

Re/Production Cycles: Affective Economies of Menstruation in Soviet Russia, ca. 1917-1953

Pavel Vasilyev

English abstract: In this paper, I bring together radical early Soviet projects of transforming both reproductive bodies and productive time by focusing on the case of the female menstrual cycle. Echoing Emily Martin's anthropological work, I examine the hidden affective economies of Soviet menstruation and place this discussion within the larger context of socialist politics of productivity and gendered citizenship. In doing so, I actively use the metaphor of 're/production cycles' and highlight the double embeddedness of the female menstrual cycle in the politics of both reproduction and economic productivity. Focusing in particular on the introduction of 'menstrual leave' provisions for working women in the 1920s and the shifting reproductive policies in the Soviet Union under Stalin, I explore the peculiar dynamics of this re/production nexus and situate it within the larger context of Soviet modernity.

Zhenia's Childhood [*Detstvo Liuvers*], a novel by the Nobel Prize winner Boris Pasternak (1890-1960), the famous author of *Doctor Zhivago*, mesmerizingly and empathetically describes how a thirteen-year-old girl ceases to be a child and becomes a woman in Russia just before the Revolution of 1917.¹ When first seeing the red blood the protagonist is confused and ashamed and tries to conceal it, but in the course of the novel, she gradually comes to terms with it and even embraces this new womanhood – this development runs parallel to the new Russia slowly accepting the emerging realities of the post-revolutionary era. In conflating the symbolic and coloristic language of communism and menstruation and by bringing the biological in conversation with the political, *Zhenia's Childhood* serves as a good introduction to the set of metaphors and temporalities that will interest me in the present article.

In the aftermath of the 1917 Revolution, Russia pioneered a significant number of progressive policies directed at women that were far ahead of their time. It was one of the first fully independent countries to grant its female citizens the right to vote, to enact a modern no-fault divorce law, to fully legalize abortion and to make it available to all women and in all circumstances, free of charge and on-demand. Even though many of these liberties were later significantly restricted or abolished under Stalin, the Soviet Union continued to about being the country that achieved full gender equality in all spheres of life throughout its exist-

1 Boris Pasternak, *Zhenia's Childhood* (London: Allison & Busby, 1982), 1-65.

ence. However, the reality often lagged behind, and Soviet women continuously found themselves subject to widespread discrimination and exploitation throughout the 20th century. Often this took the shape of the so-called 'double burden' problem, as the Soviet woman was expected to work full-time alongside her male comrades at a factory or a collective farm, yet at the same time was not relieved of her responsibilities as a mother and a homemaker.

The early Soviet period also saw one of the most radical and audacious experiments in human development that was guided by daring modernist ideas about the malleability and perfectibility of both human nature and the social environment. Especially since the end of the 1920s, the new Soviet authorities took far-reaching steps to master time and to make it serve the goals of socialist productivity. They introduced the famous 'five-year plans' that set production goals for all the industries in the country and increasingly encouraged the workers to exceed these quotas and to fulfill a 'five-year plan' within four, three or even two and a half years. In the late 1920s, the Soviets also abolished the traditional working week and instead introduced the so-called 'continuous production week' (*nepreryvnaia rabochaia nedelia*) featuring days numbered from 1 to 7 and to ensure the uninterrupted functioning of the Soviet economy. While many of these economic policies had disastrous consequences, the contemporaries also described how the illusion of mastering time increased the people's enthusiasm for the socialist project and made them believe that the Communist paradise could be established on earth within their lifetime.

In this paper, I bring together these radical early Soviet projects of transforming both reproductive bodies and productive time by focusing on the case of the female menstrual cycle. I will build on Emily Martin's anthropological work which examined both scientific and popular metaphors of menstruation and premenstrual syndrome (PMS) with a special emphasis on (failed) production and productivity.² Using the notion of affective economies,³ I place Soviet discussions about menstruation within the larger context of socialist politics of productivity and gen-

2 Emily Martin, "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 16 (1991): 485-501; Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

3 On 'affect/ive economies' as assemblages of bodies, technologies, markets and biomedicine, see P. T. Clough 'Future Matters: Technoscience, Global Politics, and Cultural Criticism,' *Social Text* 22, no. 3 (2004): 15 and (especially in relation to sexual capacities) Nick J. Fox and Katie J. Ward, 'Pharma in the Bedroom ... And the Kitchen ... The Pharmaceuticalisation of Daily Life,' *Sociology of Health & Illness* 30, no. 6 (2008): 856-868.

dered citizenship between the October Revolution of 1917 and Stalin's death in 1953. In order to do so, I actively use the metaphor of 're/production cycles' and discuss several examples that demonstrate the double embeddedness of the female menstrual cycle in the politics of both reproduction and economic productivity. While this embeddedness is not necessarily unique to the USSR and multiple parallels can be drawn to the developments in Western Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere, there are several important features which make the Soviet case stand out, which will be highlighted in the course of this article.

I shall begin by providing an overview of early Soviet reforms in the fields of gender equality and time management. Then, I will concentrate on the introduction of 'menstrual leave' provisions for working women in the 1920s and the shifting reproductive policies in the Soviet Union under Stalin. Finally, I will explore the peculiar dynamics of this re/production nexus and situate it within the larger context of Soviet modernity.

Liberating Women, Mastering Time: Radical Projects of Soviet Modernity

Predictably, the Russian Revolution of 1917 signaled a large-scale overhaul of the country's economy and the political system, but it was also accompanied by a whole range of experimental projects that sought to radically transform Russian culture, science, relations between social groups and, on a more general level, the whole system of everyday life (*byt*).⁴ While many of these projects were indeed formulated well before 1917,⁵ they could only be brought to fruition in a novel political and cultural climate after the Revolution when the speed of change made all the previously unthinkable ideas seem possible.

