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WOMEN AND REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE IN RUSSIA IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

From the very outset, the phenomenon of the numerous and active participation of women in the Russian revolutionary movement was so distinct and astounding that it attracted attention and gave rise to astonishment, bewilderment, applause or, at the very least, interest. “Up to this day, carefully educated girls who threw bombs”, wrote Elżbieta Kaczyńska and Dariusz Drewniak in their recently published book about the tsarist okhrana — “fascinate sociologists and psychologists”¹. Of course, they also fascinate historians. Only in the past twenty years were Russian female revolutionaries, including terrorists, discussed in at least over ten studies issued in Western Europe and the United States and written i.a. by Beate Fieseler, Leopold Helmson, Margaret Maxwell, Robert Mc Neal or Cathy Porter², a list of names far from complete. The same topic is also broached by synthetic publications devoted to the history of Russian women. The foremost accomplishments of the copious literature on the subject include studies Barbara Alpern Engel, Robert Stites and Linda Edmondson³. It also seems worthwhile to mention the historiography of the former Soviet Union i.e. numerous compendia and monographic biographies which at time fulfill the

¹ E. Kaczyńska, D. Drewniak, *Ochrana. Carska policja polityczna (Okhrana. The Tsarist Political Police)*, Warszawa 1993, p. 46.

² B. Fieseler, *The Making of Russian Female Social Democrats, 1890–1917*, “International Review of Social History”, vol. XXXIV, 1989, no. 2, pp. 193–226; L. Helmson et al., *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries: Voices from the Menshevik Past*, Cambridge 1987; M. Maxwell, *Narodniki Women: Russian Women Who Sacrificed Themselves for the Dream of Freedom*, London 1990; R. H. Mc Neal, *Women in the Russian Radical Movement*, “Journal of Social History”, vol. V, no. 2 (1971–1972), pp. 143–163; C. Porter, *Women in Revolutionary Russia*, Cambridge 1987. This topic appears also in collections of articles pertaining basically to Russian women cf. e.g. *Russia's Women. Accommodation. Resistance. Transformation*, ed. B. E. Clements, B. Alpern Engel, Ch. D. Worobec, Berkeley 1991; *Women in Russia*, ed. D. Atkinson, A. Gallin, G. Warshofsky Lapidus, Stanford 1977.

³ B. Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters. Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, Cambridge 1983; R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia. Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism, 1860–1930*, Princeton 1978; L. Edmondson, *Feminism in Russia, 1900–1917*, London–Stanford 1984.

function of indirect source material⁴. The great number of these books is only partly explained by the recently increased interest in feminist topics.

The considerable dimension of the participation of women in anti-tsarist opposition and revolutionary struggle is illustrated by calculations based on two extensive collections of biographies: the unfinished many-volume publication entitled *Deyateli revolyutsyonnogo dvizheniya v Rossii. Bio-bibliograficheskiy Slovar. Ot predshestvennikov dekabristov do padeniya tsarizma* (*Members of the Revolutionary Movement in Russia. Bio-Bibliographical Dictionary. From the Forerunners of "Decabrists" to the Fall of Tsardom*) (Moskva 1927–1934) and the two supplemented and revised editions of the information — rich study: *Politicheskaya katorga i ssylka. Biograficheskiy spravochnik O[bshchestva] politkatorzhan i sslynoposelentsev* (*Political Exile and Forced Labour. Biographical Review issued by the Society of Political Prisoners*), (Moskva 1927, 1929 and 1934). Both studies register the lives of persons and reveal a greatly differentiated degree of involvement — from amateurs of illegal literature, members of families of activists or even sympathizers up to rank-and-file agitators and “soldiers of the revolution”, or party theoreticians, organizers and leaders as well members of specialized, secret militant organizations who prepared the assassinations of government dignitaries, the military and police head officers or agents and provocateurs. It is not always possible to establish a clearcut division of roles played in clandestine organizations; nonetheless, as a rule, the subsequent leaders of the underground elites began their careers from an apprenticeship in the chosen craft; their further fate was the outcome of chance.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, women did not disclose the numerous types of attitudes and behaviour which were regarded in Russia as “anti-state”. The first volume of the above mentioned dictionary (*Deyateli revolyutsyonnogo dvizheniya v Rossii...*) which deals with a period up to the 1850s does not list a single woman while as many as 1,002 biogrammes discuss men. The work in question also pays no attention to female members of repressed families, including the famous wives of the exiled “Decembrists” despite the fact they subsequently became an important element of a legend of selfless sacrifice which attracted new generations of both sexes to the battle for freedom.

