conditions and in a male collective without the need for special consideration. It is interesting to note that the same negation of gender was required both to take part in a difficult expedition and to be director of the institute. Klenova did not succeed in becoming a director, but if she had, she might have been very much like the character from the iconic Soviet film *Sluzhebnyi roman* (*Office Romance*) (1977; dir. Eldar Ryazanov): the director of a statistical bureau, Lyudmila Prokofievna Kalugina, nicknamed ‘our frump’ by her subordinates, denies her gender and focuses solely on her professional tasks.

The experiences of both of our heroines working in the North were very important; their careers made their lives different from those of ordinary Soviet women. Fieldwork occupied different places in their lives. For Klenova, working every day at sea in harsh conditions was at the heart of her profession and it fully determined her life. For Rimskaia-Korsakova, who was very much embedded into the life of her own extended family, these trips to the North, whilst very important professionally, were only episodes that helped her to understand better the environment she wanted to modernise through her architectural work; this bolstered her in her determination to retain some distance from the socialist system of values both in her private life and in her professional activities.

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## Women and Girls in the Post-Stalin Komsomol

*Robert Hornsby*

During the period between the death of Stalin in 1953 and the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, around half of all young people aged between 14 and 28 years passed through the ranks of the Komsomol (Communist Youth League). Across the Soviet Union as a whole, over half of all Komsomol members during the years in question were female. While this was undoubtedly an organisation that showed very limited political agency, since it always remained in thrall to the dictates of the Communist Party, Komsomol membership was an experience—and often a formative experience at that—shared by tens of millions of girls and young women. One can certainly debate the extent to which the Komsomol fulfilled its basic task of raising successive generations to be upstanding citizens and dedicated Marxist-Leninists, but this was nonetheless a key point at which members most closely interacted with, and participated in, the workings of the Soviet system, whether or not they did so with relish.

It has long been established in the secondary literature that the Khrushchev years in particular were a time in which female social and political activism received renewed encouragement and prominence.<sup>1</sup> The repeal of Stalin-era legislation curtailing abortion rights and reducing absent fathers' child maintenance obligations were naturally matters which displayed changing state attitudes toward at least some issues affecting young women. Similarly, the expanded production of domestic labour-saving devices and greater attentiveness to female consumer desires became notable features of daily life.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, for all that young women constituted a slight majority of the Komsomol's membership roll—and were often among its most dedicated

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activists—this was an organisation that tended not to think about specific gender matters any more by the post-Stalin years.<sup>3</sup>

While its Central Committee had specialised departments for work with rural youth, student youth, school-age youth and all manner of other youth constituencies within society, there was no permanent body focused solely or primarily on female affairs within the Komsomol structure, and there were few directives or initiatives explicitly aimed at matters relating to either gender in particular (though myriad actions relating to military conscription and the like were in practice ‘for the boys’). While it was never really occupied with advocating specifically ‘female’ causes on behalf of its members, the Komsomol nonetheless did serve as the prime route for both girls and boys (or men and women) alike to ‘get on’ in the Soviet system: to enter university and receive a good stipend, participate in all manner of recreational activities, build a career and maybe even join the Communist Party.

This chapter focuses on the extent to which female members ‘got on’ within the Komsomol. It firstly addresses the theme of women as senior Komsomol post holders, from the secretaries of district-level organisations through to membership of the Central Committee in Moscow, and then at the grassroots level. As the following pages demonstrate, there were aspects of Komsomol work that can justifiably be commended in these contexts, while others reflected a heavily male-centric system that showed very limited capacity for making real headway on the much-vaunted theme of gender equality.

### WOMEN IN THE KOMSOMOL ELITE

As with the ruling Communist Party to which it was subordinate, officially the highest organ of the Komsomol was its congress, which met every four years to review recent work, set future plans and elect various bodies (most notably a Central Committee) to govern youth work between congresses. These congresses were gala affairs that drew huge coverage in the press and on television, and were often attended by members of the top Communist Party leadership and the major stars of the Soviet cultural and sporting firmament.<sup>4</sup> Only three to four thousand delegates were elected from tens of millions of members. As such, this was unmistakably a rarefied political environment and participation was a substantial honour to have bestowed: those present could certainly count themselves among the country’s youth political elite. This, in turn, at least raised the possibility that significant opportunities for even more prestigious engagements in one’s professional and political life could well be on the horizon.

While they fell short of their standing at more than half of all Komsomol members, female delegates were elected to congress in far greater numbers than one could expect to find either in the ruling Communist Party or in most Western political organisations of the time.<sup>5</sup> At the first four post-Stalin Komsomol congresses, in 1954, 1958, 1962 and 1966, over 40% of all delegates were women. For the time, this was clearly impressive. In this context it is worth noting that, as they made initial plans for the holding of their XII

congress (1954), the Komsomol Central Committee in Moscow decided that 38% of delegates (1470 in total) should be women.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in the planning stages of a 1953 congress of the Belorussian republic branch of the Komsomol, word came from the Central Committee in Moscow that the proportion of female delegates was to be 'not less than 40%'.<sup>7</sup> A quota of around 40% seems to have remained in place for such events throughout the post-Stalin years.<sup>8</sup> By the XVIII congress in 1978 that quota had climbed to 45%.<sup>9</sup> That these were fundamentally 'positive' minimum quotas, rather than 'negative' upper limits, was evidenced by the fact that they were repeatedly exceeded in practice. Once plans for the aforementioned XII congress were finalised, for example, it transpired that the decreed quota of 38% had been comfortably surpassed, as 43% of elected attendees were female.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the rate of female participation at congress was a theme that the Komsomol Central Committee kept a close eye upon. When regional Komsomol committees in Stalinskaya oblast (Eastern Ukraine) and Primorskii krai (Far Eastern Russia) sent heavily male-dominated delegations to one congress—the former sent only four women in a party of 21, and the latter three women in a delegation of 15—both were publicly rebuked by the Central Committee and held up to the rest as an example of poor practice.<sup>11</sup> The message from the Central Committee, then, was pretty clear on this issue. There is little one can say with any real assurance about what female participation at congress would have looked like without such explicit interventions from the centre, though at least some of the evidence laid out below suggests that in many regions male dominance would have been far more overt than it already was were it not for the need to placate Moscow's concerns on this point.

With congress being convened only once every four years, though, it was in practice the Komsomol's Central Committee, and particularly the Central Committee bureau, that ran affairs on a day-to-day basis. Here, away from the ceremonial glitz of the congress, the picture of female participation in the country's youth elite began to look somewhat flimsier. The 1958 Komsomol congress, for example, elected a Central Committee of 121 full members: of these, only 26 were women.<sup>12</sup> Out of 215 people voted into all elected Komsomol posts at that congress, only 58 were women.<sup>13</sup> At the XIV congress, 255 posts were up for election in total, 70 of which went to women.<sup>14</sup> Thus, while girls and women made up around 40% of delegates, they were usually less than 30% of those elected to leading posts.

Progress on bringing women into the Central Committee, then, was steady rather than spectacular, but the very highest ranks were hardest of all to reach. Women were always heavily outnumbered within the Komsomol Central Committee's bureau, which constituted the inner elite of the large Central Committee. Nonetheless, a comparison with the Communist Party elite is again stark. Yekaterina Furtseva remained the sole woman to penetrate the highest ranks of the party leadership (the Presidium and later the Politburo) in the years between Stalin's death and the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev.<sup>15</sup> Over a dozen women did so in the Komsomol during the same time period and, in fact, there



was always at least one female bureau member throughout the three decades in question.<sup>16</sup> Unlike Furtseva (who managed only four years at the very top) quite a few of those women who did rise to the very highest level of the Komsomol actually stayed there for a considerable number of years.

The likes of Lyubov' Balyasnaya (1958–1964), Marina Zhuravleva (1959–1968), Tamara Kutsenko (1966–1972), Valentina Fedotova (1956–1958) and Zoya Novozhilova (1972–1981) were all members of the Central Committee bureau for well over half a decade during the period.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Boris Pastukhov has recently stated that when his own time as Komsomol first secretary came to an end in 1982 he recommended Lyudmila Shvetsova (another long-serving bureau member) as his replacement in the top job, though Yuri Andropov (in his short-lived role as head of the Communist Party) decided to appoint Viktor Mishin instead.<sup>18</sup> All of these successful Komsomol women duly went on to take up significant posts in and around either the Communist Party Central Committee, government ministries or the USSR Supreme Soviet. A successful Komsomol career could clearly be an effective springboard for young women to advance within the Soviet system. Indeed, few women rose to the top without having a Komsomol background. Most notable since the Soviet collapse has been Valentina Matvienko, a former Komsomol Central Committee bureau member and head of the Leningrad regional Komsomol organisation in the early 1980s, who has for some years now been Russia's highest-profile female political figure.<sup>19</sup>

These elections to high Komsomol posts, of course, were not what one might call free and fair. Candidates were nominated and approved from on high, then the voting process delivered the preordained results. As such, the *nomenklatura* system of appointing cadres was on the whole no friend of aspiring Komsomol women, even if it did deliver a continual (albeit small) female presence at the top. Nonetheless, the question of why female representation among Komsomol professionals was so much better than that in the party still stands. A cynic might well speculate that there were more opportunities for women in the upper reaches of the Komsomol primarily because these posts did not carry the power or responsibility of leading party work. Another explanation might be that the high proportion of female Komsomol membership at the grassroots level firstly created a less 'male political culture' there and showed just how many highly competent women there were within the organisation. One's suspicions are largely drawn toward the former, though the appointment system was sufficiently opaque that little can be said with absolute certainty.

Another question which naturally arises from this information is why females' prospects for elevation to the Komsomol elite were not in accordance with their numerical position at congress and in the organisation as a whole. The overarching point, of course, was that the Soviet system was not nearly so advanced on matters of gender equality as regime pronouncements liked to claim. Showcase events such as the congresses saw some expectation that propaganda on equality be manifested for all to see, whether or not that represented reality

on the ground. However, even the very top officials had to admit that male chauvinism was a problem that stubbornly persisted, both in a domestic setting and within ruling structures. For example, in a speech which called on members to demand that the Central Committee there ensure a greater female presence in the republic's Komsomol elite, Gaidar Aliev noted that in Azerbaijan there was a (mistaken) belief among officials that women simply did not have the capacity for such important work.<sup>20</sup> As some of the details below demonstrate, while Komsomol and party bosses never really showed sufficient determination to make real headway on matters of gender equality, it must also be remembered that they faced some deeply ingrained prejudices and cultural practices that militated against potential achievements on this front.

Whether the call from Aliev was a statement of heartfelt conviction or just another formulaic propaganda gesture is hard to say unequivocally. Nonetheless, as presiding head of the Communist Party in Azerbaijan he could comfortably have driven forward the change he called for, but there is no real evidence that he ever did so. This was by no means unique to Azerbaijan. Indeed, the Communist Party everywhere was very much a part of the problem—not only in the fact that it exerted a decisive influence over who was selected for significant Komsomol posts, but also because of its own admission practices. To gain access to the top ranks of the Komsomol, one increasingly had to be a Communist Party member (thus proving one's political suitability for leadership over the new generation), but this was in itself a considerable barrier for women, since the party consistently accepted far more male members than female.<sup>21</sup>

It was also of crucial significance that the Soviet understanding on establishing 'equality of the sexes' was rooted in an overly simplistic notion of equality. Opportunities certainly did exist for women to move up the ranks, but the playing field was never level. Congress was an event that lasted only a few days—short enough that the most troublesome dynamics of this Soviet 'equality' did not have time to reveal themselves fully. The daily life of a full-time Komsomol worker was much harder to manage. Komsomol secretaries at district, town and regional levels often worked extremely long and unsociable hours—14 hours or more each day for six days per week was not uncommon, according to a review conducted in Latvia.<sup>22</sup> That schedule tended to become more punishing the higher up the ladder one climbed, to the point that regional secretaries and many Central Committee members were all but permanently on duty. The job also entailed lengthy work trips away from one's home area as well as spells of training and study at regional, republican or all-union Komsomol schools that could last from a few days to many months. The continuing 'double burden' of domestic work only served to exacerbate the situation.

All this placed often unmanageable demands on female Komsomol workers, most of whom fell into the mid-20s to early-30s age bracket in which family life typically began. Svetlana Pasyukova, for example, recalled at the very start of her career as a Komsomol worker being put forward for a job as a district second secretary away from her home area, a post that would leave little time at all to

see her husband and 5-year-old daughter. Much as Pasyukova found the work rewarding, she also wrote that it kept her busy almost every hour and every minute of every day.<sup>23</sup> More than a few simply had to walk away from promising Komsomol careers because such work could not be combined with anything like a normal family life.<sup>24</sup> Even for those women who fully imbibed communist ideals and loved their Komsomol work, a career in politics was a hard road to take, regardless of the fact that the doors were officially open to them. As Jerry Hough pointed out in the late 1970s, 'some Soviet women look on political participation less as a privilege and an opportunity than as an onerous obligation'.<sup>25</sup>

Looking at the overall picture of female workers in the Komsomol, one soon notices the pyramid-like structure that often pertained in other professions with a major female presence, whereby the number of women post holders diminished closer to the top and expanded closer to the grassroots level. A 1963 report on the state of Komsomol cadres policy expressed serious concern at the low female presence among first and second secretaries of RSFSR regional-level organisations, though they also noted that the figure had climbed from only 8.3% of secretaries in 1953 up to 14% by the time of the XIV congress a decade later.<sup>26</sup> The same picture was also true in many of the non-Russian republics (whose national Komsomol organisations carried roughly equal standing to that of the regional Russian bodies). When the Moldovan Komsomol Central Committee came under fire from Moscow in 1961, one of the more prominent grounds for criticism was its failure to promote female members to responsible roles—a problem highlighted by the fact that there were only four women among 37 town and district first secretaries in the republic.<sup>27</sup> These kinds of figures were especially significant since it was overwhelmingly from this level of the Komsomol that Central Committee members were drawn. Thus, there were always fewer female candidates for the highest posts.<sup>28</sup>

As noted above, female involvement did increase further down the ladder, and there was also some steady improvement with the passing years. Details from Karelia help to give some substance to the above picture. By 1968 there were 62 women out of a total of 100 professional Komsomol workers there. Of the 16 town and district first secretaries in the region there were five women; of the 16 second secretaries there were seven women. Such raw data, though, tell only part of the story. A closer examination reveals very clear gendering of the Komsomol roles that women generally filled. All 16 of Karelia's Komsomol secretaries in charge of school matters, and all 16 secretaries in charge of financial matters, were women.<sup>29</sup> This was not far removed from the basic patterns of female professionals' employment in the late Soviet period, with women often heavily predominant as teachers and economists in particular.<sup>30</sup> Work with children was always a feminised area, despite fears in some quarters that this might threaten to raise generations of effeminate young men.<sup>31</sup> Of the five long-standing female members of the Komsomol Central Committee bureau named earlier in this chapter, all were in charge of work with Young Pioneers or school children at some point during their tenure.<sup>32</sup> It seems,

though, that conceptions of 'women's work' were by no means restricted to chauvinist male attitudes, but were also common currency among many Soviet women.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the kinds of feminist movements that sprang up in many Western countries during the 1960s and 1970s did not have any real parallel among young women in the Soviet Union.

Entrenched notions of what constituted 'women's work', however, did not mean that such tasks were necessarily unchallenging or without real social and political substance. Patronage over Young Pioneers (children aged 10–14 years) in particular was consistently declared a vital aspect of the Komsomol's work. It was also a duty that still tends to be recalled with some considerable fondness by those involved.<sup>34</sup> This was by no means just 'babysitting', but often entailed organising children's recreational events, such as sporting contests, study groups, youth theatres and summer camps, as well as supervising volunteer policing work and labour tasks, such as collecting scrap metal and waste paper. Other aspects of work regarding young children clearly had real significance at times. In 1959, for example, Lyubov' Balyasnaya headed up a major Komsomol-led investigation into the state of the country's children's homes which uncovered all manner of failings, ranging from highly unsanitary and unsafe living conditions and food intended for children being diverted for private profit, through to staff violence toward children and even the rape of young girls.<sup>35</sup> The numerous sackings, party reprimands and expulsions which followed for officials who had turned a blind eye to all this demonstrated that there was nothing 'token' about such work.

### WOMEN AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

It was at the level of the primary organisation—the basic Komsomol unit to which members belonged—that female members were most likely to progress to the post of secretary. By 1970 the Georgian Komsomol boasted to Moscow that 50% of all primary organisation secretaries in the republic were female, and most of them were of native (that is, Georgian) nationality.<sup>36</sup> In many other places the proportion of female secretaries rose to well above half. Data for 1975 from Sverdlovsk, for example, showed that the region had 4612 primary organisations, of which an impressive 3073 were headed by women.<sup>37</sup> Much of the progress toward these kinds of figures took place during the 1960s, not just under the apparent 'liberalising era' of Nikita Khrushchev but also during that of his rather less progressive successor, Leonid Brezhnev.

For the Soviet Union as a whole the proportion of primary organisations headed by women rose from 49.5% in 1962 to 55.9% by 1969. More interesting patterns were also evident below this overall shift. Two-thirds of the 15 union republics had less than 50% female primary organisation secretaries in 1962, but almost two-thirds had over 50% by 1969. In the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, females represented around 65% of all primary organisation secretaries, while Belarus and Russia were both very close to the 60% mark by 1969.<sup>38</sup> Some parts of the Soviet Union, however, continued to buck the trend

in a big way: typically, this included the union republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Even by 1969, women still constituted only 25.8% of primary organisation secretaries in Tajikistan, and less than 40% in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Uzbekistan.

The predominance of female heads of primary organisations, though, was not spread at all evenly across the different sites in which Komsomol branches existed (such as in factories, on collective farms, in military units or university faculties). Most of all, this female preponderance was rooted in the country's schools (where teachers often doubled up as Komsomol secretaries), and the heavy feminisation of the Soviet teaching profession. Returning to the above matter of the 3073 female secretaries in the Sverdlovsk region, this becomes especially evident. Out of 671 Komsomol organisations in middle schools, there were 534 female Komsomol secretaries; from 455 seven-year schools there were 369 female Komsomol leaders; and from 587 *uchitel'skie* schools there were 521 female Komsomol secretaries.<sup>39</sup> When one looks to Komsomol primary organisations located in industrial workplaces, transport depots and the like, women secretaries did still feature in the data, but they were usually in the minority there.

While the Komsomol primary organisation was certainly no bastion of feminism—anything but the most staid girls' fashions were at times liable for censure, and actions such as having an abortion or giving birth outside of wedlock were still likely to be branded 'amoral behaviour' by officials—it was also not a site where serious male chauvinism always went unchallenged.<sup>40</sup> An investigation into discontent among students at one Urals university, for example, demanded that the Komsomol branch there do more to tackle manifestations of drunkenness, hooliganism, theft and 'insufficient respect for women'.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, records from Moscow State University (MGU) show that numerous male students were reprimanded or thrown out of the Komsomol and thereafter expelled from the university for showing negligent or abusive attitudes towards their wives and (sometimes) children.<sup>42</sup> Such expectations of 'proper' behaviour also applied to the organisation's officials. Among the most prominent charges aimed at one dismissed district first secretary in Estonia, for example, were that he had enjoyed 'intimate links with a whole series of women whom he had promised to marry' and had been rude and even physically abusive in breaking up with one recent partner.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, while the Komsomol clearly existed within a male-centred framework, this was not to say that women were in any way invisible. There were, for example, plenty of young women and girls celebrated for their heroics during the war (most famously Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya), for their deeds in the sporting arena and elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> After becoming the first woman in space in June 1963, Valentina Tereshkova in particular was hailed as a role model for Soviet girls to aspire to because of her great achievements in science and technology.<sup>45</sup> When a short-lived 'Committee for Work with Female Youth' was set up in September 1958, its 42 members included a host of notable women, such as *obkom* secretaries, the editor of *Rabotnitsa*, the Minister of Health, the director of the Detskii Mir children's department store in Moscow

and leading cultural figures, including actresses and ballerinas.<sup>46</sup> Such bodies, though, tended to be both temporary and few. While it generally did not serve as an advocate for distinctly 'female' causes, the Komsomol was entirely prepared to target girls as a specific group for mobilisation as and when this coincided with regime policy. The major drive to encourage young girls to go out to the Virgin Lands in the mid-1950s (primarily in order to start families with male Virgin Landers and 'settle' the region) was just one example of this.<sup>47</sup> In some places they screened films about the 'heroic' entry of women into the labour market following the revolution, or else organised rallies to celebrate female tractor drivers and mechanics in order to inspire girls to greater labour achievements.<sup>48</sup> Gendered mobilisation, though, was not at all the same as tackling wider questions about gender or female roles and aspirations.

It was not just in the number of female Komsomol secretaries that some parts of the country were found to be lacking. The Central Committee in Moscow intermittently directed lower-level branches in Central Asia and the Caucasus region to send set numbers of local girls—who, it was noted, tended to have quite weak theoretical knowledge and poor Russian language skills—for professional Komsomol training in the capital, laying on lectures and talks for them on themes such as 'the position of women in the USSR' and 'women in branches of the state economy and administration'.<sup>49</sup> When it came to the question of recruiting new Komsomol members, Central Asia and the Caucasus were again a consistent source of concern for Komsomol bosses in Moscow. There was a clear reluctance in some places to admit girls to primary organisations, and stories of families refusing to let daughters join (including in some cases effective imprisonment and violence) were not uncommon.

In 1957, girls constituted only 32% of Komsomol members in Tajikistan, and native girls only 13.5%, while native girls represented a mere 17% of members in Turkmenistan.<sup>50</sup> In a 1958 Komsomol Central Committee report the Central Asian republics, along with Caucasus branches in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Chechnya and Dagestan, were all heavily criticised. It was noted that the latter organisation had only 21% female members, while there were numerous Komsomol organisations in Tajikistan with over 100 members but no females whatsoever.<sup>51</sup> A 1961 report stated that the Turkmen Komsomol was doing especially badly at attracting girls of native nationality to the Komsomol ranks. It mentioned 15 collective farm Komsomol organisations without a single female member, and some district-level bodies that had less than 1% native girls as members.<sup>52</sup> By comparison, admission of native girls to the Komsomol in the Slavic republics was really not a problem. For example, of the Belorussian Komsomol's 1,130,349 members there were 539,814 native girls (out of a total of 662,175 female members).<sup>53</sup>

Presumably on the basis of directions received from Moscow, some Komsomol bodies in these regions did make moves to improve young women's situation. The Turkmen republican Komsomol reported in a 1979 official history volume that it had begun to hold special talks for women, organised visits to universities and other places of higher education, and founded the 'Aina' club (which apparently expanded to 600 branches) where young women could hear lectures, exchange

opinions on political matters and enjoy 'cultured recreation' over a cup of tea.<sup>54</sup> Attempts were apparently also made to attract rural women to cultural education classes with talks on themes such as 'the role of women in the construction of communist society' and 'tasks of the ninth five-year plan and the role of women in fulfilling them', as well as making doctors and teachers available to them where possible. Similarly, by the 1960s, the Chechen-Ingush Komsomol, another frequent target of Moscow's criticism on matters relating to female members and staff, began to hold intermittent workshops and conferences on improving ideological work and training for political activity among local girls.<sup>55</sup> Whether such tasks existed in reality, rather than just on paper (prepared for officials in Moscow and for foreign propaganda purposes), is hard to say for certain.

Confidential materials from the region, however, were still troubling at times. Reports on the situation facing girls in Tajikistan, for example, noted that a worrying number of native girls between 18 and 20 years of age (including at least one Komsomol member) had committed suicide because they were unable to cope with their harsh way of life and could see no escape from it. A Central Committee report noted with some disdain that local Komsomol organisations there were adopting a 'position of non-interference' in failing to help desperate young women and had not once tried to help girls known to have been in distress.<sup>56</sup>

Failings like these by local Komsomol members and officials could be a testament to the sometimes shallow penetration of the organisation's message in the region, even among its own officials. At the end of 1956, *Komsomol'skaya pravda* reported from the Kirgiz Komsomol congress that there were still not enough young women graduating from schools, and that a shocking 20 young girls had been seized during 1955, and their abductors were being shielded by the republic's Komsomol hierarchy.<sup>57</sup> The same problem had already been aired in regard to Kazakhstan, where *Kazakhstanskaya pravda* complained that two brothers who had abducted a seventh-grade girl and forced her to marry an elderly deaf-mute were not only walking around free but were being shielded from prosecution by Komsomol officials in the region.<sup>58</sup> In April 1959 *Komsomol'skaya pravda* carried the story of a female Komsomol member from Alma-Ata who had been seized off the street by four men, one of whom had apparently decided to make her his wife. He and all three accomplices were Komsomol members. The girl eventually escaped but received no support from those around her, while the quartet were again protected from above, with none of them even expelled from their local Komsomol organisation.<sup>59</sup>

For the most part, female members were active participants in the broad sweep of Komsomol activity, although there was usually still some differentiation drawn between the sexes. In Karelia, for example, cycle races were organised in teams of three men and three women, with the men covering 25 kilometres each and the women 15 kilometres (the winning team was the first to get two men and two women to the finish line). Athletics contests were again undertaken in mixed-sex teams for sprinting, long jump and high jump, distinguished only by female team members doing an 800 m run instead of the 1500 metres done by men.<sup>60</sup> While male competitors in civil defence contests



had to throw grenades, shoot at targets, assemble machine guns and crawl under barbed wire, female members of the same team would bandage ‘wounded’ soldiers and carry stretchers.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, student construction brigades usually included both sexes, but often saw men building houses, schools and sports facilities, whilst women were more likely to be found organising Pioneer camps, leading healthcare seminars and holding fundraising cultural events.<sup>62</sup>

## CONCLUSION

At the most basic level of conclusion there are three useful points of reference to draw to the reader’s attention: the Communist Party; the West; and the official Soviet narrative. In regard to the first of these, the position of women was unquestionably better within the Komsomol than it was within the Communist Party. In regard to the second, we can say that young women and girls in the Soviet Union had much more accessible routes into their country’s political life (whatever the ‘quality’ of that political life may have been) than did those in the West. Measured against the official propaganda on equality, of course, the reality of female participation still fell some way short of regime pronouncements, as male dominance across the upper ranks of the Komsomol proved both pervasive and constant. To claim, as the Turkmen Komsomol did, that the organisation had brought Soviet girls ‘genuine freedom and equality, both in public and at home’ would be nothing short of nonsense.<sup>63</sup> Where the Komsomol did prove keen to target its action at girls specifically, it was primarily to advance regime ends, not for the sake of advancing the female cause in general.

The fact that so many millions of girls and women were at one time Komsomol members and/or workers during the period in question clearly made the organisation an important facet of the way in which they experienced and participated in the Soviet system. Indeed, much of the above replicated wider social and political trends of the post-Stalin years: the increased female participation in professional life and accompanying barriers to high-level posts, and the continuing distinction between ‘men’s work’ and ‘women’s work’. There were plenty of laudable female heroes for Komsomol girls to emulate, but they too existed within these same socio-political dynamics. Even Tereshkova (who became a member of the Komsomol Central Committee after her space flight in 1963) was described in the official literature as a ‘cosmonaut, active in public work, member of Supreme Soviet Presidium, happy mother, wife and housekeeper’.<sup>64</sup>

## NOTES

1. See, for example, M. Ilic, ‘Women in the Khrushchev Era: an Overview’, in M. Ilic, S. Reid and L. Attwood (eds), *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004, p. 17.
2. Natal’ya Lebina, for example, notes the development of synthetic fabrics, dry cleaning establishments, cosmetics products and pre-prepared meals as themes



- which had a positive impact on Soviet women's lives during the period: N. Lebina, *Povsednevnost' epokhi kosmosa i kukuruzy: destruktivnaia bol'shogo stilya, 1960–60 gody*, Moscow: Kriga, 2015.
3. The early post-revolution years, however, had seen the Komsomol placing great emphasis on the need to work for women's enlightenment, viewing them as 'the most backward element' of society. See N. Noonan and C. Nechemias (eds), *Encyclopedia of Russian Women's Movements*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 145.
  4. On the personal experiences of young girls elected to Komsomol congresses, see, for example, A. Shitkov (ed.), *Komsomol'skaya yunost' moya*, Staritsa: Staritskaya tipografiya, 2014.
  5. As Genia Browning noted in 1987, the approximately 4 per cent of women in the CPSU Central Committee was roughly on a par with the British and US governments of the time. G. Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR: Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women's Groups*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1987, p. 21.
  6. RGASPI m-6/14/104/1.
  7. NARB 63/19/9/198-9.
  8. On debates about the significance of such state intervention in female political participation, see K. Ghodsee, 'Pressuring the Politburo: the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and State Socialist Feminism', *Slavic Review*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2014, pp. 538–62.
  9. RGASPI 1s/1s/1127s/1-5.
  10. RGASPI m-6/14/104/5.
  11. RGASPI m-6/12/30/21.
  12. RGASPI m-6/13/23/35-54.
  13. There were essentially three types of elected post: Central Committee member, candidate Central Committee member and member of the Komsomol's Auditing Commission.
  14. RGANI 5/31/206/12.
  15. Furtseva, too, had been a Komsomol secretary in the 1940s. She later joined the CPSU Politburo in the mid-1950s and became especially prominent for her role as Minister of Culture in the 1960s and early 1970s.
  16. On Komsomol Central Committee buro members, see N. Zen'kovich, *Elita: entsiklopediya komsomol'skikh kar'er: samye rumyanye vozdi*, Moscow: Olma, 2008.
  17. See *Sekretari i chleny byuro tsentral'nogo komiteta komsomola, vozhaki pionerii, predsedateli KMO SSSR, pervye sekretari TsK LKSM soyuznykh respublik*, Moscow, 2003.
  18. B. Pastukhov, *Druzei moikh prekrasnye cherty*, Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 2012, p. 234.
  19. After the Soviet collapse Matvienko served for almost a decade as governor of St Petersburg and is at the time of writing Chair of Russia's Federation Council.
  20. LKSM Azerbaidzhana, XXXI s'ezd LKSM Azerbaidzhana, Baku: Gyandzhlik, 1984, p. 85.
  21. There was a steady drive across the post-Stalin years to increase the party presence within the upper strata of the Komsomol. By the 1970s, virtually all secretaries from district level upwards had to be party members, and many secretaries of large primary organisations, too. Jerry Hough estimated that one in every five adult men

- were party members by the late 1970s, while only one in 20 women were: J. Hough, 'Women and Women's Issues in Soviet Policy Debates', in D. Atkinson, A. Dallin and G. Lapidus (eds), *Women in Russia*, Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978, p. 362.
22. LVA 201/6/17/112-116. As the report noted, none of the secretaries surveyed did a 'standard' 41 hours per week.
  23. S.P. Pasyukova, 'My delali obshchee delo', in Yu. Shleikin (ed.), *Komsomol Karelii v litsakh*, Petrozavodsk: Ostrova, 2013, pp. 230-2.
  24. See, for example, LVA 201/1/893/89. This document outlines the case of one Latvian district secretary who resigned from her Komsomol work because she also had two small children.
  25. Hough, 'Women and Women's Issues', p. 371.
  26. RGASPI 1/31/51/22. In the RSFSR there were a total of only six female regional (*obkom* and *kraikom*) first secretaries at the start of 1963.
  27. RGASPI 1/31/6/15.
  28. For purposes of comparison, Joel Moses noted that in 1973 less than 4 per cent of urban and district party first secretaries across the USSR were women. J. Moses, 'Women in Political Roles', in Atkinson et al. (eds), *Women in Russia*, p. 336.
  29. NARK 779/50/18/12.
  30. On employment patterns among Soviet women during the post-Stalin years, see, for example, G. Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
  31. Noonan and Nechemias, *Encyclopedia of Russian Women's Movements*, p. 148.
  32. See N. Zen'kovich (ed.), *Samye rumyanye vozhd: entsiklopediya komsomol'skikh kar'er*, Moscow: Olma, 2008.
  33. See, for example, R. Mandel, "'No Striving for Glory Here": an Essay on Women and Leadership in the USSR', *Frontiers: a Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1987, pp. 16-22.
  34. See, for example, V. Lisitsyna, 'Glavnoe, rebyata, serdtsem ne staret!', in *Komsomol'skaya yunost moyu*, pp. 71-3.
  35. RGANI 5/37/65/1-65.
  36. MIA 96/23/140/1-13. Records from the same year, however, reveal that women still accounted for only 16 out of 86 *raikom* and *gorkom* first secretaries in the republic.
  37. TsDOOSO 61/20/37/1-12.
  38. RGASPI 6/16/347/1-16.
  39. TsDOOSO 61/20/37/1-12.
  40. See, for example, TsDOOSO 61/14/388/4.
  41. TsDOOSO 407/1/18/4.
  42. See, for example, TsAOPIM 6083/1/2/1-137 on student reprimands and expulsions at MGU.
  43. ERAF 31/63/3/102. The secretary in question was also accused of a very dictatorial working style, ignoring colleagues' opinions and treating them brusquely. He was removed from his post and then expelled from the Komsomol.
  44. The Belorussian Komsomol, for example, had its members celebrate local female war heroes including Fedosiya Smolyachkova, Mariya Tolkacheva and Nadezhda Khovren Kova. See NARB 63/37/29/1-91. Similarly, they made great efforts to

- celebrate a local partisan group that called itself 'the Young Avengers', whose 17 members included ten girls. NARB 63/19/13/204-19.
45. See, for example, Roshanna P. Sylvester, 'She Orbits above the Sex Barrier: Soviet Girls and the Tereshkova Moment', in J. Andrews and A. Siddiqi (eds), *Into the Cosmos: Space Exploration and Soviet Culture*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011, pp. 195-212.
  46. RGASPI 1/3/990/135. Most famous of them all was Tatyana Samoilova, the star of the then recent hit film *The Cranes are Flying* (*Letyat zhuravli*, 1957, dir. Mikhail Kalatozov).
  47. See M. Pohl, 'Women and Girls in the Virgin Lands', in Ilic, Reid and Attwood (eds), *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, pp. 52-74.
  48. On the use of films such as *The First Girl* (*Pervaya devushka*, 1968, dir. Boris Yashin), see, for example, *Komsomol'skaya yunost' moyu*, p. 88. On rallies celebrating female tractor drivers, see, for example, RGASPI 6/17/581/53.
  49. See, for example, RGASPI 24/1/148/31.
  50. RGASPI 6/13/55/10.
  51. RGANI 5/31/108/94.
  52. RGASPI 1/31/6/20-6.
  53. NARB 63/19/34/161. This figure represented a sizeable majority of the 884,316 native members of both genders combined.
  54. *Ocherki istorii Leninskogo kommunisticheskogo soyuza molodezhi Turkmenistana*, Ashkhabad: Izdatel'stvo 'Turkmenistan', 1979, p. 276.
  55. V. Deriglazova and T.V. Pleshanova (eds), *Checheno-Ingushskaya komsomol'skaya organizatsiya, 1920-84: tsifry i fakty*, Grozny: Checheno-Ingushskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1985, p. 114.
  56. RGASPI 1/31/6/20-6.
  57. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 30 December 1955.
  58. *Kazakhstanskaya pravda*, 10 January 1953.
  59. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 8 April 1959.
  60. NARK 779/33/18/17.
  61. TsDOOSO 5852/1/104/20-3: example taken from a 1980 civil defence contest at Ural State University.
  62. TsDOOSO 5852/1/45/1-40.
  63. *Ocherki istorii*, p. 295.
  64. Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR*, p. 42.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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## State Feminism in Soviet Central Asia: Anti-Religious Campaigns and Muslim Women in Tajikistan, 1953–1982

*Zamira Yusufjonova-Abman*

After 1945, the Soviet regime largely succeeded in putting an end to the practices of veiling (*paranji*), polygamy, child marriage and bride price (*kalym*) in urban areas. These, however, still existed in rural Tajikistan but were less commonly practised in comparison with the 1920s and 1930s. Like its predecessors, the Khrushchev government described these patriarchal practices as rooted in Islam. It regarded them as the primary cause of the lower educational attainment and high unemployment rate among rural Muslim women in Tajikistan. After a period of relative easing in relation to religion during and immediately after the Second World War, the Soviet regime renewed its attack against Islam and *feudal-bey* (patriarchal) practices. An atheistic campaign was launched in 1954.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst this atheistic campaign was not as aggressive as the Bolshevik attack on religion in the 1920s and 1930s, the Khrushchev regime established a vast, functioning apparatus for advancing atheism at all levels of society.<sup>2</sup> This chapter assesses the methods and rhetoric of the anti-religious campaign under Khrushchev, which specifically targeted women. It also examines some of the impacts that became more evident under Brezhnev (1964–1982). It explores the association between two major discourses of the post-war period: the emancipation of rural Muslim women and the attack on Islam. The anti-religious campaign in rural Tajikistan was intimately connected with Khrushchev's wider plans to improve rural living conditions and agricultural productivity throughout the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> The regime considered the elimination of religion an essential prerequisite for women's participation in paid

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labour and commitment to rural productivity.<sup>4</sup> Like the Stalinist regime, the Khrushchev administration believed that women's entry into the workforce would ensure their Sovietisation and ultimate liberation, and, most importantly, it would bring about the transformation of rural areas.

The Khrushchev regime focused on the elimination of religious consciousness in the minds of its citizens in order to accelerate the construction of communism. The regime's special focus on making atheists of rural women is most vividly reflected in its revival of the women's councils (*zhensoveti*). The *zhensoveti* were expanded particularly in regions where religious influence was deemed strong: the Catholic regions of the Baltics, Muslim Central Asia and areas in central Russia where the Russian Orthodox Church retained a strong foothold. In these places, women's social status was considered to be the most held back by tradition and the level of economic and cultural development, and it was in these areas that women's consciousness most needed to be raised.<sup>5</sup> In rural Tajikistan, the state renewed its attack on Islam and patriarchal practices such as veiling, bride price, polygamy and early marriages.

Post-war anti-religious rhetoric resembled the interwar campaigns whereby women were identified as victims of *feudal-bey* practices. These practices were believed to be rooted in Islam and enforced by native men, thus denying any female agency in religious beliefs and practices. The campaign represented Islam as oppressive and backward, and glorified Muslim women's new life under Soviet rule. Analysis of the *zhensoveti*'s anti-religious campaigns shows that the regime maintained its top-down approach towards women's issues in the post-war period. Propaganda messages reveal the regime's lack of a deep understanding of rural culture and traditions in the Muslim periphery. Despite compelling descriptions of Islam as repressive and patriarchal, rural women in Muslim Tajikistan continued traditional religious practices and viewed them as integral to their identity. This eventually resulted in the 1970s under Brezhnev in the Soviet regime's tacit acknowledgement of failure and was reflected in a more relaxed approach towards religion. Moreover, the regime's use of the *zhensoveti* in this unpopular agenda against Islam prevented the councils from potentially becoming a genuine avenue for women's mobilisation in Soviet Tajikistan.

Soviet literature on Muslim women was based on two major premises. First, there was a broad assumption that sexual equality and socialism were synonymous. Hence, the degree of women's integration into economic and political life was an indicator of both social 'progress' and women's 'emancipation'. This led to the promotion of women's education, paid employment and participation in political institutions. Analyses of women's social status were based solely on these quantifiable indicators. Secondly, it was assumed that Muslim women's pre-revolutionary status was that of an exploited class, degraded by veiling, discriminated against in matrimonial laws and customs. The historical writings about Muslim women by Soviet authors clearly reflect these fundamental assumptions.<sup>6</sup>

Soviet scholars S.A. Khalikova and R.M. Madzhidov attributed the persistence of Islam, particularly among women, to the rural female population's attachment to tradition, insufficient education and high unemployment.<sup>7</sup> Other factors included women's trauma and mourning over the loss of family members during the Second World War. Various Soviet surveys also suggested that the party and Soviet institutions were generally less concerned about girls' and young women's atheistic world view. Boys' and young men's, on the other hand, were of serious concern because they were presumed to be the future leaders of the political and economic life of the country.<sup>8</sup>

Western scholarship has largely focused on men's role in preserving and practising Muslim traditions: attending secret mosques, Sufi-brotherhood congregations, male circumcision and religious marriage ceremonies. Authors attribute the endurance of Muslim culture in the countryside to the relative lack of penetrative capacity by the Soviet state.<sup>9</sup> Gillian Tett's anthropological examination of rural Soviet Tajikistan is the only Western study of women's role in preserving Islamic practices and faith. According to Tett, unlike native Muslim men, women were less affected by the Soviet regime's ban on public religious displays since they performed their religious duties at home. She points out that while few men rigorously observed Ramadan during the Soviet period, women almost universally observed it. As one elderly Muslim man in Obi-Safed village observed: 'Before, if the men met together to pray, then there'd be trouble. The women, though – that was different. No one saw.'<sup>10</sup>

According to Tett, when a society seeks to maintain its cultural traditions in the face of outside pressure and an intrusive state, women can play a significant role in perpetuating religious activity. Women are vital in maintaining the religious life and identity of the community through private activity.<sup>11</sup> This chapter supports Tett's findings that rural Muslims learned to combine their Islamic identity with their Soviet identity by making their Soviet identity public while keeping their religious identity private. As a result, women assumed responsibility for preserving and maintaining the community's Muslim identity in private.<sup>12</sup>

Irina Paert illustrates similar findings in Soviet Russia, where Russian women promoted religious culture in the family through the maintenance of rituals, festivities and diet. The celebration of Christmas and Easter, made special by traditional cuisine, remained central for Russian Orthodox families throughout the Soviet period.<sup>13</sup> In Soviet Tajikistan, women served as the main practitioners and guardians of traditional Tajik culture and Muslim values. Tett argues that this distinction between public and private, male and female, was why most households in rural Tajikistan were able to combine the two identities of being Muslim and communist without finding them contradictory.<sup>14</sup>

Sergei Poliakov explains Muslim women's higher religiosity in the post-war period in Soviet Tajikistan as due to the difference in girls' socialisation and upbringing: more emphasis was placed on the religious education of girls than boys. Mothers and grandmothers taught girls how to maintain proper behaviour and observe traditional social norms. During girls' formative years, they

also received instructions from a *bibiotun*, a female religious educator.<sup>15</sup> Despite the Bolshevik regime's earlier crackdown on Islam, rural Tajik women maintained their religious identity in the interwar period. This prompted the Khrushchev regime to focus on women in its attack on Islam. No scholarship on the tactics, extent and impact of the renewed anti-religious campaign in rural Muslim Tajikistan, however, has yet appeared.

As Abeed Khalid explains, the Bolsheviks' attack on Islam had two major outcomes. Firstly, Islam was localised and became synonymous with custom and tradition. The regime abolished all religious institutions, thus making the family the only vehicle for the transmission of Islam. The limited availability of religious knowledge resulted in a homogenisation of Islam since other interpretations of Islam were removed.<sup>16</sup> Islam became a marker of identity that distinguished locals from outsiders in Central Asia. It was deeply linked to local cultural practices and national attributes defined by the Soviet regime itself. A wide range of traditional practices, including weddings, funerals, paying respect to elders, placing high value on the family—including extended family, valuing hospitality and many others came to be seen as local and Muslim. According to Khalid, many of these practices were indeed rooted in Islam, part of the fulfilment of life-cycle rituals. Many other traditions that had little to do with Islam also became Muslim holidays. Most importantly, these local customs and traditions represented a paradox in the Soviet understanding of identity. On the one hand, these traditions were essential nation-building tools used to glue a new nation together. On the other hand, they were described as backward and in need of eradication. The Bolsheviks' extensive attack on these traditions succeeded to a considerable degree. The regime replaced these backward traditions with new Soviet ones.<sup>17</sup>

Compared to the 1920s and 1930s, the late Stalinist regime produced a favourable environment for religious revival. During the Second World War, the regime relaxed its approach towards Islam and religious traditions largely in order to mobilise the Muslim men of Central Asia for the war effort. Registered mosques were permitted to operate in a limited fashion, and private religious practices were tolerated. In 1943, the creation of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan was approved.<sup>18</sup> Instead of seeking to eliminate all religious practices, Stalin opposed only those that directly challenged the regime. Even after 1945, Stalin retained this less confrontational approach toward religion. These experiences shaped religious identity among Muslim Central Asians. The Muslim population of Tajikistan learned to combine its new Soviet identity with its traditional Muslim identity.

After 1954, Khrushchev publicly denounced Stalin and, along with his ideological advisers, sought to restore the early Bolshevik approach towards religion. The Khrushchev regime relaunched an attack against Islam in order to eradicate the remaining archaic traditions, particularly in the countryside. The party removed the old staff who had established friendly amiable relationships between religious institutions and the state. The state criticised local and central authorities for leniency towards religious activism and proposed a programme

for a crackdown on religion.<sup>19</sup> The renewed campaign was followed by closure of unauthorised places of worship and persecution of unregistered clergy. The government ordered the Department of Propaganda and Agitation to conduct a cycle of lectures in universities and to train cadres of anti-religious propagandists. The ministries of culture of all the Soviet republics and the *Znanie* (Knowledge) society were tasked with producing detailed plans for the improvement of atheistic work. At the government's initiative, *Znanie* established a monthly popular journal, *Nauka i religiia* (*Science and Religion*), with a print run of 75,000.<sup>20</sup> The state instructed the republic-level ministries of education and the trade unions to strengthen their promotion of atheism among youths and workers, with special attention paid to women.<sup>21</sup>

Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign was intimately connected with his wider policies of rural modernisation and cultural change. While travelling through the countryside in 1953 and 1954, Khrushchev observed economic and social degradation and concluded that rural problems were rooted in the religiosity of the local people.<sup>22</sup> The state viewed religious influence on Soviet rural populations as the major obstacle to a full mobilisation of the populace, and especially of women to the workforce. Khrushchev asserted that the formation of a modern Soviet socialist countryside was to be accompanied by the emergence of genuinely Soviet, atheistic citizens. He promised to transform rural areas into a model of socialist modernity by eradicating religion.<sup>23</sup> Yet these promises of rural reforms were not accompanied by infrastructural changes, such as the creation of day care facilities, secondary schools, career training centres and employment beyond manual jobs on collective farms. As Melanie Ilic states in her close examination of the Khrushchev reforms: 'The regime reinvigorated the "woman question" in the Soviet Union, but it by no means solved it.'<sup>24</sup>

Khrushchev presented Muslim women as victims of patriarchal society and objects of male manipulation. Islam was continually depicted in official reports as the main source of oppressive patriarchal traditions.<sup>25</sup> Propagandists called for an intensified anti-religious campaign and the dissemination of more information on subjects such as science and culture through the mass media.<sup>26</sup>

With few exceptions, the Soviet government's approach towards Islam claimed that fathers, brothers and husbands were the perpetrators and enforcers of patriarchal practices. In the early 1960s, a secret report by the head of the Tajik SSR Supreme Court underpinned these assumptions with statistical data on rural criminality, which showed that most of the *feudal-bey* crimes in Tajikistan occurred in rural areas.<sup>27</sup> Collective farm workers and farmers committed 85% of all patriarchal crimes, including polygamy, underage marriages and bride price. The remainder were committed by working-class men and those in administrative positions.<sup>28</sup> The report identified the southern regions of Regar, Kuibyshevskii, Moskovskii, Shaartuzskii and Sovetskii and the northern regions of Ura-Tyube, Kanibadam, Isfara and Pendzhakent as the epicentres of these crimes.<sup>29</sup>



Subsequent atheistic messages portrayed native men as the main obstacles to women's full involvement in social and economic life:

Men with old mentalities are to blame for the persistence of patriarchal practices. They force their wives, daughters and sisters to wear *paranji*. We know of many cases when a young woman who grew up in Soviet society with new values is forced into early marriage and required to take up veiling. Why? Because her husband, father or brother prohibits her from walking in public without *paranji* ... we assert that the majority of women still wearing a veil do so because of men. After all, the majority of our leaders are native men. These men have forgotten that they live in the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup>

The propagandists implied that patriarchal practices persisted in rural society because native government officials were not genuinely interested in eradicating them. The Secretary of Pendzhakent publicly acknowledged this:

We still see a *feudal-bey* approach toward women, including *chapanchi* and violence against women. While the Soviet regime introduced major reforms in the lives of our female comrades, Tajik women are not completely liberated. This is chiefly because indigenous men are the administrators of our laws and policies, including those pertaining to women's organisations and activities.<sup>31</sup>

Reports claimed that party members and government officials were not interested in challenging feudal practices because they personally took part in bride price, polygamy and women's seclusion and often forced their wives and daughters to veil when in public.<sup>32</sup>

Government reports also described women's seclusion as a reality in the majority of households, even the homes of political leaders and members of the intelligentsia: 'A woman is not allowed to welcome guests who come to her house. Sometimes she might enter the room to bring food but has to leave immediately. We vigorously fight against these traditions that are disrespectful to women.'<sup>33</sup> Stories identifying specific native men in leadership positions who enforced patriarchal practices were featured in the mass media, including the journal *Molodoi kommunist* (*Young Communist*):

Pulatova Gul'chekhira was an active member of Komsomol in the Tadkhikabad *raion*. Now she is the wife of the head of *kolkhoz* Pobeda in Pyanj *raion*, Khasanov. He married her when she was fifteen years old, while she was in seventh grade. After marriage, she stopped her social activism and quit school. She no longer pays her Komsomol membership fees. Her husband discontinued her studies and forced her to forget about Komsomol duties. As a Soviet leader, instead of serving as a respectable example, Khasanov committed a serious crime ... It's sad that some of our leaders, including teachers are often the carriers of such feudal mentality.<sup>34</sup>

If local Communist Party members and prominent leaders upheld these practices, there can be little doubt why so few rural women entered the workforce or continued their education. Propaganda claimed that because these Communist Party members, Komsomol activists, members of local party organisations, teachers and secretaries were forcing their wives, sisters and daughters to wear *paranji* and enforcing their seclusion, these women were not able to attend school or enter the workforce.<sup>35</sup> As in earlier campaigns, women were seen as powerless victims who did whatever their men told them. No female agency was acknowledged.<sup>36</sup>

When urban women activists visited rural areas and observed a significant percentage of rural women wearing *paranji*, they described it as a forced practice. These rural women were rarely interviewed or asked to explain why they wore *paranji* and practised Islamic traditions. Urban activists described veiling as 'imposed by men' and 'loathed by women'.<sup>37</sup> One report noted:

Our socialist culture and *paranji* cannot be combined. Veiling makes it difficult for women to adjust to the new Soviet life and hides them from the light of our Constitution. *Paranja* is not women's fault. We know that our girlfriends take off their *paranjas* when they arrive in urban areas and observe the new Soviet life with open faces and happy eyes. Our women are tired of the black veil. This veil is a gloomy remnant of the past, loathed by our women, including those who have not been brave enough to take it off.<sup>38</sup>

In post-war Tajikistan veiling was more common in rural than urban areas. Urban women activists who had direct conversations with rural women in Zafarabad, in northern Tajikistan, were told that the situation had calmed down during the war and nobody criticised women wearing *paranji* anymore. Women were able to walk around town freely wearing *paranji* again.<sup>39</sup>

Veiling was not simply a remnant of the feudal past but also a major obstacle for women's entry into and active participation in the paid labour force. By the 1950s, it was clear that collectivisation had largely failed to establish modern agriculture and transform rural culture. Women's labour was regarded as an essential element for the revitalisation of the countryside. As a result, calls to Muslim women to take off their veils were consistently accompanied by appeals for them to join the workforce and help increase production:

Women in rural areas are a major work force. To keep this labour force away from production is a crime ... Let's deliver cotton for the freedom we have received from the Koran and Sharia. Women's oppression is now a forgotten tale. The Soviet regime gave women a new life; a bright future and a happy life. The state drew a new path for us. We shouldn't lag behind the construction of this great work. I call on our rural girlfriends to join our fight against *feudal-bey* practices, throw off your *paranji* and promise to deliver twelve thousand kilograms of cotton per season.<sup>40</sup>

In the state-sponsored attack against Islam, it was veiling that received the most attention. Writers wrote novels, filmmakers produced movies and theatres staged plays about women's struggles, most notably against the *paranji*.<sup>41</sup> The prominent Tajik poet Mirzo Tursun-Zade dedicated a poem to the subject called 'The Three Beauties':

In *paranji* like in the tomb, Tajik women buried their youth  
Mother and daughter, daughter-in-law and sister, were hidden by the veil from the world  
Black like cloud hid spring from young girls' face  
The land was a desert where you were a slave  
For us this is a far away history now.<sup>42</sup>

The Khrushchev regime's focus on women in its drive against religion also had pedagogical and disciplinarian dimensions. The Soviet state proudly pronounced its campaign as a struggle against social injustice and oppression, promising to bring women to a fulfilling and meaningful life outside the prison of religion. As a result, the atheistic crusade consistently compared Muslim women's new lives with the pre-revolutionary past:

Before the Russian Revolution, Muslim women of the East had no rights. Their exploiters convinced them that they were men's slaves. Islam not only allowed men to sell women but also permitted their murder. The archaic mentality considered the birth of girls a curse. It was better to give birth to a rock. With these words parents celebrated a baby girl's birthday. There were various religious laws that humiliated the human dignity of women. One such custom was women's isolation from the outside world through the *paranji* – a black prison of slavery. She was completely separated from public life. It was not easy for our women to take off *paranji* ... The most oppressed of all oppressed – Eastern women – outlasted obstacles and overcame their subjugation. Take off your veils, sisters, and get in line with the builders of happiness and freedom.<sup>43</sup>

These messages were aimed at mobilising rural women's support in the fight against Islam and *feudal-bey* practices by reminding them about their destitute lives before the October Revolution. They were likewise intended to make Muslim women appreciate and value their new, happy lives under the Soviet regime. According to Paert, by emphasising women's liberation from religion, Khrushchev's regime also asserted a revolutionary role.<sup>44</sup>

The regime continued to depict Muslim men as perpetrators of patriarchal practices and women as victims of these practices. Yet unlike the earlier Bolshevik campaign, government institutions promoted a new image of the Soviet Tajik woman. One new Soviet woman personally declared war against patriarchal practices and publicly condemned her patriarchal husband:

My husband's a Communist and a promoter of feudal practices. He often uses physical force against our children and me. He banned our daughters from

attending school. When I express objection to his demands, he forces me out of the house and threatens to marry a younger woman. I've been living like this for eighteen years now. I'm here to seek the party organisation's assistance.<sup>45</sup>

This message was most vividly conveyed in a famous Tajik movie *Zumrad* produced in 1961 by the state-controlled movie industry. After graduating from secondary school, the eponymous Zumrad travels to Dushanbe to continue her education. Soon she meets and falls in love with her professor, Kadyrov, who charms her with his progressive communist views and his familiarity with Persian poetry. However, after marriage he shows his true face as a *fiodal* (patriarch). He secludes Zumrad from the outside world and forces her to quit her studies. After she gives birth to a daughter (not a son), Kadyrov becomes insolent and beats her. Zumrad breaks with traditional mores and runs away to her native village. There she becomes a respected collective farm brigadier and cultivates cotton. She eventually reunites with her secondary school sweetheart, Jalil. *Zumrad* was screened around the country for free.<sup>46</sup>

*Zumrad* was part of the post-war campaign that called on women to fight against religious traditions and patriarchal social norms on a personal level.<sup>47</sup> Zumrad depicted a proactive communist woman who determined her and her daughter's future by leaving an oppressive husband. Eventually she found happiness by dedicating herself to full-time work and social activism. As part of this campaign, women were entreated to 'Take off your *paranji* without fear!' and were assured that 'Laws will protect you!'.<sup>48</sup> These slogans followed appeals to women to learn the constitutional rights granted to them by the Soviet regime. Authors of propaganda literature maintained that it was women's fault for allowing men to abuse them. The reports insisted: 'We severely punish men and government officials who undermine women's rights and create obstacles to women's active participation in social and political life of the republic, yet often women personally choose not to practise their legal rights.'<sup>49</sup>

The post-war Soviet state's clampdown on religious custom ensured that most visible practices had disappeared by the late 1950s, thus dramatically changing the image of Muslim women. Veiling and polygamy were probably harder to hide from the state than underage marriage, bride price and other traditions. As a result, there were fewer reports about veiling from the late 1960s through to the 1980s. Muslim women eventually replaced *paranjis* with small headscarves that only covered the hair.<sup>50</sup> As for polygamy, the official problems associated with having two wives increased over time, especially if both produced children who had to be registered with the state. Marrying an underage girl, however, could be kept secret until she reached the authorised marriage age of 18. This practice was also featured in *Molodoi kommunist*:

Mekhriniso Narzulaeva is the only girl among fourteen boys to graduate from the Gorky secondary school in Iava region. For this reason she is facing social disapproval. All of her female classmates dropped out of the school after sixth grade in order to get married. Parents obtain fake birth certificates to marry their daughters

before the legal age. Mekhriniso's parents were not an exception to this social norm. While her father was happy that she was able to continue her education, her mother was in a hurry to marry her off. Only with her father's support and Komsomol assistance was Mekhriniso able to pursue a degree from the Shevchenko Pedagogical Institute. She was the first woman in her region to continue her education beyond secondary school.<sup>51</sup>

As the article accurately suggests, Muslim women were the primary actors in charge of maintaining and endorsing traditional customs. Practices such as early marriage, bride price, and lavish wedding and funeral ceremonies remained an integral part of rural culture. Mothers were in charge of arranging their children's marriages. It was usually women from the groom's household who made the first move. The groom's mother would approach the bride's mother. Negotiations took place primarily between the mothers of the two families. Some official reports noted that it was women who insisted that practices such as male circumcision, religious wedding ceremonies and other traditions be carried out.<sup>52</sup>

Dzhamilya Islamova, the first woman computer engineer in the Leninabad region, similarly described women as promoters of some of the practices the regime viewed as patriarchal and imposed by men. She recalled a funeral she attended in Isfara in the 1960s where the deceased man, a prominent doctor in the village, left a will strictly instructing his family: 'When I die, make sure that nobody wears mourning clothes. My wife and three daughters should wear mourning clothes but only for three days.' The deceased man explained in his note that he wanted to be buried according to Islamic tradition, but this mourning tradition was not based on the Koran.<sup>53</sup> After the will was read, the *mahalla* men nodded in agreement and promised to acknowledge this last wish, yet the women present at the funeral objected to it. One loudly declared: 'Why wouldn't this family wear mourning cloth? We all had to do it in the past. Our grandmothers practised this tradition, why does this family have to be an exception?'<sup>54</sup>

An example of the discontinuity between the centre and the periphery in the regime's anti-religious campaign is reflected in the atheistic literature's explanations of women's religiosity. Propaganda argued that apart from age and the usual lack of education and employment, a lack of emotional fulfilment was an important cause of rural women's attraction to religion.<sup>55</sup> Although the authors denied biological causes of female religiosity, they nevertheless emphasised women's aesthetic desire for beauty. Official reports claimed that for this reason religious officials were able to mobilise women's support.<sup>56</sup>

As a result, women were actively encouraged to participate in music, dancing and other creative activities.<sup>57</sup> The regime believed that women's engagement in such activities could provide an outlet for their need for artistic fulfilment.<sup>58</sup> During the post-war era, the Soviet regime recruited women to art and music clubs, and to theatre and dance performances. Official reports proudly claimed, 'Hundreds of indigenous women were recruited to work in the sphere of culture

and literature. One could not even imagine this in the feudal darkness of the Bukhara.<sup>59</sup> These announcements were accompanied by stories of rural girls who had never attended the theatre or opera.<sup>60</sup> There was a lack of cultural activities for women and girls in the countryside; there were no theatres or dance, music or poetry clubs in rural areas.<sup>61</sup> Urban women took advantage of Soviet cultural activities and facilities that remained unavailable outside the cities.