Early Soviet policies directed at gender equality were part and parcel of this larger project of 'life reform', and in many aspects were indeed

4 For examples of such experimental projects, see, e.g., Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Stefan Plaggenborg, *Revolutionskultur: Menschenbilder und kulturelle Praxis in Sowjetrussland zwischen Oktoberrevolution und Stalinismus* (Köln: Böhlau, 1996); Nikolai L. Krementsov, *Revolutionary Experiments: The Quest for Immortality in Bolshevik Science and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Andy Willimott, *Living the Revolution: Urban Communes & Soviet Socialism, 1917-1932* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). See also William Rosenberg, ed., *Bolshevik Visions: First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Russia* (Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishers, 1984).

5 Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2008).

pioneering achievements in the global context. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the 1917 Revolution, Russia became one of the first fully-independent countries to grant its female citizens the right to vote (the Grand Duchy of Finland within the Russian Empire was the first European country to introduce women's suffrage in 1906). In the early 1920s, early Soviet family law came to be known for its liberal, even libertarian character, with divorces being extremely easy to arrange (on the spot, no-fault, and even by mail). Seeking to get rid of what was perceived as reactionary 'bourgeois laws', the early Soviet government also took radical measures to decriminalize homosexual relations and pioneered free of charge access to abortion for all women as early as 1920, which is another global landmark. Under the feminist leadership of Alexandra Kollontai, the first People's Commissar (Minister) for Social Welfare, new emancipatory ideas about romantic love, sexuality and more egalitarian forms of companionship began to circulate across Soviet Russia.⁶

Of course, as more critical scholars have already noted,⁷ many of these 'gender reforms' were initiated by the Soviets with a pragmatic goal in mind – namely, in an attempt to win over the political loyalty of these new female, queer and other formerly marginalized citizens and to enlist their support for the Bolshevik ideological project. Indeed, as was the case with many experimental revolutionary projects, gender equality policies also suffered from Stalinist backlash as the political climate in the country turned increasingly conservative by the early 1930s. Historians and sociologists have now argued that the early Soviet emancipatory euphoria was succeeded in the Stalin era by the so-called 'double burden', as the Soviet woman was expected to work full-time alongside her male comrades at a factory or a collective farm, yet at the same time was not relieved of her responsibilities as a mother and a homemaker.⁸ Nevertheless, the achievements of the first years of Soviet rule were very significant with regard to gender equality.

Reforming time itself was another ambitious project of the early Soviet period. As scholars such as Stefan Plaggenborg and Mariia Gumerova

6 Gregory Carleton, *Sexual Revolution in Bolshevik Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 38-40; Frances Lee Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex: Lifestyle Advice for the Soviet Masses* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 37.

7 Cf., for example, Yulia Gradskaia, "Emancipation at the Crossroads Between the 'Woman Question' and the 'National Question'," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Melanie Ilic (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 117-131.

8 Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, "Gendered Citizenship in Soviet and Post-Soviet Societies," in *Gender and Nation in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Vera Tolz and Stephanie Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 96-115.

have described, the post-revolutionary years witnessed a whole range of attempts to re-organize time and to make its use more efficient.⁹ In part, these attempts related to the larger modernist project aimed at transforming the human relationship with time and productivity,¹⁰ but they also reflected specifically local preoccupations and were facilitated by the general reformatory spirit of the period.

In the middle of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the country embraced daylight-saving time for the first time in its history, which triggered both intense enthusiasm and almost existential anxieties in the population.¹¹ Already in early 1918, just a few months after coming to power, the Bolsheviks abruptly decided to switch the country to a new

-
- 9 Plaggenborg, *Revolutionskultur*; Mariia Gumerova, "'Nepreryvka' i antireligioznaia agitatsiia," [Nepreryvka and Anti-Religious Propaganda] in *Konstruiruia 'sovetskoe'?: Politicheskoe soznanie, povsednevnye praktiki, novye identichnosti: materialy nauchnoi konferentsii studentov i aspirantov (14-15 apreliia 2011 goda, Sankt-Peterburg)* [Constructing the 'Soviet'? Political Consciousness, Everyday Practices, New Identities: Materials of Student Conference, St. Petersburg, April 14-15, 2011] (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt-Peterburge, 2011), 58-63; Gumerova, "Natsionalizatsiia svobodnogo vremeni (SSSR 1920-1930-e gg.)," [Nationalization of Free Time (USSR, 1920s-1930s)] in *Konstruiruia 'sovetskoe'?: Politicheskoe soznanie, povsednevnye praktiki, novye identichnosti: materialy nauchnoi konferentsii studentov i aspirantov (20-21 apreliia 2012 goda, Sankt-Peterburg)* [Constructing the 'Soviet'? Political Consciousness, Everyday Practices, New Identities: Materials of Student Conference, St. Petersburg, April 20-21, 2012] (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt-Peterburge, 2011), 46-51; Gumerova, "Mesto nepreryvnoi proizvodstvennoi nedeli (1929-1931) v antireligioznoi kampanii sovetskogo pravitel'stva," [The Place of Uninterrupted Working Week (1929-1931) in the Anti-Religious Campaign of the Soviet Government] in *Bulletin des Deutschen Historischen Instituts Moskau Nr. 6*, ed. Katja Buisch (Moscow: Deutsches Historisches Institut Moskau, 2012), 66-80. See also Katriona Kelli [Catriona Kelly], "'V tikhom omute': Avgust kak mesiats otdykha/trudovykh budnei v pozdnesovetskoi Rossii [Still Waters? August as a Month of Rest/Everyday Work in Late Soviet Russia]," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* no. 117 (2012): 281-304.
- 10 Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992). Cf. also Steffan Blayney, "Industrial Fatigue and the Productive Body: The Science of Work in Britain, c. 1900-1918," *Social History of Medicine* 32, no. 2 (2019): 310-328.
- 11 A. I. Ermolaev, "Perevod chasovykh strelok v Rossii kak sledstvie voiny 1914-1918 gg. i dal'neishaia sud'ba etogo nachinaniia [The Introduction of Daylight Saving Time in Russia as a Consequence of the 1914-1918 War and the Subsequent Fate of This Innovation]," in *Nauka i tekhnika: Voprosy istorii i teorii. Materialy XXXV mezhdunarodnoi godichnoi konferentsii Sankt-Peterburgskogo otdeleniia Rossiiskogo natsional'nogo komiteta po istorii i filosofii nauki i tekhniki RAN (24-28 noiabria 2014 g.)* [Science and Technology: Problems of History and Theory. Materials of the 35th Annual International Conference of the St. Petersburg Division of the Russian National Committee for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology of the Russian Academy of Sciences], ed. B. I. Ivanov and E. I. Kolchinskii (St. Petersburg: SPbF IIET RAN, 2014), 61-67. For the discussion in the Petrograd popular press of the time, see, e.g., here: N. Abolin, "Pod utro [Before the Dawn]," *Petrogradskii listok*, 11 July 1917, 5.