⁴ E. g. *Politicheskaya katorga i ssylka. Biograficheskiy spravochnik O[bshchestva] politkatorzhan i sslynoposelentsev* (*Political Exile and Forced Labour. Biographical Review issued by the Society of Political Prisoners*), vol. I-II, Moskva 1934 (I ed. 1927); *Deyateli revolyutsyonnogo dvizheniya v Rossii. Biograficheskiy Slovar. Ot predshestvennikov dekabristov do padeniya tsarizma* (*Members of the Revolutionary Movement in Russia. Bio-Bibliographical Dictionary. From the Forerunners of "Decembrists" to the Fall of Tsardom*), Moskva 1927–1934.

The situation began to change in the 1860s. Out of a total 1,565 persons mentioned in the volume under examination, there are 101 women i.e. 6.5 per cent. This percentage rapidly grew in the following decade, and in the 1870s the number of women already amounted to as many as 1,469 out of the 7,009 persons recognized by the authors of the dictionary as worthy of being included in the publication. The percentage increased to 20.1. Let us partially verify data by reaching for other sources. A wide-range investigation which in the years 1875–1877 pertained to the participants of the so-called *khozhdeniye v narod* movement and other members of revolutionary circles, and which comprised a preparation for the famous “trail of 193” (1877–1878), dealt with 770 persons — 612 men and 158 women; the latter constituted 21.8 per cent of the total⁵. This is a very considerable number if we take into the account the fact that we are dealing lists of the repressed, and if we keep in mind the fact that the apparatus of oppression (cohesion) affected men even more consistently and ruthlessly.

An attempt to explain such a high percentage could refer to the relatively lenient and more “feminine” forms of anti-tsarist activity during that period. Well-organized terrorism as a prime element of the political programme of the *narodnik* movement began, for all practical purposes, from the shooting of Fiodor Trepov, the governor-general of St. Petersburg on 25 January 1878 by Vera Zasulich. The breakthrough character of this event is rather unanimously stressed by authors of diaries, publicists and historians⁶ but in the successive decade, i.e. in the 1880s, the situation remained almost unaltered despite intensified repression and a waning revolutionary tide. In a sample which is restricted due to the already mentioned gaps in the publication which serves as the foundation of our analyses, 3,890 biogrammes of persons whose surnames begin from a to z, (the first eight letters of the Russian alphabet), the number of women is 762, i.e., 19.6 per cent. We are dealing, therefore, with the same range. The indices unexpectedly decline in the later period. Beate Fieseler established the percentage of women among the registered members of social-democratic parties from the beginning of the 1890s up to the 1917 revolution at about 15 per cent. Finally, the same author claims that there were 11.5 per cent women among the veterans of the revolutionary movement living in the Soviet Union at the

⁵ Cf. M. W a w r y k o w a, *Rewolucyjne narodnictwo w latach siedemdziesiątych XIX w. (The Revolutionary Narodnik Movement in the 1870s)* Warszawa 1963, p. 365.

⁶ Cf. M. W a w r y k o w a, *op. cit.*, p. 448 sqq.; L. B a z y ł o w, *Dzieje Rosji 1801–1917 (The History of Russia 1801–1917)*, Warszawa 1977, pp. 303–304; *idem*, *Działalność narodziństwa rosyjskiego w latach 1878–1881 (The Activity of the Russian Narodnik Movement in the Years 1878–1881)*, Wrocław 1960, p. 32 sqq. (here a review of contemporary commentaries concerning the act committed by Vera Zasulich).

end of the 1920s, and willing to take part in a veterans' organization (or possibly its members)⁷. My own calculations based on the same biographical compendia raise this index to 13 per cent.

It seems possible to partially explain the mystery of the relative decline of women in illegal leftist parties and in the revolutionary movement (since in absolute numbers this group increased at the beginning of the twentieth century, due to the growing mass nature of the anti-tsarist opposition) by referring to the changed social composition of revolutionaries—opponents of the tsarist system. The “nihilists” (male and female) of the 1870s and 1880s included, predominantly, representatives of landowners, the intelligentsia and the middle and petty bourgeoisie. It is striking that the social origin of the considerable number of female social democrats during the first two decades of our century is similar although the Menshevik and Boshevik parties already recruited large groups of workers and even peasants, basically all men.