Soviet sociologists' characterisation of rural women's religiosity was not necessarily incorrect. Yet the image of an emancipated Tajik woman determined to be professionally and personally successful that was constructed by the secular culture of the Khrushchev era now competed with images maintained by popular memory.<sup>62</sup> Consider, for example, the reminiscences of Bihodzhah Rakhimova, a prominent government official. Based on her memory of post-war Soviet Tajikistan, women, including urban and rural government officials, identified themselves as both Muslim and Soviet: 'Combining these two identities did not preclude one from utilising official Soviet discourse and leading a normal Soviet life'; she noted further:

I was a government official, which often involved hosting senior officials at my house. Based on our Tajik tradition before sending guests off, my mother would have to say a blessing; instead of mentioning Allah, she'd mention Lenin, Marx and Engels. Instead of concluding with 'Amin', she'd say 'proletarians of all countries unite' and would run her hands over their faces. These were tough times; one couldn't express any religious sentiments, especially me since I worked for the Communist Party, which preached universal atheism. But I'd constantly say '*Bismillahu Rahmoni Rahim*' [In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful]. I'd observe these traditions but get on the podium and criticise people who practised religion, I'd punish those who attended mosques and read prayers.<sup>63</sup>

While Soviet ideology emphasised the dramatic differences in the images of new and old Tajik women, many seemed to ignore these distinctions. Local authorities participated in the anti-religious campaign to varying degrees. Soviet celebrations included International Women's Day (8 March), Labour Day (1 May), Victory Day (9 May), October Revolution Day (7 November) and other holidays. Muslim women, including government officials and members of the intelligentsia, continued to take part in both religious and Soviet cultural events, without necessarily adhering to the supposedly contradictory meaning of either.<sup>64</sup>

That some native women leaders felt comfortable publicly proposing the incorporation of useful aspects of religion in ideological work, among other things, speaks of the non-threatening nature of the post-war attack on religion. This is vividly illustrated at the Tenth Annual Congress of Women in 1972, when a woman doctor, Sofia Hafizovna Khakimova, suggested embracing some Islamic norms to facilitate good habits among rural woman. After all, she insisted, 'the Koran prohibits women from fasting when they're breastfeeding

... Maybe we should utilise these useful aspects of religion to teach our women good practices, especially in terms of hygiene.<sup>65</sup> Khakimova's suggestion provoked uproar in the auditorium. The majority of women activists disagreed with her. M. Gaffarova, professor of philosophy, head of the Pedagogical Institute in Dushanbe, responded first: 'We have to be cautious about using old traditions since they can turn against us, especially positive aspects of Islam. We need to address these questions with a highly scientific approach, not with religion and the Koran.'<sup>66</sup> Comrade Fadeeva followed:

All nations have well-established traditions but as comrade Gaffarova rightly pointed out some of these traditions have dangerous powers. Orthodox Christianity also has useful aspects to it. It preaches not to harm, not to steal, not to kill, but we shouldn't use that either. We must only use our Communist positions to address our problems since Communism has the moral codes that form the basis of our lives, not religion.<sup>67</sup>

H.F. Gaffarova, assistant head of the *zhensovet* presidium and Deputy Minister of Commerce, ended the discussion by thanking Khakimova for her presentation and told her to avoid using the Koran and Islam in future and to base everything on scientific facts.<sup>68</sup>

Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign was ultimately a failure, not because it did not manage to eliminate religious expression in public, but because it failed to convince believers in Russia and Muslims in the periphery that religion and the Soviet system were wholly incompatible.<sup>69</sup> While the regime forced women to enter the workforce and rural women eventually threw off their veils, fasting and traditional practices continued in the countryside. In the mid-1970s and 1980s, the failure of central and local governments to eradicate Islam and religious practices among women in rural Tajikistan was evident. In 1973, Z. Muradova and M.K. Karimova, members of the Gissar *zhensovet*, reported that anti-religious work among rural women had been ineffective: 'Rural women still practise religion, women take pilgrimage trips, practise circumcision celebrations, take part in religious wedding ceremonies.'<sup>70</sup> V. Ahmedova, head of the culture department, similarly declared: 'Our women are still religious; this is especially evident during religious holidays when the production level declines drastically and women skip work.'<sup>71</sup>

As a result, in the 1980s, Karimova called for increasing rural women's access to education and cultural facilities in order effectively to fight against Islam in the countryside:

The majority of women in rural areas practise Islam and force their children, especially daughters, to observe religious rituals and practices, including Ramadan when women and children fast. Over 75.6 per cent of women celebrate Ramadan in the countryside. The atheistic education of women should be our priority.<sup>72</sup>

The ineffectiveness of the anti-religious campaigns in rural areas triggered a new approach in the 1970s. Journals and newspapers, including *Zanoni Tojikiston* (*Women of Tajikistan*), *Nauka i religiya*, *Kommunist Tadzhikistan* (*Communist of Tajikistan*) and other forms of mass media published articles about these new approaches towards their anti-religious work. In 1974 *Nauka i religiya* published an interview with Ibodat Rakhimova, member of the Presidium of the Tajik Supreme Soviet (in office 1978–1982) regarding the government's new tactic:

The household is a very delicate sphere. Before we enter it with our ideological information, we must have a thorough understanding of its taboos. A single insensitive word can trigger rejection and make a woman indifferent and immune to atheistic campaigns. The party calls on us to increase our attack on religion, to apply diverse approaches, to stop using the same ideological propaganda, to apply approaches that are individually tailored, influence person's feelings and consciousness, to speak from the heart and use emotions, persistently introduce Soviet rituals and traditions. We are currently trying to mobilise new women campaign workers but there are still not enough of them. Before we assign a woman to carry out an atheistic campaign, we must ensure that she is articulate and knows how to carry out atheistic work properly, to ensure that she does not do more damage than good.<sup>73</sup>

Rakhimova pointed out that any future anti-religious campaign would:

... specifically clarify that feudal traditions have nothing to do with Tajik heritage, that these are local and regional customs. What can expensive religion-based funerals have in common with Tajik heritage and national ethics? Or what can wedding rituals, when a *mullah* preaches to a young bride about family, have in common with our modern principles and progressive traditions of the Tajik nation?<sup>74</sup>

The Soviet regime under Brezhnev and his successors made a tacit change of approach towards Islam and traditional practices in the Muslim periphery. It was during the Brezhnev period that many national traditions, including lavish weddings and funerals, circumcision of boys, eating with one's hands rather than with utensils and other practices became acceptable.<sup>75</sup>

The post-war Soviet campaign against Islam in Tajikistan reflects the central authority's lack of in-depth understanding of the role of religion and identity in the periphery. The regime believed that introducing women to Soviet lifestyle and rituals would not only ensure their entrance into the labour force, but also result in their complete transformation. The post-war regimes of Khrushchev and Brezhnev eventually managed to pressure rural Muslim women to enter the workforce and replace their veils with small headscarves. However, this dramatic visual transformation was not accompanied by the eradication of Islam. For the majority of the native people in Tajikistan, especially in rural areas, Islam and religious practices remained an integral part of their identity, despite, or



paradoxically because of, the Khrushchev regime's overt attempt to eliminate these practices. In the post-war period, the rural Muslim populace in the periphery simply ignored the regime's attack on their religious traditions.

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26. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/155/3/81 (1961).
27. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/155/30/122–3 (1962).
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29. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/155/30/130 (1962).
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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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## Women's Social Adaptation Models in Soviet Lithuania

*Laima Žilinskienė*

This chapter examines the various adaptation strategies adopted by four different generations of Lithuanian women during the Sovietisation process imposed by the new communist regime after 1944. The traditional socialisation approach suggest that one of the functions of the family is to provide stability and continuity to its individual members. Families provide the systematic socialisation through which children are taught social norms. Attitude similarity between generations, from this perspective, is the consequence of successful parental socialisation of beliefs and values.<sup>1</sup> Family experience, beliefs and values form appropriate behaviour models in an intergenerational prospective. The social status of the family as the socialisation agent is an important factor influencing life trajectories. However, this traditional socialisation approach is called into question from a macro-structural perspective, especially in cases when systemic changes occur. In these situations, the parents' experiences of life trajectories, in a certain sense, lose 'continuity'.

The interactionist perspective emphasises mutual intergenerational influence, whereby not only parents influence their children, but children also influence their parents. Parental influence on children may vary as children grow and as children acquire experience in a changing social environment. Thus, parental influence in children's socialisation may change not only because of differences in the parents' and children's capital of various types (financial, social, cultural, emotional, and so forth), but also because of social and historical changes. According to Glen H. Elder, social upheavals encourage children to focus on sources of information and support other than their family members.<sup>2</sup> In such cases, children's 'dependence' on their parents' changes, especially where inherited social status and that sought and/or achieved by children differ.

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Parental control and influence over the children's social status and devising the strategies of their life trajectories is weakened.

When socialisation takes place in an environment of political, economic and social changes, children are no longer able naturally to absorb the perception of their environment and social structure and behavioural patterns formed by the *habitus*, the ways in which they understand the world around them. The restrictions and behaviour validation problems of the *habitus* become apparent only when the social environment changes, when different knowledge, values and behavioural patterns are encountered.<sup>3</sup> As noted by Daniel Bertaux, the collapse of a stable social context at the time of significant political and social changes often causes the loss of accumulated resources and previous social status, disruption of usual generation-to-generation resource transfer models, changes in values, norms and lifestyles, and the emergence of new mobility factors and trajectories.<sup>4</sup> Social adaptation in a changed environment is influenced by traditions-driven behaviour as well as by other persons and institutions important for the individual.<sup>5</sup> Social adaptation, or according to Zygmunt Bauman's definition association, occurs in a close or remote environment through specific groups with which people are linked by everyday contacts.<sup>6</sup>

In a changed political environment, earlier behavioural patterns become ineffective, and new, adaptive behavioural patterns emerge or are imposed. The background of social connections also requires revision because access to opportunities and community resources becomes limited. A 'benefactor' is necessary to help different generations and experiences to adapt to changed conditions. From an intergenerational perspective, the older generation needs to revise and readapt their life scenarios. The motivation of future life scenarios is important for readaptation because significant social changes give rise to new, unprecedented rules organising the life of the individual.<sup>7</sup> This means that competing rules determined by the common ideology of the system arise for the same life situations. In such a social space, confrontation between 'the old' and 'the new' takes place. By means of coming to understand 'the new', alternatives to former behavioural practices emerge. The individual becomes involved in new and diverse social relations in accordance with their revised social expectations.

David Riesman refers to this as 'other-direction' management.<sup>8</sup> It is how knowledge beyond individual personal experience and the regulation of the individual life trajectory in the new social environment are formed. The regulation of life takes place through the establishment of new rules and examples, and practices of those rules. Social adaptation methods can be identified by acknowledgement of the changed rules and the application practices of these rules. Age, evident in the experience of each generation, is important to social adaptation and the intergenerational (non-)continuity of behavioural patterns. Therefore, age serves to structure common social experience as the experience of the generation.

According to Karl Mannheim, the identity of each generation is formed by the shared experience of significant historical events.<sup>9</sup> That common experience of the generation has distinctive examples of behavioural patterns that serve as sources of information for adaptive behaviour. System upheaval not only eliminates former models of behavioural patterns but also excludes acquired experience; new adaptive strategies are now required. The selection of the adaptive behavioural model is determined by attitudes towards the new system. These attitudes determine the ways in which close relationships are maintained, through orientation towards the experience of family practices and their continuity, or by choosing confrontation with the traditions of family practices. According to David Morgan, shared family practices serve as the guarantor of the family's solidarity.<sup>10</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

This chapter analyses women's social adaptation models in Soviet Lithuania based on a selection of life stories recorded in Lithuania, Germany, Israel and Poland between 2010 and 2012 for a project on 'Memories of Soviet Times in Life Histories'. Individuals aged 30 and older, who lived through the Soviet period, were surveyed. The primary focus was on older people, who had a longer experience of living through the entire Soviet period. In order to distinguish between generations, a group of younger people was also surveyed. A total of 181 biographic interviews were collected. These biographical materials provide the basis for an analysis of Soviet era memory strategies and reveal how people of different generations remember the Soviet period in the context of recent and changing public discourses about the Soviet past. Which aspects or topics are evident in the autobiographical memories to supplement the prevailing discourse? What can be determined about the adaptive behavioural patterns according to generation and gender?

The life stories were collected using the methodologies employed by Bertaux and also the neo-positivist approach used by Robert Miller, which assumes that a 'pre-existing network of concepts are used to make theoretically based predictions concerning people's experienced lives'.<sup>11</sup> The neo-positivist approach also assumes the existence of an objective reality and states that the story of the respondent mostly represents this reality. Miller notes that:

the emergent biographical perspective now has coalesced to the extent that some common features can be identified. Rather than limiting itself to the slice of an individual's situation located at the present, the focus of interest is upon people's complete lives or, at the very least, upon a significant portion of people's lives.<sup>12</sup>

A life narration, according to Bettina Dausien, is the 'making' of a life, which can be analysed from different perspectives.<sup>13</sup>

## OVERVIEW OF LITHUANIAN STATEHOOD IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Before analysing women's adaptation models in the Soviet period, it is appropriate to provide a brief overview of the historical context of Lithuanian statehood in the twentieth century. The history of Lithuania's statehood in this period is marked with contradictory occurrences, both of rise and of decline.<sup>14</sup> On 16 February 1918, Lithuanian independence was declared; between 1918 and 1940, the Lithuanian independent republic was consolidated. On 15 June 1940, Lithuania was occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union, but from 1941 to 1944, occupation by the Soviets was replaced by occupation by the Germans. From 1944 Lithuania was again reoccupied and incorporated into the Soviet Union for nearly 50 years. The Sovietisation of Lithuania began and Lithuanians were now faced with the task of adapting to the requirements of the new Soviet regime.

The years from 1944 to 1990 can be divided into four sub-periods. The first period (from 1944 to 1953) covers the years of late 'Stalinism'. It was in these years that the harshest 'sovietisation' of Lithuania took place. The lives of the Lithuanian people underwent significant changes: peasants were forced into collective farms (*kolkhozes*), private property was abolished and the economy was centralised. The second period (from 1953 to 1964) coincides with Khrushchev's 'thaw'. After Stalin's death, the Soviet regime became more moderate and mass repressions stopped. During this period, Lithuania experienced industrial growth and an increase in its urban population. The third period (from 1964 to 1984) has subsequently been dubbed as one of 'stagnation'. In Lithuania, the adaptation of a significant proportion of society to the Soviet regime and a tendency to consumerism and informal activities was now in evidence. The fourth period (from 1985 to 1990) was marked by the impact of *perestroika*. This period lasted until 11 March 1990, when Lithuania again restored its independence.

## WOMEN IN LITHUANIA

These various phases of Soviet rule were marked by adjustments in the levels of central control over Lithuania from Moscow. The potential and strategies for adaptation to the Soviet regime changed accordingly. A separate adaptation policy was in evidence for women. From the very beginning of the Soviet takeover, Lithuanian women were subject to policies aimed at 'creating' the new Soviet woman.<sup>15</sup> In the 1940s, the Soviet government, seeking to ensure loyalty to the regime, paid great attention to women's issues. Propaganda was purposefully used in criticising the role and situation of women in interwar Lithuania. Many of the women's organisations that had functioned in interwar Lithuania were closed down. In 1945, the Women's Department of the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) was established. Women's Councils were set up in all districts of Lithuania. In these, women learned to sew, knit and cook. Women were given lectures on the Soviet Constitution, Stalin and the

importance of paid labour. During these lectures, attention was also directed to criticism of interwar Lithuania. The aim of these councils was to generate loyalty to the Soviet government.<sup>16</sup> By 1960, the principle of women's equal rights had been established. Women were free to select a profession and place of residence, and to get an education. Throughout the Soviet period, however, women also continued many of the activities they had carried out before the Second World War, including raising women's literacy rates, improving childcare and the fight against alcoholism, and so on.

An independent education system had been established in interwar Lithuania offering a general education, and consistent efforts had been made towards compulsory education and universal literacy. Schooling initiatives were developed from 1925 and continued until 1936 with a number of reforms being introduced, largely based on the models of state education then being developed in Western Europe. The Soviet occupation also had an impact on the education system. Significant emphasis was now placed on the ideological education of students to re-educate them and to convince them of the advantages of the new Soviet regime. During this period, great emphasis was placed on preparing students for the labour force with the purpose of integrating them into socially useful work.

In the last decades of the Soviet period, the gradual transition to universal secondary education was undertaken. Soviet Lithuania had no non-state education institutions at all. Compulsory secondary education was based on centralised planning and administrative-and-command management methods. The Soviet Lithuanian educational system had both advantages and disadvantages. The most important advantage was that it was easily accessible and free; the most notable disadvantage was its emphasis on propagating the ideology of the Soviet regime. When comparing the Soviet education system with that of interwar Lithuania, it quite clearly changed its orientation 'from West to East'.<sup>17</sup> In the context of the education system and the planned economy, the Soviet ideal woman had to hold a special or higher education diploma and work in the state sector. According to Soviet propaganda, the ideal woman was also married; she was a dedicated wife to her husband and a dedicated mother to her children. Thus, the Soviet ideal woman was a composite: a worker, a wife and a mother. A woman seeking to achieve this ideal was obliged to combine all three roles.<sup>18</sup>

### SPECIFIC FEATURES OF LITHUANIAN WOMEN'S ADAPTATION MODELS IN THE SOVIET PERIOD

The experience of life in interwar Lithuania and through the different Soviet sub-periods determined women's overall choice of corresponding adaptation behaviour after 1944. These have been identified as Conformity, Innovation, Ritualism or Rebellion.<sup>19</sup> Sovietisation propagated the aspiration of 'imported' objectives and adaptation models. 'Other-directed' adapters sought to take over the control of adaptation.<sup>20</sup> Thus, a confrontation emerged between former



objectives and the measures to achieve them and the newly imposed life strategies. Tensions between 'the old' and 'the new' demanded that former life strategies were abandoned and adaptation to the new, 'advisable' behavioural models took place. Older women, of the 'Republic' and 'Stalin' generations, had experience of living in interwar Lithuania; younger women, of the 'Thaw' and 'Stagnation' generations, did not. However, the choice of adaptation models by women of the younger generations could be adjusted not only by 'other-directed' adapters, but also by the memories communicated to them by family members and close associates. By means of such communication, 'old' experiences could be embedded in the memory of younger generations even though they had not lived through the earlier period themselves. Being so supplemented, the family memory archive could influence the propensity towards either adaptation or rebellion.

Jan Assmann refers to memory of the recent past as 'living memory'.<sup>21</sup> 'Living memory' communication has an important impact because, according to Krzysztof Pomian, memory communication influences the memory through the provision of feedback.<sup>22</sup> Communicated memory, life experience in different time periods and promulgated examples of behaviour constitute background information, and each of these may have a different impact in the strategy-making of adaptive behaviour. According to Mannheim, the biggest impact on the formation of the self-identity of different generations and differences in their world outlook is made by historical events experienced during the period of their active socialisation, when the people of that generation are between 12 and 24 years of age.<sup>23</sup>

This study of Lithuanian women's Soviet adaptation processes encompasses four generations. The 'Republic' generation was born between 1920 and 1930; for these women, socialisation took place in interwar Lithuania, and Soviet occupation necessitated the readaptation of their life strategies. The 'Stalin' generation was born between 1931 and 1944. The active socialisation of the 'Thaw' generation took place between 1953 and 1964. Women whose active socialisation took place from 1964 to 1984 belong to the 'Stagnation' generation. Each of these generations encountered different adaptation tensions. The most difficult adaptation was experienced by women of the older generation, who lived both in the Republic and had to survive the Stalinist sovietisation of Lithuania. In analysing the last 'Stalin' generation, Juliane Furst notes that it:

provided an important bridge between those generations socialized before the war, which were upwardly mobile under, and thanks to, Stalin, and those Soviet generations who were born after the war and socialized under a system that was still repressive, but also allowed (and created) a cluster of mechanisms for sidestepping its demands and structures.<sup>24</sup>

For these women, the Soviet period was 'an interruption in the normal course of things'.<sup>25</sup> Women of the 'Republic' and 'Stalin' generations experienced the loss of their family property, the repressions, deportation and exile to Siberia.

Their adaptation behaviour was modelled on their assessment of 'former' Lithuania. For the 'Republic' generation, interwar Lithuania provided the model for 'the normal course of things', and was the source of their ethical, social and political values. The adaptation behaviour of the 'Stalin' generation was largely determined by their parents. They provided continuity with those social relationships and values that they had acquired mainly in childhood from their family and school environment. The choice of successful active adaptation was made possible only by making use of environmental resources and the influence of *habitus* on one's activities and self-education. In contrast, the younger generations took the Soviet regime as a given, and many chose to conform. One respondent defined her life as follows:

I was born in Vilnius, went to kindergarten and then to school. I was a Little Oktobrist and a Young Communist. It was fun to learn and I had lots of friends. My parents didn't tell me anything. Then I was admitted to the Faculty of Medicine. This is the story of my life. (W, 50; Lithuania, 2012)

Women of each generation experienced limited access to various forms of capital. Material or economic capital was limited (with regard to salary and wage levels, the distribution of living space, access to cars and so on). Therefore, the importance of social capital was particularly increased. The accumulation of this type of capital was one of the available ways to improve one's situation and gain access to other limited resources: goods in short supply, services and other forms of assistance.<sup>26</sup> This is why women paid so much attention to the accumulation of social capital. They not only safeguarded relationships within their family, relatives, neighbours and friends, but also paid significant attention to the social connections established via their education, workplace or other institutions. The 'Republic' and 'Stalin' generations, unlike the 'Thaw' and 'Stagnation' generations, generally experienced the loss of their former social capital. Their social networks in the post-war years were restricted to family members and their closest relatives.

During the 'Thaw' period, social networks expanded, there were more opportunities to find jobs and it became easier to access limited material resources. Those women who were born during or after the Second World War were better integrated into the Soviet system and adapted to it more 'smoothly'. One respondent stated: 'I was born in 1950. We were already very Soviet; indeed, deeply Soviet' (W, 62; Lithuania, 2012). For many, active conformist behaviour was chosen as a means to organise one's life for several reasons. First of all, the family's financial resources had been used up. One respondent recalled: 'At the beginning of our life, our parents bought us a car and furniture' (W, 52; Lithuania, 2012). Great attention was then paid to social connections beyond the family. An innovative conformist adaptation strategy was developed. Social connections—those 'inherited' from their parents or accumulated independently—were utilised as a means to achieve the end goal. Thus, one respondent noted, 'I needed a favour in order to find a job' (W, 69; Israel,

2012). Active conformist behaviour provided additional privileges in employment, especially after graduation. One respondent, who defined herself as an active Young Communist, recalled:

I went to the editorial offices of *Bičiulis* and *Komunistinis Žodis* to find some work. I remember the editor phoned the Department of Culture and sent me to the Culture Centre, to the director. I was eighteen. I had no idea about such things. (W, 51; Lithuania, 2012)

Innovative conformist behaviour was also applied in accessing accommodation and housing. The experience of one respondent shows that having 'useful' acquaintances was a helpful factor in sorting out a place to live: 'A flat was successfully received through acquaintances' (W, 70; Lithuania, 2012). Innovative conformist behaviour was also encouraged by the examples set by parents. One respondent offered the following example: 'My father worked in a butter factory; then it was a cheese factory. It's no secret that at that time we had sour cream, milk and cheese at home' (W, 52; Lithuania, 2012).

A commonly held idea of 'nobody's' property allowed innovative behaviour in relation to goods or services that were in short supply and high demand. This practice not only facilitated the potential to make one's own life easier but also strengthened or expanded existing social connections. Products taken illegally from the workplace were sold at lower prices within a circle of acquaintances or 'useful' people. One respondent even prayed: 'May God give us more such thieves. You buy wool, so knitting is cheaper; you buy meat, and eating is cheaper' (W, 62; Lithuania, 2012). If 'useful' relationships were not available, even having sufficient financial resources could not necessarily ensure access to limited goods or services. One respondent noted: 'In our family, we had funds to buy things but didn't have relationships with those speculators. There was always some sort of shortage. If you had an acquaintance, then you could get it' (W, 69; Lithuania, 2012). Leisure arrangements were similarly determined by parental social capital or by contacts accumulated by the women themselves. Holiday tours were distributed by the workplace and their receipt often depended on the trade unions, which had their own links to management.

From the perspective of different generations, it was more difficult for the older generations to adopt innovative conformist behaviour. Such behaviour was determined not only by personal values, but also by their lack of social connections. Innovative conformist behaviour, however, became the norm for the younger generations. From today's perspective, the 'Thaw' and 'Stagnation' generations, just like those of the 'Republic' and 'Stalin' generations, are very critical of the political aspects of the Soviet regime, but they view their everyday life at that time either neutrally or positively. For them, socialisation in the Soviet period was a matter of course. In their biographical narrations, they separate everyday life from the broader political context of the regime. They perceive everyday life as a 'non-political' sphere.<sup>27</sup> Such attitudes towards the

Soviet system are to be found especially in the memories of women from the later Soviet period.

In adaptation strategies, the 'Republic' generation can be distinguished from other generations of women by their different experiences of education. They were educated in the schools of interwar Lithuania. The younger generations received their education and devised the strategies for their professional careers in the Soviet system. These younger generations needed less effort to adapt to the changed society. The 'Republic' and 'Stalin' generations emphasise the conformist adaptation model in career strategy-making. Focus was placed on those professions that allowed them to be less ideologically associated with the political system. In women's biographies, it is possible to distinguish two adaptation strategies: adaptation/collaboration, and 'oppositional' attitudes to the system.

For the 'Republic' generation, 'ambivalence' is characteristic.<sup>28</sup> In their biographies, members of this generation emphasise the adaptation difficulties they experienced resulting from the collision of conflicting political, ideological and value systems. The adaptive 'ambivalence' behaviour is manifested in different behaviour and speech, separating the public and private spheres. They emphasise the lies and adaptation behaviour, and the distinction between their 'own' and the 'strange'. For the 'Stalin' generation, such 'ambivalence' was less of a problem. They chose the 'ambivalence' behavioural pattern as a prerequisite attribute of adaptation of that time. Meanwhile, those women who lived during the 'Thaw' and 'Stagnation' periods interpret such ambivalence as not a problem, a matter-of-course and use it pragmatically. These differences in the views of each generation to 'ambivalence' are not specific only to Lithuania. Aarelaid-Tart has also identified manifestation of 'double mentality norms' in different generations.<sup>29</sup>

The conformist strategy of women's adaptation manifested itself in the elimination of former habits that contradicted the new Soviet ideology and by choosing Soviet behavioural models. This adaptation behaviour of strategy-making was mostly encountered by the 'Republic' generation. In their adaptation behaviour, two conformist behaviour variants can be distinguished. Active conformist adaptation behaviour is attributable to women who not only tried to adapt to the contemporary requirements of the Soviet system, but also 'struggled' to gain a significant social foothold that would ensure access to various forms of capital. They joined the LCP and the Komsomol (Young Communist League) while ignoring their family's opinion on this issue. They came into conflict with the value position of their parents; by ignoring parental disapproval, they consequently experienced many conflicts in their family life. These women actively adopted Soviet values, while ignoring the attitudes of their family members towards the Soviet system.

Passive conformist behaviour is characterised by cautious behaviour, while trying to avoid risk, focusing on everyday, ordinary activities, and maintaining a lifestyle typical to all. Such behaviour externally corresponded to contemporary norms, but more significant commitment to the regime, such as joining the

LCP or the Komsomol and seeking a high-ranking post, was avoided. For this behavioural strategy, the influence of the family, experience of family members and capital of various types accumulated by them were all important. One respondent noted: 'I had a very good childhood. I had no troubles. I studied and lived with my parents. I went to school, then studied at a university, then worked and left (emigrated to Israel)' (W, 66; Israel, 2012). The importance of the family is also illustrated by the following example: 'I liked singing very much. Once there was a school concert, and my father and mother came to listen. We sang "When Communist Father Defended the Motherland". That's how my singing in the choir ended' (W, 62; Germany, 2012).

The 'Thaw' and 'Stagnation' generations felt less 'ambivalence' and pragmatically used the attributes of loyalty to the Soviet system. Such life strategy-making is commonly adopted in 'normal' societies. When conformist adaptation behaviour does not conform also with the attitudes of the family, which continue to adhere to the values of the previous system, either parents are obeyed or the decisions taken are concealed from them. One respondent provided the following example:

I wasn't a Little Oktobrist – my mother didn't allow me. When it was time to join the Komsomol, my mother was very worried. She and father taught me not to join any parties. Since it had to be done, we did it. (W, 52; Germany, 2012)

(Dis)obedience to parents is determined by the various types of capital accumulated by the family. One respondent from the younger generation presented her adaptation behaviour as follows:

It was a real shock for my parents when they found my Komsomol card. Propaganda had influenced me a lot. What was said at school was holy to me. I used not to trust my father. How could he say that Soviet soldiers wanted to shoot him dead? It's impossible. I understood that only later. (W, 61; Poland, 2012)

In adaptation behaviour during the Soviet period, there was no continuity of family experience and values. According to Riesman's analysis, the principles of 'inner-directed' adapters were ignored and the truthfulness of alternative 'other-directed' adapters was relied upon.<sup>30</sup> One respondent rationalised her choices as follows:

I trusted what teachers had to tell us. I believed my father had confused something. It couldn't be so that a Soviet soldier had behaved not as a human to human. My father prevented me from joining the Young Pioneers, but I joined the Komsomol secretly from my parents. And my father wanted to beat me when he saw my Young Communist record. (W, 61; Poland, 2012)

Active conformist behaviour, especially during school years, did not always maintain the continuity of the selected model. Self-criticism of the practised

conformist behaviour and its notional contexts promote the emergence of elements of protest behaviour: 'Later I understood what my father had told me'; 'Then I listened to Radio Free Europe and Voice of America' (W, 61; Poland, 2012). In their biographical narrations, women of the younger generations do not put too much weight on the Soviet period and take it for granted. They do not call into question the conformism of their behaviour, but focus on the opportunities available at that time, without thinking about other potential alternative adaptation behaviour strategies. According to one respondent from the younger generation:

I was happy at school. I took part in amateur activities, dance and drama groups. I was the class monitor. I liked school. I was a Young Pioneer and a Young Communist. Then I became the Secretary of a Komsomol unit. (W, 51; Lithuania, 2012)

During the 'Thaw' and especially the 'Stagnation' periods, everyday Soviet lifestyle was called into question less and less. Focus was placed on taking advantage of available opportunities. One respondent recalled: 'We weren't much interested in knowing what was going on beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. We wanted to travel and we could at that time. With my husband, I travelled to Moscow, Georgia and Armenia' (W, 52; Lithuania, 2012). In selecting professions, these generations emphasise their social status as a means of ensuring the expansion of their social network, as offering the opportunity to apply innovative behavioural models or they focused on the material provision for their family. The latter reasoning is typical of families whose available capital of various types was poor. They directed their children to professions that ensured material stability and offered the opportunity to manage their own lives without the help of others. One respondent set out the following aspects of professional strategy-making:

For us, there was no motivation to study well. If you graduated as an engineer, your salary would be lower than that of an ordinary worker. My husband could study and acquire some education but there was no need to do so. Workers received 120 roubles, while an engineer with a university diploma got 90 roubles. A qualified worker was more highly valued. Then my father told me: be a hair-dresser and that's it! But I didn't want that. (W, 52; Lithuania, 2012)

During the 'Thaw' and 'Stagnation' periods, a conformist, ask-no-questions adaptation strategy was often adopted. One respondent provided the following reasoning for such behaviour:

When something's beyond my control, I just keep calm and don't take it to heart. If I can't change something, I don't break my head over it and don't shout at the TV-set, as many people do [she laughs]. And in general... [pause], maybe it's the nature of my work that now it's the same as it was then. Sure, now when you go to shops, they're full and you don't need to stand in line. I remember that together

with my mum, we stood in queues from six in the morning, replacing each other, to be able to buy some meat. My husband never faced such difficulties because his mother was a shop assistant. (W, 52; Lithuania, 2012)

In the behaviour of the younger generations, the conformism innovative adaptation model can be identified. The propensity towards innovation underscores the importance of social connections when the availability of goods and services is limited. The 'service-for-service' scheme, which became common in Soviet society, involved representatives of different social strata and professions. Illegally taken-out and 'appropriated' products were exchanged for other scarce resources or difficult-to-access services. For example, women who knitted did so privately at home, without declaring their income. One respondent offered the following example: 'My mother knitted at home; my father was a dentist. He also worked a lot outside his official working hours. They lived very well. But my mother always dressed so as not to attract attention' (W, 66; Israel, 2012). Communist Party officials also used such services and practised the conformist innovative behaviour model. They used illegal services to satisfy their own personal needs or those of their family. They were also involved in the 'service-for-service' scheme. One respondent provided an example of such behaviour: 'Together with other students, I went to a *kolkhoz*. A Communist Party official personally brought my permit to go to Israel to that *kolkhoz*' (W, 66; Israel, 2012). Such conformist innovative behaviour, which was generated by individual access to a wide spectrum of scarce services and goods, ranging from food, clothes, shoes, sewing services, health-related services, etc., allowed ideological, social and material differences to be 'ignored' for the sake of organising personal or family welfare.

## CONCLUSION

The various Soviet-era generations of women—'Stalin', 'Thaw', 'Stagnation' and 'Perestroika'—can be looked upon as political generations. Each of these generations organised and controlled their adaptation strategies in different ways. The names of the sub-periods themselves point to the complexity, strictness of control, and possible (dis)obedience strategies of the adaptation behaviour of each period. Difficult trials fell on women who were born during the interwar period. It was the women of the 'Republic' generation who faced the most critical breakdown in their life trajectories. This generation had to survive two periods of social change: the Soviet period and the post-communist transformation. The Soviet period required the 'Republic' generation essentially to restructure their life trajectory. As Roswitha Breckner states in analysing biographical continuities and discontinuities in East–West migration, everyday life encountered 'the crossing of a polarised system border'.<sup>31</sup> During the Soviet period, that border, as a result of political transformation, arose within the state rather than between states.

The life trajectories of the 'Thaw' and 'Stagnation' generations were formed in an environment already recognisable to them, and their family relationships had slightly different solidarity and tension aspects. Their parents already had adaptation experience. One of the main and very important factors that differentiated the 'Republic' and 'Stalin' generations from women of the younger generations was the non-recognition of Soviet rules. Women of the 'Republic' and 'Stalin' generations who chose a conformist adaptation strategy succeeded in adaptation during the Soviet period. They distanced themselves from their own former experiences or those of their families and, through their education or workplace, without any confrontation with ideological rules, adapted to their new social reality. Having found themselves in an unfamiliar situation, they modelled their life trajectories according to Soviet behavioural patterns.

In family relationships, several aspects of such behaviour stand out. When the family had critical attitudes towards the Soviet regime, sometimes the family viewpoint was ignored and women focused on external adapters. Such a strategy was adopted when the parents did not have sufficient capital. Disseminated propaganda was relied upon and strategies of adaptation scenarios were drawn up accordingly. Conformist adaptation behaviour was also chosen out of fear, when there was no solidarity within the family, when 'adaptation units' were especially infringed. Conformist behaviour was also selected in those cases where parents or grandparents, who had different life experience but understood the danger of the 'imported' system, chose conformist behaviour themselves.

Several adaptation strategies can also be distinguished in the adaptation behaviour of women of the 'Stalin' generation: passive conformist behaviour, which manifested itself in life strategy-making according to the rules, while distancing themselves from their parent's environment or other environments close to them. Such behaviour was observed in women from not particularly well-to-do families who lacked 'decent' capital resources of any type. Active conformist adaptation is that involving the use of system 'bonuses' that allow the individual to gain a strong foothold in the system and acquire additional ways to access limited resources. Such an adaptation model was selected either with the family's approval or in conflict with the parent's value system and by ignoring it. The biographical materials of this generation also reveal the conformist retreat behaviour model. This model involves conformist behaviour when the adaptation behavioural examples of that period are externally adopted but, at the same time, plans for retreating from that political system are also designed. Conformist behaviour manifests itself in the choice of profession, using all the advantages provided by the education system. Focus was placed on 'practical' professions, which were less associated with the ideology of the Soviet system. In this example, retreat behaviour manifested itself in the aim of retreating from the Soviet system rather than reforming it.

For women of the 'Thaw' and 'Stagnation' periods, adaptation behaviour models were already recognisable from the life experiences of their family members or environments close to them. Family members had greater influence



and control over the strategy-making of women's life scenarios in these generations. The selection of the adaptation model was determined by the capital of various types accumulated by their parents rather than the recognisability of their parents' experience. Social connections remained very important, allowing implementation or adjustment of the conformist life scenarios. However, as Ene Koresaar and Dalia Marcinkeviciene have noted, shorter memories or suppression of the later Soviet period is evident in these life histories.<sup>32</sup> This period is presented as insignificant. The narration of the 'Stagnation' period is particularly fragmented: the Soviet regime was assumed to be a matter of course. Focus was placed instead on everyday life situations. The representatives of this generation are characterised by their conformist innovative behaviour, and innovation here is related to the assurance of material welfare and social security.

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## Man About the House: Male Domesticity and Fatherhood in Soviet Visual Satire Under Khrushchev

*Claire E. McCallum*

In February 1964, the satirical magazine *Krokodil* published a rather unusual cartoon on its front page: a father and his infant at home alone (Fig. 22.1). While images of fathers interacting with their children had appeared on the cover of the magazine almost a dozen times since 1945, this was the first time that it had depicted a father as solely responsible for the care of a small child within the domestic space.<sup>1</sup> From the state of the apartment, it would appear that this was also the first time that this particular father had been entrusted with such a task: pans bubble over on the stove, the lightshades on the ceiling swing back and forth, and the floor is littered with discarded toys, broken crockery and half-eaten bits of food, and in the middle of this disorder sits the man with his baby in his arms, both of them plaintively calling out ‘Ma-a-ama!’, hoping to hurry the return of the wife and mother still at work.<sup>2</sup>

As Lynne Attwood has highlighted in her analysis of early Soviet women’s magazines, ‘newspapers and magazines were credited by the leaders with enormous importance in socialising the population. They were seen as the main channel of communication between the Communist Party and the people, and a crucial means of disseminating propaganda’.<sup>3</sup> Yet the importance of these publications in educating and moulding Soviet people was not simply confined to the stories they told or the articles they published; the images they featured also had a crucial role in both creating the New Soviet Person and in articulating the concerns and values of contemporary society and this was equally the case for cartoons and caricatures as it was for fine art. The importance of the satirical

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Fig. 22.1 V. Chizhikov, 'Ma-a-ama!', *Krokodil*, no. 5, 1964, front cover

image for Soviet socialisation was made clear by the renowned cartoonist Boris Efimov in an article written for *Voprosy literatury* in early 1962:

Who among the workers in literature and art... does not think about how our weapons – fiery words, sharp pens, brushes, and chisels – can take part in the education of people in communist consciousness? ...we – the workers of the satirical genre, a warlike genre – destroy and mercilessly expose all that is hostile to the people's interest... From the great platform of the Soviet press the political caricature spoke with a firm voice and obtained an unprecedented internal and international resonance, and drew each reader nearer to it, entering into his abode, institution and factory ...<sup>4</sup>

For Efimov, caricature, satire and cartoons were invaluable weapons in the state's arsenal when it came to shaping Soviet society and highlighting the negative behaviours that still needed to be eradicated. Tellingly though, beyond the power of the images themselves, according to this artist, the real educational power of these cartoons lay in their inclusion in the press and subsequently in their ability to infiltrate the everyday life of the Soviet person.<sup>5</sup>

Given the obsession of the Khrushchevist state with the domestic space, it would be easy to assume that it was entirely unremarkable that these issues to do with family life should be reflected in the satire—a genre particularly responsive to contemporary preoccupations—published in the nation’s most popular magazines. However, the family tableaux which began to appear in the mid-1950s were part of a much broader visual reconceptualisation of the place of men within the home which occurred after the death of Stalin. While they may appear trivial and frivolous, the themes and motifs in these drawings were actually unprecedented in Soviet visual culture.<sup>6</sup>

### MEN AND THE HOME DURING THE KHRUSHCHEV ERA

The Khrushchevist state was particularly concerned with the home and family life: as Victor Buchli surmised, ‘if the Stalinist state was poised at the threshold of the “hearth”, the Khrushchevist state walked straight in and began to do battle’.<sup>7</sup> With the rapid development of domestic technologies during the 1950s, the home and homemaking stopped being the exclusive domain of the woman and was turned into an arena for professionalism, scientific debate and modernisation. As Susan Reid has demonstrated, the nexus of the struggle between the private and public within the home was the kitchen, not only in the Leninist sense of helping to reduce the female burden, but also through the burgeoning debate on microbes, appliances and kitchen design in line with ‘scientific-Communist’ ideals.<sup>8</sup> The kitchen was transformed into a space to showcase the latest Soviet technology, based on efficiency, solid aesthetics and underpinned by the scientific discourse of hygiene, as well as a space which demonstrated the progression of socialism to the outside world. This masculinisation of the domestic space, through the introduction of domestic appliances and rational theory, however, did not pave the way for increased male participation in household chores. As Reid has also highlighted, the introduction of modern equipment into the home, while blurring the private/public binary, only served to underline the distinct gendering of domestic labour because ‘both the discourse of modern Soviet living and the actual, built form of housing in the Khrushchev era reconfirmed the individual family home as a site of reproductive labour, and the housewife as its isolated, unpaid workforce’.<sup>9</sup>

In her investigation into the status of women during the Khrushchev period, Attwood also drew attention to the continuation of ‘traditional’ gender divisions in the home, as revealed in readers’ letters to women’s magazines. While some letters hinted at an increased willingness by husbands to participate in housework, this was often met with ridicule from neighbours and friends:

Seeing my husband bustle around the kitchen, some of our male neighbours have begun to mock him, saying he does ‘women’s work’, which they say is unseemly for a man [...] I think that if a man sometimes prepares food, this does him proud [...] We do not laugh at women if they do what is seen to be male work [...] We respect her for it. So why is it shameful for a man to help his wife with housework and childcare?<sup>10</sup>

Despite the despair that some authors expressed concerning the persistence of the 'double burden', calls came for men to 'help' with household duties rather than take on their fair share with the tasks of taking out rubbish or fetching water being presented as suitably masculine roles: a man who cooked or cleaned warranted special praise.<sup>11</sup>

A poll carried out by *Komsomol'skaya pravda* in December 1961 adds to this confused picture, with one male respondent commenting that 'it seems to me that it will soon be necessary to speak of the "emancipation" of men [...] The husband takes the child to kindergarten and brings him home, he goes to the store and minds the child [...] In my opinion, it's time to stop shouting about helping women'.<sup>12</sup> Another female respondent wrote:

The most miserable spectacle is the bored young father sitting in the garden on Sunday with his children in his arms. He is twenty-two or twenty-three and he would like to be hiking with geologists along the Angara [River] with a knapsack on his back, or else he would like to go to the library or skating rink, but instead he sits sweating as he performs the duties of an exemplary father.<sup>13</sup>

For this young woman, the paternal role was one that conflicted with, rather than complemented, the model of the New Soviet Man, as in her eyes men should be exploring nature or pursuing intellectual inquiries, not bound by domestic responsibilities. The poll also asked the multiple choice question 'which of the following would be the most important in eliminating the vestiges of woman's inferior position in everyday life?' The option 'participation of husband and children in the management of the household' was not seen as a solution by any of the respondents whose answers were published, and male involvement in household tasks was viewed as being of minor importance in comparison with government initiatives.<sup>14</sup>

What these contemporary attitudes demonstrate is that confusion proliferated during the Khrushchev years with regard to men and their place and function within the domestic space, as rhetoric slipped between the need to alleviate women's domestic burden and the notion that the husband was little more than a casual assistant for women's household duties.

## REPRESENTING MEN AND THE HOME IN VISUAL CULTURE

While lived experience may have been filled with contradiction and confusion when it came to what role a Soviet man should ideally be playing in the domestic space, official visual culture was far more clear-cut: there was just one role for the man within the home and that was as a father. The inclusion of the father within the domestic space in visual culture was a legacy of the Great Patriotic War. The use of the family as a motivation to fight in wartime posters and the subsequent motif of the returned father, symbolising the restoration of pre-war norms, cemented the man as a figure within the home after 1945. Before the war, the father had been almost completely absent from visual



representations of family life and, as Sergei Kukhterin has demonstrated, this was not a trend confined to cultural production. Family legislation of the 1920s was based on the relationship between the child, mother and paternal state, from which the biological father was actively excluded.<sup>15</sup> The experience of war changed this dynamic, both practically in terms of a redefinition of paternal responsibility in the 1944 Family Code and symbolically as the presence of the father came to be used as a barometer by which society could gauge the return to normal life after such trauma and dislocation.<sup>16</sup>

However, while we can root the introduction of the man into the domestic space in the mid-1940s, it was not until after 1953 that the father became a ubiquitous and multifaceted figure in Soviet visual culture, appearing in a range of roles, guises and media that far outstripped the rather narrow—albeit highly significant—representations of paternity of the late Stalin era. Images of fathers and their children were everywhere: in illustrations for short stories, in published reproductions of paintings, in photographs, and in cartoons. In just 2 months in 1956, the women's magazine *Sovetskaya zhenshchina* reproduced A. Lutsenko's painting *First Born of the New Settlers* (1955), in which the new father and his pals celebrate the birth of this young man's first child; Gelii Korzhev's early work *On Leave From the Construction Site* (?1956) showing a young father returning home and embracing his small child; and featured the short story *Ordinary Lads*, which told the story of Yurii Sablin and the birth of his son Mishka.<sup>17</sup> Illustrated by Petr Pinkisevich, the final image of *Ordinary Lads* was the proud new father, out with his friends, pushing the pram, a striking indication of how far the visual presentation of paternity had come since 1953. Whereas the number of photographs of fathers and their children published during the final decade of Stalinism could be counted on one hand, after 1953 photographs of men interacting with their children featured regularly, culminating in August 1960, when the cover of *Ogonek* featured a father with his child for the first time (Fig. 22.2).<sup>18</sup>

The early years of Khrushchev's 'thaw' saw two developing parallel trends in the representation of the father-child relationship, signalling a significant diversion from the construction of paternity in the last decade of Stalinism. First, fatherhood came to be presented as much more participatory, with fathers depicted as playing an active role in their child's learning and development. Second, these more involved fathers were shown to be present in their child's life from birth, typified by paintings such as Dmitrii Mochal'skii's *In the New Home* (1957) and Andrei Tutunov's *First Steps* (1959). Why there was such a radical shift in conceptualisation and representation of paternity in the years after 1953 is open to interpretation, as the father-child motif is so malleable that it could easily be shaped to fit into a wide range of Khrushchevist concerns. However, anxiety over family life, happenings within the private space, the morality of the next generation or the completion of the socialist project were hardly products of the 'thaw' and yet they had never previously been articulated through the use of a man's relationship with his children, at least not visually. As such, we are left with the question of 'why now?' What change had occurred



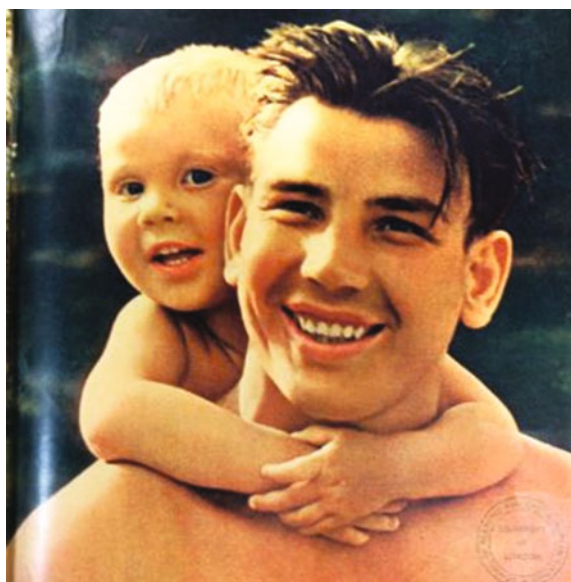


Fig. 22.2 'The New Father of the Thaw', *Ogonek*, no. 33, 1960, front cover

that prompted Soviet fathers to emerge as such a potent visual presence during the Khrushchev era? It is hard to attribute this radical change to anything other than the death of Stalin as the emergence of the father predates any shift in official policy towards the family or any other projects that subsequently influenced a whole range of artistic works that examined contemporary family life. No longer shackled by the symbolic paternal power of the state, it would appear that the death of Stalin liberated biological paternity, enabling it to be represented visually with a power, frequency and range unlike anything that had gone before.

### MEN AND THE HOME IN VISUAL SATIRE

Although most visual genres coded the role of the man in the domestic space almost exclusively through paternity, the confusion highlighted earlier surrounding men and their place within the home when it came to other duties did find an outlet in cartoons and satire. The celebration of International Women's Day on 8 March provided the most fertile ground for ridiculing the shortcomings of Soviet men around the house and the vast majority of images of men doing housework appear around this time of year. The premise was usually the same: the well-meaning husband, eager to give his wife a break from her usual domestic chores, turned his hand to preparing dinner, mopping the floors or doing the ironing with disastrous yet comical results.<sup>19</sup> By the late 1960s, the humour associated with this supposed day of celebration was so well established

that in March 1968 *Ogonek* dedicated its whole 'funny page' to the day and the panic it induced in men across the nation: a man surreptitiously removes the date from the calendar; one man attempts to make a cake using instructions from a TV cooking show and another pores over recipe books while the dinner burns.<sup>20</sup> Although all this chaos and incompetence served a comic purpose—after all a wife coming home to a pristine apartment and a beautifully cooked meal was hardly amusing—the suggestion appears to have been that no Soviet man was comfortable performing these domestic tasks. What is more, by associating this behaviour so closely with International Women's Day, the impression is given that such male involvement in housekeeping was a deviation from the normal rhythms of domestic life, an exceptional, once-a-year kind of occurrence.

