

РЕЦЕНЗИИ

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Elena Zdravomyslova, Anna Rotkirch, and Anna Temkina (eds.). *Novyi byt v sovremennoi Rossii: gendernye issledovaniia posvednevnosti* [Gender Studies of Everyday Life in Contemporary Russia]. Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2009. 524 p. ISBN 978-5-9438-0077-1.

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Novyi byt v sovremennoi Rossii presents recent research conducted in Saint Petersburg by sociologists of the European University, the Center for Independent Social Research, the Smolny Institute, and Saint Petersburg State University as well as Finnish institutions. While the studies presented are quite varied—topically, and to some extent methodologically—they are united under the rubric of everyday life (discussed both in terms of *byt* and as *povednevnost'*) in contemporary urban Russia, with the primary focus on shifting gender identities and reconfigurations of the private/domestic sphere. The authors and their research subjects do not stay neatly within the bounds of the home, however, demonstrating instead how ideological and practical renegotiations of the “private” often take place in more public or socially liminal spaces, including, notably, interactions between in-home workers (such as cleaners and nannies) and their employers or between medical professionals and their patients.

While a brief review can hardly do justice to all of the contributions in this volume of over 500 pages, a few key themes are memorable. One set of articles focuses on how the home, and expectations for women’s work within (and beyond) it, are being transformed through practice in contemporary Saint Petersburg. In the context of the Russian economy’s commercialization, the work of taking care of living spaces and children—typically included in Soviet women’s “double burden”—is likewise being commercialized. In her article on nannies, Elena Zdravomyslova shows how this commercialization depends, from the perspective of employers, on cultivating ways of establishing trust with the relative strangers who enter their homes. Though private agencies have arisen to help families locate appropriate candidates for nanny work, many employers prefer to work through informal social networks, feeling that

these deliver more tried and trustworthy employees. Consonant with such informal practices, nannies are often incorporated into the household to be “like family”—though the qualification “like” indexes the social distance employers wish to maintain from their employees. Striking similar chords, Olga Tkach discusses the relationships that are negotiated between women employers and those they hire to clean their homes. Tkach sensitively portrays the viewpoints of both employers and workers and describes many aspects of their negotiated relationships, including practical concerns such as the need to align expectations about what “cleanliness” entails and more affective matters such as the ongoing tension between emotional closeness and contractual relations. She situates her study vis-à-vis recent work in the sociology and anthropology of transnational migrant labor, attending like Zdravomyslova to the “commercialization of intimate life” previously discussed by Arlie Hochschild (2003). At the same time, the authors highlight the specificities of the Russian context (for Tkach, the key point is that here the newly commercialized labor of care is being performed by local, less affluent women rather than by transnational workers as in the U.S. and Western Europe).

Several other contributors investigate how the home is, quite literally, being reconstructed in capitalist Saint Petersburg, as residents attempt to make their apartments align with their felt or aspirational class identities. Shpakovskaia discusses how the new middle class is reshaping home spaces as part of a rationalized life project in which personal tastes and shared lifestyles are developed within households (see also Andreeva). Other articles examine how the commercialization of private life has impacted sexuality and reproduction, including the disciplinary relationships that exist between gynecologists and their patients (Larivaara); communication about birth control measures between sexual partners (Meylakhs); and both official rhetorics (Isola) and more subjective perspectives (Rotkirch and Kesseli) concerning childbirth and the desirability of children as part of the expected female lifecourse. In a particularly interesting and original piece, Brednikova employs auto-ethnography to assess how age categories are applied to pregnant women and new mothers. Using Foucault to theorize institutional practices of power and subjectification, Brednikova explores how medical institutions can construct the same woman (in this case, herself) as both a “young” and an “old” mother in different contexts; the contradiction becomes intelligible when we see that these seemingly arbitrary age labels index distinct relationships of authority and discipline in specific medical settings. In another consideration of the often tense confrontation between medical authority and “private” concerns, Angelova and Temkina investigate the rising participation of Russian fathers in the births of their children—a trend in some cases associated with progressive attitudes and egalitarian relationships between partners, but in other situations less planned or intentional. Across the board, the authors find that the increased presence of fathers in delivery rooms reflects couples’ lack of trust in the medical establishment (see also Odintsova on the politics of swaddling).

As the examples above should suggest, the scope of the volume is quite broad; there is easily material enough here for two volumes. Overall, the articles cohere

fairly well around the question of how commercialization and related institutional and discursive shifts impact interpersonal relationships and self-identity (see Temkina), including women's decision-making about their own obligations towards professional development versus care of the home and family (e.g., Zdravomyslova, Chepurnaia). The volume is also about the commercialization of care and the class-stratified division of labor that accompanies it; different women bear different burdens and responsibilities, even as they all seek to provide for their families while performing (and reimagining) normative womanhood. Particularly welcome is the care taken by many of the authors to provide historical context for contemporary developments and to give circumspect attention to the ways in which many Soviet-era ideals and practices (notably, dependence on informal social networks) continue in the new context of privatization (see also Caldwell 2004, Rivkin-Fish 2005). Western scholars such as Hochschild are engaged for their applicable concepts, but ever with an eye to Russian contextual specificities. The group is also distinguished by some fresh methodological choices, such as Brednikova's auto-ethnography and Yargomskaia's look at contemporary understandings of female sexuality via an analysis of websites that promote plastic surgeries intended to "renew" virginity.

It should be noted that "middle class" lifestyles are certainly at the heart of this volume, though perspectives on lower-income women and families are included (Tkach, Yaroshenko). While the authors are careful to specify what kind of occupational, income, or consumer guidelines they use to determine the middle-classness of their interviewees, class as a performative and contested identity is not problematized significantly (though see Gladarev and Tsinman's interesting discussion of how the Russian middle class both models itself on the West and is developing a sort of consumer Slavophilism; see also Liechty 2003, Patico 2008). More theoretical attention could be paid, too, to the "private" as a realm not (just) resignified through new practices and discourses in a relatively coherent way in the recent Russian past, but also as a situational and pragmatic *claim* that is continually asserted, shifted, and reframed across specific social contexts in any time and place, as posited by Gal (2002).

Overall, *Novyi byt v sovremennoi Rossii* is a rich compilation that illuminates the intersection of neoliberal understandings of personal freedom and personal responsibility with shifting gender contracts and local political economies. More broadly, it demonstrates the vitality of gender research underway in Saint Petersburg and reflects a high level of engagement with, and contribution to, sociological conversations underway in the United States and elsewhere in the world. One hopes that this work will soon be published in translation, so that a wider swath of international interlocutors will speak back and the conversation will continue.

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