Obviously, an image of a movement joined by women solely from the social elites would not be true and would not explain their high percentage. The same issue appears in a slightly different light if, while considering the social origin of the female revolutionaries of the generation, we would apply a slightly archaic category of “plebeian descent”. This procedure would entail a highly numerous group of female activists and rank-and-file members who came from the poor basically Jewish petty bourgeoisie. Such a line of thought is indicated by a survey of the biographies of many female representatives of the leadership of assorted parties and organizations engaged in a battle with the tsarist system, in particular at the turn of the century and later on. There is no source material information, however, which would be suitably precise and as numerous as previously; thousands of samples are insufficient, therefore, for drawing further conclusions.

This observation compels us to recall the specific causes of revolutionary involvement which was so often connected with national repressions, a factor which holds true both for men and for women. The overwhelming representation of the national minorities among persons struggling for political freedom and social equality in Russia is well known and frequently stressed both in literature and publicistics, particularly those of a nationalistic hue. It is vivid in the example of Poles (men and women) — participants of the narodnik groups and modern political parties; this phenomenon was described i.a. by Ludwik Bazylow and Zygmunt Łukawski and, in reference to women, by Maria Wawrykowa as well as by popular works of Dionizja Wawrzykowska—Wierciochowa and Bożena Krzywobłocka⁸.

⁷ B. Fieseler, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

It is a matter for debate whether the discrimination of women, alongside political, social and national discrimination, stimulated their revolutionary activity. Generally speaking, the overwhelming opinion claims that emancipatory accents which were lively in the 1860s among the legal and illegal social groups and movements, and distinctly present in publicistics, were subsequently subdued by the camp which proclaimed the idea of revolution that would automatically solve all problems. It is an indubitable fact that from the second half of the 1880s, press discussions held on this subject in Russia were not as frequent as previously. At the same time, women's circles which had been established earlier by Russian women studying in Switzerland and attending courses held in Moscow and St. Petersburg, grew more radical, and commenced close cooperation with men according to the principle of equal rights. During discussions concerning programmes female members of the second *Zemlya i Volya*, *Narodnaya Volya* or *Chorniy Peredel* did not force through the issue of "women's liberation". In Russia, the feminist movement in the strict meaning of that word assumed shape in the first years of the twentieth century, during the 1905 revolution. From the very beginning, it was divided, and only its part, although numerous and influential, support social democrats and the socialist revolutionaries. Many of the enthusiasts of socialism (men and women) rejected some of the slogans and forms of activity pursued by the adherents of women's emancipation as overly "bourgeois"⁹.

Similarly to other societies who found themselves at an early stage of modernization, Russia at the end of the nineteenth century was dominated by traditional views concerning the social roles of women which were well protected by educational, legal, economic and administrative barriers. In certain domains, they reduced the professional activity of women to null. Summary data of a general population survey conducted in 1897 show that in the Russian Empire women comprised barely 0.4 per cent of all physicians (without the military) and one — thousandth of engineers. They were totally absent among the enormous army of civil servants and employees of the administration of justice (the courts and attorneys at law). True, women constituted 8.6 per cent of elitist groups described in statistics as "scholars

⁸ Cf. Z. Łukawski, *Polacy w rosyjskim ruchu rewolucyjnym 1894–1907 (Poles in the Russian Revolutionary Movement 1894–1907)*, Warszawa 1984; M. Wawrykowa, *Kobiety polskie w rosyjskim ruchu rewolucyjnym w latach 70tych XIX stulecia (Polish Women in the Russian Revolutionary Movement During the 1870s)* in: *Prace historyczne Instytutu Polsko-Radzieckiego (Historical Works of the Polish–Russian Institute)*, vol. 1, Wrocław 1956; B. Krzywobłocka, *Towarzyski tamtych dni (Comrades from Those Days)*, Poznań 1982; D. Wawrzykowska, *Wierciłochowa, Nie po kwiatach je los prowadził... Kobiety w ruchu rewolucyjnym (Fate Did Not Lead Them Through Flowers... Polish Women in the Revolutionary Movement)*, Warszawa 1987.

