

Women's Memory of Socialism: 15 Years of International Networking, National Research and Public Promotion

FRÝDLOVÁ Pavla – ŠMEJKALOVÁ Jiřina

GRASSE Marina

DIJANIC Dijana

KIS Oxana

Sub-theme: Organizing Oral History: Institutions, archives, museums, organizations and grassroots groups.

FRÝDLOVÁ, Pavla
(Czech Republic)

Women s Memory: Searching for Identity under Socialism (A Project from Post-communist Europe)¹

Abstract

This project was initiated by a group of Czech feminists in 1996. It was done in response to the post-1990 'Western' interpretation (and misinterpretation) of the everyday experience of women living under the communist regimes of the Soviet block. Insofar as possible, papers and presentations should allow the audience to hear the voices of the interviewed narrators. Therefore, the project originators decided to document the life experiences of women of three generations born between 1920 and 1960. They were interested above all in their life strategies and in their personal culture of survival. To date the project has been conducted by 8 national interdisciplinary research teams from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the former East Germany, Poland, Croatia, Serbia, Monte Negro, and Ukraine. Till today their work has resulted in 400 interviews and approximately 20000 pages of transcription. The major tangible outcome is the international archive located in Prague, and also more than 20 published books. In terms of the content, some initial potentially surprising findings have emerged out of this research. Most importantly, it has become clear that the form of emancipation experienced by women under socialism has to be understood in terms of its essentially non-Western otherness. There are three dominant aspects of this otherness the proposed paper discusses in the light of the findings so far: firstly women's economic independence, secondly access and attitude to education and/or professional competence, and last but not least the question of the independent social identity of women.

Memoria de las Mujeres: Proyecto de los países de Europa post comunista. Resumen

Este proyecto de investigación internacional, educativo a largo plazo, fue iniciado en el año 1996 por un grupo de feministas checas. Su idea nace a partir de las reacciones y respuestas contracríticas a la interpretación (muchas veces falsa) de la realidad de la vida cotidiana de las mujeres durante la época comunista...

La presentación del proyecto se concentra principalmente en las declaraciones de las narradoras que confiesan su vida. El centro del proyecto se enfoca en las experiencias, estrategias y conceptos vitales de las mujeres de tres generaciones, nacidas entre los años 1920 y 1960. Hasta el día de hoy este programa fue dirigido por ocho equipos interdisciplinarios de investigadores de la Rep. Checa, Eslovaquia, ex Alemania Democrática, Polonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Croacia y Ucrania. Los documentos de audio de más de 400 entrevistas presentan casi veinte mil páginas de transcripción. La mayoría del material fue alojado en el archivo internacional del proyecto en Praga. En base a este material se editaron más que veinte libros, varios programas de radio y filmes documentales. A través de esta búsqueda han emergido averiguaciones sorprendentes, que pueden elaborar un significación aparte. El hallazgo más relevante es que la emancipación probada por las mujeres en el socialismo tiene un caracter particular y muy diferente de las formas de emancipación occidental. Hay tres aspectos de esta diferencia que hablan sobre este hecho: primero es la independencia económica de la mujeres, segundo el acceso a la educación y

¹ This paper was proposed for the 15th Oral History Conference, Guadalajara, Mexico, but it wasn't presented because Pavla Frýdlová could not participate at the conference.

tercero las posibilidades de obtención de la competencia profesional y, por consiguiente, la cuestión de la identidad social independiente de la mujer.

Paper:

The lifting of the Iron Curtain in 1989 was accompanied by high expectations, especially in the sphere of production and distribution of knowledge. Perhaps nowhere were these expectations so high as in the area of women and gender studies.

At that time many Western feminists rushed to the so called "backward" region of Eastern Europe under the flag of global sisterhood. Most of them were equipped with more enthusiasm than linguistic competence and cultural understanding. They were trying to judge the position of women in the East on the basis of their own social and cultural experience. Some of them saw women in this Region as not emancipated enough, while others had idealized and unrealistic ideas about something called "socialist woman".

Most of the feminist writing resulting from these approaches was loaded with decontext-ualized data and misleading interpretations. And at the same time, in the East European media an almost pathological allergy towards anything redolent of "feminism" and gender issues had emerged.

In that slightly hysterical context of anti-feminism without feminism, several women mostly of an academic background and one man started to meet in the Prague flat of the prominent Czech human rights activist and professor of sociology at Charles University Jiřina Šiklová in order to discuss gender-related issues. Out of these meetings emerged the **Gender Studies Center in Prague**.

Soon it became clear, however, that there was a need for a major project that could serve as a source for knowledge of gender issues not only in the Czech context but in the entire Region of the former Soviet block. In 1996 the idea of the **Women's Memory** project emerged. The aim of this project was to grasp the history of women under socialism, in all its complexity. We wanted to challenge the established myths and clichés about "socialist woman", often presented as some kind of heroic female tractor driver. We wanted to document the life experiences of women of three generations born between 1920 and 1960. We were interested above all in their life strategies and in their personal culture of survival.

The complexity of relations between socialism and gender issues can never be fully grasped from one discipline only. Therefore the national research teams included women from various disciplines, such as sociology, history, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, ethnography, anthropology and journalism. Nevertheless the aim of the project cannot be reduced to its

cognitive aspects. It is unique in the sense that it goes far beyond the academic community and is oriented towards the large population in the related countries and hopefully will have an impact on a society as a whole.

So what does the project look like today?

To date the project has been conducted by 8 national interdisciplinary research teams from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the former East Germany, Poland, Croatia, Serbia, Monte Negro and Ukraine. Until today their work has resulted in 500 interviews and approximately 20,000 pages of transcription. The archive - located in the Gender Studies Center in Prague - includes hundreds of tapes and minidisks; 20 books of edited interviews in different local languages have been published, and based on the interviews, we have prepared three documentary movies as well as several radio programs.

More important was the question of **methodology**. Feminist developments of the social sciences have challenged the traditional male dominated interpretation of the world. For instance, it has emphasized the importance of personal experience as a part of the research method. For this reason many feminist researchers are applying narrative and biographical approaches. According to these methods, history does not represent a set of events, but is a result of interaction between individuals. It is the meaning and significance attributed to the events by the individuals which retroactively shapes historical "reality". The choice of the method of **oral history** based on interviews for this project seemed to us quite logical. This method is rooted in the oral transmission of information and particularly in family narratives. We are interested in lived experience rather than so-called objective truth.

The elaboration and finalization of our method lasted over a year. While we initially drew on the experience of other related projects, our own method was shaped by the actual process of interviewing itself. The methodology has been further developed at five international workshops. At these workshops, while respecting the cultural, religious and historical differences between involved teams from different countries, we had to establish an agreed common ground which would enable us to compare the project results internationally.

What form does the interview take?

We understand an **interview** to be a **process of interaction** between the interviewer and the respondent. It is based on mutual trust, which is seen as an indispensable condition of communication. The absolutely equal position between those involved in the interview is a key ethical question in the project, since the purpose is not just to collect "data", but also to lead women to reflect on their own identity. A basic scheme of the interview is prepared in advance, but this represents only a helpful outline, which we keep at the back of our minds. A majority of interviews could last for several hours and often it takes several meetings to complete the testimony. Without the deep commitment of the team members such a demanding task would be impossible.

Not everyone can conduct an interview. The testimony of the respondent often goes beyond words and this level of non-verbal communication is equally important. Not everyone knows how to silence tears or fears. It is a special art not to burden the respondent with misleading questions. The ideal aim is to achieve a situation in which the interviewed **woman** feels that **she** is the one who is controlling the main direction of the story she is sharing with us.

How have we chosen the women to be interviewed?

Careful selection of the women has been one of the main conditions for the success of our work since the very beginning. Each life story is important to us, but not every woman is able or willing to tell it. There is a variety of ways of searching for the right women to be interviewed. Personal recommendation is one way, and this is often crucial for the success of the interview. Otherwise it would be nearly impossible to ask about intimate issues such as sexual relations, childbirth, abortion, family planning, etc. Needless to say, the full anonymity of the respondent is guaranteed.

We also use the **snow-ball method**, asking the interviewed women to propose others known to them. The interviewed women have included a farm worker, a typesetter, a nurse, a librarian, a physician, a lawyer, a photographer and a pilot. Although since the very beginning we stated clearly that this was not meant to be a completely representative sample of the female population of the country concerned, we have attempted to maintain a relative balance among the social and age groups of the women chosen.

The most urgent task was to interview the **oldest generation**. It became obvious to us that this generation – then in their late 70s and early 80s was not going to be with us for long. We cannot allow the circumstances which shaped their lives as women to be forgotten, or even worse, to be deformed by later second-hand interpretation. The task is even more important considering the fact that this is the **first economically independent generation of women**. There has never been at any time in history a generation like this one which, thanks to the socialist regime under which they have spent most of their lives, have known complete economic independence.

What are the results of the project?

It is obvious that such a large-scale project cannot have one single research result. The major tangible outcome is the **international archive** located in Prague. This includes all the records and transcriptions of the interviews in their original languages. All interviews include supplementary materials and a short resume in English or German. The supplements consist of a number of particular monographs on sociological, historical, demographic and legal aspects of women's issues in the respective countries. There are also specific analyses of the representation of women in the media during the fifty years covered by the project. We plan to make the archive accessible to the professional as well as the general public. This will happen at the point at which the collection of all interviews in all the collaborating countries will be completed and analysed. We also have organized a number of lectures, seminars and conferences at both national and international levels in order to discuss particular problems arising from the project. Although the project is still far from complete, we decided to share some of the interviews with the public in the form of a two-volume book *All Our Yesterdays* (Všechny naše včerejšky). Since 2006, the Czech team has also introduced a set of new publications targeting the general public. These have been very popular and include titles such as *Ženská vydrží víc než člověk* [A Woman Endures More than a Person], *Ženám patří půlka nebe* [Women Own Half of the Sky], *Ženy mezi dvěma světy* [Women in between of Two Worlds]. A one-hour long documentary movie entitled *War in Women's Memory* was also a success. The movie was developed with our respondents (narrators) and was aired on the Czech national television in May 2005 (anniversary of the end of the WWII).

To date, our Serbian colleagues have produced five 12 books, and the Croatian, Slovenian and Monte Negro teams have published one each. The Slovak team even published one in English (Women's Memory. The Experience of Self-shaping in Biographical Interviews. 2006). The team members' use the experience gained in the Women's Memory project at Universities in several countries.

There is another dimension to the concept of "research output". This can be defined as a process of consciousness-raising among the women interviewed in the project. This process begins already during the interviewing itself. Many interviewed women were genuinely surprised that we wanted to hear their life story at all. Others were for the first time trying to recapitulate about their own lives. The interview has enabled them to see themselves from a new perspective. The very fact that somebody else is interested in their life boosts their self-confidence.

There is a significant impact of the project on the researchers outside of the actual interview, such as its transcription, completion of the text, mutual reading of the interviews and their evaluation in workshops. Throughout the project we are learning what **multiculturalism** really means, while all the clichés about the gray uniformity of life in East Central Europe are rapidly being eroded.

What was it like for women under socialism?

Firstly, let me give just one example of the kind of narrative that has emerged from the interviews. The following life story reflects most of the dramatic changes, which took place since the 1940s in Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore this is both typical and at the same time a highly individual story.

Katarina, or Katy as they call her, was born in 1930, the only child of a Jewish well established architect and builder in an East Slovak city Košice. She was brought up in German and Hungarian but did not know Yiddish, as the family was not orthodox. Her happy childhood ended in 1944, when as a 14 year old girl she and her family were shipped along with one of the last transports to Auschwitz. She was the only one who survived.

After her return she could not face going back to school among all her fellow students who had spent the whole year living a more or less normal life. At the age of 16 she married a medical student, a man slightly older than her of a similar fate. He also had lost all his family in a concentration camp. The marriage collapsed after two years just after Katy gave birth to her first

son. She could no longer stand living in a city where everything reminded her of her parents and decided to move to Prague with her one year old son. She did not know Czech, knew nobody in the city and yet started building up her new life. She put her son in a residential nursery, which meant that she saw him only on weekends. At that time facilities of this kind were highly recommended, as they were believed to provide much better „professional“ care than a family could. She started taking care of her son only when he was three years old and she had secured finally her own housing.

At the beginning of the 1950s she remarried and her daughter was born soon afterwards. At this time she also accepted a creative job in a newly established Center of Hungarian Culture in Prague. She was translating, interpreting, and promoting Hungarian culture and particularly film in Czechoslovakia. This way she achieved a very respected position in the Czech as well as Hungarian cultural and film circles.

In the early 1950s she became a member of the Communist Party. Like many young people at that time, she saw the idea of Communism as a guarantee of social justice as well as the only secure way of ensuring that the horrors of fascism would not return. Not even the bloody events in Hungary in 1956 challenged her convictions. Along with her third husband - a respected manager of animated film - she belonged to the leading representatives of the Prague Spring liberation movement, which set out to create a „socialism with a human face“. The Russian tanks in the streets of Prague in August 1968 brought a bitter awakening from the reformed socialist dream. Katy's husband lost his job in the film industry, her daughter was not admitted to higher education and later on in the 1980s ended up in exile in Australia. Only after several years when Katy had already retired, was she allowed to travel to Australia in order to visit her daughter and grandchildren.

Despite all this, Katy has been an enormously hard working woman, always busy doing several things at once: translating, doing film criticism for local media, organizing cultural events. For almost twenty years she was not allowed to travel anywhere except on business trips to Hungary and thus she devoted all her spare time to transforming a half ruined listed building into a summer house.

It is hard to believe how, besides her demanding job, she could manage to run a large household full of children and regular guests who were attracted by her culinary skills. Her

family shared a house with her mother-in-law, a situation for Katy, which was a blessing rather than a burden.

Nevertheless Katy always managed to do everything as if it was the most natural thing, whether it was her demanding job or her city and weekend households. Only recently after difficult surgery and the death of her husband she has slowed down. This overactive seventy-something woman, however, did not express much self-pride in the interview. She admitted that she had been a workaholic, but she kept emphasizing her failures, the things she did not manage rather than her achievements. Her major frustration has been a lack of formal education. She regretted that she did not force herself to study and therefore she remained a self-made-woman in everything she did. And yet, she is a highly professional and independent woman who at the same time impresses everyone with her graceful femininity.