The notion that housekeeping was alien territory for the Soviet man was made even more explicit in a number of cartoons that linked domestic chores to more manly pursuits. In 1964, for example, *Ogonek* depicted a husband tending a boiling pot using the same protective equipment usually worn by metal workers.<sup>21</sup> An earlier cartoon by the same artists shows another husband standing to attention in the kitchen, saluting his wife and reporting that nothing significant has happened in her absence, as the pan behind him boils over and spills on the floor.<sup>22</sup> This military subtext is also found in one of the most intriguing cartoons from the era, this time published in *Krokodil* in 1965, again to coincide with International Women's Day. Bedecked in a uniform of floral aprons and wielding an array of household appliances, a group of men march in formation through the street as the women watch from a dais in a parody of the military marches that took place on Red Square. Here male participation in household duties is endowed with a sense of heroism, as if men were off to face the enemy rather than some dirty dishes!<sup>23</sup> The link between domestic and more typically male public spaces provided the basis for German Ogorodnikov's sketch, *Happy Housewarming!*, in which a man cooks a meal for his son over an open fire in the courtyard outside their new, but unfinished, apartment block.<sup>24</sup> The insinuation appears to be that it is only in this carnivalesque world, where the patterns of everyday life have been completely disrupted, would a man perform such a task, although interestingly this is one of only a few images where the man is shown as competently fulfilling a traditionally female role, presumably because the target of the satire is not the uselessness of the Soviet man within the home but the quality of Soviet construction. Yet, despite showing the man wearing an apron, taken outside the home, with all its connotations of primitiveness and adventure, the setting and fire transform this 'female' task into something suitably masculine, and life in the city is endowed with the rugged pioneer spirit found in contemporary representations of the Virgin Lands.

The idea that emerges most clearly and consistently from these images, then, is that men's participation in housework was an aberration, something confined to specific days of the year and with largely negative, if amusing, consequences. Nevertheless, however formulaic such cartoons may have been, they were the

only visual media that engaged with the issue of men's place within the domestic space in any capacity beyond fatherhood. For all the rhetoric that came from the state with regards to easing the burden on women when it came to domestic chores, even in official culture the idea that the solution for this lay in increasing male participation in such responsibilities was quite literally laughable.

### REPRESENTING FATHERS IN VISUAL SATIRE

The mid-1950s witnessed both an explosion in the range of roles that fathers were presented as playing in the upbringing of children and the frequency with which fathers and their children appeared in Soviet print culture. Satirical representations not only map onto the hugely expanded repertoire of father figures found in other visual media, but also created a space for the exploration of some of the more negative aspects of the parent/child relationship that did not have an outlet in other genres, which by and large continued to be optimistic in their outlook, despite the move towards the exploration of some of the more emotionally profound aspects of Soviet life. This is not to say that the representation of the father and his interaction with his children was always presented positively in other forms, but satire engaged far more with the Khrushchevist concerns of parasitism, hooliganism and negative family dynamics than with other 'high-brow' forms of visual culture.

The regime's obsession with youth during the 1950s and 1960s has been well documented: from the attempts to engage the next generation with the Soviet project through programmes such as the Virgin Lands scheme, to the worries over the so-called 'youth problem' that proliferated in official discourse, the young people within Soviet society and their outlook was of particular concern for the government.<sup>25</sup> The most infamous embodiment of the negative Soviet youth was the *stilyaga* (style-hound), whose ridiculous clothing and vacuous lifestyle provided rich fodder for satirical cartoonists even though, as Mark Edele has demonstrated, the *stilyagi* themselves were very much products of the immediate post-war era not de-Stalinisation.<sup>26</sup> Rather than viewing the lifestyle and appearance of these apparently indolent youths as demonstrative of new forms of expression and experimentation, though, the prevailing view was that these children were the products of poor parenting.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the mid- to late 1950s saw a wave of satirical images that condemned the attitude of some parents towards bringing up their children, which were founded on the implicit belief that the raising and socialisation of a child was the responsibility of both adults: in the case of the portrayal of the idle youth, the overindulgent father was just as much to blame as the overprotective mother. In Aminodav Kanevskii's *Busy Hands* (1958), for example, as his mother lights his cigarette, a young man is supported physically, and we can assume financially, by his father, who is depicted as haughty and unbothered by his son's slothful existence (Fig. 22.3).<sup>28</sup> Another drawing by the same artist from earlier in the year shows a youth lounging in a hammock hung between his parents' necks;<sup>29</sup> while a



Fig. 22.3 A. Kanevskii, 'Busy Hands', *Krokodil*, no. 35, 1958

1955 cartoon entitled *Year After Year* also depicts a grown man lazing in a hammock as his parents ply him with food and shade him from the sun, wistfully hoping this will be the year 'little Kolenka' goes to college.<sup>30</sup> Writing in 1957, Allen Kassof recalled seeing similar images on posters on the streets of Kiev, with one showing a middle-aged man struggling to hold his grown-up son in his arms, the slogan reading: 'Falko Edvard, born in 1937, works nowhere, studies nowhere. Supported by his father [...] He goes aimlessly through the city. His father will clothe him, his mother will feed him—they have brought up a "specialist" who cares not a fig for anything'.<sup>31</sup> While the responsibility for raising such idle and pampered children was most frequently associated with the actions of both parents, the father was singled out for particular attention on a couple of occasions, most notably in the *Krokodil* cartoons *Once he climbed on his father's shoulders...* (1955) and *At Their Father's Bosom* (1957), both of which explicitly linked 'bad' fathering to the profligate adolescents depicted.<sup>32</sup>

Whilst the rhetoric of parental blame did not disappear completely, in the early 1960s there was a shift in the portrayal of these problematic youth as parents now came to be represented as victims of their children's idleness rather than the root cause of it. However, their frivolous lifestyle remained central to

these cartoons as they were depicted sleeping off the excesses of ‘dancing, restaurants and picnics’, being buffed and preened by their parents or lounging on the sofa being waited on by family members, although this time more out of coercion than pandering.<sup>33</sup> In many images, interest in fashion and personal grooming was used to signify the lack of ideological zeal in these youths. For example, in one *Krokodil* cartoon from 1962, a fashionably dressed hula-hooping girl defends her lifestyle to her parents, shown pegging out the laundry, by proclaiming ‘I don’t work? All day long I spin like a squirrel in a wheel!’<sup>34</sup> In another from October 1965, the immaculate and Westernised dress of a brother and sister is juxtaposed against the shabby and unfashionable clothing of the adults, who are occupied with cleaning their shoes, brushing their coats and fixing on loose buttons so that the pair can hit the town.<sup>35</sup> This was not the same deriding of fashion as it had been with the *stilyagi*, but rather clothing and appearance were now used as a means of distinguishing between generations: with their tailored suits, high heels and coiffured hair, the impression was instantly given that young people were not the same as their modest, work-conscious parents.<sup>36</sup>

In his discussion of later *Krokodil* cartoons, Alexei Yurchak has pointed out that, while these caricatures ridiculed the young for their slavish adherence to ‘bourgeois influences’, at the same time they helped to ‘normalise the use of Western symbols among Soviet youth who were interested both in having Western music and clothes *and* in work, study and many other pursuits’, and who did not see themselves reflected in *Krokodil*’s treatment of their indolent peers.<sup>37</sup> According to Yurchak, by drawing upon a characterisation of the most extreme negative elements within the young generation, the state inadvertently legitimised other, less extreme forms of deviancy.<sup>38</sup> While there is no doubt that satirical images reveal a great deal about the state’s perception of Soviet youth during the 1950s and 1960s, we should not overlook what this can also tell us about parental relationships and the changing place of the father in representations of the family. Less than 20 years separates the introduction of the Soviet man into the domestic space as a father—primarily in the guise of the returned veteran—and the use of the father within that same domestic space to comment on the shifting outlook of youth. That the notion of a present and proactive father was by this point so ingrained in representations of family life that his love and care for his children could now form the basis of satire shows just how central paternity had become to the Soviet masculine ideal by the mid-1960s.

However, the portrayal of men with their problematic adolescent children was by no means the only depiction found in satire from this period. As Deborah Field has highlighted, advice given to fathers by contemporary pedagogues often centred on the need not to be a workaholic, alcoholic or physically abusive, rather than being constructed in more positive terms.<sup>39</sup> These same concerns influenced satirical representations of fatherhood as such undesirable behaviours became the benchmark for representing what ‘bad’ fathering looked like and which, in turn, conveyed what every Soviet father should strive to be. While artistic depictions of Soviet fathers were not always positive—Sergei

Grigorev's *He's Come Back* (1954) being a case in point—satire provided an outlet for the exploration of these negative paternal figures with a far greater frequency than in fine art. There are a handful of cartoons that represent a physically abusive father, such as the 1961 *Krokodil* cartoon, *A Contradictory Upbringing*, which shows a boy going off to school, his mother lovingly saying goodbye on one side and his father standing belt in hand on the other.<sup>40</sup> An even more explicitly violent cartoon, *With the Help of God* (1964), depicts a father having just finished beating his son with his belt under the watchful eyes of the icon in the corner of the room.<sup>41</sup> Yet such images are the exception and it was generally a more benign neglect that was portrayed, with the most common motif being what we might think of as the disengaged father.

The idea that the father was responsible for children's educational development and achievement of *kul'turnost'* ('culturedness') was well established in Soviet society. It had been a part of how fatherhood was conceptualised from the 1930s and the Stalinist state's shift in attitude towards the family and its place in socialist society. As a 1936 *Pravda* commentary on the role of the father proclaimed:

In the Soviet land, 'father' is a respected calling [...] It designates a Soviet citizen, the builder of a new life, the raiser of a new generation [...] Under Soviet conditions the father is the social educator. He has to prepare good Soviet citizens: that is his duty, that is also his pride [...] A man who cowardly and basely abandons his children, shuns his responsibility, hides in corners and puts all the paternal duties on the mother's shoulders, shames the name of a Soviet citizen [...] A Soviet child has a right to a real father, an educator and a friend.<sup>42</sup>

This idea persisted beyond the end of the Stalin era, as emphasis continued to be placed on the father's role in providing both 'discipline and intellectual stimulation' during the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>43</sup> Given how central the role of disciplinarian was to the traditional paternal ideal, it is surprising then that it plays a remarkably small part in how fathers were portrayed in satire under Khrushchev.<sup>44</sup> A lack of parental discipline was covertly at the heart of many of the cartoons lambasting the lifestyle of indolent adolescents, and harmful and abusive forms of discipline can be found in images that portray physical violence, but, generally, images that examined a father's (in)ability to control his unruly children were few and far between. One rare example, featured on the front page of *Krokodil* in February 1965, depicted a sheepish-looking child, carrying a slingshot, being brought home by a disgruntled neighbour, only for the man to be sent away by the child's father because his wife was not home to deal with the situation.<sup>45</sup>

Far more common were images depicting fathers interacting with their children, which centred on school work or education more generally. Two examples that were printed on the front cover of *Krokodil*—one in 1954 and the other in 1962—are particularly noteworthy. The earlier cartoon depicts a mother and her three children studying together around a table, the older



children wearing Pioneer uniforms, while the little girl, clutching her ABC book, looks at her father warily as he sits in a comfy chair away from the rest of the family, puffing on a cigarette.<sup>46</sup> Although the barb of the cartoon was aimed at those who undertake ‘self-improvement’ only to gain a tactical or political advantage, it is interesting that the artist chose to articulate this both within the confines of the family home and explicitly through the father. This detachment from learning purely for the love of learning or disengagement with the education of one’s own children also comes across in an image from the 1960s: a man on a couch lies with his back turned towards his daughter, who has come to ask him what the word ‘nobility’ (in terms of behaviour not social class; *blagorodstvo*) means, only to be dismissed by her father for asking ‘silly questions’ (Fig. 22.4).<sup>47</sup>

Through these images, then, it is possible to ‘reverse engineer’ what the ideal father was perceived to be during the Khrushchev era. The derision aimed at those men who showed no interest in their child’s education, who were too busy to play a role in their child’s life or who set a poor moral example for their offspring demonstrate that even during the 1950s paternal responsibility was portrayed as being far more multifaceted than simple financial support and the imposition of discipline. It demanded an emotional engagement and day-to-day



Fig. 22.4 V. Goryaev, ‘Papa, What is Nobility?’ *Krokodil*, no. 24, 1962

involvement more commonly associated with later attitudes towards the father's place in the family. While there may have been ambiguity surrounding what role the Soviet man had in the maintenance of the family home, there was no doubt that he had a crucial part to play in successfully raising the next generation, and such representations of 'bad' fathers served to reinforce this ideal.

It would be a mistake, however, to characterise all fathers represented in satire as being feckless individuals who had a negative influence on their child's life. There were also images (such as Fig. 22.1) that presented the father as simply clueless or, to put it politely, challenged by the realities of childcare. While depictions of 'bad' fathers were for the most part restricted to *Krokodil*, the portrayal of bumbling and charmingly incompetent fathers, along with their housekeeping counterparts, also found a place in *Ogonek*. The humour of these more positive images rests on the supposition that the father was inexperienced and ill-equipped when it came to dealing with children on his own: we find images of a father contemplating drying his child's tears with a laundry mangle; a father telephoning his wife because the baby has refused the food and drink he has prepared (which looks remarkably like caviar and vodka!); a father covered in bruises from attempting to feed his small son; and a father chatting to a friend on the street oblivious to the fact he is holding his child upside down.<sup>48</sup>

Of course, the common denominator in all of these images is that the father had been left in charge of an infant, a scenario that is almost exclusively the preserve of satire during this period. Although a father failing miserably to pacify, feed or entertain a baby was perhaps riper for comedic exploitation than situations involving older children, it would appear that the humour in such cartoons rested on the notion that, while a good father should be intimately involved in raising his children right from birth, he was still not expected to do so alone; hence left to his own devices with a small child, calamity ensues. Yet, for all their absurdity, we should not overlook the real importance of these cartoons, which is that they comprise a significant part of a much wider trend that brought an aspect of Soviet family life that was entirely absent from visual culture just a few years earlier to the pages of the nation's most widely read magazines, and consequently into the homes of millions of Soviet citizens.

## CONCLUSION

With its destruction of the paternal cult and the subsequent disruption to the dynastic patterns of the state, the emergence of new identities and modes of expression and the questions raised about the role of the older generation in the crimes of the previous regime, some commentators have viewed the Khrushchev era as defined by the rejection of the father.<sup>49</sup> While it is certainly the case that the processes of de-Stalinisation eroded some of the certainties of Soviet society and that paternal relationships, particularly figurative ones, can provide a useful lens for exploring how these changes were both conceptualised and navigated, moving away from the symbolic reveals that in reality the Khrushchev years were anything but fatherless. Given the preoccupation of the state with all things



domestic during the mid-1950s and early 1960s, it is not surprising that scenes of family life proliferated in visual culture but the portrayal of the family, and particularly the relationship between father and child, was radically different from the visual culture of the post-war Stalin era, which had marked the initial introduction of the father into the domestic space. Gone was the subtext of wartime absences and separation, and instead a plethora of emotionally engaged and fully developed father figures populate the imagery produced and published in Soviet print culture after 1953.

Satirical representations of men within the domestic space played a unique part in this development. Cartoons were the only visual medium which dared to broach the thorny issue of men's involvement in the family home in any capacity beyond fatherhood. Largely confined to the humour pages of *Ogonek*, rather than the more hard-edged satire of *Krokodil*, such representations of male participation in housework were more a light-hearted ribbing of supposed male incompetence than a critique of the domestic burden that continued to be largely shouldered by women. While the importance of this trend should not be overlooked, it is arguably in relation to the depiction of men as fathers that cartoons and satirical drawings prove to be particularly valuable sources as they provided a conduit for examining some of the more negative aspects of domestic life with a frequency and acerbity unparalleled in other forms of visual culture. As positive images of the perfect father proliferated on the pages of magazines such as *Ogonek*, primarily through photographs and reproductions of paintings, cartoons showed the other side of family life through portrayals of fathers who were disengaged, physically abusive or morally suspect. While it is impossible to gauge how greatly such images may have impacted on the outlook and behaviours of actual Soviet men, at the very least the willingness to broach such issues demonstrates how visual culture changed following 1953, as Socialist Realism moved closer to representing real life.

Thus, through satire the premise that a good father, and by extension ideal Soviet man, should be actively involved in the intellectual and psychological development of his children from birth was reinforced—not a concept that was new in the mid-1950s but one that found artistic expression for the very first time. However trivial these cartoons may seem, they are actually part of nothing less than a visual revolution in how the father, his role in the home and his relationship with his children were represented after the death of the self-styled ultimate patriarch, Father Stalin.

## NOTES

1. Fathers appeared as the front cover of *Krokodil* eleven times between 1945 and 1965, but only twice during the Stalin era (10 September 1948 and 20 November 1949); half of these images appeared in 1964 and 1965.
2. V. Chizhikov, 'Zhena zaderzhalas' na rabote...', *Krokodil*, no. 5, 1964, front cover.
3. Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922–53*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 2.

4. Boris Efimov, 'Ozuzhie smekha', cited in Stephen M. Norris, 'Laughter's Weapon and Pandora's Box: Boris Efimov in the Khrushchev Era', in David Goldfrank and Pavel Lyssakov, *Cultural Cabaret: Russian and American Essays for Richard Stites*, Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2012, pp. 106–7.
5. The social function of satirical humour and joke-telling in the Soviet Union has been an area of interest for a number of scholars in recent years, particularly in relation to the Stalin period. See, for example: Jonathan Waterlow, 'Sanctioning Laughter in Stalin's Soviet Union' *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 79, no. 1, 2015, pp. 198–214, and his chapter in this volume; David Brandenberger, *Political Humor under Stalin*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009; and Robert Thurston, 'Social Dimensions of Stalin's Rule: Humor and Terror in the USSR', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1991, pp. 541–62.
6. References here to visual culture exclude film.
7. Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism*, Oxford: Bloomsbury, 1999, p. 138.
8. Susan E. Reid, 'The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2005, pp. 289–316.
9. Reid, 'Khrushchev Kitchen', p. 293.
10. Lynne Attwood, 'Celebrating the "Frail-Figured Welder": Gender Confusion in Women's Magazines of the Khrushchev Era', *Slavonica*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2002, p. 166, citing *Rabotnitsa*, no. 10, 1955, p. 25.
11. Attwood, 'Celebrating the "Frail-Figured Welder"', pp. 167–9.
12. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 17 December 1961, p. 4.
13. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 24 December 1961, p. 4.
14. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 17 December 1961, p. 4.
15. Sergei Kukhterin, 'Fathers and Patriarchs in Communist and Post-Communist Russia', in Sarah Ashwin (ed.), *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 74.
16. For the 1944 Family Code, see Rudolf Schlesinger (ed.), *The Family in the USSR: Documents and Readings*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949, pp. 367–77.
17. *Sovetskaya zhenshchina*, no. 7, 1956, p. 30, and no. 5, 1956, pp. 6–10.
18. For example, twenty-five photographs of the father–child relationship appeared in *Ogonek* between May 1945 and March 1953; the number of photographs published only exceeded five per annum in 1946 and 1952.
19. See, for example, I. Semenov, 'Iz samykh lushikh pobuzhdenii...', *Sovetskaya zhenshchina*, no. 3, 1958, pp. 12–13; I. Lisogors, 'V den' 8 marta', *Krokodil*, no. 7, 1960, p. 6; G. and V. Karavaev, 'Dorogoi, ty opyat' zabyl chto 8 Marta ya delayu vse sama', *Ogonek*, no. 10, 1961, p. 33 and the page of cartoons 'Prazdnik zhen-shchin v raznye epokhi', *Krokodil*, no. 6, 1963, p. 5.
20. 'Zhenskii den', *Ogonek*, no. 10, 1968, p. 30.
21. G. and V. Karavaev, 'Ekh ty, a eshche luchshii stalevar na zavode!' *Ogonek*, no. 26, 1964, p. 31.
22. G. and V. Karavaev, 'Za vashe otsutstvie nichego sushchestvennogo ne proizoshlo' *Ogonek*, no. 9, 1964, p. 33.
23. S. Aleksandrov, Untitled, *Krokodil*, no. 6, 1965, p. 7.
24. G. Ogorodnikov, 'Schastlivy novosel'e', *Krokodil*, no. 24, 1966, p. 8.
25. See, for example, Juliane Fürst, 'The Arrival of Spring? Changes and Continuities in Soviet Youth Culture and Policy Between Stalin and Khrushchev', in P. Jones (ed.), *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 135–53.

26. Mark Edele, 'Strange Young Men in Stalin's Moscow: the Birth and Life of the *Stiliagi*, 1945–1953', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2002, pp. 37–61.
27. 'O ser'eznykh nedostatkakh v vospitanii detei', 24 August, 1955, in *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954–8*, vol. 2, Moscow, 2003, pp. 114–22.
28. A. Kanevskii, 'Ruki zanyaty' *Krokodil*, no. 35, 1958, p. 5.
29. A. Kanevskii, 'So vsemi udobstvami', *Krokodil*, no. 8, 1958, p. 7.
30. E. Shcheglov, 'Iz goda v god' *Krokodil*, no. 21, 1955, p. 13.
31. Allen Kassof, 'Youth vs the Regime: Conflict in Values', *Problems of Communism*, vol. 3, no. 6, 1957, p. 20.
32. B. Leo, 'Odnazhdy on zabralsya ottsu na sheyu... ....da tak i ne slez', *Krokodil*, no. 32, 1955, p. 5; V. Konovalov, 'U ottsa za pazukhoi' *Krokodil*, no. 22, 1957, p. 14.
33. E. Gorokhov, 'Uzhasno ustal nash synok!...', *Krokodil*, no. 17, 1956, p. 5.
34. E. Gorokhov, 'Ya ne rabotayu?' *Krokodil*, no. 13, 1962, p. 8.
35. Yu. Uzbyakov, 'Vechno my opazdyvaem iz-za roditelei!' *Krokodil*, no. 29, 1965, p. 9.
36. Other examples include B. Leo 'Ditya ekrana' *Krokodil*, no. 14, 1962, p. 11; V. Goriev, 'Mamoobsluzhivanie', *Krokodil*, no. 9, 1962, front cover; E. Gorokhov, 'Tebe ne kazhestsya, chto my kak-to ne tak vospityvaem rebenka?' *Krokodil*, no. 24, 1963, p. 6; B. Leo, 'Nu, milochka, v etom naryade vam v trudovom pasporte ne otkazhut!', *Krokodil*, no. 13, 1964, p. 7; L. Samoilov, 'Na kogo by nazhat?' *Krokodil*, no. 29, 1965, p. 9; E. Shcheglov, 'Tryakhnem starinoi!' *Krokodil*, no. 31, 1965, front cover.
37. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: the Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 198.
38. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 198.
39. Deborah Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia*, New York: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 88.
40. A. Kanevskii, 'Protivorechiya vospitaniya', *Krokodil*, no. 17, 1961, p. 8. This cartoon was part of a double-page spread featuring simple cartoons on the theme of parents and children, mostly drawing on examples of bad parenting.
41. V. Goryaev, 'S bozh'e pomoshch'yu', *Krokodil*, no. 8, 1964, p. 5. See also Yu. Uzbyakov 'Povtoryayu: nel'zya tak vospityvat' rebenka!', *Krokodil*, no. 20, 1952, p. 5, for an earlier representation of an abusive father. In a more light-hearted vein, see G. and V. Karavaev, 'Vot vidish', chto znachit ne slushat'sya papu!' *Krokodil*, no. 31, 1965, p. 25, which depicts a man showing a young child Il'ya Repin's painting *Ivan Groznyi i syn ego Ivan 16 noyabrya 1581* (1885).
42. 'Otets', *Pravda*, 9 June 1936, p. 1.
43. Deborah Field, 'Mothers and Fathers and the Problem of Selfishness in the Khrushchev Period', in Melanie Ilic, Susan E. Reid and Lynne Attwood (eds.), *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004, p. 97.
44. Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890–1991*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 104.
45. G. Andryanov 'Vash syn? – Da. No zaidite s nim v drugoi raz, zheny net doma', *Krokodil*, no. 6, 1965, front cover.
46. L. Gench, 'U nas v sem'e vse uchatsya...', *Krokodil*, no. 25, 1954, front cover.
47. V. Goryaev, 'Papa, chto takoe blagorodstvo?...', *Krokodil*, no. 24, 1962, front cover.
48. G. and V. Karavaev, 'Eshche raz prostirnu i budu sushit' *Ogonek*, no. 10, 1966, p. 18; V. Tamaev, 'Vozvrashchaisya skoree, on ne p'et, ne est', *Ogonek*, no. 10,

- 1966, p. 19; Yu. Cherepanov, 'Nakonets-to s mannoi kashei my pokonchili!', *Ogonek*, no. 50, 1965, p. 33; A. Belov, 'A gde zhe mama? V roditel'skom universitet', *Ogonek*, no. 18, 1963, p. 25.
49. Nancy Condee, 'Cultural Codes of the Thaw', in William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev and Abbott Gleason (eds.), *Nikita Khrushchev*, Chelsea, MI: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 160–76; Dina Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: Novyi Mir and the Soviet Regime*, New York: Praeger, 1982, pp. 121–2.

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## Sex Education and the Depiction of Homosexuality Under Khrushchev

*Rustam Alexander*

During the Khrushchev thaw, from the early 1950s to the early 1960s, the Soviet state launched a campaign on sex education, publishing a whole series of manuals on the subject. This represented an important shift in the official Soviet policy towards sex: from prevailing silence on sex issues to their examination in sex education brochures aimed at Soviet young people. These manuals were introduced in the hope of restricting the sexual activity of Soviet young people and to raise their awareness of venereal diseases, abortion and some facts about human physiology. In addition, some of these publications featured homophobic passages on homosexuality, labelling it a ‘sexual perversion’.

This chapter examines the sex education manuals published in the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev era (1956–1964) and explores how their framing of sex education changed over this period. It argues that during this period the main focus of the manuals’ discussions shifted from the initial task to eliminate ‘the vestiges of the capitalist past’ to a focus on confronting ‘ideological diversion’ of the West. This chapter also explores the treatment of homosexuality in these texts hypothesising on why its descriptions appeared in these manuals. The chapter starts with a brief exploration of the Stalinist era and the Stalinist era sex education manual. Then it proceeds to the Khrushchev era, demonstrating how the ideas expressed by Stalinist-era physicians remained in the Khrushchev-era sex education manuals and were reframed thereafter in accordance with contemporary political developments. The third section of the chapter elaborates on the treatment of homosexuality in these manuals and how they were affected by changes in sex education narratives.

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## THE FIRST SOVIET SEX EDUCATION MANUAL

The emergence of the first Soviet sex education manual *Healthy Marriage and Healthy Family* (1948), written by Soviet doctor L.A. Zalkind, seems extraordinary. It attests to the fact that despite the rigid ideological controls and total silence about sex peculiar to the Stalinist era, there were still professionals who expressed the need for sex education among young people.<sup>1</sup> The reasons why the Stalinist government allowed the publication of this sex education manual remain unclear. New archival materials and sources can offer new insights and possible explanations for its publication.

The questions of sex education in the manual were treated with an overt Marxist gloss. Zalkind heralded the victory of socialism in Soviet society, which, according to him, had brought about women's liberation and equation of their rights with those of men. Socialism was said to have rid society of such undesirable phenomena as depravity and prostitution, to have reinforced the institution of the family and to have decreased both the divorce rate and the incidence of venereal diseases. Likewise, according to Zalkind, the victory of socialism had raised public consciousness and the cultural level of Soviet people; old 'bourgeois morality' was gradually being replaced by 'communist morality', stemming from interest in the building of communism. However, to Zalkind's chagrin, some undesirable phenomena framed by him as 'remnants of bourgeois morality' (such as adultery, the disrespectful treatment of women and even depravity) still ailed Soviet society. Their elimination was declared to be the most important task of sex education in the Soviet Union.

The achievements of the socialist revolution and communist morality were counterpoised by Zalkind to life in the West and 'hypocritical' bourgeois morality, which supposedly permeated Western society. Western youth (gendered as masculine) was depicted as depraved, since, according to the author, it resorted to the services of prostitutes and was generally prone to promiscuity and sexual depravity. In contrast, the lifestyle of Soviet young people was depicted as completely antithetical: Soviet adolescents were more concerned with the interests of the collective and society, their approach to marriage and family was more 'critical and conscious', their sexual attitudes were said to be more restrained.<sup>2</sup>

Three years later, *Healthy Marriage and Healthy Family* (1951) was republished, having undergone several changes in its content. In this revised edition, the detrimental effects of 'established deleterious habits and prejudice of the past' as well as 'vestiges of the capitalist past' lingering in Soviet people's consciousness were framed as undesirable even more rigorously. Some of the chapters were reworked to emphasise the treacherous nature of these phenomena. Whereas the first chapter of the first edition was simply titled 'Marriage in bourgeois society and in our country', the title of the first chapter in the second edition was more elaborate: 'Marriage in bourgeois society and the fight against the vestiges of bourgeois attitudes towards marriage in our country'.<sup>3</sup>

These two editions of the same sex education manual were the only successful attempts by Soviet doctors to contemplate sex education and bring their ideas within the reach of the Soviet reading public under Stalin. Their publication suggests that different perspectives regarding sex education were apparently allowed within a tolerable range of opinions. While Zalkind deplored parents' inability to engage in the sex education of their children due to their own ignorance, he was also cautious not to challenge the official Soviet policy towards sex, which sought to prevent young children from early sexual maturation. Zalkind constantly reminded his readers that sex education, if conducted improperly, might trigger premature sexual curiosity.<sup>4</sup> Zalkind's ambiguities towards sex education, as well as his repetitive warnings about the existing 'capitalist vestiges of the past', are discernible also in the narratives of the first Khrushchev-era sex education manuals.

### KHRUSHCHEV'S 'THAW'

After Stalin's death in March 1953, the so-called period of the 'thaw' set in. This was characterised by important transformations in Soviet society distinctive from the Stalinist period: millions of Soviet political prisoners were amnestied and released from labour camps and the Soviet Union became more open to the outside world. Khrushchev's Secret Speech to the XX Communist Party Congress in February 1956 launched the process of de-Stalinisation in the Soviet Union, which manifested itself in significant relaxation of censorship and gave more freedom of information in the media. This freedom extended to issues surrounding sexuality, gender and the family: abortion was decriminalised in 1955 and the Soviet government started publishing more sex education manuals.

Soviet chief doctors, however, were very cautious in their approach to introducing such topics to the broader public, especially to young children. The Stalinist approach towards sex education, which sought to prevent children and adolescents from obtaining any information about sex, was still dominant. Moreover, Soviet chief physicians espoused different standpoints on sex education.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps as a result of such diversity of opinion, the first years of the Khrushchev era did not see the publication of any new sex education manuals, although Zalkind's *Happy Marriage and Healthy Family* was republished for a third time in 1956. The third edition contained some amendments: all mentions of Stalin were excluded and all of the passages citing abortion as crime were removed since abortion was now legalised. Despite these changes, the focus of Soviet sex education remained the same: the removal of 'vestiges of the capitalist past'.

The first genuinely Khrushchev-era sex education manual was titled *Sex Life and the Family* (1958) and was written by A.G. Stankov, a rural doctor from Ukraine. The author framed his arguments for sex education around the necessity to confront venereal diseases, which in turn, were blamed on 'vestiges

of the past'. According to Stankov, it was important to raise public awareness of these 'vestiges' since they also allegedly resulted in moral degeneration, sexual disorders and venereal diseases.<sup>6</sup> Stankov's narratives moved along the familiar trajectory laid down by Zalkind: he proclaimed that family and marriage were not a private matter in the Soviet Union and demonstrated the same ambivalence towards the issue of sex education, arguing for its introduction on the one hand and warning against excessive elucidation of sex issues on the other. Stankov also preferred to talk about bud and amoeba reproduction before talking about human reproduction and even discussed the issues of castration and transplantation of reproductive glands, which were described in Zalkind's books. It remains unclear whether Stankov was merely imitating Zalkind's discussions (in the absence of any other template) or following particular handed-down instructions on how to frame his manual. Considering these similarities, one gains the impression that this could be the case.

The next Khrushchev-era sex education manual was *Questions of Sex Education* (1959), written by Soviet physician T.S. Atarov, who put a new emphasis on the importance of 'communist morality' in the sex lives of the Soviet people. Unlike Stankov's *Sex Life and Family*, which highlighted the importance of raising young people's awareness of venereal diseases and human physiology, Atarov's book shifted from this approach to assign primary importance to moral education. Such a stance reflected the views of Soviet senior officials, including Khrushchev himself, who stressed the importance of communist morality at the XXI Communist Party Congress in 1959 and explained that it was based on 'devotion to Communism', 'consciousness of societal duty', 'active participation in labour for the benefit of society' and 'intolerance towards the destroyers of social order'.<sup>7</sup> This could be the possible reason for Atarov's book being extremely moralistic, bringing the issues of morality to the fore. Despite this novelty, Atarov's manual maintained continuity with Zalkind's and Stankov's manuals on 'bourgeois vestiges of the past'. In fact, Atarov dedicated more attention to them and even examined particular cases, wherein communist morality was violated due to 'bourgeois vestiges' at work. The examination of these cases fitted well with the official discourse on the importance of communist morality.

*Questions of Sex Education* (1959) also introduced another element to the discourse on sex education: the link between a healthy sex life and healthy daily life (*zdorovyi byt*).<sup>8</sup> According to the author, only 'healthy' environments could prevent young children from early sexual maturation. Elaborating on his point, Atarov offered examples of 'unhealthy' environments and factors conducive to it: for example, if parents allowed themselves to demonstrate excessive affection to one another in front of their child this might infringe on the moral development of their offspring.<sup>9</sup> Young people's dietary habits had to be healthy as well: excessive consumption of sweets, spices and smoked food might trigger 'increased sexual arousal'.<sup>10</sup> On top of all that, working conditions were also of paramount importance: those young people who worked in restaurants or cafés were particularly susceptible to premarital liaisons and the unhealthy awakening



of sexual feelings. Atarov advised employers to hire only adults to work in such places.<sup>11</sup>

By 1959, the Soviet Union had thus seen the publication of only three sex education manuals: *Healthy Marriage and Healthy Family*, republished for the third time, *Sex Life and Family* and *Questions of Sex Education*. The narratives of these manuals moved along a similar trajectory, proclaiming that the primary goal of Soviet sex education was the elimination of 'the vestiges of the capitalist past', which were allegedly the reason for all of the undesirable phenomena still lingering in the Soviet society (notably venereal diseases). Soviet physicians attributed these remnants to the 'serious shortcomings' in the education of youth.<sup>12</sup> Yet, they were cautious not to challenge the basic essence of the Soviet education system; they claimed that 'immoral behaviour' was not characteristic of Soviet youth.<sup>13</sup> The authors of these manuals also shared a similar ambiguous attitude towards sex education: on the one hand they stated that it was important; on the other hand they made clear that on no account did they intend to indicate that it was necessary to introduce immature children to such topics. Such an approach towards sex education was combined with the exigencies of communist morality, which was proclaimed by Soviet officials to be the principal guide of Soviet people's lives.

In 1960 the Soviet State Medical Publishing House brought out several brochures on sexual education: *The Youth becomes a Man* (1960), written by a Czechoslovakian professor of sexology, Josef Hynie, and with a print-run of 200,000 copies<sup>14</sup>; *The Girl Becomes a Woman* (1960) by Rudolf Peter, Vatslav Shebek and Josef Hynie with a print-run of 300,000 copies<sup>15</sup>; and *Questions of Sex* (1960) by East German hygienist Rudolf Neubert with a print-run of 100,000 copies.<sup>16</sup> These books stood in stark contrast to the previously published Soviet manuals on sex education. They dared to open a relatively frank discussion on sex with young readers, a task which Soviet sexologists so far had failed to accomplish. These new publications almost ignored the ideological underpinnings inherent in earlier Soviet sex education manuals.

With fresh evidence on the behind-the-doors discussions of these manuals' reception by Soviet top physicians, some light can be shed on the reasons why these books were published in the Soviet Union. One possible reason for such a decision could be the fact that Soviet physicians were aware of the fact that sexology in Czechoslovakia and East Germany was more sophisticated. In fact, by the late 1950s, sexology was already an established and legitimate field of academic and scientific inquiry in Czechoslovakia. At this time, Czechoslovakia could boast the Czech Institute of Sexology, which had been founded in Prague in 1921 and compared to similar institutions in Berlin and Vienna had a far more sophisticated approach to sexology.<sup>17</sup> Hynie directed the Institute from 1934 and 1974 and clearly had a strong international reputation as an experienced sexologist; thus, his works and those of his colleagues were translated into Russian and presented to Soviet readers.<sup>18</sup>

Compared to earlier Soviet manuals, *The Youth Becomes a Man* and *The Girl Becomes a Woman* indeed seemed to be more understanding of the problems

and questions which young people might potentially have; the narratives of the manuals were less didactic and more engaging. More importantly, it was Hynic's profound medical experience (as well as that of his colleagues), which shaped the content of these books and made them less moralistic; for instance, the familiar tropes about 'capitalist vestiges of the past' and passages on 'communist morality' were absent.

Such a detour from the mainstream sex educational narrative about 'the vestiges of the capitalist past' and 'communist morality' (along with obvious discrepancies between Soviet and East German realities) was more evident in another foreign sex education manual, also published in the Soviet Union in 1960, *Questions of Sex*. In fact, Soviet doctors responsible for the publication of this manual were aware of such shortcomings and that is why they felt compelled to provide an introduction to the manual, reminding readers of 'the vestiges of the capitalist past' that were allegedly still prevalent in the Soviet society and the importance of 'communist morality', which was supposed to guide every Soviet person (in the editor's foreword to the book it was noted that Neubert failed to elaborate sufficiently on 'communist morality').<sup>19</sup> The inclusion of these points in the introduction suggest that by 1960 there had formed a preferable way of framing and treatment of such topics among Soviet authors, a template, which went hand-in-hand with Khrushchev's pronouncements on the importance of 'communist morality' and earlier discourse on the 'vestiges of the capitalist past'. *Youth Becomes a Man* and *Questions of Sex* deviated from the usual way of writing on sex education.

The following 3 years did not see the publication of any sex education manuals. The possible reasons for this remain unclear. Drawing on some commentaries provided by Soviet professor of psychology V.N. Kolbanovskii in the medical journal *Soviet Healthcare* it may be inferred that the divergence of opinions regarding sex education could be one explanation.<sup>20</sup> The publication of sex education manuals, however, was resumed in the wake of the June 1963 Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

The decision to organise this Plenum was related to specific political developments in Soviet society in 1961 and 1962 that led the Soviet leadership to believe that 'detrimental Western influences' were seeping into the Soviet Union, corrupting Soviet people's minds. What seemed particularly disturbing for Soviet officials were 'negative' effects of Western culture, to which Soviet people were now exposed, either on their trips overseas or even at home mingling with foreign tourists visiting the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup> According to Khrushchev himself, some prominent Soviet cultural workers, instead of propagating socialist ideals, had fallen prey to the 'ideological diversion of the West' imitating 'inferior bourgeois traits' in their art, which were presumably alien to the Soviet people.<sup>22</sup> These anxieties essentially legitimized Khrushchev's claim for greater ideological propaganda against bourgeois influences from the West and made the Soviet leader backpedal on almost every front.

The June 1963 Plenum of the Communist Party Central Committee was arranged to tackle this problem. It was devoted to the 'tasks of ideological battle

in contemporary conditions' and stressed the importance of the strengthening of ideological propaganda in the face of 'the bitter ideological fight on the international arena'.<sup>23</sup> It was decided to 'increase political vigilance' against 'imperialist sabotage', the displays of which had already manifested themselves in the Soviet society, in the art of some prominent Soviet cultural workers and in some 'depraved' Western theatrical plays shown in Moscow theatres.<sup>24</sup> The delegates of the Plenum coincided in the opinion that 'imperialist ideologies are trying in every way possible to influence Soviet people; their main objective is unstable elements, that is individuals who are not politically and ideologically case-hardened'.<sup>25</sup> Educational work was stated to be the most effective means of confronting this malevolent capitalist ideology.<sup>26</sup>

The Plenum led Soviet sex education authors to reframe their discussions of sex education accordingly. Soviet physicians were now expected to address the issues of sex in a similar anti-Western vein. From this point on, sex education discourse became more defensive: it essentially became an effective Soviet instrument for the dissemination of anti-Western propaganda. While earlier sex education manuals were merely expected to set their narratives around communist morality and 'capitalist vestiges', the authors of sex education manuals published in the wake of the Plenum were apparently expected to extrapolate the Plenum's decisions on their discussions of sex education, suggesting that the main threat to a healthy sex life of the Soviet people was now coming from the West. In fact, in one brochure this point overshadowed all others: thus, the foreword to *On Sex Education* (1964) explicitly stated that the task of sexual education was to prevent young people from acquiring 'deleterious views' (*vrednie vzgliady*) on sex, as the 'deleterious ideological influence of the West with its propagation of the animal importance of sexual attraction is still insinuating in our country in different forms'.<sup>27</sup> The authors of another manual *Marital Hygiene* (1964) stated: 'Unfortunately the pernicious influence of bourgeois ideology, dominating the literature and arts of the capitalist countries, is taking its toll on a group of less stable representatives of Soviet youth in regards to morals'.<sup>28</sup> The eradication of negative bourgeois influence required the joint work of parents, educators and doctors.<sup>29</sup>

The authors of *On Sex Education*, *Marital Hygiene* and *Hygiene of Sex Life* (1964) devoted more energy to descriptions of Western society's inherent degeneracy. Soviet physicians suggested that it was the economic structure of the capitalist system that was inherently perverted and which constituted a threat to the 'sincere and chaste' nature of sexual relations between people. In particular, they contended that with the emergence of capitalist society and the prevalence of a 'buy and sell' attitude, economic inequality had become widespread, and this forced women to indulge in prostitution as the only means they could resort to in order to survive. The proliferation of prostitution, for its part, spawned nightclubs with erotic dancing and binge drinking, which were referred to as 'dens of depravity'. Young people in the West, having at their disposal such a wide assortment of potentially corrupting institutions (the aforementioned nightclubs, rampant prostitution, cinema and television)

became increasingly susceptible to vice: their sexual interest displayed itself earlier than that of youth in the socialist countries and their attitude to sexual relations was necessarily limited to deriving a transient pleasure.<sup>30</sup> Although these narratives were not new (Zalkind's *Healthy Marriage and Healthy Family* had depicted Western society in the same vein), they became more pronounced and elaborate, as it was now especially important to deconstruct the nature of the 'perverse ideological influence' coming from the West.

The professedly high level of unemployment in Western society was now more accentuated by Soviet physicians as the root of various kinds of antisocial behaviour:

Obvious and veiled vice of the social realm corrupt young people in capitalist countries physically and morally and they often adopt the path of a criminal. This is fostered by the prevailing unemployment in the West, which provokes a desire to live for the day.<sup>31</sup>

Soviet conditions were presented as an effective and healthy alternative to the depraved Western world. The aptitude of Soviet institutions to help Soviet people engage more deeply in productive labour and social life was counterpoised to Western institutions, which allegedly facilitated the pleasure-seeking desires of an individual: 'Sexual continence in our country can be feasibly achieved, for we have a variety of possibilities for sublimation. Devotion to work, studying, science or social activities alleviate the problem of sexual continence before solemnizing a marriage'.<sup>32</sup>

### HOMOSEXUALITY IN KHRUSHCHEV-ERA SEX EDUCATION MANUALS

The descriptions of homosexuality in the Soviet sex education manuals of the Khrushchev era seem inconsistent with official Soviet policies: homosexuality had been criminalised in 1934 and the only public mention of it was contained in the second edition of *the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* (1952).<sup>33</sup> Thus, a reasonable question arises: why familiarise young people with the phenomenon of homosexuality in a country where it was a punishable crime and a taboo for any discussions? Sources documenting the behind-the-scenes discussions of these manuals' content among Soviet physicians can shed new light upon this curious inconsistency. This section offers an interpretation of the descriptions of homosexuality in the Khrushchev-era sex education manuals and examines how they were modified in the wake of the June 1963 Plenum on ideology.

The first Soviet sex education manuals to mention homosexuality were, as we have seen, the translated versions of sex education manuals from Czechoslovakia and East Germany: *The Youth Becomes a Man* by Josef Hynie and *Questions of Sex* by Rudolf Neubert. Each of their understandings of homosexuality appears somewhat different, but both descriptions are homophobic. For instance, Hynie presented homosexuals as insidious and dangerous

individuals. In the first Soviet sex education manual to mention homosexuality, Hynie provides the following:

One can find people who have abnormal attraction to individuals of the same sex; they are called *gomoseksualisty* (homosexuals). *Gomoseksualisty* are aroused by and satisfy themselves with adolescents and youngsters, even though the latter have a normal interest towards girls. *Gomoseksualisty* go all out to gain the affection of the youngsters' society; they buy sweets and cigarettes for youngsters, tickets to the cinema, give them money, help to do home assignments and generally pretend that they unselfishly love youngsters. However, after such preparation, they sooner or later proceed to act. Do not let them touch you! Do not be shy about reporting them to your parents or educators, do not hesitate to report such attempts aimed at you or other young men! Both parents and educators will willingly help: homosexuality is a punishable crime, *gomoseksualisty* are perfectly aware of that: that is why it is not difficult to get rid of them!<sup>34</sup>

When we compare the ways in which different problems and 'perversions' are treated in *The Youth Becomes a Man*, homosexuality in this book stands out as the most dangerous threat to the healthy sexual life of youngsters: while boys indulging in indecent conversations about sex with their comrades might be talked out of it and the habit of masturbation may be broken by active participation in social life, homosexuality was a hopeless case of moral degeneration, which could not be disciplined and had to be eradicated from society and even punished. Furthermore, being concerned only with satiation of their abnormal sexual desires and the invention of new tricks aimed at seducing youngsters, homosexuals stood alien to the main foundations of socialist society, such as labour and family life. Homosexuals were not simply useless as their interests were necessarily limited to the infinite search for young men, they were also dangerous as they tried to seduce young boys against their will. Hynie did not provide any explanation for why homosexuals existed in society and why he considered them to be paedophiles; as 'a friend of youth' he merely gave his young readers comradely advice: to report homosexuals to their parents or educators. Hynie also did not seem to acknowledge the existence of female homosexuality as no such thing as lesbianism was mentioned in the manual addressed to girls.

While Hynie's description of a homosexual smacked of overt homophobia, the contemporary views of Czechoslovak sexology regarding homosexuality were not as unequivocal. In the 1950s and 1960s Czechoslovak sexology was instrumental in promoting heterosexual norms and traditional family values, but at the same time it showed concern for the issue of homosexuality. For example, in 1961, Czechoslovak doctors and sexologists initiated a debate on the abolition of the article in the Czech criminal code criminalising homosexual relations between consenting adults. This debate triggered the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Czechoslovakia in 1961, which rendered Czechoslovakia one of the first countries to make homosexuality legal.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, in 1960 with Hynie's sex manual publication, the Soviet Union was importing ideas and

views on homosexuality that had already become somewhat outdated among prominent sexologists from one of the Soviet Union's closest allies.

The topic of homosexuality was carefully and gradually disclosed in another sex education manual addressed to Soviet youngsters, also published in 1960 (and republished in 1961) under the title *Questions of Sex* (1960) by Rudolf Neubert with a print-run of 100,000 copies.<sup>36</sup> Unlike Hynie's book, where the narrative on homosexuality was incorporated into the chapter dedicated to masturbation, *Questions of Sex* had a separate rubric for 'sexual perversions', under which homosexuality was discussed. When talking about the topic, Neubert essentially replicated the prevalent Nazi readings of homosexuality, which argued that homosexuality was either the result of seduction perpetrated during adolescence, or that it was necessarily coupled with crime or mental problems.<sup>37</sup> Neubert was an East German hygienist whose views on homosexuality were typical of East German medical thinking of that time. According to the current medical and moral definition of sexual norms in East Germany, homosexual desire was a result of one's seduction by an older homosexual, with the latter being 'effeminate and politically unreliable cosmopolitans who threatened to spread their malevolence to the innocent'.<sup>38</sup> Such readings of homosexuality presented by East German sexologists were offered to Soviet readers in the form of Neubert's book.

It is in no doubt that the reason for the inclusion of 'sexual perversions' in the Soviet version were not merely due to the Soviet censors' and editors' oversight: they reworked and abridged the original version, making it shorter and editing out some details mentioned in the original version.<sup>39</sup> Neubert explained that initially he was unwilling to talk about 'sexual perversions' as 'diseases and morbid phenomena should be in the competence of doctors'; however, since these topics sometimes featured in the conversations of young people and even of adults, the author felt compelled to write a passage about it.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike Hynie's description of homosexuality, Neubert's writing expanded on homosexuality's presumed causes and suggested some ways to treat it. He emphasised the biological nature of homosexuality: 'the reason for such a deviation is the incorrect development of endocrine glands. There are people with alterations in the pancreas, who suffer from childhood with "sugar illness". In the same way, there are people whose sex glands develop incorrectly from childhood'. Even in suggesting the congenital nature of homosexuality, Neubert deemed it necessary to treat homosexuality with hormone preparations, surgery and psychotherapy:

Medical science has found ways to treat this anomaly partially with hormonal drugs or by means of surgery through the transplantation of glandular tissue. However, more often, an already tried medical method is employed – psychotherapy, that is, an educative influence imposed by the doctor on the patient.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike Hynie, who advised his readers to report homosexuals to law-enforcement agencies, Neubert's attitude seems to be somewhat more lenient: homosexuals had to be treated, rather than just removed from society. He did, however, note that such treatment was essential: 'People with such deviations from the norm cannot have healthy relations with people around them and that is why they are to be subject to serious treatment'.<sup>42</sup>

An incorrect upbringing was also offered as a possible cause for the development of sexual perversions, although these cases were encountered not as often as those where sexual perverts were genetically predisposed: 'Perverted inclinations may appear in individual cases as a result of a depraved upbringing or under some other unfavourable circumstances'. These 'circumstances' might occur as a result of parents' irresponsible attitude to their children:

Deviations from the norm can be prevented provided that parents pay enough attention to their children. If parents are busy with their own business and amusements while children are on their own [...] there is a danger that this will produce some undesirable phenomena.<sup>43</sup>

Lack of occupation was another reason for homosexuality and sexual perversions: 'A person whose life is not filled with joyful labour seeks to make use of his energy in various follies (*sumasbrodstvo*)'. Thus, in a socialist society, where collective labour was of the utmost importance, instances of perversions were an exception:

All these phenomena are more characteristic of the obsolete, decaying capitalist world, rather than a developing and growing society. Often various perversions are the consequence of satiety and a frivolous way of life. In the majority of cases this can be said about the perverted progeny of rich families or anti-social elements.<sup>44</sup>

The next mention of homosexuality appeared in *Hygiene of Sex Life* (1964), which was written by Soviet doctors. Once again, more evidence is needed to establish the underlying reasons for the inclusion of information on homosexuality in this manual. It is possible that the authors' treatment of homosexuality was affected by the June 1963 Plenum's pronouncements as homosexuality was framed as a phenomenon characteristic of the West. Homosexuality in this manual was framed as the result of unemployment in the West:

the most important reason for homosexuality lies in those conditions of the capitalist countries, which prevent starting a family [...], unemployment, the uncertainty about the future, lack of housing or its unaffordability, the uncertainty about whether one will be able to provide sustenance for future children – all these factors provide conditions for sexual perversions.<sup>45</sup>

Even though this particular passage does not plainly explain the logic of how homosexuality and uncertainty about the future are linked with each other, a section from another sex education manual published in the same year discloses



the inferential link between homosexuality and allegedly precarious social conditions in Western society:

Sexual debauchery and promiscuity are rooted in a deeply erroneous logic about the necessity to 'get everything out of life' (*vzyat' ot zhizni vse*)...[...] in bourgeois countries such thoughts are based on the uncertainty about the future, the constant threat of unemployment and the absence of any room for growth for young people in the future...<sup>46</sup>

Promiscuous sexual activity resulting from uncertainty about the future was believed to be the key reason for sexual perversions: 'Promiscuous sexual activity is always related with excess, which leads to satiety, which prompts a desire to irritate the nervous system more actively. This, in turn, leads to sexual perversions'.<sup>47</sup> In the face of ostensibly unreliable Western social institutions and lack of occupation, therefore, young people were believed to become more desperate and sceptical about their future. According to Soviet physicians, they had no other option but to live their lives to the full and welter in endless sexual pleasure (since they could not afford to have a family), which drove them to seek new and sophisticated ways of appeasing their sexual desire, with homosexuality being one of the best options to do that.

When delineating the notion of homosexuality, the authors of *Hygiene of Sex Life* reluctantly admitted that homosexuality was a phenomenon that might also be found in Soviet society, although very rarely: 'Along with normal (sexual) attraction in very rare cases an attraction to the same sex is observed, so-called homosexuality (*gomoseksualizm*)'. They continued:

The latter is [...] the result of psychopathic alteration of personality. Socially created reasons for mental perversions, for homosexuality in particular, are military barracks, prisons of the capitalist countries, where many men lead an unhealthy life. The homosexuality-breeders are also private male institutions, which are very common in the West.<sup>48</sup>

The authors sweepingly discussed the roots of homosexuality, not providing any credible evidence for their claims and hampering understanding of the logic of their descriptions. Yet, if one places these claims in the overall narrative on sex and sexual perversions contained in this manual, it becomes clear that the authors did not just randomly refer to homosexuality as a 'psychopathic alteration of personality'. An explanation for what might trigger such a condition was essentially provided in the preceding section of *Hygiene of Sex Life*, where the authors discussed 'excessive sexual desire', which was a sign of 'neurasthenia, hysteria and psychasthenia with signs of sexual obsession'.<sup>49</sup> Since, allegedly, homosexuality, like other sexual perversions, was a result of sexual excesses, then it comes as no surprise that a 'psychopathic alteration of personality' (that is homosexuality) was a direct consequence of it.



## CONCLUSION

Although it might initially appear surprising, the first attempts to make a case for sex education in the Soviet Union emerged during the extremely conservative period under Stalin. Sex education first became available to the Soviet public with the publication of *Healthy Marriage and Healthy Family* (1948), which was dedicated to topics dealing with sex that had not previously been openly discussed: human physiology, and sexual relations between man and woman. This book also delineated the overarching goal of Soviet sex education: the fight against 'the vestiges of the capitalist past', the term that embraced all of the undesirable phenomena existing in Soviet society at the time: venereal diseases, extra marital sex and adultery (though homosexuality did not feature among them).

These ideas gained momentum in the sex education manuals published during the Khrushchev era. *Sex Life and Family* (1958) appears to follow the sex education narrative patterns of its predecessor. The goal to fight against 'the vestiges of the capitalist past' was complemented here by the idea of imposing communist morality on Soviet people's sex lives, as evident in *Questions of Sex Education* (1959). This development apparently was the result of official discourse amongst Soviet politicians, including Khrushchev himself, who stressed the importance of communist morality in his official speeches.

In 1960, the Soviet government decided to introduce two sex education manuals, from Czechoslovakia and East Germany, that took a different perspective from earlier Soviet sex education manuals with their focus on 'vestiges of the capitalist past' and 'communist morality'. Furthermore, these new books also talked about homosexuality, which was presented as both a crime and a disease. It is hard to establish with certainty why such a topic was allowed to appear on the pages of Soviet translated versions, but it is clear that this was no mere oversight on the part of Soviet editors; it was a conscious decision.

As cultural contacts between the Soviet Union and the United States expanded under Khrushchev and the Soviet government became more anxious about the consequences, Soviet sex education manuals saw corresponding changes. After the Communist Party June 1963 Plenum, which was devoted to strategies of confronting 'ideological influence of the West', Soviet sex education changed its focus from the goal of eliminating 'vestiges of the past' to the fight against the 'advancing bourgeois ideology' that allegedly sought to influence 'unstable elements' in Soviet society. As a result, Soviet authors for the first time mentioned homosexuality in a sex education manual, now framing it as a characteristic trait of Western society.