⁹ Cf. R. Stites, *op. cit.*, p. 191 sqq.

and men of letters”, and 37.1 per cent of teachers employed in the state and private school system¹⁰. Pedagogical work (especially care of small children and the education of girls) was, as is known, regarded as most suitable.

Let us note that only the last index is higher than the earlier presented of female revolutionaries (cf. p 113–114). If, therefore, we were to recognize their activity as “professional”, and as a career similar to a professional one, then it would become one of the earliest and most feminized “professions” in tsarist Russia. Obviously, this is a controversial point of view but it seems at least partially justified. Already a superficial examination of the lives of outstanding Russian female members of the revolutionary movement indicates that it was precisely the blocking of social and professional aspirations which was the cause of frustrations and frequently led to the radicalization of attitudes and opinions. Often the initial stage was rebellion against a conservative home environment, pressure to marry early and a hostile attitude towards the education of women. The path often led from self-education to study in Switzerland, or on St. Petersburg or Moscow women semi-high schools and ultimately to contacts with revolutionary circles. This was especially the case when it became apparent that the obtained education was an ineffective instrument for altering the world. Such a mechanism was perceived by the authorities and the families of future “nihilists” who tried to counterpoise it but, as a rule, failed to do so. Both the efforts made by official factors, and the rigours applied by parents frequently produced results contrary to intentions. A tsarist rescript issued in 1873 forbade Russian women to study in Zürich, and justified this decision by referring to an opinion that the local Russian colony was dominated by socialism and free love. The ban produced universal protest and although some of the female students obeyed it, it encouraged other a path of a determined struggle against the tsarist system¹¹.

The young female rebels also discovered ways for liberating themselves from under the rule of conservative fathers and strict mothers. This aim was sometime attained by fictitious marriages which freed from parental custody and, as a result, signified permanent affiliation with revolutionary opponents. Such marriages also made it easier to hide from the police. At other times, however, the severance of all ties with a social milieu which

¹⁰ *Pervaya vseobshchaya perepis Rossiyskoy imperii 1897g. Obshchiy svod po imperii (The First General Census of the Russian Empire in 1897. General Report for the Empire)*, vol. II, S. Peterburg 1905, pp. 260–284; cf. K. Y e r m a n , *Intelligentsiya v pervoy russkoy revolyutsii (The Intelligentsia in the First Russian Revolution)*, Moskva 1966, pp. 9–13.

¹¹ V. F i g n e r , *Trwały ład (Permanent Trace)*, pt 1, Warszawa 1962, p. 97; B. A l p e r n – E n g e l , *op. cit.*, p. 127 and D. N e u m a n n , *Studentinnen aus dem Russischen Reich in der Schweiz*, Zurich 1987, p. 38 sqq., 117 sqq.

cultivated tradition did not lead to “nihilism”. Pavel Axelrod, an eminent social democratic leader recalled that when in 1874, during his *narodnik* youth he worked as an agitator in Kamenets Podolski, a group of young Jews requested that he free a girl named Polgielm from the “tyranny of her mother”. Axelrod helped her to flee to Kiev where she was entrusted to Ekaterina Breshko–Breshowskaya whose house was the local center of revolutionary conspiracy. The young girl, however, did not become an ardent comrade engaged in underground work, but the lover of two successive gendarmierie officers¹². An overwhelming majority of case, however, ended with assimilation with the conspirators. A secret or party cell became the sole configuration of reference; as a rule, the young people identified themselves with the given without any reservation. When the latter opted for political terror, this bond favoured the rejection of all doubts. One must also add various emotional ties whose significance in the revolutionary environment must be duly appreciated although in accounts provided by that milieu they are frequently ignored. At times, these emotional attachments preceded the acceptance of the system of values, ideas and political views of the partner.

Did female participants of illegal parties and circles whose number, as we could see ourselves was considerable, play merely auxiliary and secondary roles? Were they not just *okolorevolutсионnye zhenshchiny*, to paraphrase a well-known Russian saying?¹³ Although their number must been large, a sample analysis of the composition of the leading groups of the revolutionary world negates such an assumption. The 18 members of the Executive Committee of *Zemlya i Volya*, established in June 1879 at a convention held in Voronezh, included 6 women (Vera Figner, Sofia Ivanova, Anna Yakimova, Tatiana Lebedieva, Maria Oshanina and Sofia Perovskaya)¹⁴. In the spring of 1906, the dangerous Militant Organization of the Socialist–Revolutionary Party, the author of assassinations against Viacheslav von Plehve, Minister of the Interior, and the Grand Duke Sergiey, had 28 members, of whom 6 were women¹⁵. A prime role was played during the 1905–1907 revolution by female representatives of the more radical party of maximalist socialist revolutionaries; one of them. Natalia Klimova, was the right hand of the party’s leader, Mikhail Sokolov¹⁶. There were slightly less women among the leaders of the Mensheviks

¹² P. Axelrod, *Perezhitoye i peredumannoye* (“Experiences and Reflections”), pt. 1, Berlin 1923, pp. 118–119.