In analysing narratives like this, we try to proceed without any a priori suppositions. And although the project is still very much in progress, we can legitimately give part of the answer. This is, no don't surprisingly for many people in the west, that women under socialism experienced a form of emancipation, one which we have to understand in terms of its essentially non-Western **otherness**.

While women in the West had to fight long and hard for many of their rights, the paternalistic socialist states ruled by Communist governments provided these rights from above. Women's rights were included in the first Communist Constitutions. Women's rights were part of the whole package of social and economical change. True to the Marxist theory of women's emancipation as a part of the emancipation of the working class, women's issues became part of socialist revolutions. One of the leading questions of our project is how these mostly legal changes were applied in practice.

There are three major aspects of the otherness of this emancipation I would like to discuss here in the light of our findings so far. Firstly **economic independence**, secondly **access and attitude to education** and/or professional competence. Last but not least the question of the **Independent social identity of women**.

For this discussion I draw on a selection of interviews - 97 of them - with Czech women of various social and professional backgrounds, born before 1930, from urban areas as well as the countryside. These women not only survived the major social and political changes of the twentieth century - such as World War Two, the Communist coup, the Cold War, the Soviet

occupation of 1968 and the velvet revolution of 1989 - but also actively participated in them. Not all of these women were purely of Czech origins – some were Jewish survivors of the Holocaust as well as women of Czech-German origins. And others, interviewed by colleagues in related projects, include Czech Gypsy women.

As in the rest of Europe and the United States, the turning point in the history of **women's employment** was World War Two. It was during this period that a significant portion of women of various social backgrounds participated in paid labor. But unlike the situation in the West, where women subsequently returned to the household, women in our Region continued to work even after the war. In addition, reorganization of national industry and agriculture gradually led to almost full employment among women. As a result, at the end of the socialist era there were up to 97% of Czech women *fully* employed. Flexible working hours or part-time work almost did not exist. At some point in the 1950s the model of the *double-income household* developed and gradually become the social norm as well as an economical necessity. Due to the above noted economical and social pressures, the concept of the *housewife* almost entirely disappeared. Among all the women we interviewed we have not met a single woman who has spent her entire life just caring for her children and husband.

The massive economical independence of the female population resulted in *a double burden* that does exist in most industrialized societies. The major negative consequence of economical independence during the socialist regime, however, was an *over-burdening* of women. Women acquired their professional roles without any decrease in their domestic workload.

At the beginning of the 1950s the socialist regime assumed that it had discovered a solution to the conflict of women's double roles. This solution was seen in terms of communal service and collective lifestyle. One of the major areas of state intervention was childcare. For example, some nurseries were even introduced as week-long boarding facilities. There was a system of afternoon facilities attached to every elementary school. By the 1960s the communal child day-care was attended by 90% of children.

Some of the social service projects as they were designed and practiced in the early 1950s may sound almost incredible today. There was a chain shopping service: ordered food was delivered to the house every day for a minimal fee. Lunches were provided in factory canteens and school cafeterias for a symbolic price. Families were offered housing in communal state-

owned houses for a small rent. All services related to laundry, washing, cleaning etc. were provided by a centralized, nation-wide state-run company symbolically called The Liberated Household. Leisure time was also taken care of. Each company or factory ran a variety of recreational facilities where families spent their holidays. All school children spent several weeks of the school year in the mountains and summer camps. Needless to say, all these facilities included a proper ideological and political training. All this was designed to minimize the traditional role of the family in society and consequently free a woman for her participation in collective production.

The awakening from *the socialist dream* came sooner than expected. The dominating orientation of the Czech economy towards heavy industry led to the stagnation of the so called "non-productive" sector of services. The bad management of distribution and supply led to constant shortages particularly in imported food, such as non-local fruit. Women in some companies and factories even organized a direct sale of products at the workplace but this creative idea was practiced with varying levels of success. The growing problems of the national economy at the beginning of the 1960s - especially in the services area - had the most dramatic impact particularly on the female population. Again it fell to women to cope.

Despite all this social and economical development, the issues of a new male and female role in society remained unaddressed. It was not until the late 1960s, in a period of relative political freedom - that these issues emerged in the public arena. Some surveys proved that an average "socialist woman" had an extremely limited amount of free time compared to her partner. This resulted in decreasing the quality of women's lives and consequently led towards *inequality between men and women*. The turning point in most women's lives, a point on which depends her inequality, was usually the birth of her first child. In the 1960s the national birthrate dramatically decreased. One of the measures introduced by the state to counter this trend was a gradually extended maternity leave. By the end of the 1980s the state provided six months of fully paid maternity leave plus up to three years guaranteed job security along with state benefits. This arrangement is still in place today.

The reaction of most women to their over-burdening and the decreasing capacity of the state to help was to develop *strategies* which would enable them to cope. One of them was a generally accepted lowering of their professional ambitions. That a woman worked was accepted as normal but that she could occupy a position of influence at work was not. Women tried to take

the longest maternity leave possible and have their children in close sequence in order to spend 3 to 9 years at home, some of it on full pay and without losing their jobs or benefits. A very important factor in this was, and still is, the institution of the larger family. The help of grandparents - particularly grandmothers - is still almost taken for granted.

While interviewing women born in 1920s and 1930s we expected that the issues of overburdening would represent one of the leading themes of our interviews. To our great surprise, however, this did not happen. Only when explicitly asked, did they start talking about the difficulties of managing the conflicting *dual roles of working women and mothers* in more detail. The range of their life strategies for dealing with these conflicts turned out to be much wider than we expected. Considering the lack of part-time work this was truly astonishing. There was an even more surprising issue. Even though women emphasized hardship and difficulties, especially when their children were small, they *never presented themselves as victims of the regime*, let alone their partners or family. On the contrary, they highlighted their courage and invention. Rather than complaining, they were *proud* of themselves. They take their professional position for granted and the achievement of independence is for them a substantial and desired part of the quality of their life.

No matter what social background the interviewed women came from what they shared without exception was a desire for education. In addition, this generation suffered from limited access to higher education since the Nazis closed down all Czech Universities during World War Two. Many women had to catch up with their education in all kinds of intensive university courses after the war. For example, Ms. Ludmila N., born in 1919, went back to University after four years spent in a concentration camp Ravensbrueck. Then she was already 27 years old. She said: "My husband was ten years older than me so he completed his study already prior to the War. We married in August 1946 and in September I started at the university. My mother in law was a bit unhappy about this. She saw in me a good future housewife and I went to school instead...Almost all the students in my department were already married, and in our group alone there were three of us pregnant. Our male colleagues were always checking whether our professor had his car parked in front of the laboratory in case we needed a lift to the hospital. It was quite funny... My son was nearly two years old when I graduated." There were many women who received their education in a variety of evening and part-time courses. Nevertheless, for a

mother of small children it was very difficult to complete her education. That required help and the understanding of her partner. Not all of them managed.

Ms. Antonie Š. - born 1923 - followed her husband from a small village to Prague. She said: “There was one thing I truly regret about the old man. I wanted to go the secondary. I would have to do one year of preparatory courses and then three years of afternoon school. But he said ‘NO! I will not look after YOUR children. You wanted children - so you take care of them!’ I could not leave them alone and I had nobody in Prague to ask thus I had to give up.” As a result, there was no other option for Ms. Antonie but to spend most of her life doing exhausting manual jobs of a cleaner and a stoker.

Some women obtained the education they wanted only in their later years when their children were already grown up. Most of the women, who have not achieved any education, even at secondary level, never stopped seeing this as the major failure of their lives! They regretted that during the decisive period of their lives when they might have obtained it, they were not insistent enough. Such women tended to be persistent in ensuring the education of their daughters and granddaughters.

There is one more aspect of our women's otherness we mentioned above. The women we interviewed never derived their own social status and identity from the identity of their partners, husbands, fathers or brothers. In their life stories the social or professional identity of their partners seemed to have played a rather marginal role. They talked about themselves as teachers, farmers or workers but not as wives. That was the way socialist society defined woman. I would like to mention one more, rather personal memory, which illustrates this point. It is generally known that many women in Eastern Europe were forced to join *traditionally male occupations* as for instance, tractor drivers, bricklayers, or crane-operators in the 1950s. When I was looking for a woman of this kind for our interviews I remembered a woman **Marie T.** whom I had known since my early childhood and often visited with my mother. At that time that young lady made some money making in her flat women's brassieres. Bras were a commodity, which was in very short supply at that time. Needless to say, any private business was considered illegal in socialist Czechoslovakia. A few years later I noticed an remarkable change: a rather domestically oriented shy woman transformed herself into a proud professional. She had become a crane-operator in a large Prague factory. She talked about her new job with a great deal of excitement, she was proud of wearing her boiler suit and especially of the fact that she was treated as an equal by her co-

workers. In addition she earned more money than her husband. Even when I conducted the interview with her when she was in her early seventies, she enthusiastically described how from the cabin of her crane near the roof of the big factory hall, she felt that she had the whole world at her feet. She sees herself as an independent professional not just as somebody's mother and wife. Even though not all of them managed to become a crane-operator, all the women we interviewed for this project in all the countries concerned, share a sense of identity as a woman in her own right.

Once the project is completed in at most three years time, we would expect further patterns of this kind to emerge under the critical gaze of historians, sociologists and scholars from other disciplines. For whom we hope *the Archive will be an important resource in years to come.*

FRÝDLOVÁ Pavla – ŠMEJKALOVÁ Jiřina

**Pavla Frýdlová - Gender Studies, o.p.s., Prague, CR; independent researcher, editor
and publicist**

Dr. Jiřina Šmejkalová - University of Lincoln, UK; Reader in Cultural Studies

**Pavla Frýdlová - Gender Studies, o.p.s., Gorazdova 20, 120 00 Praha 2
Jiřina Šmejkalová - University of Lincoln, Brayford Pool, Lincoln LN6 7TS,
Tel: + 44 (0)1522 882000; Fax: +44(0)1522 886041**

E-mail:

pavla.frydlova@centrum.cz

jsmejkalova@lincoln.ac.uk

Language of presentation: English

State if you are a member of IOHA or COHA: PF – yes, JŠ - no

Necessary equipment: No

Title of your paper in English: **Women's Memory in Prague: 15 Years of Research and Public Promotion**

Following examples taken predominantly from the Czech part of the Women's Memory project, our paper addresses the changes in both, public and professional context of the 2000s that generated challenges and rather problematic issues which we were unable to foresee back in the late 1990s when the project was launched, issues mainly related to preservation, protection and sharing of our research results. The interest in gender issues as well as the reputation of oral history as a valid research method grew significantly during this period and this put the Archive of the Women's Memory project under heavy pressure to open up an access to these unique, often intimate and personal 'data'. We will argue (and the international experience, particularly of German projects of a similar kind confirms this) that it is our responsibility towards the narrators, who shared with us their life stories, to make sure that this highly sensitive material remains protected from possible academic misinterpretation as well as political misuse.

Title of your paper in Spanish: **La memoria de la Mujer' en Praga: 15 años de investigación y fomento público**

Abstract in Spanish (300 words):

A raíz de los ejemplos tomados principalmente de la parte checa del proyecto “La memoria de la Mujer”, nuestro trabajo aborda los cambios, tanto en el contexto público como profesional, que tuvieron lugar en la última década (2000-2010), y que generaron nuevos desafíos, o mejor dicho, dificultades que no habíamos podido prever a finales de los años 90, cuando este proyecto se puso en marcha. Las dificultades a las que nos referimos aquí están relacionadas principalmente con la preservación, protección, distribución y publicación de los resultados de nuestra investigación.

El interés en las cuestiones de género, así como la reputación propia de la historia oral como fuente y método de investigación válidos, se ha incrementado de manera significativa durante este período. Esto supuso para el Archivo del proyecto “La Memoria de la Mujer” una fuerte presión en lo que se refiere a dar a conocer estos datos considerados únicos, íntimos y personales. De esta manera, hemos de poner hincapié (y esto, avalado por la experiencia internacional, y en particular, por los proyectos de la misma naturaleza que fueron llevados a cabo en Alemania) en el hecho de que es nuestra responsabilidad frente a los narradores que compartieron con nosotros sus historias de vida, el asegurarse de que este material, particularmente sensible, quede al margen de una mal interpretación académica o de un uso políticamente incorrecto.

Women's Memory in Prague: 15 Years of Research and Public Promotion

Our today's contribution is a follow up on a paper entitled "Women's Memory: Searching for Identity under Socialism" by Pavla Frýdlová, the director of this project, which could not have been presented at the IOHA conference in Mexico two years ago but was released in the conference proceedings (CD – *Conference Proceedings...*). Her paper already includes a more detailed account of the international and interdisciplinary oral history project Women's Memory thus at this point, it shall be at least noted that the initiation and development of this project cannot be separated from the post-Cold-War Euro-American social and intellectual context of the early and mid 1990s. To put it in very simplified terms, almost a pathological allergy towards anything redolent of "feminism" and gender issues distributed by media and supported by majority of local intellectuals in most of the East European countries was, on the other side of the ex-Berlin Wall, accompanied by largely de-contextualized and even misleading attempts at interpreting what was seen as an "East European woman" produced predominantly by North American and West European feminist scholars. (Smejkalova 1997) As also Joan Scott noted a decade later, in the 1990s Western feminists constructed a "presumed superiority" to Eastern European women while offering to the emerging feminist community in the East "what they called (in the singular) 'feminist theory' ... as the solution to their problems in the post-communist era." (Scott 2002: 15) The potential key object of their enquiry, the "communist woman", was then constructed either as a 'backward' creature trapped in a double oppression of the totalitarian and patriarchal orders, or wrapped up in the aura of idealized and unrealistic ideas about equality and emancipation under the real-socialist regimes.

