

## Rezensionen

**Voices of Their Own (Oral History Interviews of Women).** Edited by Krassimira Daskalova, Vania Elenkova, Daniela Koleva, Tatyana Kotzeva, Reneta Roshkeva, Rumiana Stoilova, Sofia: Polis Publishers 2003, 437 S., BGL 6,50 (EUR 3,36), ISBN 954-796-005-9.

The project *Voices of Their Own (Oral History Interviews of Women)* has integrated the research efforts of leading Bulgarian women historians, women sociologists, women culture studies specialists focusing upon women's studies, women's history and qualitative methods of investigating those fields.

Their purpose is, as defined by Krassimira Daskalova in the introduction of the collection, "to ascertain the impact of the family institution and family relationship upon the reproduction of power and hierarchy mechanisms in contemporary Bulgarian society; to detect the symbolic domination structures deeply rooted in women's mentality as well as to suggest the respective actors and the ways of their reproduction; to attempt to understand the reasons why amnesia prevails and no data as to the essence of feminism and the impact of feminists are available; to formulate the ways in which society constructs the genders as well as the ways in which genders create the social, political and economic order under which we live" (8f).

The authors of the collection seek to achieve an approximation to these themes of Bulgarian social sciences, which appear to be essential and significant as well as still insufficiently studied, through the method of *Oral History*. Out of the 73 interviews conducted in Sofia, three other Bulgarian towns and the adjoining villages the compilers have selected 34 for publication. The tendency has been to attain a maximum variety in representing the women – in respect to their ethnical affiliation (Bulgarian, Turkish, Jewish, Roma, Armenian women), creed (Christians, Moslems, Armenian-Gregorians, Judaism followers), education (secondary school education, university education), professional status (teachers, doctors, workers, etc.). A particularly apt solution has been found in allotting over 50 per cent of the interviews to mothers-and-daughters interviews. This affords the opportunity to reconstruct the mother's part in transmitting female behaviour patterns along with a comparison of the different generations' interpretations of their common family life.

All the (semi-structured) interviews encompass questions related to the themes defined in advance: the family (family roles and hierarchies, parents – children and brothers –

sisters relationships); personal and professional choice; women's image in the media and educational programmes; feminism as an ideology and practice in Bulgaria.

All this has resulted in an unusual book in which women are not merely objects of research, they are also co-authors of the text, they speak in their authentic "voices of their own". The presence of the women researchers is restricted (acting as interviewers); it is, however, by no means undetectable. They conduct the dialogues skillfully so as to extend their interlocutors' stories, to stimulate them to reflection or aid them in surfing over embarrassing moments of the conversation. The feminist viewpoint enriches the study, finding expression in the interest in women's subjectivity as well as in the effort to encompass various types of women (in terms of age, profession, ethnical and religious affiliations); this viewpoint likewise consists in the endeavour towards authenticity of the women's speech, and, last but not least, in the level of interaction, i.e. in the created community of women reflecting upon women's problems. The feminist viewpoint lifts the conversations off the value-neutral level and triggers off a different speech in the interlocutors which makes for a more plausible unveiling of their identity.

*Voices of Their Own* is a rich book. In point of content, family patterns and the changes in them stand out as themes concentrated upon (in diachronical level, traced back to the 1930's, the emphasis being upon the state socialism period and the interest in today's situation). The impact of the family institution upon the construction of gender relations is likewise dwelt upon. The various aspects and manifestations of the patriarchal order are outlined in varying social, religious, ethnical and cultural context. Although the focus of research is upon the family and the individual's life course the stories contain much additional information as to the respective social order and the rest of the institutions (the school, the church) instrumental in constructing gender arrangements; the mechanisms of maintaining power relationships within the family in society are highlighted. Already the aspects mentioned so far would fully suffice to convince a gender-indifferent reader that the women's personal stories provide an indispensable source to studies of everyday life at the time of socialism and during the subsequent period of transformation.

