The Emerging Women of the Russian Revolution

Jessica De La O

After generations of oppression, nineteenth-century Russia experienced a turning point in both the role of women and the use of rebellion as a vehicle for change. While civil disruption was common amongst the female citizenry, the height of it came as a direct result of the emancipation of the Russian peasantry in 1861 and the 1881 assassination of Czar Alexander II. Amidst the chaos, questions about the actions of these new emerging women produced new perspectives on gender and radicalism, embodied in new forms of female agency.

Historians now understand the revolutionary woman less as a result of noble efforts and more as a product of a process where women chose to shed their traditional roles and become rebels. Scholars have studied the revolutionary woman, but historians have overlooked overlaps of motive, action, consequence, and change amongst this group of actors. A comparative analysis of the women who sought change in Russia through terrorism, education, and writing, this study demonstrates that the long-term impact of more violent acts often overshadowed more peaceful efforts for change. It also shows how these women—and their divergent approaches to revolution—intertwined.

The study of revolutionary women in the late nineteenth century is a major part of Russian history. Autobiographies, memoirs, letters, and official documents demonstrating women's perspectives have contributed to scholarship on the twentieth-century Bolshevik Movement.[1]

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[1] Barbara Alpern Engel, "The Emergence of Women Revolutionaries in Russia." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 2, 1 (Spring, 1977): 92–105; Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton University Press, 1977); Derek Offord, *The Russian Revolutionary Movement in the 1880s* (Cambridge University Press, 1986); Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700–2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Natalia Pushkareva, *Women in Russian History: From the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1997); George

This article compares and contrasts the life stories, actions, and writings of seven revolutionary women in turn-of-the-century Russia. Vera Figner, an advocate for peaceful reform, saw how newly emancipated serfs continued to suffer from inequality and turned to terrorism as a solution. Vera Zasulich's need for political freedom and gender equality also eventually led her to endorsing terrorism. Emma Goldman's non-violent approach to revolution communicated her views on the struggles of the citizenry and stressed that absolute liberty was fundamental to her cause. After the revolution, Vera Broido also promoted nonviolence by using her mother's experiences of radicalism to examine government corruption, while Alexandra Kollontai argued that women played an essential role in the proletarian revolution. Sofya Kovalevskaya took advantage of the traditional path of government reform and argued that it was in the government's best interest to provide equal rights and access to anyone who pursued higher education. Lastly, Sofie Satina worked from within the Russian education system to criticize the ways the state served as an obstacle.

Examining the importance of the radical movements these women chose to participate in reveals what made these women so prominent, why they chose their causes, and why they considered the revolution worthy of risking everything they had. This traces the political movements of female revolutionaries and identifies their social connections to the *intelligentsia* and beyond. These social connections were integral to explaining the influences behind the revolution and outside factors that have shaped their actions.

The radical mood of the 1860s gave rise to a full movement in the 1870s and introduced a period of uncertainty and unrest, mainly because the women's movement reached its greatest

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Kearns, "Revolutionary Women and Others," *The Hudson Review* 39, 1 (1986): 121–134; Claudia Verhoeven, "Time of Terror, Terror of Time: On the Impatience of Russian Revolutionary Terrorism (Early 1860s – Early 1880s)," *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 58, 2 (2010): 254-273; Marina Liborakina, "Women's Voluntarism and Philanthropy in Pre-revolutionary Russia: Building a Civil Society," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 7, 4 (1996): 397-411.

numbers.[2] Although that generation failed to achieve educational reforms and equality, the revolution was far from over. Less than a decade after the emancipation of the serfs, the development of the radicalized revolutionary woman had begun: self-sacrificing activists who questioned their role in society denounced their traditional feminine characteristics.

For centuries, young women had been taught, primarily through religious scripture, that they were inferior to men and were obligated to obey their fathers or husbands.[3] Amidst the Decembrist revolt of 1825 and refusals to swear allegiance to Czar Nicholas I, a new group of actors arrived: the wives of the male aggressors who supported the revolution.[4] While hangings were a common punishment for the radicals, many others were exiled with their wives.[5] Many of these women believed that Russia was trapped in a feudal society and aligned themselves with other female radicals who shared their view that Russia was rife with injustice.