¹³ In the original version — *okololiteraturnye zhenshchiny*.

¹⁴ L. Bazylow, *Działalność narodziectwa rosyjskiego*, pp. 103–104.

¹⁵ B. Savinkov, *Wspomnienia terrorysty (The Reminiscences of a Terrorist)*, Warszawa 1991, p. 221.

and Bolsheviks, and their presence among leading anarchists is almost unknown¹⁷.

Let us return once again to statistics which illustrate the participation of women in the professions of the Russian intelligentsia at the end of the nineteenth century. Apart from a rather small number of such women, none of them, with the exception of certain actresses could on attaining within their profession such celebrity, position and prestige as “professional” female revolutionaries.

The direct participation of women in acts of terror sometimes gave rise to doubts on the part of their comrades. Boris Savinkov described his polemics with Eugene Asef who during preparations for the assassination of *gradonachalnik* of St. Petersburg Vlodimir von der Launitz chose Valentina Kolosova–Popova, a member of the Militant Organization of the Socialist Revolutionary Party to be the person to throw the bomb despite the fact that she was pregnant at the time. The author of *The Reminiscences of a Terrorist* fervently protested, and threatened that he would not take part in the act. He also mentioned that was his belief that the organization could entrust a task of this variety to a women only if no one else could take her place. Faced with such blackmail, Asef resigned from his project. Undoubtedly, Savinkov described this incident primarily because he wished to present his superior, later shown to be a provocateur, in the worst possible light. The fact itself, however, appears to be true, and the conflict–characteristic¹⁸.

In a search for the ideological and emotional roots of the Russian revolutionary ethos — an ethos of sacrifice and devotion which are a value in themselves — scholars draw attention to the model of Christian Orthodox religiosity. Patterns which were not always consciously observed but which remained permanent elements of culture, also affected the *narodniki*, and subsequently the followers of socialism. This assumption is partially confirmed by source material. According to her biographer, as a child Ekaterina Breshko–Breshkovskaya, the famous “grandmother of the revolution”, used to enjoy reading the lives of saints and in particular that of St. Barbara the martyr¹⁹. She returned to them in old age when she became religious in a specific, highly unorthodox manner. Maria Bienievskaya, a member of the

¹⁶ D. Pavlov, *Esery–maksimalisti w pervoy russkoy revolyutsii (The So-called Esers–Maximalists in the First Russian Revolution)*, Moskva 1989, pp. 167–168.

¹⁷ Cf. W. Kołodziej, *Działalność anarchistów w Rosji w latach 1905–1907 (The Activity of Anarchists in Russia in the Years 1905–1907)*, Warszawa 1988.

¹⁸ B. Savinkov, *op. cit.*, pp. 130–131.

¹⁹ V. Chernov, *Pered burey. Vospominaniya (Before the Storm, Reminiscences)*, N. York 1952, p. 149.

Militant Organization of the Socialist Revolutionaries explained her part in acts of terror by referring to the teaching of... the Gospel and a special interpretation of a fragment of the Gospel of St. Matthew which mentions the need for making absolute sacrifice²⁰. The foremost element of many individual choices was a readiness to die either in the course of battle or on the gallows (since from the time of Sofia Perovskaya, the co-organizer of the unsuccessful assassination of Alexander II, death sentences were issued and carried out, albeit rarely, against female political prisoners). Even more probable was the perspective of martyrdom: in prison, exile or as a forced labourer. The vision of future of suffering made it easier to opt for the path of terrorism, and seemed to sanction the transgression of traditional ethical taboo within the framework of new morality.

