

REVIEWS

Sharon Kowalsky. *Deviant Women: Female Crime and Criminology in Revolutionary Russia, 1880-1930*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009. 330 pp. \$42.00 cloth. ISBN 978-0-87580-406-4

Sharon Kowalsky's *Deviant Women* begins with a scintillating account of Nastia E., who in 1923 cut off her husband's penis after she found out that he cheated on and infected her with a venereal disease. Psychiatrists and criminologists explained her actions not as a radical reaction to a horrible domestic situation but rather as a manifestation of her "primitive" rural background and larger female concerns regarding reproduction and the domestic sphere. The story of Nastia E. exemplifies this book's larger focus on criminologists' construction of female crime to understand how much the Soviet Revolution transformed attitudes about gender constructions and social and legal norms.

Deviant Women is divided into five chapters in two parts. Part One lays the historical and conceptual foundation for Part Two. The first chapter provides an historical background on the development of criminology in Russia. Late nineteenth-century Russian social anthropologists, jurists, and criminologists reacted to the writings of West European criminologists, especially those of Cesare Lombroso, and wondered whether they could be applied to Russia. Russia's intellectuals debated the role of biology and sociology in criminal deviance. What is important in this book, however, is how Russia's scholars understood female deviance. According to Lombroso, women were inherently primitive and as such were natural prostitutes and potential criminals. While many Russian scholars were critical of Lombroso's views of the primitive woman, they still emphasized female physiology and sexuality as critical factors in female criminality. This idea of female criminality carried through the October Revolution and into the 1920s, when the Soviet state supported the professionalization and growth of criminology, which Kowalsky discusses in chapter 2.

The second part of the book engages the reader in fascinating essays on specific aspects of criminologists' constructions of female deviance. Chapter 3, "The Woman's Sphere" explores the tension between social and physiological understandings of female crime. Socialist specialists believed that females would struggle when they entered the public sphere and the "struggle for existence" but would eventually overcome primitive ways tied to the domestic sphere when the socialist economy and culture prevailed in Russia. However, criminologists (non-socialist and socialist alike) after the Revolution still incorporated the role of female sexuality on crime. In chapter 4, Kowalsky outlines how criminolo-

gists correlated criminal behavior and geography. Criminologists saw the urban landscapes as male and ascribed crimes that occurred there as professional and modern. Rural crime, though, was seen as female and marked as unconscious, peasant and traditional. As criminologists ascribed crimes to geographic mentality, certain crimes were seen as rural (such as brewing *samogon*) or urban, regardless of where they actually happened. In the NEP-era society, this dichotomy became a point of concern for Soviet officials who saw women as both backward and peasant, and so still not adopted socialist, proletarian, modern values. The “backward” crime of infanticide is the subject of a fitting final chapter as it highlights all of the tensions in Soviet criminological constructions of female crime. For criminal specialists, women committed infanticide for material, moral, and domestic ills that should not have appeared in a socialist society. Specialists wrestled to explain the persistence of infanticide and once again turned to the social and cultural backwardness of women and their physiological deficiencies. They fought to overcome these problems with education and social services. This is also one of the few chapters where Kowalsky deeply analyzes how courts interpreted the law and criminologists’ understanding of a crime. In this case, many courts offered leniency to the mothers who had committed infanticide, even if it did not completely correspond to the law.

The book covers 1880 to 1930, although the bulk of the material pertains to the NEP era. As the chapters are thematic, rather than chronological, the revolutionary divide fades into the background. While this leads to an initial cognitive dissonance, it also underscores Kowalsky’s main point that the socialist ideals continued pre-revolutionary images of the female deviance.

Deviant Women is part of a larger wave of scholarship on the role of human sciences and health in the modern Russian state’s attempts to transform its subjects. Kowalsky and Daniel Beer in *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), for example, both provide a compelling argument that the Soviet state empowered human scientists in their endeavors to study and transform the population. Daniel Beer uses a study of the human sciences and especially criminology to critique the role of liberalism in developing the modern Soviet state’s transformative projects. Kowalsky’s study supports Beer’s claims, although she does not dwell on the role of liberal ideals in the violence of the Soviet state. Kowalsky does, however, infuse the central role of gender construction in understanding how human scientists and the Soviet state understood the population and how that shaped their policies for transformation. Likewise, one of the other useful contributions of the wave of scholarship on Russian social sciences is how it links Russia to the West, something that Kowalsky does throughout the book, especially with Great Britain. This

pan-European approach is important because it emphasizes that similar intellectual trends and gender constructions flowed across the continent and political systems.

The book examines a largely male-constructed model of female deviance. I had hoped for more examples of criminal cases and individuals to allow females themselves to be actors. This might be too much to ask if we accept the Foucauldian dilemma, in which the observed have little to no agency in their fate. However, there is a wealth of court cases, studies, and journal articles that give voices to these women. Likewise, not all Soviet court workers subscribed to the modernist conception of female deviance, especially not in the countryside. These are less critiques of what is a very fine and coherent cultural history of criminology and more a statement that there are places for scholars to build off of Kowalsky's work.

Sharaon Kowalsky has produced an intellectually stimulating study. It greatly expands our understanding of Russian criminology, social norms, and fundamental importance of gender in late Imperial and Soviet state social programs.

Aaron B. Retish

Wayne State University