After Czar Nicolas I's death in 1855, heir to the throne Alexander II implemented multiple agrarian reforms and emancipated the empire's serfs in 1861. Despite signs of change, newly freed serfs still felt their economic standing was in peril.[6] These changes, along with "processes of economic development, expansion of formal education, and cultural change that powerfully affected the lives of most women" bred uncertainty, especially as the peasantry left the countryside in search of work in cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg.[7]

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[2] Jane McDermid and Anna Hilyar, *Midwives of the Revolution: Female Bolsheviks and Women Workers in 1917* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 99.

[3] Pushkareva, *Women in Russian History*, 36.

[4] Ibid., 44–45.

[5] Ibid., 202.

[6] Engel, *Mothers and Daughters,* 49–50.

[7] Robin Bisha, et. al., ed., *Russian Women, 1698–1917: Experience & Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 161.

Life for women in cities was not much different from the countryside. Access to equal education still had many barriers.[8] As "changes in employment in turn both compelled a redefinition of what constituted 'women's work' and helped to undermine the system social estates," many women found themselves doing demeaning work, including cleaning and other domestic labor.[9] When the inconsistencies and empty promises of reform, welfare, and equality from the Czar became impossible to ignore, many anarchist groups shared their ideas on revolution, the need for education and work, and shedding the traditional familial roles. With the spread of the need for action, the emergence of the nihilist woman was no longer a question of *if*, but *when*?

The revolutionary women of the late nineteenth century came from all walks of life. Inspired by the early writings of European feminists, Russian literature, and revolutionary propaganda, these women were desperate to act on their new ideas. Regardless of their chosen method of action, the radicalization of these women was only the beginning of a new understanding of womanhood. Influenced by novels like Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done*, these women read about fictional revolutionaries that lived the rebel's dream of escaping a restricting verve to live one of freedom and independence.[10]

Studies of nineteenth-century revolutionary Russia primarily focus on the acts of terrorists like Vera Figner and Vera Zasulich, who believed their actions would accelerate change. Some terrorists swore allegiance to the revolution and vowed a continuous fight to instill fear into the government and promote the transformation of the country. But once the empire's police began arresting and punishing these revolutionaries, many of them chose alternatives more fitting to their beliefs and proclivities.

Born into a wealthy family, Vera Figner lived her childhood unaware that the Russian peasantry lived in extreme poverty. In her teens she became aware of "the disparity between her own

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[8] Sophia Satina, *Education of Women in Pre-Revolutionary Russia* (New York: Sophia Satina, 1966), 38.

[9] Bisha, et. al., *Russian Women, 1698–1917,* 161.

[10] Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What Is To Be Done* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989. First published in 1863).

privileged position and the destitution of the peasantry."[11] Figner wanted to help the poor by studying abroad and becoming a doctor but her father, expecting her to marry, forbade the plan. She eventually conformed to her father's expectations and married Aleksey Victorovich in 1870. Little did her family know, her husband did not expect his new wife to submit to a traditional familial life. Figner wrote in her memoir, "he shared my views and sympathized with my plans. We read books together and were of one mind with respect to my entering a university."[12] By conforming to the traditional system of marriage, Figner leveraged her married status to her benefit and convinced her husband to move to Zurich so she could study medicine.

While in Zurich, Figner buried herself in her studies, became more attracted to the growing radical movement in the city, and drifted from her husband.[13] She was angry with the government, their treatment of commoners, and the economic toll on women, but received little support from her husband. Figner eventually made her decision and "became a socialist and a revolutionary."[14] She believed that her involvement would make a significant difference and slowly joined the fight for equality, determining both her future and the route she would take toward revolution. Figner returned to Russia without her degree, divorced her husband, immersed herself in the life of the peasantry, and dedicated herself to the revolutionary movement.

Figner believed she had a "moral obligation" to destroy "the absolutist form of government," but began to question if ending her education was a mistake as she was at odds with some revolutionaries. She chose extreme radicalism, concluding that "violence was the only solution. I could not follow the peaceful path."[15] She volunteered her time to radical committees and became an executive member of the *People's Will*, an anti-Czarist

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[11] Barbara Alpern Engel and Clifford N. Rosenthal, *Five Sisters: Women Against the Tsar* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 3.
[12] Vera Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), 36.
[13] Ibid., 40–41.
[14] Engel and Rosenthal, *Five Sisters*, 11.
[15] Ibid., 43.

group of male and female revolutionaries from different occupation and included members who wished to assassinate Czar Alexander II. Figner reflected on her experience and expanded her inner circle of radicals while she pondered how she could encourage young people to participate.[16] Making use of her knowledge of the Russian legal system via passports and forged marriages to procure explosives, she conspired with fellow revolutionaries against administrators and landowners.