calendar, thus bringing it in sync with the Gregorian system employed in the West since the 16th century. As a result, Russia miraculously leapfrogged the first half of February 1918, with its citizens going to sleep on January 31 and waking up on February 14.

By the late 1920s, as Stalin was gradually consolidating political power in the Soviet Union, the decision was made to accelerate the technological development of the country to achieve the paramount goal of 'catching up with the West'. As the Soviet leader himself put it at the First Conference of Workers in 1931: 'We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make up this gap in ten years. Either we do it or they will crush us.'¹² Accordingly, the five-year plans that were introduced for a better planning of the socialist economy were now increasingly being revised, with workers in different industries being encouraged to fulfill these quotas within four, three or even two and a half years. This was further facilitated by the abolishment of traditional days of the week and the switch to the so-called 'continuous production week' (*nepreryvka*) which was also believed to help eliminate 'religious superstition' by banishing Orthodox Christian holidays.¹³

All these changes in 'time management' certainly gave many Soviet politicians and ordinary citizens an illusion of being able to master time and to make it serve the purposes of socialist productivity. The apparent capability of the new government to move 'time forward' (to borrow a famous expression from Vladimir Mayakovsky's 1930 play, *The Bathhouse*) and significant advances in many branches of Soviet industry contributed to the emergence of a new sense of optimism that persisted despite the Great Famine and the purges of the 1930s.¹⁴

In the following two parts, I will focus on the case of the female menstrual cycle which, I believe, can serve as a useful prism for bringing the two early Soviet reform projects of gendered citizenship and socialist productivity together. In order to do so, I have employed a wide range of sources from archival materials and articles in medical journals to fictional texts. I start with the more conventional definition of the men-

12 Iosif V. Stalin, "O zadachakh khoziaistvennikov: Rech' na Pervoi Vsesoiuznoi konferentsii rabotnikov sotsialisticheskoi promyshlennosti 4 fevralia 1931 g. [On the Tasks of the Industry: Speech at the First All-Union Conference of Workers of Socialist Industry, February 4, 1931]," in Stalin, *Sochineniia* [Works], vol. 13 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1951), 39.

13 Gumerova, "'Nepreryvka' i antireligioznaia agitatsiia"; Gumerova, "Mesto nepreryvnoi proizvodstvennoi nedeli".

14 Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995). Cf. also Jason Cieply, *Voices of Enthusiasm: The Mobilization of Revolutionary Emotion in Soviet Literature and Culture, 1917-1935* (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2016).

strual cycle as a *reproductive* one before looking at its embeddedness in the larger politics on *production* in the early Soviet Union.

Reproduction Cycles: New Citizen-Soldiers for the Soviet Motherland

Evgenii Zamiatin's story *Navodnenie* [The Flood] (1929), one of the best murder stories in Russian literature, set in early Soviet Leningrad in the mid-1920s, opens up with a fascinating and somewhat disturbing passage that discusses the marital union of Trofim Ivanovich, a steam-boiler operator, and his thirty-something wife Sof'ia. A seemingly normal marriage – yet one that is also haunted by something elusively 'not right' [*chto-to ne to*]. This unspoken 'not right' is finally revealed when Trofim Ivanovich proclaims against the backdrop of the rising water in the Neva – 'You don't give birth to children, that's *it*'. With these words, he accuses Sof'ia of not conforming to the conventional gender role which closely tied the status of a married woman to giving birth. On morning after this conversation Sof'ia wakes up screaming from a nightmare only to be scared further as she discovers that her hands are covered in blood. But this, as the author notes to calm the reader, 'was her usual female blood' [*eto byla ee obyknovennaia zhenskaia krov'*]. The onset of the menstrual cycle here both symbolizes Sof'ia's (yet another) failure to conceive a child and serves as a 'bloody' introduction to a fascinating tale of jealousy and revenge. Indeed, at the end of *Navodnenie*, Sof'ia simultaneously fulfills her reproductive role as she gives birth to a baby girl – and pleads guilty to a bloody murder that she committed in a fit of rage.¹⁵

This, of course, is a highly peculiar take on the menstrual cycle as a reproductive one – one that serves its main purpose in *re-producing* new citizens for the country. In the highly politicized and militarized Soviet context before and after the Second World War, one may also add that female reproductive health was primarily valued as the 'incubator' for producing new soldiers or for 'replacing the dead'¹⁶ (although it was by no means exclusive in this regard as similar processes could also be de-

15 Evgenii Zamiatin, 'The Flood', in Zamiatin, *The Dragon: Fifteen Stories*, trans. Mirra Ginsburg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

16 Chris Burton, "Minzdrav, Soviet Doctors and the Policing of Reproduction During Late Stalinism, 1943-53," *Russian History* (Summer 2000): 197-221; Mie Nakachi, "Replacing the Dead: The Politics of Reproduction in the Postwar Soviet Union," (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

tected in Germany, Israel or the United States, as described by scholars such as Atina Grossmann and others).¹⁷

Under Stalin, liberal early Soviet projects began to lose popularity and were ultimately replaced by a rather restrictive set of reproductive policies. By the mid-1930s, homosexuality and abortion were re-criminalized again, and the divorce procedure was becoming more and more complicated and costly for Soviet citizens. On the incentive side, the government was actively encouraging higher birthrates, culminating in the establishment of a special 'Mother Heroine' (*mat'-geroinia*) legal status for women with ten children or more that was introduced towards the end of the Second World War.

