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Avtor

Nina Vodopivec

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Sem delavka, mati in gospodinja

This article traces society's changing views of women in Ljubljana from 1945 to 1951, the responses of women to the conditions in the new state, and the ways how society and the state's policies reacted to these responses. It is based on printed sources, feminist anthropological literature, empirical researches about women in Eastern Europe, historical literature about the Slovene territory, newspaper analyses and life stories. The article focuses on the gap between the ideal and the different strategies women used to cope with everyday life in the post-war period.

Summary

Women as workers, mothers and housewives

The factors which determine the position of women in society are the state's policies, including direct and indirect strategies, economic development, demography, social policies, education, cultural policies, social relationships, behaviour and relations between people as well as the concepts and ideas people have about one another. All these factors also shape the public and private environment. After the Second World War an important role in these developments was played by pre-communist practices which were carried over into the new era and even became part of the new system's ideology. The traditional attitudes of the past remained obvious in the behaviour of people and in their values, in particular in the home environment. The article further establishes that after the war the life of women, their image and position were heavily influenced by political practices.

There is no doubt that the post-war generation of women and men, but above all the women, were marked by commitment to the new era, happiness brought about by the liberation, youthfulness and enthusiasm. It is hence difficult to compare the women of the liberation time and their lives with those of their successors a decade later.

The relationship between women and the state was in many ways influenced by their participation in the national liberation war, which certainly contributed to the changed relations between men and women after the war. In spite of its ideological premises the state's policies maintained a specific attitude to women. The major reasons included, of course, the post-war demographic conditions, a deep-rooted social mentality and the powerful Catholic heritage. Marta Verginella, however, holds that these factors alone fail to explain the over-emphasised role of the post-war mother figure (Verginella 1999: 78). This self-sacrificing and subordinated woman-and-mother figure of the post-war iconography, created after the image of the Christian Mary, is in complete contradiction with her ideological commitment. This indicates not only that the communist party did not really wanted women to be independent, but also illustrates the unwillingness of men to admit women to public life.

On the other hand, women emancipated themselves at least formally. Through their practical measures the authorities in reality enriched women; education widened their opportunities for self-assertion, the atmosphere of the post-war period and its social perception of employment being the norm gradually changed women's self-image and self-consciousness.

Besides by sexual stereotypes and traditional concepts, which were transferred into the new era, the inequality of the sexes was also influenced by the ambiguous nature of the post-war ideology. It was further enhanced by family solidarity and by the we-versus-the-state dichotomy. Basically, family life not only determined the limits within which women were to move and act by their own will in the future, but in the new period it also became a kind of surrogate for the social sphere. Basic education remained within the family and this meant that the ideas about the relations and relationships between the sexes were formed within the family. Hana Havelkova saw this relationship as linked primarily to the individual family environment, as are all other connections which are important to the culture of behaviour and human relations and which should be the subject of public discussion.

Women were connected by ideology and by the general atmosphere, which had a much more significant influence on people as I had initially expected. The relationships between the sexes, sexual concepts and the redefinition of the public and private spheres, of course, did not change or formed only in line with the post-war ideology, but people themselves, their experiences and past also influenced the forms. It is therefore important to examine this gap between the ideal in which people believed and the way life and relationships between people were really organised.

After the war a range of new opportunities were open to women and they enabled them independent assertion in society. These opportunities, however, did not replace the chores, waiting for her at home, because the economic policy did not diminish their significance, but rather increased them. Women were thus on the one hand additionally burdened, but, on the other hand, they were given the feeling, that the existence and survival of the private and public spheres depended on them.

The fact that women were torn between their homes and their jobs had also other consequences, not only negative ones. In the course of time the relationships within the family changed and women became gradually more independent.

Links

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