While many people did not see violence as the answer and preferred peaceful protests, they were still met with "wholesale arrests, exile, penal servitude, and central prisons."[17] Witnessing these acts further radicalized Figner and she continued plotting against the totalitarian regime. As she met with other radicals who shared her views, she became even more determined to follow through with her extremist acts and encouraged other women to risk their freedom in the name of "justified" political crimes. One of Figner's last revolutionary acts was her part in planning the assassination of Czar Alexander II, which included several well-organized attempts to plant bombs and the construction of mines under railways in places the Czar was known to frequent.[18] The assassination finally occurred when Nikoli Rysakoff threw a bomb under the Czar's carriage in 1881.[19] Despite not throwing the bomb herself, Figner's involvement had dire consequences. She was arrested, charged with conspiracy, imprisoned, and ultimately exiled from Russia. After she learned some of her compatriots had legally denounced their actions in written statements, she resorted back to the life she knew before she became a revolutionary and pursued her education.[20]

Throughout her imprisonment, Figner deeply reflected on her life and her use of terror in the revolution. She realized that "the revolutionary movement had been defeated, its organization

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[16] Ibid., 47.
[17] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 73.
[18] Ibid., 75.
[19] Peter Kropotkin, "The Assassination of Alexander II" in *Readings in Modern European History,* James Harvey Robinson and Charles Beard, eds., vol. 2 (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1908): 362–363.
[20] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 151–152.

destroyed, and the Executive Committee had perished to the very last member."[21] Figner concluded that the acts she committed and her role and contributions to the revolution were things to be left behind. While some women wanted the revolution to target the highest political authority, others took it upon themselves to act on their own accord.

Born into an impoverished family, Vera Zasulich was considered noble by birth. After her father's death, her mother expected her to "become a respectable noblewoman, equipped with all the proper refinements," which included an education and marriage.[22] She was sent to live with her well-to-do extended family and rebelled against their expected conventions. Zasulich was drawn toward the peasantry and their lifestyle. She became increasingly familiar with the plight of the poor and began to sympathize with their cause. Like Figner, Zasulich was unaware of Russian class inequality. Even though she had no sense of the struggles of the poor, she knew that she was not meant to lead an aristocratic life. Zasulich wrote, "Even before my revolutionary dreams, even before I was sent to boarding school, I made elaborate plans to keep from becoming a governess."[23] She became well-read on human suffering and socialist propaganda. Her dedication to Orthodox Christianity had molded her daily life and she understood revolutionary sacrifices in religious terms. Other women, such as Vera Figner, had imagined themselves as the Virgin Mother, stretching out their arms to the afflicted masses and offering them hope.[24] Some believed that martyrdom might be necessary. Zasulich's inspiration went further. She interpreted the New Testament in accordance with her new radical outlook and claimed to break free from traditional life to serve Jesus Christ, even if it meant becoming a martyr.[25]

Like it had for many others born into nobility, the reign of Alexander II continued to fuel Zasulich's radicalization. Although

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[21] Ibid., 186.
[22] Siljak, *Angel of Vengeance,* 17.
[23] Jay Bergman, *Vera Zasulich: A Biography* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983), 4.
[24] Siljak, *Angel of Vengeance, 28.*
[25] Ibid., 29-30.

she attended a boarding school, her studies were no match for the radical propaganda and pamphlets she read, or the evening lectures she attended with extremists like Dmitrii Karakozov and Sergei Nechaev. After many private discussions with Nechaev on radicalism and the state of Russia, Zasulich took her militancy a step further and became a nihilist.[26] Convinced that her fellow extremists would accept her without question, she committed to her new radical life and began contributing to the undertakings of her fellow revolutionaries despite lingering hesitation.[27] Nihilism revealed to Zasulich how the educational system had failed her and how the government dismissed her as a woman. She justified her involvement in the group through the empowerment she felt they offered, stating that the "specter of revolution made me equal to a boy."[28] Zasulich felt that revolution and nihilism allowed her and her fellow conspirators to reach their goals. Little did she know, Nechaev worked alongside the police and sought to betray all those who followed his supposed beliefs.