In a similar vein, the 'normalization' of the female menstrual cycle also came to be perceived as a pre-condition for a 'normal' reproduction of the citizen-soldiers for the socialist state.¹⁸ This was reflected in a number of ambitious scientific projects that were launched by the Soviets in the 1920s and 1930s with the goal of mastering experimental endocrinology and using hormonal drugs to make human bodies better suited for the purposes of building 'socialism in one country'.¹⁹ This reflected the global early 20th century fascination with the (largely unfulfilled) promises of experimental endocrinology and its potential in managing human populations for the needs of the modern state.²⁰

17 On the post-Holocaust politics of reproduction in Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East, see Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Grossmann, *Wege in der Fremde: Deutsch-jüdische Begegnungsgeschichte zwischen Feldafing, Berlin und Teheran* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012); Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick and Grossman, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017). On the 'baby boom' in the United States after the Second World War, see Landon Jones, *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1980); Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 299-316.

18 Cf. also the discussion of reproduction in Michele Rivkin-Fish, *Women's Health in Post-Soviet Russia: The Politics of Intervention* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005) and Inna Leykin, "Population Prescriptions: State, Morality, and Population Politics in Contemporary Russia," (PhD. diss.: Brown University, 2010).

19 Nikolai Kremmentsov, "Hormones and the Bolsheviks: from Organotherapy to Experimental Endocrinology, 1918-1929," *Isis* 99, no. 3 (2008): 486-518; Alexander Etkind, "Beyond Eugenics: The Forgotten Scandal of Hybridizing Humans and Apes," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological & Biomedical Sciences* 39, no. 2 (2008): 205-210.

20 Heiko Stoff, *Ewige Jugend: Konzepte der Verjüngung vom späten 19. Jahrhundert bis ins Dritte Reich* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004); Chandak Sengoopta, *The Most Secret Quintessence of Life: Sex, Glands and Hormones 1850-1950* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Christer Nordlund, *Hormones of Life: Endocrinology, the Pharmaceutical Industry, and the Dream of a Remedy for Sterility* (Sagamore Beach,

One of the most ambitious attempts of this kind was the story of *gravidan* – an allegedly all-curing hormonal drug from the urine of pregnant women that was developed and actively promoted by Moscow doctor Aleksei Zamkov (husband of renowned Soviet sculptor Vera Mukhina) from the late 1920s onward. In 1932, he was given unprecedented amounts of financial, administrative and human resources to launch his pet project – the State Research Institute for ‘Urogravidanotherapy’.

In the mid-1930s, *gravidan* was industrially produced on a mass scale and used by Soviet physicians to treat an impressive list of conditions ranging from alcoholism and drug addiction to hemorrhoids to the ‘progressive exhaustion of the nervous system’ (*progressiruiushchee istoshchenie nervnoi sistemy*),²¹ yet there was an explicit focus on reproductive health and rejuvenation. Employing a payment scheme that was pro-rated for income, the Institute managed to attract both the Soviet elite and ordinary citizens²² and to set up a whole network of branches in different areas of the Soviet Union.²³ Even though Zamkov’s whole idea of ‘urogravidanotherapy’ had been largely discredited by the late 1930s and he himself had gotten into serious trouble with the Soviet authorities, some of his disciples managed to pursue a successful career in medicine and continued administration of *gravidan* until the mid-1960s.²⁴ Industrial production of *gravidan* in the USSR only stopped in 1964.

MA: Science History Publications, 2011); Michael Pettit, “Becoming Glandular: Endocrinology, Mass Culture, and Experimental Lives in the Interwar Age,” *American Historical Review* 118, no. 4 (2013): 1052-1076; Randi Hutter Epstein, *Aroused: The History of Hormones and How They Control Just About Everything* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

21 Iosif V. Strel’chuk and P. P. Obnorskii, “Gravidanoterapiia v bor’be s narkomaniie,” [Gravidanotherapy In The Struggle Against Drug Addiction] *Biulleten’ instituta gravidanoterapii* 1 (1934): 37-44; Strelchuk, Obnorskii, N. E. Dudko et al., “Gravidan i problema bor’by s prezhdvremennym odriakhleniem pri alkogol’noi i morfiinoi intoksikatsii,” [Gravidan and the Problem of Struggle Against Premature Aging by Alcohol and Morphine Addicts] *Biulleten’ instituta gravidanoterapii* 2 (1935): 42-50; N. E. Dudko, “Gravidanoterapiia gemorroia u narkomanov,” [Gravidanotherapy of Hemorrhoids in Drug Addicts] *Biulleten’ instituta gravidanoterapii* 2 (1935): 61-65; Evgenii Zhirnov, “Mocha i kamen’,” [Urine and Stone] *Kommersant Vlast’* 49 (2001): 56; Zhirnov, “Progressiruiushee istoshchenie nervnoi sistemy,” [Progressive Exhaustion of the Nervous System] *Kommersant Vlast’* 19 (2009): 64.

22 Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [State Archive of the Russian Federation] (hereinafter referred to as GARF), *fond A-7840, opis’ 1, delo 7*.