This "happy marriage" of domestic anti-feminist paranoia on the one hand, and what was largely seen by East European women's intellectuals as a form of Western intellectual colonisation on the other, generated a need for giving the women of the former real-socialist region their own voice and allowing them – though indirectly through their own life stories - to contribute to the international discussion on the totalitarian and commanded gendered experience. I would argue that this mission was a major driving force behind the activities of all the national research teams (Czech Republic, Slovakia, the former East Germany, Poland, Croatia, former Yugoslavia, later on Serbia and Monte Negro, and Ukraine). These were formed following the initiative of the Prague Gender Studies group in 1996 and joined gradually the project during the following years regardless of – perhaps from a today's academic perspective – naïve and to a

large extent inexperienced notion of research funding, the method of oral history, qualitative data interpretation and – as we shall discuss later in this paper - data management and publicity. During the years that followed, over 500 biographical interviews were conducted and transcribed and most of the transcriptions form a basis of an archive currently located in the Gender Studies Center in Prague. Each of the national teams handled the research results in a different way, in some cases they lead to a production of documentary films, radio programmes, and books addressing larger public (Serbia, Croatia, Monte Negro and Czech Republic), others, such as the Slovak team, focused on interpretations that were published in a form of academic monographs (Kiczková 2006).

In Czech itself seven books based on the interviews were published till to date, two serials of documentary programmes for public radio broadcasting, and a documentary film produced by jointly by the Czech Television and Gender Studies Centre entitled “War in Women’s Memory” was aired in 2005. In this paper we shall focus on a case study of the Czech archives and its public appropriation by the local professional community as well as by wider local audiences.

Though in strictly sociological terms the sample was never meant to be fully representative of the female population of the country concerned, there was an attempt to maintain a relative balance among the social and age groups of the women chosen. Thus we interviewed quite a few teachers but also nurses, farm workers, librarians, physicians, lawyers and a pilot, as well as the stereotypical symbols of communist “enforced equality”, the she-crane operator and she-tractor driver. As, for example, Bożena Umińska-Keff pointed out in relation to the Polish context, these intensely medialised images, particularly in the 1950s, served as an important symbol of the “new model of femininity” and of “a presence of the woman in social life”. Nonetheless this “thoughtless mockery of the image of emancipation has never been about reality”, for socialist regimes “never did propagate any model of actual equality between sexes” as women had to stand “next to the cooker (...) even having come back from the tractor” and tractors as such were – in the technologically backward post-war Poland – rather an inaccessible luxury. (Umińska-Keff 2009: 16,17). Regardless of the professional identity of our interviewees, however, as with any oral history project, countless hours went into recording just in order to discover that the technology failed us or the interviewed woman changed her mind about how much of the interview is she willing to authorize after everything had been recorded and retyped.

At the same time, it must be noted, however, that back in the late 1990s there was a general mistrust towards qualitative research methods commonly shared by the local social science community, and very few sociologists and historians were willing to accept the legitimacy of personal narratives for a construction of relevant and valid data. (Konopásek 1999) The project became a target of attacks for the lack of “scientific accuracy” and validity, lack of correctness and reasonableness. As number of personal narratives stored in the archive grew, the relatively large size of the sample was again being criticised for losing focus and thus an analytical potential. Perhaps just the very fact that the Czech OH Association was only established in 2007 speaks for itself (www.oralhistory.cz).

Also, the project’s public and academic perception cannot be separated from the already noted media-constructed “anti-feminism without feminism” that dominated public perception of virtually any gender-related matters. The Czech post-1989 anti-feminist hysteria – disseminated in the media as well as in some serious professional periodicals – was driven, among other things, by the argument of “importing of American feminism” into the East European context. The “horrors of feminism” were in many cases constructed as an aggressive ideology coming from the “other world”, an ideology alien to the lives of local women. (Šmejkalová 1998). Although the general awareness of the complexity of feminist agendas, partially due to the inexhaustible effort of NGOs (including the Gender Studies Centre) as well as a number of ‘enlightened’ journalists and activists was growing, the echoes of this hysteria were still present in the public sphere of the late 1990s.

When it comes to the perception of gender-related issues as well as the status of qualitative methods, the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries saw significant changes in the Czech academic as well as general public contexts. While the first academic body that institutionalised gender as an analytical category, the Research Department of the Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences CR „Gender & sociologie“ has been operating already since 1990, the first university centre for gender studies was established at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University in 1998, and the first Czech department and MA program in gender studies was set up only in 2005, due to a conflict with the Philosophical Faculty management under the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University. (Šmejkalová 2004). Early 2000s also saw further progress in professional organizations and periodicals focused on gender issues (Academic refereed journal *Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum* est. 2000, Národní kontaktní centrum – ženy a věda/

National Contact Centre Women and Science est. 2001). Also the general attitude towards qualitative research methods as well as towards oral history as a valid tool of investigation was underwent significant changes during the late 1990s and 2000s. Centre for Oral History was set up as a part of one of the Academy of Sciences Institute in 2000 (Centrum orální historie Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR) and an MA in Oral History – Contemporary History was launched at the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University in 2008. A group of sociologist around Josef Alan and Zdeněk Konopásek in a project “Samisebe” [Us ourselves] initiated already in 1990 used their own biographical data as a resource of sociological analyses of the pre-1989 era and in 1994 began to publish an academic journal devoted to biographical and qualitative research *Biograf* (Spalová 2006, Konopásek 2000). Along with these significant changes in the academic spheres which began gradually to embrace still marginalised but no longer absented qualitative research and gender issues, also the discourse of media slowly began to distribute a more balanced construction of ‘feminism’ as well as of gender issues in more general terms. (Šmejkalová, J. 2005).

In addition also the project – at least in the Czech Republic – continued to gain increasing public attention and respect. In 1998 the first volumes of interviews edited by Pavla Frýdlová were published in a paperback format by the Gender Studies Centre itself in a print run of 800 (Vol. I) and 1000 (Vol. II). (Frýdlová 1998) They represented essentially the first publications based on oral history method produced in the Czech context, as after all Josef Chuchma - one of the few journalists who have been continually contributing to a sympathetic media attitude towards gender agenda - pointed out in his review of another, at that time pioneering oral history project *Sto studentských revolucí*, a collection of testimonies of the former students’ activists of the Velvet revolution published at the 10th anniversary of the event. (Chuchma 1999, Otáhal et al 1999) Due to the general lack of interest of the local public as well as professional communities back in the late 1990s, the Women’s Memory volumes were only distributed through the GS office while even established bookstores with an intellectual and academic clientele refused to sell them. Nonetheless eight years later - though still with a financial support of the Gender Studies - a renown local publisher released Frýdlová’s book of edited interviews entitled *Ženská vydrží víc než člověk* in a total print run of 3000 (including two reprints) and the next several volumes published in the course of following three years came up in an average print run of

1,500 copies and have been selling through established distributors both in bookshops as well as on line. (Frýdlová 1998, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009)

This entirely different public as well as scholarly environment, however, brought along challenges and rather problematic issues which we were unable to foresee back in the late 1990s when the project was launched, issues mainly related to preservation and sharing of our research results. It must be noted again that the idea of preserving the gathered data for the future generation of researchers as well as general public was among the leading motivations behind the project since its very beginning. One of the problems we faced, however, was that there was virtually no experience with archiving oral history data in the countries involved. Along with the collection of the respective data, the method of preserving and archiving the data was being discussed and negotiated differently by each of the national team. Only the German team managed to receive full support for the entire project from state resources, while other teams were combining private funding (often from German resources!) with some EU funds support.

The issue of preservation and public use of the data is closely related to the one of legislation on the protection of personal data, a legislation which in all the countries involved in this project was just being constructed during the 1990s, indeed often under very different terms. In addition, the variety of social, educational etc systems in the respective countries, as well as the relatively long time period covered in the project (fifty years) made it nearly impossible to create an internationally applicable indexing system, i.e. kind of "a one-stop" source of information for further research which would have facilitated orientation in the indeed massive pool of transcripts. Although it could be argued that completion of such system for an international project of this size is too ambitious, in 2003 the list of 165 keywords was produced. Clearly the issue was that particular keywords generated different meanings and connotations in different national contexts, including such basic ones as "secondary" or "higher" education. Each keyword thus became in a way already an interpretation of a given historical phenomena/process it was to cover and label. As a result, it was just the Czech team that completed an electronic index allowing orientation in its 180 interviews. So far the access was limited to individual researchers – mostly students, the general public had a chance to read a number of the interviews in edited format in the books as referred to above.

While rich professional literature exists on the various technical aspects of the method of oral history, data collection, recording etc., very few resources are currently available on the preservation and further use of the databases. As, for example, Steven High, the head and key designer of The Concordia Oral History Research Laboratory (COHRL), a project providing individuals engaged in oral history research with their digital needs, noted recently “oral historians have been so focussed on the making of the interview that we have spent remarkably little time thinking about what to do with the audio or video recordings once they are made”. (High, 2010). One example of such rare reflections on these matters was presented at the international workshop “ZeitzeugInneninterviews im Archiv. Strategien zur Bewahrung erinnerter Geschichte” held 14 September 2007 in Berlin, by Almut Leh, the director of "German Memory" ("Deutsches Gedächtnis"). This archive of the Institute for History and Biography is housing the largest collection of oral history interviews in Germany, i.e. approximately 1,500 life history interviews with witnesses of time periods from East and West Germany, including photos, personal documents, diaries, letters or other written sources from particular witnesses. Leh summarized the key issues related to the preservation of oral history data, including the problem of anonymity and transfer of rights, the preparation for data use and the physical deterioration of audio and video tapes, i.e. issues that each manager of related resources would have – one way or the other – faced. (Leh, 2000)

Everybody dealing with oral history projects is aware of the highly sensitive nature of the data and its accessibility. The very concept of ‘data’ here is highly misleading in this context, nonetheless. Our role in the interviewing process was not that one of a ‘objective researcher’ who collects ‘data’ but saw ourselves as partners in the communication process, as those who were being provided a particular life story by a particular individual. Therefore we always balanced in-between our own responsibility towards the narrators who trusted us, on the one hand, and towards the future users of the ‘data’ stored in the archive, on the other. This unwritten ‘contract’ of a mutual trust negotiated between the two subjects involved in the actual process of communication shall include a guarantee to the interviewee that her or his story will not be misinterpreted in the. Almut Leh also noted that at the moment when the interview (in its audio or transcribed format) becomes part of a collection, an archive, and consequently gets into the hands of a third subject, the entire situation, or as I would suggest, the fate of the ‘contract’ outlined above becomes more complicated. A certain *distance* (in terms of time and space) is

added to the original, in most cases highly personal and to some extent intimate relation between the interviewer and the narrator, and consequently this relation turns into a de-personalized relation between a researcher and a research resource/data. (Leh, 2000)

It cannot be more emphasized more how highly sensitive is the matter of further access to the oral-history databases, i.e. the process of sharing these texts with the wider public. It is further complicated by the fact that generally acceptable standards may not be a solution here, as it is the manager of the archives who must decide in each individual case which interviews (as long as they are not older than 30 years) are to be provided to the researchers. This a rule more or less observed by all archives that handle written documents. As, for example, Linde Apel – a researcher focusing on the history of women concentration camp *Ravensbrück* and currently the director of Hamburg-based archive “Hamburger Lebensläufe – Werkstatt der Erinnerung” - noted, the archive which includes over 1000 interviews mostly with Jewish and other political refugees who fled the city during the Nazi regime, is trying to meet the requests of the researchers, and the archive’s website includes an on-line version of the databank which shall facilitate the process of background and literature research. (Hamburger Lebensläufe) Nonetheless by no means does the archive plan to publicize the transcriptions of the interviews on line, and, according to Apel, the archive management is so “old-fashioned”, and the protection of the narrators goes so far that the researchers are not even allowed to copy parts of the interviews.

Due to all these changes in academic as well as public spheres the interest in the Women’s Memory archives has been significantly increasing during the last decade, and such interest is not limited to professional scholars or students. The project began to attract printed media, radio and TV documentary producers. While some valuable work has been produced in this area too and it has always been our aim to make the general public aware of the complexity of gendered experience during the centrally controlled political regimes, given the commercialization and increasing tabloization of contemporary media outlets and, most importantly, it would be naïve to expect that the journalists are able to and, indeed, willing to respect basic ethic commitments to our narrators. Lately, there have been numerous examples in the Czech public sphere of particularly younger researchers and journalists misusing historical data for particular political purposes and compiling simplified judgmental statements – from whichever political perspective – about the ‘nature’ of the ‘Old Regime’. To take just one recent

example from another disciplinary rank: the recent Kundera-affair, which exploded on the basis of essentially one piece of de-contextualised and clearly mis-interpreted archival “evidence”, might serve as a serious warning. (Hradilek 2008)

Perhaps one of the key (and indeed often bitter) lessons that we have learnt during the 15 years of conducting the project of Women’s Memory is, that – to paraphrase the famous Katz’s principles of Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, 1959) - the complex story of this project is not just about the question of what our narrators say and what their narratives do to people, but also about what people do with these narratives. The project began to live its own public life, a life which often goes beyond the control of those who conducted the interviews as well as those who provided their own, often highly personalised and intimate, life stories.

Bibliography:

Biograf [on line] <<http://www.biograf.org>>

CD – *Conference Proceedings of the 15th IOHA International congress, Guadalajara, Mexico, September 2008.*

COHRL - The Concordia Oral History Research Laboratory.
<<http://storytelling.concordia.ca/oralhistory/index.html>>

Deutsches Gedächtnis. <<http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/geschichteundbiographie/>>

Frýdlová, P. (ed.) (1998) *Všechny naše včerejšky: paměť žen I, II* [All our yesterdays, Women’s memory], Prague: Nadace Gender Studies.

Frýdlová, P. (ed.) (2007) *Ženám patří půlka nebe* [Women own half of the sky], Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny; Gender Studies.

Frýdlová, P. (ed.) (2006) *Ženská vydrží víc než člověk: dvacáté století v životních příbězích 10 žen* [A Woman endures more than a person: Twentieth Century in the life stories of ten women], Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny; Gender Studies.

Frýdlová, P. (2008) *Ženy mezi dvěma světy* [Women in between of two worlds], Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny; Gender Studies.

Frýdlová, P. (2009) *Ženy odjinud* [Women from elsewhere], Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny; Gender Studies.