Despite Nechaev's betrayal, her arrest, imprisonment, and exile, Zasulich held on to her revolutionary beliefs and sought betterment for the Russian population. After learning of Alexei Bogoliubov's beating by official forces, she concluded that violence was necessary and plotted the assassination of Fyodor Trepov, the governor of St. Peterburg's.[29] Even knowing she could be caught, arrested, imprisoned, and exiled all over again, this never deterred her plan. She truly believed that revolution was pointless unless one was willing to commit to martyrdom for their cause.[30] Once face-to-face with Trepov, Zasulich hesitated. She claimed it was "inconvenient to shoot," but it is possible that she was simply less dedicated to the revolution than she asserted.[31] The Russian citizenry paid little attention to the assassination attempt itself. What concerned them more was her attitude toward

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[26] Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), 280.
[27] Siljak, *Angel of Vengeance, 53.*
[28] Ibid., 75.
[29] Engel and Rosenthal, *Five Sisters,* 78. His crime was not removing his hat while in the presence of Governor Trepov.
[30] Ibid., 79.
[31] Ibid., 81.

the event. At the same time, her hesitation contradicted her feelings of invincibility. A jury acquitted her, blaming the government for her actions, and Zasulich went into hiding amongst other radicals, later fleeing to Switzerland.

The fight for gender equality was difficult, but it was only when Figner and Zasulich turned their attention toward the inequality of the classes that they recognized the true state of affairs in Russia. While both walked away from terror and violence, the acts that emerged from these women did not come from a desire to instill pain and fear in the public, but to make their cry for equality in all realms heard. As Figner and Zasulich recalled in their memoirs, resorting to terror and death was necessary. Yet, not all revolutionaries saw this as the only way.

Russian women participated in producing propaganda in addition to engaging in terrorism. Concerned with the social welfare and the standing of women in Russia, many began writing on the social ills and liberation of women. While many reforms for women and education took place under Czar Alexander II, many revolutionaries believed they were not enough. Some remained frustrated with the immoral treatment of women. Others were concerned with the standing of Russians and humankind as a whole, and few were simply focused on feminism. Regardless of their motivations, these women wanted their experience to be valued as an inspiration for change, a starting point for the development of the new woman in Russia.

One of the most influential voices that emerged from the Russian Revolution belonged to the feminist anarchist Emma Goldman. Although her most noted radical activity took place in the United States, her personal life and experiences with imprisonment, travel, political activism, and reform movements revealed many parallels between her time in the United States and her return Russia in exile. Never one to keep women's issues private, Goldman expressed her ideas of birth control, friendships, expression of free love, and her overall fight at the turn of the century.

Born into difficult familial circumstances, Goldman grew into a very studious adolescent. Passing her required exams to attend school, she often challenged her instructors and soon found herself without a good recommendation. Unable to further her education,

she found herself taking on odd jobs with her family.[32] In defiance of her disapproving father, she began to study the works of the nihilists, the reforms imposed by Czar Alexander II, and other revolutionary fodder. Like other women of the day who did not conform to traditional roles and sought to do what was best for themselves and womankind, she identified with Vera Pavlova, the protagonist in Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done*.[33] After leaving Russia with her sister and arriving in New York City in 1889, her revolutionary life began with her introduction to Alexander Berkman, a prominent figure in the anarchist movement.[34] She was then introduced to Johann Most, "the leader of the masses, the man of magic tongue and powerful pen."[35] It was under Most's guidance and Berkman's influence that she began public speaking, immersing herself in the cause of the anarchists. Finding herself growing closer to Berkman and other anarchists, she found love in different people, supporting one of the greatest themes of her entire life: "Yes, it is possible to love more than one!"[36] After a brief affair with Most, she refocused on the anarchist movement. This time she set her sights on the assassination of Henry Clay Frick, "a man known for his enmity to labor… the owner of extensive coke fields, where unions were prohibited and the workers were ruled with an iron hand."[37] Frick's attempt to restrict workers and their families from working or residing in the company houses enraged Berkman, who sought to assassinate Frick, while Goldman remained in New York to speak out on the injustices of Homestead.[38] After a failed attempt

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[32] Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (University of Chicago Press, 1982), 6–7.
[33] Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 27–28.
[34] Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 115-119; Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For," *Anarchism and Other Essays* (Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1910).
[35] Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For," 154.
[36] Ibid., 167.
[37] Ibid., 205.
[38] Ibid., 208–209.

to assassinate Frick in 1892, Berkman was sentenced to fourteen years in prison and Goldman found herself alone.[39]