After Khrushchev's removal from power, Soviet sex education manuals continued to be published in the Soviet Union, with their content now less influenced by anxiety about 'ideological influence of the West'. Instead, Brezhnev-era sex manuals became more focused on increasing young people's awareness of the physiological aspects of their bodily maturity. Throughout the ensuing 'stagnation' period, homosexuality was mentioned even less frequently

and few allusions to it were apparently informed by the Soviet 'sexopathology', which emerged in 1964 and defined it as a medical condition. For the remainder of the Soviet period, such readings of homosexuality became widespread among doctors and Soviet law-enforcement agencies, and they have continued to be pervasive after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with catastrophic consequences that are all too evident today.

## NOTES

1. The official Stalinist approach towards discussions of sex consisted of re-channelling the sexual energy of Soviet people. See D. Gorfin, 'Polovaya zhizn', in *Bol'shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediia* (hereafter BSE), Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'sovetskaya entsiklopediya', 1940, vol. 46, pp. 163–9.
2. L.A. Zalkind, *Zdorovyi brak i zdorovaya sem'ya*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1948, p. 36.
3. L.A. Zalkind, *Zdorovyi brak i zdorovaya sem'ya*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1951, p. 5.
4. Zalkind, *Zdorovyi brak i zdorovaya sem'ya*, 1951, p. 62.
5. These differences are evident, for example, in a documented presidium meeting held on 29 December 1955 of an education board of the RSFSR Ministry of Education, which discussed the manuscript of a new manual on biology *Human Anatomy and Physiology*. GARF A-2306/75/1074/1-26.
6. A.G. Stankov, *Polovaya zhizn' i sem'ya*, Kiev: Gosudarstvennoe meditsinskoe izdatel'stvo SSSR, 1958, p. 5.
7. See, for example, Deborah A. Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia*, New York: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 11.
8. T.S. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1959.
9. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, p. 29.
10. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, p. 54.
11. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, p. 54.
12. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, p. 59.
13. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, p. 61.
14. J. Hynie, *Yunosha prevrashaetsya v muzhchinu*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1960.
15. R. Peter, V. Shebek and J. Hynie, *Devushka prevrashaetsya v zhenshinu*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1960.
16. R. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1960.
17. V. Sokolova, 'State Approaches to Homosexuality and Non-Heterosexual Lives in Czechoslovakia during State Socialism', in Hana Havelkova and Libora Oates-Indruchova (eds.), *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism*, Oxford: Routledge, 2014, p. 85.
18. Sokolova, 'State Approaches to Homosexuality'.
19. R. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1960, p. 5.
20. V.N. Kolbanovskii, 'O polovom vospitanii podrastayushchego pokoleniya', *Sovetskoe zdravookhranenie*, no. 3, 1964, p. 19.
21. The Khrushchev government started worrying about the potential undesirable consequences that the exchange of tourists between the Soviet Union and the United States might entail as early as 1955, when for the first time Soviet citizens received permission to apply to travel overseas, including to capitalist countries. Therefore, only 'politically prepared' and 'stable from the perspective of morality and everyday life' Soviet citizens were accepted to travel abroad. Accordingly, to

- prevent Soviet citizens from excessive mingling with foreigners, the Soviet press warned Soviet citizens about Americans engaging in anti-Soviet behaviour. For more details see: Anne E. Gorsuch, *All this is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. On other kinds of socio-cultural interactions between the Soviet Union and the United States, see Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003.
22. On 1 December 1962, Khrushchev attended an exhibit of paintings and sculptures, organised by the Moscow branch of the Union of the Soviet artists, where he expressed his infuriation at a number of abstract works, which according to him were 'alien' to Soviet people (he even suggested that homosexual influences might be at work). For details, see Abraham Brumberg, 'Tempest in a Gallery', in *New Republic* vol. 148, no. 7, 1963, pp. 17–20. On the following day the main Soviet newspaper *Pravda* denounced 'inferior bourgeois traits' in the works of those Soviet cultural workers, labelling them traitors of the Soviet 'realistic art'. For further details, see 'Iskusstvo prenadlezhit narody', *Pravda*, 3 December 1962, p. 1.
  23. B.P. Bortsov, *XXII s'ezd partii i iyun'skii (1963g.) Plenum TSK KPSS o zadazhakh ideologicheskoi raboty v sovremennykh usloviakh*, Kiev: Vyshaya partiinaya shkola pri TSK KP Ukrainy, 1964, p. 16.
  24. V. Ageev, O. Korogodskii, P. Novikov, *Iyun'skii/1963/ plenum tsentral'nogo komiteta KPSS i ego istoricheskoe znachenie*, Moscow: Moskovskoe gorodskoe otdelenie obshchestva 'Znanie' RSFSR, 1963, pp. 10–13.
  25. Bortsov, *XXII s'ezd*, p. 16.
  26. Bortsov, *XXII s'ezd*, pp. 17–18.
  27. N.I. Chuchelov, *O polovom vospitanii*, Moscow: Meditsina: 1964, p. 4.
  28. A.A. Gabelov and Ye.B. Derankova, *Gigiena braka*, Moscow: Meditsina, 1964, p. 67.
  29. Gabelov and Derankova, *Gigiena braka*, p. 67.
  30. S.A. Artemiev, V.D. Kochetkov and G.G. Shta'nko, *Gigiena polovoi zhizni*, Moscow: Znanie, 1964, p. 20.
  31. Gabelov and Derankova, *Gigiena braka*, p. 27.
  32. Gabelov and Derankova, *Gigiena braka*, p. 19.
  33. On criminalisation, see Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 186. For the encyclopaedia mention, see BSE, 2nd edn, vol. 12, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'sovetskaya entsiklopediya', 1952, p. 35.
  34. Hynie, *Yunosha prevrashaetsia v muzhchinu*, p. 36.
  35. Sokolova, 'State Approaches to Homosexuality', p. 86.
  36. R. Neubert., *Voprosy pola*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1960.
  37. See, for example, D. Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 197.
  38. Cited in Jennifer V. Evans, 'Decriminalization, Seduction, and "Unnatural Desire" in East Germany', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2010, p. 560.
  39. R. Neubert, *Die Geschlechterfrage*, Rudolstadt: Greifenverlag, 1956, pp. 80–2.
  40. Neubert, *Die Geschlechterfrage*.
  41. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, p. 44.

42. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, p. 44.
43. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, p. 44.
44. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, p. 44.
45. Artemiev, Kochetkov and Shta'nko, *Gigiena polovoi zhizni*, p. 20.
46. Chuchelov, *O polovom vospitanii*, pp. 24–5.
47. Chuchelov, *O polovom vospitanii*, p. 25.
48. Artemiev, Kochetkov and Shta'nko, *Gigiena polovoi zhizni*, p. 20.
49. Artemiev, Kochetkov and Shta'nko, *Gigiena polovoi zhizni*, p. 19.

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## Women's Role in the Alternative Culture Movements in Soviet Latvia, 1960–1990

*Maija Runcis and Lilita Zalkalns*

In the West, the radical social movements of the 1960s were expressed largely through political activism.<sup>1</sup> In Eastern Europe, however, such movements necessarily took a different form. For example, one type of opposition to the Soviet regime was that of alternative cultures and lifestyles, which took a stand against the official ideology and culture.<sup>2</sup> As with other countercultures in the Soviet Union, the energising nucleus for many radical social movements often gravitated around a public meeting place that could provide the illusion of being separate from the all-pervasive state and societal power structures of the Communist regime. From the 1960s, two such spaces in Soviet Latvia were the café bar Kaza (Goat) and the open-air café Putnu dārzs (Bird Garden) in Riga Old Town, which became dynamic centres for the local youth movement. The leading participants in these movements were intellectuals.<sup>3</sup>

Another type of opposition to the Soviet regime can be identified in the formation of groups, where religion was discussed and practiced independently of the official, state-approved religious institutions. The gathering together in religious interest groups was a conscious action in direct opposition to the state's ideological objective of the elimination of religion through the promotion of scientific atheism. Informal local religious activism often had links to religious denominations and churches abroad.<sup>4</sup> This only added to the maximal surveillance and persecution by state security organisations that was experienced also by the individuals within these religious movements.<sup>5</sup>

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Individual members in both types of these alternative movements, the cultural and the religious, have avowed that their activities were 'not at all political' or 'not always political' in intent. Yet because the central tenets of Soviet communism were intolerant of ideological differences, the very existence of sub- and countercultures as well as religious groups was often considered to be tantamount to the forms of independent political activism that were banned by the state. As can be seen in this chapter, cultural expression could also form the means of political expression.

The aims of this chapter are to explore Latvian women's agency as identified by their participation in two different alternative movements in Latvia, and to examine how Latvian women experienced their agency in a period of Soviet state suppression. The chapter examines two different interviews. The first interview is analysed as a set of memories providing an oral history that focuses less on the events narrated than on the meaning of memory and narrative. The second interview recounts the history of the events in the manner they are reconstructed by the narrator.

How do these respondents narrate their own past experiences now (in 2016)? Has the 'non-political' become 'political' in today's context? How do respondents today reflect on the past? The study is based on published documents and interviews conducted with two female participants in the Soviet Latvian radical social movements: Māra Zirnīte of the alternative cultural scene of the 1960s and 1970s, and Gunta Rožkalne of the alternative religious scene of the 1980s. Both women were interviewed during the period from 2014 to 2016, but only Māra Zirnīte has given permission for her answers to be cited here word-for-word. In both cases, the knowledge we already have concerning the historical context will be expanded and combined with oral history.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Jürgen Habermas offers an analytical approach in understandings of the 'public sphere' (of the intellectual elite) and on 'new social movements'. The 'new' movements are primarily social and cultural and only secondarily, if in any way, political. They emphasise social changes in identity, lifestyle and culture. According to the sociologist Gemma Edwards, it is the 'new' movements of the post-1960s era (such as the Women's, Youth, Alternative and Ecology Movements) that for Habermas, 'form the raw materials of the public sphere'.<sup>6</sup> What is 'new' about these movements is the conflict around which they organise (away from the capital-labour struggles). In his explanation, Habermas has replaced conflict within the class structure with the view that the pathologies of late capitalism are caused by the 'colonisation of the lifeworld' by the 'system'.<sup>7</sup> Even though Habermas's theory is based on late capitalist systems in Western Europe, we can still apply his overall concept in analysing the Latvian Soviet system and the alternative culture movements. The agents generating a 'new' public sphere in both systems are asking the same questions: who are we, how should we live, and who is accountable?<sup>8</sup>

The main point of departure for this study is, however, located in the theoretical frameworks of feminism and intersectionality. Feminist oral historians have examined issues arising from the study of, on the one hand, women's potential to act as agents of change and to oppose it, and, on the other hand, the norms and mechanisms of women's subordination.<sup>9</sup> Intersectionality explains how different and discrete forms and expressions of oppression are shaped by one another.<sup>10</sup> In this chapter, the documentary evidence and interview data are analysed from the perspective of the power relationships evident within the social and cultural categories of gender, class, age, religion and nationality, and how these factors interact simultaneously on multiple levels. The main focus is on how power relations operate on an individual and personal level within an authoritarian state. In applying a feminist perspective to our analysis of the life stories, it is important for us to acknowledge here also our own power as researchers and interpreters, having both grown up in Western democracies (Sweden and the United States). This is a perspective that is not recognised in the contemporary stories by the two Latvian women analysed here. As American cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo pointed out, 'Human reality is always the reality of interpretations'.<sup>11</sup> This remains the case even when the interpretation conflicts with the experienced reality, for example, in the case studies examined here, when West meets East.

In this chapter, different aspects of both women's agency and their subordination in multi-temporal contexts are elucidated. The purpose here is to present women's narratives that have been overlooked in past historical writings and at the same time to offer our own interpretation of their stories by putting them into new contexts. The central questions asked in this study concern women's agency and subordination: whose voice is to be heard and whose voice is potentially made invisible in history? To what extent were these women given the license to act within their respective movements and within the power structures of the Soviet system? How did they position themselves in relation to Soviet society and the contemporary political context?

### KAZA SUB-CULTURE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the mid-1950s, Khrushchev's 'thaw' led to an easing of Cold War tensions and to the Soviet Union's resumption of contacts with capitalist countries and with communists abroad. For the non-Russian periphery of the Soviet Union, the temporary abandonment of Stalin's Russification programme and the Communist Party's resurrection of Lenin's nationalities policy resulted in major political, cultural and social transformations. Measures were passed that promoted economic and cultural autonomy in the national republics of the Soviet Union. This was reflected in the ways in which local, non-Russian communists were appointed to leading positions in the republican-level government apparatus.<sup>12</sup> The Communist Party's ideological grip over culture was loosened somewhat. In the press and in published literatures, previously forbidden themes, such as forced deportations, the Gulag, the questioning of Soviet

bureaucracy and challenges to the stereotype of the ideal life under Communism, could now be discussed.<sup>13</sup>

In 1956, Khrushchev's Secret Speech to the XX Communist Party Congress initiated a process of de-Stalinisation that had repercussions across Eastern Europe. It was met with worker unrest in Poland and the Hungarian revolution, both of which were violently suppressed by Soviet armed forces. By the time of the XXI Communist Party Congress in 1959, measures were passed that were interpreted by the non-Russian nationalities as a return to the repressive ideological climate of the pre-thaw era. The national communists were purged and replaced by cadres loyal to Moscow, and the process of Russification was reignited.<sup>14</sup>

The paralysing fears of the Stalin era, however, had now lost their determining role in the hearts and minds of many of the younger generation, where the stirrings of rebellion remained latent. The Iron Curtain was still firmly in place, but its fabric was being slowly perforated by small holes, through which free and alternative information from the West was seeping. During the 1950s and the 1960s, a new generation of future élites was coming of age. These were the poets, writers, artists and scientists who would later gain power and influence during the crucial 1980s, which ushered in the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the ideological backlash that followed the downfall of the national communists, and the crackdown against several political dissidents who were sentenced to spend up to 15 years in the Gulag, the cultural freedoms of the 1950s were not forgotten, and the 1960s saw the appearance of an alternative cultural scene in Soviet Latvia. This was predominantly a youth counterculture, consisting of rock groups, non-formal artists, hitch-hikers, mods and hippies.<sup>16</sup> The café bar Kaza became the centre for this dynamic youth movement, with its expressions of marginalised cultures evident in the participants' silent opposition to official ideology and the contemporary culture of Soviet Latvia. Their mute protest strove to realise personal ideas of artistic expression on paper, on canvas, in photographs and through the physical body. Their marginality was determined by the fact that all that they did was unauthorised and all that they were interested in was inaccessible. They consciously made the decision to live their own independent lives, that there would be no aggressive dissidence and no political confrontation.<sup>17</sup> The goal was freedom of speech and the freedom of expression, while at the same time the participants did not want to attract undue attention in the authoritarian society. For the intellectuals, this was often a delicate balancing act.

### THE STORY OF MĀRA ZIRNĪTE

The whats and hows of the changes attempted by the younger generation in Soviet Latvia appear in the memoirs and writings of the so-called uncensored cultural advocates of the 1960s and 1970s. The café Kaza continues to hold a special place in the collective memory. This is a collective life story that has not previously been gathered into a uniform writing or memoir framework, but



which illuminates important differentiating features in contrast to the accepted cultural standard of Soviet society in these decades.

What was Kaza? What was the Kaza period like from the 1960s? Why is it even important to talk about these years? These questions were put to Māra Zirnīte, chair of the Riga-based NGO 'Lifestory' (Dzīvesstāsts), the Association of Oral History Researchers of Latvia, and herself once a participant of the informal Kaza group.<sup>18</sup> Her initial response was that we have already heard too many stories of Latvians being either victims or dissidents, and that we now have to broaden this view: 'We, too, had times of joy and happiness in everyday life. Soviet Latvia wasn't all drabness and uniformity, as it was propounded in the West. We were the first generation educated in the Soviet Latvian university system. We weren't afraid'.<sup>19</sup> There is, then, an expression in her reply of the need to talk about 'the right to happiness' in Soviet times.<sup>20</sup> Yet she was also worried about the interpretation of her story, since it could be understood as a romanticised, nostalgic longing for the late socialist era, similar to how it was among radical movements in West European countries. She proceeded to clarify her position:

If it appears this way to you, I can't contradict you; however, my intention in telling you this was to say that adults and young people didn't walk around in mourning, but sought meaning and fulfilment in their lives. Not all were dissidents, not all ended up in conflict with Soviet power — especially in the 1960s, when the major mass deportations were long past.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, as Zirnīte points out, young people could enjoy themselves during the Soviet era. Even though pervasive propaganda and widespread mendacity permeated the atmosphere, she remembers the post-Stalin era as a period of incessant mirth, anecdotal story-telling, laughter and heightened illusions. Her response shows consciousness and confidence in her own role as an intellectual woman. Her own memories of that time are cheerful and bright to her, but the interviews take on a new sensitivity in the political context of 2016.

Māra Zirnīte was born in 1943 in Riga, where she grew up. When Māra and her sister were young, their mother was an ordinary housewife. In pre-war Latvia (1918–1940), their mother was a 'non-working intelligentsia', and their father was an electrical engineer. Māra graduated from the Latvian State University in Riga with a degree in Latvian literature and Baltic philology. In 1968 she began to work as a journalist for Latvian State Television. Māra thinks that neither her childhood nor her parents particularly influenced her later choices in life, nor did they influence her will to be independent:

I remember that even during my school years, I attempted to formulate my priorities in this vicious state, and under the shadow of the atomic bomb, I wanted to familiarise myself with world culture. Within this context, I wanted to cultivate Latvian national culture, strengthen the Latvian viewpoint, and promote Latvian self-awareness as much as possible.<sup>22</sup>

She was not the type of 'girl who stayed at home'; she wanted to find her own way, discover her own truth. She did not believe everything her parents told her about the cruelty of the Soviet system: this awareness came to her later on, step by step.

For Māra, becoming a member of the Kaza group began with an announcement about the formation of the university Cinema Club: interested members of the public were invited to attend organised discussions about Russian, Polish and other topical films that were being shown in Riga at the time. In contrast to the social realism that had previously dominated all art forms, these films represented a new, creative approach in Soviet filmmaking. One film that was particularly intensively discussed was *Kommunist* (*The Communist*), released in 1958 and directed by Yuli Raizman. Māra, once again, anxious that her intentions and the broader context might be misunderstood, explained why the film was discussed at that time:

The film is interesting in that, for the first time ever, it portrayed the harshness of the Soviet system through the character of an ideal (male) Communist. Like Jesus Christ, he acted according to his conscience, ending up in conflict with the system. In a pictorial manner, the film criticised Soviet reality, which had no room for such a Communist. Therefore, there was much to debate. This was one of the many discussions about films that took place in the Cinema Club.<sup>23</sup>

The Cinema Club and the discussions about the creative qualities and the new mode of filmic expression were part of the legal renderings of freedom during the 1960s. The Cinema Club's ongoing discussions, mostly about art and culture, continued in Kaza. The novelty of this situation is highlighted by the fact that in earlier years all types of larger assemblies had been forbidden and people who convened in unsanctioned groups ran the risk of incarceration. In 1950 and 1951, for example, thirteen people who met in a private apartment in Riga to discuss French literature were sentenced to lengthy periods of imprisonment.<sup>24</sup>

Among their activities, the Cinema Club members and Kaza attendees met with Cuban students who were studying in Riga, and they arranged group excursions to Moscow or Tallinn in order to attend semi-forbidden or difficult to access foreign film showings, jazz festivals and other events. The movement snowballed as more and more new participants joined up. Russian, Jewish and Latvian students gathered together and, speaking in both Latvian and Russian languages, challenged the boundaries of Khrushchev's thaw. Māra describes it as 'a movement without limits'.<sup>25</sup> The Kazists somehow managed to slip past the official system.

At this stage, it was not really possible to speak about different associations within Kaza; it was simply an amorphous group of friends and acquaintances. The leading participants of this informal group were all intellectuals, though there were also a few alcoholics and social dropouts. The central figure was Juris Zvirgzdiņš, who had the status of an acknowledged leader within the wider

group. One member of the Kaza group, Eižens Valpēters, describes Zvirgzdiņš as the 'son of a mafia boss: he had brown eyes, a steady gaze, a beard, and he was very talented. He was nicknamed "Maestro", after his favourite writer Anšlavs Eglītis' novel *Maestro*. Everybody revolved around him'.<sup>26</sup> Even if the central figure was a charismatic male, as a young woman, Māra did not feel any kind of subordination within the group because everybody (men and women) admired 'Maestro' Zvirgzdiņš. The gender perspective, therefore, is invisible in her own narration, and she does not acknowledge any diversity between sexes. Furthermore, in follow-up communications, she seems unsettled by questions concerning women's subordination in the group, giving rise to an undertone of a range of possible different contexts and interpretations between interviewee and interviewer.<sup>27</sup> Māra continued to explain:

There was no subordination in Kaza at all. People could freely come and go. If someone wished to undertake a task – travel to Tallinn or Moscow, or gather at somebody's house – then this was arranged on the spot. If some person was disliked, then you simply didn't hang around him or her. Affinity, sympathies, intellectual authorities and interesting original characters – that was the power of attraction that appealed to people and kindled different ideas. This was done in a normal manner, as everywhere else – not as if under the heavy yoke of occupation. But that yoke never disappeared, we couldn't blot it out of our consciousness.<sup>28</sup>

Māra, in wishing to correct an oversight from an earlier interview, stressed that women also had leading positions in the movement, and these women included, for example, theatre director Māra Ķimele and performance artist Mudīte Gaiševska.<sup>29</sup>

Even though the movement was 'without limits', there were limits concealed within the Soviet system, and challenging the system sometimes led straight to the KGB. Māra acknowledged that:

Yes, we were naive, reckless and careless. But we ignored the ever-present eyes of the KGB. We pretended the KGB didn't exist, even though we knew they observed us. We knew there were informers. However, as long as we weren't affected by them, we let it pass.<sup>30</sup>

The story of Māra Zirnīte and her memories from Kaza of the 1960s can be interpreted both as resistance and liberation in relation to the Soviet socialist system. These were intellectuals of different nationalities struggling for the freedom of speech and national identity within a multi-cultural community. The subordination was not within the Kaza group, but, rather, it could be acknowledged as located within the Soviet socialist system. This picture is confirmed by the creative artist and writer Eižens Valpēters, who remembers that:

in Kaza, while smoking and drinking coffee or vodka, everybody pursued their own private revolution; one did not speak about politics there. The stories of deportations and Gulag were not in the minds of the Kazists; they felt quite

unconcerned. All the restrictions imposed by the socialist system—they were discouraging, but they could be bypassed. We had a kind of axiom: don't resist in an aggressive way, don't give into any kind of political confrontation, live your own independent lives.<sup>31</sup>

The Kazist youth were individualistic and offbeat. Most were between the ages of 15 and 30, and many came from the nearby art schools. For the most part, the makers of alternative culture were not overt dissidents. Alongside searching for their own manner and style in painting, writing, theatre, music, photography and cinematography, all were more or less united in their passion for modern literature, art, Polish periodicals, listening to the partially banned radio station Radio Nord, to Radio Luxembourg and other banned radio stations. Kaza was a place where things that were judged to be interesting and worthy were usually belittled or even forbidden elsewhere in official Soviet culture. Friendship ruled, and mutual delight was taken in each other. This was youthful infatuation, when one regards one's friends as being extremely talented and very special, and where their uniqueness and perspectives were valued.<sup>32</sup>

Of course, not everybody could endure this Bohemian lifestyle. Many were damaged; they broke down mentally or disappeared from the scene because their nerves could not withstand the pressures. Some were wrecked by the KGB, others drank themselves into oblivion, and still others, tired of this relative freedom, returned to somewhere, but where? Kaza provided if not freedom, then the illusion of freedom.<sup>33</sup>

### MĀRA ZIRNĪTE'S STORY ANALYSED

It is quite obvious that during the course of the interviews, Māra Zirņīte negotiates and constructs her identity in the various situations and contexts. She disapproves of my interpretations of her interview materials and my subjective analysis of her identity constructs. However, after toning down the textual material in various settings, she finally accepts my interpretations. A salient feature in Māra Zirņīte's story is her way of underestimating the activity in the Kaza group, where she sees everything as just happening accidentally. The actions taken were not conscious strategies with conscious goals, but rather they were akin to happenings without organisers. In her story, she also downplays the international contacts with students from Cuba, Russia, Poland, other Soviet republics and East European countries. At the same time, she tries to maintain and emphasise her national identity, which is of great importance to her. Therefore, she sets out to clarify in our interpretations of the interviews the aspects that she feels in our typically West European manner are too unappreciative and negative to her Latvian national consciousness. The different contexts from the West and the East of interpreting her story make hers an inconvenient, but not unequal, experience.

Māra's memories are told from the position of a privileged, well-educated woman and, of course, being the director of the Association of Oral History

Researchers of Latvia, this also affects her way of telling. She remembers her youth from the 1960s in the aftermath of the thaw as a period of stability, with glimpses of what life was like abroad. The drabness and uniformity of everyday Soviet life has faded away, and is no longer connected to her memories and lifestyle of the café bar Kaza. Today, many of the former Kazists have become distinguished, well-known professionals and it is now rather sensitive to raise anything critical about their past lives, especially concerning the power relationships within the group. This may provide one explanation for why Māra is so anxious about our interpretation of her story. Another reason may be that, as interviewee and interviewer, we have different life experiences and we know each other very well. We have 'quarrelled' about gender perspectives and discussed Soviet socialism many times and it is likely that Māra has left much unsaid. She is aware of the silences in Soviet-era narratives and life story-telling in general, and she herself has included silences in her own story.<sup>34</sup>

### RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM IN SOVIET LATVIA AS CONTEXT FOR GUNTA ROŽKALNE'S STORY

Religious institutions and the practice of religion were not forbidden outright in the Soviet Union, but official policy, with its anti-religious decrees and repressions, imposed severe limitations on all forms of religious expression.<sup>35</sup> Many people with religious beliefs in the Soviet Union found themselves being automatically classified as dissenters by the state, since the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was 'committed to atheism, and any attachment to religion is a form of dissent'.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in the Soviet Union, being both non-Russian and a believer proposed a double vulnerability, since non-Russian ethnicities, who engaged in non-conforming activities, were at risk of also being accused of nationalism.<sup>37</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s, religious dissent in the Soviet Union acquired a new intensity. On the one hand, this was partly the result of a 'religious renewal', and, on the other hand, it was the outcome also of increased contacts with believers abroad.<sup>38</sup> The double onus of religious dissent and nationalism was felt, among others, by the Baptists in Soviet Latvia. Though not outlawed, their religious practices were minutely scrutinised by the authorities, up to the point of discrimination and harassment, whilst simultaneously the most active members were automatically categorised as dissident-nationalists.<sup>39</sup>

The struggle of the Baptists in Soviet Latvia, the actions of the spin-off organisation of the Latvian Independence Movement (Latvijas Neatkarības Kustība: LNK) and its most well-known cousin, the Helsinki-86 Group, have been widely reported upon in exile publications, contemporary Western media and in current Latvian media. A book about the Bonn-based Ray of Light movement, which cooperated with religious dissidents in Soviet Latvia, was published in Riga 2012 by its former leader, the Baptist pastor and former Latvian Member of Parliament Paulis Kļaviņš.<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, during the 1990s and thereafter, religious and nationalist activist Jānis Rožkalns (husband of Gunta Rožkalne) has published a profusion of commemorative articles about the 1987 protests organised by the Helsinki-86 Group and about his previous experiences in the resistance movement. During the 1980s, when Jānis and Gunta Rožkalns had become known to Western audiences as the ‘religious dissident and his wife’, many articles were published about them covering their application to leave the Soviet Union, Jānis’s imprisonment in Perm, Gunta’s appeals for the release of her husband from imprisonment, their activities in the Helsinki-86 Group, their expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1987 and their new life in freedom in West Germany.

In one of the articles published on a ‘non-traditional Christian’ homepage on the internet, Jānis Rožkalns writes about how he remembers the late 1960s:

During that time, total hopelessness ruled, people everywhere drank themselves to death, and we understood that only the Gospel could offer people some perspective in life. Even talented people – artists, professionals – not seeing any future in their life, sought answers in the bottle. We had gospel groups...<sup>41</sup>

In his group of friends, he explained, they did not discuss politics. Jānis played the guitar; they travelled all over Latvia (including the traditionally Catholic region of Latgale), where they approached and talked to young people. In those days it was very unusual for youth groups openly to sing and talk about God. Mothers approached them and invited them into their homes to meet their children and other young people. Soon enough, the KGB began to follow them.<sup>42</sup> Contrary to the intellectuals of the Kaza group, Jānis Rožkalns and his religious friends had a conscious mission to spread the Gospel.

The Rožkalns’s story has been repeated many times in the Latvian exile press, but almost exclusively with the focus on Jānis’s experiences. Jānis has maintained a conscious strategy to collect and save ‘lost and invisible facts’, and in October 2013 he delivered the archive of the Latvian Independence Movement that he had accumulated over the years to the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia 1940–1991 in Riga.<sup>43</sup>

### IN THE SHADOW OF A HERO IS THE STORY OF GUNTA ROŽKALNE

As recently as 2012, Gunta Rožkalne was interviewed by the leading Latvian *Diena* media for the video series *Is it Easy to be a Woman?*<sup>44</sup> In her narrative, she focused on her husband Jānis Rožkalns’ experiences, and barely mentioned her own activities, beliefs, emotions or feelings pertaining to the ‘years of dissidence’ in the 1970s and 1980s. To read the transcribed video interview is as if to look only into her husband’s life experience (he was awarded the prestigious Latvian Three-Star medal for his freedom struggle), in which Gunta played a subordinated role as his assistant. Her story bears the stamp of women’s normative subordination in present-day Latvia, but her personal role in the struggle for freedom has not yet been told. In addressing the question on ‘whose voice is

to be heard', it is clear that Gunta's story has been left potentially invisible in the history of the movement. Despite such a potential outcome, for this chapter, permission was not given for us to tell her story using her own words.

Over the course of more than 20 questions requesting more detailed information about specific events, Gunta willingly talked about her experiences.<sup>45</sup> Yet, when asked to review and re-read her answers, as they had been transcribed by Lilita Zalkalns, Gunta and Jānis Rožkalns replied together that they were unable to accept the transcribed text, and they requested that no direct quotations be included in the final publication. Both were dissatisfied with how Gunta's answers appeared when formulated in writing, and they presented corrections and explanatory context for how the answers should appear in print. However, as the authors of this chapter, we decided not to accept these modifications, and therefore we retell her story here in our own words. It must be emphasised, therefore, that our understanding of her answers has not been authorised by Gunta Rožkalne. This means that the focus of our analysis is on the narrative (the content) and not on how Gunta has narrated her story.

Gunta was born in 1956 in Riga into a Baptist family, the oldest of eight children. Her father, Edmunds Cirvelis, was a former deportee, having been imprisoned for 10 years in Siberia.<sup>46</sup> The father's Siberian past, together with the whole family's involvement in the Baptist movement, was a debilitating factor that cast a shadow over the family's ensuing life in Soviet Latvia. All family members felt the burden of discrimination in the exercise of their ordinary, day-to-day living: the children were denied access to higher education; finding and holding down jobs became an ordeal, especially for the head of the family.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, Gunta graduated from sewing school, and after working for a short while as seamstress, she became a laboratory operator at the Institute of Inorganic Chemistry. She got to know Jānis Rožkalns when she was just 16 years old, and she married him in 1982, when she was 26 years old.

The most visible nationalist-dissident activists of the Cirvelis's 20-person clan were Edmunds Cirvelis, his daughter Gunta Rožkalne and Gunta's husband Jānis Rožkalns. Their activism had its roots in their religious involvement with the Baptist Church, and this later developed into the outright articulation of forbidden nationalism. Jānis Rožkalns (born 1949) writes that he became a religious activist during his high school years. The underground Latvian Independence Movement was initiated in 1974, when two Baptist brothers, Pāvils and Olafs Brūvers, came to the mutual conclusion that 'the gospelisation of the nation was not possible, unless the freedom of Latvia was reinstated and democracy were to rule'.<sup>48</sup> In 1976, the Brūvers brothers were expelled from the Soviet Union, and the leadership of the Latvian Independence Movement was transferred to her husband Jānis Rožkalns.<sup>49</sup>

Gunta Rožkalne, a believer since childhood, describes her transition to nationalism as occurring through internal conviction. Throughout her

childhood upbringing, her father and grandparents instilled in her Christian ethics, and told her tales of what life was like during the years of Latvia's first independence. These romanticised stories led her to imagining the Latvia of the past as something wonderful and pure. These dreams, in the shimmer of white light, accompanied her through her adolescence.

Even as a young schoolchild, Gunta fearlessly passed on to her classmates her convictions of how perfect and honest life once had been in Latvia before the Communist occupation. As a 15-year-old, she secretly started to type Christian literature for illegal distribution, continuing some years later with the typing of bulletins and folders for the Latvian Independence Movement. It was not an easy assignment, especially because privately owned, unregistered typewriters were a rarity and one had to be careful not to disclose unintentionally the whereabouts of an unregistered typewriter. So as not to arouse the interest of inquisitive neighbours, for example, the typewriter was placed on pillows, which dampened the sound when typing.

Gunta and two other women also participated in the dyeing of cloth and the sewing of the red-white-red flag of independent Latvia.<sup>50</sup> For many years, the red-white-red flags were secretly raised in public places by the male members of the Latvian Independence Movement on 18 November, the Latvian Day of Independence, the commemoration of which was forbidden during the Soviet period. Gunta also participated in the distribution of printed Latvian Independence Movement materials. She travelled to townships around the Latvian countryside, and dropped off the individually addressed appeals or brochures into mailboxes at different apartment houses. In retelling her experiences, Gunta clearly expresses surprise and pride at her own courage and resourcefulness in carrying out her assignments. Even in Jānis's memoirs we can detect glimpses of his pride in his wife, especially when he retells the story of his own trial proceedings: 'In order for dad to see his baby daughter and son one more time, Gunta came to the court hearings with both [babies], who were now 10 months old [...]'.<sup>51</sup> In November 1983, Jānis Rožkalns was sentenced, according to Article 65 of the Latvian SSR Criminal Code, for anti-Soviet activity to 5 years in a high-security prison in the Gulag and 3 years of banishment. He ended up in Corrective Camp No. 37 in Perm. Jānis admits that '[It] was Gunta's enduring love that helped me endure imprisonment'.<sup>52</sup>

In the video interview *Is it Easy to be a Woman?* from 2012, Gunta talks about her feelings from that time. The psychological stress on her was extreme. In addition to the double responsibility of two newborn babies, Gunta had to deal with the Soviet reality of being the wife of a political prisoner. She and her children were at times denied medical aid or were given incorrect medical treatment. Her health was weak due to intermittent heart ailments, and bouts of pneumonia. A friend who came to help her care for the twins received a summons from the KGB. She was interrogated and told to stop washing diapers and to no longer help the Rožkalns family.<sup>53</sup>



### GUNTA'S STORY ANALYSED

The major event in Gunta's life story is the imprisonment and deportation of her husband Jānis. Her narrative mainly revolves around the difficulties she experienced in this connection. The family is placed at the centre of events, whereas the religious movement remains on the periphery.

Gunta's childhood was characterised by political dissidence and religious activism, which also influenced her gender position in life. She submitted to her father and her husband but when she talked about her experiences in the video interview in 2012, she expressed pride in that she herself had survived the repressions. Her struggle was not only for Latvian independence but also for her family. She felt important as an individual, and she was aware of this: she was not afraid to travel to Perm six times in order to visit her husband. She stood at her husband's side with dignity, which she also accepted as her duty. The Gospel and her belief in God gave her trust, confidence and satisfaction. Her pride both as woman activist and as the wife of an idealised hero is evident in the core of her story. Despite this, religion, the idea of an idealised nation and gender subordination in family life provide the main content of her life story.

### CONCLUSIONS

The research findings outlined in this chapter highlight the ways in which Soviet countercultures sometimes had their roots in dynamic youth movements from the 1960s to the 1980s. These decades were shaped very much by the Iron Curtain, the Cold War and intermittent contacts with the West. The case studies elucidate both the aspect of agency and subordination of women in multi-temporal contexts. The tensions between memory politics and personal experiences, expressed in oral and personal accounts, have also been explored. On the one hand, studying the memory of the socialist era in Latvia offers an insight into the collective memory and memory politics. On the other hand, in doing this, an understanding of their connections with current politics also emerges. In pursuance of their struggle for freedom and through their attempts to create an ethnic identity, the women attained self-fulfilment and self-realisation through the alternative movements of the Soviet era. Though they remained strong, it was nevertheless still difficult to talk about this experience against the background of the dominating discourse of 'traditional family values' in present-day Latvia. In that sense we can say that the 'non-political' has become political.

The two women interviewed for this study offer insights into two very different radical movements, the cultural and the religious, and neither has interpreted her agency within these groups as in any way political. The Kaza cultural movement emanated from university circles, whilst the Baptist religious movement in Latvia was a counter reaction to the alcoholism and hopelessness evident amongst Soviet youth. In both cases, the main idea of these radical

movements was to improve and strengthen Latvian culture and identity and to maintain the dream of future Latvian independence. This was made possible in part through international contacts from outside the Iron Curtain.

Māra Zirnīte's story emphasises her views on her capacity for action and, in further analysis, how she negotiates this in dialogue with the interviewer. Though the narrative is not dominated by an unequal power structure, it does, however, appear every now and then in the story through the manner by which the context is interpreted. Māra provides for her own negotiation space in her narrative and in her relationship to the interviewer, which indicates that the repressive Soviet context is assigned a subordinate meaning. In Gunta's narrative the situation is reversed. The repressive Soviet power and gender order is at the centre of events. We are offered only a glimpse into her difficulties as wife of a political prisoner and single mother of two small children.

In Gunta's story there is no capacity for negotiation. Her individual story has been subsumed into a meta-narrative that has been repeatedly told in public within the framework set up by her husband in his role as a Soviet dissident and in the continual portrayal of him as a heroic freedom fighter in the independent Latvian media. Her own voice as woman, activist, wife and mother remains in this way partially unheard.

## NOTES

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‘As the Thread Follows the Needle’:  
The Social Construction of the Prisoner’s  
Wife in Russia from the Nineteenth  
to the Twenty-First Century

*Elena Katz and Judith Pallot*

My husband only let me find  
That near him I may die!  
His pride, his pride, I mean to save,  
And strength on him bestow.  
Nikolai Nekrasov, *Russian Women* (1871–1872).<sup>1</sup>

Twentieth-century Soviet history produced a mass phenomenon as prisons became central in the lives of many families. Post-communist Russia has continued this sad tradition. In the late 1990s the Russian Federation was ranked first for its rate of incarceration and even though successive amnesties subsequently have reduced the prison population, the country remains among the world’s top ten high imprisonment societies. Whilst it is largely men who pass through Russia’s prisons, the motto ‘every real man should pass through prison’ being affirmed from one generation to the next, women also are victims of Russia’s attachment to incarceration. From the time of Stalin’s Gulag to the present day, women have had to exercise ingenuity to adapt to their enforced involvement with the prison system, whether this has been as prisoners themselves or as a result of their relationship with someone serving a sentence.<sup>2</sup> Conditions in Russian penitentiaries and the geographical structure of the

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prison estate mean that maintaining contact with a prisoner takes time, money, and emotional and physical energy. A round trip to a distant colony can take a week or more and cost a month's average wage, and sending the parcels of food, medicines and 'trade-goods', essential to prisoners' health and well-being, is a major drain on most household budgets.<sup>3</sup>

On top of the material and emotional impacts that flow from a family member's incarceration, women also have to cope with the consequences of the 'courtesy stigma' which attaches to them through their affiliation or shared 'web' membership with the offender.<sup>4</sup> Throughout Russia's troubled history, the status 'prisoner's wife' has carried with it the danger of job losses, bullying of children at school, social rejection and degrading treatment by prison personnel. The danger of arrest and incarceration that being married to an 'enemy of the people' carried for women during the years of Stalinist repression placed Soviet Russia at the extreme end of a spectrum for projecting 'spoiled identities' onto prisoners' family members. The societal expectation of women is that they should rise to all these challenges. No less than other women in Russia, wives of prisoners are supposed to subordinate their personal interests to those of their incarcerated husband, according to the Russian proverb 'as the thread follows the needle' (*kak nitka za igolko*). Russia's historic attachment to expelling people it perceives as politically threatening, socially deviant and/or criminal to the geographical peripheries, has meant that 'following the needle' is strongly associated with long journeys and spatial displacement.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter explores social models of women whose lives and identities have been transformed by the penitentiary in the past 200 years. Today, these models frame both how these women are viewed by society and how they make sense of their experiences at the hands of the penal monolith. Attention in this chapter is focused on three stereotypes that have surfaced in fiction, memoirist literature and in the popular media about women who are either already married to men before the latter were incarcerated or who choose to marry someone who has already been convicted. These are the figures of the 'Decembrist wife', the 'correspondence wife' and the 'bandit wife'. The discussion begins with the familiar trope that since the nineteenth century has informed Russian society's understanding of the prisoner's wife.<sup>6</sup>

### The *Dekabristka*

How often our thoughts had turned to the Decembrists and their wives! I recited a passage about Princess Volkonskaya meeting her husband: 'I fell on my knees to him. Lifting his chains, I kissed them before I embraced him'. No, these were no longer just lines in an anthology – they expressed the longing of all seventy-six of us. As I declaimed them, I saw before me all those pairs of anguished eyes [...] As for the Decembrist wives we felt as if we were sharing the journey with them and they with us [...] But of course, they had had an easier time of it .

Evgeniya Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind* (1967).<sup>7</sup>

In the closing months of 1826 a woman set out from St Petersburg bound for Siberia. Climbing into the horse-drawn carriage that would take her on the first leg of a 6-week long journey, the woman knew that she would never return or see again the child to whom she had bid a tearful farewell. Her departure also signalled the abrogation of her noble status and rights associated with her rank. The woman was Princess Mariya Volkonskaya and the reason for the journey was her decision to follow her husband into penal exile. He was one of the young officers who had protested against serfdom in St Petersburg's Senate square in December 1825. Mariya Volkonskaya's actions, together with those of another seventeen women who followed the 'Decembrist' officers into exile, were mythologised in the decades that followed as they came to personify the virtues of love, devotion and personal sacrifice to a man. Although there were mothers and sisters among the Decembrist women, the appellation *dekabristka* has become attached most strongly to the figure of the wife, and still today is the enduring touchstone against which the wives of the many hundreds of thousands of men who pass through Russia's prisons interpret their situation and are judged by society.<sup>8</sup>

The canonisation of the Decembrist wife in liberal and radical circles owes a particular debt to Nikolai Nekrasov's poem of 1871–1872, *Russkie zhenshchiny* (*Russian Women*). While the poem focused on two Decembrist wives, the princesses Mariya Volkonskaya and Ekaterina Trubetskaya, it treated these women's superior spiritual powers as qualities possessed by all Russian women. Construing the women's mythic martyrology in religious terms, the poet contributed to the *dekabristki* attaining deep significance for the spiritual history of Russian society.<sup>9</sup> Nekrasov's poem also described the women's actions in standing by their dissident husbands in terms of revolutionary ideas of the late 1860s and 1870s.<sup>10</sup> Russian historians of the late Imperial period would pattern their analyses of the Decembrist wives' idealistic actions on this poem's radical ideology.<sup>11</sup> And successive generations of women patterned their views on femininity on the *dekabristka* stereotype, which became a romantic standard of voluntary devotion, self-sacrifice, altruism and self-effacing love.<sup>12</sup>

The nineteenth-century celebration of the *dekabristki* also included admiration for the practical skills the women demonstrated in overcoming the privations to which they were subjected. In Siberia, they quickly learned how to do housework, grow vegetables, sew clothes, pluck chickens and dress wounds. Their mutual friendship and support, combined with their newly acquired skills, brought them security and stability and helped their husbands survive the ordeal of incarceration and hard labour. Exploiting their noble origins and liberal society's respect for the Decembrists, the women were able to secure financial, medical and other necessary goods for the prisoners. In the eyes of their incarcerated husbands, these women were their 'guardian angels'.<sup>13</sup>

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 could have brought an end to the *dekabristka* myth; the image of wifely duty sat uneasily with the feminist views of revolutionary women for whom the idea of marriage was anathema. However, there were new models of women dedicated to the revolutionary cause who,

*dekabristka*-like, had followed their comrades-in-arms into exile and took the myth forward. Most celebrated among these was Nadezhda Krupskaya, who accompanied Lenin to Siberia. The couple married in July 1898 but refused to wear wedding rings, the symbol of bourgeois marriage, and official discourse emphasised Krupskaya's role as a revolutionary in her own right. Notwithstanding this recasting of the way in which marriage was to be performed in the worker's state, Soviet historians showed a remarkable attachment to the elements of the Decembrist story that reproduced gender stereotypes and Nekrasov's poem maintained its romantic appeal to the new Soviet intellectual elite. Soviet universal education and media representations spread admiration for the Decembrists and their wives to the masses.

Stalin's 'Great Terror' and the post-Stalin repression of dissidents gave rise to new interpretations of the Decembrist story as the intelligentsia sought to give meaning to their experiences in the Gulag by positioning themselves as fellow-martyrs of their nineteenth-century forebears. The *dekabristka* trope was appropriated by women whose fathers, sons and husbands were repressed under Stalin. University lecturer Evgeniya Ginzburg, arrested in 1937 and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment as the wife of an 'enemy of the people', recited Nekrasov's poem as an act of defiance, empowerment and support to her arrested companions, all destined for the labour camps for the 'chsir' (*chleny semei izmennikov rodiny*: 'family members of traitors of the motherland'). Like Mariya Volkonskaya, these women's 'guilt' consisted of nothing more than being married to a man whom the authorities had condemned.

The huge population of the Gulag prison camps was treated as a disposable labour force. A combination of remote locations, internal camp regulations and external political pressure conspired to fragment the family networks of people sent to the Gulag. The protection and survival of the family was placed firmly onto the shoulders of the women remaining at liberty who were presented with the choice of either surviving in society or standing by their persecuted relative.<sup>14</sup> A wife who did not make a public denunciation of an arrested husband ran the risk of social ostracism, loss of job, rations and home, and arrest. The law allowed an immediate divorce 'on demand' to any Soviet citizen whose spouse was imprisoned. In Alexander Solzhenitsyn's words, this amounted to 'a call to abandon the incarcerated spouses and forget as quickly as possible about the marriage, so that for a woman it was not only silly and un-socialist to grieve about an estranged husband but also illegal'.<sup>15</sup>

Amidst this horror, the intelligentsia tried to give meaning to their experiences by positioning themselves as fellow-martyrs of the nineteenth-century Decembrists.<sup>16</sup> The *dekabristka* trope resonated with women whose family members fell afoul of the political articles in the criminal code. The literary testimonies of Anna Akhmatova, Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Lidiya Chukovskaya bear witness to the long queues outside prisons as women tried to learn the fate of their arrested loved ones and to pass on letters and food parcels.<sup>17</sup> These were the experiences that prompted Akhmatova to liken these women to *dekabristki*.<sup>18</sup> In her poetic cycle *Requiem* of 1935–1940,



Akhmatova reflects from long historical perspective on the bitter fate of women who lost their loved ones to the state terror. Referring to the executed or exiled elite guard which rebelled against Peter the Great in 1698, she declared her own 'inconsolable wailing beneath the Kremlin towers' to be joined 'with the wives of the murdered *strel'tsy*' (guardsmen).

Use of the *dekabristka* trope provided women with a sense of belonging, pride, self-esteem and identity as historical memory endowed their suffering with some value. At the same time, it demonstrated how deeply women had internalised the norm that it is her relationship with a man that takes priority in defining her identity. Yet there were limits to how far the *dekabristka* analogy could speak to the victims of the Stalin repression. Here is Evgeniya Ginzburg comparing the conditions of her transportation to the Far East with those of the original *dekabristki*:

I always thought that the *dekabristki* endured the most frightful sufferings, but listen to this: 'of the wondrous built, so firm, so fast the carriage' [...] They ought to have tried one of the Stolypin coaches.<sup>19</sup>

Anna Larina, widow of Stalin's arch-rival Nikolai Bukharin, was even more dismissive of the Decembrist wives' suffering:

What are the tears of times past in comparison with the tears of the women in our prison camps? [...] Consider the 'Russian Women', Princess Trubetskaya and Princess Volkonskaya abandoning their lives of luxury in Petersburg and riding post chaise to join their Decembrist husbands in Siberia. There is no denying that it was a heroic deed! A subject fit for a poet! But how did they travel? Behind a team of six horses wrapped in furs, enclosed in a marvellously furnished carriage [...] Also they were riding to their husbands! Our women, Russians and non-Russians ...were transported in cattle cars [...] and on arrival we had to line up and walk from the station to the camp, drained of strength, barely able to haul our miserable belongings in suitcases or bundles, guarded by police dogs and terrorized by the shouts of convoy: 'Anyone steps to the side, and I'll fire without warning!' or 'Sit!' Even in snow or muck, just sit! And we were not going to our husbands, though some dreamers among us naively hoped that in that camp over in the other world they would be united with their men [...] Ah, how different that road would have been to me if I could have believed that it led to Nikolai Ivanovich!<sup>20</sup>

The use of the criminal justice system to control political dissent resumed after Stalin's death and persisted to the end of the Soviet Union, albeit ebbing and flowing as political priorities changed. A wave of repressions from the late 1960s resulted in additions to the already vast corpus of labour camp memoirs. Dissidents were imprisoned, exiled or, in a new torment, placed in psychiatric institutions. Testimonies from that era bear witness to the continuing power of the Decembrist trope to give meaning to the experiences of prisoners and their relatives. The journalist Elena Frolova, wife of poet Anatoly Berger sentenced to

imprisonment and exile in Siberia in 1969 for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, describes her troubled experiences 'on the other side of the fence' as the wife of a dissident. Berger describes how, when subjected to an interrogation during which she was offered the opportunity to persuade her husband to become an informer in exchange for his freedom, Frolova found strength by reciting to herself the following lines from Nekrasov's *Russian Women*:

A life of deep and boundless woe  
My husband's fate will be,  
And I do not desire to know  
More happiness than he.<sup>21</sup>

By the late Soviet period, the *dekabristka* mythic canon had lost much of the political content that had hitherto been woven into it as the balance shifted firmly towards the circulation of more traditional, patriarchal representations of the women. In popular culture this can be illustrated in Vladimir Motyl's film about the Decembrist wives, *Zvezda plenitel'nogo schast'ya* (*The Star of Enchanted Happiness*) (1975). The film reaffirms an old-fashioned, male-dominated vision of women as sacrificial and affectionate, while stressing the material aspects of marital duty. Comparison of contemporary prisoners' wives with their nineteenth-century forebears now mainly concerned the practicalities of prison visiting and the despatch of survival parcels to incarcerated men. Yuliya Voznesenskaya's *The Women's Decameron* (1986), a satirical fictional exposé of the Soviet system, is an assemblage of women's voices in a Leningrad maternity ward telling stories about their lives. Galina, wife of an imprisoned dissident, compares her entry into the harsh Siberian reality with the *dekabristki*'s:

Making my way to that God-forsaken Mordoviya I felt like a Decembrist wife. The bags of food made my arms feel as if they would drop off, and as for transport – you take what you can find. The whole situation was unfamiliar [...] I found the camp and was even more frightened: it was just like being in a film about the Fascists! [...] A camp is a camp, but it doesn't matter whether there is a star over it or a swastika, it's just as horrible for those inside.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike Ginzburg and Larina, the women in Voznesenskaya's *Decameron* conclude that their own suffering was less than the original Decembrist wives', 'because today's women are more used to hardships'.<sup>23</sup>

In recent decades, the *dekabristka* trope has undergone an even more fundamental dilution as it has migrated from the intellectual realms of the intelligentsia to other social classes.<sup>24</sup> Today, the title of *dekabristka* is commonly applied to any woman who stands by her imprisoned husband, whether or not she makes an arduous journey to a remote camp to visit him and regardless of his offence. For today's prisoners' wives, the *dekabristka* myth is a narrative resource upon which they can draw to justify their continuing investment in someone cast out of society for his wrongdoing. One woman, herself married to

recidivist who was murdered in jail, describes her mother as the quintessential Decembrist wife:

My parents? My father is a prisoner in his genes; he was involved with the prison system for 45 years. Mum waited for him for 30 years. Like a *dekabristka* she followed him, all over Siberia. Mum died; and Dad, well, I don't really know. The last time he was released he came home, already an old man but he left and went back to live in Siberia.<sup>25</sup>

No less than in the nineteenth century, the personal sacrifice made by women who choose to stand by their jailed husbands fulfils traditional roles that are valorised in the patriarchal and conservative society that Russia is today.<sup>26</sup> This, no doubt, is the reason why the *dekabristka* myth has been so enduring. The myth's reproduction has also been enabled by the central place that prison has occupied in Russian history. With each new phase in the state's punitive approach to dealing with crime, the *dekabristka* myth has been renewed and modified to suit the circumstances of the day, and so it is likely to continue as long as Russia's penal monolith remains in place. The most obvious and, literally, intended-to-last, expression of the resonance of the *dekabristka* trope in twenty-first-century Russia is the large bronze composition by Zurab Tsereteli, *Decembrist Women: the Gates of Fate* (2008), which stands in the courtyard of the Russian Academy of Arts, Moscow. The sculpture depicts eleven women with their children standing at a solid prison gate, bearing icons and flowers. The monument is inscribed with Pushkin's iconic lines to the banished rebels: 'Deep in the Siberian mine /Keep your patience proud [...]' Tsereteli declared at the unveiling that this work was a 'cry from his heart' to commemorate the heroic women's *grazhdanskii podvig* (civic feat).<sup>27</sup>

The *Zaochnitsa*:

Last night in colony number 2 in Kazan' they showed a documentary film entitled *Zaochnitsa*. The subject of the film was the phenomenon of the so-called 'correspondence wives' – women who date and get married to prisoners. The nick-name is connected to the fact that they get to know their future husbands exclusively through letters or the phone. They first meet their future husband in person on a prison visit or the, most daring, only on their wedding day.

Publicity for the film *Zaochnitsa*.<sup>28</sup>

Among the models of women dedicated to the revolutionary cause who before 1917 had followed their comrades-in-arms to Siberia was a new type of the *dekabristka*, a woman who, like Krupskaya, initially had no marital ties to the man she followed. Today's version is the *zaochnitsa*, a woman who consciously looks for partners in Russia's prisons. Rendered as a 'correspondence' or 'pen-pal' wife, the more accurate appellation would be 'social media wife' as today relationships with prisoners are largely struck up via the illegal electronic devices that widely circulate in Russia's penal institutions. Historically,

relationships made ‘by correspondence’ have not been associated exclusively with the penal monolith, but in the twentieth century the appellation *zaochnitsa* came to be associated precisely with women who sought a relationship with a prisoner.

