

**Tóth, Zsófia Eszter, *Kádár leányai, Nők a szocialista időkben [Kádár's Girls, Women During Socialism]*, Budapest, Nyitott Könyvműhely, 2010.**

Reviewed by Susan Glanz, St. John's University.

This book is a collection of seven studies written between 2006-2009 by Zsófia Eszter Tóth, a young historian, senior archivist at the National Archives and faculty member at ELTE. The book promises answers to tantalizing questions which are posted on the back of the book such as why a girl living in a worker's hostel, and who went on a date wearing lace underwear, did not manage to catch a boyfriend from Budapest; when did the female parliament members find time to go to the hairdresser; or why did the picture of Rózsi Vékony, the tractor driver, shift off kilter?

The seven chapters analyze the role of working women in various situations from after World War II to the 1980s. Topics covered are migration to the cities, the role of women in 1956, women doing men's jobs, the changing attitudes to childbirth outside marriage, female members of parliament and the daily life of women on maternity leave on housing estates in the 1980s. Using newspaper sources of the period (e.g., *Nők lapja - Women's Paper*) and her interviews, and film analyses (The films examined are: *Vészcsengő*, [Alarm bell], *Adj király katonát*, [King, let some soldiers go] [a children's game in Hungary- SG], *Falfűró* [Drill]) personal histories become History or should we say Herstory. Through these tools the reader gets to understand these working women's thoughts and expectations about others and themselves. Several of the interviewees were the subjects of the articles quoted and are still alive, and some were interviewed several times over the years. We learn many things like how the girls from the countryside slowly become city dwellers, what fashions they took back to the villages to impress their neighbors to prove to all that their decision to leave was the correct one. The ultimate goal of many of the village girls moving to the cities and accepting unskilled and difficult jobs in factories was to assimilate and to be thought of as a city dweller, and to earn higher wages. Buying the same clothes worn by city girls and getting similar haircuts was the easiest. Learning mannerisms and language was more difficult. The most obvious sign of success was having a boyfriend from the city. The girl who purchased the lace underwear was not successful in catching a 'beau', her and her boyfriend's clothing were judged not satisfactory by a nightclub bouncer who would not let them in. She failed in transforming herself into a girl from Budapest, and she also lost the boyfriend, implying that being judged provincial was "fatal."

The chapter on women doing male jobs reflects the frequent propaganda statements of the 1950s and 60s of the equal opportunities for women, which were frequently symbolized by female tractor drivers. Various prizes for shock workers were awarded to women, and the winners of these prizes received a lot of media coverage. In the propaganda materials of the time more pages were devoted to young women than older women winning various prizes. The young women purchased desired consumer goods and this was covered in the media, thus proving to the rest of society that participating in the shock labor movement was worthwhile.

Rózsi Vékony, who was the subject of an article 1950 to prove that driving a tractor will not destroy her ability to bear children (the original article conveniently forgot to mention that she already had 3 children) was re-interviewed in 1968 when she was the only female tractor driver left. The paradigm shift that occurred between the two interviews was the change in the expectations in the role of women. In the 1950 article the emphasis was on her ability to do a man's job and be able to bear children, in the 1968 article the cooperation between female

members of the cooperative was emphasized. Even in the 1980s women doing men's jobs were not equal; not only did they not receive equal compensation they often had to meet different criteria than men to fill the jobs.

There are a lot of similarities in the stories of the two women who became parliament members, who did not suspect that the Party had picked them until they were told by the Patriotic Popular Front that they will be nominated for parliament. Both attributed being picked for being outspoken at work, for sticking to their opinions even when confronted by party leaders. Both women viewed their elections as the epitome of their femininity and emphasized the time and money spent on being elegantly dresses. Both saw their achievement as parliament members was their ability to help their constituents. While one of the women resigned her post claiming that the Party did not renominate her because she would not join the Party, the other received a higher post after her term ended.

The last chapter deals with stay-at-home mothers living in housing estates. To encourage childbearing, in 1967 a childcare assistance program was introduced, where mothers were paid to stay home with their children under three. A film, a book and a series of articles were published in the 1980s about life on these estates. All paint negative pictures of the women, who stayed home with their young children and instead of improving themselves or cooking meals for their husbands spent time drinking beer and hanging out with others like them. The media of the 1980s that painted the negative picture of the mothers on maternity and childcare leave did not know how to handle the conflicting national goals of increasing childbirth and increasing production. Instead of dealing with some of the serious issues such as isolation experienced by some mothers, the media instead criticized that they did not fulfill their role as productive employees as they accepted their role as stay at home mothers, but then did everything to avoid staying home, like hanging out with others on maternity leave, and drinking.

Tóth's is a well written book as well as a fun read, with the various snapshots of daily life woven together well, with sufficient theoretical background and no political agenda.