

Marcinkeviciene D. ***Tamed Realities 1945-1970: Biographic Interviews with Lithuanian Women.***-Vilnius University.- V.- 2007.- 205 p. ISBN 978-9955-33-034-9

The study "Tamed Realities: 1945-1970: Biographic Interviews with Lithuanian Women" is comprised of 10 life stories and their analysis. The book presents experiences of women in post-war Lithuania, years of Khrushchev rule and the beginning of Brezhnev era.

The study reveals women's identities, which evolved in occupied Lithuania and the impact made upon this process by the Soviet ideology. The latter is understood as Communist propaganda in Soviet Lithuanian periodicals of the time. The study makes a presumption that women's understanding about gender roles, reconciliation of work and family life, principles of child education often matches official patterns promoted in the press. Life stories of Lithuanian women reveal that their decisions were influenced on propaganda clichés of the time. However, the presumption about sheer dictate of the Soviet regime on women's subjectivity is not the conclusion of this study. Apart of biographic interviews does not have propaganda imprint and reveal an authentic social memory. Such narratives belong to women, which the Soviet Government thought to be reliable and loyal or in opposite - not worth its attention and care. Unlike popular opinion, women who avoided direct impact of ideology had little to do with open or secret resistance against the regime. The study reveals that to slip through the grasp of the Soviet propaganda could only hope those women which belonged to Avant-garde of socialist society or were the outcasts of the regime.

Notwithstanding the fact, that after Stalin's death in 1953 citizens of the USSR acquired more civil liberties, Soviet propaganda turned to disciplinization, rationalization and control of private life [1]. During the so-called political thaw under the rule of Khrushchev women especially suffered a huge propaganda pressure. They were encouraged to follow a role model of educated, socially active and "emancipated woman". Biographical interviews with Lithuanian women support the fact that Soviet women identities intensively developed in the mid. fifties. This chronological boundary is reflected in most interviews. Women gave articulated and detailed stories of their life until the Soviet occupation of 1940, vividly remembered the Second World War and post-war years. However, beginning with the mid. fifties, their memory was overshadowed by constructs of the Soviet propaganda: narratives of women apparently became poor, formal and reminded of excerpts from Soviet newspapers and magazines of those days.

The study includes interviews with women of various social groups, different social status, background and education. Such is interview with an ordinary Communist Party member Marija Popova (born 1932), kolkhoz farmer Apolonija Birutė-Paliulienė (born 1937), artist Adasa Skliutauskaitė (born 1931), inmate of orphan house Aneta Šlegel (born around 1940), top ranking party official Leokadija Diržinskaitė (born 1921), medical nurse Danutė Marija Kvasienė (born 1938), restaurant waitress Julija Greičienė (born 1926), Stalin regime deportee Stefanija Kučinskienė (born 1914), mother of a child with a disability Monika Jonynaitė-Makūnienė (born 1920), wife of Soviet vice-minister Aušra Dilienė (born 1932).

[1] Susan E. Reid. *Women in the Home. Women in Khrushchev Era.* Ed. by Melanie Ilič, Susan E. Reid and Lynne Attwood. Hampshire, New York: Palgrave, 2004, p. 154-156; Deborah A. Field. *Mothers and Fathers and the Problem of Selfishness in the Khrushchev Period. Women in Khrushchev Era.* Ed. by Melanie Ilič, Susan E. Reid and Lynne Attwood. Hampshire, New York: Palgrave, 2004, p. 97; Kharkhordin Oleg. *The Collective and the Individual in Russia.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999, p. 279-354.

The interviews were taken in 2001-2005, when women's memories were influenced by post-communist social transformations. The study reflects how after Lithuanian independence in 1990, there was a reconsideration of women's memory and their new identities evolved. Depending on what relationship with the Soviet period the women strived to preserve, their narratives could be divided into three groups. The first group consists of memories, where life in Soviet days is viewed positively and is juxtaposed against post-communist "materialization and loss of spirituality of Lithuanian society".