The etymological dictionary of Vladimir Dal’ records the use of the term *zaochnitsa* and its derivatives in the nineteenth century as something that happens beyond what can be seen ‘with your own eyes’ (*za glaza*). Applied to love, the double meaning in this phrase was popularly used both to signify a man loving a woman ‘for her eyes’ and ‘without seeing her’. From the end of the century another meaning was added as Imperial Russia, and then the Soviet Union, developed distance-learning. The *zaochnik* or *zaochnitsa* was a man or woman who gained an education by correspondence (*zaochnoe obuchenie*). The application of the term *zaochnitsa* to the single-woman/prisoner relationship most probably began in the second half of the twentieth century and, encouraged by countless cultural productions, has become firmly attached to it in post-Soviet Russia.

In Russia the phenomenon of the ‘mail bride’ was known in the nineteenth and early twentieth century but the Stalin years of oppression were not conducive to people seeking out convicts with whom to make a relationship. Khrushchev’s ‘Thaw’, in contrast, was more propitious; prisoners were rarely the ‘husband of choice’ for women (and writing to political prisoners was still dangerous) but the gender imbalance caused by high male mortality rates during the Second World War and the Stalin labour camps identified ‘ordinary criminals’ as a pool of potential suitors. In the course of a relatively short period of time, prison camps, now renamed ‘correctional labour colonies’, generated an industry of letter-writing with prospective brides. Sergei Dovlatov’s semi-autobiographical novel *The Zone: a Prison Camp Guard’s Story* (1982) contains an ironic template for a prisoner’s letter to an unknown woman from this time:

Dear unknown woman (or maybe – girl) Lyuda! It is a former stubborn house-breaker, but now qualified timber truck driver, Grigorii, who addresses you. I am holding the pencil in my left hand, as my right one is rotting from excessive hard labour ...<sup>29</sup>

By the 1970s, the *zaochnitsa-zek* (*zek* being the colloquial name for a prisoner) theme appeared for the first time in the cinema in Vasilii Shukshin’s 1974 film *Kalina Krasnaya*. The film contains an early cautionary tale for women who would become *zaochnitsy* that resonates with warnings circulating today about how these relationships rarely end well. In the film, Egor Prokudin arrives at a village where Lyuba, the woman with whom he corresponded whilst in prison, lives. The couple’s life together is brought to an untimely end when Egor’s past catches up with him and he is murdered by a former mate from the criminal underworld. Happy endings remain elusive. A recent example is *Glukhar’*, a popular serial set in a police station launched on Russian television in 2008. The

third season introduced the character of Vera, a *zaochnitsa*, who feels threatened when her prisoner pen-pal is released and comes to live with her. Vera's fears subside only when the man is returned to prison after a fight in a cafe in which a waitress dies. The message that prisoners have difficulty adapting to life on the outside is contained in a popular 'anecdote' about a long term lag who goes to live with his *zaochnitsa*:

A recidivist comes to the end of his twenty-year sentence. Having made the acquaintance of a *zaochnitsa*, he decamps from prison and goes to live with her. He lives with her one month, then another [...] the old girl gets much joy from him: he works on her tractor, brings money home, doesn't drink anything but *chefir*, does everything around the house. The only grief is that he doesn't have sex with her. She says to him 'Vanya, why don't you f\*\*\* me?' He replies: 'What for? We eat grub from the same bowl!'<sup>30</sup>

Angela Devlin, the author of a monograph about women in the West who establish relationships with prisoners, has noted that, typically, they are seen through a gender lens as one of several unflattering stereotypes: the gangster's moll; the obsessed woman who marries the prisoner on death row; posh 'totty' after a bit of 'rough'; and 'warder falls for lag'.<sup>31</sup> These stereotypes all are in circulation in Russia and they are no less gendered, but, on the whole, they are 'gentler'. However base or deluded their motives in seeking out a prisoner-partner, *zaochnitsy* are also understood as archetypes of women who sacrifice all for their men and who, moreover, have the power to redeem offenders. The reality is that once a relationship is established with a prisoner, the *zaochnitsa* is normally fastidious in fulfilling the role of dutiful wife, making frequent visits to see her new partner, sending him parcels and taking upon herself the burdensome bureaucratic tasks needed to secure his smooth passage back into society after release.<sup>32</sup> The principal difference in popular understanding between the 'genuine' *dekabristka* and the *zaochnitsa-dekabristka* is the conviction that the latter is someone who can be easily duped by the manipulative prisoner, intent on securing parcel deliveries and free sex.<sup>33</sup>

The Bandit Wife:

I loved the thief, and I followed him.  
The thief got caught, so did I.  
The *musor* tortured me, he is a shameful rat:  
'Tell me, bitch, with whom you mooched!'  
But I answered proudly and boldly,  
'This is my soul's secret!'  
Prison chanson, early 1930s.<sup>34</sup>

Anyone with a passing familiarity with the popular and scholarly literature on the so-called Thieves-in-Law (*vory-v-zakone*), the sub-culture that dominated the Gulag prison camp, will know that the traditional rules of criminal society forbade members to marry. Wives were a distraction from the business of

controlling the society of captives and a potential weak link to be exploited by enemies and prison administrations.<sup>35</sup> This was not a call to celibacy; members of the prison sub-culture were allowed sexual relations with women prisoners and Gulag testimonies tell of mass rapes by criminals and of prostitutes brought in from 'campside'. The rigorous rules of the Thieves-in-Law did not hold to the end of the Soviet period and, subsequently, the market economy has eroded traditions further as links were forged between criminal groups across colony fences. The traditional prison subcultures have fragmented and been replaced by new ones.<sup>36</sup> Among other changes has been a lifting of the prohibition on marriage, which has resulted in the emergence of another category of prisoner's wife in popular discourse: the professional criminal's wife (*zhena-ugolovnitsa*) or, more popularly, the bandit wife (*banditskaya zhena*).

The discursive boundary around the wives and girlfriends of career criminals is reflected in a social ordering that takes place in prison visitors' waiting rooms, as Olga Romanova, prison reformer and former prisoner's wife, describes:

They [the wives of career criminals] didn't socialise with us, of course, because we were the wives of *muzhiki* ['peasants' or rank-and-file prisoners]. The *muzhiki* want to get their sentence over as quickly as possible. But prison is home for the *muriki* and *blatnye* [high status members of prison sub-cultures]. These wives so love their husbands. You sit next to them in the 'glass' ['*stakan*' or waiting room] and when they're called in you can see how much they love their men. Others don't show such emotion. I mixed with them, I loved talking to them. Of course, they're very experienced and that helps them. They're aloof from everything because they've been here twenty times already. They already know everything – all the entrances and exits. They weren't always ready to help the rest of us. If you asked them something they might not answer. It was a sort of snobbery. Our aim was to come and go as quickly as possible, but for them it was home.<sup>37</sup>

Popular culture has a love/hate relationship with the bandit wife. On the positive side, she is a figure veiled with mythic qualities of loyally supporting the daring outlaw. As embodied in the fictional character of Sonya Marmeladova, she also can be the agent of the criminal's redemption. Sonya is the saintly prostitute in *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky's novel of 1866, who demonstrates superior capacity for self-sacrifice by following the murderer Raskol'nikov to Siberia. More negatively, the bandit wife is understood as a parasite who may be complicit in her husband's criminal activities, going with him 'to rob a dacha', and beneficiary of her husband's ill-gotten gains.<sup>38</sup> When her husband is imprisoned, the wife of a career criminal is popularly supposed to avoid the material problems that afflict other wives as her husband's criminal network is mobilised to keep her 'decked out in furs'. There are downsides, however, rarely acknowledged in popular culture: the bandit wife can suffer disproportionately from degrading treatment meted out by guards when she visits her husband, visits can be cut short or cancelled at the last moment and rarely can she hope for her husband's early release. Furthermore, a bandit wife can find her own freedom constrained from within the prison walls; the same

'friends' who bring her fur coats on her husband's behest also monitor and report back on her movements, keeping her imprisoned within the walls of her elite apartment.<sup>39</sup>

Russian culture has its own counterpart of the Western Hollywood gangster's moll which informs the understanding of the wives of criminal prisoners. Alexander Bloc's 1914 poetic cycle *Karmen* introduced the gypsy bandit to Russia making her a possible model for the bandit wife. Carmen is the stereotype of the selfish, unfaithful and unreliable partner, definitely not a committed wife prepared to follow her husband to Siberian exile. More in tune with the *dekabristka* meta-narrative—because she suffers for her love—is Russia's gangster heroine, 'Son'ka the Golden Hand'. Son'ka is the legendary queen of the nineteenth-century criminal world who ran the Jacks-of-Hearts club (*Chervonnye valety*), the biggest club of swindlers in Russia.<sup>40</sup> Films about her life, which started with a 1915 silent movie and are still popular today as, for example, in a television serial in 2007 and 2010, portray her as a 'heroine of our time' and a woman dedicated to the men she loved. Son'ka ended her life in the Sakhalin Island penal colony, chained and beaten with lashes, as the result of a young lover's betrayal. He served 6 months in the 'work house' and proceeded to become one of the richest landlords in Russia's south.<sup>41</sup> In post-communist Russia, Carmen and Son'ka have been transformed into entrepreneurs who use the profits of their husband's life of crime to start legal businesses. One website used by prisoners' relatives tells the 'true story' of a bandit who terrorised a small town and dressed his wife 'in silks and diamonds like a New Year's tree'. He was murdered in prison, but his wife, lost from view for a time only, resurfaced heading up a legitimate business funded on the bandit's money.<sup>42</sup>

The *dekabristka* has never been far below the surface in people's imaginings of the bandit wife. She surfaces, for example, in the 'sensational exposé' by lawyer Valerii Karyshev in his book, *Bandits' Wives: the Advocate's Version* (1999). The author promises to tell readers about 'the thrilling realities of women's liaisons' with famous and powerful professionals of the criminal world. To be the permanent companion of a Thief-in-Law, bandit or killer, the author assures readers, 'is a deadly risk'. While the bandits fulfil their 'professional duties' in prison, at home they are awaited by 'life companions' whose destinies at times are 'no less breath-taking' and 'intricate' than the fates of their chosen men. These are no mere stay-at-home trophies; they are heroines as 'capable of brave and often dangerous actions in real circumstances'.<sup>43</sup> All this is subordinated to wifely duty once the husband is incarcerated:

I [her lawyer] was surprised by the changes which came over her. The wife of a 'new Russian', who used to wake up no earlier than 1 pm, and from whom one could not expect a cup of coffee, suddenly turned into the Decembrist wife, and began visiting her Alik every day, going shopping and buying food, passing him letters.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, in a television programme billed as the first ever interview with a 'genuine' Thief-in-Law, Alexander Sever, a notorious gangster, described his

wife as a 'godsend' for having remained loyal to him despite his spending 15 years of their married life in prison. Invoking the *dekabristka* trope, he described how Galina followed him 'through Russia's whole prison geography'. Internalising such '*blatnoi* romantics' (a romantic entanglement with a high status bandit prisoner), contemporary women visitors to prisoner-dating websites ask how to become a bandit's wife. The lure of *blatnoi* romantics leads some women down the *zaochnitsa* route taking them to marriage with a high status member of the prison sub-culture. Since it is the illicit criminal hierarchies that control access to electronic telecommunication devices in Russian prisons, it is not surprising that the criminal sub-cultures have the first pick of young women looking for love across the colony fence, a reminder of the power relations that inhere in Russia's celebration of the self-sacrificial wife who will follow her husband 'as the thread follows a needle'.

### CONCLUSION

The majority of men in Russian prisons today bear little resemblance to the heroic Decembrist officers exiled to Siberia in 1825. That their wives and girlfriends, 200 years later, can, nevertheless, be compared with these same officers' wives is testimony to how deeply embedded in Russian culture are patriarchal notions about women's role. Stripped today of its political content, the *dekabristka* trope constructs all women in Russia as homemakers, bearers of the redemptive power of love and the repository of virtues necessary for the nation's moral deliverance. For women who are fortunate enough not to have a partner or husband in jail, it is possible to challenge this gendered construction of their role. For women who do have a husband or lover in jail, challenging the trope is more difficult, not least because the consequences of failing to be 'nurturers and saviours' of their men folk can be very high. Russian prisons are supremely unhealthy and dangerous places and the material and emotional support of relatives on the outside can make all the difference to an individual prisoner's survival prospects. The Russian Prison Service cynically reaps the benefits of women's internalisation of the *dekabristka* trope, as is evidenced in the 'advice' on its official website to prisoners' family members:

In addition to the rights you have as the relatives of the convicted person, you have a moral obligation to help your loved one to find the right path that will lead him to a correct and normal life after release. In this respect, much depends on you, in that you have a moral, and often material, responsibility to support the prisoner.<sup>45</sup>

The treatment of the women married to the Decembrist officers and to the millions of men sent to the Gulag in Stalin's Russia was shocking. The choices these women faced and the consequences that followed a decision to stand by their husband were an order of magnitude greater than for today's prisoners' wives. Nevertheless, in the context of the twenty-first century, the transfer to family members by the state of its responsibility for the welfare and



rehabilitation of the hundreds of thousands of men it chooses to imprison is also shocking. The figure of the women weighed down with bags of produce struggling over rural roads to reach the correctional colony where her husband, son or father is imprisoned symbolises Russia's continuing attachment to the *dekabristka* trope. By extension, it is also a symbol of popular acceptance of the collateral damage that Russia's penal monolith does to some of society's most vulnerable members. The final word goes to Olga Romanova:

If you, the cultured young lady, [...] suffer — you are a *dekabristka*, are you not? And when without thinking you fill bags with food and trudge through a snow-field to a prison or camp — are you not a *dekabristka*, and is it not a heroic feat? And here I think: for me to get to the prison it was — ten minutes by the underground! But women come from *auls* [a Caucasian mountain or Central Asian settlement], leave children at stations, speak hardly any Russian, know nothing and don't understand, but make their way into this devil's prison and there try by hook or by crook to find out something about their husbands but all of them are grilled, offended [...] talk to them about romantic love.<sup>46</sup>

## NOTES

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  16. Ludmilla Trigos, *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009.
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  18. Beth Holmgren, *Women's Works in Stalin's Time: on Lidiia Chukovskaia and Nadezhda Mandelstam*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 108.
  19. Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind*, p. 205. The 'Stolypin coach' refers to the prison railway carriages named after the pre-revolutionary Prime Minister Petr Stolypin that were introduced to transport convicts arrested in the 1905 Revolution.
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  27. Available online: <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/128462> (accessed October 2016).
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30. Available online: <http://www.tyurem.net/books/azhippo/issl.htm> (accessed June 2014). Jokes are notoriously difficult to translate, and this one needs explaining for non-Russian speakers. The woman is referred to in the original as *baba*, a not very complimentary term of endearment, just short of 'old bag'; *chefir* is the strong tea brewed by prisoners to give them a 'high'; and 'sharing a bowl' is a rendering of the Russian *khavat*, which refers to the ritual of sharing the same cup or bowl in prisons to signify membership of an in-group.
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33. Securing a *zaochnitsa*-bride gives a prisoner access to sex since the majority of prisoners are entitled to three-day residential visits with family members, the frequency varying according to the article of the criminal code they are sentenced under. The spectre of grooming obviously hangs over the *zaochnitsa* phenomenon but this has not been raised as a matter of concern by official agencies, though it figures in informal chatrooms used by prisoners' relatives.
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44. Karyshev, *Banditskie zheny*, p. 147.
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## ‘Forced Re-Settlers’ in Post-Soviet Russia: Gender and Age Dimensions of Social Inequality in State Assistance with Permanent Housing

*Larisa Kosygina*

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia constructed a system of migration management that, for the first 10 years, was focused on assisting former Soviet citizens who moved to Russia from other ex-republics of the defunct USSR and were recognised by the Russian authorities as forced migrants. Although in the 1990s ‘forced migration’ from post-Soviet space attracted the attention of many scholars, exploration of gender issues was not a popular area of focus.<sup>1</sup> A gender analysis of migration regulations was not conducted until 1998 and was focused solely on the experiences of women.<sup>2</sup> To address this gap in the literature, I initiated a research project.<sup>3</sup> The project explored how the gender order of the Russian Federation was reflected in the gender regime of the social institution of migration management.<sup>4</sup> Through this, it looked at how the gender order influenced the experiences of both women and men who were designated as ‘forced re-settlers’ (*‘vynuzhdennye pereselenetsy’*).<sup>5</sup>

The project was designed within the framework of the theory of structuration and its applications in Gender and Migration Studies.<sup>6</sup> The primary sources of information were semi-structured interviews with migrants.<sup>7</sup> These interviews focused on key aspects of respondent experiences arising from the Federal Migration Programmes implemented from 1992 to 2002. These accounts were

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analysed alongside data obtained via interviews with other social actors, analysis of legislation and mass media presentations, statistical overviews and observations of interactions between officials and migrants.

In this chapter, I readdress the empirical data and analyses produced in the original study by taking a step towards an intersectional analysis, introducing a theoretical account about the age dimension of social inequality, and approaching its interconnections with gender.<sup>8</sup> My analysis focuses on government assistance with acquisition of permanent housing with reference to two schemes: interest-free loans and free housing. Before proceeding with this analysis, however, I examine the historical context of the implementation of these schemes from 1992 to 2002.<sup>9</sup>

### REGIMES OF ADMISSION

It is estimated that between 1992 and 2002, Russia gained 6,264,000 people from its migration exchange with other former Soviet republics.<sup>10</sup> The prevailing discourse produced by the Russian authorities in the 1990s interpreted the geographic movement of former Soviet citizens changing their place of residence from former Soviet republics to Russia as ‘forced migration’.<sup>11</sup> This movement provided the focus of Russian migration policy up to 2002. The first migration programme was completely devoted to tackling issues related to this type of migration.<sup>12</sup> Although subsequent migration programmes identified other population flows, they continued to focus on forced migration from this region.<sup>13</sup> Measures linked with the integration of ‘forced re-settlers’ received the largest share of government funding in migration regulation throughout this period.<sup>14</sup> Besides, for a long time, forced migration was the only type of migration regulated by laws issued in post-Soviet Russia; other international migration flows and issues relating to foreign citizens in Russia were regulated via decrees and amendments to Soviet legislation.<sup>15</sup>

Russian federal legislation defines ‘forced migration’ as the geographic movement of people who have left their places of residence because of the threat of persecution on the basis of race, nationality, religion, language and affiliation with a particular social group or political conviction.<sup>16</sup> The Russian authorities subdivided forced migrants into two categories: ‘forced re-settlers’ and ‘refugees’. The former status is available to foreign nationals who are permanent residents in Russia and to Russian citizens who return to Russia from abroad, while the latter is for foreign citizens and stateless persons coming to Russia from abroad. However, in the 1990s, in the case of forced migration from abroad, the overall composition of the regulations affecting migrants drew distinctions not so much on the basis of their actual citizenship as on the basis of their former belonging or non-belonging to Soviet citizenry. The federal migration programmes clearly stated that the treatment of forced migrants who were once Soviet citizens and the treatment of other forced migrants should differ. This differentiation was facilitated by the relatively easy access of former-Soviet nationals to citizenship of the Russian Federation, and as a result

to the status of 'forced re-settler'.<sup>17</sup> Further, from 1995 they were allowed to apply for 'forced re-settler' status even without yet having obtained Russian citizenship. The document certifying registration of their petition for citizenship was sufficient to file an application.<sup>18</sup> Legislation of the Russian Federation also allowed former Soviet citizens who had come to Russia from other former Soviet republics and received refugee status to obtain the status of 'forced re-settler' within one month of their acquisition of Russian citizenship.<sup>19</sup>

The division of forced migrants into 'forced re-settlers' and 'refugees' was more than symbolic. Whilst the 1992 Federal Migration Programme prescribed equal assistance to both groups, programmes and legislation adopted later made the scope of the state's help allocated to refugees much more modest in comparison with 'forced re-settlers'.<sup>20</sup> The main difference in the treatment of these two groups was in assistance with housing. Whilst 'forced re-settlers' were considered to be people who had permanently changed their country of residence, 'refugees' were perceived as those who sooner or later would return to their countries of origin. The Russian authorities focused on providing permanent accommodation to the former and temporary housing to the latter.

Some commentators argued that representation of the geographic movement of former-Soviet citizens from former Soviet republics to Russia as 'forced migration' reflected the complexity of post-Soviet Russia's political positioning as a former imperial centre towards other parts of an extinct empire.<sup>21</sup> They also pointed to the oversimplified picture of factors influencing people's decisions to migrate from or stay in their previous places of residence.<sup>22</sup> The reasons identified for the migration of 'ethnic Russians', at least in the 1990s, were mainly linked with re-nationalisation: a process of forming and strengthening boundaries (not only territorial) between those who 'belong to the nation' and those who 'do not belong to the nation' that was taking place in the newly emerging states.<sup>23</sup> Whilst in some parts of post-Soviet space re-nationalisation caused armed conflicts, in many it did not.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, it resulted in a range of other phenomena linked with the redefinition of social positioning of so-called 'titular' (*'titul'nye*) and 'non-titular' (*'netitul'nye*) ethnicities (*'natsional'nosti*) residing in former Soviet republics.<sup>25</sup> These included the prioritisation of a 'titular' ethnicity's language over other languages; reinterpretations of the history of the post-Soviet region as a whole and the territory of a newly emerged state in particular; an increasing concentration of political, economic and administrative power in the hands of people considered to belong to 'titular' ethnicities, and so on. In the case of 'non-titular' ethnicities, such manifestations of re-nationalisation could lead to the disruption of 'ontological security'— the feeling of certainty in the continuity of the social order and their everyday routines.<sup>26</sup> Such disruption could lead people to migrate to places which they perceived as more secure.<sup>27</sup>

According to official statistics, 1,632,866 people were recognised as 'forced re-settlers' and 'refugees' by the Russian government between 1992 and 2002. Of these, 85% came from former-Soviet republics, mostly from Kazakhstan, other Central Asian republics and the Caucasus.<sup>28</sup> 'Ethnic Russians' constituted

71% of all forced migrants registered in Russia up to 2002.<sup>29</sup> Those who came from post-Soviet space and were recognised as forced migrants constituted around 26% of net migration received by Russia from 1992 to 2002.<sup>30</sup> The majority of forced migrants received the status of 'forced re-settler' (84.4% for the period from 1994 to 2002).<sup>31</sup> 55% of 'forced re-settlers' registered from 1992 until 2002 were women.<sup>32</sup>

### INTEREST-FREE LOANS AND FREE HOUSING SCHEMES

Measures to assist 'forced re-settlers', which were in action until 2002, were incorporated into the subsequently issued Federal Migration Programmes. These measures included the admission of people in cases of emergency; assistance with temporary accommodation while they applied for 'forced re-settler' status; assistance to some groups recognised as 'forced re-settlers' with transportation of their belongings to their chosen place of residence; assistance to 'forced re-settlers' with temporary and permanent accommodation; measures to help with their employment in the Russian labour market; consultations with psychologists; and assistance with socio-cultural adaptation.<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, not all this assistance could be fully implemented due to lack of funding resulting from the economic downturn and armed conflicts on the territory of the Russian Federation.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, the system of assistance excluded many people who were eligible for the status of 'forced re-settler'.<sup>35</sup> Those who received this status could still experience problems with access to their rights and assistance prescribed by the legislation.<sup>36</sup> Such situations had various causes, including contradictions between existing regulations, arising partly from the co-existence of post-Soviet and Soviet regulations on the federal level and partly from the existence of regional regulations which were in conflict with federal legislation<sup>37</sup>; lack of funding; the 'double loyalty' of the regional branches of the Federal Migration Service<sup>38</sup>; and informal practices of officials informed by their interpretations of the written rules.

Assistance with housing for 'forced re-settlers' was one of the priorities of the Russian Federation's migration policy up to 2002. The biggest share of funds allocated to the Federal Migration Service was directed towards this assistance.<sup>39</sup> The Russian authorities developed several mechanisms in this line of help. Some dealt with the provision of temporary housing, while others dealt with helping 'forced re-settlers' to find their own accommodation in Russia.<sup>40</sup> The second group consisted of federal grants for buying accommodation, assistance with organising settlements, interest-free loans for ten years for building or purchasing accommodation and the provision of free accommodation. In their accounts about permanent housing acquisition, the 'forced re-settlers' who participated in my research project only addressed the two last mechanisms. This factor has determined the focus of this text.<sup>41</sup>

The interest-free loan scheme for building or purchasing accommodation was amongst the first initiatives to assist 'forced re-settlers' with permanent



housing. Regulations were issued in 1992.<sup>42</sup> The scheme reflected one of the principles of state assistance to encourage forced migrants' own initiative and active participation in integration into the receiving society.<sup>43</sup> The loan was given to the family of 'forced re-settlers' for 10 years, during which time the sum should be repaid. According to regulations effective until 1997, the upper limit of this loan was determined by the cost of construction or the sale price of accommodation, but could not exceed the limit set by the government.<sup>44</sup>

In 1997, the rules regulating the interest-free loan scheme changed.<sup>45</sup> Russian authorities introduced a formula by which the maximum amount should be calculated. Accommodation purchased had to have at least 12 square metres per family member, the norm prescribed by the Housing Code of the Russian Federation. The size of loan also was differentiated according to the region where it was received. In some regions forced migrants could obtain a loan covering up to 70% of housing costs; in others it could constitute only 5%. This encouraged the acquisition of housing by 'forced re-settlers' in regions that had experienced an outflow of population.<sup>46</sup> The loan calculation also took into consideration the average price of housing in the region. The discrepancy in housing prices between rural and urban areas meant that many families were pushed to buy accommodation in villages or smaller cities.

In 1997, the Russian government also introduced new rules governing loan administration. 'Forced re-settlers' now had to provide a guarantee that money would be repaid by either providing two guarantors or signing a contract of pledge. If 'forced re-settlers' could not complete repayment, then their guarantors had to do so, or, in the case of the contract of pledge, their housing passed to the state. The interest-free loan scheme existed in this form until 2002. In 2003, it was suspended for one year, then for another, and then indefinitely until 2008, when it was abolished entirely.<sup>47</sup>

The first edition of the 1993 law 'On forced re-settlers' indicated that 'forced re-settlers' had the right to free housing built by the state.<sup>48</sup> They also had the right to be placed in a 'privileged queue' for housing.<sup>49</sup> However, in 1994 the federal migration programme indicated that this assistance was to be provided only in cases of 'socially vulnerable groups of population' (*sotsial'no uyazvimye/nezashchishchennye gruppy/kategorii naseleniya*). The definition of those considered to be vulnerable changed throughout the history of migration regulation in Russia.<sup>50</sup>

According to the first two Federal Migration Programmes (issued in 1992 and 1994) and the first edition of the law 'On forced re-settlers' (issued in 1993), the list of the most vulnerable groups included old-age pensioners and people with disabilities who were living alone, single mothers with children younger than 3 years old, and families with more than three children.<sup>51</sup> The 1995 edition of the law was more inclusive. The list now encompassed the families of old-age pensioners and the families of people with disabilities, as well as 'single parent' instead of 'single mother'. However, this extension in the definition of vulnerable groups did not relate to assistance with acquisition of permanent housing.

The 1995 law 'On forced re-settlers' linked the implementation of the free housing scheme to the Housing Code of the Russian Federation.<sup>52</sup> As a result, this mechanism became available only to those 'forced re-settlers' who were eligible for the 'privileged queue' defined by this Code. The categories of people with the right to be in this queue included single mothers *de jure*, parents of twins or parents of more than three underage children, veterans of the Great Patriotic War, labour heroes, people with disabilities and people of certain professions, such as teachers and physicians. The Federal Migration Service financed the construction and acquisition of housing to be distributed among 'forced re-settlers' belonging to these categories. This scheme continued to exist for a number of years.

### INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER AND AGE

The Novosibirsk region, where the empirical research was conducted for this project, was amongst those regions of the Russian Federation that were indicated by the Russian authorities as preferable for the settlement of 'forced re-settlers'. Bordering Kazakhstan, it was among nine regions of the Russian Federation in the 1990s where the largest numbers of 'forced re-settlers' and 'refugees' were registered. Altogether, more than 56,000 people received one or the other status in this region from 1992 to 2002.<sup>53</sup> More than 64.7% of those registered between 1994 and 2002 received the status of 'forced re-settlers'.<sup>54</sup> The majority (88.4%) of people with this status were 'ethnic Russians'. The main country sending 'forced re-settlers' was Kazakhstan (70.7%), followed by Uzbekistan (11.7%). Some 62% of 'forced re-settlers' were of 'working age'; only 8.6% were of retirement age. Women and girls comprised 52.2% of those registered as 'forced re-settlers'. The distribution of gender along age lines differed, however. Women constituted 51.4% of 'forced re-settlers' of 'working age', and 66% of those of retirement age.

The migration regime constructed in the Novosibirsk region in the 1990s could be classified as receptive.<sup>55</sup> There were no major contradictions between regional and federal regulations in relation to mobility and stay/residence of migrants. The possible 'double loyalty' of officials working in the Territorial Migration Service did not prejudice assistance to 'forced re-settlers', since the regional authorities had a positive attitude towards this group of migrants in particular, and towards Soviet citizens coming from post-Soviet space for permanent residence in general. Although there was some concern about lack of opportunities in the labour market caused by the economic decline in the region, migration flows of re-settlers were considered to be beneficial due to the region's demographic problems. Throughout the immediate post-Soviet period the mortality rate exceeded the birth rate, and there was also a significant migration out-flow of the local population to the western part of the Russian Federation. The identification of migrants as 'others' was not raised in local political discourse, nor did the regional press construct the idea of 'otherness' of 'forced re-settlers'.

The receptive character of the Novosibirsk region migration regime, however, coincided with gender biases in assistance to 'forced re-settlers'. Moreover, neither female nor male 'forced re-settlers' constituted homogeneous social groups with regard to their gender positioning and experiences in the receiving society. Age also mattered significantly. Intersecting with gender in the legislation, as well as in the labour market and family, age defined and redefined the opportunities of an individual to access schemes developed by the Russian authorities to help 'forced re-settlers'.

According to Laz, age can be understood as an 'on-going process of accomplishment'.<sup>56</sup> It is constantly produced and reproduced through the social actors' everyday interactions informed by the social structures. This process is about the creation of differences between people, and in this sense age can be interpreted as a dimension of social inequality. This differentiation is rooted in the imagination (based on an interpretation of body and appearance) and/or knowledge about the length of years of interacting social actors. It informs all social practices—recursively reproduced (and durable) social actions—and, consequently, the social institutions and constitution of the whole society.<sup>57</sup> Thus, as in the case of gender, it is possible to speak about age regimes of social institutions and age orders of a given society.

The application of lenses provided by the above-mentioned theorisation about age to the data received via my research makes visible the age regime as inherent to the social institution of migration management created in Russia in the 1990s. This regime was manifested in the written and unwritten rules of this institution, in the meanings constructed about this or that age-related category that were circulated there and, as a result, in the allocation of resources to the 'forced re-settlers'. This regime reflected the post-Soviet age order, which following the Soviet one, was (and still is) based on such highly institutionalised binary categories as 'non/pensioners', 'people of non/working age', 'non/adult' and so forth.<sup>58</sup> The rest of the section provides an account of how this regime intersecting with the gender regime affected my respondents' access to interest-free loan and free housing schemes.

Women and men were affected disproportionately by the arrangements for free accommodation distribution that were created in 1995 and which effectively excluded two vulnerable groups: single parents *de facto* (that is single parents who did not have the status of single mother)<sup>59</sup>; and people who had reached retirement age but were not teachers, doctors, Second World War veterans, labour heroes and/or were not recognised by the authorities as people with disabilities.

The post-Soviet gender order equated parenthood with motherhood.<sup>60</sup> Thus it was more often a woman who found herself as a single parent; that is a single mother *de jure* or *de facto*.<sup>61</sup> Novosibirsk Territorial Migration Service officials indicated that women constituted the majority in this group. They also noted the prevalence of women amongst 'forced re-settlers' who had reached retirement age: for the period from 1994 to 2002, there were twice as many women

as men amongst such 'forced re-settlers'. Data collected across the whole of the Russian Federation showed similar results in other regions.<sup>62</sup>

'Forced re-settlers' who belonged to the two groups excluded from the opportunity of obtaining free housing could find themselves without any housing at all, since they also experienced problems accessing the interest-free loan scheme. These difficulties stemmed from the rules applied to loan calculation in relation to the family situation and economic positioning of pensioners and single parents, as well as from the informal practices of officials arising from their stereotyping of these two groups.

The rule that loans should be given only to a family group discriminated against all single adults regardless of gender and age. However, even in the absence of this rule, regional labour markets in the 1990s did not provide many employment opportunities that would allow single earners to generate an income sufficient for participation in the interest-free loan scheme. Although single parents (men and women) *de facto* and their children were recognised by the authorities as families, often they were not able to access the scheme because their earnings were not high enough. A single mother *de facto* with a 13-year-old daughter described her experience:

The loan wasn't enough to buy [housing] [...] It's funny [...] actually, by law, I've no right to buy a one-room flat because of my daughter [...] we're required to have a two-room flat. In other words, for some health standards, we're not allowed to get [a one- room flat], and for a two-room flat our loan's too small [...]

The probability of being single at retirement age was much higher for women than for men.<sup>63</sup> Amongst 'forced re-settlers', more women than men were single pensioners denied the opportunity to participate in the interest-free loan scheme. Non-single pensioners, however, also experienced difficulties. Married pensioners, formally eligible for the scheme, often could not obtain the loan because they were unable to demonstrate sufficient income to purchase housing of the required size. Although people above retirement age were not prohibited from continuing to work, many did not have any real opportunities to do so.<sup>64</sup> In the case of 'forced re-settlers', the situation with employment for this age group was even worse because of the disruption of social connections, as well as other factors stemming from their migration.<sup>65</sup> Pension income alone was not enough to secure a proper-sized loan.

The ability to generate a monetary income was key in calculating the interest-free loan provided to families of 'forced re-settlers'. In the given economic context, it appeared that the rules for loan calculation privileged so-called 'full families' at a certain phase in their lives. A single mother *de facto* with an underage child commented on the reasons for her non-participation in the scheme:

To apply to the Migration Service [makes sense] for full families [...] For example, husband, wife and children [...] If they're 40 years-old, if parents are 40 years-old,

they've a future, so to speak. These families can obtain a large loan [...] It's especially good when their children have already grown-up [...] They can find a job and bring references [stating] that they work. It'll be a large loan, and they can pay it back quickly [...] As for me, I can receive only a small loan.

Such 'full families', however, could benefit from the scheme only if they had officially registered their marriage, since authorities did not consider unregistered partnerships to be a family. Adults living together in an unregistered partnership had to apply for the interest-free loan separately, and in many cases the amount of each individual loan was not enough to purchase housing. A 44-year-old man, who lived with his partner in such partnership confessed:

It's very difficult to receive the interest-free loan. Your income should be no less than a certain amount in order to receive it [...] My wife and I aren't [officially] registered [as a couple]. I [applied for the loan] only with my daughter. If we'd applied as [official] husband and wife, it would be a different story.

As low-income groups, single parents and pensioners were also at risk of facing discriminatory social practices on the part of officials administrating the loan distribution. One of these practices was discouragement of people with low earnings from applying for this scheme. Respondents reported that although officials informed them about the opportunity to receive money to buy accommodation, they also told them that their earnings were not sufficient, and thus it did not make sense for them even to file an application. Such informal practices of officials conflicted with the legislation, which did not specify a level of income below which a person could not get a loan. However small a loan calculated on the basis of available income might be, individuals still had the right to receive it if they managed to find appropriate housing. By discouraging people from even considering the interest-free loan scheme, officials diverted them from the search for suitable options in the housing market.

The 'forced re-settlers' whom Federal Migration Service officials considered to be 'old' (usually of retirement age) also suffered another discriminatory practice which complicated their acquisition of housing. In the Novosibirsk region, such people were refused a contract of pledge, which was one of the mechanisms available to provide a guarantee that the loan would be repaid. In many cases, they were not even told that this option existed. Instead, officials presented the guarantor option as the only one available. Although federal legislation and all other documents regulating the interest-free loan scheme did not set any age limit for people concluding the contract of pledge, respondents took for granted the practice of officials providing interest-free loans only for older-age people with guarantors.

The officials administering the interest-free loan scheme proved reluctant to deal with accommodation that would be returned to the Federal Migration Service under the contract of pledge in the event of the beneficiary's death within ten years of loan repayment. They discriminated against those whom

they considered to be elderly because of the assumption that such an outcome was more likely. By refusing to conclude a contract of pledge, officials could exclude people from buying housing via the interest-free loan scheme, since it was not so easy to find guarantors given the responsibility and significantly large sums of money involved. Usually relatives of applicants were asked to help, but sometimes even they could not fulfil this role because of insufficient income or, in the case of employment in the informal labour market, lack of documentation certifying their earnings. A 73-year-old with two adult children living with her responded:

Interviewee: [My daughter] works in one of these little shops [...] My son doesn't have [Russian] citizenship yet [...]

Interviewer: Did you ask anybody else to be your guarantor?

Interviewee: Whom can I ask? Who would agree?

## CONCLUSION

Fifteen years ago the discrepancies I found in the experiences of my respondents prompted me to speak about different 'gender subgroups'.<sup>66</sup> Such naming was a reflection of the general trend observed in the literature produced in the area of Gender Studies in Russia at that time. Referring to variations observed among the experiences of different social actors, researchers working in this area presented age and other dimensions of social inequality as constituent parts of the gender order.<sup>67</sup> In this chapter, however, I have readdressed the empirical data and analyses of that study and have taken a step towards an intersectional analysis, introducing a previously missing theoretical account about age. This theorisation has allowed me to see that although the gender and age dimensions of social inequality experienced by 'forced re-settlers' in their access to state assistance are closely interconnected, they should not be considered as part of each other. For example, discrimination experienced by those respondents who were of retirement age was directed at both men and women. Although the high proportion of women in this vulnerable age group could be partly explained by reference to the concepts of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' produced and reproduced within the gender order of Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, this order did not affect the essence of the discrimination.<sup>68</sup> In other words, discriminative practices were the same for both female and male 'forced re-settlers' within the identified age group. In its turn, discrimination towards *de facto* single parents stemmed entirely from gender order arrangements, although a connection with the age order can also be found—for example, with the age of a person's offspring.

Since 2002, the Russian Federation has been developing a more differentiated migration regime in relation to former Soviet citizens. As with the category of 'forced re-settlers', migrant groups defined by current legislation are not homogeneous. However, the majority of the research conducted in Russia on

migration issues works with officially constructed categories of migrants without looking into other aspects which differentiate the experiences of people assigned to these groups. Those who still look beyond the official categories tend to focus on exploration of issues linked with ethnicity and citizenship. The existing studies on gender issues in migration are few and, following a trend observed in the 1990s, are mainly focused on women. The age dimension of migrants' experiences remains almost entirely unaddressed.<sup>69</sup> Intersectional analysis remains unused.<sup>70</sup> Development of these so far neglected directions in the study of migration issues will provide valuable data not only about migrants' experiences and the geographic mobility of people in this part of the world, but also contribute to the much broader sociological debates about social inequality production and reproduction, and the interconnections between agency and social structures.

## NOTES

1. Zhanna Zayonchkovskaya, *Migratsii v transformiruyushchemsya obshchestve: annotirovannyi bibliograficheskii ukazatel' literatury, izdannoï v stranakh SNG 1992–1999*, Moscow: Kompleks-Progress, 2000.
2. Natalya Kosmarskaya, 'Zhenskoe izmerenie' *vynuzhdennoi migratsii i migratsionnoe zakonodatel'stvo Rossii*, Moscow: Proekt Gendernaya Ekspertiza Moskovskogo Tsentra Gendernykh Issledovaniï, 1998.
3. The project 'The Effectiveness of Programmes for the Integration of Forced Migrants: a Gender Perspective' was conducted in the Novosibirsk region from 1999 to 2003 and was supported by the International Association for the Promotion of Co-operation with Scientists from the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union (fellowship reference N YSF 01/1–26).
4. Both 'gender order' and 'gender regime(s)' signify historically constructed systems of relations between men and women based on different interpretations of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. 'Gender order' is inherent to the society as a whole, while 'gender regime' characterises a social institution (for example, education, family, religion): see Raewyn Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987.
5. In English-language literature, '*vynuzhdennye pereselenets*' is usually translated as 'forced migrant': see, for example, Hilary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement, and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia*, London: Routledge, 1998. However, this translation creates confusion in narration and analysis since it describes only one category of forced migrants as indicated in Russian legislation. Thus, here I translate '*vynuzhdennye pereselenets*' as 'forced re-settler'.
6. Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984; Connell, *Gender and Power*; Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*.
7. In total, I analysed accounts made by 61 migrants: 44 women and 17 men. Five respondents had reached retirement age, defined by Russian legislation in the majority of cases as 55 years for women and 60 years for men. Around half had children younger than 16 years old living with them. Five women were raising

- children alone; all of the men raising children were living with their partners or wives.
8. This theoretical and methodological approach, developed within Gender Studies, indicates that social inequality has multiple interrelated dimensions which are not reducible to each other. For more information, see Hae Yeon Choo and Myra Marx Ferree, 'Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: a Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities', *Sociological Theory*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2010, pp. 129–49.
  9. 2002 was a pivotal year for migration regulation in Russia. Migration management came under the supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Russian authorities also adopted two federal laws: Law No 62 'On Citizenship' and Law No 115 'On the Legal Position of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation', which completely changed the process of admission of foreign citizens to Russian territory and society. These two laws redefined former Soviet citizens from other post-Soviet republics as 'others', instead of 'part of us' (former citizens of the Soviet Union). See Larisa Kosygina, 'The Russian Migration Regime and Migrants' Experiences: the Case of Non-Russian Nationals from Former Soviet Republics', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2010, pp. 107–19.
  10. Anatoli Vishnevskii (ed.), *Naselenie Rossii 2003–2004: odinnadtsatyi-dvenadtsatyi ezhegodnyi demograficheskii doklad*, Moscow: Nauka, 2006, p. 316; available online: <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/knigi/books.php#02> (accessed November 2016). For information about migration trends observed in the former Soviet Union during the period under review in this chapter, see Timothy Heleniak, 'An Overview of Migration in the Post-Soviet Space', in Cynthia J. Buckley, Blair A. Ruble and Erin Trouth Hofmann (eds), *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia*, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center and Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, pp. 34–56.
  11. Moya Flynn, *Migrant Resettlement in the Russian Federation: Reconstructing 'Homes' and 'Homelands'*, London: Anthem, 2004, pp. 44–51.
  12. Russian government Decree No 327 'On Republican Long-term Programme Migration'.
  13. For the texts of these programmes see: Edict of the President of the Russian Federation No 1668 'On the Federal Migration Programme'; Decree of Government of the Russian Federation No 935 'On Clarification of the Federal Migration Programme'; Decree of Government of the Russian Federation No 1414 'On Federal Migration Programme for 1998–2000'.
  14. Vladimir Mukomel', *Migratsionnaya politika Rossii: postsovetskie konteksty*, Moscow: Dipol'-T, 2005, pp. 141–6.
  15. See Cristiano Codagnone, 'New Migration and Migration Politics in Post-Soviet Russia', *Ethnobarometer working paper No. 2*, Rome: Centre for European Migration and Ethnic Studies, 1998, pp. 35–48; Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, pp. 42–6; Mukomel', *Migratsionnaya politika Rossii*, pp. 114–15.
  16. Law of the Russian Federation No 4530–1 'On Forced Re-settlers', and Law of the Russian Federation No 4528–1 'On Refugees' (see Article No 1).
  17. Kosygina, 'Russian Migration Regime', p. 116. A range of factors, however, could complicate the acquisition of citizenship by former Soviet citizens arriving from former Soviet republics. For more information, see Codagnone, 'New Migration', pp. 41–2; Kosmarskaya, 'Zhenskoe izmerenie', pp. 39–40. For regulations regarding



- Russian citizenship acquisition before 2002, see Law of the Russian Federation No1948-1 'On Citizenship of the Russian Federation' (first and second editions).
18. Article No 3 of Law of the Russian Federation No 4530-1 'On Forced Re-settlers' (second edition). This regulation allowed former Soviet citizens to meet the newly introduced requirement of filing an application for this status within one year of leaving their previous place of residence: Article No 2 of Law of the Russian Federation No 4530-1 'On Forced Re-settlers' (second edition).
  19. See Article No 1 of Law of the Russian Federation No 4530-1 'On Forced Re-settlers' (second edition). This clause was introduced to correct the situation created by the first versions of Law No1948-1 'On Citizenship', which required former Soviet citizens not permanently registered on Russian territory to return to their countries of origin in order to be eligible to apply for Russian citizenship. For some, it was impossible to meet this requirement when their previous residence was experiencing war or armed conflict. Being unable to obtain Russian citizenship and consequently 'forced re-settler' status, they had to apply instead for the status of refugee.
  20. See the texts of the Federal Migration Programmes of the Russian Federation. The discrepancy is evident in laws regulating admission of the two categories of forced migrants: Law of the Russian Federation No 4530-1 'On Forced Re-settlers' (second edition), and Law of the Russian Federation No 4528-1 'On Refugees' (second edition).
  21. Flynn, *Migrant Resettlement*, pp. 49–50; Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, pp. 35–6.
  22. Flynn, *Migrant Resettlement*, p. 49; Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, pp. 138–40.
  23. See Ludger Pries, 'Configurations of Geographic and Societal Spaces: a Sociological Proposal between "Methodological Nationalism" and the "Spaces of Flows"', *Global Networks*, no. 2, vol. 5, 2005, p. 177. For how renationalisation occurred in post-Soviet space, see Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, and Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and After the Soviet Union: the Mind Aflame*, London: Sage, 1997.
  24. Valery Tishkov (ed.), *Migratsii i novye diaspory v postsovetsskikh gosudarstvakh*, Moscow: Institut Etnologii i Antropologii Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, 1996.
  25. 'Titular ethnicity' ('*titul'naya natsional'nost'*') refers to 'ethnic groups', the names of which coincide with the names of territories. The term was actively used in the Soviet Union, when the government made efforts to construct 'ethnic groups' and link them with certain territories. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, most former Soviet republics employed the notion of 'titular ethnicity' to construct their nations: see Tishkov, *Ethnicity*, and Ronald Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
  26. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991, pp. 53–4.
  27. Flynn, *Migrant Resettlement*, pp. 62–9; Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, pp. 131–8.
  28. This calculation is based on official statistics available online: [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus\\_ref\\_2003.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_ref_2003.php) (accessed November 2016).
  29. Anatoli Vishnevskii (ed.), *Naselenie Rossii 2002: desyatyi ezhegodnyi demograficheskii doklad*, Moscow: KDU, 2004, p. 168.

30. Calculated on the basis of information provided in Vishnevskii, *Naselenie Rossii 2003–2004*, p. 316, and official statistics available online: [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/spp/rus\\_ref\\_2003.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/spp/rus_ref_2003.php) (accessed November 2016).
31. This calculation is based on official statistics available online: [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/spp/rus\\_ref\\_2003.xls](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/spp/rus_ref_2003.xls) (accessed November 2016).
32. Goskomstat, *Zhenshchiny i muzhchiny Rossii. 2002: statisticheskii sbornik*, Moscow: Goskomstat Rossii, 2002, p. 44; available online: [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/B02\\_50/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d010/i010210r.htm](http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/B02_50/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d010/i010210r.htm) (accessed November 2016).
33. See the texts of the Federal Migration Programmes of the Russian Federation as well as Law No 4530-1 'On Forced Re-settlers' (second edition).
34. Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, p. 65.
35. Codagnone, 'New Migration', pp. 42–3; Kosmarskaya, 'Zhenskoe izmerenie', pp. 41–3; Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, pp. 39–40.
36. Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, pp. 40–2; Valery Tishkov (ed.), *Vynuzhdennye migranty i gosudarstvo*, Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii Rossiiskoi Akademii nauk, 1998.
37. Mukomel', *Migratsionnaya politika Rossii*, pp. 161–9.
38. Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, pp. 61–3.
39. Mukomel', *Migratsionnaya politika Rossii*, pp. 140, 144–5.
40. For the full list of these mechanisms that existed up to 2002, see the Law of the Russian Federation No 4530-1 'On Forced Re-settlers' (second edition).
41. For more information about state assistance with settlements, see Elena Filippova, 'Kompaktnye poseleniya migrantov v Rossii: "za" i "protiv"', in Irina Butenko (ed.), *Sposoby adaptatsii naseleniya k novoi sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi situatsii v Rossii*, Moscow: Moskovskii Obshestvennii Nauchnii Fond, 1999, pp. 99–117.
42. Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No 762 'On Issuing Interest-free Long-term Loans to Refugees and Forced Re-settlers'; Order of the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation N 2341 'The Procedure of Issuing Interest-free Long-term Loan for Building or Purchase of Housing to Forced Re-settlers'.
43. This principle is stated in the first two federal migration programmes and can be traced in measures suggested by the third.
44. Due to inflation, this limit was constantly rising: see the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No 762 'On Issuing Interest-free Long-term Loans to Refugees and Forced Re-settlers'.
45. Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No 106 'On Issuing Interest-free Long-term Loans for the Building (Acquisition) of Housing to Forced Re-settlers'.
46. Order of the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation N 13 'On Issuing Interest-free Long-term Loans for Building (Acquisition) of Housing to Forced Re-settlers'.
47. Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No 220 'On Changing and Abolishing Some Decrees of the Government of the Russian Federation in Connection with Improvement of the Russian Federation's Migration Policy'.
48. Article No 6 Law of the Russian Federation No 4530-1 'On Forced Re-settlers' (first edition).
49. The 'privileged queue' phenomenon originated from Soviet legislation regulating distribution of housing among citizens of the Soviet Union. People in this queue received accommodation much faster than people from the general queue.

50. It is worth noting also that the concept of 'socially vulnerable groups of the population' does not have a clear definition in Russian law: see Mariya Asacheva, 'O legal'nom opredelenii ponyatiya "sotsial'no-nezashchishchennye kategorii grazhdan"', *Sotsial'noe i pensionnoe pravo*, no. 4, 2014, pp. 31–4.
51. In the Soviet Union, the term 'single mother' was first used in the 1944 family law. Based on this and on a 1970 decree, a single mother was defined as a woman whose children do not have their father named on their birth certificates. For post-Soviet Russia, see Sergey Zakharov, 'Odnokoe materinstvo v Rossii', *Demoscope Weekly*, no. 553–554, 2013, available online: <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2013/0553/demoscope553.pdf> (accessed November 2016).
52. This Housing Code was issued in the Soviet era and remained in force in post-Soviet Russia up to the end of 2004 with minor amendments.
53. *Demoscope Weekly*, 'Prilozhenie: spravochnik statisticheskikh pokazatelei', available online: [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus\\_ref\\_reg.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_ref_reg.php) (accessed November 2016).
54. Data cited further in this paragraph were provided by the Novosibirsk Territorial Migration Service, which did not subdivide forced migrants into 'forced re-settlers' and 'refugees' in its statistics before 1994.
55. The term 'migration regime' comprises discourses about migrants and migration, the legislative framework, and the composition of resources available to social actors participating in the production and reproduction of this regime: see Kosygina, 'Russian Migration Regime', pp. 30–2. For more information about the migration regime constructed in the Novosibirsk region in the 1990s, see Larisa Kosygina, *Vynuzhdennye pereselenitsy i gendernyi rezhim upravleniya ikh obustroistvom*, Novosibirsk: Izdatel'stvo Sibirskogo otdeleniya RAN, 2003 pp. 27–48.
56. Cheryl Laz, 'Act Your Age', *Sociological Forum*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1998, pp. 85–113; Cheryl Laz, 'Age Embodied', *Journal of Aging Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2003, pp. 503–19.
57. For more on social practices and their role in the constitution of social institutions and society, see Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, pp. 1–37.
58. For more information about the Soviet age order, see Aleksei Levinson, 'Starost' kak institut', *Otechestvennye zapiski*, no. 24, 2005, available online: <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2005/3/starost-kak-institut> (accessed November 2016).
59. For example, women who gave birth within marriage, but subsequently divorced, were widowed or their spouse disappeared; and single fathers.
60. Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, 'Gendered Citizenship and Soviet and Post-Soviet Societies', in Vera Tolz and Stephenie Booth (eds), *Nation and Gender in Contemporary Europe*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005, pp. 107, 109–10.
61. In Russia, according to census data, women raising children without spouses constituted 89.1 per cent of all single parents in 2002, and 88.5 per cent in 2010. See Federal'naya sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki (Rossia), *Sotsial'no-Demograficheskii portret Rossii: po itogam vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniya 2010 goda*, Moscow: 'Statistika Rossii', 2012, p. 47.
62. Kosmarskaya, 'Zhenskoe izmerenie', p. 58.
63. Rosstat, *The Demographic Yearbook of Russia, 2005: Statistical Handbook*, Moscow: Rosstat, 2005, pp. 36–39.
64. See Tat'yana Cherkashina, 'Rabota na pensii: neobkhodimost' ili vozmozhnost', *EKO*, no. 4, 2011, pp. 101–14.

65. See Larisa Kosygina, 'Doubly Disadvantaged? Gender, Forced Migration and the Russian Labour Market', in Rebecca Kay (ed.), *Gender, Equality and Difference During and After State Socialism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007, pp. 200–4.
66. Kosygina, *Vynuzhdennye pereseleniia*, p. 80.
67. Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, 'Gosudarstvennoe konstruirovaniie gendera v Sovetskom obshchestve', *Journal of Social Policy Studies*, vol. 1, nos 3/4, 2004, pp. 309–10.
68. For how the gender order influences the mortality rate, see Yevgenii Andreev, 'Smertnost' muzhchin v Rossii', *Voprosy statistiki*, no. 7, 2001, pp. 27–33.
69. The quantitative studies thus far make only estimations of the number of women of different ages migrating to Russia and their distribution within the Russian economy. Some qualitative studies have mentioned the significance of age in migrants' experiences, but they do not proceed with an exploration of this dimension of social inequality in the lives of their research participants. See, for example, Natal'ya Zotova, 'Zhenshchiny-trudovye migranty iz Tadzhikistana [starshaya vozrastnaya gruppa]', *Vestnik Evrazii: nezavisimyi nauchnyi zhurnal = Acta Eurasiaca*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2007, pp. 72–87. For experiences of children, see Dmitrii Potetaev, 'Trudovaya ekspluatatsiya detei migrantov v Rossii (na primere Moskvy)', *Nauchnye trudy: Institut narodnogo prognozirovaniia*, RAN, no. 11, 2013, pp. 134–51.
70. Even those who recognise that migrants' experiences are mediated through the interconnection of several dimensions of social inequality do not go further, but rather simply note the existence of discrepancies. See, for example, Elena Tyuryukanova, *Zhenshchiny-migranty iz stran SNG v Rossii*, Moscow: Maks Press, 2011, pp. 21, 26. In Russia, at the time this chapter was written, the only application of the intersectional perspective for analysis of migrants' experiences has been provided by Anna Rocheva, "'Ponaekhali tut" v roddomakh Rossii: issledovanie rezhima stratifikatsionnogo vosproizvodstva na primere Kirgizskikh migrantov v Moskve', *Journal of Social Policy Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2014, pp. 367–86.

