

REVIEWS

Dan Healey. *Bolshevik Sexual Forensics: Diagnosing Disorder in the Clinic and Courtroom, 1917-1939*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009. 262 pp. \$40.00 cloth. ISBN: 978-0875804057.

In this densely packed monograph, Dan Healey truly does diagnose the disorders and the discrepancies in Soviet sexual forensics and the modern sexual revolution Soviet style. Although the work covers a number of institutions and agencies, it focuses on the medical profession, specifically on those physicians and psychiatrists who dealt with sexual crimes or sexual deformities. Reference is made to judges, police officials, criminal investigators and even some Communist Party functionaries, but the real agents are the medical personnel who examined victims, perpetrators, hermaphrodites and regular citizens involved in trying to establish some credibility, or proof, in relation to a wide range of sexual issues. The book is complicated by the author's decision to compare across tsarist and Soviet periods and between NEP-era Soviet policies and Stalin-era conditions. Not only does the book present broad, sweeping histories of a number of topics, but it also presents highly personal and extremely specific cases based on trial and medical records of particular ordinary Soviet citizens caught up in rape and other cases either as victims or defendants. This grand narrative is both a strength and a weakness as it generally is exciting, broad-reaching and illuminating, but in some cases can seem repetitious and create confusion for the reader.

Although this book covers 1917-1939, as purported in the title, it definitely focuses on the first ten years of the Soviet era, due to the 1917 revolution itself and the two law codes established in 1922 and 1926. In several chapters, the book also has extensive background on the tsarist period, as early as the middle of the nineteenth century. In fact there is really more information from this earlier era than there is concerning the last ten years of the study. Multiple mentions are made of the Stalin era and specific cases and testimonies are drawn upon from these later years, but there is little attempt to provide a full analysis of this period. In fact the most in-depth analysis is placed in the conclusion. Thus the periodicity of this book squarely lands it in the NEP era.

The use of sources is also broad. The author perused national and regional archives, and a vast array of secondary literature on a wide range of tangential topics to augment his archival materials and case studies. These fascinating case studies range in time from the 1920s to the 1930s, include both urban and rural cases, and views from the center of Russia as well as from the provinces. In addition, the ages and backgrounds of victims and perpetrators are varied.

Healey begins with an analysis of sex and sexuality as it was perceived before and after the revolution. He admirably argues, with evidence from other studies as well, that the Bolsheviks re-defined sex and sexuality from tsarist, bourgeois and even early revolutionary practices to bring social order, modernity and the collective to a society rife with religious views, lack of scientific knowledge and institutions, and an elite tendency to follow the Western models. By creating new criminal codes, re-aligning forensics from tsarist police control to Soviet medical institutes, and emphasizing the material/bodily side of sexuality rather than the emotional/psychological, a new profession, forensic medicine and psychiatry, was vitalized and conjoined with the police and legal systems.

Healey presents a history of forensic medicine and describes some of the key personalities involved with the transition in the early Bolshevik years. They were made more independent from the police and court systems. Expertise was honored in ways the tsarist system had rejected: right to participate in trials fully, interview parties involved, pay for service and more. The attitude of the new health ministry, despite the noticeable lack of Party members and political activists, was to promote a "vision of proactive 'diagnosticians of society' whose work would uncover social defects and suggest timely remedies" (p. 26) Yet, criminal codes and definitions still limited some of this work and also point to the lack of progress in the so-called sexual revolution. Where sex crimes were concerned, the law eliminated "age of consent" as a definition in favor of the more ambiguous "sexual maturity". The examples illustrate how women were now the focus of examinations to establish their sexual maturity before decisions were made as to the credible claims of rape. Thus despite the claim of gender equality and equal opportunity, this legal decision limited women's rights, focused on the age-old virgin hymen, and the morality of the victim more so than on the crime inflicted or the status of the perpetrator(s). Clearly crimes against women who were deemed sexually immature or who suffered defloration were punished much more severely than crimes against mature women. Thus the claims of older sexually active women might be disregarded, questioned more rigorously with multiple physical exams, or under punished due to the excessive focus on the victim. This was clearly a blow to female rights and social/sexual equality. Male sexual maturity was not as emphasized and when it was it was judged in more psychological terms than physical ones.

Healey covers several areas concerning forensic medicine. He describes the development of the profession itself, the pitfalls of being first linked overly closely with police in the tsarist period, and then being independent in the early Soviet era. The field lacked trained physicians, and many areas had no experts or relied on one individual for all cases. Yet in more urban areas, or where institutes were strong, commissions

and panels could be established. One entire chapter is dedicated to the psychiatrists and how they played a role in the system. This and the chapter on how psychiatry and medicine dealt with hermaphrodites were almost stand alone in their nature and were two of the most solidly argued and supported chapters in the book. Other issues covered included the research and publications in forensic medicine and the changes in these trends over history, the role of the courts and investigators *vis-à-vis* forensic experts, and the attitudes of the public and criminal defendants about medical arguments. Healey also addresses the use of ideology in the field, minimal in most cases, but it does lend a class conscious interpretation to situations with victims and criminals alike.

This broad analysis would benefit from a clear explanation of Bolshevik attitudes toward homosexuality. Despite Healey's expertise on the subject, he does not thoroughly explain the relationship of homosexuality to the new sexual forensics.¹ The issue is raised in several cases and it is clear that homosexuality was considered legal from 1918 until the codes were changed again in 1934. However no attempt is made to clarify why Bolshevik policies supported this. After all, with an emphasis on the collective, bodies being functional for society and a de-emphasis on the individual and desire, and given the generally narrow interpretation most Bolsheviks had towards sex - all points that Healey makes in relation to other issues - such an explanation seems warranted. It is clear that Soviet physicians and psychiatrists in the case of hermaphrodites did not have any qualms about leaving an individual whatever gender they socially and functionally practiced, no matter the hormonal and organ-based gender definition, even if it ended up in "homosexual" marriages. Healey does point out that this allowance for personal preference over social or scientific norms was a rare case where Soviet psychiatry and sexology out-progressed the West by decades.

The author scatters transliterated Russian terms and phrases throughout the text in a seemingly random manner. These terms are certainly useful but the haphazard manner of selection and placement is distracting. A glossary of Russian terms might have been more useful. The various segments of the book stand up well and are solidly written, interspersing historical narrative, analysis and the recounting of individual cases in a flowing style. Yet the over-arching organization of the book as a whole sometimes loses the flow of the main theme. For example, the chapter on psychiatry might well have stood more closely to the whole introduction and analysis of forensic medicine, rather than appearing after the legal discussions of sexual maturity, rape and public attitudes and advocacy. Nevertheless this book depicts both the ideal and real where

¹. Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001).

forensic medicine, the law and gender issues blend in sexual crimes, sexual abnormalities and Communist Party and social attitudes regarding them. Although there were real discrepancies in how things worked across the nation, and cultural norms often canceled out the new policies, it is clear from this in-depth research that the Bolsheviks truly and consciously tried to create a new world regarding sexuality. In many ways the ideal was never reached, but the effort was made.

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