

РЕЦЕНЗІЇ / REVIEWS

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WOMEN'S STORIES IN THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF UKRAINE AND GEORGIA
(review of the monograph: Hnydiuk O., Keburiya T., Stiazhkina O., Parunova A.
Women and History: Gender Dimensions of Everyday Life (the 1970s – the 1980s):
Kyiv-Tbilisi, 2021. 62 p.)

ЖІНОЧІ ІСТОРІЇ У ПОВСЯКДЕННОМУ ЖИТТІ УКРАЇНИ ТА ГРУЗІЇ
(рецензія на монографію: Гнидюк О., Кебурія Т., Стяжкіна О., Парунова А.
Жінки та історія: гендерні виміри повсякденного життя (1970 – 1980-ті рр.):
Київ-Тбілісі, 2021. 62 с.)

As a result of the joint project of the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Kyiv and Tbilisi, a small in volume but very interesting collective monograph “Women and History: Gender Dimensions of Everyday Life (the 1970s – the 1980s)” was published. It should be stated that the title of the book has nothing to do with “a geographical clarification”, hence, an unprepared reader will not understand at once that the book is about “women’s history” in the two republics of the Soviet Union – Ukraine and Georgia.

The book consists of four chapters (articles), the authors of which are two Ukrainian and two Georgian researchers. The authors tried to answer the following questions: What was the social and economic situation of women under the state socialism in the 1970s and the 1980s?; What were the preconditions for women's economic empowerment and their involvement in the labour market?; What were the discourses of sexuality in the Brezhnev era?

Olha Hnydiuk elucidated interesting aspects of the Soviet leadership's policy on women's labour in Ukraine in Chapter I, entitled "Trade Unions are Doing a Great Job in this Direction: Labour Policy and Gender Issues of Women's Labour in Ukraine, the 1970s – the beginning of 1980s". First of all, the researcher noted accurately that emancipation was one of the main Soviet socialist promises to women. However, in the Soviet reality the lives of working women were accompanied by a double burden, the elements of the patriarchal system's society, the equality on paper and in figures rather than in family life or work, understanding motherhood as a primary social function, and prioritizing state interests over women's interests (pp. 8–9).

Due to industrialization in the USSR from the end of the 1920s to the beginning of 1930s, women began to be involved in the production massively. At the same time, the country's leadership aimed at increasing the population growth, so it put emphasis on motherhood as a social function of women. A number of measures and decrees were adopted in order to encourage women to perform their motherly duties. Hence, the Family Code of 1936 criminalized abortions and introduced financial assistance to mothers with many children. It was later decided to extend maternity leave, expanded the categories of women with children, who received social benefits, etc. (p. 9).

According to O. Hnydiuk, such kind of policy led to the formation of a "gender contract of a working mother", which meant the active women's participation in the workplace and, at the same time, gave them a leading role in taking care of children, family and household. In the 70s – the 80s of the XXth century the leadership of the USSR paid attention to the development of material and institutional support for women and motherhood (the formation of nurseries, kindergartens, etc.), which, however, contributed to increasing women's participation in the industrial production. During the period of the years of 1970 – 1985, there were approximately 50 – 52% of women in the Ukrainian SSR employed in production. According to the researcher, the decline in birth rates since the beginning of 1970s prompted the Soviet leadership to return to rhetoric that emphasized that motherhood remained the main social function of women (p. 13). As a result, the trade unions launched a campaign to transfer women from hard and harmful jobs to lighter ones. However, such measures often had the opposite effect.

Hence, O. Hnydiuk described an incident that occurred at Christmas tree decoration factories in Terebovlia, Lysychansk and Klavdiyevo. The inspectorate demanded that the management of the enterprises give women, who worked as glassblowers less harmful jobs. However, the workers did not agree to it, because in the case of transferring to another position, they lost the right to additional leave, free special meals and preferential pensions, which they received working as glassblowers (p. 12). As it turned out, the attempts, which were made at the Christmas tree decoration factory to change working conditions for women failed and provoked resistance among women workers, as it could mean lower wages, loss of benefits or even jobs.

Tamar Keburiya, the Georgian researcher, wrote the second chapter "White Robe and Fur Coat: Life Trajectories of Women Metallurgists in the Era of Late Socialism". Her work

consisted of three parts: the first part elucidated changes in the social role and functions of women in the Soviet Union; the second part showed the socio-economic and cultural role of women in the 1960s and the 1980s (on the example of Georgia); the third part presented a biography of the “outstanding metallurgist” of the Soviet era Shazina Hotsiridze, through the prism of whose life the author tried to represent the forms of activity and life trajectories of women of the late socialist period in the USSR.