23 GARF, *fond A-7840, opis’ 1, delo 1, l. 201, 217*.

24 Strel’chuk, *Klinika i lechenie narkomanii* [Clinical Picture and Therapy of Drug Addiction], 2nd edn (Moscow: Medgiz, 1949), 64; Strel’chuk, *Klinika i lechenie narkomanii* [Clinical Picture and Therapy of Drug Addiction], 3rd edn (Moscow: Medgiz, 1956); Viktor Ostroglazov, “Mif o gravidane,” *Meditsinskaia gazeta* no. 60-61 (2008); Alisher

Another radical and extravagant project of this kind was also initiated in 1932 when medical doctor Ignatii Kazakov founded his own state-of-the-art facility: the State Research Institute for Metabolism and Endocrine Disorders. Kazakov's method of 'lysate therapy' involved extracting secrets of different organs (with a special emphasis on sex organs) from recently slaughtered animals with the goal of influencing metabolism in humans.²⁵ Like his competitor, Kazakov, too, engaged with different Soviet organizations (most significantly, the trade unions) to set up a network of partner institutions and attract additional funding.²⁶

Even though 'lysate therapy' also initially claimed to have been extremely successful it ultimately did not succeed in delivering the all-curing drug that Kazakov had promised. By the end of the 1930s, this institute was also liquidated and the scientists behind it were discredited and purged (Kazakov himself was shot in Moscow in March 1938).

Crucially, the treatment of amenorrhea (absence of menstruation, in that period often linked to sterility and thus endangering human reproduction on the national scale) was one of the central concerns for both Zamkov and Kazakov. Understanding amenorrhea as primarily an endocrine disorder, both doctors proposed that the injections of their respective miracle drug of choice would remove the issue by normalizing metabolism in women.²⁷ The State Research Institute for 'Urogravidanotherapy' boasted over 100 successful cases of treating menstrual cycle disorders with *gravidan*.²⁸ Some of these were very high profile, as evident from the much-publicized case of the wife of Professor Skladovskii (a researcher at the Moscow Institute of Experimental Biology) who stopped menstruating and developed severe psychiatric symptoms following a previous unsuccessful operation. After just three injections of *gravidan*, this woman was allegedly completely cured.²⁹ Similarly, Kazakov reported an astonishing 91% success rate in the treatment of amenorrhea with his 'lysate therapy'.³⁰

Latypov, "The Soviet Doctor and the Treatment of Drug Addiction: 'A Difficult and Most Ungracious Task'," *Harm Reduction Journal* 8, no. 32 (2011): 16.

25 See *Teoriia i praktika lizatoterapii po metody I.N. Kazakova* [Theory and Practice of Lysate Therapy by I.N. Kazakov] (Moscow: Medgiz, 1934).

26 GARF, *fond R-5474, opis' 14, delo 588*.

27 Ibid.

28 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki [Russian State Archive of Economy] (hereinafter referred to as RGAE), *fond 9457, opis' 3, dela 475-481, 485-488, 490-492, 496-498, 507-511*.

29 I.A. Blum, "Zhenskaia ferma v Abramtsevo [Female Farm in Abramtsevo]," *Sergievgrad*, November 15, 2019, available at: <https://www.sergievgrad.ru/news/2684975/gravidan-zenskaa-ferma-v-abramcevo-cast-vtoraa> (accessed January 23, 2022).

30 GARF, *fond R-5474, opis' 14, delo 588*.

While there is no definitive evidence as to why exactly these two projects were so quickly abandoned after being highly praised early on, most explanations point to the fact that both Zamkov and Kazakov had close connections with Soviet political and cultural elites. This fact both enabled them to recruit unprecedented resources early in the decade and made them vulnerable in the context of the Great Terror of the late 1930s.

However, these two competing large-scale institutional projects signified the beginning of modernist medical attempts at normalizing, regulating, and managing the female menstrual cycle with the help of hormonal drugs. Indeed, '(auto)urinotherapy' remains an influential branch of alternative medicine in Russia until today³¹ while lysates (recast as 'cytamins' since the 1970s) have become an example of a popular and successfully commercialized dietary supplement developed in Russia but available globally online.³²

Cycles of Production: The Politics of Menstrual Leave in the Soviet Union

Let us now turn to the discussion of socialist politics of productivity. For many women around the globe, their period experience is accompanied by menstrual cramps and a substantial amount of pain is involved. In the contemporary world, whether or not a woman will be allowed to take a few days off because of her monthly period, depends on the national jurisdiction. Examples of countries that guarantee their citizens this 'menstrual leave' provision include Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Taiwan.³³ At the same time, it is not accepted in most countries, including the Russian Federation.

Menstrual leave remains a highly controversial and hotly debated policy. On the one hand, it can be viewed as a piece of progressive legislation that accounts for a specific condition that many women around the

31 See, e.g., recent discussion in Tat'iana Brit, "'la lechus' mochoi': Endokrinolog – o patsiente, kotoryi vpechatsia v pamiat' ['I Treat Myself With Urine': An Endocrinologist Recalls a Memorable Patient]," *Meditsinskaia Rossiia*, 9 April 2019, <https://medrussia.org/28248-vrach-o-pacientakh-kotorie/> (accessed January 23, 2022)

32 <http://cytamins.ru/> (accessed January 23, 2022)

33 See Sophie Cullinane, "There Are Countries Where 'Menstrual Leave' Is Actually a Thing," *Grazia*, 20 May 2014, <https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/real-life/countries-menstrual-leave-actually-thing/> (accessed January 23, 2022); Aneri Pattani, "In Some Countries, Women Get Days Off for Period Pain," *The New York Times*, 24 July 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/24/health/period-pain-paid-time-off-policy.html> (accessed January 23, 2022).

world experience on a regular basis by providing a tailored and accommodating response to this ‘medical necessity’. It can thus be compared to explicitly gendered legislative provisions that exist in most countries today in relation to pregnancy and childbirth.