Let us, however, abandon our psychological reflections and take a closer look at the images of the revolutionary heroines created by their comrades, sympathizers and opponents. Source material, predominantly of a para-literary nature, is exceptionally copious and includes posthumous reminiscences, diaries, and publicistic articles of a more or less propaganda character. Their scheme very frequently brings to mind precisely lives of saints. One of the most popular publications of this sort was *Podpolnaya Rossiya (Underground Russia)*, written in the 1880s by the emigré Sergey Stepniak-Kravchinski, and later read by several generations. Its significance is testified by the fact that the above cited Pavel Axelrod whose diaries described Vera Zasulich with whom he was personally acquainted, regarded it suitable to cite the words of Stepniak-Kravchinskiy and thus seemed to resort to an apparently canonical text instead of composing his own²¹. Let us quote the first sentences which open chapters devoted to three most celebrated heroines of the revolutionary *narodnik* movement. Hesia Helfman: "There are magnificent heroines and modest workers who sacrifice everything on the altar of cause and demand nothing in return". Vera Zasulich: "Glancing through the grand register of history it would be difficult and probably impossible to find a name which had gained an equally wide ranging and unquestioned celebrity". Sofia Perovskaya: "She radiated goodness although her beauty did not belong to the sort which dazzles upon first glance but more to the sort which comes to one's liking the more one examines it"²². The further sequences of the book are equally full of superlatives, sometimes extremely imaginative ones.

²⁰ B. Savinkov, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-224, cf. Mt. 16, 25.

²¹ P. Axelrod, *op. cit.*, pt. 1, p. 191.

²² S. Stepniak (S. Kravchinskiy), *Podpolnaya Rossiya (Underground Russia)*, S. Peterburg 1906, pp. 90, 94, 104.

Both this publication as well as others by authors who were representatives of revolutionary circles or their sympathizers stress, at times in one breath, the feminine softness and masculine ruggedness of the heroines. This approach is particularly distinct in descriptions of their attitude towards acts of armed terror. Vera Figner declared: “We (i.e. she and the Kornilov sisters — A. S.) were proposed participation in political struggle (...) My mind told me that one should follow the same path which was pursued by our comrades, political terrorists exhilarated with combat and bewinged with success but we felt otherwise and our hearts dictated something else (...) After certain deliberation, however, we overcame our moods and inclinations”²³. Dora Brilant mentioned by Boris Savinkov as his subordinate and close comrade in the Militant Organization of the Socialist Revolutionaries, appeared not to experience such doubts. “Silent, modest and timid, Dora lived only for one thing — her belief in terrorism”, wrote Savinkov²⁴. Later, however, he added upon a number of occasions that she regarded violence as something repulsive and that after the successful assassination of Grand Duke Sergey she wept instead of expressing triumph²⁵. Once again, one could multiply such examples. Pertinent descriptions demonstrate profound inner conflicts; they also portray enormous psychological tension experienced in the face of incessant danger. If, however, we would follow the footsteps of historians of culture and discern assorted topoi or archetypes, then the most obvious motif would be that of Gethsamene. Just as numerous is an association with monastic vocation which can be applied both for men and for women²⁶.

It is obvious that official circles and right-wing publicistics tried to counterpoise the white legend of noble and devoted revolutionaries — male and female — with a black legend. Such attempts were already made in the 1860s, especially in publications by Mikhail Katkov. Although only a weak echo of such ventures has survived to our days (in contrast to the period after 1917 when apologetics were constantly repeated), condemnations and accusa-

²³ V. Figner, *op. cit.*, pt. 1, p. 248; cf. B. Alpern Engel, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

²⁴ B. Savinkov, *op. cit.*, p. 51. Among the previous generation of women revolutionaries — leading members of *Zemlya i Volya* — a lack of scruples was supposed to have been characteristic for Maria Oshanina (B. Alpern-Engel, *op. cit.*, p. 178). One should keep in mind, however, that sources whose authors tried to depict the mental state of others are the most fallible.

²⁵ B. Savinkov, *op. cit.*, pp. 119, 136.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 136. This observation was maliciously albeit aptly formulated by S. Frank, the co-author of the celebrated almanac “Viekhii” (Beacons) which was critical towards the revolutionaries (“Recapitulating (...) we can describe the classical member of the Russian intelligentsia as a militant monk of a nihilistic religion of mundane happiness” — S. Frank, *Etika nihilizma. K kharakteristike npravstvennogo mirovozzreniya russkoy inteligentsii (The Ethics of Nihilism. The Characteristics of the Russian Intelligentsia's Ethical Views)*, in: *Viekhii. Sbornik statey o russkoy inteligentsii*, 5th ed., Moskva 1910, p. 204).

tions concerning the “underground people” should not be ignored owing to the wide ranging circulation of *Moskovskiye Vedomosti*, *Novoye Vremya* and similar periodicals. The latter was supported by a considerable part of Russian men of letters; alongside the best-known *Devils* by Dostoevskiy, critical accents are to be detected in Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* and *Novelty* not to mention such libelous works as Korney Tkhorzevskiy’s *Teneta* (*Trap*, 1885).