Hamburger Lebensläufe – Werkstatt der Erinnerung. <www.werkstatt-der-erinnerung.de>

High, S. (2010) “Telling Stories: A Reflection on Oral History and New Media” in *Oral History Society*, 38 (1), "POWER AND PROTEST"
<http://www.ohs.org.uk/journals/journal_indexes/38.php>

Hradilek, A. and Petr Třešňák (2008) “Udání Milana Kundery” [Denunciation of Milan Kundera], *Respekt*, 19/42, 12 October, pp. 38-45.

- Chuchma, J., (1999) "Orální historie se chopila studentských vůdců" [Oral history embraced student's leaders], *Mladá fronta DNES*, 17 November, p. 22.
- Katz, E. (1959) "Mass communication research and the study of culture", *Studies in Public Communication*, 2.
- Kiczková, Z. (2006) *Women's Memory. The Experience of Self-shaping in Biographical Interviews*, Bratislava: Iris.
- Konopásek, Z. ed., (1999) *Otevřená minulost. Autobiografická sociologie státního kapitalismu*, Praha: Karolinum, 1999.
- Konopásek Z. (2000) *Our lives as database: Doing a sociology of ourselves (Czech social transitions in autobiographical research dialogues)*, Praha: Karolinum.
- Leh, A. (2000) "Problems of Archiving Oral History Interviews. The Example of the Archive 'German Memory' ", *Qualitative Social Research*, 1 (3), Art. 8 – December [on line] <<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1025/2209>>
- Otáhal, M. and M. Vaňek (1999) *Sto studentských revolucí* [Hundred students' revolutions], Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny.
- Pošová, K. (2003) *Jsem, protože musím* [I am because I have to], edited by P. Frýdlová, Prague: Prostor.
- Smejkalova, J. (1997) "The Other Monster: 'American Feminism' in the Post-Communist World", *Bulletin Nr. 14: Frauen in den ehemals sozialistischen Landern*. Berlin: Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung, pp. 1-8.
- Šmejkalová, J. (1998) "Strašidlo feminizmu v českém 'porevolučním' tisku: úvaha, doufejme, historická." [The Monster of Feminism in the Czech 'Post-revolutionary Media: a Hopefully Historical Essay], in H. Havelková and M. Vodrážka (eds.) *Žena a muž v médiích*, Praha: Nadace Gender Studies.
- Šmejkalová, J. (2005) "Framing the Difference: 'Feminism' and 'Plebeianism' ", in J. van Leeuwen-Turnovcova et al., (eds.), *Mediale Welten in Tschechien nach 1989: Genderprojektion und Codes des Plebejismus, Specimina Philologiae Slavicae, Band 142*, Munchen: Verlag Otto Sagner, pp. 9-27.
- Šmejkalová, J. (2004) "Feminist Sociology in the Czech Republic after 1989", *European Societies* (Routledge), 6:2, pp. 169-180
- Spalová, B. (2006) "Biografie kvalitativního výzkumu v sociálních vědách v České republice" [Biography of qualitative research in social sciences in the Czech Republic], *Biograf*(39) [on line] <http://www.biograf.org/index.php?aktivni=cisla&filtr_cislo=39>
- Scott, J. W. (2002) "Feminist Reverberation", *Difference: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 13 (3), pp. 1-23; based on JWS keynote address at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women held on 7-9 June 2002.
- Umińska-Keff, B. (2009) "Reclaiming the Tractors", in *Women in Times of Change 1989-2009: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, East Germany and Ukraine*, Warsaw: Heinrich Boell Stiftung, pp 14-27.
- Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, 1990-2006.
<<http://www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/ssc/vof/vof-intro.html>>
- Wagnerová, A. (1974) *Die Frau im Sozialismus - Beispiel ČSSR*, Hoffmann und Campe.
- Women's Memory/Paměť žen.
<<http://www.womensmemory.net/>>

"Women's Memory: Oral Histories from Transition. Theory and Practice"

Oral History Workshop at the Central European University, Program on Gender & Culture, 3-5 November, 2000 in Budapest.

GRASSE Marina

**OWEN – Mobile Academy for Gender Democracy and Peacebuilding
Anklamer Straße 38
10115 Berlin**

**Phone.: +49 (0)30 / 280 85 41
+49 (0)30 / 283 22 51
Fax: +49 (0)30 - 283 22 52**

E-mail: grasse@owen-berlin.de

Title of your paper in English: **From the Women's Memory Research Project to Emancipatory Learning through Dialogue on History and Recollection**

The German women's NGO, OWEN e.V., was one of the partner organisations in the international oral history project, Women's Memory – Searching for the Life and Identity of Women during the Socialist Era. Since 1998, we have recorded and transcribed some 130 narrative biographical interviews with women from Eastern Germany (formerly the GDR), as well as a few interviews with women from Western Germany. Our interviewees were born between 1920 and 1960. At the time of the interviews, the East German women had lived the greater part of their lives in a socialist system. All of the interviews were based on an open introductory question. Gradually, from searching for women's experienced and narrated life histories, we arrived at a new pedagogical approach to biographical-historical education in international and intercultural contexts. The paper gives an overview of the development and theoretical backgrounds of our approaches and methods. Furthermore, one practical example of the use of our methodology from our part in the Women's Memory project is given.

Abstract in Spanish:

La ONG de mujeres OWEN e.V. participó en el proyecto internacional de historia oral, "La Memoria de Mujeres – En Búsqueda de la Vida e Identidad de las Mujeres durante la Era Socialista". Desde 1998 hemos grabado y transcrito unas 130 entrevistas con relatos autobiográficos hechas a mujeres de Alemania Oriental (antes RDA), y a algunas más a mujeres de Alemania Occidental, nacidas entre 1920 y 1960. En el momento de la entrevista las mujeres de Alemania Oriental habían vivido la mayor parte de sus vidas en un régimen socialista. Todas las entrevistas con relatos biográficos partían de una pregunta inicial abierta. Desde la búsqueda de las historias vividas y relatadas por mujeres llegamos gradualmente a plantear un nuevo enfoque pedagógico de educación biográfica-histórica en contextos internacionales e interculturales. Esta ponencia resume el desarrollo y el trasfondo teórico de nuestros enfoques y métodos. Contiene además un ejemplo práctico de cómo aplicamos nuestra metodología en el proyecto de "La Memoria de Mujeres".

From the Women's Memory Research Project to Emancipatory Learning through Dialogue on History and Recollection

The women's organisation, OWEN was founded as East-West European Women's Network in 1991. Most of its founders came — as I did – from the oppositional peace movement of the GDR. For the past ten years, we have increasingly focused our activities on the field of gender related civil and peace education.

Our concept of education and our pedagogical working methods are based on Gestalt pedagogy and Liberation Pedagogy, which date from the work of the psychotherapist Ruth Cohn and the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire.

Our experiences during the Women's Memory project had a significant impact on the further development of this emancipatory educational concept, which is based on the principles of learning through dialogue, in the field of biographical-historical education.

I will therefore focus on the lessons we have learnt during the process from the Women's Memory research project to emancipatory learning through dialogue on history and recollection.

The enquiry from Gender Studies Prague about participating in the international project, Women's Memory, reached us in 1998 at a time in united Germany when there were fierce debates on how to deal with German history and particularly the history of the GDR. Feminists from East and West were discussing the question of whether the socialist model of equal rights had promoted or impeded women's emancipation. During diverse encounters that OWEN had organised between women from Eastern and Western Europe and from Eastern and Western Germany since the beginning of the 1990's, the impact of history and recollection not only on the construction of one's own identities as a women, but also on the patterns of interpretation and the acceptance of the life paths and identities of the Other in question had already become clear to us.

In the beginning OWEN related various objectives to the Women's Memory project:

1. Firstly, we simply wanted to collect and preserve the life histories and biographical accounts of East German women in the form of narrative biographical interviews.
2. Our research interest was in finding out
 - how East German women had shaped their lives and how they look back upon them
 - which historical events or developments they remember and HOW they remember them

- to what extent the political and social parameters that had accompanied their lifetime had influenced their lives

- what self-images they had developed.

3. In the international dimension of the Women's Memory project, we perceived an opportunity to find out if and in what way socialist women's policies in the various now post-socialist countries had in fact promoted women's emancipation.

Interviewees

We conducted a total of some 130 interviews with East German women who were born between 1920 and 1960. The first series of interviews took place between 1998 and 1999 with the oldest generation of women; the second series was from 1999 to 2001 with those born between 1930 and 1940 and the third series was carried out in 2001 and 2002 with those born between 1940 and 1960. In the following years, interviews were conducted with several West German women, who were also born between 1920 and 1960.

In selecting our East German interviewees, it was important to us to include the widest possible spectrum of socio-cultural background milieus and lifeworlds. The individuals whom we interviewed included women from towns and rural areas, farmers, workers, academics, former functionaries, professors, artists, housewives, women with different world views, single and married women, women who had children and those who did not, etc. We found our interviewees in our own social surroundings, at events, by placing advertisements in newspapers, or via acquaintances who put us in touch with the women. Where possible, the interviews were conducted in the interviewees' home.

Our Team

The team consisted of me, as the project manager, and two journalists who conducted the interviews with the East German women. These journalists also worked in journalism in the GDR and both belong to the generation born in the late 1950's. At a later stage, the team was expanded to include historians, who were responsible for contextualising the interview material. Other colleagues from OWEN took part in the evaluation stage: a colleague who was born in Poland at the end of the 1960's and moved as a student to West Berlin during the 1980's; and two political scientist, who were born and raised up in West-Germany during the 1970's and 1980's. I am

mentioning these biographical details here, as it became clear over the course of the project that the various biographical as well as social and political backgrounds in question played a significant role during the exemplary evaluation method and in our subsequent pedagogical work with the biographical material.

Research Approach and Method

Our research approach was based on the feminist positioning that the women had actively shaped their lives as subjects and that they, as active subjects in the interview situation, should also receive the space to decide for themselves what they would like to talk about, how they would tell their story, and what they would not say. This influenced both the selection of the interview method and the evaluation method.

We assumed that every interview and interview situation constitutes a communicative interaction and is simultaneously a communication process between the respective narrator and interviewer. Both participants generate this process of interaction. Therefore, as a product of the interview, the resulting text is also a product of this interaction. Every interview is also influenced by the interviewer. Our aim was to shape this influence in such a way that the narrator would be given as much room as possible to develop the form of her biographical account.

As we could not know in advance what was important to the women we interviewed, which phases of their lives had which type of meaning to them, what topics were important to them, what they wanted to talk about – and in which way – and what they did not want to mention, we were interested in the entire experienced and narrated life history in the form that the interviewees presented it to us.

We decided on the narrative interview method for the biographical interviews. The classical narrative interview begins with an open introductory question, which prompts the interviewee to produce a spontaneous main narration. This narration is not interrupted by questions. The interviewers listen actively and attentively, merely stimulating the flow of words, but otherwise remaining entirely in the background. Only after the interviewee had ended the spontaneous account of her own accord does the interview continue to the dialogue part. In opening the conversation, we always used the same, relatively general question to prompt the narrated account: “In the Women’s Memory project, we are interested in the lives of women who lived in the GDR. I would like to ask you to tell me the story of your life, everything that occurs to you.

You can take as much time as you like. I won't interrupt you at first, but I'll just make some notes about questions I'd like to ask you later on."

After the interviewees had finished their main account, open but more detailed follow-up questions were asked during the second stage, the question part. This stage served to motivate the autobiographers to illustrate certain topics that they had already mentioned with more detailed information. In the third and final interview stage, questions were asked on topics that had not yet been raised and in which we were particularly interested. The conclusion of the interview was formed by a question with the aim of bridging the perception of one's own biography and the future: "When you look back at your life, what are you proud of and what message would you like to give to the next generations?"

Biographical data, which formed the basis of a biogram, was only requested after the conclusion of the interview. Reports in which the interviewees described their personal impressions were written on all of the interviews. Complete interview transcripts were produced.

Experiences

In the interviews, we encountered very different women and a wide range of life histories experienced by them, which showed us that "THE LIFE and THE IDENTITY of women in GDR socialism" did not exist. We were confronted with very different forms of presentation of the narrated life histories and with very different self-images. The perceptions of one's own life and the historical epochs that the women of the various generations had experienced were also equally diverse. What we particularly noticed was that the type of presentation of one's own biographical memories, historical memories and evaluations demonstrated clear links to the public discourses then and now. On the other hand, the presentation of the women's biographies and their way of remembering the GDR were also influenced by whether or not the changes of 1989 and the period since unification had led to far-reaching biographical ruptures (negative or positive developments) in the lives of our interviewees and also what expectations of the future they had for their further path through life.

The women whom we interviewed also organised the narration of their lives in very different ways. There were women who structured the story of their life chronologically, while others started off with a description of their current situation. Others started by taking a stand on a topic that was currently a matter of public discussion, or began their narration with an overall

evaluation of their life, which they then corroborated with narrative examples. There were interviews that lasted an hour – and others that went on for eight or more hours, sometimes even including several interview appointments.

The relationship between the respective interviewer and her interviewee proved to be very decisive for the course of the interview. When the interviewers were successful in creating an atmosphere of trust, the women spoke far more often about personal situations that they had experienced and raised difficult topics that were an emotional burden on them. It was not always easy for the interviewers to develop this type of relationship based on trust and to maintain it during the course of the entire interview. Particularly in interviews during which topics were raised that were also of importance to the interviewers on a personal level, or when opinions were expressed that were completely contrary to the viewpoints of the interviewer, it was difficult to hold back and continue listening attentively and actively to the interviewees.

The experiences from the direct interview situations and the enormous diversity of the narrated life histories, which we had not expected, also confronted us with the question of how we could make further use of the biographical material in our pedagogical work. We looked for an evaluation procedure that would allow us to reconstruct and contextualise the form of experienced and narrated life histories, using selected case studies. In our project team at OWEN, we decided to test the procedure of reconstructive case analysis. This evaluation method used by Gabriele Rosenthal is based on the assumption founded on Gestalt theory that every action in the experienced and narrated life history represents a choice from a range of given options. From the choice of a certain option, further decision options subsequently emerge, from which a certain option is then selected. In the presentation, that is, in the narration of her life history, the autobiographer also has various options from which she consciously or unconsciously chooses one. The shaping of a potential thematic field already starts with the first sentences of the narrative, biographical spontaneous narration. A focus on certain points thus becomes more likely, while a focus on others in turn becomes less probable. In other words, a certain range of action options is opened by the selective decision, while others options are closed off.