On the other hand, however, menstrual leave is often dismissed as a discriminatory measure, criticism of women’s work efficiency and a veiled form of sexism. Indeed, it seems that the underlying assumption of any menstrual leave policy is the idea that the female organism cannot function properly and to its full extent a few days a month – and, of course, it is the male organism that is taken to be the ‘standard’ in this comparison. This is also evident from a recent controversial statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin who famously confessed in an interview to the American director Oliver Stone that he is ‘not a woman’ and hence ‘does not have bad days’. Putin further stressed that in making this judgement he ‘was not trying to insult anyone’: ‘That’s just the nature of things. There are certain natural cycles.’³⁴

Putin’s intent here is blatantly obvious – yet veiled enough to remain within the imagined borders of decency. But what are these ‘natural cycles’ and how exactly do they work in a post-socialist setting? While there is currently no menstrual leave provision in the Russian Federation, a similar policy *did* exist for some time in the 1920s and the 1930s in the jurisdiction that was called the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). This important historical example remains relatively unknown in the contemporary world and deserves further discussion and analysis.

In line with the Soviet modernist ideas that were discussed above, some social theorists of that turbulent period even linked menstruation to the subjugated position of women under capitalism and predicted its disappearance in the communist future. For instance, Martyn Liadov, the rector of the Sverdlov Communist University (the foremost school for Soviet activists in the 1920s and the 1930s) caused much uproar and debate when he published *Voprosy byta* [Problems of Everyday Life] in 1925. In this controversial book, he insisted that the menstrual cycle in human females was simply a function of the market economy in which a ‘woman ... was transformed into private property and had to be prepared to satisfy her master’s demand at any time’.³⁵ This unorthodox view of female biology proved to be too radical even for the revolution-

34 Matthew Diebel, “Vladimir Putin: ‘I am not a woman, so I don’t have bad days,’” *USA Today*, 7 June 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/06/07/vladimir-putin-i-am-not-woman-so-dont-have-bad-days/376589001> (accessed January 23, 2022).

35 Martyn N. Liadov, *Voprosy byta* [Problems of Everyday Life] (Moscow: Kommunisticheskii universitet, 1925), 30.

ary Soviet 1920s, and, as Eric Naiman brilliantly described in the introduction to his thought-provoking book *Sex in Public*, Liadov immediately came under harsh critique from the People's Commissar (Minister) of Public Health Nikolai Semashko and others for his 'ignorance of basic biological and historical facts'.³⁶

This critique was quickly reproduced in the Soviet press in publications ranging from central the news outlet *Izvestiia* [News] to the more obscure venues such as *Za zdorovyi byt* [For Healthy Everyday Life]. Liadov's eccentric views on the menstrual cycle seemed to have been decisively rendered ridiculous and unscientific. But – utopian as it may sound – menstruation did occasionally disappear during the Bolshevik experiment. At times, it did so due to the harsh material conditions that persisted throughout the Soviet period (as evident, for example, from frequently reported cases of amenorrhea during the Russian Civil War, the Great Famine, or the Siege of Leningrad in the Second World War) – but also following the late introduction of birth control pills in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, or just sporadically during pregnancy and lactation. In re-visiting the 'menstrual imagination' of Liadov and other early Soviet thinkers, I want to highlight the socio-economic embeddedness of the human body that they put forward in their writings and discuss how the most daring of their predictions might have come true later on in the 20th century.³⁷

The elimination of menstruation may indeed be only a particular instance of utopian communist fantasies, severe malnutrition or modern bodily management practices. But my claim here is more general: I believe that the menstrual cycle is a useful prism through which to view and to re-assess the female experience and the history of everyday life in the Soviet Union. In proposing to focus on menstruation, I include yet another persistent factor of a woman's life which – depending on the perspective – could be greeted enthusiastically as an empowering sign of femininity or perceived as an additional bodily 'burden' to be dealt with and taken care of.

In doing so, I want to propose the metaphor of the 'red days of the calendar' as a way to discuss this peculiar double status of menstruation

36 Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3.

37 On imagining the future in the early Soviet period, see Stites; Plaggenborg; Rosenberg. Gleb Albert, *Das Charisma Der Weltrevolution: Revolutionärer Internationalismus in der Frühen Sowjetgesellschaft 1917-1927* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2017) and Margarete Vöhringer, "Messen, beschleunigen, anhalten, zurückdrehen: das Zeitmanagement der Russischen Avantgarde," in *Tempo! : Zeit- Und Beschleunigungswahrnehmung in Der Moderne*, ed. Frauke Fitzner (Berlin: Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, 2016), 6-18.

as potentially both a ‘time off’ and a time of celebration.³⁸ For example, a relatively little-known piece of early Soviet legislation that was unearthed by British researcher Melanie Ilic in the early 1990s introduced provisions for menstrual leave in a number of industries (such as the textile industry) that primarily employed women workers.³⁹ Starting from 1922, these women could take two or three days off every month or in some cases demand to be transferred to a less physically strenuous job. The rationale behind the innovation related both to the productivity concerns of the Soviet state, its emancipatory rhetoric as well as the widespread medical and scientific views of female physiology as inherently inferior to its male counterpart at the time. The ending date of this policy remains unclear, but there is evidence from a number of different industrial branches that the menstrual leave provisions were in force and even to some degree extended as late as 1931.⁴⁰

In the context of recently reignited press and parliamentary debates about the impact of menstruation on women’s capacity to work in countries as diverse as Russia, Italy and the UK⁴¹, the early Soviet menstrual

38 This phrase (*krasnye dni kalendaria* in the Russian original) is often used as a euphemism by women to refer to the periods.

39 Melanie Ilic, “Soviet Women Workers and Menstruation: A Research Note on Labour Protection in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 8 (1994): 1409-1415.