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## ‘A Woman Isn’t a Woman When She’s not Concerned About the Way She Looks’: Beauty Labour and Femininity in Post-Soviet Russia

*Holly Porteous*

The quotation in the title highlights this chapter’s key argument: that work on achieving a beautiful body (henceforth: ‘beauty labour’) is, and has long been, one of the most important elements of a discourse of normative femininity in Russian culture and society.<sup>1</sup> As the participant, Katya, says, a woman is simply not considered a woman if she does not worry about her appearance.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter demonstrates how women in contemporary Russia understand the achievement of a beautiful body as a central aspect of being a woman. It draws on feminist and gendered theoretical perspectives to explore beauty and femininity as social constructs in post-Soviet Russia. Rather than dwelling in too much detail upon elements of change in gender or gender-related discourses, I argue that post-Soviet trends related to beauty (for example, glamour and conspicuous consumption) have in some ways been facilitated by continuities in how women are viewed in Russian society.<sup>3</sup>

The ‘concern’ also mentioned in the title is an important aspect of how I conceptualise beauty and femininity discourses: displaying worries about one’s body, and performing beauty labour in order to address these worries, essentially represents a striving to meet socio-cultural gender norms that stress beauty as a signifier of femininity. In this sense, I argue that a feminist theoretical perspective is at least as significant as a post-socialist perspective in exploring how beauty is understood in patriarchal Russian society.

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After a brief discussion of methods and feminist theory on beauty, I begin with a discussion of women's understandings of beauty labour as a form of bodily disciplinarity.<sup>4</sup> It is also a means of 'doing' or performing normative femininity.<sup>5</sup> In the empirical sections, I show how women understood beauty labour as a process which highlights gender differences. Women are seen to lose out from a pressure to be beautiful, as masculinity was not seen to draw on the same ideals and practices. The chapter draws links not only between beauty and normative femininity, but also between beauty and perceived professionalism. Beauty labour is seen as a means of lending women the confidence to succeed in the post-Soviet world of work, where the onus is on the individual rather than the collective. Finally, the chapter explores links between beauty, femininity and Russian national identity, picking up on previous work on the Soviet-Russian context and showing how women use these topics to frame their discussions of post-Soviet social change.<sup>6</sup>

Although the interviews I conducted were carried out with readers of women's magazines, the questions and discussion were not entirely focused on this topic. They also encompassed attitudes towards gender roles, beauty and conspicuous consumption. The examples used in this chapter demonstrate that this group of participants discussed beauty as a social category relevant to the majority of women. Given the content of these media, it may be posited that readers are more likely than the general female population to take an interest in beauty labour. Although I acknowledge that there may be certain social groups where women's bodily appearance is less critical to their perceived achievement of normative femininity, it is not always straightforward to predict which groups this may encompass.

## BEAUTY AND FEMININITY FROM THE SOVIET ERA TO THE PRESENT DAY

A number of recent publications have discussed the importance of beauty and femininity to women during the Soviet era. Djurdja Bartlett's work challenges the Cold War stereotype of the dour, utilitarian Soviet fashion landscape and emphasises Soviet women's interest in looking beautiful.<sup>7</sup> Melanie Ilic's work on late Soviet beauty contests shows the social value of a beautiful appearance, even as this perspective clashed with some official Soviet norms.<sup>8</sup> Olga Vainshtein explores the significance of homemade cosmetics and style advice in Soviet-era women's magazines.<sup>9</sup> Yulia Gradskaia draws on oral history interviews to examine how Soviet women understood beauty and femininity as performative, a perspective I will show is still very much in evidence today.<sup>10</sup>

Moving to aspects of change relating to gender and beauty in the post-Soviet era, the deregulation of the socio-cultural sphere led to some noticeable differences. For example, early post-Soviet advertisements for secretaries who were beautiful, slim or even willing to perform sexual favours have been well documented<sup>11</sup>; and the mass availability of pornography and the growing popularity of beauty contests,<sup>12</sup> even in prison,<sup>13</sup> point in the direction of a 'clear trend towards the commercialisation and objectification of women's bodies'

beginning in the Gorbachev period. Other trends, such as a culture of glamour<sup>14</sup> and conspicuous consumption,<sup>15</sup> have certainly brought about a changing cultural landscape in Russia, where feminine beauty has (at the very least, visually) been brought more to the forefront. However, I would argue that these changes have reframed rather than reformulated the links between beauty and femininity. From the Soviet era to the present day, femininity has been inextricably linked to a discourse of beauty and beauty labour. Below, I discuss how a feminist approach can help to deconstruct this discourse.

### THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO GENDERED BEAUTY

Beauty has always been a central tenet of feminist thought. One significant feminist critique of how women's bodies are understood in Western society and culture is based on the assumption that, whatever a woman may do or say in everyday life, whatever status she may hold in economic or social terms, to a large extent her body is seen to represent her worth as an individual. Women, arguably to a greater extent than men, are judged on their ability to achieve a normative body, and it is assumed that bodily appearance is a direct result of their own lifestyle.<sup>16</sup> Naomi Wolf's 1991 book *The Beauty Myth* is a key text from this perspective, and puts forward a strong argument that a culture of beauty is limiting to women and contributes to gender inequality. Sheila Jeffreys' work expands on this idea with regard to the new millennium, exploring new consumer opportunities and technologies as increasing pressure on women to 'look good'.<sup>17</sup> Anderson et al. discuss how women's bodies and appearances are perceived to be the key resource they can draw upon in order to negotiate their position within social hierarchies, discussing how 'traits of beauty [...] are perceived as assets capable of yielding privilege, opportunity and wealth'.<sup>18</sup> Kwan and Trautner empirically demonstrate the disadvantages women face for being seen as *less* beautiful, exploring education, work, and even the law.<sup>19</sup> Although some authors have argued that patriarchal structures mean women should take advantage of their 'ability' to exploit beauty as a form of social capital,<sup>20</sup> I would disagree. The pressures faced by women can be seen to result in the proliferation of women 'doing gender' via beauty labour, which points to an understanding of gender as a social construct which is understood performatively (that is, as negotiated and renegotiated on an ongoing basis), rather than being a stable facet of a subject's 'identity'. The first empirical section of the chapter below discusses this in more detail.

### BEAUTY LABOUR AS DISCIPLINARITY

Some feminist scholarship has utilised Michel Foucault's work on bodily discipline and surveillance to critique social norms which encourage women to put their bodies under ongoing surveillance and to 'discipline' them via beauty labour (which encompasses a wide range of activities from dieting, to wearing make-up, to having cosmetic surgery).<sup>21</sup> Practices of bodily discipline reflect

social pressure on women to spend a considerable amount of time, money and energy on them, arguably much more pressure than men face to take part in the same activities.<sup>22</sup> It is thus not just disciplinarity itself that is problematic from a feminist perspective, but the ‘continual’ aspect: work on the body is more of a constant and never-ending struggle for many women, and has been argued to contribute towards psychological and physiological disorders such as anorexia.<sup>23</sup>

Participants’ discussions reflected a view of the female body as in need of discipline and surveillance. This view was not always demonstrated in a straightforward dislike of their bodies, but rather in a tendency to view them in segmented parts. It is the parts that are in need of ‘improvement’:

Overall, I like my body. But I should do more sport, use a hula hoop – I want a slim waist. (Vika, 22)

I don’t like my teeth. I have two little ‘fangs’ that stick out, I don’t like them. I also don’t like my breasts, but most of all it’s my teeth. But everything else is fine. Everything’s fine with me, just my teeth and then the rest is good. (Margarita, 21)

Vika and Margarita spoke about their bodies as a general whole, but also in terms of constituent parts that were in need of discipline. Indeed, there were very few participants who did not name some change they would like to make, even if they claimed to be happy with their bodies overall:

HP: What do you like best about your body, and is there anything you don’t like?

Nina: I don’t like [*pause*] I wouldn’t say that I’m terribly thin, but I’d like to put on a little weight. That is, gain some curves, and then it would be fine. Well, and my bust of course.

Oksana: Probably everyone wants a better bust. I also want to get rid of my tummy.

Nina: I want to go to the gym. (Nina and Oksana, both 22)

Here, both women are immediately able to pinpoint certain parts of their bodies that they would like to improve. Oksana’s comments suggest that she sees this view as particularly normative: ‘everybody’ (or, more accurately, every woman) must want a ‘better bust’: why would they not? This suggests that the pressure for women to ‘improve’ their bodies according to an ideal of the feminine body is relevant to wider Russian culture.

Furthermore, despite the usual stress on weight loss as a means to enhance femininity, Nina feels that she should put on weight in order to feel better about her figure, a point that may seem anomalous at first glance. However, when considering idealised portrayals of women in popular culture as very slim with large breasts, a figure that few women naturally possess, Nina’s comments make a lot of sense. Femininity is partly constructed via highlighting the curves of an idealised female body, so as to distinguish it from the angles and muscles of an idealised male body. Curves and slimness are thus two sides of the same coin in



terms of essentialising a 'feminine' body. Feminine curves may also be linked to women's reproductive role, especially as a means of addressing the 'demographic crisis' that has been a consistent discourse from the Brezhnev period to the present day.<sup>24</sup>

Participants often held a dichotomous understanding of femininity, which was constructed as both inherent (natural) and achieved.<sup>25</sup> For many participants, beauty labour seems to be a way of making up for the femininity that their body (supposedly) lacks: a form of bodily disciplinarity. However, this 'lack' is also perceived as a sign of failure on the part of the individual woman, as femininity is supposed to be 'naturally' present when in fact it is performatively constructed via beauty labour, as I discuss further below.

### BEAUTY LABOUR AS GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

Many participants spoke about beauty labour as specifically feminine work: as an inherent part of being a woman. For example, women spoke about a well-kept body as both a sign of, and a reason for, confidence in social situations:

- HP: In your opinion, how important is it for a woman to look beautiful?  
 Diana: It's hard to say what beautiful is. Maybe well groomed—that's important. Beautiful—when it's over the top glamour, it's too much. But beautiful is important.  
 HP: And how does it affect work, personal life and relationships with men?  
 Diana: I think it improves your self-worth; a person is more confident if they can easily communicate with everyone. When people believe in themselves, I think it's better. (Diana, 24)

Although women often talked about the significance of personality, intelligence or other initially invisible qualities, many noted the value of the body in presenting a positive image to the world. Perceptions of appearance as significant to selfhood to others may be said to reflect a wider trend towards post-feminist notions of individualism linked to the body in certain types of literature and media.<sup>26</sup> This approach tends to highlight the capacity of the individual for self-improvement whilst neglecting genetics, personal circumstances, health or social structures, for example, all of which contribute to bodily appearance. In relation to contemporary Russia, this reflects patriarchal notions of women's role in society.

Furthermore, Diana's observations highlight the social penalties that failing to achieve an acceptable level of beauty may entail, implying a consciousness of the amount of beauty labour performed; she does not wish to look 'over the top'. This reflects continuities with the Soviet discourse of *kulturnost*, which emphasised 'appropriateness' in dress rather than an overly individualistic or sexualised look for women.<sup>27</sup> Although individualism is more acceptable as a social value compared to the Soviet era, there is still a social pressure not to be *too* individual and to achieve the correct balance.

A desire to be perceived correctly by others, and the perception that it affected a woman's success in life, was also present in other interviews:

HP: How important is it for women to look beautiful?

Masha: I think it's very important. When I'm in social situations, I notice that not everyone thinks so. They simply don't have the desire, because when you have the desire, you can find the time and money. I think that it's important and it's an expression of our inner condition. Because when a girl or a woman is well groomed, people see her completely differently.

HP: And how does that affect her career, personal life, relationships?

Masha: It has a direct effect. The people around us value us only as much as we value ourselves. For example, as far as I've seen, in personal relationships when a woman is well groomed people want to give her presents, flowers, look after her. [...] If she values herself highly, men are attracted to that and value her more. The same goes for work—at work it's very important. (Masha, 22)

Putting time, money and effort into performing femininity was perceived by Masha as directly linked to a woman's success in various spheres of life. This is a pragmatic response to patriarchal social norms: several studies have pointed to the benefits of achieving an appearance considered beautiful—and the penalties of failing to carry out beauty labour—for women outside of Russia.<sup>28</sup> Masha clearly describes the perceived benefits of beauty labour and implies that she has internalised these standards in judging other women ('I notice that not everyone thinks so'). It is also significant that Masha's answer puts a stress on heterosexual romantic relationships and male attention. This is seen not as a product of mutual interests or compatibility, but a result of the woman's beauty labour and gender performance. Although there is continuity in some aspects of this from the Soviet period, the amount of beauty labour now expected from Russian women may have increased, and become more overtly sexualised, since the Gorbachev era, especially given the greater 'opportunities' for the consumption of beauty products and procedures in the post-Soviet era.

Women also talked about the extent to which creating a desirable body was in itself gendered—a task that women are socially expected to perform to a much greater extent than are men. As such, beauty labour was viewed not as confined exclusively to women, but certainly as a *feminised* activity. Demonstrating concern about one's body and the way it is seen by others could be seen as just a taken for granted part of womanhood; a pressure that men were not perceived to face in such a strong way:

[When young men take part in physical activity] it's for themselves – not for women, not for their appearance. [...] Men have more confidence, they think that if a girl's with you then they'll love you whether you have a beer belly or not. For some reason they have a slipshod approach to their appearance. But if a girl gets a little fatter or stops wearing makeup and looking after herself, men start to look at

other girls. You see it all the time – a really pretty girl, well groomed, going around with a man who's practically bald; it's not even important that he's not the same age and has a beer belly and dirty boots. If a woman appeared in front of him looking like that, he wouldn't stand for it. I don't know why that is. Perhaps it's because there are more women than men, and they know that if they don't catch one, there are plenty more fish in the sea. (Zinaida, 23)

Zinaida's comment that men do not face the same pressures as women highlights pressure on women to 'improve' their bodies, to enact their femininity via wearing makeup and 'looking after [themselves]'. She also links it to romantic relationships and a perceived double standard which allows men lapses in personal grooming unthinkable for women, as they risk the loss of a valuable male partner.<sup>29</sup> Another participant brought out similar observations:

Yulia: [Men] do look after their appearance, but within limits. In the first instance it's sport, fitness, when men maintain their figures, that's one thing—to keep their bodies looking good. But of course they don't use lip gloss or mascara. For women it's more pronounced.

HP: Is it more important for women?

Yulia: It seems that it's very important in the modern world. Men are also influenced by the mass media and advertising, and the mass media portrays an ideal woman—she has ideal legs, ideal breasts, an ideal figure, face. She's completely idealised, right down to the tips of her fingers. One way or another, we have to measure up to that benchmark, especially unmarried women who are looking [for a man]. (Yulia, 27)

Yulia's comments emphasise the high levels of personal grooming that women are expected to carry out, much more than is expected of men. The benefits that women perceive they will gain from beauty labour could also be linked to economic stability, given the stress on the man as breadwinner (*korrmilets*) in Russian society.<sup>30</sup> This could be due to a belief that women may perceive their beauty as a form of aesthetic capital which they can turn into economic capital in the form of financial support from a male partner.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, men's efforts to work on their body are described as 'within limits' and linked to the active *participation* in sport, as opposed to purely physical appearance and being *passively* objectified by others. Research carried out in the early 1990s suggests that this is by no means a new phenomenon: one participant interviewed by Bridger, Kay and Pinnick noted the double standard for men and women's appearances in very similar language to Yulia and Zinaida: 'the men look such a mess and the woman have obviously taken such care and dressed really thoughtfully'.<sup>32</sup> Beauty labour is thus highly linked to an essentialised version of femininity:

I think a woman isn't a woman when she isn't concerned about the way she looks. She has to be – that's what her job is. Be concerned about how you look. I don't think it's the biggest sin to walk out [sic] without makeup on – you can do that, of

course. In winter, I'm so lazy, I'm always oversleeping. So when I wake up I have ten minutes to go to work – I don't care, I would just be warm and go to work. But I feel uncomfortable – when I arrive at work and I didn't do my makeup, I would be like [to another woman] 'hey, do you have a mascara or something? Let me [use] that'. So I will do it. (Katya, 25)

On one hand, Katya identified worrying about appearance very strongly with femininity, going as far to describe it as a woman's 'job'. Though she stressed certain aspects of everyday life, such as work responsibilities and the difficulties of a St Petersburg winter, as obstacles to performing a minimum level of beauty labour, she felt a very clear pressure to apply make-up when she had not found the time to carry out her normal beauty routines in the morning. For Katya, as for other women I interviewed, beauty labour was a vital reflection of their femininity to the outside world. Worries about how one's body appears to others are taken for granted as simply part of being a woman. This suggests that beauty labour can be seen as an essential part of gender performativity in contemporary Russia, and it creates pressures for women to which men are not subject in the same way. I would also highlight the personal failure women perceived, which reflects an understanding of the body as a signifier of a woman's individual worth.

### BEAUTY LABOUR AT WORK

In the previous section, Masha mentions work as another area of life where women can benefit from beauty labour (or, indeed, lose out from a lack of it), a view also held by other participants:

For women it's important to be beautiful because a woman's success depends on a lot of things, including beauty. A person is judged by their clothes. If a man doesn't look good: oh well, perhaps he's brainy. But a woman? [*pause*] I don't remember who said this [*pause*] generally an intelligent woman can't look unattractive – she has to be good looking *as well* [as intelligent]. She can't go into a big company looking untidy, ungroomed, dressed badly, and ask for work. No one would take her on. (Marta, 23)

HP: Do you use make up every day?

Lyubov: At work, every day, but rarely on weekends. At the weekend I try not to wear makeup if I'm not going anywhere.

HP: Do you like using make up?

Lyubov: It's more of a necessity because, for example, my facial skin tone is uneven and too pale. At work I'm coming into contact with people, so you have to look 'one hundred per cent'. (Lyubov, 22)

Lyubov worked in a business setting and again took a fairly instrumental approach to beauty labour, but for different reasons to Masha: it was necessary

to look 'one hundred per cent' at work, but in her everyday life she preferred not to wear cosmetics.

Marta highlights the additional, *gendered* pressure women face in achieving career success, whereby skills and achievements must also be accompanied by an acceptable level of beauty labour. This shows how beauty labour can be seen as a specifically feminine duty linked to one's professional life. For many women in this study, looking professional was associated with wearing makeup to hide undesirable (that is, unfeminine) features and highlight desirable ones.

As previously noted, scholars have discussed the phenomenon of women's job advertisements in the early post-Soviet period containing stipulations for women to possess certain normative feminine traits linked to their face or figure. Although this overt sexism may be less noticeable in post-millennial employment practices, Susanne Cohen's recent work looking at notions of professionalism and image in the 2000s suggests that a feminine appearance is still perceived as very important to Russian women's success in the workplace.<sup>33</sup> Cohen's work suggests that a new 'gendered morality' linked to the development of capitalism may act to frame work on one's image in different ways in post-Soviet Russia. However, this may also represent continuity with Soviet values of femininity which also stressed beauty and a 'cultured' appearance via forms of beauty labour. Thus, although women may now face less obvious pressure to look a certain way for their jobs than was reflected in 1990s advertisements, pressures linked to ideas around 'professionalism' are still apparent—and in some ways are also fundamentally linked to women's performances of beauty labour.

### BEAUTY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

In this final empirical section, I discuss different ways beauty and femininity can be discursively linked to the idea of 'Russianness', an aspect that has been discussed in existing literature on both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras.<sup>34</sup> 'Russianness' could also be defined in temporal terms in relation to Soviet beauty ideals, or in relation to perceptions of how women of other nationalities performed beauty labour.

To begin, participants often mentioned the idea of 'Russianness' as inherently linked to a beautiful or feminine appearance. This was sometimes seen as somehow 'natural', or could be perceived as a result of Russian women putting more emphasis on beauty and beauty labour than women of other nationalities:

Ever since I was a child I heard that Russian women were the most beautiful. [...] Despite the fact that in Russia salaries are lower than in Western countries, women here manage to figure it out so their appearance is A + [*vygladet' na pyat' ballov*]. [...] The question of femininity is very important. [...] In Europe, you value comfort more than we do here. I would even say that if you go to our rural areas, you'll still see girls in stilettos. She'll be walking through potholes in such [high] stilettos, that it's clear that the question of femininity is of primary importance – she'd walk through a field in high heels! (Sveta, 23)

HP: In your opinion, how important is it for women in Russia to look beautiful?

Lyubov: To me it seems important to the majority of women. Here, it's not like Europe. Here, every girl strives to look good. (Lyubov, 22)

Although some participants discussed Russian beauty as somehow inherent or natural, Sveta and Lyubov's understanding of it highlights beauty as socially constructed, as a product of greater beauty labour or disregard for the discomforts of trying to emphasise one's bodily femininity.

In terms of specific post-Soviet developments, some participants perceived the fall of the Soviet Union as a significant point at which gender norms around beauty and femininity began to change:

Previously [lots of personal grooming for women] wasn't cultivated so much. Before women had a choice... as far as I know, women could wear make-up, but it wasn't so important and not as popular, and women's natural beauty meant one large plait and wearing a uniform. Now it's fitness everywhere – every step you take – advertising, hair removal cream, plastic surgery. It's becoming more and more idealistic. Now there are lots of girls with fake nails, fake lashes, fake breasts, and men are thinking 'hurrah!' Of course there are men who don't want that, but most of them like it. (Yulia, 27)

Yulia's perception that pressure on women to look a certain way has grown in recent memory seems to draw a line between the more natural feminine ideal of the Soviet era, implied by the braid and uniform of the typical Soviet working woman, and the post-Soviet era in which the accoutrements of a culture obsessed with bodily appearance are visible at 'every step'. It is interesting that this participant links 'choice' to the Soviet past, which contradicts prominent discourses of choice more often linked to the neoliberal, capitalist global order. Once more, this may be seen to be linked to newer trends such as individualism, and particularly to a culture of conspicuous consumption, both of which have seen women's bodies classified as commodities. Yulia's view of these social changes is quite pessimistic. Other participants, however, were more enthusiastic about social change in the post-Soviet era:

I think that now – in Russia anyway, how the situation has developed – women have started to look after themselves more. [...] Here a large percentage of women go to beauty salons. I think that it's really great. In Russia young designers import things, bring in fashion shows. In the city we get all of these fashion shows by the fashionable designers, the industry. It's interesting, it's great – I think that we need to introduce young women [to this] so they can look after themselves. And it's not about whether they can afford it, but rather about a desire to look beautiful all the time. [...] I talk to my clients and our partners and those who have already spent a long time in the beauty business, and they tell me: you know, ten years ago we had no work, it was boring, no one went anywhere – well, rarely – and now it's the opposite. [Even] women on an average wage try to put some money aside for

themselves, for their own beauty: to visit a beauty salon, to go to the gym. I think it's very cool. Demand creates supply – demand grows, and supply grows. (Valentina, 24)

Despite the fact that, as previously noted, there was a clear stress on beauty for women in the late Soviet period and the 1990s, Valentina perceives a growing focus on maintaining a beautiful body in the Putin era alone. Furthermore, she clearly links this rise in beauty labour to changes in the economic sphere – the supply and demand of capitalism and the growth of a consumer society in Russia. A discourse of beauty as liberation from Soviet political norms or post-Soviet economic troubles is also present here, with consumer opportunities being framed in a language of choice for women who previously would have been largely excluded from consumer-linked beauty activity. Although from some feminist perspectives previously discussed the framing of beauty practices as liberating is problematic, and I would agree that such change is less of an advance than an entrenchment of patriarchal gender norms, the example above does point to one element of change that has been perceived in contrast to Soviet gender norms.

Some participants took a long-term view of beauty norms that was more ambivalent:

Understandings of femininity change with the fashions. Previously it was fashionable to be plump. If women used to wear long skirts and an open neckline, everything was on show, but today it's stylish to be slim, like models. [...] All of the models on fashion adverts have that figure. [...] In our time it's fashionable to have your body on display – not just your bust like before, but your legs too. It seems to me that everything changes with the times. In the Soviet era it was fashionable to be athletic – defined muscles, they had gymnasts, all of that... biceps, triceps. It all changed. (Yevgenia, 25)

Although Yevgenia did link harmful diseases such as anorexia to a new female archetype which emphasised a slim body, she also saw it in historical context, possibly as a phase that would pass with time. Others took a similar view:

- HP: In Russia right now, how important is it for women to look beautiful?  
 Tamara: It's not only in Russia, it's everywhere—women in all countries want to look good. [...]  
 Nina: Appearance is very important here.  
 Tamara: Now in the twenty-first century, it's important. If you look at the past, at the beginning of the twentieth century/end of the nineteenth century, then they had noblewomen with big dresses and hairstyles. It's just the style has changed. Women have always wanted to look good all the time in any era.  
 Oksana They sacrificed even more.

Tamara Now standards are different. Before the beauty standard was Marilyn Monroe, now it's Pamela Anderson. (Tamara, 21, Nina, 22, Oksana, 22)

Tamara contrasts the different body ideals of different eras, though interestingly draws upon Western archetypes as opposed to Soviet ones: Marilyn Monroe is used as a cultural icon rather than any of the many Soviet film stars who would presumably be as well known in post-Soviet Russia. Unlike Yevgenia, these women do not see 1991 as a changing point, but rather perceive continuity in gender terms with earlier periods of Russian history. Although Tamara uses a different archetype of feminine beauty – the curvy, sexualised Pamela Anderson figure as opposed to the presumably more androgynous model figure – the emphasis on beauty as a key feminine attribute nevertheless goes unquestioned.

### CONCLUSION

A feminist critique of post-Soviet gender and beauty norms demonstrates how Russian women share anxieties about achieving a beautiful body that have also been explored in Western feminist literature. Many women internalise normative discourses on the necessity of achieving beauty, and their reactions to the inevitable failures of their own bodies to meet feminine ideals (for example, self-criticism, performing beauty labour) are in line with concepts of the feminine body as in need of discipline. Although some literature has argued that women should use beauty labour to enhance their prospects in life, I would argue that a stress on women's bodily appearance is a sign of ongoing gender inequality and is inherently limited, where women suffer feelings of injustice at the extent to which men are excluded from beauty labour. I would also point to the temporal (that is, due to ageing), class (that is, due to lack of money to spend on beauty products or procedures) or other limits inherent in forms of capital linked to gendered bodies.

Discourses of national identity in Russia are shown to intersect with normative gender discourses, and this chapter has also shown how contemporary discussions draw upon more deeply rooted understandings of femininity also present in the Soviet era. Some women saw an excess of beauty labour as linked to post-Soviet change, whereas others framed beauty labour and its results as a particular virtue of Russian women. Furthermore, some participants perceived an increased emphasis on beauty labour as negative, and perhaps linked to a concurrent perceived rise in individualistic or man-pleasing values. Others welcomed such trends as progressive. Clearly, though opinions are mixed, the perceived beauty of women's bodies is (and will likely remain) not only discursively linked to normative femininity in Russia, but a visual and discursive signifier of a variety of other social norms and developments from professionalism to national identity.



## NOTES

1. My use of the term 'beauty labour' may be understood as a means of 'doing gender' (see Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, 'Doing Gender', *Gender and Society*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1987, pp. 125–151) aimed at achieving normative femininity: from wearing make-up, to attempting to change their body shape via weight loss, to cosmetic surgery. 'Beauty labour' represents the drawing together of a range of feminist approaches to beauty practices as problematic: see, for example, Sheila Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*, London: Routledge, 2005; Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, London: Vintage, 1991; Samantha Kwan and Mary Nell Trautner, 'Beauty Work: Individual and Institutional Rewards, the Reproduction of Gender, and Questions of Agency', *Sociology Compass*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2009, pp. 49–71.
2. For further theoretical background and discussion about how beauty labour is central to an understanding of femininity in women's magazines, see Holly Porteous, "'There Are No Ugly Women, Only Lazy Ones": the Duty of Beauty Labour in Contemporary Russian Women's Magazines', in Helle Ehlers, Gabriele Linke, Nadja Milewski, Beate Rudloff and Heike Trappe (eds), *Körper – Geschlecht – Wahrnehmung. Geistes- Und Sozialwissenschaftliche Beiträge Zur Genderforschung*, Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013, pp. 133–56.
3. This analysis of gender discourses is based on a view of gender as socially constructed; that is, notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are not linked to biological truths. See Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*, London: Temple Smith, 1972. According to this view, gender may be seen both as discursively constructed via language (see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge, 2006) and also as 'a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction' (see West and Zimmerman, 'Doing Gender', p. 125).
4. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, London: Penguin, 1979; and, from a gendered perspective, Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. I use the term 'beauty labour' as a reflection of the value association of 'labour' as work on the body which is associated with the production of gendered aesthetic and cultural capital. 'Labour' is semantically faithful to the everyday striving of many women to achieve and sustain an attractive and feminine appearance, reflecting social pressures they face to carry out such work.
5. Butler, *Gender Trouble*; West and Zimmerman, 'Doing Gender'.
6. This chapter is based on my Ph.D. research, which looked at femininity, beauty and consumption in Russian women's magazines and according to reader perceptions. In-depth interviews were conducted in St Petersburg and Nizhniy Novgorod with 39 Russian women aged 18–35 who were (or had previously been) regular readers of women's magazines. The interviews were analysed from a feminist perspective in tandem with a discourse analysis of the magazines.
7. Djurdja Bartlett, *FashionEast: the Spectre that Haunted Socialism*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.
8. Melanie Ilic, 'Women and Competition in State Socialist Societies: Soviet Beauty Contests', in Katalin Miklóssy and Melanie Ilic (eds), *Competition in Socialist Society*, London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 159–75.

9. Olga Vainshtein, 'Female Fashion, Soviet Style: Bodies of Ideology', in Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren (eds), *Russia—Women—Culture*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996.
10. Yulia Gradszkova, *Soviet People with Female Bodies: Performing Beauty and Maternity in Soviet Russia in the mid 1930–1960s*, Stockholm: Södertörn University, 2007.
11. See Barbara Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700–2000*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 250, and Valerie Sperling, 'The "New" Sexism: Images of Russian Women during the Transition', in Mark Field and Judyth Twigg (eds), *Russia's Torn Safety Nets: Health and Social Welfare during the Transition*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000, p. 180.
12. See, for example, Ilic, 'Women and Competition'; Sue Bridger, Rebecca Kay and Katherine Pinnick, *No More Heroines? Russia, Women, and the Market*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 29; and Rebecca Kay, 'Images of an Ideal Woman: Perceptions of Russian Womanhood through the Media, Education and Women's Own Eyes', in Mary Buckley (ed.), *Post-Soviet Women: from the Baltic to Central Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 82.
13. See Dominique Moran, Judith Pallot and Laura Piacentini, 'Lipstick, Lace, and Longing: Constructions of Femininity inside a Russian Prison', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2009, pp. 700–20.
14. See, for example, Helena Goscilo and Vlad Strukov, *Glamour and Celebrity in Contemporary Russia: Shocking Chic*, London: Taylor and Francis, 2011; M. Litovskaia and O. Shaburova, 'Russian Glamour and its Representations in Post-Soviet Mass Media', in A. Rosenholm, K. Nordenstreng and E. Trubina (eds), *Russian Mass Media and Changing Values*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 193–208; Larissa Rudova, 'Uniting Russia in Glamour', *Kultura*, no. 6, 2008, pp. 2–3; Birgit Menzel, 'Russian Discourse on Glamour', *Kultura*, no. 6, 2008, pp. 4–8; and Katharina Klingseis, 'The Power of Dress in Contemporary Russian Society: on Glamour Discourse and the Everyday Practice of Getting Dressed in Russian Cities', *Laboratorium: Journal of Social Research*, no. 1, 2011, p. 84.
15. Olga Gurova, '"We are not Rich Enough to Buy Cheap Things": Clothing Consumption of the St Petersburg Middle Class', in Suvi Salmenniemi (ed.), *Rethinking Class in Russia*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, pp. 149–66.
16. C.J. Heyes, *Self Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
17. Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny*.
18. T.L. Anderson, C. Grunert, A. Katz and S. Lovascio, 'Aesthetic Capital: a Research Review on Beauty Perks and Penalties', *Sociology Compass*, vol. 4, no. 8, 2010, pp. 565–6.
19. Samantha Kwan and Mary Nell Trautner, 'Beauty Work: Individual and Institutional Rewards, the Reproduction of Gender, and Questions of Agency', *Sociology Compass*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2009, pp. 52–4.
20. See, for example, Catherine Hakim, 'Erotic Capital', *European Sociological Review*, vol. 26, no. 5, 2010, pp. 499–518.
21. See, for example, Heyes, *Self Transformations*; Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*; Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny*; Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, London: Routledge, 1991; and Monique Deveaux, 'Feminism and Empowerment: a Critical Reading of Foucault', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1994, pp. 223–47.

22. It has been argued that men are ever more subject to similar discourses on creating masculinity through body work. See, for example, Chris Haywood and Máirtín Mac an Ghaill, *Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research and Social Practice*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2003. Wacquant, however, shows the differing nature of men's body work as compared to women's: a normatively masculine body is linked more to its ability to *do* things rather than its desirability as an object: Loïc Wacquant, *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, and Loïc Wacquant, 'Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour among Professional Boxers', *Body & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1995, pp. 65–93.
23. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*.
24. See Mary Buckley, *Perestroika and Soviet Women*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 3; Bridger, Kay and Pinnick, *No More Heroines*, pp. 22–4; Michele Rivkin-Fish, 'Pronatalism, Gender Politics, and the Renewal of Family Support in Russia: Toward a Feminist Anthropology of "Maternity Capital"', *Slavic Review*, vol. 69, no. 3, 2010, pp. 701–24.
25. For a more in-depth discussion of this phenomenon in women's magazines, see Porteous, 'There Are No Ugly Women'.
26. See, for example, Suvi Salmenniemi and Maria Adamson, 'New Heroines of Labour: Domesticating Post-Feminism and Neoliberal Capitalism in Russia', *Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2015, pp. 38–55; Anna Gough-Yates, *Understanding Women's Magazines: Publishing, Markets and Readerships in Late-Twentieth Century Britain*, London: Routledge, 2003.
27. Gradskova, *Soviet People*, p. 271.
28. See, for example, Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*; Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny*; Kwan and Trautner, *Beauty Work*; Anderson et al., *Aesthetic Capital*.
29. I discuss a perceived scarcity of eligible men in Russian society, and its implications for gender roles, in greater depth in Holly Porteous (2017), 'From Barbie to the Oligarch's Wife: Reading Fantasy Femininity and Globalisation in Post-Soviet Russian Women's Magazines', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 180–98.
30. Sarah Ashwin and Tatyana Lytkina, 'Men in Crisis in Russia: the Role of Domestic Marginalization', *Gender and Society*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2004, pp. 189–206.
31. There is not scope fully to discuss aesthetic capital in this chapter, but for a more in-depth discussion, which draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital, see Anderson et al., *Aesthetic Capital*.
32. Bridger, Kay and Pinnick, *No More Heroines*, pp. 187–8.
33. Susanne Cohen, 'Image of a Secretary: a Metapragmatic Morality for Post-Soviet Capitalism', *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 86, no. 3, 2013, pp. 725–58.
34. Gradskova, *Soviet People*; Bridger, Kay and Pinnick, *No More Heroines*; Djurdja Bartlett, 'Let Them Wear Beige: the Petit-Bourgeois World of Official Socialist Dress', *Fashion Theory: the Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2004, pp. 127–64. Note that in the Soviet Union the notion of 'Russianness' could be interchangeable with the idea of 'Sovietness'.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**Holly Porteous** completed a Ph.D. in Russian gender studies at the University of Glasgow, UK, in 2014. Her doctoral research centred on gendered bodies, popular media and conspicuous consumption in Russian society and culture. She is currently working on a joint project between Swansea University and the University of Glasgow focused on the experiences of Central Eastern European migrants to the UK. Her most recent publication is 'From Barbie to the Oligarch's Wife: Reading Fantasy Femininity and Globalisation in Post-Soviet Russian Women's Magazines', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2017).

## New Russian 'Macho' Between Literature and Life

*Olga Tabachnikova and Natalia Vinokurova*

Terms such as 'macho' and 'machismo', both in a universal context and in a nationally restricted sense, are rooted in the general theme of masculinity, which has provided the focus of considerable recent scholarly research. As a prelude to a discussion of 'new Russian macho', this chapter begins by looking at the concept of masculinity. Masculinity is clearly multifaceted, and the term implies a variety of physical, psychic and behavioural features (secondary sexual attributes) that externally distinguish man from woman, and male from female in the animal world.<sup>1</sup> In the vernacular, these features may include physical strength, striving for domination, self-assurance, even cruelty and sexual sadism, a tendency towards taking risks, a restricted emotional spectrum and under-developed affection.<sup>2</sup> However, for the purposes of studying Russian macho in the contemporary context, this chapter focuses on masculinity in terms of gender expectations. Raewyn W. Connell describes these in the framework of the social-constructivist approach, rather than in the biological sense of the term.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, masculinity is considered in historical context, in line with the approach accepted world-wide (summarised, for instance, by the leading Russian social scientist, anthropologist and sexologist Igor Kon in his work on masculinity), since every chronological period, characterised by social and cultural shifts, presents a different understanding and examples of masculinity.<sup>4</sup> For example, the bravery of warriors is one of the main characteristics of masculinity exhibited during military conflicts.

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Masculinity as the focus of academic enquiry in historical context has been studied extensively both in Russia and abroad.<sup>5</sup> Ye. V. Styazhkina writes that, 'masculinity enters history via psychology (using bio-psychological, psychoanalytical and post-Freudian approaches), philosophy (essentialist, constructivist and performative approaches), sociology, anthropology, literary and artistic research, and political analysis'.<sup>6</sup> Gender metaphor allows us to extend the meaning of the male–female opposition to the broader cultural paradigm of the attitude to the 'other'. In reality, masculinity always emerges as a relational distinction.

It is possible to distinguish between low and high masculinity types. Low masculinity is characterised by such life priorities as the family, relationships and quality of life. Conflicts within this type of masculinity are resolved through negotiation: men and women occupy equal positions in society; professionals work in order to live, and tend to have long-term work places and flexible work regimes. By contrast, high masculinity is oriented towards achievement, material wealth and development. Conflicts are resolved by aggressive means: men and women occupy different social positions; professionals live in order to work, leading to longer working days and fewer days off.

The hegemonic type of masculinity is based on two defining foundational principles: fallocentrism and logocentrism. Fallocentrism is the embodiment of male power to conquer, fertilise and dominate, whilst logocentrism involves purely intellectual power. The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan united both fallocentrism and logocentrism into one combined concept of 'fallogocentrism', a term which is widely used in feminist literature. However, the primordial tension between the two results in a single, unified canon of masculinity being rendered impossible, as Kon argues, and gives rise to different types of masculinity within the framework of one culture.<sup>7</sup>

During first-wave feminism, at the beginning of the twentieth century with the struggle for women's legal rights in Russia, the foundations of the masculine as a universal human norm were shaken. This first wave, which coincided with the development of ideas of cultural evolutionism, Darwinism and positivism, gave rise to another tension and search for scientific inviolability of the masculine as a universal norm common to all humans.

During Soviet times, manifestations of masculinity were reduced to (or integrated with) exceptional examples of Soviet labour and military achievements.<sup>8</sup> This can be traced through a multiplicity of discourses, but emerges with particular clarity in the literary works of Soviet realism.<sup>9</sup> In general, literature can serve as an:

inexhaustible source for studies in philosophical, psychological and social anthropology. Indeed, literature, just as art more generally, might be (and always has been) regarded as a certain laboratory where possible human reality can be presented and tested. This is based on the perception of narrative as a model of the world.<sup>10</sup>

This is particularly true in the Russian context, where literature has traditionally been seen as a magic mirror, reflecting back and shaping reality, whilst in turn being shaped by it.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in addition to purely sociological research based on interview data, this chapter also analyses literature, both fictional and non-fictional, as a rich source of sociological material.

From early Soviet times, emerging from revolutionary rhetoric, the myth of an omnipotent male-hero—a harmoniously developed individual—based on the proletarian model, which served as a paragon of inner and outer strength, was incorporated into the new canon of masculinity. A typical female formula about her beloved, rooted in the stereotypes of realist Soviet art and mass media, was of the type: 'mine is so tall, his shoulder-span is huge, like this, and he is forever hanging on the wall of fame!'<sup>12</sup> This model, however powerfully endorsed by the state, was in many ways a phantom of communist ideology. Moreover, it coexisted with a feeble intelligentsia stereotype, considerably feminised in comparison. Such weakened urban man, who would be passed from apron strings to apron strings, in many ways embodied the image of an eternal son, a perpetual adolescent. In this urban setting, the mother-son model significantly prevailed in relationships between spouses whilst intrinsically striving to conform to the daughter-father model instead, but essentially failing.

The 'anti-communist spirit of perestroika and post-Soviet reforms [...] was connected in particular with the thesis of the need to restore the "natural order" of the male-female relationship. Invectives against socialism were based on the claim that it caused a distortion of the natural order and contradicted human nature by breaking, in particular, the normal relationship between sexes. In other words, socialism infantilises men, whereas the basis of masculinity proper is private enterprise, underpinned by independence, responsibility and self-reliance'.<sup>13</sup> In the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, as many researchers point out, traditional Russian masculinity collapsed.<sup>14</sup> 'At the same time, a deconstruction of the Soviet, less aggressive, type of masculinity took place. In its place, a more aggressive, sometimes criminal kind of masculinity emerged'.<sup>15</sup>

In the post-Soviet period, with the shift towards capitalism, especially given its initial 'wild' stage, the socio-economic situation changed drastically. Many kinds of traditional male employment disappeared (many professional-vocational institutions closed down and it became much less prestigious to work on production lines once wages were no longer reliably paid). Men started looking into other spheres of employment. In Russia, the 1990s acquired the name of the 'wild nineties'. Small business, which was in its formative stage, solved its own problems using crude force (from extortion to racketeering and taking over other businesses). Former sportsmen, boxers and wrestlers formed their own militia organisations; professional groups of watchmen and bodyguards emerged and reached enormous proportions.<sup>16</sup> Bouncers working at nightclubs and similar places (where the new businessmen-half-criminals gathered to set scores or to enjoy themselves in the company of prostitutes) often risked their lives in just the same way as the clients of these shady places. At the same time, the state started to extend its power structures with various OMONs

(*Otryad militsii osobogo naznacheniya*; Militia Regiments for Special Purposes), RUBOPs (*Regional'noe Upravlenie po Bor'be s Organizovannoi Prestupnostyu*; Regional Directorate for Combating Organised Crime) and UBOPs, and similar law enforcement agencies.<sup>17</sup> With the beginning of the war in Chechnya, members of these agencies were the first to take part in military action, facing cruelty and death as their everyday reality.

During these years, a new image of Russian man was formed, whose life and work were based on physical strength. This was reflected in everyday appearance: 'our external appearance presents a purposefully constructed interpretation of our identity'.<sup>18</sup> A strong man was supposed to shave his head bald, wear a leather jacket and comfortable tracksuit bottoms, and to have well-developed muscles. This was not just fashion, but also had a practical purpose: such conventions were more helpful during fights (there was no hair to grab; the jacket served as protection against blows). Such men often had special tattoos: soldiers who served as paratroopers might have tattooed 'wings' and former criminals who had served time had their own recognisable tattoos. All this was intimidating. Militarised clothing became part of daily life (although even elderly men going to work on their summer allotments often wore such clothing because of its practical convenience). Weapons became commonplace.

The Putin era (from May 2000), closely associated with a return to autocratic government, pursued the restoration of the strong patriarchal masculine role model within the general search for a renewed national idea and concept of citizenship. In the cultural sphere, this led to the search for a positive hero who turned out to border also on an anti-hero. In general, as a result of this policy and the general socio-political situation in the country, Russia's metaphoric image amongst the country's cultural elite was regarded as that of a romanticised *zona* (prison camp), with a criminal mentality and criminal cultural rituals. Interestingly, this affected also the images of fatherhood in Russian culture. A positive father-figure was rendered accordingly a criminal authority of sorts, incorporating the old patriarchal *macho* image. Neya Zorkaya suggests that Andrei Zvyagintsev's much celebrated film *The Return* (2003) provides 'subtle commentary on the cultural evolution of post-Soviet Russia, where the rise of criminal organisations overwhelms and substitutes for existing social structures'.<sup>19</sup> As Vladimir Strukov writes, building on Zorkaya's observations,

In such an interpretation, the island [where the father, who suddenly appeared after a 12-year absence, takes his two teenage sons] – in the manner of Daniel Defoe – functions as a metaphor for contemporary Russian society. [...] From such a perspective, the father returns home to introduce his children to the law of his clan, that of the criminal world.<sup>20</sup>

This period witnessed a renewed research interest into the theme of macho in Russia. However, this phenomenon in the national Russian context acquired substantially different features from those inherent in the original concept. Indeed, in the traditional understanding, the term 'macho', translated from the



original Spanish, means literally 'male', but came to imply an aggressive, primitive and sexually attractive man. The term in Spanish (sometimes rendered as 'machista' as opposed to the feminine 'hembra'), is neutral when applied to the animal world. However, describing a human, it varies depending on the context from neutral to drastically negative, with explicit misogynist connotations. Apparently, if a woman in Spain calls a man 'macho', it means she no longer wants to have anything to do with him.

In Hispanic countries, the term emerged to describe a man of a distinctly masculine type of Mediterranean or South American appearance and sexuality, displaying stereotypical male features. The term then spread across the Mediterranean region and then to the whole world, entering Russian language as well. In Russia, the concept acquired not so much the meanings of aggression and brutality, but rather of physical strength, decisiveness and dominance, as well as hyper-sexuality and conquering women, although the term is often also used with irony or sarcasm.

From the 1990s, Russian literature, cinema and television quickly incorporated the theme of violence, with emerging new heroes being 'strong and cruel'. The theme of macho has gained substantial popularity in Russia, where macho became juxtaposed to unisex men and yuppies of various kinds. Nowadays, discussions of macho can be found in virtually any discourse, including journalism, popular culture, psychology, sociology, politics and high art.

New Russian macho has also been reflected in 'proper' literature. Zakhar Prilepin has been recognised as one of the most significant representatives of contemporary Russian literature. 'His works received high acclaim and have been distinguished by numerous literary awards. As one of the leaders of contemporary Russian prose, Prilepin is now included in the syllabus of higher educational institutions in Russia, and many literary critics call him a new Maxim Gorky. He currently features among the best 100 Russian writers, and in the near future his rating can only improve'.<sup>21</sup> Prilepin's writings are largely autobiographical. He served in the OMON, fought in Chechnya, and worked as a bouncer. He is observant, and writes from experience; he does not just describe external realities, but delves into the psychology of his heroes.

Even Prilepin's appearance reflects that of a new Russian macho. He is bald; he does not wear standard suits with ties, opting instead, just as his heroes do, for sportswear; he demonstrates his 'coolness' by drinking a bottle of vodka, yet he denounces male dependency on alcohol as an inadmissible weakness: 'I don't accept male weakness in any form. Some time ago I rejected alcohol and cigarettes—they've simply ceased to interest me now'.<sup>22</sup> He is not inclined to conformism.<sup>23</sup> Prilepin also positions himself as a person with traditional gender views: the husband is the head of the family, its main pillar and breadwinner; the wife is foremost a mother and housewife. In more subtle terms, as in his story 'Botinki, polnye goryachei vodkoi' ('Shoes Filled with Hot Vodka') (2008), 'female work goes unnoticed', whereas the results of the man's labour are visible and tangible—'the fence, garden shed, porch, house'; yet, 'a woman lives in service, whereas a man lives in torment'.<sup>24</sup> As Prilepin says himself about the

gender situation in contemporary Russia, 'in the last decades the cult of masculinity has disappeared, and generally the fundamental understanding of what is family, what husbands and wives should be like has been destroyed. We've all disintegrated into atoms; the rug was pulled from under our feet'.<sup>25</sup> Prilepin demonstrates a certain dominance. A new situation whereby man loses his status as breadwinner or tends towards the unisex fashion in his style of dress is definitely not for him. As one blogger noted, 'These types of men were forged by Soviet institutions—if they could survive those without becoming beastly; by student hostels, by industrial plants and factories, military regiments and prison camps'.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, Prilepin mocks the stereotypical concept of macho as being someone who is vacuous, vain and irresponsible, and whose only merit is sexual. Such a person is not fulfilling man's proper task in life, that of being the main pillar of the family and source of inner strength: 'Any normal Russian guy who's told that he's macho will laugh or even get offended. In the old days in Russia there was a wonderful word "*mudotrias*".<sup>27</sup> This is precisely our primordial definition of 'macho', Prilepin writes with disdain.<sup>28</sup>

Prilepin's own literary heroes are OMON members, bandits and bouncers. Their life is full of risk; they often live on the edge. Undoubtedly they have many traditionally masculine features. Their masculinity is manifested in their desire to take on the opponent, to test their own strength, to prove their dominance in relation to their male rivals; their understanding of friendship is rather primitive ('let's go and fight our enemy together'). All this corresponds to the concept of power relationships, described in a number of works.<sup>29</sup> The cult of physical strength is combined with such features as everyday cruelty, rudeness, lack of sophistication in their attitude to women, the dominance of sexuality over emotions and other properties inherent in machismo.<sup>30</sup> In his writings, however, Prilepin asserts that rude manners, a crude and robust exterior and the 'macho' appearance do not necessarily imply negative inner properties. Such characters preserve a reverent, awed attitude towards women (even to prostitutes), tenderness, purity, and striving for real love. This is a paradox of new Russian macho.

In the example of Prilepin, this conclusion takes issue with Mark Lipovetsky's views on the writer presented in his article 'Politicheskaya motorika Zakhara Prilepina'.<sup>31</sup> Lipovetsky places Prilepin into the conservative, reactionary and nationalist camp, inscribing his gender views into the same negative paradigm without the nuanced differentiation this area deserves. Whilst it is hard to argue with the former accusations (of Prilepin's socio-political views), the gender situation in Prilepin's world appears to be the very opposite of misogynist, as can be seen from multiple examples.

This paradoxical situation was first sensed by literary critics rather than sociologists. The French writer Emmanuel Carrère remarked, 'Despite the fact that externally he [Prilepin] is a brutal man with a shaved skull, his books are full of tenderness, kindness and warmth'.<sup>32</sup> Writer and translator Anes Dezart commented on Prilepin's appealing manner when depicting women and

children, even though 'he is himself quite a masculine author, if this term can be used for describing a writer'.<sup>33</sup> Prilepin himself, when interviewed about his experience of first love, confessed that, 'she too felt for me, but my feeling was so pure and tender that I preferred simply to sob from the emotion of an unrequited love'.<sup>34</sup> A similar paradigm can be traced in Prilepin's fiction.

The hero of Prilepin's story 'Shest' sigaret i tak dalee' ('Six Cigarettes and So On') (2007), who works as a bouncer at a nightclub, is psychologically subtle, emotionally sophisticated and morally firm. The question of dignity is high on his agenda. The debauched clients of the club are often deliberately provocative and disrespectful and he is constantly faced with acute moral dilemmas: 'I heard that in the nearby clubs there'd been situations when spiteful, drunk groups extinguished the watchmen and forced the badly beaten up bouncers out onto the street. If something like this was to happen to me, I'd be in terrible anguish', the hero says.<sup>35</sup> Witnessing the barman at the club not standing up for himself against an impudent customer, he feels personally ashamed for the barman:

It always breaks me inside to see such non-fulfilment of masculinity. Poor Vadik, how can he live like this? He's taller than me, of normal build. He's blond, quite a handsome fellow. He has a girlfriend, she's eye-catching, sometimes she comes in before opening time, with a textbook, and reads something – she's a student. Vadik pours her coffee; she drinks it delicately, without taking her eyes off the page. If she could hear it all now, if she could see it...

He has to resist temptations coming from female customers who fancy him, attracted by his macho image and by the solid inner world that can be sensed beneath his tough exterior. Yet, he keeps withstanding the pressure and remains loyal to his wife and child:

At home are my little son and my tender wife. They're asleep now. My wife keeps the empty space – my space – in our bed, and strokes with her palm where I'm supposed to lay. Our son wakes up twice or three times a night and asks for buttermilk. He's not yet two. My wife gives him his bottle and he falls asleep, continuing to suck with his lips [...] My son always looks as if he's sitting on a river bank, kicking the air and looking into the fast-flowing stream. He has a flaxen head, exuding soft light. I don't know why, but I call him 'Birch tree bulb'. This name suits him really well.

In the end, however, the strain of having to remain professional, yet staying safe (that is, having to fight his own fears) and sustaining his dignity breaks him, and he quits the job.

Similarly, the hero of 'Vos'merka' ('Eight') (2012), despite his tough policing job during the wild Russian 1990s—a job which has a degrading effect on him by equating criminals with the police in the disorderly, unlawful socio-political situation of the time—feels a genuine love for a young woman, effectively a prostitute, and is full of compassion and admiration for her. This is

hardly compatible with the conventional macho image, superficial and sexually promiscuous:

I'd hold her close to my chest, I'd wash her, I'd cook her milk-soup and spoon-feed her, I'd shut up at her first request and at her first request I'd – say – sing to her, I'd listen to her shouting and smile in response to her every smile – even at her sneering at me – I'd do anything. I love continuing this list; it always has plenty of items, very different items, and there are always enough of them to last until I fall asleep.<sup>36</sup>

The hero of Prilepin's novel *San'kya* (2006), about the revolutionary youth movements of the same period (the hero is a member of a political party whose real-life equivalent is Eduard Limonov's 'National-Bolshevik Party'), with all his striving for tough masculinity and radical ideas, with all his questionable, not to say unsavoury, political affiliations, is also a deeply emotional youth. He is full of high moral convictions and noble ideals, ready to give his life for the collective cause and for the woman whose love he craves.

Prilepin himself is described as a man who 'with all his brutal biography and equally brutal appearance, is in fact a very subtle and sensitive person. He loves reading, which is the best way to cultivate and train feelings. He has published an entire book of reviews and sketches, "Knigochet", and a book of interviews with contemporary writers, "Imeniny serdtsa"'.<sup>37</sup> Many, even Prilepin's ideological opponents, speak of his masculinity: 'Zakhar Prilepin, in his principles and beliefs, in his militarised consciousness and demonstrative brutal masculinity, accompanied by the writer's introspection, is certainly not my cup of tea. However, it would be insane to claim that he's not a gifted writer'.<sup>38</sup>

One should stress a contrast between Prilepin's characters as embodiments of a new Russian macho on the one hand and the Western new man on the other, who is influenced by feminism and, as a result, is gentle, polite and compassionate towards women. In Prilepin's characters this compassion is carefully concealed behind aggression and roughness. As is argued in an internet discussion by one blogger, 'this is likely a product of the collective spirit of the older generation, defining the basis for a social behavioural norm: be aggressive and no one will dare strip you of your rasher, your girlfriend. This is relevant especially in families where someone has done time'.<sup>39</sup> Harsh Russian reality requires a correspondingly tough individual masculine response, but Russian macho is also distinct from his Western counterpart, from the models suggested by 'James Bond' or 'Ernest Hemingway' types, as discussed below.