Rosenthal uses the process of abduction – the development of hypotheses – in reconstructive case analysis. In accordance with this method, one asks which horizon of options – from the perspective of the person conducting the analysis – is available within a certain sequence in the biographical events or within a sequence from the biographical account, which choice the acting

person could make, and what results the various options would have. Only after all possible hypotheses and follow-up hypotheses have been developed, are they contrasted and checked on the basis of the process of the actual biographical course or the next text sequence. Certain hypotheses now become more likely for the further process, while others cease to apply. The development of hypotheses is supported by material that provides information on the respective historical and socio-cultural contexts of the biographical data and on the text sequences in question.

During the analysis of the first interview examples, it already became clear that the reconstructive case analysis method required a very large time input, which becomes even larger when the analysis is conducted in a group as a joint dialogue-based process. However, these few, selected “cases” and our team’s attempts to approach the lives and identity constructs of the interviewed women by developing hypotheses in a joint process and contrasting them with the life history that was actually experienced and narrated, led to many insights. We saw that our respective hypotheses about the possible range of decision and action options as regards both the shaping of the actual biography and the presentation of the life history were significantly different. In our evaluation team, there were considerable variations in the reading and interpretation of the lived and narrated life histories. During our heated discussions on the decisions that were hypothetically possible and those that were actually made, we experienced very directly what influence our own pasts, self-images, patterns of interpretation and stereotypes exerted on the type of perception and evaluation of the life and identity of “the Others” as well as our relationships to the “Others”

On the one hand, these encounters with the lives of others challenged us to critically examine our own biographies, memories, experiences, roles as women, constructs of femininity, and perspectives of the past and present. On the other hand, they opened up new methodology options for our biography-oriented historical/civic and peace education work. In this work, we linked the research approach based on Gestalt theory from biography research that I have outlined here with a model from memory research, which I will present in the next part of my lecture.

Dimensions of Individual and Collective Recollection

In the broadest sense, OWEN’s biographical-historical educational work deals with history and the interaction of history policies, collective and individual recollection, and identity constructs.

In this part of our work, we use the previously outlined Gestalt theory approach in biographical research, distinguishing between the following levels and dimensions of memory that have been proposed by the German cultural scientists, Aleida and Jan Assmann: individual and collective memory with the dimensions of communicative and cultural memory. However, in order to emphasise the active and processual character of recollection, we use the term “remembering” (*Erinnern*) instead of the word “memory” (*Gedächtnis*).

Individual Remembering

Individual remembering and narrations about past events always present subjective and therefore selective reconstructions of the past, which cannot be equated to the actual events of “back then”. Therefore, it is of vital importance in biographical research and oral history, as well as in biography-oriented historical educational work, to differentiate between the actual events of the past, the experienced, recollected and narrated events and their role in one’s own life history. Individuals remember what they themselves have witnessed, experienced, learnt and “preserved” in their personal memory. However, not only “knowledge” about the past is stored, but also emotions that were associated with that time and contents that are associated with the period between then and now.

For example, in the analysis of the narrative interviews from the Women’s Memory project, it was very clearly demonstrated that the interviewees did not remember and reproduce the actual events and experiences of the past as a mirror image, but instead narrated what they retrieved from their memory based on their current perspective and in the given interview situation.

Collective Remembering

The generic term, “collective remembering”, describes the knowledge base about the past that is shared by a group – a collective. These collectives of memories can be families or other social communities, but also communities that define themselves through shared identities.

Collective remembering also occurs in a very selective way. Some contents and topics associated with the past are made taboo in a certain social context, while others are particularly highlighted. For instance, recollection of the mass rape and deportations of Germans after the end of the Second World War was made a taboo subject in GDR society, while the recollection of the resistance of German communists was especially emphasised and became the foundational myth

of the GDR. However, after the German unification 1990 official commemoration of the communist resistance faded completely into the background, but recollection of the mass rape by the Red Army and the deportation of Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia increased all the more instead.

In collective recollection, Aleida and Jan Assmann differentiate between the two levels of communicative memory (or remembering) and cultural memory.

Communicative Remembering

Individual recollections are passed on to co-existing generations in the form of communicative recollection. This level of recollection arises in a milieu of spatial proximity and a process of interpersonal interaction. What is remembered and communicated in this interaction, and how this occurs, depends both on the type of relationship between the participants and on the social legitimisation of the recollected contents and of the emotions associated with them at the time when they took place and in the present.

As a result of being limited to the time of co-existing generations, communicative memory represents the short-term memory of a society (around 80 – 100 years in Central Europe.)

In the Women's Memory project, we concentrated on biographical narrations that were communicated verbally in an interview situation. During the evaluation, we compared the received biographical details and narrative texts with researched facts about events and conditions, as well as developments of the female role models legitimised by society during the historical epochs in which our interviewees had lived.

Cultural Memory

The function of cultural memory is to "safeguard" the collective recollections that can no longer be passed on directly to further following generations on account of the fixed time limitations of the recollections which can be communicated in person. This occurs via cultural codifications such as written texts, photographs, films, monuments, rituals, commemoration days, symbols, etc. Which contents are preserved and passed on via cultural memory, and in which form of cultural codification this occurs, depends largely on the social structures, power relations (including gender), and collective and individual identity constructs (including collective, individual identities as "women", "men")both in the past and present period of time.

Women's Memory as an Educational Project: A Practical Example

In the last part of my lecture, I would like to present a highly abbreviated practical example of OWEN's biographical-historical educational work, in which we worked with biographical material from the Czech, East German and West German "women's memory". The basis was formed by the biographical information and texts of a total of six women interviewed during the Women's Memory project. In the run-up to the biography and history workshop, additional accompanying material was produced. This material included historical data, photographic material from magazines and women's magazines, as well as explanations of statements in the narrative texts of the biographical case studies. The aim of providing this accompanying material was to make it possible for the workshop participants to understand the respective social and socio-cultural contexts of the narrative texts and the courses of the biographies.

The topic of "women's emancipation" formed the core of this workshop. The participants came from Eastern and Western Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic.

Over the course of the workshop, the participants were supposed to search for the "emancipatory elements" of the lives of women in Europe who belonged to different generations and had lived in different countries and, until 1990, in different political systems. As researchers and learners, the idea was that the participants would be stimulated to engage in dialogues about the concept of emancipation, as well as the structural and cultural parameters that promote emancipation in the past and present, through their encounters with the biographies and self-presentations of the "case studies". In addition, the objective was to trigger processes of reflection about the participants' own perceptions, life paths, and decision-making and action options in their respective contexts by examining and discussing the biographies of other women.

The participants worked with sequential biographical data and narrative texts and in this way explored the shape of the respective occurred and narrated life histories together step by step in a process of articulation, discussion, rejection and re-articulation. At the same time, they also discussed the backgrounds of their hypotheses and follow-up hypotheses in the context of their own biographies, patterns of interpretation and social and socio-cultural contexts. Specially prepared context materials were made available to them for orientation and assistance purposes.

The first step in working with the case studies began with biographical data about the respective family background – the date and place of birth of the biographer, her parents and, where

available, her grandparents, including details of their professions. The participants were asked to formulate assumptions about the family and socio-cultural milieu into which Frau X was born and about the options for her life path that may have been available to her as a result of this background. From that point on, the participants worked through the biographical chronologies and narrative texts. Using the further biographical information and accompanying material provided to them and forming new hypotheses, the participants inferred the respective biographies step by step. Afterwards, they were given extracts from the transcribed biographical accounts in order to discuss the form of the narration of the life history by formulating hypotheses and follow-up hypotheses.

In a further process, the participants were provided with an overview of historical events in the form of a country-comparative time chart, which began with the date of birth of the oldest case study (1922 in this case) and covered the period until the beginning of the 1990's. The data were supplemented by photographs from magazines and women's magazines, which gave information about change and continuities in the "women's role models" favoured by society.

The participants then marked or added details about historical events/developments in the time chart, which they regarded as important for the biographer whom they were researching, both from their own point of view and that of the narrated life history.

The concluding discussion about the socio-political and cultural factors influencing the action and decision-making options, emancipation opportunities and identity constructs of women "then" and "now" took place against the backdrop of this time chart.

The following quotations should give an impression of the ideas that the German, Polish and Czech participants aged between 24 and 52 years old acquired from the workshop:

"It wasn't easy to take leave of one's own stereotypes in the interpretation of other biographies and societies. I saw what a hindrance all my preconceptions and stereotypes are in really being able to understand something."

"I realised how little I know about the East."

"The exercises really helped me to see much more clearly how closely the political and the personal are connected."

“I really became motivated to think about my own emancipation and the lives of my grandmother and mother and what role history played in their decision-making options.”

“I am leaving with the realisation that one cannot understand anything at all without knowing the context of a life.”

“I learned a lot about the other participants, particularly as a result of the discussions about the different interpretations, and was able to understand better why we have such different perceptions.”

“I never used to be interested in history. Now I know that history is very exciting when you deal with very concrete life histories.”

“I never knew anything about communism in the past and had no idea at all about what the people were like there. Now I have become curious about the people who lived there. I simply want to know more.”

“It became clear to me that emancipation has to do with responsibility for one’s own decisions above all, regardless of which society we live in.”

**DIJANIC Dijana
NIEMCIC Iva**

**Centre for Women's Studies, associates in the oral history project Women's
Memories: Searching for Identity within Socialism**

**Dolac 8, Zagreb 10 000, Croatia
Phone: 00385 91 535 39 38; 00385 1 48 72 406**

E-mail: dijana.dijanic@skole.hr

Language of presentation: English

State if you are a member of IOHA or COHA: No

Necessary equipment: LCD projector, computer

Title of your paper in English: **Socialism through women stories – Croatian study**

The aim of this study is to explore women's experience in Socialism by using oral history method and gender-conditioned methodology. The study included interviews with thirty four participants during the period of two years. Participants were women born between 1920 and 1950 from Croatia. The interview started with general question about woman's life, than personal questions (the family in which you grew up, relation with mother, schooling and childhood, work, public engagement, love, partner, marriage, family, material state, leisure time, caring for yourself, politics) and questions regarding political context (AFW -Anti-Fascist Women's Front, the Cominform, Goli otok - detention camp on a deserted uninhabited island, socialist holidays, self-management, Tito, changes in 1989). Interviews were conducted by six trained experts.

Findings of our study were: opinion of interviewed women is opposite to opinion of experts in Socialism, status of women in the political and economical fields slightly started to change. Although it was still time of strong patriarchal society women benefit in political participation, working and social rights and educational rights.

Study results were presented in the book named *Women's Biographical Lexicon – Women's Memories: Searching for Identity within Socialism*, authors are, Dijana Dijanic, Mirka Merunka Golubic, Iva Niemcic and Dijana Stanic.

Title of your paper in Spanish:**El socialismo a través los relatos de mujeres – Un estudio croato**

El propósito de esta investigación es examinar la experiencia mujeril en el socialismo utilizando el método "oral history" y la metodología genéricamente condicionada. La investigación contiene entrevistas con 34 interlocutoras, coleccionadas durante dos años. Las participantes son mujeres nacidas entre 1920 y 1950, que viven en Croacia. La entrevista empieza con una pregunta de carácter común sobre la vida de la mujer y continúa con preguntas personales (la familia en que creció, relaciones con su madre, su niñez y educación, su empleo, su injerencia pública, su vida sentimental, su pareja, matrimonio y familia, sus condiciones materiales, su tiempo libre, como trabata a sí misma, política) y con preguntas relacionadas con el contexto político (AFŽ – Movimiento antifascista da mujeres, Kominform, La isla calva – la prisión para oponentes políticos en una isla deshabitada, las ferias socialistas, Tito y los cambios políticos del 1989). Las entrevistas hicieron seis mujeres expertas.

Los resultados de nuestra investigación son: Las opiniones de mujeres entrevistadas son contrarias a las de los expertos para el período del socialismo. La posición de mujeres en el campo político – económico empezó lentamente a cambiar. Aunque éste era un período de sociedad todavía fuertemente patriarcal, las mujeres tenían derecho a la participación política, derechos sociales y de trabajo y derecho a la educación.

Los resultados de la investigación son presentados en el libro: "Lexicon biográfico mujeril – recuerdos de mujeres a la vida en el socialismo." Las autoras son: Dijana Dijanić, Mirka Merunka Golubić, Iva Niemčić y Dijana Stanić.

Socialism through women stories – Croatian study

How we began²

Women's Memories: Searching for Identity within Socialism is an international project begun in 1995. We joined the project in November 1998 at the invitation of Pavla Frýdlova, coordinator of the international project, and Biljana Kašić, program coordinator at the Centre for Women's Studies in Zagreb. By joining the project we accepted the given work methodology³ so that the obtained results would be comparable for a mutual analysis.

We started out to compare women's experience and self-knowledge from socialism and about socialism. We did, however, pose the question: What motivates us to do research on socialism? We turned to exploring our own memories of socialism, the images and rituals that we remembered, and recalled the stories of the experiences of life during socialism of our grandmothers, mothers, neighbours. The images were varied ... images of our childhood ... images of socialism through remembrances on Republic Day ... the baton [*štafeta*] that was welcomed every May 8th on Republic Square in Zagreb [during the annual relay race] ... March 8th and the greeting cards we would make at school for our mothers and teachers in honour of Women's Day ... the reactions of dissatisfied high school teachers with the way that holiday was celebrated ... red carnations ... The media images of socialism were also quite strong ... Tito ... the waving of flags to Tito and Mao Tse-Tung Tito's death and the collective mourning ... the television shows about antifascist movement in WWII ... but also reductions in energy, constant inflation and the lack of money in the mid eighties, shortages of coffee, chocolate, oil, sanitary napkins and diapers, fuel shortages which was the reason why cars with licence plates ending in even numbers could only drive on even days and those with odd numbers on odd days, going to church was banned for members of the Party and their families. However, we considered a different way of thinking: there was a lower crime rate then, Zagreb women would go across the border to Italy (Trieste) and Austria (Graz) to purchase goods, loans were taken out at banks. These various live associations on socialism and the countless number of memories from socialism boosted us during the course of the entire research. We admitted that in our

² This is modified and extended version of introduction of the Dijanic, D. Merunka-Golubić, M. Nemčić, I. Stanić, D. (2004) *Women's Biographical Lexicon – Women's Memories: Searching for Identity within Socialism*. Centar za ženske studije. Zagreb.