40 Ilic, 1412-1414.

41 In July 2013, lawmaker from the nationalist LDPR party Mikhail Degtiarev, a rising star in Russian politics, proposed a draft law that would give women additional two days of paid leave a month during their menstrual cycle (see Toyin Owoseje, “Menstruation Leave: Russian Lawmaker Proposes Paid Days Off for Women Employees on Period,” *International Business Times*, 31 July 2013, <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/russian-lawmaker-proposes-paid-days-menstruating-women-495918> (accessed January 23, 2022)). The bill was ultimately rejected, but the idea continues to be popular – most recently, outspoken Moscow psychologist Pavel Rakov has lobbied for menstrual leave at the highest level, arguing that women can behave ‘inadequately’ while on their periods (*Mash*, 19 April 2019, <https://tigrm.ru/channels/@breakingmash/11566> (accessed January 23, 2022)). Similar proposals have been made by four female lawmakers in Italy in 2017 (see Anna Momigliano, “Italy Set to Offer ‘Menstrual Leave’ for Female Workers,” *Independent*, 25 March 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/italy-menstrual-leave-reproductive-health-women-employment-a7649636.html> (accessed January 23, 2022); Anna Brech, “This Country Could be The First in Europe to Offer Women Paid Menstrual Leaves,” *Grazia*, 28 March 2017, <https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/real-life/paid-menstrual-leave-women-period-pain-italy-country-offer-policy/> (accessed January 23, 2022); Annalisa Merelli, “Italy’s Paid Menstrual-Leave Bill Would Come With a Big Cost to Italian Women,” *Quartz*, 29 March 2017, <https://qz.com/944210/italys-paid-menstrual-leave-bill-would-come-with-a-big-cost-to-italian-women/> (accessed January 23, 2022)). Recently, the issue has also been seriously discussed in the UK across the political spectrum (see, e.g., Anna Hodgekiss, “Forget Maternity Leave – Women Should Get PAID Menstrual Leave Every Month (And Men Will Just Have to Lump It), Says Leading Doctor,” *Daily Mail*, 3 December 2014, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2857096/Forget-maternity-leave-women-PAID-menstrual-leave-month-men-just-lump-leading-doctor->

provisions might appear to be a very early example of such progressive legislation. However, as mentioned earlier, this can also be seen as rather crude biological determinism that constantly puts women's work efficiency in doubt and mandates the release of female labor from work during menstruation – and, indeed, a number of early Soviet female workers outright protested this practice and refused to take 'time off' during their periods.⁴² As an Austrian visitor to the Soviet Union in the early 1930s Lili Körber graphically put it: 'We women can never expect to obtain equal treatment with men if we cry off once a month'.⁴³

Echoing Emily Martin's anthropological work, I insist on uncovering the hidden affective economies of Soviet menstruation and placing this discussion within the larger context of socialist politics of productivity and gendered citizenship. One of the interesting affective dimensions of this discussion relates to the perceived, prescribed, and experienced influence of the menstrual cycle on the emotional state of the woman. Particularly important here is the case of the so-called premenstrual syndrome (PMS) that has by now become common knowledge in popular culture – yet it is also a notion that remains highly controversial among scientists, up to the point where its very existence is at times openly rejected. For example, a major research study led by Professor Gillian Einstein of the University of Toronto in 2012, found no substantial link between the pre-menstrual phase of the female menstrual cycle and women's negative moods, considered to be one of the key constitutive elements of PMS.⁴⁴

Another important part of the discussion is the pain that many women often experience during menstruation. Following Elaine Scarry's seminal work *The Body in Pain* (1985),⁴⁵ researchers from various humani-

claims.html (accessed January 23, 2022); Claire Lampen, "Can 'Period Leave' Ever Work?," *BBC Capital*, 8 September 2017, www.bbc.com/capital/story/20170908-can-period-leave-ever-work (accessed January 23, 2022); Rose George, "Menstrual Leave: A Workplace Reform to Finally Banish The Period Taboo?," *The Guardian*, 28 June 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jun/28/menstrual-leave-period-taboo-work-reform-women-health> (accessed January 23, 2022)). In the German context, in the absence of an official menstrual leave policy, many women being paid by the state budget can apparently take a few days off work during menstruation every month without having to provide additional justifications (personal communication with Dr. Polina Aronson (independent scholar based in Berlin and editor at openDemocracy Russia), July 3, 2017). I would also like to emphasize here that pioneering Soviet menstrual leave policies of the 1920s are never mentioned in these contemporary discussions.

42 Ilic, 1413-1414.

43 Lili Körber, *Life in a Soviet Factory* (London: Bodley Head, 1933), 161-162.

44 Gillian Einstein et al., "Mood and the Menstrual Cycle: A Review of Prospective Data Studies," *Gender Medicine* 9, no. 5 (2012): 361-384.

45 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

ties have productively studied pain as a physical phenomenon with wide-ranging emotional and socio-cultural effects. Historians of emotion and the body such as Esther Cohen, Otniel Dror, Joanna Bourke, and Rob Boddice also traced how the understanding of pain in Western culture changed over the last centuries.⁴⁶ Importantly, as the studies have shown, these understandings are often highly gendered, but in a dialectic way, with women both reporting significantly higher levels of pain than men on average *and* being able to withstand extreme levels of pain, particularly during childbirth.⁴⁷

Throughout the Soviet period, pain, irritability, and mood swings that are routinely associated with the female menstrual cycle were often labeled as 'bourgeois' emotional symptoms and contrasted with the emerging image of a new 'strong' Soviet woman – with important political, social and (as we have seen) even legal ramifications for the women involved. For example, in a 1926 article entitled "The Chemistry of Female Moods", researcher A. Chizhevskii presented a whole panoply of 'degenerate' peri-menstrual women whom he claimed were only 'partially sane', suicidal and prone to criminality.⁴⁸ Similar concerns about the potentially 'abnormal' sex life of some women before and during menstruation were also expressed in other Soviet medical publications.⁴⁹

In a different instance, early Soviet addiction researcher Vladimir Gorovoi-Shaltan reported that many Leningrad sex workers in the 1920s became addicted to morphine, he noted that they started using the drug in the first instance to alleviate their menstrual cramps – but also (and in an interesting twist of the menstrual leave narrative!) because of 'the inability of the prostitute to practice her craft during the period of menstruation'.⁵⁰

46 Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Cohen et al., eds., *Knowledge and Pain* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2012); Joanna Bourke, *The Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkillers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Rob Boddice, ed., *Pain and Emotion in Modern History* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Boddice, *Pain: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

47 See also Atul J. Butte et al., "Sex Differences in Reported Pain Across 11,000 Patients Captured in Electronic Medical Records," *Journal of Pain* 13, no. 3 (2013): 228-234.