By 1906, Goldman began publishing *Mother Earth*, a magazine where she expressed her thoughts on the cause of the anarchists and her political associations.[40] Her publications and speaking engagements made her a target for law enforcement, resulting in multiple arrests. After she and Berkman were charged with violating the Espionage Act, they were deported to the Soviet Union, where they were both met with the animosity of the Bolsheviks.[41] After witnessing the atrocities under the Bolshevik Revolution, Goldman escaped and headed to Western Europe, and later Canada. She eventually settled in France, where she reflected on her immersion into the anarchist ideology, what she was willing to risk, and how her relationships formed and changed throughout her endeavors. She was a prominent figure in the revolution because she not only wrote on the experiences of womanhood and the limited choices they had. She questioned the ways the government tried to impose itself on almost every aspect of a woman's life, and the injustice confronting womanhood.

Aleksandra Kollontai was born into an aristocratic family during the height of the revolution. Growing up with servants, her mother insisted she grow into a respectable figure in society.[42] Recognizing the restrictions imposed upon women who received a higher education, she viewed "political action as highly esteemed and to perceive political injustice as personally threatening."[43] As she grew into her adolescence she wanted to expand her education and take higher level classes but her mother discouraged her from attending, fearing that potential influences behind the revolution would negatively impact her. At the behest of her parents, she married Vladimir Ludvigovich Kollontai at twenty-two years old. Married for only a short time, she became

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[39] Ibid., 234.
[40] Vivian Gornick, *Emma Goldman: Revolution as a Way of Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 62.
[41] Goldman, *Living My Life*, 804–805.
[42] Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 7–8.
[43] Ibid., 10.

disgruntled with the relationship, especially after the birth of their first child, stating, "I hate marriage… It's an idiotic, meaningless life. I will become a writer."[44] She was determined to be independent and finding herself "more and more [inclined] to the Russian workers' revolutionary movement." She first became involved with the revolutionaries in the early 1890s.[45] As a young educated female, she was able to contribute her knowledge to the cause and slowly became a respected figure amongst inner circles of men and women. Distanced from her husband, isolated from her family, and interested in another man, she made a drastic decision to separate from her husband and child and immersed herself into the world of the Marxists.[46]

After studying in Switzerland and then returning to St. Petersburg, Kollontai began publishing her work, beginning with the struggles of the poor, criticizing capitalism, and the rise of the social classes in Russia. It was not long until she turned her focus to the struggles of women and went from a revolutionary to a "socialist feminist."[47] As she continued to write, she became increasingly involved with those who were loyal to the working class and against the bourgeoisie. In 1905, one of the very first interests of the new socialist feminist was the theory behind 'The Woman Question', which questioned the role of women outside of the home in developing nations. After attending many feminists' meetings, she concluded that the Russian government did little to place women at the forefront of the social hierarchy and made efforts to establish programs and groups that would support women in the workforce and elsewhere.[48] Continuously supporting the role of working women, Kollontai came out with *The Social Basis of the Women's Question*. The focus of her book was centered on Marxist beliefs about the economic independence of women, family life, pregnancy rights, and political rights.[49] The

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[44] Ibid., 16.
[45] Kollontai, *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman*, 16.
[46] Ibid., 23.
[47] Ibid., 39.
[48] Ibid., 4.
[49] Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist,* 56.

major theme of her monograph seemed to be indecisiveness as she continuously asked readers, "Which way shall we go? What should we do? How can we make sure that the female section of the population of Russia also receives the fruit of the long, stubborn and agonizingly difficult struggle for a new political structure in our homeland?"[50] Believing that an economically dependent woman was at the root of the issues women faced, she made multiple historical references on free women and how the quiet feminist was the greatest enemy of womanhood. Although she recognized and praised the independent woman, she also emphasized the hardships that women confronted.[51] As she became a more prominent figure in the pre-revolutionary era, her writings became more radical. She continued to question the role of women. Often basing her ideas on women refusing to conform to gender norms and entering the workforce, she emphasized how these individuals were under public scrutiny. Commenting on such events as "Women's Day," she questioned how women could emancipate themselves.[52] Initially dedicating her thoughts to the emancipation of women in Russia and beyond, she began referencing capitalism and how women in the labor force would benefit the nation. Believing that a society where women would be seen as equal members was only the beginning.