The official government anti-revolutionary propaganda was, as a rule, quite ineffective and primitive, restricted by its own tightly binding conventions and usually belated. In order to overcome the success of the wing which was aiming at winning over public opinion, the Ministry of the Interior in St. Petersburg produced a publication entitled *Khronika rievolyutsionnogo dvizheniya v Rossii 1878–1887 godov* (*Chronicle of the Revolutionary Movement in Russia in the Years 1878–1887*), Moskva 1906. This is the way in which it characterized Sofia Löschern von Herzfeld, member of *Zemlya i Volya*, arrested in Kiev in January 1879: “She was a real revolutionary vixen, vulgar and bold; only a few women in the socialist movement had attained her degree of fanaticism”²⁷.

A Polish version of anti-nihilistic propaganda, moderated, however, by a critical attitude towards tsardom and the Russian Orthodox Church, is well presented by *Geneza i rozwój nihilizmu w Rosji* (*The Origin and Development of Nihilism in Russia*), a book by Father Stanisław Załęski (known i.a. as the author of many volumes about the Jesuits in Poland), published in 1894. Załęski was quite well acquainted with official sources and material produced by the narodniki themselves; this is the way which he described the problem of interest to us: “Young ladies, daughters of the intelligentsia, usually brought up with little or no impact of religion, ran away from home already at the age of 15 and signed up for ‘courses’; or, having fictitiously married a nihilist, they became legally independent women who left abroad to study where (once again) they signed up for medical courses and placed their names on lists of socialist scum”²⁸. With the experienced eye of a specialist, the author noticed the para-religious nature of the ideological involvement of certain revolutionaries; he regarded it a religion of blasphemers or outright followers of Satan. On the other hand, we come across in Załęski’s book fragments which are an objective report or ones which even disclose concealed admiration. The author described female participants of the revolutionary movement as “(...) midwives, miraculous physicians,

²⁷ Cited from: L. Bazyłow, *Działalność narodziństwa rosyjskiego*, p. 77.

²⁸ S. Załęski, *Geneza i rozwój nihilizmu w Rosji* (*The Origin and Development of Nihilism in Russia*), Kraków 1894, p. 65.

ordinary workerson the field or in factory, and teachers who pursued their crafts extremely skilfully”, to list immediately: “various students and uneducated frivolous of both sexes”²⁹.

I have drawn attention to only a number of problems which come to mind in connection with the numerous participation of women in revolutionary struggle, and in particular in acts of terror. In doing so, I have bypassed assorted aspects which exceed beyond the “feminist” perspective, such as the violence of the authorities and that of the revolutionaries, questions of tactics, inner-party controversies as well as those waged between parties. I have also not discussed testimonies which had not been produced by the warring sides although one should look for pertinent statements made by liberals or other “centrists”. It would be also extremely interesting to attempt to reach beyond the works of authors of diaries, men of letters and publicists in order to become acquainted with the opinions of wider strata of society. A more complete characteristic of the attitude of Russian public opinion towards women who took part in conspiracies and armed activity would, call for time-consuming and long terms research which would take into consideration also archive material. Therefore, in order to take part in the discussion, I have opted for a more modest task. Authors engaged in this discussion represent certain untypical attitudes; some even negate the specificity of the above mentioned attitudes and behaviour. Barbara Alpern Engel, for instance, claims that one should rather speak about the phenomenon of terrorism as such and not about the participation of women in terrorism. D. Bowers, on the other hand, is of the opinion that a repressive social and political inclined women to a larger degree than men towards acts of violence since “only violence could topple institutional and emotional barriers which for the young marked her place in society”³⁰. The truth seems to lie between those two extreme points of view.

(Translated by Aleksandra Rodzińska-Chojnowska)

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³⁰ D. Bowers, *Training the Nihilists*, Ithacca 1975, p. 22.