

Life Stories Of Soviet Women: The Interwar Generation. By Melanie Ilic. London: Routledge, 2013. xi, 184pp. List of figures. Glossary. Acknowledgements. Map. Appendix A. Appendix B. List of people. Notes. Select bibliography. Index. Hard bound.

Life Stories of Soviet Women portrays the lives of ten Soviet women born between the revolutionary and World War II eras. The women, all approximately 80 years of age during the research process, described their experiences in education, work and family. They also express their political opinions and real world wisdom. Overall interviewees were sophisticated and urban. Each interview, in-depth, open-ended, face-to-face and conducted in Russian was completed circa 2010.

Through describing and giving voice to each interview, the book manages to articulate a number of features of Soviet life, unknown to Westerners and the young, such as the less than completely subtle differences between kinds of opportunity individual women might have. The author also allows many participants to divulge why they approved or disapproved of Stalin's regime, allowing readers otherwise unlikely opportunities to understand individual political psychology of that time. For example and in terms of accurately describing how Soviet life really was and thus nullifying Western stereotypes, Ilic uses the research process to uncover and remind readers of two strata of the Soviet intelligentsia; those who succeed and those who are the "losers" in their educated class. One interviewee describes her short-lived experience as a teacher at a technical school while in the role of the latter.

While seemingly not a tactical move by Ilic, the forthcoming interview of another woman who, due to economic limitations, was not able to complete her own post-secondary technical education nonetheless allows the reader to understand that while the Soviet system might have degraded or lumpenized those aspiring to more prestigious achievements, nonetheless honestly recognizes how it gave great opportunity to those who continued to face economic uncertainty through providing details about the aforementioned interviewees' work life in a number of fields. The women, who also had family lives as mothers and wives, described their work life in the academy, journalism, filmmaking, engineering, law, bookkeeping, banking and accounting, and more informal occupations such as working at a box office, farm work, sewing or cashiering. They likewise described educational opportunities leading to those occupations that would have been unlikely for women in most other countries during that time period.

These interviews suggest that the strength and weakness in the Soviet project were felt simultaneously by those who served it as well as those who were served by it while revealing that such progress transpired in ways both ironic and multifaceted albeit united and shared. Only this quality of qualitative and humanistic research could accomplish such descriptive coherence.

Clearly this kind of highly personable, detail oriented qualitative investigation stands as Ilic's strength. The author, not claiming the project is necessarily representative of the entire interwar population, makes note that she focused on women who were generally privileged in interwar Soviet society. Ilic succeeds in dispelling many stereotypes about Soviet citizens, Soviet life and possibly the Soviet Union as well despite the specificity of her sample.

The reviewer recommends this unique book to those involved in or studying History, Slavic Studies, Gender Studies and Lifespan or Human Development Studies. *Life Stories of Soviet Women* provides insight into the sort of social history overlooked by many Political Scientists and wanted by scholars in Women's Studies. The sophisticated yet gentle prose makes a number of very serious and delicate topics approachable and understandable for many audiences and readers alike.

Jeanine Pfahlert