The revolution of the late nineteenth century not only influenced a new generation, but also served as an inspiration for those who saw the progress of previous revolutionaries. In the case of Vera Broido, who was too young to become an active participant, it was her familial experiences that influenced her view of revolutionaries when she decided to put her thoughts on paper. Broido was born into the life of the revolutionaries and the experiences of her family allowed her to see how the government had targeted them. Both her mother and father were Mensheviks, a faction of the Russian Socialists, who had exposed her to the life and experience of the revolution.[53] By this time, the terror had died

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[50] Kollontai, *The Social Basis of the Women's Question.*
[51] Ibid.
[52] Kollontai, *Selected Articles and Speeches,* 244.
[53] Vera Broido, *Apostles Into Terrorists: Women and the Revolutionary Movement in the Russia of Alexander II* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979), v.

down and the once militant revolutionary women were left to share stories with the new generations. Broido's writing began with these firsthand accounts, allowing her access to the history of Russian women from a bottom-up perspective. Although very young, the experiences of her mother, revolutionary Eva Broido, deeply affected her and her understanding of the right to revolt. Although her mother was not a terrorist, seeking an education was radical for a woman.[54]

Through her mother's stories of struggle, Broido was able to reflect and understand the role the government played in privileging education access for the rich.[55] As she relived the experiences of the previous generation when her mother was forced into exile, it is almost as though she had gone back to those moments when the revolution was at its peak in the nineteenth century. Whether it was being watched by the government, hearing the stories of nineteenth-century Russia, or becoming involved in new underground work for the movement, these individuals had a fresh story to tell and it proved to be not that much different from that of the pioneers of the revolution. Fortunately, she did not see her revolutionary work as troublesome for their family, but long overdue for Russia.

As Goldman, Kollontai, and Broido used the experiences of the past as a basis for understanding the revolution, they also compared them to the actions that led to their writing. The twentieth-century revolutionaries sought to finish what those in the nineteenth century could not, showing how impossible change was in Russia and why it would take something greater than terror and propaganda to make any semblance of progress.

While many revolutionaries of the nineteenth century spoke out and protested against the government, many silent revolutionaries began taking on a different path toward political enlightenment. Although concerned with the injustices of Russia, these revolutionaries were not willing to risk their freedom, and did not want to commit terrorist acts that would only cause an uproar for a short period of time. Nor did they write what they felt about the system with hopes that their propaganda would be

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[54] Eva Broido, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, trans. ed. Vera Broido (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 9.
[55] Vera Broido, *Apostles Into Terrorists, 7.*

distributed. Instead, they focused on actions with lasting effects on the Russian population and possibly the rest of the world: they sought an education.

Sofya Kovalevskaya was born into a traditional aristocratic household that encouraged her to marry and raise children, rather than pursue an education.[56] Her maternal family was well-educated, especially her grandfather, who had studied science and published many books.[57] Kovalevskaya once said, "I was just mesmerized by the strange symbols. I'd stare at them for hours, trying to figure out which page came first, which next, and so on."[58] As an adolescent she applied herself in mathematics, especially calculus. All the while, she learned about the oppressive state. Kovalevskaya became strongly influenced by her sister, Anyuta, and began a slow transition into the study of nihilism, which she interpreted as the movement of a "progressive young lady."[59]Although intrigued by nihilism and the community, her love for mathematics did not cease, but the restrictive reforms on education for women prevented many from attending lectures and classes. She understood that the only way she would be able to attend school and be a contributive member to her country was to either get permission from her father or to marry someone who supported the advancement of her education and study abroad. She found the latter in Vladimir Kovalevsky, who she married in 1868.[60] A student himself, Kovalevsky sought to help his new bride in her search for education by leaving Russia to study abroad in Heidelberg, and later Berlin.[61] Despite many years of struggle, including periods where universities refused to credit her for

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[56] Sofya Kovalevskaya, *A Russian Childhood* (New York: Springer, 1978), 88.

[57] Joan Spicci*, Beyond the Limit: The Dream of Sofya Kovalevskaya* (New York: Forge Books, 2002), 39.

[58] Ibid., 42.

[59] Ibid., 153.

[60] The spelling of Sofya Kovalevskaya's husband Vladimir Kovalevsky was taken from Sofya Kovalevskaya, *A Russian Childhood*.

[61] Sabine I. Golz, et. al., "Hypnotism and Medicine in 1888 Paris: Contemporary Observations by Sofia Kovalevskaya," *SubStance*, 25, 1, issue 79 (1996): 3–4.

classes she had taken, she received her doctorate in mathematics from the University of Göttingen in 1874.