New Russian macho reflects a masculine resistance to the age of disappearing boundaries between the sexes. This resistance is especially prominent in Russia, where the old patriarchal model proves resilient. The conservative Russian tradition, including its literary manifestation exemplified by Prilepin, insists on traditional gender roles. At the same time, Russia notably shares with Europe its unisexual tendencies. For example, many large European cities have a popular 'metrosexual' paradigm, and a number of Russian psychologists have pointed to

the disintegrating models of masculinity: 'Men just like women are characterised by sensitivity and sentimentality', claims psychologist Inna Khamitova, 'boys are forbidden to cry, their feelings are tabooed, but this does not mean that they disappear. Our attitude to male emotions has changed: manifestations of men's inner world are appreciated and no longer cause surprise'.<sup>40</sup>

Psychologists claim further that men, influenced from an early age by their mothers, increasingly resemble women as a result. They have gained the freedom to be more sensitive and use it to its full extent. They no longer want to have sex without emotional attachment, to endure rejection, to be successful all around and to satisfy the desires of their girlfriends at the expense of their own. They, too, want tender care and understanding. This contradicts our stereotypical views of 'feminine' and 'masculine', but at the same time this rapprochement of men and women has the advantage of facilitating a better understanding between the sexes. There are ever more masculine women and feminine men, as people try out behavioural models normally associated with the opposite sex.<sup>41</sup>

The prominent psychologist Aleksandr Orlov believes that the unisex line, which leads to changes, both external and internal, in men and women, has become one of the principal directions of development in our fast-changing world. He sees its foundation in the unification of professional and social activity of both sexes: in offices, both men and women are administrators, indistinguishable from one another. Orlov predicts the end of macho culture, saying that soon such men will be left exclusively in virtual reality, such as novels and action movies. Equally, the traditional feminine woman is becoming a thing of the past.<sup>42</sup>

The unisex line is shared by Russia and Europe, but the wave of rejecting this new androgynous order of things is visibly gaining momentum in Russia. Prilepin is not alone in propagating traditional gender roles under the façade of a newly rediscovered external brutality. A recent award-winning documentary by Anastasia Vinokurova, entitled 'A Plumber for Every Need' (2011), tells the story of a Moscow plumber who lived through the Russian 1990s and adopted a macho exterior and habits.<sup>43</sup> He carries a gun, served as a military conscript and believes that every man has to go through the army. He teaches his son 'to be a man', to react to an aggressor with force: 'You have to strike on the nose, immediately, as hard as you can, so the person forgets their own name'.<sup>44</sup>

He portrays himself as a tough guy, going about his business sometimes in squalid places, and sees his manly role as a breadwinner and head of the family. Yet, his attitude towards his wife and son is that of tenderness and profound care; he collects his son from school, looks after him while at home, and takes on other roles traditionally regarded in Russia as feminine, such as cooking family meals. When he tells the story of his love for his—then—future wife he almost has tears in his eyes, and appears in a shy, moving in its seriousness, respect for her. Moreover, it is clear that it is not he who controls his wife and is the head of the household, but instead his wife, in a soft manner, actually controls this macho.<sup>45</sup> By his own admission, 'she's very strict [...] she corrects

me all the time'.<sup>46</sup> It is not surprising that in Russian the film's title is 'Armed, but not very dangerous'.

Yet there exist marked differences between Russian and Western understandings of macho in that the former combines qualities that are mutually exclusive for the latter: brutal exterior and gentle inner world. The image of James Bond, a stereotypical, even if ironic, paragon of macho behaviour, conforms to the traditional model of physical strength, sexual promiscuity mixed with taking care of any given girlfriend, but rather to make her dependent and to remain free himself. By contrast, the new Russian macho, with his romantic awe of his woman, falls into a dependency on her. Macho qualities, such as the phallogocentric striving for possessing, conquering, fertilising and depriving, are not necessarily inherent in the Russian case because the desire for real love, including the upholding of traditional family values, completely transforms his strife into a noble masculine stance of the protection, care and even worship of his beloved. As Prilepin has said in interview, 'the most reliable method to preserve your human essence, your human fulfilment is family and everything related to it'.<sup>47</sup> 'It's the centre of the world, it does indeed protect the person. [...] Family harmonises man, renders him part of the world order, puts him in contact with such things that are simply unattainable outside the family framework'.<sup>48</sup>

The oppositional tendencies, especially evident during the formative years of a future macho when a teenager is characteristically rebellious and goes for simple and radical solutions, rejecting the ideology passed on from the previous generation, are not normally manifested by Prilepin's macho heroes. His characters adhere to the values inherited from their parents. This is the situation with Prilepin's award-winning novella 'Grekh' ('Sin') (2007), about a 17-year-old boy falling in love with his cousin, who is older and married with a child. Her sister is young, unattached and makes clear passes at the hero. He stays away from the 'sin', remaining within the purity and divinity of his first love. His respect for his grandparents, at whose house he is staying, is evident throughout the novella and provides an invisible, all-pervasive foundation on which his morality is based, inseparable from the acutely felt poetry of life:

His old folks never quarrelled. Zakharka loved them with all his heart. [...] Hanging on a nail [in the wooden hut of the outside toilet], there was an old edition of a magazine *Rural Mechanic*. For the hundredth time, he looked through it, but didn't understand anything. In this lack of understanding, in the lazy browsing through the dusty pages, in the sunny gaps, in the aimlessly buzzing flies, in proximity of the wooden walls, in the yellow wallpaper, broken here and there, in the dusty bolt, in the roof covered with black tar to prevent flooding – in everything there was a quiet, almost unattainable, lyrical grace.<sup>49</sup>

The consequent psychological drives behind macho-type behaviour are hardly applicable to the new Russian macho. These include low levels of

self-confidence and rather weak self-identification in gender terms, which turn on certain compensatory mechanisms of trying to prove and reassert one's masculinity. The psychoanalyst Dmitrii Olshansky, a specialist in male sexuality, describes these processes:

Macho is a neurotic, and as such he demands something. Yet what he demands isn't sex or women – those can't satisfy him. They're just the means, used to assert his identity, of which he is so unsure. That's why he's constantly trying to prove that he's a 'real man', as if he doubts it himself.<sup>50</sup>

Olshansky offers the example of Ernest Hemingway, whose mother wanted a daughter and in his childhood plaited his hair and tied it with bows. As Olshansky explains, Hemingway cultivated his masculinity, trying to squeeze the femininity out of his system. Olshansky is convinced that this is a common feature in the life story of many macho-men: their mothers wanted a girl, leaving the resultant boys to prove their masculinity throughout their life. Another factor discerned by many analysts is latent or displaced homosexuality, which macho cannot possibly accept. Thus, it becomes a hidden drive for asserting masculinity through numerous heterosexual endeavours, while the question of what it is that constitutes a 'real man' remains unanswered.<sup>51</sup>

These characteristics do not appear in Prilepin's heroes, who seem to continue the literary line of Russian 'derevenshchiki' (the authors of 'village prose'), even though Prilepin writes about city dwellers more than country folk. There are certain archetypal values determining the characters' ethics and aesthetics that appear to continue Russian classical traditions. It has been suggested that 'Prilepin starts where Fedor Abramov ended'.<sup>52</sup> The theme of the disintegrating Russian village is paramount for Prilepin, as it was for all the 'derevenshchiki'; it implies the apocalyptic decline of the human race itself. In the same tender and bitter language, Prilepin writes about his roots, his native land and beautiful nature, helpless in the face of 'civilisation', and about the irreversible decline of the village:

The street was empty, dark and dirty, like all the rest of the village streets. [...] The sun was setting; it had nearly set. A child was waving a twig and stomping on the spot. The grandmother was looking without blinking over the child's head, over the vegetable gardens, over the trees. The village was disappearing and dying out – this could be felt in everything. It had drifted away as a dug up, hardened, dark ice floe, and was floating quietly. Derelict sheds, sunk into the ground, which were built along the road, were black, with damp sides and rotted planks. [...] Among all this slow and almost complete disintegration, the child appeared strange, shameful, unsuitable.<sup>53</sup>

The generational continuity is equally important for Prilepin, who is invariably tuned to historical context, as his hero, Sasha Tishin, thinks:

Only he alone, Sasha, remains the keeper of the small knowledge of that life which was lived by the people portrayed on the black-and-white photos; he was, at least to some extent, a witness to their existence. After the grandmother passes away, no-one will be able to explain who's depicted here, what kind of folk the Tishins were. Besides, no-one will ask. New owners will throw away the icons into the impenetrable bushes across the road, time will blur the faces on the photos, and that's it. As if none of this had ever happened.<sup>54</sup>

These lines convey a particular hierarchy of ethical values where responsibility and care for the 'other' are of primary importance, as an embodiment of certain patriotic qualities, associated with men more than women, because the former are perceived in the national consciousness as potential defenders of the Motherland.

This need to protect is best exemplified by Prilepin's lyrical hero in his attitude to love, invariably palpitating and profound. The typically Russian redemption of a prostitute, characteristic of both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, is continued in most of Prilepin's works. The male hero's love encompasses not just the woman, but also the country, its natural resources and its people. The new Russian macho of Prilepin's writings is sensitive to the problem of dignity, first raised in Russian letters with all its eternal significance by Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoevsky. For Dostoevsky, writing in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), the question of 'Am I a trembling creature, or do I have the right?' can be identified as the principal question of his entire oeuvre, the question with which all of his heroes are struggling. Prilepin often puts his main hero in the extreme situations of war, revolutionary opposition and other explicit conflicts, providing an existential test that helps to answer precisely this question, first and foremost for the hero himself. Moreover, in his own words:

Russian men need extreme emotions: of fear, of horror, of risk. Our masculine world exists precisely in this form. Man needs to invest his predestination, his space with meaning. If he can't find it, he becomes an alcoholic or turns into a chewing animal; I don't connect male life just with war. I connect it with the male struggle for life.

The fatal predicament and the worst fear is 'the impossibility to fulfil oneself as a masculine, state entity, with boiling blood'.<sup>55</sup> This quest for meaning is often ascribed to Russian life in general, and especially in what concerns the love relationship and its portrayal in Russian letters. Thus, as David Bethea suggests, 'the fear was not so much sin, as in the Catholic and Protestant West, but cosmic indifference, meaninglessness'.<sup>56</sup>

More generally, these famous Russian 'cursed questions' haunt those of Prilepin's characters who try to stay faithful to traditional moral values as their only reliable compass in life. 'We have thousands of obligations with respect to our loved ones, to our aging parents, to our motherland, to our past and future', Prilepin declared in expressing his world-view.<sup>57</sup> In the words of a character in *San'kya*, 'Russia brought about in the course of history very much



in order to aid understanding the world, but very little that helps us live in it'.<sup>58</sup> In sociological terms, the latest Russian opinion polls confirm the axiological foundations of Prilepin's literary world. They reveal that the vast majority of Russians hold 'conservative' values: they insist on a traditional family and exhibit patriotic sentiments.<sup>59</sup>

A paradoxical conclusion arises from this chapter. Despite the fact that Russia is changing irreversibly—affected by globalisation, commercialisation and the computer age, which corrupt and marginalise the moral world of an individual, and with the sexual revolution continuing to influence new generations of youngsters, erasing old values—something primordial, sacred and deeply concealed remains intact in Russian literature and life. The tough and soulless world outside, capable of brutalising appearances and subverting behavioural norms is still unable to break the old ethical (and aesthetic) paradigm, shaping a singular image of a new Russian macho. Whilst being externally brutal and often repulsive in his ruthless dealings with his fellow men, he, at the same time, stays movingly and helplessly tender in his near-worship of the woman he loves (who often dominates and controls him much more than the other way around).

Whilst our research on the phenomenon of Russian macho, or Russian masculinity more generally, does not claim to be exhaustive, we have nevertheless highlighted a particular tendency overlooked by other studies. Our conclusions do not deny the existence of insensitive brutal men in Russia, who have a different attitude to love, family and women from that discussed above, but we argue that the aforementioned tradition proves more resilient, and this explains why the works of writers such as Prilepin, who share and defend this tradition, remain in high demand in Russia.

## NOTES

1. This is a commonly shared definition, drawn from Wikipedia.
2. See, for example, W. Snell, 'Development and Validation of the Masculine Behavior Scale', *Sex Roles*, vol. 21, nos. 11–12 (1989), pp. 749–67.
3. Raewyn W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987, p. 118. See also A. Il'nykh, *Kontsepty maskulinnosti i femininnosti v rusle gendernogo podkhoda*, available online: [http://ideaidealy.ru/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/S.A.Il'nykh\\_410\\_2011\\_t\\_1.pdf](http://ideaidealy.ru/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/S.A.Il'nykh_410_2011_t_1.pdf) (accessed August 2016).
4. See Igor Kon, 'Muzhskie issledovaniya: menyayushchiesya muzhchiny v izmenyayushchemsya mire', in I.A. Zherebkina (ed.), *Vvedenie v gendernye issledovaniya*, textbook, part 1, Kharkov: KhTsGI, 2001.
5. Amongst the Russophone studies of men and masculinity, in particular see those by Ye. Zdravomyslova, A. Temkina, S. Ushakin, S. Zherebkin, A. Sinelnikov, Ye. Meshcherkina, A. Yurchak and N. Khodyreva.
6. Ye.V. Styazhkina, *Maskulinnost' kak istoricheskaya problema*, available online: <http://ecsocman.hse.ru/data/2012/12/04/1251391129/19.pdf> (accessed August 2016).

7. See Igor S. Kon, 'Menyayushchiesya muzhchiny v izmenyayushchemsya mire', available online: <http://www.owl.ru/library/047t.htm> (accessed September 2016).
8. For more on this, see Yelena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, 'Krizis maskulinnosti v pozdnesovetskom diskurse', available online: [http://www.owl.ru/win/books/articles/tz\\_m.htm](http://www.owl.ru/win/books/articles/tz_m.htm) (accessed August 2016).
9. Prominent examples include Fedor Gladkov, *Tsement (Cement)* (1925), Mikhail Sholokhov, *Podnyataya tselina (Virgin Soil Upturned)* (1935), and Daniil Granin, *Idu na grozu (Into the Storm)* (1962), describing workers, peasants and scientists who burn themselves out by their excessive and heroic labour.
10. J. Brockmeier and R. Harre, 'Narrativ: problemy i obeshchaniya odnoi alternativnoi paradigmy', *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 3, 2000, p. 39.
11. Richard A. Peace, *Russian Literature and the Fictionalisation of Life*, Hull: University of Hull, 1976, p. 2.
12. From Natalia Vinokurova's interview with a female worker in 1977.
13. T.B. Ryabova, 'Maskulinnost' v politicheskom diskurse rossiiskogo obshchestva: istoriya i sovremennost', *Zhenshchina v rossiiskom obshchestve*, no. 4, 2000, pp. 19–26.
14. I.N. Tartakovskaya, 'Nesostoyavshayasya maskulinnost v postsovetском kontekste', available online: <http://www.nir.ru/sj/sj3-02tar.html> (accessed August 2016). See also Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 'Krizis maskulinnosti'.
15. Ryabova, 'Maskulinnost' v politicheskom diskurse'.
16. See V.V. Volkov, 'Tsennosti i normy nelegalnykh silovykh struktur', *Zhurnal sotsiologii i sotsial'noi antropologii*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1999, pp.78–86.
17. These special agencies were created at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. According to a Decree of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs of 3 October 1988, instead of the militia special forces, a new entity was formed: militia regiments for special purposes, whose principal task was to maintain order during public events, natural disasters, catastrophes, for providing extra-support and back-up for militia special operations, and so on. From the late 1980s, they expanded in number and staffing size. By 1996, there were 99 regiments in operation, including 75 in the republican and regional centres with populations over 200,000. For more detail, see *Organy vnutrennikh del v period perestroiki* (Law-Enforcement Bodies during Perestroika), available online: <http://helpiks.org/2-42565.html> (accessed August 2016).
18. For further discussion, see the commentary and references available online: <http://psibook.com/scholarly/interpretatsiya-maskulinnosti-fermininnosti-vneshnego-oblika-zhenschiny.html> (accessed August 2016).
19. Neya Zorkaya at the 2004 Pittsburgh Film Symposium: <http://www.rusfilm.pitt.edu/2004/bios.html> (accessed August 2016).
20. Vladimir Strukov, 'The Return of Gods: Andrei Zviagintsev's "Vozvrashchenie (The Return)"', *Slavic and East European Journal*, Special Forum Issue: Resent, Reassess, and Reinvent: the Three R's of Post-Soviet Cinema, vol. 51, no. 2, 2007, p. 334.
21. Biography of Zakhar Prilepin, available online: <http://top-knig.ru/zaxar-prilepin/> (accessed November 2016).
22. Interview with Zakhar Prilepin, available online: <http://www.matrony.ru/zahar-prilepin-semeynoe-schaste-eto-trud/> (accessed July 2016).
23. For example, he maintains his (rather conservative and reactionary from the liberal perspective) political views, not succumbing to the pressure and attacks applied by his numerous opponents.

24. Zakhar Prilepin, 'Botinki, polnye goryachei vodkoi', available online: [http://www.bookol.ru/proza-main/sovremennaya\\_proza/133578/fulltext.htm](http://www.bookol.ru/proza-main/sovremennaya_proza/133578/fulltext.htm) (accessed August 2016).
25. Interview with Zakhar Prilepin, available online <http://www.fontanka.ru/2014/12/24/119/> (accessed August 2016).
26. Andrei Plygach, blogger from the social network 'V kontakte', available online: <http://www.zaharprilepin.ru/ru/zhivaya-rech/blogeri-o-romane-obitel.html> (accessed May 2016).
27. This word *mudotriyas* comprises two roots: one derived from the old term for a male sexual organ and the other from the verb 'to shake'.
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## ‘To Give Birth or Not to Give Birth?’: Having Children in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia

*Lynne Attwood and Olga Isupova*

‘Rozhat’ ili ne rozhat?’ was the title given to several of the web discussion forums we analysed for this article.

In his address to the Federal Assembly in May 2006, President Vladimir Putin described ‘love, women, children [and] the family’ as the most important matter in Russia, and the demographic situation as ‘the most acute problem’ facing the country.<sup>1</sup> He told Russian citizens that they were declining in number at a rate, on average, of 700,000 per year. Reversing this trend required a three-pronged approach, he argued: lowering the death rate, establishing an effective migration policy, and increasing the birth rate. Yet he paid by far the most attention to the third of these approaches, both in his speech and in subsequent policy initiatives.

Concern about the family and the birth rate is not new; the so-called demographic crisis emerged periodically throughout the Soviet era. There are, however, enormous changes in the ways it has been tackled in different historical periods. This chapter starts with a discussion of these varying approaches, and then looks in more detail at Putin’s understanding of the causes of the demographic problem, how he has attempted to resolve it, and how this fits in

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with his broader understanding of the family and gender relations in Russia. In Soviet times there were no reliable sources which could tell us how women themselves viewed these subjects, but this is no longer the case. We have carried out a 'netnographic' study—an analysis of discussions on internet sites—to discern how important the family and children are for women in post-Soviet Russia, how they explain their decision whether or not to have children, and how their attitudes differ from those of women in the late Soviet era.

### THE 'DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS' IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA AND THE SOVIET UNION

Concern about the family and demography began at the start of the twentieth century. The uprisings of 1905 led to a loosening of family ties and moral norms, especially amongst the young, and to a large increase in the number of abortions, which were illegal at that time. This led to a debate about whether birth control should be made available and abortion legal. The arguments put forward against helping women to avoid childbirth by either method focused on two issues: the possibility that it would result in the population not only failing to grow but even failing to reproduce itself, and concern that separating sexual relations from the risk of pregnancy could lead to moral laxity and encourage women to shirk their 'natural function' of motherhood. Laura Engelstein claims that '[t]he real problem with which abortion confronted physicians [...] was the moral and political crisis—coded in sexual terms—of educated men faced with [...] women challenging established patterns of cultural and civic control in an increasingly less predictable social and cultural environment'.<sup>2</sup>

The October Revolution did, in some ways, overturn traditional attitudes towards the family. There were differing opinions on what the family would look like under socialism, or even if it would exist at all, but there was a general consensus that the new society would be characterised by gender equality, that women would leave the imprisonment of the home and enter the public spheres of work and politics, and that domestic chores would be taken over by state institutions.

Yet the revolutionaries were conservative when it came to reproduction. They legalised abortion in 1920, but saw this as a temporary measure which would be revoked once the state was able to provide for all of its children. Lenin insisted that the Bolsheviks were 'unconditionally the enemies of neo-Malthusianism', the birth-control movement based on concerns about over-population put forward by the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus in the late eighteenth century. According to Lenin, only 'unfeeling and egotistical' petty-bourgeoisie, not courageous workers, would want to avoid parenthood.<sup>3</sup> Aleksandra Kollontai, the Bolsheviks' principal theorist on the family and their greatest advocate of women's equality, still saw having children as an integral feature of the 'new woman'. She would not have to rear them herself, however. Kollontai insisted that the collective would ultimately replace the family and would take over

responsibility for childcare. Financial responsibility would be assumed by the state, paid for by means of a General Insurance Fund to which all working adults would contribute.<sup>4</sup>

With Stalin in power, a more traditional view of the family was revived. His rapid industrialisation programme resulted in social upheaval, a spontaneous drop in the birth rate, and a high incidence of 'hooliganism'. As Gail Lapidus notes, it was hoped that old-fashioned families would provide 'islands of stability in a sea of social chaos'.<sup>5</sup> In June 1936 abortion was banned; the ostensible reason was that the state was now able to provide for all of its children, but an underlying demographic concern was voiced in a 1935 article in the women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* (*Woman Worker*) that denounced abortion on the grounds that 'the country needs people'.<sup>6</sup>

The country needed even more people after the enormous loss of life in the Second World War, and replenishing the population became women's patriotic duty. Military-style medals were introduced in 1944 ('Medals of Maternity' and 'Hero Mother' awards) for women who showed supreme valour on the reproductive front. There was also a loosening of the strict morality of the pre-war era; since there were no longer enough men to go round it was necessary to share, and single motherhood was exonerated.

By the time Brezhnev was in power (1964–1982), the one-child family was the norm in urban areas of the European republics, and demographers were insisting that the 'demographic crisis' was one of the major social problems confronting the country.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, at the XXVI Communist Party Congress in 1981, it was declared that two and three child families should be promoted throughout the Soviet Union. There was some attempt to boost the birth rate by introducing more economic and social support for families: maternity leave was increased (partially paid leave was extended from 1 year to 18 months, and unpaid to 3 years), child benefits were raised, and there was a pledge to increase the number of nursery places and encourage enterprise managers to allow flexible working for mothers of small children. Yet demographers insisted that material improvements would not automatically increase the birth rate, and that the battle should be fought primarily on the ideological front. As demographer Anatoly Antonov put it, 'it is essential to form in the country's inhabitants, in effect, a new desire for several children'.<sup>8</sup> This involved persuading women that gender equality did not mean men and women performing the same functions; it meant that their different functions would be of equal value. Hence women should derive their main satisfaction from the traditional roles of wife and mother rather than from excelling in their professions. They should still work (indeed, given the labour-intensive nature of the Soviet economy, it was essential that they did so), but they should devote less time and energy to climbing the professional ladder and more to raising children.

Journalists were in the front line of this psychological offensive. A flood of articles appeared in newspapers and magazines lamenting the loss of 'real' men and women, insisting that this had resulted in serious problems for society and individuals, and urging people to embrace more traditional gender roles. As G.



Belskaya wrote in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, under the heading 'Where do bad wives come from?', '[w]hen cultivating in the woman the characteristics so useful in the sphere of business, such as firmness, steadfastness, intolerance [*sic*], rationality, and a grasp of business, we must be clearly aware that we are certainly reconstructing her emotional balance and contracting her purely maternal qualities'.<sup>9</sup> Men also suffered from the erosion of distinct gender roles. Deprived of the functions of breadwinner and head of the family, they adopted a distorted version of 'female' characteristics: 'Softness becomes spinelessness, attention to detail becomes pettiness, maternal prudence becomes cowardice...'<sup>10</sup>

The education system backed up this media assault with the introduction, in 1984, of a school course on 'The Ethics and Psychology of Family Life'. This was essentially a programme of gender socialisation. As one pedagogical theorist explained: 'Up to now, school-children's ideas about the psychological differences of men and women have been formed by chance. With the introduction of the new school subject, teachers will be directed towards the upbringing of children according to the laws of personality connected with their sex'.<sup>11</sup> Film-makers also put out pro-family messages; the new *bytovoi* or 'daily life' genre of films was peopled by women who, as film critic Elena Stishova pointed out, were 'emancipated, independent, equal, but all the same, for some reason, not very happy'.<sup>12</sup> The message was that Soviet women had paid a high price for prioritising work over family.

By the mid-1980s, demographers were claiming that the pro-natal campaign had achieved modest success. In the words of Viktor Perevedentsev, '[e]xperience has shown that it is possible to raise the birth-rate'.<sup>13</sup> Yet this increase was vulnerable, and it did not survive the upheaval brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

### PUTIN'S APPROACH TO THE 'DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS'

In his 2006 address to the Federal Assembly, Putin emphasised material difficulties and the problem of combining work and motherhood as key factors in women's decision to curtail their family size.

What prevents young families, women, from taking [the] decision [to have] a second or third child? The answers are obvious and well known: they are low incomes, inadequate housing, doubts about their own ability to provide a decent level of medical care and good quality education for their future child. And sometimes also doubts [...] as to whether they will even be able to feed [the child]. When a woman is thinking of having a child she has to make [the following] choice: either give birth but lose her job, or abandon the idea of having a child. This is a very difficult choice.

Accordingly, he announced the introduction of a programme aimed at encouraging women to have 'at least a second child' by providing them with increased financial and social support. Measures would include an increase in

childcare benefits (from 700 rubles per month to 1500 for the first child and 3000 for a second child); payment of no less than 40% of a woman's previous salary during maternity leave; a contribution towards the cost of state-run pre-school childcare, from 20% for the first child, 50% for the second, to 70% for a third; an increase in the value of the childbirth certificates which had been introduced the previous year to help offset the costs relating to childbirth; and, most significantly, the introduction of 'Maternal Capital', a new one-off payment to be made on the birth of a second or subsequent child. Putin explained:

In my view the state has an obligation to help women who have given birth to a second child and have to leave the work place for a long time, which results in them losing their skills. Unfortunately [...] the woman in this situation often falls into a state of dependence, and sometimes, to put it frankly, a humiliating position within the family. And the state, if it is really interested in raising the birth rate, has to support women who have made the decision to have a second child. It must provide such women with an initial, basic 'Maternal Capital' which will raise their social status and help to resolve future problems. And they can use it for the following purposes: either to resolve their housing problem, using [the money] to secure housing with the help of a mortgage or other form of credit once the child has reached the age of three; put it towards the child's education; or, if they prefer, use it to improve their own pensions.

This Maternal Capital should be no less than 250,000 rubles in the first instance, and would increase every year in line with inflation.

Putin's approach is quite different to that of his predecessors. He has not attempted to boost the birth rate by controlling access to contraception and abortion, as was the case in the late Imperial and Stalinist years. Nor has he bombarded women with pro-family propaganda, as happened under Brezhnev. However, this may be because he is unable to use such tactics now that there is some semblance of democracy in Russia.

### FAMILY AND CHILDREN AS A LIFESTYLE CHOICE

Russia is not a democratic society in the Western sense, but it cannot exert the same level of control over the population as it did in the past. Alternative sources of information are now available (most notably the Internet), and people have much more opportunity both to form opinions which differ from those promoted by the state and to act on them.

Authoritarian attempts to control life style choices are not entirely absent from the pro-family drive, however. There is an evident link between pronatalism and the clampdown on homosexuality. In 2012 a 100-year ban was imposed on Gay Pride marches in Moscow, and in 2013 a new Federal Law prohibited the propagandizing of homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism amongst minors. As Masha Gessen explains, this renders illegal anything which could be said to encourage the 'perception that traditional and non-traditional relationships are socially equal'.<sup>14</sup> According to Dan Healey,

this anti-gay legislation is supported by 'conservative forces who view the population decline as the gravest issue facing Russia'<sup>15</sup>; and Putin has acknowledged that his own attitude towards sexual minorities reflects 'the fact that one of the country's main problems is demographic'.<sup>16</sup>

Concern about the demographic situation might also be linked to a broader concern about the state's loss of control over its citizens. Despite the limitations of Russia's democracy, people are able to make choices about how they live their lives which were impossible in the Soviet era. Back then, parenthood was promoted not only through the dearth of contraception (though abortion was famously used in its place after it was again legalised in 1955), but also through housing allocation: almost all housing was owned by the state, and there was virtually no possibility of the unmarried and childless being assigned apartments. Now contraception is readily available, and the privatisation of housing means that family status is no longer a factor in the procurement of an apartment. It is, accordingly, easier to opt out of the norm.

Choosing not to have children is now an option, and the 'Childfree' movement, which began in the 1970s in North America to support people who chose to remain childless, has arrived in Russia, largely in the form of an Internet community. There are no statistics on its size, but the Russian media outlet *Russia Today* estimates that it has thousands of online members.<sup>17</sup>

In June 2011, a Demographic Summit was hosted in Moscow under the patronage of Svetlana Medvedeva, wife of then-President Dmitry Medvedev. Organised by the Illinois-based World Congress of Families, it expressed opposition to sexual minorities, radical feminists and the Childfree movement.<sup>18</sup> It also expressed approval of new pro-life movements in Russia such as the Foundation of Socio-Cultural Initiatives, headed by Svetlana Medvedeva, which listed among its achievements an anti-abortion week in July 2008. Russian participants included prominent figures in the Orthodox Church and academics such as demographer Anatoly Antonov who, as noted previously, was an advocate of the pro-natal propaganda campaign of the Brezhnev era. One of the visiting speakers was Steven Mosher, a social scientist from the USA; father of nine children, he is a staunch critic of China's one-child policy and president of the pro-life Population Research Institute, which views overpopulation as a myth. He called on the Russian government to change the Constitution so that life would be guaranteed from conception, to exempt families with three or more children from tax, and—a tactic reminiscent of Soviet days—to introduce pro-family propaganda in school text books.<sup>19</sup>

### PUTIN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE FAMILY AND GENDER RELATIONS

In the discussion of demographic issues in his 2006 speech, Putin referred only to mothers. He did not consider the possibility of paternity leave, nor of part time work for both parents. Indeed, he only acknowledged that fathers had a role to play in family life when he referred to the amount of money which

parents, rather than mothers, had to pay for pre-school childcare. The father's contribution to childcare seems, then, to have been seen as largely financial.

In their analysis of this speech, Anna Rotkirch, Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova were fairly positive about Putin's attitudes towards women. They noted that his proposals to stimulate the birth rate were directed almost entirely at women and that he did not refer to a paternal childcare role, but he did not promote 'heterosexual normativity' by 'deplor[ing] the rising number of unwed parents, divorcees and single mothers', nor suggest that women leave the work force in order to devote themselves to their families. He also did not explicitly 'reproduce the strong symbolic elevation of women as mothers typical of the Soviet gender order' by stressing 'specific female values and inborn psychological skills'. They concluded that he accepted that women were entitled to make choices about their lives.<sup>20</sup>

In this chapter, we take a rather less positive view, and would argue that 'heterosexual normativity' is promoted in Putin's speech through the exclusion of any forms of family which do not accord with the traditional model. There are no negative references to single, unmarried or divorced mothers because there are no references to them at all. Putin did not actually discuss ways of getting mothers back into work, but implicitly suggested that they be compensated for being out of work. He talked of full-time mothers finding themselves 'in a state of dependence, and sometimes [...] a humiliating position within the family', but his proposed solutions seemed to be aimed at enabling them to improve their status within the family by making a financial contribution even if they were not working; this would certainly be the effect if they used their Maternal Capital to improve the family's housing or pay for their children's education.

Putin insisted that the birth rate could not be raised without a change in attitudes towards family values: 'Academician D.S. Likhachev once wrote that "love for one's homeland, for one's country, begins with love for one's family". And we must restore these time-honoured values connected with caring for the family and home'.<sup>21</sup> This suggestion is not so dissimilar to the promotion of traditional gender norms in the Brezhnev era. Gessen holds that Russia is presenting itself as the "family values" capital of the world', and this feeds into hardening attitudes towards homosexuality.<sup>22</sup> It might also hinder the expression even of alternative heterosexual forms of the family.

## WOMEN'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS FAMILY AND CHILDREN

In an attempt to understand women's own attitudes towards the family and children we have analysed discussions on a range of Russian Internet forums. Use of the internet in Russia has grown exponentially in recent years and our target group, women of child-bearing age, is particularly well represented: in 2012, *Moscow News* estimated that 48% of internet users in Russia were between the ages of 25 and 45.<sup>23</sup> The Internet provides a rich source of data on personal matters since, as Christine Hine has pointed out, 'the cloak of anonymity can

lead people to a frankness [they] rarely show in face-to-face encounters'.<sup>24</sup> Olga Isupova, who provided the Internet data for this chapter and contributed to its analysis, has personal experience of this, having taken part in very frank Internet discussions on IVF treatment, about which there is considerable stigma in Russia.<sup>25</sup>

We chose to use what Robert V. Kozinets, the pioneer of netnography, terms 'observational netnography', in which 'the researcher does not reveal him or herself to the online community and its members, [...] does not enter or alter the community, and also has fewer opportunities to learn about the community through the lived complexity of actual interactions with the community'.<sup>26</sup> In her research on infertility treatment, Isupova participated fully in her online community, but she was undergoing fertility treatment herself and so her participation was appropriate. In the current project we felt that it would have been inappropriate and intrusive.

Using Internet discussions as source material does produce some difficulties. Firstly, contributors rarely provide personal information about themselves. We were always able to determine their gender, but few participants revealed their exact ages or whether they lived in large cities, towns or the countryside (though the latter was sometimes implicit). There are also ethical considerations. Isupova was able to discuss her research project on fertility treatment with members of her Internet community, and asked permission to use quotations and information from the discussion threads. We were not able to do so in this project. Arguably an Internet forum constitutes a public space since the material is available for anyone to read; to quote David Jacobson, '[t]here is no reasonable expectation of privacy in these conceptual spaces [...], and messages posted to publicly accessible fora are not private and are not protected by privacy laws'.<sup>27</sup> However, in an authoritarian society in which the state has such a strong concern about demography, discussions on whether or not to have children, and why, could be considered sensitive. Accordingly we have ensured that the people posting on these sites cannot be identified. We have referred to contributors by the first initial of the names they used on the site, even if these were humorous nicknames, adding a roman numeral when more than one person had the same initial (for example, A(i)). Some people posted anonymously, or as 'guests'; these we have referred to respectively as 'Anon' or 'Guest'. We have used only brief direct quotations, and have avoided the use of specific terms which could enable contributors to be identified. Kozinets has pointed out that '[u]sing contemporary search engines, many netnographic quotes and verbatim are easily traceable to other identifiers of a contributor to the research'.<sup>28</sup> However, since the posts were in Russian and we have translated all quotations into English, we are confident that this could not happen. To further protect the discussants, we have given only the year in which discussions took place but not the actual dates of the posts.

In an attempt to get as representative a sample as possible, we used a large range of sites and forums. At one end of the spectrum is *Probirka* (test tube) (<http://www.probirka.org/>), the site with which Isupova was involved.

Women who take part in discussions on this site are clearly very keen to have children, since they are willing to go through the emotionally gruelling use of reproductive technologies. At the other end is the *Childfree* forum (<http://ru-childfree.livejournal.com/>), used primarily by women who have chosen not to have children. In between are another 12 forums which tackle issues of more general concern to women but have all hosted discussions on women's attitudes towards the family and children. These are *Community.livejournal.com*; *spbg.ru*; *woman.ru*; *sibarit.ru*; *otvet.mail*; *29.ru*; *eva.ru*; *forum.rusmama.ru*; *kid.ru*; *forum.mamka.ru*; *puzyaka.ru*; and *klymba.ru*. There are occasional posts from men, but the vast majority of contributors to the forums are women.

### MATERIAL FACTORS AND 'MATERNAL CAPITAL'

As we have seen, Putin argued that material factors were paramount in women's decision to limit their family size. His concerns were echoed by a male contributor to an internet site in Arkhangel'sk, who explained that women were put off having children because they had insufficient money, their accommodation was inadequate, they lacked good jobs, they had health problems, and they had no faith in the future (AM, *29.ru*, 2011). The arguments put forward by women themselves were not so straightforward.

This does not mean that material factors were unimportant to women. One of them held that '[c]hildren are a luxury now, and the only people who can have more than two are very rich!' (L, *Otvetmail*, 2007). Another described herself as "materially childfree": that is, I want children, but only if I have a sufficient material level' (S(i), *Livejournal*, 2006). A third said she would like a second child, but was waiting until her situation was more stable and she had sufficient income (E(i), *29.ru*, 2011).

It was acknowledged that people brought up in the consumerist atmosphere of post-Soviet Russia have a different understanding of material sufficiency than previous generations. 'In the past people lived modestly (or even in poverty), but they still had no fewer than two children, and in even earlier times they had as many as 10! And they managed to live somehow' (CD(i), *eva.ru*, 2011). Women now insisted that they needed 'rivers of money' before having children, while 'during the war they gave birth and everyone was happy' (N(i), *kid.ru*, 2011). One woman pointed out that although we assume people will have more children if they are materially well-off, in fact the highest birth rates are in the poorest countries (PP, *Probirka*, 2007).

Even if women did see their material conditions as a factor in their decision not to have children, they were cynical about Putin's attempts to resolve them. Maternal Capital was derided: if it was used to improve the family's housing, it would fund at best around '5.5 square meters of living space' (L(i), *Otvetmail*, 2007), and much less in a major city such as St Petersburg (V(i), *Livejournal*, 2008). If it was put towards higher education, it would pay for just one year of study in a prestigious state university (V(i), *Livejournal*, 2008). If it went towards the mother's pension, it would add just three rubles per month (V(i),

*Livejournal*, 2008). In any case, 'the laws in Russia change every week' (V(i), *Livejournal*, 2008), and since parents could only start claiming the money when the child reached the age of three, 'we'll have different legislation and another government [by then], so we're not going to receive anything' (N(ii), *Otvemail*, 2007). A number of participants saw Maternal Capital as an attempt to manipulate women; it was 'aggressive propaganda about childbearing' (N(iii), *Livejournal*, 2006), a 'PR job' to persuade people to have more children (WV *Livejournal*, 2006). Women with any sense would see through the state's trickery: '[i]ntelligent people understand that there's no sense in having children for the sake of this [money]' (V(i), *Livejournal*, 2008), and would 'decide whether or not to give birth irrespective of these empty promises' (Yu(i), *Otvemail*, 2007). All the same, the scheme might possibly prove successful because less intelligent or educated women were likely to be taken in (Yu(i), *Otvemail*, 2007), and there was also a danger that it would 'encourage alcoholics and drug addicts in smaller cities to start breeding like rabbits' (E(ii), *Otvemail*, 2007). One particularly cynical comment was that women who did what was required of them and produced 'cannon fodder' for the state would just end up living in poverty (A(i) 29.ru, 2011).

Not all women were entirely dismissive of Maternal Capital. One conceded (perhaps at least partly in jest) that she might be persuaded to have another child if she was offered an entire apartment rather than just a contribution towards its cost (Anon(i), *Otvemail*, 2007). Another said she would consider taking up the offer since she wanted a second child anyway and the money would make it easier (S(ii), *Otvemail*, 2007). A third pointed out that many women had fewer children than they wanted because of material problems, and while 'in Moscow 250,000 [rubles] is equal to five square metres, somewhere or other in the depths of the countryside this is a whole house! If it would help [me] to resolve the housing issue, I'd give birth straight away' (Yu(ii), *Otvemail*, 2007).

## OTHER FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN'S DECISION TO HAVE OR NOT HAVE CHILDREN

While Soviet women were brought up to see having children as their duty to the state and, accordingly, held the state at least partly responsible for their care and subsistence, the women participating in these forums placed much more stress on personal choice and responsibility. Although she was concerned about the low birth rate, one woman insisted that people should not have children if they did not have enough money to ensure the child 'doesn't lack anything and feels himself happy' (CD(i), *eva.ru*, 2011). Another felt the state could not be trusted: 'It would be ok if the state helped, but at present all our bureaucrats are thieves' (V(ii), 29.ru, 2011). A third contributor saw choice and responsibility as paramount: 'Whether to have or not to have children is each person's personal

choice. Children MUST be born only if there is a huge desire for them, and an understanding of exactly what it means to be a parent' (Ts(i), *sphgu.ru*, 2007).

The difficulty in combining work and motherhood, one of the issues raised by Putin, was important to many women. Inadequate childcare was a big part of the problem; most childcare facilities now closed too early, and those that did stay open later charged extortionate fees (F, *Childfree*, 2006). However, Soviet childcare facilities were not remembered with much nostalgia. 'In Soviet times there was a general blessing—"the kindergarten". You had a child, put it in a kindergarten, and went to work without having to worry. Everyone was happy (apart from the child). But now it would be very naïve and stupid to think that you can combine children and career' (T, *Childfree*, 2006).

If the state no longer played a large role in childcare, some felt that fathers should fill that gap. Yet there was little hope that men would be persuaded to play a larger role. A number of women bemoaned the fact that 'parental duties [...] fall overwhelmingly on wives' (B, *Childfree*, 2006), but all the same, '[i]f you want to do less work for your family on an unpaid basis there is an obvious solution – don't have [children]' (N(iv), *Childfree*, 2006). Again, it was down to personal choice: 'If you have three children, don't complain that you can't work as well. If you want to work, then don't have children' (T, *Childfree*, 2006).

We suggested earlier that Maternal Capital was intended in part to offset the difficulty of combining work and motherhood by giving non-working women more financial clout and status in the family. This did not tempt many of the women in the Internet discussions to embrace full-time motherhood. Work was not only a source of money and status but also of pleasure and self-realisation.

[When] I went on maternity leave, I had to give up for a time my beloved and profitable business. [...] Now it will soon be two years; my mother has left work and looks after my son and I've gone back to work. I've become beautiful again, I'm working in business again, I've bought myself some new clothes and shoes, I'M BACK AT WORK!!! HURRAH!!! [...] I don't ever want to go on maternity leave again [...] (Anon(ii), *Eva.ru*, 2012).

Another respondent pointed out, with clear disapproval, that women in republics with traditionally large families, such as the Caucasus, 'don't go to work in stiletto heels and beautiful clothes', and that giving birth to healthy children was their only means of 'achiev[ing] self-realisation, of having social significance' (Anon(ii) *Eva.ru*, 2012).

The desire for self-realisation, to look good and simply to enjoy life were common reasons for not wanting children. One woman said she did not wish to spend all of her money on children so that there was nothing left for herself (V(ii), 29.ru, 2011). Another acknowledged that: 'Neither I nor my husband want to sacrifice ourselves' (S(i), *Livejournal* 2006). Motherhood forced women into dependence on their husbands or partners, meant they had less money to spend on themselves, and deprived them of the chance to 'experience the [other]



tastes of life' (CD(ii), *Childfree*, 2006). Concern that they would become less attractive and desirable was also an issue: a woman who actually wanted children had decided against it as her husband 'doesn't find mothers sexually attractive' (Ts(ii), *Eva.ru*, 2011). A 'Childfree' woman summed up the 'concern for one-self' position: 'My sleep, my plans for the future, and my beautiful body are more important to me' (P, *Childfree*, 2008).

Participants on the Childfree forum tried to understand why they were not interested in having children. The possibility of biological factors was explored: that is, that the 'maternal instinct' was naturally weaker in some women than others. However, most respondents claimed to have made their decision entirely on pragmatic grounds, 'because the plusses of having a child and being a mother are weaker than the minuses of not having [one]' (CD(ii), *Childfree*, 2006). The consensus was that it should be entirely a matter of personal choice, with no reference to social norms or concerns. Not wanting a child should be sufficient reason not to have one, and one contributor was convinced this was the underlying rationale of all childfree women, even if some felt compelled to put forward other excuses to ward off criticism (TT, *Childfree*, 2006). The expression of negative attitudes towards women who chose not to have children was a common experience, and was universally condemned by the childfree. '[E]veryone has a right to their own views. The only people who aren't right are those who think that there's some kind of norm and that to deviate from this is bad' (B, *Childfree*, 2006). This was seen, at least in part, as a hangover from the Soviet era. One woman who now identified as childfree had felt compelled to have children in the past because of social pressure: 'I never consciously wanted children, [...] but I was a product of Soviet education and believed that I simply had to have children' (A, *Childfree*, 2012).

Negative references to childless women, and to the Childfree movement itself, did make an appearance across the Internet sites. One of the more vitriolic was posted by a man who condemned 'the imported movement called 'Childfree', which [...] is now widespread in Russia' and which had resulted in many women openly declaring that they did not want children (AM, *29.ru*, 2011). He was challenged by a woman who described herself as childfree and insisted that 'I'm not going to have children, and neither Putin nor anyone else can persuade me to do so' (TV, *29.ru*, 2011). A contributor to another forum said she had never had maternal feelings and was tempted to join the Childfree community; not having children was a valid personal decision and women who made this decision should not have to put up with the abuse of others (R, *woman.ru/health*, 2012). The pressure placed on women to have children was seen by some, at least in part, as 'a Soviet inheritance, when children really were the only joy many people had' (Guest, *woman.ru*, 2012).

In short, then, Russian women are not rushing *en masse* to produce multiple children for the post-Soviet state. Their reasons include material conditions, the difficulty of combining work and motherhood, concern about the detrimental effects of pregnancy and childbirth on their appearance, and the necessity of putting other pleasures and interests on hold. Space restrictions have prevented

us from discussing some other issues which received a fair amount of attention, such as the fragility of marriage and the likelihood of being left with sole responsibility for small children; concern that having children might push a modern couple into traditional gender roles; fears about over-population; and a broader pessimism about the future. There were also lengthy discussions on the age at which women were choosing to have children, with some contributors suggesting that some seemingly childfree women might just be postponing childbirth until they had established their careers and settled their financial positions. This has long been the case in the West, and with families receiving far less state support than they did in Soviet times, the Western approach is proving increasingly attractive to some Russian women.

### CONCLUSION

The 'demographic crisis' has been a cause of alarm for the Russian authorities for more than a century. Attempts have been made to control reproductive behaviour by restricting access to contraception, distributing housing in accordance with family status and propagandising a single model of family life as the norm for all. While there were differences in approach throughout the decades of Soviet power, successive Soviet leaders shared an authoritarian attitude towards women and the family that saw children as a national resource and reproduction as a social duty on the part of women.

The conditions of post-Soviet Russia make it impossible for Putin to impose such a rigid, state-sanctioned model of family life on the population, and his attempts to boost the birth rate have focused more on economic inducements than on pressure and propaganda. All the same, we have argued that he is still promoting a traditional understanding of the family that is not so dissimilar to that of the late Soviet era: it is based on differentiated gender roles, is mother-centred, produces at least two children, and is, of course, unwaveringly heterosexual.

The Internet discussions we have followed make it clear that many Russian women refuse to embrace Putin's model. The most notable aspect of the discussions was the insistence on personal choice and responsibility in relation to family, children and life style in general. This not only stands in stark contrast to the old Soviet approach, but might also be seen as a challenge to Putin himself.

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## Recent Russian Press Coverage of Unfree Labour

*Mary Buckley*

Across the world there is increasing awareness about the process of human trafficking, which is seen as one form of migration. Some mistakenly conflate human trafficking and slavery but they are not synonymous. The former, however, may result in some form of labour abuse along a continuum of exploitation which at its worst may take on the characteristics of slavery.<sup>1</sup> Migration from one place to another may also have the outcome of exploitation for workers even if they have travelled independently. The same may, or may not, happen if migrants pay a smuggler to help them in illegal transit from one state to another. These problems are global. In many situations of unfree labour individuals are *de facto* denied the citizenship rights that they might otherwise have enjoyed. They lack protection and security when they find themselves susceptible to maltreatment and debasement. They lack what I call ‘enabled citizenship’. There are also many migrants who enjoy happier outcomes.

For over 15 years the Russian press has reported tales of labour abuse and situations of slavery across the world, discussed how its own citizens have been trafficked out of the country and how others have either arrived in Russia that way too or entered quite freely but ultimately found themselves in some way exploited or entrapped. The press has been open about these problems. The definition of human trafficking that has been in general coinage in recent years in many states is that used in the ‘Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children’, which supplemented the United Nations (UN) Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime, which the General Assembly adopted in 2000 and which came into force in 2003. In this Protocol human trafficking was portrayed as a process which involves ‘the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of

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persons' and 'by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, or the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability'. Integral to the definition was 'control' over another person 'for the purpose of exploitation'.<sup>2</sup>

The threefold objects of this chapter are: first, to provide a brief overview of human trafficking out of, into and within Russia; second, to note highlights of anti-trafficking efforts; and third, in more detail to explore the ways in which the Russian press has reported selected recent examples of labour abuse.

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING OUT OF, INTO AND WITHIN RUSSIA

After the collapse of the Soviet state at the end of 1991, the topic of 'trafficking in persons' or '*torgovlya lyud'mi*' out of Russia hit the headlines, followed by the English terms of '*treffiking*' and '*trafik*', variously spelled.<sup>3</sup> Initially the spotlight fell on the women and girls who were trafficked into the commercial sex industries in the European Union (EU), Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Israel, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Japan, North America and elsewhere. Due to the 'hidden' nature of this process, statistical estimates were hazardous and unreliable and the press did not always point out that they were not necessarily 'correct'. The published estimates in the newspaper *Trud* were nonetheless large at 60,000 per year trafficked out of Russia.<sup>4</sup> Dmitri Babin, at Moscow's office of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), was quoted in 2010 as saying that experts thought that up to 50,000 people were trapped each year in forced labour.<sup>5</sup> Other specialists have suggested that around 175,000 people who had been exploited in the sex industries elsewhere every year failed to return to Russia and to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Some articles stressed that the trafficked were 'victims' or *zhertvy*, whereas others observed prostitutes were looking for better wages abroad too. The general message delivered, however, was that many women and girls were deceived, yet it is impossible to ascertain percentage breakdowns of those duped, those partially suspecting and those not fooled. *Pravda*, however, insisted that over 80% were deceived and had indeed believed that they were going into the jobs that they had been promised. These might be as a waitress, nanny or dancer.<sup>7</sup> Those in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) witnessed the traumatised physical and psychological results of many trafficked women and girls who managed to return.

In the 1990s there was also a growing awareness that men and boys were trafficked out of Russia into construction work, domestic labour, fieldwork and fisheries, although it was estimated that women and girls made up the majority at around 75–80%. It was soon evident that begging rings were in the control of unscrupulous operators too, and that the business of mail-order brides might result in prostitution, pornography or forced childbearing and caring for the elderly.<sup>8</sup> Awareness grew of the sale and/or kidnapping from children's homes for illegal adoption or prostitution and of a trade in human organs and tissues.

Whilst sites of subjection could vary and conditions differ, shared predicaments included deception about the job on offer, forged documents, loss of a passport, confinement, debt-bondage, threats, violence, rape and threats of harm to relatives or to offspring back home. There were also documented flows of women and girls within Russia from small towns and the countryside to big cities and also from Eastern Europe into Russia, particularly from Ukraine and Moldova. An extensive literature in Russian and English discussed these developments, the reasons behind them and the different theoretical approaches used to analyse them.<sup>9</sup>

In recent years, more press coverage has been devoted to the flows of migrants from Central Asian states, particularly from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan into Russia. Some migrate using their visa-free access and some are trafficked but, however they travel, both groups are vulnerable to labour exploitation and predicaments of unfree labour whether in construction, quarrying, landfill, agriculture, felling trees, street cleaning, shop work, factories, as janitors or in domestic labour and prostitution. Whilst women are among these migrants, estimates suggest that the majority of arrivals, or 75–80%, is male. Current media coverage in Russia and comments by politicians intertwine narratives about trafficked people with those of slavery, illegal immigration, the loss of jobs for Russians, crime, drug trafficking, terrorism and the changing ethnic composition of the capital city. Fears have been expressed about crimes committed by migrants and their risk to national security, despite statements to the contrary from experts and those in law enforcement. Some labourers from Vietnam, China, Moldova and Ukraine have also found themselves exploited or confined in underground factories or brothels in Russia. Unfree labour may be gendered according to the work demanded but neither adults nor minors are immune. The most recent flows of migrants since 2014 and 2015—those escaping hostilities in Eastern Ukraine—present competitors for jobs with some Russians preferring their labour to that of other incoming *gastarbaitery* from the south.

### LEGISLATION AND ANTI-TRAFFICKING EFFORTS

The story of the failure to adopt an overarching anti-trafficking law in the early 2000s has already been told. Similarly, details of the eventual amendment in 2003 of the Criminal Code which led to the anti-trafficking Article 127.1, supported by President Vladimir Putin, are also known. This Article defined trafficking as ‘the buying and selling of a person, or other actions committed for the purpose of such person’s exploitation in the form of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of such a person for the purpose of their exploitation’.<sup>10</sup> Pressure from Russian women’s groups and the international community had thus finally prevailed after denials from politicians that trafficking existed and dismissive comments that the women concerned were prostitutes anyway so not really worth bothering about.<sup>11</sup> Article 127.2 of the Criminal Code covers ‘the use of slave labour’.<sup>12</sup> There was also discussion of a

change in 2008 to Russia's definition of human trafficking, removing the earlier phrase 'for the purpose of their exploitation', which had made law enforcement officers initially hesitant to try to get a conviction under Article 127.1 since a person could be recruited by a trafficker but sold on, so the question became did the seller directly exploit them or was it rather the purchaser who did so? 'Proof of the intent to exploit' was viewed as 'one of the biggest barriers'.<sup>13</sup> Now the law held that any transaction involving a person was alone a crime. In increasing the minimum sentence to 6 years, the 'gravity', or *tyazhost*, of the crime was also raised thereby enabling a longer period of investigation and longer sentence. A judge told me in 2007 that such a change would facilitate more thorough investigations, which he supported.<sup>14</sup> In instances of possible corruption, however, the greater *tyazhost* increased the size of the bribe that might be paid from traffickers to guard against conviction.<sup>15</sup>

Given the scale of human trafficking in and out of Russia, the US State Department has criticised Russia for too few convictions of traffickers. In fact, due to the complexities of proving Article 127.1, it is often easier to convict a trafficker under Articles 240 and 241 of the Criminal Code concerning recruitment into prostitution and the organisation of prostitution.<sup>16</sup> In 2013, to the annoyance of Russian officials, the US State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons (TiP) Report downgraded Russia from the Tier-2 'Watch List', after 9 years in that category, down into the lowest classification of Tier-3 where it had also sat in 2001 and 2002. In short, the US State Department deemed that the Russian state was inadequately meeting anti-trafficking standards and toned down its small diplomatic praises of past years. Continued criticisms included inadequate psychological counselling services for returnees, the need for shelters and the advisability of a comprehensive strategy that required formal national procedures.<sup>17</sup> The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow reacted strongly to the downgrading and dubbed it an 'unacceptable ideological approach'.<sup>18</sup> Two members of the NGO community, however, considered the downgrading 'justified'.<sup>19</sup> The US State Department's TiP Reports kept Russia at Tier 3 in 2014, 2015 and 2016.<sup>20</sup> The 2015 report described the Russian government's 'limited efforts to prevent trafficking' in one of its harshest assessments yet, reiterated in 2016.<sup>21</sup>

Those in women's groups and NGOs generally agree that support for returning trafficked persons who need help is insufficient. What is essential immediately is somewhere to live, psychological support, medical checks and legal advice. Indeed, the provision of shelters has been both rare and short-lived. The productive work of MiraMed, which was run in Moscow by Dr. Juliette Engel, a US citizen, has now ceased and the associated Angel Coalition is defunct. MiraMed's concentration on Russian orphans had broadened to address the consequences of human trafficking and its Moscow Trafficking Victim Assistance Centre functioned as a coordinating office for the rescue and repatriation of the trafficked and sponsored inter-regional exchanges of safe-house personnel.<sup>22</sup> The nine shelters that it had opened in 2000 no longer exist.<sup>23</sup> The shelter used by Natalia Khodyreva's gender crisis centre in St



Petersburg also closed in December 2007.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, the IOM's shelter, which did excellent work in Moscow for 3 years from March 2006, also ceased to operate when its funding ended. The city was asked to facilitate its continuation but one official's response was that he did not wish the image of his city to be 'blackened' by such a shelter.<sup>25</sup> There had been a shelter in Vladivostok with places for just six women funded locally by the *krai* but in 2016 its operations had been suspended. Another shelter in St Petersburg was run by the Russian Red Cross but in 2014 there were rumours that it might have to close. By 2016 its work been scaled back and its focus was on accommodation and assistance for refugees but no longer on shelter for victims of human trafficking.<sup>26</sup> There are also shelters in Russia for sufferers of domestic violence, but these are not set up to deal with the consequences of human trafficking. Local hospitals may be recommended by officials but these lack the specialised package of treatment needed with simultaneous help from social workers, psychologists and lawyers, as had been perfected by experienced staff in the IOM.