³ More about project methodology see at web page <http://www.womensmemory.net/>

recollections there was a selection of images and impressions and differences in feelings on certain matters and events then and now. We assumed that the women who we would be interviewing would react in the same way.

Guidelines for conducting the interviews

We decided to formulate thematic guidelines for conducting interviews as we wished to avoid the recorded stories being sparse and stereotypical and to call attention to at least a minimal political context of socialism. We envisioned this as a stroll through history, passing through the years 1968, 1945, 1974, 1989 ... to see our mothers how they strolled through the streets of the city, buying material to sew dresses from Burda patterns, to see parents looking at furniture for the furnishing of their first flat, to see women getting ready for their AFW [Anti-Fascist Front of Women / AFŽ] meetings ... Preparing the interviews, we endeavoured to recognize in the various stories by women the ways in which these women see their lives, to notice the different lifestyles, and the challenges they were exposed to and their views on socialism.

In that way, we set up the guiding thread for the interviews. This was a half-structured interview which opens up a great number of various themes and motifs, be they private or of a public nature, and which gradually connect to create an integral story. We began with the question: *Tell us something about your life during socialism* and then progressed with thematic secondary questions.⁴

Even though guidelines for the interview exist, the interview itself is of an open nature and during the interview we did not ask the interviewee to speak of important years or specific events. It is the interviewee who shapes and leads the conversation, defining its dynamics. Only if mention is made of a certain event from socialism or if during the conversation we come to some event in her life which was tied with the political context do we ask a question related to that event. The questions are intertwined in the woman's stories and they are never entirely the same. The woman telling us her story is important. She is the subject, and her life story is our fundamental interest. Through it we can measure and form a judgement about socialism as a political or

⁴ Interview guidelines are: first part of interview - tell me something about your life, then second part of interview - the family in which you grew up (relation with mother, schooling and childhood, work, public engagement, love, partner, marriage, family, material state, leisure time, caring for yourself, politics, how do you live today, the most significant moment in life, when were most happiest, the most difficult in life, message for daughters and granddaughters, what would you change in your life), third part of interview - questions relevant for our project – Croatian/Yugoslav historical background (Anti-Fascist Women's Front, The Cominbiro, Goli otok [detention camp on a deserted uninhabited island], socialist holidays, self-management, Tito, changes in 1989)

historical time. In research we wished to avoid the valorisation and questioning of the historical accuracy of their memories and/or experiences, as it is not our intention to search for a “single truth” on socialism. Contribution of project is collection of interviews which make important archive for future research of socialism, women’s history in socialism, women’s experience of socialism and how women felt about political events and what those events meant to women because as ‘Anderson says traditional historical sources tell us more about what happened and how it happened than how people felt about it and what it meant to them (cited by Minister, p35)’⁵.

As we carried out the interviews with women from various strata of the socialist society and with all degrees of education, we can say with great certainty that we have a random sampling from which we can recognize the key points which the lives of women gathered around and in which they recognized themselves. We have made thirty four interviews with women from three generations; fifteen with women born between 1920 and 1929, ten with women born between 1930 and 1939, four with women born between 1940 and 1949 and five with women born before 1920.⁶

Research outcomes

Outcomes of this project are exceptionally rich and comprehensive material which can correspond to, we believe, any possible question. On one level, as a woman’s life story, it is exceptionally interesting reading material which is read almost like a novel and whose special value is given through its authenticity and truthfulness of experience. On another level, as historical material, as we already mention this is infinitely valuable material for further research and analysis.

We chose few points from research to point out how women perceive socialism.

1. Firstly, socialism as personal her/history and memory

Have you lost something with fall of Socialism?

⁵ Minister, J (1991) ‘A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview’, In: Berger Gluck, S. and Patai, D. (eds.) *Women’s Words The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. Routledge. New York, London. 27-43.

⁶ More about generational structure of interviewees see at web page <http://www.womensmemory.net/>

*With fall of Socialism I lost everything. My children are scattered over the world, and I am in old age home. (Herta K.)*⁷

*With the fall of socialism I lost absolutely everything. I lost my faith in people, I lost my lifestyle. (Zdenka)*⁸

*In that system, I was nothing, I didn't exist. (Daša M.)*⁹

*Socialism paid my education. Then you could go on University to study ... (Zdenka)*¹⁰

*With fall of socialism, I lost my security ... (Dada Š.)*¹¹

*The best years of my life were from 1945 to 1990. (Zdenka)*¹²

*Today I feel as a woman, regardless of everything, one who is not a mother, that she is not supported by society ... (Daša. M.)*¹³

*With the fall of socialism I lost nothing. I am a scientist, I continued to work and write. (Olga C.)*¹⁴

Regardless of their political attitudes, women are nostalgic for communism as a part of their youth, they are nostalgic because of a lifestyle they had and were able to maintain, which they cannot maintain anymore due to their retirement. The women that were closer to the ruling ideology of socialism reminisce about the lost ideals and values; others remember the safety they had. In their answers a certain indifference towards socialism as a political system can be noticed, because it never had a great impact on lives of women and on their identities. Those memories were certainly influenced by the wars that broke out in Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

2. Secondly, socialism as system and women's identity in socialism

Socialist society and socialism as idea proclaimed equality among men and women in all aspects of social life. Although women we have interviewed declared their satisfaction with their position in socialist society *“I felt on equal terms with men. I could speak freely in the various committees”* or *“Women were selected into various political bodies”* or *“They listened to what I said”* if we go further in analyzing women's stories and their status and participation in public

⁷ Here and later cited from Centre for Women's Studies (later Centre), archive of project Women's Memories (later Memories), transcript of Herta K

⁸ Centre, Memories, Zdenka

⁹ Dijanić, D. [et al] (2004) *Ženski biografski leksikon – Sjećanje žena na život u socijalizmu*. Centar za ženske studije. Zagreb. 90

¹⁰ Centre, Memories, Zdenka

¹¹ Dijanić, D. [et al] 256

¹² Centre, Memories, Zdenka

¹³ Dijanić, D. [et al] 119

¹⁴ Centre, Memories, Olga C.

sphere of life and equality in private sphere in period of Socialist Republic of Croatia we will find that outside of political/ideological and class discourse it was not the case. Socialism assumed that women are one coherent group with similar problems and needs regardless their ideological, class, educational and other background.¹⁵ Their discourses were organized predominantly around official political ideology, socialist bureaucracy and revolutionary mythology.

‘Socialism didn’t allow me to be a woman, worker and Croat simultaneously ...’ (Daša M.)¹⁶

This sentence condenses the question of women’s multiple identities during socialism, the possibilities of their practicing and the problem of the position of women.

‘I was protected by my status and not by socialism.’ (Herta K. – she was university professor)

What bothered you the most?

The rights for abortion and protection of family were never accepted, that bothers me the most. That would mean that children go to kindergartens, that they have nursery schools, everything should be organized in order to free women from doing the house chores. That is my biggest resentment. We did not have enough kindergartens, no organized working hours. For example, when I was in Germany, they had those mess halls, they had first-class food and you had no reason to cook (she means student canteens), we never had those... The most important is that you must educate women to raise their children as equals, if you don’t do that, you did nothing at all.

‘Women were limited in their rights, women were cheated, and nothing we promised in a pre-war propaganda had been done. ... I equally blame the Communists for deceiving women ... Firstly they banned abortion ... and in the beginning, you know, abortion was banned ... As far as women and feminism goes, socialism did not make any impact here ... It often happened that if the husband had an important function then the wife also had a function. Those women did not impress me...

¹⁵ More about women as homogeneous category see at Mohanty, Talpade C. (1991) ‘Under Western Eyes. Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses’, In: Mohanty, Talpade C. Russo, A. and Torres, L. (eds.) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Indiana University Press. Bloomington and Indianapolis. 51-80. The research team gathered around the project *Women’s Memories: Searching for Identity within Socialism* from Croatia sees the importance of the project even beyond its primary symbolic meaning of inscribing women’s experiences into history. Namely, we, believe that women with their testimonies to life during socialism have a direct influence on the empowerment and setting into motion of those subjects in society ready to look on their recent history unfettered by ideology, and the unease before the Western, modern and liberated civilization – unease because of the lack of information and isolation from this very same civilization which named itself the model that should be reached – and began to examine the processes that had taken place during socialism.

¹⁶ Dijanić, D. [et al] 105

On those meetings, when you discussed women's enrolment in politics, how did the men react? How would they...? Enroll, go ahead, they said, but at the same time they had excuses women have the family to take care of and kids, so they wouldn't enroll. It sounded something like that. I remember a young intellectual who once said: "I have neither a family nor anybody. Choose me then." They were silent, never said a word. What could they have said? Of course they had never chosen her, and that was it.' (Herta K. is one of rare women who declared herself as feminist)¹⁷

'Women from rural areas said that this [content of meetings of women's political organization] was too academic for them, that there was too much theory and nothing practical ...' (Jelka, Č.)¹⁸

'Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ)¹⁹? I think that this existed primarily so that women could gather together because this was nearer to them than joining some political organization ... AFŽ was not regarded as political in the sense of 'serious' politics...

'AFŽ was also concerned with family-care, children's allowance, housing problems, preparation of food provisions for winter and there was also talk of including women in self-government bodies ... ' (Jelka Č.)²⁰

'I argued with the AFŽ this was just a new form of unpaid work for women. Along with their jobs, women were also forced into sewing in the AFŽ ... ' (Herta K.)²¹

The Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ) is an organization which in women's memories symbolizes women's identity in socialism and is mentioned because of its importance for women identification on an ideological level.

Women did not see the AFŽ as an important political organization that has the power to change their status in the society, but as an organization that deals with problems such as functioning of the family and children, while it set aside other aspects, such as reproductive rights. Despite the AFŽ's reputation as such an organization, it was the first period of socialism that was the most dynamic one, regarding the activity of women and their public visibility. In later periods of socialism and their lives women abandoned this activist approach and took on a role of a mother,

¹⁷ Centre, Memories, Herta K

¹⁸ Dijanić, D. [et al] 59

¹⁹ AWF was the only women-only organization. It was founded during the World War II (in 1942) with the goal of enrolling women in the antifascist movement. In the post-war period, until it was shut down in 1953, AWF had tried to change the view on what is women's role in the society and what should their social status be like.

²⁰ Dijanić, D. [et al] 58 and 59

²¹ Centre, Memories, Herta K

worker, scientist, teacher, clerk, and wife. Although dissatisfied with the condition, they did nothing about it.

We can say that socialism hasn't empowered women's identity and that women we have interviewed couldn't single out their female/gender identity instead of telling stories that could be part of everybody's life. The reason for that we can find in socialist categorization of feminism as something negative, as bourgeois whose only interests were exclusive women's rights.²²

3. Thirdly, employment and relations of power

Our research has shown that the conclusions of socialist sociologists, political scientists and historians in many things do not agree with the opinion of the interviewed women. Example of such differences in opinions is disagreement of most respondents with attitude²³ that women's employment did not substantially affected patriarchal relations of power in a socialistic family, intergenerational relationships (mothers and daughters), the raising of children and political engagement.

‘‘ We never had any material problems. But I wanted to work, and my mother wanted me to work also.

Have you discussed it?

Yes, we have. Then my mother told me that she doesn't like the fact that I do not work and that I should be working.’’ (Jelka Č.)²⁴

²² The beginning of organising women's movements in Yugoslavia was in second decade of 20th century. Women's independent organisations have been trying to improve their situation within political spheres through: the women's right to vote and equal rights back from the first years of the 20th century. There were two feminist-oriented women's societies: Alliance of Women's Movement and Yugoslav Women's Society which were in operation in Yugoslavia between the two world wars. The bourgeois feminist movement was critical towards the patriarchal regime in order to achieve democratic changes in Yugoslav society. They believed that changes would be possible only with women as an electoral body. Within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) and the Union of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia, an initiative was established, namely the Women's Movement Youth, in Zagreb during 1934. Despite the differences between these two groups of women, cooperation between the organisations had begun. Women's history was built together by highly-educated women, feminists and young working women. The start of World War II was also the end of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (as it was once called). As a consequence of this event, bourgeois feminists found themselves outside of their paradigm and the movement ended in 1940. The tradition of bourgeois feminists remained under a veil of silence. When the Second World War ended the country has been liberated and the government has changed. The CPY made it known to women that their economic, social and political inequality was the result of a class society and that only within the framework of a revolutionary movement could they fight for their rights. In this manner, the danger of turning towards a reactionary civil feminist direction which leaned towards the individual solving of a "woman's issue" was annulled.

²³ Leinert-Novosel, S. (1990) *Žene-politička manjina*. NIRO Radničke novine. Zagreb

²⁴ Dijanić, D. [et al] 56

“I gave my mother my salary. My husband disapproved it, you know, because he looked at it differently, but I did not want my mother to feel as a woman, a mother without a pension, without anything, to feel like a servant. I wanted her to feel like a human being.

Did you feel equal to your husband in your marriage?

Not only that, I felt superior. I was more active, he was a quiet man, and I did not feel susceptible.” (Daša M.)²⁵

While your husband was alive, who earned more?

Firstly him, but after I started receiving honorariums, we became equal, since he did no part-time jobs. My salary was much smaller but when you counted in the honorariums, it became equal. When he died, I refused to take his pension. And not even when I retired, I took only my own. (Herta K., she was university professor)²⁶

Conclusion

Thanks to the socialist ideology of abolishing every aspect of exploitation and making men and women equal in the field of work, women, got the right to vote and the right to participate in the political life. Political willingness, education and emancipation of women to enroll in shaping of the politics that deals with solving their problems was neither followed by the emancipation of men nor by the change of the view on the social status of the women in general.

