


Women's Experiences of 1937: Everyday Legacies of the Purges and the Great Terror in the Soviet Union

Tools

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Abstract

The year 1937 is one of the most important dates in Soviet history. August 1937 saw the introduction of Operational Order No. 00486, which allowed action to be taken against the wives and children of 'enemies of the people'. Autobiographical and biographical accounts, life stories, eye-witness testimonies, memoir literatures and other forms of personal narratives often mention direct experiences of battle and the struggle for survival during the Second World War as the most significant turning point in their individual accounts of the history of the Soviet Union. This chapter examines the various recollections of '1937' in a selection of women's life narratives. Family lives were disrupted by the purges in ways other than direct arrests, as Yelena Khanga has explained in relation to the wider international community. The family members of those who had been purged during the Great Terror carried the burden of association and this now tainted personal biography with them throughout their lives.

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Also known as the Great Purges or Ezhovshchina (after the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, Nikolai Ezhov, who oversaw the process before himself becoming one of its casualties), it has been a major subject of debate concerning its origins, extent, and consequences. Recent archival-based research has resolved some issues, but there remains much that is elusive about the Terror. The Great Terror was punctuated by three elaborately staged show trials of former high-ranking Communists. A second show trial followed in January 1937 with Lurii Piatakov and other leading figures in the industrialization drive as the chief defendants. 2. Women's Experiences of 1937: Everyday Legacies of the Purges and the Great Terror in the Soviet Union. 3. Victims and Collective Trauma: Surviving Mass Repression and Living through the Soviet period. 4. Women's Experiences of Repression in Czechoslovakia, 1948-1968. 5. Women's Experiences of 1956: Student Protesters and Partisans in Romania. View More. View Less. Corina Snitar is a PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow. Eszter Zsofia Toth is in the Research Institute for History, Budapest. Book Series. This book is included in the following series: Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe. Related Subjects. Central Asian, Russian & Eastern European Studies. violence of the Great Terror followed from a fearful and insecure regime. Stalin and his leadership group were "afraid of everything."¹⁹ They suffered from an insecurity complex that forced them to resort to violence and repression. Stalin and his cronies were profoundly reactive, Getty argues, reacting to the chaos that surrounded them, to the fears that threatened to plunge them into oblivion. Khlevniuk argues that the Great Terror was centrally orchestrated, "a series of purposeful and carefully planned centralized operations."³²

Stalin had two specific goals: destroy a potential “fifth column” and purge the leading cadres. These millions of people would turn against Stalin and the Soviet Union – they would unite to form a “fifth column.”