48 A. Chizhevskii, "Khimiiia zhenskikh nastroyenii [The Chemistry of Female Moods]," *Zhenskii zhurnal* no. 1 (1926): 5-6.

49 Gofmekler, *Chto nado znat' kazhdoi zhenshchine* [What Every Woman Should Know] (1923); N. Mikulina-Ivanova, "Normal'naia i nenormal'naia polovaia zhizn' zhenshchiny [Normal and Abnormal Sexual Life of a Woman]," *Zhenskii zhurnal* no. 9 (1927).

50 Vladimir A. Gorovoi-Shaltan, "Morfinizm, ego rasprostranenie i profilaktika," [Morphine Addiction, Its Spreading and Preventive Measures] in *Voprosy narkologii: Sb.*

By consciously using Soviet menstrual leave, PMS and menstrual pain as controversial case studies and by unearthing their currently obscure history, I would like to further stress the relationship between affect, citizenship, and gender in a state socialist setting. While the early Soviet state pursued some emancipatory policies that favored women, this emancipation was in many cases paternalistically prescribed from above and closely linked to a highly negative view of female physiology and psychology. To what extent Soviet women tried to negotiate this prescribed view would be a highly interesting avenue for further research.

Epilogue

I would like to close this article with the discussion of another novel. *Vtorogo marta togo zhe goda* [March Second of That Year] by contemporary Russian novelist Liudmila Ulitskaia (1943-).⁵¹ By carefully weaving multiple narrative threads and by oscillating between the everyday and the transcendent, Ulitskaia masterfully describes how the first period of the main protagonist, an eleven-year-old girl called Lilechka, coincides with the death of both her grandfather and the ‘father of the nations’ of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin. Set in the beginning of March 1953, as the name suggests, the novel both draws a line under Stalin’s era and simultaneously signifies the beginning of a new *period* which is yet difficult to grasp, but which is simultaneously exciting and terrifying.⁵² Invoking a powerful menstrual metaphor to describe the emergence of a new post-Stalin subjectivity,⁵³ *March Second of That Year* reiterates the close connection between the personal and the political, demonstrating the embeddedness of the female menstrual cycle in the larger Soviet body politic.⁵⁴

no. 2 [Questions of Narcology: Collection no. 2], ed. Aleksandr S. Sholomovich (Moscow: Moszdravotdel, 1928), 47-48.

51 Liudmila Ulitskaia, “*Vtorogo marta togo zhe goda* [March Second of That Year],” *Russkaia mysl’*, 28 July-9 August 1991.

52 It is perhaps not insignificant that the post-Stalin era is usually referred to as the ‘Thaw’, invoking strikingly fluid language. Cf. also Maya Vinokour, “Daniil Kharms and the Liquid Language of Stalinism,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 60, no. 4 (2016): 676-699.

53 Cf. Anatoly Pinsky, ed., *Posle Stalina: pozdnesovetskaia sub’ektivnost’ (1953-1985)* [After Stalin: Subjectivity in the Late Soviet Union (1953-1985)] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt-Petersburge, 2018).

54 Some of these themes were also previously explored in another award-winning novel by Ulitskaia, *The Kukotsky Enigma* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016).

As I have shown in this article, menstruation was seen in the first few decades of the twentieth century as a crucial element in the Soviet politics of productivity and reproduction and as a powerful cyclic feature of the socialist economy. From menstrual leave policies to hormonal treatment of amenorrhea to the adoption of reusable menstrual hygiene products, which also needs further research, the Soviets were pioneers in the bizarre and unknown world of reproduction in high modernity. While many of their ‘achievements’ in this regard are indeed subject of much controversy, it is telling that these unorthodox policies and practices are being rediscovered today absolutely independently in many national contexts. Menstrual leave policies are being discussed around the globe, many women experiment with menstrual suppression techniques,⁵⁵ while menstrual cups and other reusable products are on the rise. In this regard, I hope that the article can also serve as an indicator of much longer genealogies and histories of ‘menstrual innovation’ beyond contemporary liberal societies.⁵⁶

Pavel Vasilyev, Contact: pvasilev (at) hse.ru. Studied Russian and Central European History in St. Petersburg and Budapest. Postdoctoral projects on law and emotions in early Soviet Russia and on the cultural history of the female menstrual cycle in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Currently Senior Lecturer at HSE University in St. Petersburg.

55 Cf. Emilia Sanabria, *Plastic Bodies: Sex Hormones and Menstrual Suppression in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

56 For somewhat similar perspectives from the Global South, cf. also Shing-ting Lin, “‘Scientific’ Menstruation: The Popularisation and Commodification of Female Hygiene in Republican China, 1910s–1930s,” *Gender & History* 25, no. 2 (2013): 294–316; Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, “Medicalising Menstruation: A Feminist Critique of the Political Economy of Menstrual Hygiene Management in South Asia,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 22, no. 8 (2015): 1158–1176; and especially a recent book by Chris Bobel, *The Managed Body: Developing Girls and Menstrual Health in the Global South* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).