With that changes, women were neither more visible in the society, nor had they greater power or any chance to represent women-specific problems. A question arises whether the women’s coming out (politics, employment) was enough and is it enough today? Are we more aware of those problems nowadays? What is the opinion of the women that participated in this project?

“Women have to continue fighting for their rights.”

“Women have to courageous and respect themselves. Not to be afraid of men.”

(Daša M.)²⁷

“You must not be satisfied only with your husband.” (Slava K.)²⁸

“Nowadays I celebrate Women’s Day demonstratively. Before, everything used to be so tasteless, as this wasn’t holiday which was supposed to celebrate the affirmation of women.” (Daša M.)²⁹

²⁵ ibid 106 and 110

²⁶ Centre, Memories, Herta K.

²⁷ Dijanić, D. [et al] 118

²⁸ ibid 153

²⁹ ibid 96

KIS Oksana

**Institute of Ethnology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine
Senior Research Fellow**

15, prospekt Svobody, Lviv 79000 Ukraine

office phone (+38-032) 297-01-57 fax (+38-032) 297-01-55

E-mail: oksanakis55@gmail.com

Language of presentation: English

State if you are a member of IOHA or COHA:
member of Ukrainian Oral History Association which is a member of IOHA

Necessary equipment: No

Title of your paper in English: **Twentieth Century Ukraine in Women's Memories**

Study is based on recording and qualitative analysis of 30 autobiographical narratives of elderly women recorded in three different Ukrainian cities (Lviv, Kharkiv, Simferopil). The feminist notion of a distinctive character of women's historical experiences and a special woman's agency in general historical, social and cultural changes constitute the theoretical framework of this project. The political loyalty to the Soviet regime or independent Ukrainian nation-state and corresponding Soviet or national discourses/identities appears as the determinant factor framing women's life stories and determining their views of the past. The language problem (the status and use of Russian language in Ukraine during Soviet times and nowadays) related to the issue of interethnic relations occupies one of the central places in women's reflections on their past and present. Professional education proved to be one of the key values for all the narrators: it is presented as an important pre-condition of a woman's self-fulfilment.

Title of your paper in Spanish: **El Siglo veinte Ucrania en Memorias de mujeres**

El estudio está basado en grabación y análisis cualitativo de 30 narrativas autobiográficas de mujeres ancianas registradas en tres ciudades ucranianas diferentes (Lviv, Kharkiv, Simferopil). La noción feminista de un carácter distintivo de experiencias históricas femeninas y una mujer en agencia de cambios históricos, sociales y culturales generales constituye el marco teórico de este proyecto. La lealtad política al régimen soviético o estado nacional ucraniano independiente y correspondientes soviético o discursos/identidades soviéticos o nacionales aparece como el factor determinante que enmarca las biografías femeninas y determina sus visiones del pasado. El problema de lengua (el estado y el uso de la lengua rusa en Ucrania durante tiempos soviéticos y hoy en día) relacionado con la cuestión de relaciones interétnicas ocupa uno de los sitios centrales en reflexiones femeninas de su pasado y presente. La educación profesional resultó ser uno de los valores claves para todos los narradores: es presentado como una condición pre-condicional de la autorealización de una mujer.

Twentieth Century Ukraine in Women's Memories

The Historical and Academic Context

The history of Ukraine in the 20th century is replete with events that have altered the country's political, social, and economic landscape, yet the experiences of the women who lived under the various political regimes that controlled parts of Ukraine in the past hundred years have not been studied sufficiently. The gender dimension of this entire epoch is especially important; it represents a time when Ukrainian women obtained extensive rights and opportunities for self-realization in their public lives, a transformation which changed both the women and the public spaces. Women's participation in and contribution to all national achievements of the 20th century however have been underestimated and concealed in the modern history of Ukraine. In fact, women have found themselves underrepresented or even excluded from the core historical narratives; their life experiences and practices, values and aspirations, views and identities remain unknown either to scholars or to their younger counterparts.

It is true that at the beginning of the 20th century studies in history and anthropology of women represented one of the most popular and rapidly growing research fields within Ukrainian studies. This very promising trend, however, was brutally broken in Soviet times when social sciences were to serve the political interest of the Communist party legitimizing its ideology and policies. Total misconceptions of feminist scholarship precluded any critical study of Ukrainian women's history beyond the Marxist-Leninist paradigm at that time. It was not surprising therefore that at the time of collapse of the USSR, women's history found itself among the least developed research areas. After almost two decades of independence and academic freedom Ukrainian women's history it is still maturing and struggling for proper recognition and institutionalization in Ukrainian academia.

History is not a politically neutral subject, especially in Ukraine where the past is a permanent battlefield for several rival political agents trying to construct and to promote competing historical narratives. And women's history is not an exception. The critical overview of post-Soviet scholarly publications on Ukrainian women's history reveals a range of very disturbing tendencies in the development of this academic field. I would like to point out only three of them.

First, contemporary research in Ukrainian women's history is largely determined by and subordinated to the emerging Ukrainian national grand-narrative. The Ukrainian state tends to support publications and studies which comply with its official politics of history and promote the vision of Ukrainian women's past, which fits into the new national mythology. With only a few exceptions, the majority of research on women's history - irrespective of the particular subject (from legal statuses of women in Ukrainian society centuries ago to biographies of prominent women of the past, from the history of women's movement to the everyday women's lives in Soviet times) prove to be framed by the dominant historical discourse. The general idea is to construct women's history as a part of the Ukrainian national history: a century-long story of national struggle for independence and nation-state building. Ukrainian women are seen through the lenses of their devotion and contribution to the national cause. This determines the choice of the "important and actual" research themes, methods and approaches to be applied, and even the conclusions to be made. All the aspects of the women's past that do not fit into the national paradigm are deemed irrelevant and remain mainly neglected. In fact, women's history is not considered an independent research field but is appropriated and co-opted for political purposes, facing the risk of becoming another appendage to a ready-made his-story.

Second, there is a perceptible tendency to represent women as eternal victims of dramatic historical events. Scholars tend to focus on women's sufferings, constructing strong association between the concepts of *womanhood* and *victimhood*. Consequently women's historical experiences are conceptualized in terms of passivity, helplessness, tribulation and loss, while their survival strategies and practices of resistance or accommodation remain overlooked. The victimization of women ultimately dislodges the very possibility to recognize them as versatile historical agents.

And last but not least: the majority of Ukrainian historians have little (if any) knowledge of feminist theory, epistemology and methodology, so their studies are factual and descriptive at best. Facing the problem of sourcing proper analytical tools, scholars tend to use non-academic instruments to interpret their empirical materials; an unbiased and comprehensive critical analysis is too often substituted by excessively emotional moralist rhetoric, publicist nationalist pathos and gestures of political loyalty. In short, Ukrainian women's history is too weak to fulfill its key mission: to challenge the androcentric paradigm of historical science by means of critical revision

of existing studies and sources from a feminist standpoint, accompanied by comprehensive exploration of the wide variety of women's historical experiences.

Project Design and Documentation

The acute shortage of works in women's history, as well as a social and academic demand for serious research in the oral history of contemporary Ukraine compelled me to conceive a project in Ukrainian women's oral history based on theoretical principles and methodology applied by the international research project, *"Women's Memory: Searching for Lives and Identities of Women under Socialism."* This project was initiated in 1996 in Prague by a group of women from Central European countries (the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, former East Germany, Poland, Serbia, Montenegro, and Croatia)³⁰. Its initial goal was to document women's life experiences under socialism by recording, archiving, and analyzing women's life stories. This method of using biographical narrative interviews is regarded as the most effective way to obtain accurate and elaborate first-hand information on the everyday lives, views, social identities and practices of women living in the former "Soviet bloc". Utilizing a common interviewing technique aims to facilitate the further cross-cultural examination of the international women's oral history archive. In 2001-2002 I attended two workshops on women's oral history and biographical interviewing (organized by OVEN), which helped me to design the project. In November 2002, during a meeting of an international team in Berlin my proposal was approved and I became the head of the Ukrainian branch of the international project "Women's Memory".

In January 2003 the research project "20th Century Ukraine in Women's Memories" was also approved by the Academic Council of the Institute of Ethnology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and became a part of the Institute's general research layout. In autumn 2003 the process of recording women's oral autobiographies started. A research grant from the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (University of Alberta, Canada) allowed us to purchase the necessary equipment (voice recorders), conduct thirty biographical interviews and completely transcribe all the records.

Three regions of Ukraine: western, eastern and southern (represented by three cities respectively: Lviv, Kharkiv and Simferopol) were chosen as the areas of focus. This choice was

³⁰ For general information about the project, its goals, methodology, chronology, and outcomes, see <http://www.womensmemory.net>

determined by considerable historical, cultural, social, political, and economical differences among them. We interviewed the oldest generation of women: those born between 1920 and early 1930s, regardless of their education, professional background, ethnic descent, or religious persuasion. Since age and gender are the only criteria of a respondent's eligibility, all possible channels were to be used for recruitment of potential storytellers. The potential narrators were identified in different ways, including personal contacts, various NGOs, social services for senior citizens, parish communities, as well as via snowball method.

Three interviewers worked for this project: besides myself, who conducted interviews in my home city of Lviv, two other women-activists served as interviewers in the remaining cities: Lyudmyla Chesnokova in Kharkiv and Galyna Klintsova in Simferopol. They were especially instructed and trained for this particular project during the workshops delivered by German organization OVEN e.V. in Kharkiv and Saint-Petersburg in 2001-02. The idea to recruit local interviewers came from our strong mutual belief that producing an oral biographical narrative is an interactive process to which both interlocutors – interviewer and narrator – contribute. The role of interviewer in it is crucial as the general success of the interview and the quality of the narrative produced depend greatly on her personality and performance. Her gender, age, social background, ethnicity and language are of special importance as those factors determine the personal distance between her and the subject of the interview, and govern the psychological comfort during the interview; establishing a trustful, open, and frank atmosphere is absolutely necessary for the process of narration to be as detailed and authentic as possible. It is important that an interviewer shares the interviewee's cultural background in order to be trusted and to understand the interviewee's verbal as well as non-verbal messages. Given serious political tensions and prejudices existing between the three regions, we decided that our potential narrators would feel more comfortable telling their life stories to somebody residing in their home city. Each of the local interviewers is in her fifties, so this reduced the age gap and facilitated communication between the interlocutors.

In 2003-04 we recorded thirty biographical narrative interviews revealing the life experiences of elderly women. All the interviews were conducted in the language chosen by the narrator – either Ukrainian or Russian. The total length of voice recording is 102 hours 30 minutes; the average duration of one interview is 3 hours 25 minutes. The audiotapes and digital audio-files have been fully transcribed, anonymized and archived. Presently the audio-recordings

and transcripts (along with other documents) are stored as a special unit titled “Women’s Memory of Ukraine” at the Archive of Institute of Ethnology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Each transcript is accompanied by two compulsory documents:

1) *a bio-gram* which includes the respondent’s principle data (date and place of birth of herself and her relatives – parents, grandparents, children, sisters/brothers; dates of marriage/divorce and birth/death of husband; dates and places of relocations; education; professional experience). This information is indispensable for reconstruction and further analysis of each woman’s life chain. Such records help to reveal and interpret the events, people, and places that impacted the woman’s life, especially if these items are described in detail in the narrative, or, on the contrary, excluded from it. Basic social characteristics like the respondent’s church affiliation and ethnicity are also indicated in the bio-gram as they are important for further analysis.

2) *a protocol of interview* - a short report written by the interviewer describing the context of the particular interview (where and how the respondent has been recruited, her reactions and behavior before and during the interview, the setting in which the conversation took place, the interviewer’s observations of the interviewee’s actual living conditions, and any encountered difficulties). This information might be helpful for better understanding and/or interpretation of the respondents’ reasons for selecting, sequencing, emphasizing or avoiding certain themes while constructing her story. It may also help to identify the topics that are most important for the respondent herself.

The technique of interviewing used in our project was based on the work of Gabriele Rosenthal³¹ with minor modifications to fulfill the goal of this particular study. The idea of a biographical narrative interview is to stimulate and sustain a natural continuous narration and to minimize the interviewer’s influence on it. Each encounter consisted of four consecutive phases. It begins with an open-ended introductory question (“We aspire to learn as much as possible about the lives of women in Ukraine during the Soviet era and the ensuing years of Ukraine’s independence. Would you recount your life as fully as possible, from the beginning up to the present day, please? I will not interrupt you, but I will take notes, and ask a few questions at the end”), allowing each respondent to construct her story in her own way. The continuous flow of

³¹ Rosenthal, Gabriele. Biographical method – biographical research, in *Qualitative Research Practice*, ed. Clive Seale, Giampietro Gobo, Jaber F. Gubrium, and David Silverman. London: SAGE Publications, 2004.

narration is supported through a technique of active listening that permits the interviewer to ask only so-called *neutral* questions to stimulate a narrator's talk. After this first phase was completed, the second one began with so-called *internal* questions directly related to the interviewee life story (persons, events, facts cursorily mentioned or on the contrary – silenced before). At this time, the narrator has an opportunity to immerse deeper into memories, so many details that were previously omitted emerge at this time. After all clarifications are completed and the respondent has nothing to add, the interviewer can proceed to the next phase, which consists of so-called *external* questions determined by our research team specific academic interests. We asked respondents to express their opinions and reflect upon more general societal issues. The questions are as follows: (1) What meaning does the Soviet regime have in your life? (2) What do you think about people of various ethnicities living next to you? (3) Which historical events have had the most significance in your life the most? (4) What is the meaning of Ukrainian independence in your life? (5) What helped you the most to surmount hardships in your life? At the closing stage the interviewee is asked to reflect upon the question: "What in your life are you most proud of?" which helps the narrator return from her trip to the past back to her present day life and restore a positive emotional state.

Methods and Techniques

The theoretical basis of the project derives from the feminist notion of a distinctive character of women's agency in historical, social and cultural processes (Gluck, Patai, 1991; Scott, 2000). Since the first feminist historians appealed to make women visible in His-story it became very clear that this problem can not be solved merely by mechanical "adding and stirring." The entire androcentric history paradigm has to be challenged. Oral history and biographical approaches represent an alternative way of historical research, which could considerably counterbalance the male-biased historical sciences, which tend to neglect, marginalize and instrumentalize women's history in Ukraine. The real inclusion of women's perspectives into modern Ukrainian history will make it more accurate and comprehensive.

