

le livre de Stéphane Capot n'en est pas moins utile à qui travaille sur l'une ou l'autre de ces thématiques, pour la comparaison qu'il permet.

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Barbara Alpern Engel and Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, eds. — *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History* (translated by Sona Hoisington). Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997. Pp. x, 236.

The collapse of the Soviet Union has transformed the way Western scholars conduct their research into the Soviet experience. On the most obvious level, formerly closed archives have been opened, permitting the usual type of archival investigation. For those seeking sociological data or public opinion, surveys can be conducted and questionnaires distributed. Finally, for the first time in 60 years, oral history is possible.

A Revolution of Their Own is an excellent example of what intelligent oral history can produce. Anastasia Posadskaya, former director of the Centre for Gender Studies in Moscow, conducted 25 taped interviews with “ordinary” Russian women in 1994. From these, she and her co-editor, Barbara Engel from the University of Colorado, selected eight for inclusion in this volume. The editors sought women born before the revolution who remained active in public life until the 1950s. They were interested in how these women viewed the revolution; how they fared under NEP, collectivization, and industrialization; how they and their families were affected by the terror of the 1930s and the difficulties of the war years; how they profited from new educational and vocational opportunities made available to women by the Soviet state; and how they viewed their roles as wives, mothers, and women.

Those whose comments were eventually selected for publication came from a variety of social backgrounds — peasant, proletarian, clerical, noble. They also represented diverse occupations: teaching, medicine, journalism, engineering, a chauffeur, and a collective farm worker. The “success stories” of stereotypical Soviet women so common in pre-1991 publications are notably and mercifully absent. All but one of the subjects lived their lives in the provinces, usually in the Urals or Siberia. Contrary to the editors’ intentions, ethnic diversity is lacking — all of the women were Slavic and native Russian speakers — and peasant women are under-represented in the sample.

The interviews chosen were subsequently radically abridged by the two editors to remove irrelevant or repetitive material and annotated to explain obscure references and inconsistent or contradictory testimony. Each interview has an informative introduction and a series of interesting photographs of the subject. The volume includes an introduction and a glossary for the general reader and it concludes with a more sophisticated “afterword” and a discussion of methodology for the specialist. Full transcripts of 12 of the interviews and the tapes of all 25 have been deposited at the Hoover Institution for use by other scholars interested in oral history.

In some respects, the experiences of these women are predictable and simply confirm our previous understanding of Soviet society. The economic hardships endured by citizens of all walks of life during the 1930s and 1940s are amply illustrated. So also are the absence of adequate housing and the widespread use of abortion as a means of birth control. The importance of class origins on education and employment is given useful specificity. Those women with “objectionable pasts” — the daughters of a successful Old Believer peasant, a noble landowner, and a village priest — had disrupted childhoods during the 1920s and were denied educational and vocational opportunities unless they denounced their parents or disguised their origins. In contrast, two women from working-class families obtained the type of education denied the vast majority of their pre-revolutionary counterparts and entered productive careers in medicine and higher education in accordance with Soviet mythology.

In other instances, however, the experiences of these women run counter to Soviet stereotypes or to perceived wisdom in the West. Despite the fact that these were “ordinary” women, usually from modest backgrounds and uninvolved in higher politics or government, all but one had a brother, father, husband, or lover who suffered “repression” during the 1930s. The concept of the purges affecting largely those at the upper levels of society, as postulated by some revisionist historians in the West, clearly does not find support in this sample.

The ideal of the strong socialist family must also be re-examined. All eight women were married, in one case three times and in three other instances twice. Only one of these thirteen unions proved to be lasting and satisfying, while two others were happy but abruptly terminated by war or arrest. In most of the remaining cases, the husbands were abusive or unfaithful, were frequently drunk, and ultimately abandoned their wives or were divorced by them. Seven of these women were forced to be single parents for much of their lives. None of them acknowledged an awareness of the theories of female equality as preached by early Soviet feminists or practised briefly by Zhenotdel in the 1920s. They were scornful of the nurseries, communal kitchens, and orphanages set up by the state supposedly to aid them. Posadskaya found that her feminist perspective was alien to all of her subjects. While even the successful women interviewed acknowledged having experienced sexual harassment and unequal treatment in the workplace, none blamed these inequities on a patriarchal system or advocated any form of division of labour in the home. Soviet women may have participated more actively in public and productive life than their Western counterparts during the first half of the twentieth century, but they lag far behind in almost all other areas of the feminist agenda during the second half of the century.

I was surprised by the relatively minor role played by the Second World War in the recollections of these women. While all experienced economic hardship during the war, far fewer suffered the loss of family members in combat than during collectivization or the purges. The heroic image often associated with the Soviet war effort is curiously missing. Paradoxically, the most detailed and original interview in this book was given by Vera Ivanovna Malakhova, who recounted her experiences as a doctor with a front-line infantry regiment. Her lengthy comments about the role of women

in combat, sexual harassment by officers, the abandoning of wounded soldiers, the prevalence of the secret police near the front lines, and the popular image of female soldiers as simply camp followers will surely be of interest to military historians.

A Revolution of Their Own has been thoughtfully edited and attractively produced. Even this reviewer, an admittedly old-fashioned political historian of the male type, found the essays enjoyable and informative. They will be of particular interest to persons studying the comparative history of women's experience in Europe and to students of twentieth-century Russia.

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A. James Hammerton — *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life*. New York: Routledge, 1992; 1995. Pp. xi, 236.

The paperback re-issue of James Hammerton's study of marital conflict in nineteenth-century England brings a rich and important study to a wider audience. This study moves well beyond the most sensational and well-known cases of marital conflict — such as Caroline Norton's case — to illuminate the diverse experiences of both men and women across the social spectrum. The range of Hammerton's sources is impressive. He moves confidently from the newspaper accounts of cases in the Preston Police Court to John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* to autobiographies, fiction, and prescriptive literature, as well as debates in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Westminster Review*. The richest and most illuminating sources for his study, however, are the cases that came before the new Divorce Court after the *Matrimonial Causes Act* of 1857. Hammerton's analysis of individual cases allows him to uncover the complex and competing causes of marital conflict and marital breakdown and the ways in which those conflicts and breakdowns were shaped by and in turn helped to shape class and gender ideologies in Victorian England.

Hammerton's main goal in the book is to complicate our understanding of the supposed shift which took place during this period, from a "patriarchal" to a "companionate" model of marriage. While Hammerton agrees that, broadly speaking, it is possible to trace a shift towards a more companionate model, at least at the level of prescriptive ideology, he is adamant that historians must recognize the ways in which inequality and patriarchal power were recuperated within the companionate model of marriage. The companionate and patriarchal models of marriage, he argues, were not opposites: they co-existed in uneasy tension. At the same time, he does trace a significant shift over the course of the century, as concerns over the regulation and modification of male behaviour gradually displaced earlier injunctions to women to "suffer and be still".

The first part of the book explores conflict within working-class marriages and focuses on cases of domestic violence. In this discussion, Hammerton is at pains to point out both the limitations of the sources available and the political context in which the debates over (working-class) domestic violence emerged. He notes, for