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Edited by Linda Edmondson

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## Women and society in Russia and the Soviet Union

Until the late 1960s, most western scholars studying the history, culture, social and political life and economy of the Soviet Union, paid scant attention to the participation and experience of women. The multifarious ways in which gender roles and perceptions of gender were influenced by and in turn influenced the heterogeneous cultures of the Soviet empire were largely ignored. Over the past twenty years, however, this neglect has slowly been rectified and now the study of women and gender relations has become one of the most productive fields of research into Russian and Soviet society.

This volume demonstrates the originality and diversity of this recent research. Written by leading scholars, it spans the last decades of tsarist Russia, the 1917 revolutions and the Soviet period. The essays reflect the interdisciplinary nature of women's studies and include chapters on women writers, women's work, women and politics, women as soldiers, female prostitution, popular images of women and women's experience of *perestroika*.

This study offers a fresh and interdisciplinary insight into women's experiences and the role of gender in Russia and the Soviet Union. It will be widely read by students and specialists of Russian, Soviet and women's studies.

**Linda Edmondson** is ESRC research fellow at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Birmingham. She has been working for many years on the history of women in Russia and the Soviet Union and her publications include *Feminism in Russia, 1900–1917* and, as co-editor, *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia*.

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**Linda Edmondson**

ESRC Research Fellow, Centre for Russian and  
East European Studies, University of Birmingham



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ELIZABETH WATERS teaches Russian and Soviet History at the Australian National University in Canberra. She has written a number of articles on social issues in the 1920s and in contemporary Russia, including prostitution, childcare and sexual equality. *Women in a Bolshevik World: Work and Family in Post-Revolutionary Russia* will be published shortly by Macmillan. She is currently working on a book on gender and Soviet society.



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## Preface

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All the contributions to this volume were written in 1990 and revised before the disappearance of the Soviet Union. One small consequence of the final collapse of the Soviet system has been to render obsolete many place names and names of institutions that only a few months ago were still current usage. We have made some minor modifications to the texts of a number of the essays, but have decided to leave those by Sue Bridger and Mary Buckley substantially as they were. It would have been possible, if cumbersome, to have reset every 'is' as 'was' but to do so would give the impression that the conditions and debates recorded in both these chapters have disappeared along with the USSR. The problems that both these authors discuss are as pertinent to the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1992 as they were to the Soviet Union in 1990. As no one can be sure what the 'former Soviet Union' will look like a year, or five years, from now, it seems better to let these chapters stand, in effect, as eye-witness reports on the 'woman question' in the era of perestroika, and to leave it to future reporters to discover what effects the far-reaching political, economic and social changes of the coming years will have on the daily lives and aspirations of women in those lands that once comprised the Soviet Union.

February 1992