The "life history approach" proved to be a relevant and effective research tool because it "encourages the narrator to shape her own story as well as to tell it in her own words, and thus

puts her at the forefront of the historical stage.”³² Thus the biographical narrative interview could be perceived as a method of empowerment granting their agency in producing history: women are enabled to speak for themselves providing immediate accounts of their practices, views, opinions, values, interests, etc. from women’s standpoints, in their own terms. The autobiographical narrative interview is an indispensable tool to reveal women’s own perception of the lived past. This is especially important in the post-Soviet countries. After decades of forced silence and denial of any individual memory, it is not easy for elderly women to express themselves, to articulate their opinions openly and plainly. Since for decades Soviet people were trained to publicly recite only the statements that complied with the “general line” of the CP leadership, it is almost impossible to get women’s personal views through asking them only direct questions now; those are usually answered in the most politically correct way with standard propaganda clichés. Furthermore, without an end-to-end cross-reading of a woman’s autobiography we could not understand meaning of any individual event in the woman’s life, neither can we adequately interpret why a woman’s life trajectory and her narrated life story are constructed in this particular way. Oftentimes some passing remarks and seemingly minor details turn out to be extremely important in revealing unarticulated standpoints, values, feelings and thoughts.

The autobiographical approach brings an individual’s life inscribed in its immediate milieu (micro environment) into the center of the study, so the subject’s reflections upon her own life as well as her social, political, and cultural entourage are in focus simultaneously. Joan Scott stressed the necessity of simultaneous study of the past on individual and societal levels at once in order to get the most accurate historical picture: “To pursue meaning we need to deal with the individual subject as well as social organization and to articulate the nature of their relationships, for both are crucial to understanding how gender works, how change occurs”³³. From its inception, oral history not only offered its methodology and tools to women’s history, but it was also in line with the theoretical goals of the field: to fill the void in historical source material with experiences and perspectives of the marginalized people by means of the interview.

³² Angel, Barbara Alpern and Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck. Introduction, in *A Revolution of Their Own*, ed. Barbara Alpern Angel and Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck (New York: Westview Press, 1998), 2

³³ Scott, Joan W. Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis, in *Feminism and History*, ed. by Joan W. Scott New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 167

Oral history is not only about the reconstruction of events or the documentation of facts by means of individual testimonies. “The first thing that makes oral history different is that it tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*” as Alessandro Portelli correctly remarked³⁴. Done in the form of the in-depth autobiographical interview, oral history allows us to reveal the complexity of women’s views and attitudes, to grasp the complexity and controversies of their lives, and to better understand some causes or motives of their decisions and practices, especially those which are not directly articulated or silenced. Indeed, in narrating a life story, one is talking not as much about events she witnessed as about the meanings those events have produced in the context of her individual life experiences. The individual’s historical, ethnic, class, gender and other identities are determined by a person’s experience of history. Taken together they reflect the individual’s sense of history.

Research Topics and Modes of Analysis

Since each national research team of the international project “Women’s memory” retains relative autonomy, we have been able to set the priorities of our project to meet the specific academic interests of scholars involved in the project as well as the more general demands of Ukrainian women’s history as a research field. In addition to covering a number of so-called proper women’s issues (the transformation of gender regime and gender ideology, women’s gender identity construction, the notion of motherhood, woman’s sexuality, etc.), this project is also designed to explore women’s views and beliefs regarding more general social, economic, and political issues in Ukraine during socialism and in post-socialist times. Those are reflected in the abovementioned five questions being asked at the final stage of interviews.

Women's views and (re)evaluations of the different political regimes and corresponding state formations – the USSR and the fledgling Ukrainian nation-state - are of special interest to us. We aspire to understand how a woman’s past shapes her perception of the present, how her present day shapes perception of the past, and how both determine her perception of the future. The issue of interethnic relations for centuries remains among the most pressing for Ukrainians, so we cannot neglect it in our study. The core idea, which inspired the entire project, was to

³⁴ Portelli, Alessandro. What Makes Oral History Different, in *Portelli, A. The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories. Form and Meaning in Oral History*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 48

explore the variety of women's agency in building their lives and coping with hardships they lived through.

The initial hypothesis was based on the assumption that women from different regions would naturally have rather different images of the experienced past because the three regions are so diverse in their political history, cultural heritage, economy and social structure, ethnic composition of population and prevailing languages, etc. Aside from rather predictable differences, we were looking for any possible convergences and shared views, values, practices, etc. in the women's narratives. We also wondered if there would be anything common in the way women construct and present their biographies, if it is possible to detect some peculiar women's pattern of presenting their subjectivities through a life story. One could assume that the women who grew up, were educated and socialized under the same political regime and social order, lived most of their lives in the same epoch and country, could very likely resort to similar discursive strategies and narrative tools while constructing their biographical narratives.

The "grounded theory"³⁵ approach constitutes the core method of analysis of the women's biographical narratives. According to its principles the entire analysis should depart from below - from the narrative itself: following well-developed procedures, a scholar should identify the key issues and themes within a given narrative, so those become the subject of further interpretation and analysis and a "grounded theory" is constructed thereupon. In addition, the method of critical discourse analysis³⁶ is used to explore the interrelations between women's discursive practices and the wider cultural, social and political events, phenomena and institutions. This allows us to reveal manifestations of the dominant discourses in these women's narratives as well as any alternative standpoints. By means of narrative analysis we also pay attention to the variety of linguistic tools (nominations, word sequences, jokes, euphemisms, idiomatic expressions, metaphors, etc.) used to articulate the women's subjectivities and to represent their social identities against a wider socio-cultural background. It is also important to see how elements of a life story are structured and sequenced, why some issues are given more room and emphasized while the others are silenced or neglected, and to examine how and why certain seemingly separate themes turn out to be interconnected in a given life story.

³⁵ Strauss, A., Corbin J. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. London: SAGE, 1990; Charmatz K. *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. London: SAGE, 2006

³⁶ Wodak Ruth. *Gender and Discourse*. London: SAGE, 1997; Wodak Ruth. *The Discourse Historical Approach* // Wodak R., Meyer M. (eds.) *Methods of Critical Discourse*

Some Research Outcomes.

Along with me, two other scholars contributed to this project in terms of analyzing women's life stories. Dr. Viktoria Sereda, a Lviv-based sociologist focused on exploring women's historical identities through analysis of historical events, historical personages and commemorative practices women referred to in their biographical narratives. In her conference paper and the article she published afterwards, Sereda examines the processes through which collective memory of an official history become a shared part of women's personal stories.³⁷ Dr. Viktoria Sukovata, a Kharkiv-based philosopher and cultural studies scholar, in the process of analyzing women's narratives singled out four distinctive life strategies adopted by women in order to achieve their goals and to promote their interests under unfavorable life circumstances (unpublished manuscript).

Amongst the themes I try to analyze, the issue of women's political loyalty as represented by their attitudes towards different political regimes and the respective state formations (Soviet / USSR and democracy / independent Ukrainian nation-state) turned out to be especially interesting. At first glance, one could easily draw a dividing line between the Western region and the rest of Ukraine, as quite expectedly the majority of women who expressed their overall approval of the Soviet regime are ethnic Russians (or Russified Ukrainians) residing in eastern and southern Ukraine, whereas Western Ukrainians of rather nationalist spirit showed their criticism towards the Soviet regime. A closer reading of the women's life stories however reveals the a complicated causation of women's attitude towards the socialist past. Women's narratives confronted with their biographical data reveal that loyalty to the Soviet regime correlates greatly with the women's personal experiences, and namely their ability to achieve upward social mobility.

The women who consider the Soviet regime a cause or contributing factor of their overall life achievements tend to express their profound loyalty to it. Such an allegiance is articulated in a form of *gratitude* for the favourable conditions and special opportunities of personal growth and development provided to the citizens of the USSR. Some of their statements sound like an oath of devotion (quotes) which they would never betray – even after the Soviet regime ceased to

³⁷ Sereda, Viktoria. Regionalni osoblyvosti istorychnoi dentychnosti: gendernyj aspekt, in: Visnyk Odeskogo Natsionalnogo Universytetu. Vol. 12, issue 6 "Sociology and Political Studies". 2007, p. 78-88

exist. It is remarkable that they express their loyalty as an allegiance to the country (*страна*) and/or to the Soviet rule (*советская власть*) interchangeably, but not to the Communist Party, Marxist-Leninist ideology, socialism, certain political leadership, etc. Remarkably, even those whose families suffered directly from the regime did not necessarily express their disapproval of it. They rather considered such circumstances as additional obstacles, which have been *successfully* surmounted *owing* to the auspicious conditions created by that regime. The typical trope of argumentation is “I survived and became a worthy human *despite* all those hardships!” Even being aware of the key demerits of the Soviet regime they try if not justify than at least diminish its aftermath. Remarkably, in the narratives of women from eastern and southern Ukraine one can hardly find any criticism of the limitations on human rights and civil liberties; many insisted that the crimes of the Soviet regime are misrepresented and exaggerated.

Loyalty to the former regime does not allow women to be simultaneously loyal to the current one. Indeed for them, these two states and respective political systems are antagonistic in many senses. They do express their discontent of the present-day state in many ways during the biographical narration, but they feel uneasy making a clear-cut negative statement about it. So they resort to some escapist strategies to avoid direct answers, namely: (1) refusal to answer the question or to discuss this issue in depth; (2) denial of the very existence of Ukrainian independence as such; (3) brief and formal recognition of the existence of Ukraine as a legitimate independent state with no expression of personal attitude; (4) evading the answer under the pretext of a poor understanding of politics.

The women who consider the Soviet regime a key obstacle or a restrictive factor in their life attainments openly show their disloyalty clearly expressing their critical attitude and openly blaming Soviet authority for its inherently hypocritical and unjust nature. Among the main demerits of the Soviet regime, women named the following: ethnic inequality and discrimination of non-Russian populations, forced Russification, violation of civil rights and liberties (freedom of speech and religion, property rights), groundless mass repression and the totalitarian oppressive nature of the entire system. Although it is much easier to criticize the fallen regime the women try to keep a fair balance between an entirely negative evaluation and acknowledgment of certain positive aspects of the Soviet regime, especially its social policies.

Quite expectedly, the Ukrainian women from the western region constitute the majority among those who felt discriminated by the Soviet regime, so their criticism is sometimes quite

harsh. A good indicator of such radicalism is the language, which in this case is often politically offensive. For instance, the women tend to use denominations with certain pejorative connotations (*moskali, sovyety, rusски*) talking about the regime or its agents. The language of those who are loyal to the Soviet regime is more politically correct, and the insulting denominations are used only in few instances when it comes to very personal negative experiences with Ukrainian nationalists (named *banderivtsi, zapadentsi*). I consider this a manifestation of deeply internalized political correctness, which was an essential instrument of control of citizens' verbal behaviour under state socialism. It is remarkable that none of our interviewees ever used the most common indecent names for Ukrainians and Russians during our interviews: *khokhly* and *katsapy* respectively.

Another interesting observation is that the most radical critics from both sides tend to call the regime-antipode with its original phonation - not in translation into Ukrainian or Russian respectively. Thus, the most persistent Russian speaking proponents of the Soviet regime would call Ukrainian independence *nezalezhnist* as it sounds in Ukrainian (*nezavisimost'* in Russian); at the same time west-Ukrainian nationalistic women frequently use term *sovyety* (the Russian word for Soviets – the Soviet regime and its representatives) – not the Ukrainian equivalent *radyans'ki*. By not translating the word a speaker stresses that this particular phenomenon is something completely alien and irrelevant to her life; such a non-recognition helps the speaker to keep the strange phenomenon away, at a safe distance; thereby women dissociate themselves from what seems to be totally unacceptable. Moreover, the intentional use of untranslated Russian or Ukrainian words from political vocabulary is commonly perceived as a jeer.

All the women occasionally expressed a certain degree of bias towards other ethnic groups in the course of their biographical narrations. Surprisingly, the same women claimed their total and unconditional cultural openness and tolerance towards all other nations when answering the direct questions about their ethnic attitude. Those answers were perfectly politically correct and constructed of clichés women obviously adopted from the official political discourse. This observation proves the advantages of the biographical narrative interview in what concerns research on politically invested and sensitive issues. Another peculiarity of women's discourse on ethnic issues as narrated in their life stories concerns the use of other ethnic groups (including Jews, Poles, Germans and other Soviet nations) as a background against how the Russian-Ukrainian dichotomy is constructed and represented. Indeed, the opposition of Russians and

Ukrainians appears to be central to all the stories. Despite quite perceptible mutual prejudices, representatives of both camps resort to the same discursive strategy to put the blame for all interethnic tensions between Ukrainians and Russians on the other nation; both Russian and Ukrainian women claim their open-mindedness and friendliness towards all other nations which in fact are used to exemplify those good intentions and to suggest that their adversaries are the troublemakers.

One of the few issues on which all the interviewed women agreed was their opinion on education. All the narrators unanimously appreciated the opportunity to acquire a good professional education for free during the Soviet period. Actually, education has been given special value in women's life stories: the women consider it as a means of individual self-accomplishment and a measure of overall life success. Remarkably, even those who did not receive a good education openly express their regret about this and tend to emphasize their inborn intellectual potential and aspirations to knowledge. Those who established good professional careers stressed the significance of the proper training for their upward social mobility. None of the interviewed women paid attention to Soviet education as a means of communist propaganda and the indoctrination of youth, however.

Formally, Ukraine has been united since 1939, yet the East-West-South divide continues to plague the country. This is due in part to the mutual stereotypes that originated centuries ago, and have been exploited politically through the ages. Women's personal historical experiences have contributed greatly to developing all kinds of biases, mistrust and grievances. It is too late to change the views and attitudes of these elderly women, but examination of their experiences as narrated in their own words could be very instructive for a better understanding of the origins and mechanisms of existing tensions and prejudices. Such knowledge could help in educating a new generation of Ukrainian women in the spirit of belonging to one country and one nation.