Kovalevskaya's negative outlook on the Russian empire influenced her perception of attaining an education and going on to use that knowledge to benefit others. Enduring her own setbacks of being denied the right to education, forcing herself to marry, and traveling abroad, she used her understanding of traditional feminism and the revolutionary movement as a means of using government reforms to her advantage. By conforming to marriage, she became a professor, proving the revolutionary within herself sought an alternate way of getting what she wanted. Earning a doctorate and professorship was a rare feat in itself. Those who were not as fortunate were left at the mercy of a dismal education. But Sophie Satina showed that even having a basic education in the nineteenth century was miraculous.

Sophie Satina grew up amongst those with a nihilist or rebellious mentality, but her desire for an education made her an extremely prominent figure in the revolution. Once reserved for the upper-class, it was under the reign of Catherine the Great (1729–1796) that education was viewed as a priority for women.[62] According to Satina, "Catherine considered that there should be no difference in the education of men and women and that enlightened women would be of value to their country," justifying why many believed change was coming but would take time to be fully accepted by the male leaders of the Russia government [63]. While education for women was a priority during Catherine's reign, it soon became again almost impossible for women to attain.[64] The government promoted young men's education instead. Satina wrote, "[The villagers] were more willing to send boys because, in order to win the cooperation of the parents, the Government announced in 1874 that social privileges would be granted in military service to literate young man [sic]."[65] As the rigor was a lot to handle in the early days of public education, many believed the educational system consistently referred

[62] Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700-2000*, 15–16.
[63] Satina, *Education of Women in Pre-Revolutionary Russia*, 35.
[64] Ibid., 8.
[65] Ibid., 24.

women back to domesticity. [66] Moreover, after practically being torn away from their families, women were expected to follow regulations imposed by headmistresses, nuns, and matrons, which revolved around the formation a dignified woman, as opposed to an educated woman.[67] The educational process did little to prepare these young girls for a world where they would be allowed to work in competitive fields. Thus, a teaching program was added to the Institute after 'primary' education was completed.[68] While these institutions seemed to improve their practices, in terms of developing an independent woman, as the nihilist movement came around, access to higher education became extremely restricted.

While the rigor was the same, passing examinations seemed to be the biggest struggle for many. Satina notes, "They were written and oral in mathematics in Russian and modern languages, but only oral in other subjects."[69] Even during the nineteenth century, Russia had roughly ninety-four dialects used all over the country, many of them differing from the countryside. While access to education was granted to the peasantry after their emancipation, the oral examinations were a restrictive tool, as many were not familiar with the modernization of the languages, often resorting back to their native dialects. Although many believed the acts of the terrorists were making the case for equality widely known, those like Satina struggled with the new reforms on education. The change in reforms at the hands of the government caused those who were going through the long process of receiving a higher education to form their own organization. They pressured the government to remove these restrictive reforms, so they could finish in a timely fashion.[70]

Sexism played a role in the early advancement of women taking on higher positions, where educated males refused to take on professorship or do anything to help Russia's female citizenry, even in healthcare. In these cases, women had been allowed to be trained in fields of dentistry, pharmaceuticals, and gynecology,

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[66] Ibid., 36–37.
[67] Ibid., 37.
[68] Ibid., 39.
[69] Ibid., 52.
[70] Ibid., 66–68.

but were very limited, especially during the Crimean War (1853–1855).[71] The true fight came from the women who had followed the educational foundation input by the system, and passed their exams, yet, the government introduced new reforms, as a result of the terror, to stop female students from finishing their studies. Satina writes, "It was the women themselves who became most active in the difficult task of organizing these schools to which the Government was opposed. The struggle between the Government and the women "…lasted many years."[72] Lack of formal recognition after passing their examinations proved to be another frustration for women like Satina, as women received a certificate not a diploma.[73] As higher education had been denied to women for centuries, she took advantage of the opening reforms and studied "botany, zoology, histology, embryology, crystallography and mathematics."[74] Reflecting on the terror and reform, she and many other students did not allow themselves to be influenced by early twentieth-century radicals who sought more from the government. Feeling that students, especially young females, had come so far, there was no need to push further. Although seeking higher education during the nineteenth century was a revolutionary concept, the revolt opened up educational rights to women early in the twentieth century, of which Satina was more than willing to take advantage of, receiving her doctorate in 1944 and teaching in multiple universities.