The researcher emphasized that during the period under analysis of the history of the Soviet society, a woman, who combined different identities at once and could be successful at work, in a social and cultural life, was considered successful. The author pointed out the factors of women’s mass involvement in heavy industry. First of all, such kind of attitude was due to the efforts made by the Soviet leadership in order to increase the share of women’s employment in the economy in general. Second of all, the presence of indiscipline at heavy industry enterprises, being absent at work and the lack of planning by men. It was believed that the “feminization” of jobs would increase productivity and the level of discipline or organization at workplace. Third of all, the post-war crisis of masculinity, the empowerment of women in society and their image as loyal and disciplined subjects of work (pp. 26–27).

A historian T. Keburiya found a certain contrast in the assignment of certain social roles to women metallurgists. Hence, in the official discourse of that time, it was emphasized that among other women the metallurgist were distinguished by “courage”, “endurance” and “bravery”. On the other hand, they were recognized as “weaker beings” and subjects, who had a sense of “maternal care”. The women’s activity of that period was also diverse and at the same time contrasting. According to the researcher, the stories of women metallurgists illustrated that they often acquired different identities, and that ability became more refined over time. That is why, the image of women’s success during that period was reduced not only to ideological purity or professionalism but also to individualism, the aspiration to satisfy material desires – therefore, there was a synthesis of these contrasting roles gradually (pp. 33–34).

Olena Stiazhkina, the Ukrainian professor in the article (chapter of the monograph) “Ukrainian Women in the Creation of the Soviet Shadow Food Market (the 1970s – the mid-1980s)” emphasized that women’s participation in illicit food trafficking in the 1970s – the first half the 1980s was a well-established practice, which, on the one hand, was the Soviet gender contract’s implementation of “a working mother” and, on the other hand, ensured the apparent rise in society’s food standards. The author analyzed the reasons for women’s participation in shadow operations, their use and / or creation of shadow food mechanisms.

O. Stiazhkina used James Millar’s concept of a “small deal” for the methodological substantiation of her research. Its essence was that in exchange for loyalty of the urban population, Brezhnev’s leadership allowed the expansion of a number of ways of small private economic activity (some of them were legal, some were in a partial shade, and some were clearly illegal) (pp. 37–38).

The researcher claims that the reasons for women’s participation in shadow food market were gender configuration of a “small deal”, which was based on the logic of the Soviet gender contract of a working mother, and gender segregation of labour market, which was stable in the 1970s – the 1980s. Analyzing archival and press materials, O. Stiazhkina provided many examples of a “small fraud” of women in the food sector of the economy (especially, setting additional prices on food, cheating when weighing products, theft in canteens, creating local artificial deficits, etc.). At the same time, she considered two examples of women’s

participation in large-scale shadow deals: the case of Kyiv restaurant “Stolychny” (1974), the abuse of Sofia Goldenberg, a director of Lviv bar “Vezha” (1980). In general, the researcher claims that some of the illegal ways to obtain money and “natural” profits was gender labelled at the food market in the second half of the XXth century. In the fourth article (Chapter), the representative of the Equality Movement Alla Parunova focused on the discourse of sexuality inherent in Georgian society during the Soviet Union during the period of Leonid Brezhnev, and tried to show its intertwining with a nationalist discourse.

The author studied the texts of “The Georgian Woman” magazine (including literary stories, short stories) mostly, on the basis of which she showed that the studied period was characterized by a stricter discipline, supervision by family or society aimed at imposing harsh sexuality on women. It, in turn, contributed to the creation of conditions for the education of traditional receptions of sexuality among Georgian women (p. 55). Among the key topos of the discourse of sexuality A. Parunova singled out the concepts of love and marriage, as well as points to silence sexuality and sex in the Georgian society.

The researcher noted that the nationalist discourse inherent in Georgia intersected with the discourse on sexuality on a number of issues. On the one hand, both discourses emphasized women’s honor and decency, and on the other hand, nationalist discourse gave one of the central roles to the Georgian mother and thus gave her the status of “a guardian of the nation” (p. 61). In nationalist discourse the notions of “motherhood” were closely intertwined with issues of “morality” and “purity”, which were associated with a female sexuality inevitably (p. 62).

Taking everything into account, we should note the novelty of methodological approaches of researchers, who resorted to the practice of discursive analysis and used modern scientific concepts. Interesting studies carried out by four authors from Ukraine and Georgia showed us new pages in the history of the Soviet women in the 1960s and 1970s, depicted the interpretation of women in society, political power discourse, national traditions and, at the same time, demonstrated her new social identities, career trajectories, management and a personal life. Nevertheless, reading the book leaves the impression of a fragmentary nature of the problem, unspoken, as the scholars left out the issues of educational, cultural roles of women, family practices, age, and etc. The study of a female sexuality is incomplete, as well as its manifestations, awareness and representation during the period under analysis. However, we believe that the authors will be still able to take a more comprehensive approach to understanding the declared issues.

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