The second group consists of interviews, the authors of which took with deep sorrow Lithuania's incorporation into the USSR in 1940, although during the interview they did not emphasize a negative point of view towards Soviet times.

The third, largest group consists of interviews with women, who at the beginning of the conversation expressed their extremely negative opinion of the Soviet period and said they were able to tell "how it really was". However, none of the interviews from this group were included into the study because memories about the Soviet period were too intermittent and illogical. Although they were asked to tell their biographies in a chronological sequence, the women did not keep this agreement. They were willing to share their memories, although they showed very little interest in Soviet years and gave their entire focus to restoration of Lithuanian independency in 1989-1990. Some women agreed to tell about the Soviet period, but they strictly avoided talking about their personal life. At the end of the interview they would suddenly declare that the conversation was utterly "individual, private" and is not subject to publication, although in fact it did not include any private or even slightly intimate information. It often happened that the informants refused to have their interviews recorded, but instead they told their story in writing. Alas, such descriptions of women also reminded of official Soviet autobiographies or excerpts from Soviet newspapers, rather than the promised stories of "how it really was".

No doubt that women of this group strived to create a new history of their personal life in the Soviet period, but they failed to establish a convincing version. Apparently, new identities of women were not perceived yet and did not become an authentic experience of the informants.

Examples of similar historical amnesia, inability to remember details of one's private life or an unexpected refusal to publicize the interview are also mentioned by Engel and Posadskaya-Vanderbeck and Sigrid Rausing.[2] Engel and Posadskaya-Vanderbeck relate this unwillingness to speak with the traditional reticence of Russian country women, fear of the stranger. Rausing relates the silence of the informants to fear of former Soviet censure and persecution. However, the perceived fear of the persecution shapes a post-traumatic memory, not the historical amnesia. Witnesses and participants of the most painful events - genocide, deportation, holocaust, sooner or later voice their most terrible moments of their lives. Active officials of Nazi Germany or fascist Italy, although with reservations, also recreate detailed stories of their life[3]. Lithuanian women also remembered the postwar period chronologically and in detail, although for many of them it was the time of tragic experiences. However, the mid. fifties is the point when biographical interviews with women become interrupted, they are satisfied with merely scant

[2] *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*. Ed. By Barbara Alpern Engel and Anastasya Posadskaya-Vanderbeck. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1998, p. 5; Rausing Sigrid. *History, Memory, and Identity in Post-Soviet Estonia: the End of a Collective Farm*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 223

[3] *Memory & Totalitarianism*. Ed. by Luisa Passerini. New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers. 2005, p. 10-11; Davies Sarah. *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia. Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge Press, 1997, p. 6.

biographical bits and pieces, the interviews more and more remind of propaganda newspaper clichés. So the post-traumatic memory can be hardly compared with the historical amnesia, when the person does not reveal the events, evidently tells lies or wishes but is unable to give an articulated sequence of his life events. It is rather plausible that the Soviet regime and its ideology, having lasted for decades, not only had a tragic impact on people's lives, but actually changed their reality. Or the regime itself became people's reality.

Interviews with Lithuanian women are not similar to life stories of women from other former Soviet republics that have undergone the same regime. Barbara Alpern and Anastasya Posadskaya-Vanderbeck have edited a study of interviews *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, where Russian women related themselves with active subjects of history, not victims of the regime. Russian women were proud of the achievements of the Soviet period [4]. Biographic interviews with Lithuanian women reveal their slightly different identities - narratives lack the heroic pathos - a distinctive feature in life stories of the Russian women. Lithuanian women identified themselves with residents of occupied country and accepted Soviet reality as inevitability. Although the majority of Lithuanian women adopted the roles foisted upon them by the Soviet propaganda, emotionally they remained observers of social life, rather than active participants.

[4] *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*. Ed. By Barbara Alpern, Anastasya Posadskaya-Vanderbeck. Boulder, Colo: Westview press, 1998. 252 p.