Given that young women were conforming to marriage and family, many aligned themselves with radical men to use their marital standing as a means to seek education outside of Russia. While the right to education came at a slow pace, many women still found roadblocks. Fearing the influence of outside western ideals, new reforms eventually allowed for more reasonable access to education for women. Although the route to education was eventually granted to women in the twentieth century, the previous generations had to endure an oppressive system that was set up to ensure their failure and force them back into the home. While some adopted non-violent means, they should not be seen

[71] Ibid., 83–84.
[72] Ibid., 70.
[73] Ibid., 87.
[74] Ibid., 114.

as anything less than revolutionary. Their enlightened and radical desire to be educated would not only prove detrimental to Russia but as an influence on the education of woman around the world. Once forced to remain in a half-educated state of limbo, these progressive women proved that education was not only meant betterment not only for their sex but for Russia.

The involvement of women in the revolution was not new to nineteenth-century Russians, but the lengths these women were willing to resort to show how serious they were about making change a reality. Losing their livelihood, families, and social standing in Russia was a risk they were more than willing to take, considering their strife was not a feminist myth, but a question of humanity as well. Figner and Zasulich resorted to terrorism, hoping to attain equality for the class and gender systems. Once they realized that their actions had created more problems than solutions, they concluded that terrorism solely changed their own experiences and found that a push toward education may have better suited the cause than such extreme measures. Goldman and Kollontai analyzed and used the experiences of the female citizenry as the basis for writing and a reason to question the modes of the government. Convinced that the Czarist regime continuously oppressed Russian women, both women questioned why people were not as outraged as they were by this injustice and acknowledged the role of female terrorism, using it as another mode for writing. While curious what women were doing to liberate themselves, they also referenced the work of the terrorist actors and questioned why these measures were necessary to get a message out. Broido was an interesting case because although her participation in the revolutionary movement revolved around her writing, her mother's experiences transcended through her at an early age, forcing her to experience the life that her mother had once led. By using that experience and referencing the work of former terrorists, Broido was able to formulate a better argument against the Czarist regime and the need to revolt. These three figures used the work of former radicals to reflect on the results of the past and as propaganda for the upcoming generation. While Satina and Kovalevskaya were not necessarily special actors in the revolutionary movement, their experience within the Russian educational system forced them to continue pursuing degrees in

their respective fields. Knowledgeable of the roles the nihilists were playing against the government, these women used those experiences as an influence for not taking *No* for an answer. Although not considered radical for the time, Satina and Kovalevskaya used the basic educational resources provided to them and eventually found their way to higher education through alternate modes. Though their struggles continued into the twentieth century, their continued untraditional role in society would benefit many.

The origin of each revolutionary woman details their revolutionary thought process and how fighting the government became a priority. Despite many not having an alternate plan, their need for change in Russia could no longer be ignored. Although some revolutionary women referenced their familial occupations and name as a reason to revolt, their movement into new social groups gave their narratives a point of transition, resulting in them becoming self-taught and finding others who shared their same beliefs. While the memoirs and autobiographies tell how some revolutionaries were fostered to fend for themselves, all the while writing, transporting, and sharing nihilists' literature, the details of their development as emerging women clearly explains the influence they had on the future generations of Bolshevik women in the twentieth century.

In looking at the anti-Czarist revolutionary movement and how terrorism was seen as a means of action in Russia, the development of the non-violent aggressors was slow but recognizable. Those who conformed to their social expectations to revolutionize themselves show how each individual woman created her own path. Some revolutionary women resorted to violence and terrorism as the answer. Some wrote on the opposition against the regime. Others looked to marriage to create their own rebellious path toward higher education. Each woman had her own reason for revolting, her own actions, her own outcome and her own consequence. Each woman did what she deemed necessary and was selfless in her own right, knowing that success was not guaranteed.

In studying these revolutionary women, some may find the gift of knowledge, as well as the true meaning of chance, dreaming, recovering, and reasoning. These women took a chance

on the revolution; many of them were willing to risk so much for change they knew they would probably never see in their lifetime. These women knew how to recover when things did not go according to plan. When one idea did not work out, they did not leave the cause and conform to what was expected; they picked up where they left off and continued on with their journey. These women used logic and reasoning when planning their individual method of revolt. While considering the pros and cons, the revolution was the obvious answer. Regardless of the terror, the literature, and the need for education, each woman wanted to ensure that one day their voices would be loud enough, and Russia would finally rid itself of its feudal traits and emerge as a strong and viable nation for all future generations of Russian men and women to come.