In addition, the reader is steeped in dialogues where the women reflect on themselves, their own lives, their experience, their roles, their attitudes, their beliefs and doubts, and, in interaction with the interviewer, they construct themselves, their own identity. In this sense, he witnesses the creation of a feminist anthropological text, a feminist anthropology of the self. In this focus upon the women's subjectivity that, in my opinion, comes to the fore as yet another merit of the book. The women interviewed build up their own image defining themselves as "a good/bad mother/daughter/wife", "a successful/ unsuccessful woman", etc. and expressing their views on the dominant models of femininity within their family, within their own ethnical, cultural and religious community and within the social order in general. The picture is varied indeed – ranging from complete adoption and internalization of patriarchal ideology through acquiescence and discomfort to collision with and rejection of the imposed norms of the patriarchal gender order. Set against the tired, uncertain, dissatisfied, reconciled voices of the mothers (in their forties and fifties), the voices of their militant daughters evincing courage and a marked ability to reflect on themselves and the self – society relationship sound a particularly optimistic note. Needless to say, here as elsewhere generalizations appear irrelevant since

one of the implications of the women's experience shared is the profound complexity, ambivalence and discrepancy in the self-attitude to the rest of the world. I would like to mention merely one of the most common examples manifest in women of various social status – a statement of egalitarian gender views coexisting with a simultaneous rejection of feminism (as disrupting the “natural” social order) and a corresponding adherence to traditional roles and relationships in the family. In a word, the autobiographical stories afford a “close up” look into the combination of gender ideologies and gender practices (within the family and outside it). Dwelling upon such socially significant themes as the combination of professional and family roles, women's poverty and labour discrimination, these stories offer the opportunity to cast light upon other themes less looked into as for instance those of (self)sacrifice, speechlessness and submission as elements of womanhood construction. In the analysis of the latter, the interviewees' subjective experience and authentic language are of major importance; as a matter of fact, the book's powerful effect upon the reader is largely due to the language.

In spite of the sadness in *their own voices*, I regard the appearance of this collection as a good sign of the changing situation in Bulgarian society and Bulgarian social sciences. It is yet another serious attempt to draw attention to the women theme which will stimulate future anthropological, historical, sociological and ethnographical studies.

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Gunilla-Friederike Budde, **Frauen der Intelligenz. Akademikerinnen in der DDR 1945 bis 1975** (Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft; 162). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2003, 446 S., EUR 49,90, ISBN 3-525-35143-7.

Aus ihrer „gewichtigen“ – so die Autorin – Habilitationsschrift (2001, Freie Universität Berlin) destillierte Gunilla-Friederike Budde ein „schlankes Buch.“ Im Zentrum der Untersuchung rund um Akademikerinnen in der DDR steht das Verhältnis von Emanzipationsrhetorik und Emanzipationsrealität. Kernfragen sind, wo Akademikerinnen ideologisch und real platziert waren beziehungsweise wo sie sich selbst platzierten/platzieren konnten – wie sie Zuweisungen, die vorwiegend von staatlicher Seite kamen, annahmen, veränderten oder verwarfen. Die Historikerin schließt sich dabei an die neuere DDR-Geschichtsforschung an und verknüpft diese mit einer geschlechtergeschichtlichen Perspektive. Sie überprüft und relativiert auf die DDR bezogene Thesen von Wandel und Kontinuitätsbruch, stellt dazu konsequenterweise Rückblicke, insbesondere in die NS-Zeit, und Vergleiche mit der BRD an. Budde plädiert dafür, gängige historische Periodisierung nach geschlechtergeschichtlichen Aspekten zu differenzieren. So bedeutet für Akademikerinnen in der DDR die Phase von 1949 bis 1961 nicht so eindeutig Aufbau, die Zeit von 1961 bis 1968/71 hingegen Konsolidierung usw. Die erfahrungs- und kulturgeschichtliche Analyse soll die Grenzen und Selbstbegrenzungen der Diktatur aufzeigen, also deren poröse Stellen, Konfliktlinien, kulturelle Resistenzbereiche, Nischen, individuelle „Handlungsspielräume“ und Formen der Verweigerung.