



Village Values: Negotiating Identity, Gender, and Resistance in Contemporary Russian Life-Cycle Rituals

Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby

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Village Values is the first book to examine the trends in the development and practice of urban Russian life-cycle rituals from the 19th to the 21st centuries. Rituals were a source of contention for theorists from the earliest decades of the Soviet Union because of their connection to religion and to outmoded patriarchal views of the family. After they were embraced by official state policy in the 1930s, birth, marriage, and funerary rituals became the locus for negotiation of social and familial identity. Drawing upon extensive interviews with ritual participants and state celebrants, Rouhier-Willoughby examines developments in the Soviet ritual complex from the post-WWII years to the present day, with a particular emphasis on the heyday of ritual creation, the 1970s and 1980s.

The Soviet ritual complex featured a tripartite structure based on native folk material, Soviet ideology, and borrowings from the West. Ritual practice allowed citizens to apply these three disparate, and yet oddly coherent, symbolic systems to establish their identity as spouses, parents, and the bereaved. Rouhier-Willoughby shows how ritual participants perpetuated and undermined the social hierarchy in the face of state policy that viewed the family as the fundamental socialist cell and as the core of social stability.

The book examines how the shifts in post-Soviet society have realigned the three elements making up the Soviet ritual complex into an oppositional structure of ours versus theirs. Ritual actors continue to practice rites that restructure and accommodate to the consumerism many find disturbing and anti-family. This book will be of great interest to specialists on Russia and on ritual as well as to a general audience interested in Russian culture.

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