### RECENT RUSSIAN PRESS COVERAGE, 2006–2013

There has already been discussion in the literature of how 'new' topics came onto agendas under *glasnost* (openness or publicity) in the late 1980s that previously had been officially declared not to exist under state socialism since they were 'blights' of capitalism. These included prostitution, rape and child abuse.<sup>27</sup> By the first decade of the twenty-first century, human trafficking was now also very visibly packaged and portrayed across the Russian press. Papers such as *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, *Izvestiya*, *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, *Moskovskii komsomolets*, *Argumenty i fakty*, *Kommersant*, *Pravda* and others informed readers about human trafficking but very much within the style and tone of each individual paper. Early press coverage in Russia has already been examined up to 2005.<sup>28</sup> How then has it been discussed in the more recent past, what have been the main changes, if any, and how does the content of articles compare? Certainly investigative journalism continues to uncover topical stories, particularly concerning harm to others and injustice. Here I have done a trawl of articles in *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, *Pravda* and *Argumenty i fakty* to include a span of newspaper styles.

Reporting in both *Nezavisimaya gazeta* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* is often informative and relatively calm even when exposing shocking findings. Back in 2008, for example, *Nezavisimaya gazeta* printed a piece about fighting trafficking and highlighted the international nature of slavery and responses across the globe.<sup>29</sup> It often provides a big picture as well as details about Russia. Terse reports also give minimal details, such as: the arrest in London of four Russians for taking Russian, Bulgarian and Latvian women to the UK as 'sex slaves',<sup>30</sup> and discussion of the capture of a criminal group in China who were holding 89 children from Vietnam and the fact that from 2009–2011 the Chinese police

had unmasked around 5000 criminal groups.<sup>31</sup> Emphasis is often on crime, law enforcement and the role of the state.

Frequently, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* produces factual and reflective reporting which tells a story and debates particular aspects of the trafficking process. It exposes abuse, notes punishments and decries corruption and failure to convict. One recent article exposed the exploitation of men by a trans-national criminal group. From their office in Rostov *oblast* they placed an advertisement in a local newspaper for construction workers, indicating well-paid work. Successful job applicants were transported to Abkhazia with false promises about the work awaiting them. Upon arrival they were informed that they had been 'sold'. Loss of passports, beatings, threats and long hours of manual labour followed.<sup>32</sup> The gang members were sentenced to 12, 10 and 9 years for human trafficking and for using slave labour. Reporting was crisp rather than packaged as sensationalism.

If a story makes headline news, it is likely to be covered across the press. This was the case with reporting about Kazakh and Uzbek citizens who had been confined for 10 years in the basement of a Moscow shop where they had to unload deliveries and serve customers. *Rossiiskaya gazeta* described how a married couple from Kazakhstan, who owned the shop, 'mercilessly exploited' migrants who had to sleep on the floor. For vivid reporting, the article quoted the freed workers. One revealed: 'I didn't receive a kopeck for ten years. We worked for sixteen hours, were fed twice a day with skilly'. Another said 'the female owner beat us' and the male 'watched' which was 'offensive'.<sup>33</sup> *Rossiiskaya gazeta* developed its angle by asking how people could 'submissively (*pokorno*) bear slavery for ten years?' It went on to discuss the psychological effects of 'paralysed fear' and 'total lack of rights', noting the dilemma that even if the migrants had run away, they had no money or documents.<sup>34</sup>

Other articles in *Rossiiskaya gazeta* have informed readers about a range of topics which include: the attempted sale of babies, including by a former head of a children's home;<sup>35</sup> how a gang in the Urals took minors from the streets, forced them into prostitution and killed at least thirteen 'obstinate' ones who refused to comply;<sup>36</sup> and the involvement of corrupt police in the trafficking of Siberian women into prostitution in Tyumen by taking a cut in the money which the women earned in a hotel.<sup>37</sup>

Reporting in *Pravda* has been less calm. In the 1990s it had a particular bent for sensationalism, shaming and apportioning blame. *Kto vinovat?*, or 'who is to blame?', was a key dimension in its articles. Then, with its focus on the trafficking of women and girls out of Russia into the sex industries, *Pravda* laid blame firstly at the feet of EU countries, particularly Holland and Germany since they had legalised prostitution, which the journalist thought had led 'to a rise in the sex-trade', and secondly at rich foreign clients lustily looking for sex. Russians criminals were not targeted, implicitly suggesting that they were blameless. Where *Pravda* talked of 'bosses' in crime they tended to come from the Caucasus, thereby giving blame an ethnic dimension.<sup>38</sup>

By 2012, *Pravda*'s focus was rather different. Now, like other papers, it exposed a series of cases of what it called 'slave' labour inside Russia, but without dropping stories of women trafficked out. If we compare its narration with the story told by *Rossiiskaya gazeta* of the Central Asian workers confined in the shop, however, we see different emphases despite overlapping details. More is made of the fact that they were found in October 2012 by a group of volunteers and journalists and freed without police involvement. More is made of the presence of children in the basement, who, when the workers finally came out, were quickly driven away by the owner of the shop. They belonged to one of the female captives who had given birth in the basement. The shop owner had previously taken one child away when the infant was 5 years old. For 2 years, the mother knew nothing about what had happened to her until finally informed 'your daughter died'.<sup>39</sup> *Pravda*'s journalist highlighted the heartless dimensions of the story.

The tale was preoccupied again with blame. It asked who was responsible for making migrants work up to 14 hours a day? Why were they not paid? Why could they not go out onto the street? Why was telephone contact prohibited? Blame, the article emphasised, squarely fell on the shoulders of the shop owners. The message was that they had deceitfully 'enticed' migrants with the lure of pay and instead enslaved them. The paper then explored what happened next. The shop owners were first taken to the police and the case was subsequently referred to the Investigative Committee (*sledstvennyi komitet*). Yet they were not detained. A lawyer remarked that possibly the police had an agreement ('*sgovor*') with the shop owners'.<sup>40</sup>

Next *Pravda* reported that the district procuracy had closed the case but that the Investigative Committee had lodged a complaint about this. Members of the group *Al'ternativa*, who had freed the migrants, were quoted as saying 'anyone can now take slaves'.<sup>41</sup> A year later *Pravda* reported that meetings about this case were being postponed and that it was now stuck in the General Procuracy. Throughout its reporting, *Pravda* apportioned blame, stressed the injustices involved and explored consequences.<sup>42</sup> Sensation was integral to its toolbox.

The newspaper *Argumenty i fakty* in both the 1990s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century has often been sensational in its coverage. In 2007, for example, it carried two serialised articles on the fate of a young woman with the pseudonym of 'Svetlana' from the Russian Far East who had been trapped in sexual slavery since 1991.<sup>43</sup> Her journey began at the age of fifteen when she went to buy a train ticket to return home from a neighbouring town but none were left. The guard, however, said that she could ride for free. Once travelling in the guard's compartment she was 'pumped' with narcotics. When, much later, the train reached Moscow, two accomplices met the train, took Svetlana and locked her in an apartment where she was beaten and raped.<sup>44</sup> *Argumenty i fakty* constructed a dramatic picture of good versus bad. Svetlana was then moved to what the newspaper described as a 'den' (*priton*) in Moscow's Biryulyovo district, where she was confined for 6 months. Subsequently, her

captors drove her to a village near Nazran' in Ingushetia where Svetlana was required to sew camouflage for fighters. Here the paper hinted at a link between human trafficking, rebels engaged in terrorism, people from the Caucasus and ethnicity. Again Svetlana was beaten mercilessly and raped, sometimes by ten men a day.

Svetlana's fate changed when someone described as a 'rich and kind client, not local' promised to take her to the UAE as his third wife. Apparently feeling that this was a better option than her current trapped position, Svetlana agreed. Somehow he took her out and hid her in his car, only to sell her into a brothel elsewhere. Here, it turned out, the situation slightly improved as Svetlana was beaten less frequently and the clients were regulars. Only after 2 years did Svetlana learn that she was not in the UAE but in Turkey. She spent her time locked up facing four walls, unaware of the collapse of the Soviet state and ignorant of the economic and social changes in the new Russia. The story packs in sensational, shocking and fantastic details, one after the other, at speed.

Apparently years later, with the help of a Turkish client who heeded her pleas, Svetlana finally escaped on a steamer going to Odessa. She was without her official documents, but a sailor agreed to hide her. Steering her out of sight of port scrutiny, the kind sailor gave her one hundred dollars and told her to get to Kiev and go straight to the Russian embassy. By then, the 15 year-old who began unknowingly on this epic journey had reached the age of 31. The paper did not explore how many times she may have tried to escape, so the reader is left unclear. Rather, the implicit suggestion is that this was most unlikely in the circumstances.

It took Svetlana three days to reach the capital of Ukraine, relying on passing cars to get her there. Once in Kiev, she found the Russian embassy and asked for help. The article reported how staff listened to her story and then asked for her passport. Since she did not have it, Svetlana was shown the door. Without official documents it became starkly evident to her that returning to Russia would be hard. Here representatives of her own state denied her citizenship rights without proof of them. Now determined, however, Svetlana headed for the Ukrainian/Russian border, to the village of Gorodnia. At this point, Svetlana froze according to the story's presentation. Frightened, she asked herself what might happen if those at the border simply sold her to someone else? The tale made a fast-paced and gripping read, hard to put down.

In Gorodnia, Svetlana went to the church and found a priest who played the role of willing global citizen, even 'citizen pilgrim'.<sup>45</sup> Father Miron suggested that they go to the post office and that she telephone her father, offering her money. Svetlana did this, but no-one answered. The priest thought that she should talk to the telephone information services and gave her more money, saying he had now to go and attend to church business but would soon return. 'Don't leave me', she screamed.<sup>46</sup> When Father Miron later returned, she had gone.

It turned out that Svetlana had reached her father and that he told her to go to the militia. At first, however, he did not recognise her voice as, in despair, she

told her story. He then pressed her for personal details to confirm who she really was. He asked her to name their neighbour's dog. When she did so correctly, he said 'wait for me at the militia. I'll fly there'. Thereafter Aleksandr Bui, head of the town's criminal police, dealt with her case. Bui described her as 'a girl like any girl: jeans, boots. She was poorly dressed, but clean. From her appearance, you wouldn't say that she'd come out of slavery. But in her eyes, if you look closely, there's little that's human'.<sup>47</sup> This raises further questions concerning the denuding of the psyche and the impact of brutality. Implicit is the message that mental illness after this ordeal is inevitable. Yet this was not discussed as sensation outweighed analysis. The technique of quoting what different people said, however, created a vivid picture.

Svetlana spent three days in the district militia. Initially, she was afraid to leave the building. On the first day, she declined all food, afraid that sedatives might be in her soup. She also refused to believe the militia men. Finally, one persuaded her to eat by bringing borsch, sausage and fat (*salo*) from home. During the day she watched the television, crying all the time. As the newspaper reported it, 'she flinched at every rustle, was frightened of any shadow'.<sup>48</sup> Her father finally arrived with her birth certificate. Svetlana flung herself at him and they both cried. He took her to Kiev and then back to Russia.

What Svetlana did not know was that after her disappearance her father, Oleg Malyshev, had informed the town's criminal investigators. They were meant to have acted within 10 days but, if the press is correct, it took them until the end of that year to do anything. Years later when the investigation was taken over by a new person 'practically nothing' was done to find his daughter. In fact, one day an investigator visited Malyshev and what *Argumenty i fakty* described as an 'abhorrent conversation' followed in which the visitor asked Svetlana's father if he did not have self-interested reasons for wanting to get rid of his daughter.<sup>49</sup> Three years later it was suggested to Malyshev that he go through court proceedings to declare his daughter dead. He refused on the grounds that he had no supporting evidence.

Oleg Malyshev's hopes rose when a former neighbour rang him to say that a young woman had telephoned asking for him and she was very upset when she learned that he had moved away 15 years ago. According to the newspaper, his heart missed a beat and he felt that it must be Svetlana. Malyshev tried to find out where the call had come from but apparently the "competent" organs, as *Argumenty i fakty* sarcastically dubbed them, declared that it was 'technically impossible' to find out. Throughout the process, if the newspaper's reporting is accurate, Malyshev appeared to have little support or action from the authorities and was himself emotionally distraught.

When finally Svetlana reached him on the telephone, she was able only to say '*Papochka*, forgive me'. He had not heard her voice for 16 years. The paper zoomed in on emotional dimensions to pull at readers' heartstrings for effect. In the same genre it told how Svetlana's mother, unbeknown to her daughter, had died two months after Svetlana's fateful train journey in 1991. In fact, her father had moved, married again and had a second daughter. The clear message was

that throughout these years Svetlana enjoyed none of the citizenship rights of Soviet or subsequent Russian citizens. All she had endured was captivity and regular rape—a hidden life of forced slavery either on Soviet and Russian territory or in Turkey. Formerly she was still a citizen but she was not ‘enabled’ to be one. *De jure* citizenship did not mean *de facto*.

This story makes a gripping read and *Argumenty i fakty* is a newspaper adept at shocking its readers. This fast-paced style of journalism, however, also serves the function of exposé and the deliverance of moral messages. The journalist, Sergei Kozhin, who wrote the second half of Svetlana’s story, uses a warning heading in very dark print: ‘any Russian girl or woman could find herself in her place’. He hits over the ‘terrible statistic’ that ‘every year throughout the entire world around 50,000 Russian females become sex slaves’, repeating the UNICEF figures published in Vladimir Kozhemiakin’s first episode of Svetlana’s story.

Reports in *Komsomol’skaya pravda* are similarly shocking. Some tales, however, go one step further by provocatively asking about the fault of the victims for getting themselves into slave conditions. This question echoes one belief found in my public opinion poll conducted in 2007 of 1600 people in Russia across 45 regions (725 men and 875 women) in which 40.8% of male respondents and 38.8% of female respondents felt that women who were trafficked into the sex trade were ‘themselves to blame’.<sup>50</sup> Under the headline, ‘They are selling Natashas. For export. Not expensive’, journalist Natal’ya Ostrovskaya began her article with the almost weary subheading of ‘What? Again about sex-slaves?’ She made it evident that she was asking herself why she had to look again at ‘THIS’. Surely, she suggested, these girls were once more to blame? She rhetorically mused that like butterflies off they flew, willingly, without contracts to distant countries. Were they not at fault for their plight later?<sup>51</sup>

In Khabarovsk krai, Ostrovskaya interviewed Dasha, a 22 year old, who was surely one of these ‘guilty’ women. It turned out that her son had needed an expensive operation and so Dasha agreed to work in Israel to earn the money pay for it, but had found herself in one of Tel Aviv’s brothels. She then refused to work as a prostitute, so was raped and sold on to Greece. Locked in a basement, Dasha managed to contact home after her minder went out and, by mistake, left his phone. The deputy head of the Investigative Department in Komsomol’sk-on-Amur revealed that she had received details of more than over 40 similar cases and that the number ‘grows day by day’.<sup>52</sup>

Ostrovskaya lamented the fate of ‘THOUSANDS of beautiful girls of the most splendid age (17 to 30 years)’ who were leaving the east of Russia for far-flung destinations. She named and shamed the culprits as greedy foreigners who traded in women. In the process she turned her starting question on its head to show who the guilty really were and to highlight that it was not the women and girls. Her journalism attempted to tackle the stereotype of ‘stupid girls’ through Dasha’s case. Nonetheless, the reader is left thinking that Dasha’s naiveté is still partly responsible. Ostrovskaya also informed readers that the

Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) now had its own special department for investigating kidnapping, human trafficking and slave labour. She quoted its head, Lieutenant-Colonel Andrei Mel'nikov, to the effect that the sale of girls from the Far East was now more profitable than drug trafficking since just one slave would earn her owner from 75,000 to 250,000 US dollars a year.<sup>53</sup> Articles more readily now used the term 'slavery' (*rabstvo*).

Such a sensational mode of packaging of articles as found in the examples cited here from *Argumenty i fakty* and *Komsomol'skaya pravda* is just one genre. In recent years, there has been a mix of messages with drier reports and commentaries in papers such as *Izvestiya* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* and similarly shocking in *Moskovskii komsomolets*, or framed against certain nationalities inside Russia or against Western states. Indeed, Svetlana's story, as told in *Argumenty i fakty*, is underpinned by themes about ethnicity. One is meant to make certain inferences about who is blamed when it is not always made explicit. One message is that those wishing to subvert the Russian state may also be involved in people trafficking and may have connections with drug trafficking too. More highbrow newspapers adopt fewer stereotypes and crude links but in common they all by 2015 narrated sad stories about the plight of migrants, whether trafficked, smuggled or legal entrants into Russia who become duped in some way. Whilst success stories, of course, exist of happy employments in a new land, there is a grim underbelly to migrant trends worldwide and the Russian state and its citizens are more aware of this today as are their embassies abroad. What happened to Svetlana in the Russian Embassy in Kiev would be less likely to occur in Russia's foreign embassies today.

## CONCLUSIONS

If one looks at J.D. Mabbot's classic claim that 'the paradox of politics is the reconciliation of liberty and obligation', then for the existence of what I call an 'enabling citizenship' the state must guarantee the security and freedom of citizens (in so far as they do not harm others) in return for their duty to obey its laws.<sup>54</sup> Although the Hobbesian social contract is based on an historical myth, it is hard to dispute that in the twenty-first century, the notion of citizenship in liberal states is generally predicated upon expectations of security and protection to be provided by the state and a general guarantee of peace in return for a duty to submit to its rule. Deviations necessitate punishment and a system of justice. Such a 'contract' between citizen and state is embedded in a political system which is historically reached and shaped by multivariate factors which include geopolitics, the nature of the economic system, developing political culture, political values, the nature of institutions and their interrelationships, the policies and goals of key decision makers and the actions and personalities of leaders. Conflicts, wars, competitions across states and driving aspirations as well as fears and even paranoias mould political results. The 'enabled citizen', however, is free to seek opportunities in economy, polity and society subject to the circumstances of the day.



There is a complexity to questions of citizenship in the post-Soviet space and a paradox for those who are indeed citizens of a particular state but who, in reality, are without *de facto* citizenship since they are held in some form of labour exploitation which denies them citizenship rights, either in their own state or in another. They do not necessarily enjoy the liberty of which Mabbot writes, or protection from the state. They thus remain outside a social contract and are without enabled citizenship. Russia is not the liberal state integral to Mabbot's argument but it is one whose 1993 Constitution devotes Articles 17 to 64 in Chapter Two to 'Human and Civil Rights and Freedoms'.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, it is also worth noting the smouldering issue of negative attitudes within Russia from some citizens towards the *gastarbaitery*. Explosions on the streets, such as the ones in early October 2013 in Moscow's Biryulyovo district after a man had been killed, quickly resulted in a migrant worker being blamed. Riot police took to the streets and some locals called for vigilante groups to form in all areas of Moscow to protect citizens from migrant workers.<sup>56</sup> The next day Channel One showed the capture and arrest of Orxan Zahid-Oglu from Azerbaijan. A vegetable warehouse had been stormed and 1200 people detained. MVD head, Vladimir Kolokol'tsev, was shown shaking hands with the militia men who had found the alleged culprit. The clear message to television viewers was that the system was acting quickly and decisively.<sup>57</sup> Nine months earlier, however, the Head of the Federal Migration Service, Konstantin Romodanovskii, had pointed out that although in the preceding 3 years the number of foreigners entering Russia had increased by 23%, the number of crimes committed in that community had fallen. He observed that at the same time sociologists were showing that there was a growth in anxiety (*ozabochnost'*) amongst the population about immigrants. Romodanovskii announced that, in fact, only 3.4% of known crimes were committed by migrants and most of those were about false papers. His message was that 'there is not a wave of crime among foreigners'.<sup>58</sup> They have, however, become a 'folk devil' among sections of the Russian public and signs of 'moral panic' are visible. This panic has different characteristics from the one about women and girls trafficked out which, on the part of the state, concerned its negative impact on Russia's gene pool and the birth rate. The concerns of those in NGOs were more focused on human rights' abuses, although some politicians stressed these too. When journalists report about migration and provide exposé about certain situations, their tales often reveal, and sometimes share, signs of alarm and panic in society. This is another pattern that is not restricted to Russia.

## NOTES

1. For definitions and discussion of slavery, refer to Kevin Bales, *Understanding Global Slavery: a Reader*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
2. 'Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children', available online: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolTraffickingInPersons.aspx> (accessed June 2015).



3. In legal terms, 'human trafficking' and 'smuggling' are distinct but sociologists have pointed out that smuggling can involve deception too.
4. Aleksandr Danilkin, 'Zhenu otdai dyde', *Trud*, 21 March 2006.
5. 'Pochemu v Rossii protsvetaet rabotorgovliya?' *Argumenty i fakty*, 5 May 2008; Babin is quoted in Andrei Sharov, 'Rabotorgovtsy XXI Veka', *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 29 October 2010.
6. Tat'yana Svad'bina, Ol'ga Nemova and Tat'yana Pakina, 'Sovremennyi trafik rabotorgovli: prichiny, posledstviya, profilaktika', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, no. 2, 2014, pp. 43–4.
7. Gennadii Yefimov, 'Lolity ponevole, ili kto torguet russkimi devushkami', *Pravda*, 16 October 2003.
8. Irina Ivakhnyuk and Vladimir Iontsev, *Human Trafficking: Russia*, CARIM East—Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration: Explanatory Note 13/15, May 2013, p. 2.
9. For discussion of key sources and theoretical approaches, see Mary Buckley, 'Public Opinion in Russia on the Politics of Human Trafficking', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 61, no. 2, 2009, pp. 214–17. For analysis of migration and forced labour, consult Yelena Tyuryukanova, Vera Anishina, Dmitrii Poletaev and Stanislav Shamkov, *Prinuditel'nyi trud v sovremennoi Rossii*, Moscow: IOM, 2004.
10. Up-to-date texts are found in *Ugolovnyi kodeks Rossiiskoi Federatsii po sostoyaniyu na 1 Oktyabrya 2014g.*, Moscow: Prospekt, KnoRus, 2014, pp. 56–7.
11. See Yelena V. Tyuryukanova and Lyudmila D. Yerokhina (eds), *Torgovlya lyud'mi*, Moscow: Akademiya, 2002; Mary Buckley, 'Menchenhandel als Politikum: Gesetzgebung und Problembewusstsein', *Osteuropa*, vol. 56, no. 6, 2006, pp. 192–212; Mary Buckley, 'Human Trafficking in the Twenty-First Century', in Linda Racioppi and Katherine O'Sullivan See, *Gender Politics in Post-Communist Eurasia*, East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2009, pp. 125–31; and Janet Elise Johnson, *Gender Violence in Russia*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009, pp. 130–5.
12. *Ugolovnyi kodeks Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, pp. 57–8.
13. For fuller details, see Lauren A. McCarthy, 'Beyond Corruption: an Assessment of Russian Law Enforcement's Fight against Human Trafficking', *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 18, no.1, 2010, p. 15.
14. Interview by the author in St Petersburg, 2007. The judge said that discussions about amending Article 127.1 had been underway for a while and that the change was likely, as proved to be the case.
15. See Lauren A. McCarthy, *Trafficking Justice*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015.
16. See *Ugolovnyi kodeks*, pp. 146–8. For a detailed study of convictions, see McCarthy, *Trafficking Justice*.
17. US State Department, *Trafficking in Persons (TiP) Report*, available online: <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2013> / pp. 310–12 (accessed July 2016).
18. Konstantin Dolgov, the Russian Foreign Ministry's Plenipotentiary for Human Rights, argued that the 'politicising of human trafficking' in this manner 'hampered international cooperation'. See *RT*, 'Moscow attacks US human trafficking report as politicized and arrogant', 20 June 2013, available online: <http://rt.com/politics/trafficking-arrogant-politicized-report-992> (accessed June 2015).
19. Interviews by the author in Russia.

20. US State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 2014, available online: <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2014/226649.htm> (accessed June 2015); *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 2015, available online: <http://www.state.gov/j/tiprpt/rls/tiprpt/2015/index.htm> (accessed July 2015); and *TiP Report*, 2016, available online: <http://www.state.gov/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2016/258848.htm> (accessed June 2016).
21. *TiP Report*, 2015; *TiP Report*, 2016.
22. Interview at MiraMed in Moscow, September 2004. See MiraMed Institute, 'Preliminary Survey Report on Sexual Trafficking in the CIS', Moscow, June 1999; and MiraMed Institute, '*The Russian Report*', an activity report for February–July 2004.
23. Natal'ya Khodyreva, 'Gender Violence and Cost of Social-Psychological Rehabilitation and Legal Assistance: Russian Federation', paper presented at the First World Conference of Women's Shelters, 8–11 September 2008, Edmonton, Canada.
24. Khodyreva, 'Gender Violence.'
25. Interview by the author in Moscow, August 2013 and e-mail communication in July 2016.
26. Interviews by the author in Moscow, August 2013 and September 2014, and e-mail communications from Russia in July 2016.
27. See Mary Buckley, *Redefining Russian Society and Polity*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003, pp. 72–113.
28. Mary Buckley, 'Press Images of Human Trafficking from Russia: Myths and Interpretations', in Rebecca Kay (ed.), *Gender, Equality and Difference During and After State Socialism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007, pp. 211–29.
29. 'Borb'ba s torgovlei lyud'mi – delo vsego mezhdunarodnovo soobshchestva', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 13 February 2008.
30. 'Politsiya Londona raskryla set' сутenerov iz Rossii', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 15 May 2013.
31. 'Banda rabotorgovtsev likvidirovana v Kitae', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 28 July 2011.
32. Larisa Ionova, 'Zarplata – miska pokhlebkki', *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 19 January 2013.
33. Lidiya Grafova, 'Rabototorgovliya v magazine "Produkty"?'', *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 7 November 2012.
34. Grafova, 'Rabototorgovliya'.
35. Yelena Brezhitskaya, no title, *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 2 August 2013.
36. 'Prodannaya svoboda', *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 6 September 2007.
37. Anatolii Men'shikov, 'Proklatyi rai', *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 22 October 2008.
38. For details, see Mary Buckley, 'Press Images of Human Trafficking'.
39. See Anton Frolov, 'Osvobozhdennye v Moskve "raby" boyatsiya ugroz', *Pravda*, 7 November 2012, and his continuation of the story in 'Zakryto delo o rabakh v magazine', *Pravda*, 14 November 2012.
40. Frolov, 'Osvobozhdennye v Moskve'.
41. Frolov, 'Zakryto delo'.
42. Anton Frolov, 'V Rossii vse bol'she sluchaev rabovladieniya', *Pravda*, 20 March 2013.
43. Vladimir Kozhemiakin, 'Pyatnadsat' let v nevole', *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 42, 17–23 October 2007, pp. 17–23; Sergei Kozhin, "'Primu ee lyuboi" 15 let

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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## Opportunities for Self-Realisation?: Young Women's Experiences of Higher Education in Russia

*Ulrike Ziemer*

This chapter is based on case study research into the changing nature of the higher education experiences among graduates in Krasnodar, southern Russia, between July and August 2013. Alongside interviews with educational experts, this research includes in-depth interviews with 15 female university students and five recent graduates. The study has feminist predispositions in so far as it was conducted by a female researcher in a patriarchal society. Thus, as well as exploring the higher education experience of female students, a central objective of this study has been to discuss the female research participants as competent subjects creating opportunities in a male-dominated society such as Russia's. Hence, this analysis applies a feminist approach that foregrounds hitherto unheard voices.<sup>1</sup>

The research participants were drawn from the three major higher education institutions in Krasnodar: the Kuban State University (KubSU), the Kuban State Technological University (KubSTU) and the Kuban State Agrarian University (KubSAU). While the Kuban State Agrarian University is, with 174 ha, the largest university in the south of Russia and one of the whole country's leading universities for higher education in agriculture, the Kuban State University is by far the most prominent higher education institution in the Krasnodar region. Currently it has more than 27,000 students enrolled and approximately 6000 students graduate each year. Furthermore, the Kuban State University is the only university in the Krasnodar region that is recognised as among the 40 best universities in Russia.<sup>2</sup>

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To examine the higher education experiences of these young women, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the gendered experience of university and examines the reasons why these young women chose to go to university and why most of them chose to follow a typical female career path. The second part explores the ways in which these young women traversed inequalities at university, such as corruption, which does not seem to be a gendered experience. Before discussing these complex experiences, this chapter elaborates on the broader theoretical framework, the background to higher education and gender equality, and the changing gender discourse in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The empirical analysis in this chapter is set within wider debates regarding reflexive modernisation and individualisation. For social theorists such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, the reflexive individual is central to today's global culture, in which borders and boundaries are gradually being dissolved.<sup>3</sup> The penetration of markets and abstract systems into every aspect of post-Soviet Russian society has rendered life a 'planning project', in which social actors must constantly monitor their skills and competencies in an attempt to 'colonise the future'. Old certainties and traditions come to be questioned and collective identities rooted in class and gender no longer guide the life course, but become differential resources in the construction of individual, 'do-it-yourself' biographies.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while social divisions continue to structure opportunities, this process is experienced increasingly at the individual rather than the group level: individuals themselves become 'the reproduction unit for the social in the life world'.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, youth as a stage of life has been individualised in ways that impel young people to become reflexive and shape their own biographies.<sup>6</sup> This, however, does not mean that young people are considered completely 'free' agents. Rather, they may be viewed as making creative responses within the boundaries of the parent culture.

In several respects, the notions of 'individualisation' and 'de-standardisation' appear particularly applicable to the transitions made by young people in former socialist countries. Whereas transitions from simple to 'post-Fordist' modernities have taken place in the West over many years, the disintegration of the socialist variant of modernity and, moreover, the fundamentally state-led nature of this variant have apparently made both the pace and depth of these processes extreme. At every stage of the transition to adulthood, everything that had previously been structured by state agencies and organisations has now become a matter of individual choice and responsibility. As Pilkington argues, with regard to Russia, 'the collapse of state embedded social organisations structuring and managing young people's careers, leisure time, moral welfare and upbringing ... transformed the experience of living in Russia overnight from one of being tied to a chronically stable state to being "unleashed" into a critically unstable society'.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, however, the dislocating and

often stunted nature of the transformations taking place in post-Soviet Russia may equally have resulted in a 're-embedding' of individuals not into new and predominantly market-based social institutions, but rather into 'insulated' and 'pre-modern' forms of integration. Reflecting this, research on youth transitions in a number of post-communist countries has pointed to processes of re-traditionalisation and greater dependence by young people on family and kinship rather than individual level resources.<sup>8</sup>

## HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE SOVIET UNION AND POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

The centralised system of the Soviet approach to higher education was rooted in the socialist core belief of equality, which was based on the principle of equal distribution of resources among the various ethnic, linguistic, cultural and gender groups. Thus, the state approach was gender neutral and most policies were also gender neutral, focusing on education equality in terms of access (that is, giving the same opportunity to participate at university), attainment (that is, giving the same number of years of education) and achievement (that is, demonstrating learning of the same quality and type of knowledge).<sup>9</sup> Until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, women were gradually qualifying for more education and had caught up with men.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, women were concentrated in the educational fields characterised by leading to lower wage returns—mostly education, the social sciences, the humanities, medicine, law and economics—whereas men were concentrated in more remunerative fields, such as skilled manual work and engineering.<sup>11</sup>

In the Soviet Union, university degrees were highly regarded, and there was fierce competition for the limited places in the 600 universities and institutes serving a population of approximately 300 million people.<sup>12</sup> The enrolment rates in higher education and the available number of study places were all centrally controlled by the Soviet state. Job assignments from almost all educational institutions were obligatory, ensuring a close link between the educational system and the labour market.<sup>13</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, Russia was hit by a 'transitional shock' characterised by increasing employment insecurity and a considerable restructuring of both the economy and the labour market. In this transition process, from 1991 to 2002, the spending on higher education institutions fell from 1.2 to 0.4% of GDP and swung back to 3.5% in 2007.<sup>14</sup> The latter is still much less than Western countries spend.

Noteworthy here is that while universities struggled for finance after the demise of the Soviet educational system, the number of students increased immensely, from approximately three million to six million, accounting for more than half the population aged between 17 and 22.<sup>15</sup> This increase in student numbers was also accompanied by a feminisation of higher education. A difference of more than 15% in gross enrolment ratios between female (72.99%) and male students (57.38%) was recorded in Russia between 1999 and 2000.<sup>16</sup> Just as in Soviet times, women were surpassing men in terms of

educational attainment. Nonetheless, empirical studies have found that women were heavily penalised in terms of growing gender wage inequality.<sup>17</sup> Occupational allocation was very gender-specific, with women concentrated in low-paying jobs.<sup>18</sup> Evidently, Russian women were less able than men to convert their educational advantages into occupational opportunities.

While during Soviet times higher education was exclusively funded by the state and access to it was free, the reforms following 1991 created private and public programmes that led to a massification of higher education. The numbers of non-state universities grew most rapidly in the 1990s (from 0 in 1992 to 358 in 2000 and 450 by 2010).<sup>19</sup> The numbers of fee paying students increased rapidly in the first decade after 2000 (from 146,000 in 1993 and 1,940,000 in 2000 to 4,654,000 in 2009).<sup>20</sup> By 2012, the student population of approximately 143 million had access to nearly 3000 institutes of higher education.<sup>21</sup> With more than 6000 enrolled students per 100,000 population, the reach of Russia's higher education system is second only to that of the United States.<sup>22</sup>

While the state in the 1990s paid little attention to higher education policy, being overwhelmed with more urgent and economic issues, from 2000 onwards, the year after Putin came to power, higher education began to be promoted as a source of innovation, economic growth and regional development. A major driving force behind this significant change has been the state-led modernisation (*modernizatsiya*) of Russia's economy and societal institutions.<sup>23</sup> This modernising approach to higher education focused on major changes. It focused, for one thing, on introducing competition into the service delivery by instituting the Unified State Examination (USE; *YeGE* – *Yedinyi Gosudarstvennyi Eksamen*) in 2009.<sup>24</sup> Even though the higher education market grew rapidly in the 1990s, state funds were still being distributed between the universities according to Soviet type planning procedures. Therefore, the reforming government sought to tie state funding to the student and make universities compete for state funds by attracting more and better qualified students.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the Ministry of Education introduced in 2000 a new quality management system aimed at increasing the effectiveness of state funding in universities.<sup>26</sup>

Alongside the national project of modernising higher education, the Russian government also acknowledged the need to internationalise Russia's higher education system, so as to keep up with wider globalisation processes. Thus, in September 2003, Russia joined the Bologna process which set out to harmonise European education standards through adopting an Anglo-American model of higher education.<sup>27</sup> This attempt certainly shook up the Russian higher education system, one of its biggest changes being the 2007 move away from the semi-reformed Soviet university model of the 1990s to the two-tier Bologna model. This process also involved a change, from the previous wholly *specialist* qualification which took 5 years to complete, to universities operating within a four- plus two-year system, meaning that students take 4 years to complete a Bachelor's degree and a further two to qualify for a Master's degree.



To conclude this background to higher education in post-Soviet Russia, it seems that although Russian women have caught up with Russian men in the numbers of enrolments in and graduation from universities, Gerber and Schaefer argue that this gender equality in higher education has not translated into gender equality in the earnings of university students.<sup>28</sup> However, this trend is not very different from the experiences of female graduates in Great Britain or in Europe. According to a report by the University of Warwick's Institute for Employment, which analysed the 2012 salaries of more than 17,000 recent graduates in full-time work, one in five men (20%) after completing a first degree is paid more than £30,000, compared with just one in twelve (8%) women who earn the same.<sup>29</sup> Women in Europe also earn 16.2% less than men for doing the same job.<sup>30</sup>

### FROM THE SOVIET GENDER DISCOURSE TO GENDER IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA

Just before the collapse of the regime, the Soviet Union had the highest rate of female worker participation of any industrial society.<sup>31</sup> According to Lapidus, more than 85% of working age women were engaged in full-time work or study, and women constituted 51% of all workers and employees.<sup>32</sup> The Soviet government had officially proclaimed the establishment of gender equality. Free, universal primary education was introduced in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, eight years of universal education in the 1950s and universal secondary education in the 1970s. By the 1980s, 61% of women in the Soviet Union were specialists with higher or secondary specialised education and women comprised 54% of students in higher educational establishments.<sup>33</sup>

However, the idea of establishing gender equality in the Soviet era has to be treated carefully, as many publications have shown.<sup>34</sup> Although in official discourse the Soviet government's commitment to gender equality was demonstrated by such policies as equal pay for equal work and child care, this Soviet ideology was also tailored to the needs of different periods of Soviet history, as defined by their political leadership.<sup>35</sup> Instead of achieving gender equality, the formal state structures of socialist society and also the separation of the public and private spheres seem in practice to have strengthened traditional gender norms and reinforced traditional patriarchy.<sup>36</sup>

The demise of the Soviet Union prompted a re-evaluation of Soviet gender politics in which Russia seemed to have experienced a certain 're-traditionalisation', that is, a resurgence of traditional notions of gender as a way of dealing with the allegedly 'distorted' Soviet past.<sup>37</sup> With the demise of old structures, new structures and opportunities in the labour force led women to new opportunities for *samorealizatsiya* (self-realisation).<sup>38</sup> Yet, according to Ashwin and Lytkina, the dual-earner family in which the man is the chief breadwinner and the woman takes primary responsibility for household management remains the norm in Russia.<sup>39</sup> In this respect, Tsetsura maintains that the reason women were subordinated to men in the Soviet Union and in Russia was the cultivation of a dual role for women as mothers and workers which



placed emphasis on women's roles as family and house keepers, whereas men's role was to be the breadwinner.<sup>40</sup> In short, these contradictions between traditional gender roles and emancipation still continue to dictate women's lives in post-Soviet Russia.

### UNIVERSITY—AN UNQUESTIONABLE CHOICE

Much research on youth transitions has shown that entering university after school is not an uncommon decision for girls. In fact, in the Australian and British contexts, for example, for young women with a white, middle-class background, it has been described as a natural and unquestionable career progression bolstered by strong family expectations.<sup>41</sup> In this respect, Allatt writes that these 'taken for granted assumptions' were embedded in middle-class family processes, where the expectation of going to university does not need to be articulated.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, research participants also mentioned that at home there was not much discussion about going to university; it was simply embedded in the family, as stated by Violetta:<sup>43</sup>

My parents didn't even say a word; it didn't need any discussion because I knew that there was no other option than going to university. We didn't even talk about it. But then again, it never crossed my mind not to go.

Judging by the sharp rise in student numbers in Russia it seems that going to university is a 'taken for granted assumption' across all social backgrounds. Violetta herself could be described as coming from a well-to-do background since both her parents have respectable jobs. Her mother, for example, works in a bank. Considering class background, it is worth mentioning that scholars, such as the Russian sociologist Simon Kordonsky, argue that class in Russia should be understood in terms of rank (*soslovie*), characterised by the power to pass down privileges from generation to generation.<sup>44</sup> In this way, Russia can be understood as a resource-based society in which resources are constantly redistributed solely among ranks.<sup>45</sup> Yet, despite the dependence of one's choice of university on resources, as will be shown below, many research participants thought that '*going to university is just something you do for yourself*'. In this way, they indicate transition paths that conform to the individualisation discourse and what du Bois-Reymond calls 'do-it-yourself biographies'.<sup>46</sup> Thus, this choice is not something that can be related solely to one's social background. Masha, coming from a not too well-off single-parent household, admits.<sup>47</sup>

To be honest, I only went to university just for the sake of experiencing academic life; not to get a better job or that it would help me to progress in life or because my parents had an academic background. I just like learning something new.

Masha not only communicates the ordinariness of going to university, simply because she likes to learn, but at the same time addresses the somewhat

paradoxical development in Russia, where, although most people value higher education, a university degree does not seem to help to get a better job (as discussed below). Despite high student numbers, Russian higher education has suffered in terms of values and standards. Even though Putin has attempted to modernise higher education, his policies have been slow to bear fruit.<sup>48</sup>

Like Masha, Irina maintains that a 'university degree is like fashion'. She thinks that once people know that 'you got a degree, they go "wow, you got a university degree"'. Irina shows that her pursuit of higher education is significant symbolic capital for her to construct a respectable self-identity with.<sup>49</sup> Both Maria and Irina seem to be performing according to the discourse that demands self-realisation, in which 'each individual must render his or her life meaningful as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in the furtherance of a biographical project of self-realisation'.<sup>50</sup> Although obtaining a university degree is described as 'choice' and 'fashion', it actually emerges as 'compulsory' in so far as it is the only acknowledged way these women can create a respected subject position for themselves in today's Russian society. This development is also indicated in other research on young women in Russia. Walker, for example, shows how 'working-class' female respondents in vocational education also communicated the importance of having a university degree to create a respected position for themselves.<sup>51</sup>

### CHOOSING A FEMALE PROFESSION

In the Western context, research has shown that parents are having an increasing impact on the way in which applicants choose university courses and institution.<sup>52</sup> While a great many of these publications focus on the financial background since the introduction of student fees and its impact on decisions, with parents having a significant influence, often seeing it as a form of investment, there is also a significant number of publications that have highlighted the gendered experience of parental influence.<sup>53</sup> Most interesting, for this chapter, is examining the ways that university courses were chosen, which indicate that it is a gendered experience. Growing up in Russia, where patriarchal values are still very much accepted without much questioning, this selection process often embodied limits for the research participants, as Alina confirms:

I always wanted to become a journalist. I love writing and even in school I wrote little articles. But my father said that journalism is too dangerous for a girl and not the right career for a girl because it could involve travel, so instead I decided to study literature.

From this, we can see that the interview response says rather more about the relationship between parents and children in making choices, and is thereby related to gender, given that fathers are often more protective of their daughters than they are of their sons. In this context, it is also noteworthy and significant that Alina herself is second generation Russian-born Armenian. Previous

research on ethnic minorities in Russia has shown that ethnic minorities, Armenian girls in Russia in particular, encounter patriarchal upbringing and are not completely free agents.<sup>54</sup>

Another research participant also discussed how her parents decided where she should study. Anna is from a village about an hour's journey from Krasnodar. Rostov, which has a better university, is another big city located about two hours from her village and could have been an alternative to Krasnodar, but she says that her parents' overall financial situation did not allow her to go further than Krasnodar; at the same time, she claims, her parents were protective of her, since she was a teenage girl when she had to choose her university:

My parent didn't want me to study far away from them. Our financial situation didn't allow it either. At that time, it seemed cheaper to study in Krasnodar than further away. But then again, a 17-year-old girl far away from her parents ... Well, my parents thought that they really didn't want me to go far away. That's why I didn't go. Even though maybe now I kind of regret that I didn't study in Rostov or Moscow, even.

Interestingly, some research participants considered the aspect of familiarity with specific subjects and chose to study the subject that their parents had studied. However, this principle of choice was not only communicated in interviews with female graduates, but also male graduates and, thus, does not necessarily seem to be a gendered experience.

I chose my course because my parents were indirectly linked to this profession too, well, they kind of suggested to me the Humanities Faculty. (Anita)

Well, it's just we kind of have a dynasty of economists ... Dad, Mum, brother, sister-in-law, granddad and grandma, all of them ... and that's why I studied economics. (Olga)

While Olga does not seem to conform to the gendered experience of choosing a degree subject that is seen rather as more male-dominated, the subsequent excerpt from an interview with Masha confirms a trend in higher education that women generally chose very 'female' degrees.<sup>55</sup>

This is because I understood that I couldn't study well in the Faculty of Science, I don't like maths, chemistry or physics ... I had the choice between history or philology, but chose philology because my sister studied there, and really I knew the faculty very well, that's why ... My Mum also studied at this university, and my sister and I knew some of the lecturers already and some of the students too. I just liked it there...

Yet there is also Katya, who chose to study engineering, and seems to have deliberately made the gendered discourse work to her advantage:

I always wanted to study a course that has fewer girls but more boys because boys always help me, and give me anything I want but girls, they are too dramatic, they gossip and all that rubbish.

### CONSTRAINED BY INEQUALITIES AT UNIVERSITY

According to the 2013 Global Wealth Report, in Russia the gap between the broad masses and the super-rich is greater than in any other major country in the world. Thirty-five per cent of the country's total wealth is in the hands of 0.00008% of the population, or 110 people out of a total population of 143 million.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, higher education is not spared from inequality in terms of opportunities, access and career progression. Therefore, this section explores corruption and informal practices as examples of opportunities and constraints. Most importantly, as previous research has shown, these practices, intended to navigate inequalities, do not explicitly relate to gender but cut across all sections of the Russian population.<sup>57</sup>

Corruption in higher education may be defined as a system of informal relationships established to regulate unsanctioned access to material and non-material assets through abusing the office of public or corporate trust.<sup>58</sup> Corruption in higher education ranges from bribery in order to be admitted to university and receive good marks in examinations, and fraudulent schemes for receiving and using budget money, to bribes for the distribution of money advocated for construction and repair work.<sup>59</sup> The Russian Public Opinion Research Centre conducted a study of corruption perceptions among Russians at the end of 2008. This survey showed that 15% of respondents thought that education was considered amongst the most corrupt professions.<sup>60</sup> Thirty-six per cent of the respondents admitted in this survey that they had made informal payments to educators.<sup>61</sup>

According to some research participants, corruption is so great a problem that the end result of a degree seems not to matter anymore:

A university degree is not really a guarantee that you are a clever and well-educated person, qualified for work. These days you can buy your degree, you can pay to study, you can pay for exams, you can get an average degree, or you can get a first class degree, but this is not necessarily because you studied hard but because you have a good relationship with your lecturer, meaning you paid your lecturer.  
(Anna)

As research has shown, the increasing gap between pay rates in the private and public sectors of the economy urges public employees to seek other sources of income.<sup>62</sup> In post-Soviet times, the average salaries for academics have been lower than the average per capita income in Russia, with professors earning less than a professional holding a Master's degree. Besides encouraging academics to find additional sources of income, this has also led to a significant brain drain

—estimates indicate that approximately 80,000 academics left Russia in the early 1990s alone—while not enough young Russians are entering academia to replace an ageing academic cohort.<sup>63</sup>

With few exceptions, Russian universities do not address issues relating to academic offenses (such as plagiarism, the falsification of term papers or even various forms of gratification in return for good grades) at institutional level.<sup>64</sup> These corrupt practices are used by both students and lecturers. According to a MEMO Survey, 14% of the respondents reported that they had cheated during exams and 4% had bought at least one mid-term-, term-paper or thesis.<sup>65</sup> Just as the survey showed, most of the research participants talked casually about these practices and justified using them to get by in their degree course:

I paid a bribe for my practical training at university. We needed to conduct a period of summer practical training. I know that it's very hot in Krasnodar in the summer; I didn't have anywhere to live and was supposed to work for three weeks in the park interviewing people. I knew I wouldn't like it. And in all fairness, I thought I wouldn't learn anything new from it. So I found out how much it would cost, put the money into an envelope, and met the lecturer at the other end of town, in a different part of Krasnodar. We did it all really professionally (*grahmotno*). I went with him to his car, we didn't exchange a word about the money, about the bribe, he just opened the door of his car, I put the envelope on the seat inside the car and left. Well, you see all was very professionally done without any risks. Like, because he didn't say a word, I couldn't record him on my phone. There's no evidence. And well, I know that many do pass exams in this way. (Tatiana)

Like Tatiana, who justified her bribe by referring to the hot weather in Krasnodar and her surmise that she would not learn anything, many students provided similar justifications of the ordinariness of these corrupt practices. However, some of the research participants resorted to these practices very much out of desperation, as one young student, a single mother explained to me: by paying for her exams, she could get a degree without going to university, and at the same time could take care of her child. In short, she is making such opportunities work in her favour to enable her to pass her degree, which in the long run could contribute to her following the path of 'self-realisation'.

Noteworthy here is that these corrupt practices very often originate in the belief, as students claim, that higher education in Russia has nowadays lost its high quality. Maria, for example, said that 'in Soviet times, having a higher education degree meant you are *intelligentsiya*, but these days having a degree really means nothing'. Tatiana also made it clear in our interview that her future salary does not depend on her education but actually on how well she works. Hence a degree for her is more a formality and not necessarily 'a sign of intelligence'. Others, such as Violetta, highlight the influence of corruption on the devaluing of degrees in Russia, but at the same time stress the meaning of a degree as symbolic capital:

A diploma is just a tick in the box – many employers know that you can buy a diploma. In fact, it's not important if you have a diploma as employers don't really look at it. You don't really need a diploma for career reasons. But I guess many parents would like to say 'this is my child with higher education'. The general saying is 'what would my child be without higher education?'

Another research participant makes it even more explicit: 'our higher degrees aren't of high quality and therefore don't mean much. You can buy degrees'. She continues, however, to justify these informal and corrupt practices as a sign of real democracy and concludes by raising the question: 'Whether you pay or don't pay for your exam, isn't this what democracy is about—free choice?'

The above interview excerpts all come from research participants whose families are fairly well-to-do. However, it seems that the research participants who rely on state-funded places and have no money to pay bribes are far more critical of these informal practices when they talk about their disadvantages. The next excerpt is from Irina's interview. Irina studies economics and has obtained a state-funded place. She calls herself disadvantaged because, according to her, only a few lecturers treat her fairly; some lecturers even give her worse marks than she deserves because she cannot pay a bribe. Nonetheless, she concludes by defending corrupt practices.

Well, the Economics and Law Faculty is one of the most corrupt faculties in the university. I just know that my peers, some of them, said to the lecturer, 'well, I don't want to study ... well, that costs, for example, 10,000 roubles'. Well, we have so many studying economics, they're all from rich families, they just need to tick the box and have a degree. For them it's much easier to pay lecturers than actually study. But then again, why go to lectures and write exams if you can already earn some money?

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the complex experiences of young women in higher education in post-Soviet Russia. In many respects, the empirical data presented here confirm the reflexive modernisation thesis, which points to processes of individualisation and the weakening of norms that previously guided the lives of individuals, just as in other Western societies. With regard to the ways that these young women decide whether to study at university and choose their course, for instance, this analysis shows similarities to their equivalent for female graduates in Western democracies. Just like Baker's and Reay et al.'s research participants, the young women's narratives in the research presented here demonstrate aspects of notions of self-realisation and choice, as well as personal responsibility.<sup>66</sup> They navigate their gendered identities by, for example, consciously choosing university degrees as expected in light of the gendered discourse in Russian society.

Even though they demonstrated agency and choice, these were not always supported by resources and opportunities, especially when it comes to the emerging higher education system in which corruption is entrenched. While this provides opportunities for some to succeed, for others with limited resources it is a clear disadvantage. To conclude, the ways the young women in this research ‘choose’ to negotiate their identities point to McRobbie’s contention that ‘choice is a modality of constraint’.<sup>67</sup> It is not that these women free themselves from constraints, but that they deal with them in a complex, ‘individualised’ way. Although most of the research participants appear to move freely within these constraints, they do not challenge them.

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## ARCHIVES

AFSC FS	Archives of the American Friends Services Committee (Philadelphia)
ERAF	Eesti Riigiarhiivi Filiaali; State Archives of Estonia (Tallinn)
GAPO	Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Penzenskoi oblasti; State Archive of Penza Oblast (Penza)
GAPO/OFOPO	Otdel fondov obshchestvenno-politicheskikh organizatsii; Division of Fonds of Socio-Political Organisations
GARF	Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii; State Archive of the Russian Federation (Moscow)
GARF A	Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv RSFSR; Central State Archive of the RSFSR (Moscow)
GAVO	Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Vinnitskoi oblasti; State Archive of Vinnitsa Oblast (Vinnitsa)
GAYaO	Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Yaroslvskoi oblasti; State Archive of Yaroslavl' oblast' (Yaroslavl')
LVA	Latvijas Valsts arhīvs; State Archives of Latvia (Riga)
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs (Georgia) Archive (Tbilisi)
NA IRI RAN	Nauchnyi arkhiv instituta Rossiskoi istorii Rossiskoi Akademii Nauk; Scholarly Archive of the Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow)
NARB	Natsional'nyi arkhiv Respubliki Belarus'; National Archives of the Republic of Belarus (Minsk)
NARK	Natsional'nyi arkhiv Respubliki Kareliya; National Archive of the Republic of Karelia (Petrozavodsk)
NART	Natsionl'nyi arkhiv Respubliki Tatarstan; National Archive of the Tatarstan Republic (Kazan)

- PAIPI TsK KP RT Partiynyi Arkhiv Instituta Politicheskikh Issledovaniï pri Tsentral'nom Komitete Kommunisticheskoi Partii Respubliki Tadjikistan;  
Party Archive of the Institute for Political Research of the Republic of Tajikistan Communist Party Central Committee (Dushanbe)
- RAS Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk  
Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow)
- RGAE Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki;  
Russian State Archive of the Economy (Moscow)
- RGALI Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustva;  
Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (Moscow)
- RGANI Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii;  
Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (Moscow)
- RGASPI Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskii istorii;  
Russian State Archive of Social-Political History (Moscow)
- RGASPI M Komsomol archive (at RGASPI)
- RGVA *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv*  
Russian State Military Archive (Moscow)
- TsAOPIM Tsentral'nyi arkhiv obshchestvenno-politicheskoi istorii Moskvy;  
Central Archive of the Social and Political History of Moscow
- TsDOOSO Tsentral'nyi dokumentatsii obshchestvennykh organizatsii Sverdlovskoi oblasti;  
Centre for Documentation of Social Organisations of Sverdlovsk Oblast (Yekaterinburg)
- TsGAIPD Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov;  
Central State Archive of Historico-Political Records (Moscow)
- TsGALI SPb Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva Sankt-Peterburga  
Central State Archive of Literature and Art of St. Petersburg
- TsGANTD SPb Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv nauchno-tekhnicheskoi dokumentatsii Sankt-Peterburga  
Central State Archive of Scientific-Technical Documentation of St. Petersburg
- VOANPI Vologodskii oblastnoi arkhiv noveishei politicheskoi istorii;  
Vologda Oblast Archive of Contemporary Political History (Vologda)

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