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Irina Iukina. *Russkii feminizm kak vyzov sovremennosti* [Russian Feminism as a Contemporary Challenge]. Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteia, 2007. 539 p. ISBN 978-5-9033-5421-4.

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Since the mid-1980s—particularly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union—the study of women and gender has become a vibrant aspect of Russian social, cultural and historical research and intellectual discourse. Irina Iukina's monograph is part of that remarkable and overdue opening up. While Russian readers will have their own perspectives on the issues raised in it, to an outsider like myself this study has a special significance. It both confirms and challenges the approaches and conclusions of the research of Western historians, social scientists and literary specialists since the 1960s and 1970s, a period when the study of Russian feminism and the "bourgeois" women's movement was largely dismissed by the Soviet historical establishment. I should note, however, that scholars in Western universities had to fight their own academic establishment for recognition; in the West the reluctance to take women's (and later gender) history seriously was less openly driven by ideology than in the USSR, but hardly less powerful.

One of the main challenges that Iukina throws down concerns the conceptualization of the research. Hardly surprisingly, she devotes much of the Preface and Chapter I to a critique of Soviet Marxist historiography, especially its requirement for research to be framed in the constricting theory of ineluctable class conflict. But she also targets empirical historical research, which she accuses of assuming that the practice of history is somehow "natural" (p. 13). This critique applies to Western historiography as much as to Soviet. Iukina notes that only in the post-Soviet period have Russian feminism and the women's movement been subjected to new theoretical approaches: gender studies, political studies, and the sociology of social movements (p. 37). She cites the work of Svetlana Aivazova, Ol'ga Khasbulatova, and Natal'ia Gafizova, which provide the methodological framework for Iukina's study. Remarkably, she plays down the critical role of economic change (Western and Russian) as a driving force in women's movements. Social and economic change is categorized as one of the "external" factors at the "macro-level," whereas it was surely intrinsic to the transformation of gender relations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Perhaps Iukina is over-compensating for the crude economic determinism of Soviet Marxist theory in this regard.

The second challenge in this book is more specific. Iukina claims that women's liberation in Russia must be divided into two distinct periods. The first period

(1850s to 1905) she labels "women's movement"; the second (1905–1918) "feminist movement." She argues that in the first phase women activists lacked an ideological framework, their work was ameliorative and they did not directly challenge the existing patriarchal gender relations. The later feminist movement, she claims, was a "logical development" of the first phase and arose out of women activists' increasing awareness of the "gender asymmetry" in Russian society (p. 8). This argument is attractive, but not quite persuasive. Firstly, many if not all of the women who began to organize from the mid-1850s were indeed aware of the asymmetry and the explicitly patriarchal structure of tsarist society (in the 1860s it was common to compare women's position in society to that of the serfs before Emancipation). Secondly, the absence of a political dimension to the women's movement before 1905 owed more to the prohibitions on political activity and discourse (increasingly during the 1870s and for a decade after Alexander II's assassination in 1881) than to the lack of consciousness. It was almost impossible for women to organize on their own behalf until the mid-1890s and when eventually the very moderate feminist Russian Women's Mutual Philanthropic Society (RZhV-BO) was authorized, its activities were strictly monitored and restricted. So while I would agree with Iukina that the movement after 1905 differed significantly from that of the first phase, I would argue that one should view both phases as "feminist," but the second phase as political feminism, enabled by new social and political conditions.

Iukina's third challenge concerns the relationship of Soviet feminism to the pre-revolutionary liberal movement. Integral to her critical dialogue with Soviet Marxist historiography is her assertion that both feminisms are inextricably linked, a statement that must seem more radical to a Russian than to a Western readership. However, in her critique of the Soviet Marxist discourse of class conflict, she understates the significance of exactly that conflict within the women's movement before 1917. We can agree that the "class interests" of liberal middle- and upper-class feminists were not invariably opposed to those of working-class and peasant women (though certainly there were different interests and political positions); but there is no question that revolutionary (and pre-eminently Bolshevik) politics hindered the attempts of liberal and radical women to work together, and that there was mutual antagonism between them (with some notable exceptions).

Finally, a brief word on the issue of misogyny in Russia. Iukina cites me as arguing that misogynist ideas were never popular in Russia (p. 233). This is not quite accurate. My argument was that unlike France, for example, misogyny was not openly displayed in Russian radical discourses, because it was indelibly associated with right-wing (and therefore anti-feminist) polemics. But misogyny certainly influenced official ideology and its response to the women's movement. Iukina is quite right to point to the popularity of imported misogynist texts (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Weininger) in Russian translation around 1900. By that date there was a new readership for such texts; in earlier decades literate Russians—much smaller in number–would have read Schopenhauer in the original German.

There is much more to comment on than I have space for here. But overall this is a very valuable book. I suspect that Iukina did not need the methodological framework she created for herself, as her study resembles in many ways the empirical approach she criticizes at the beginning. It is very readable, well organized and informative, with helpful and illuminating biographical (and pictorial) sketches of leading figures in the women's movement. It will be indispensible for any future research on feminism in Russia in this period.