

Magali Delaloye, Universität Bern (Switzerland):

Gender Relationships in Stalin's Ruling Circle. Practices and Discourses (1928-1953). PhD Project.¹

Although equality between men and women was considered as established since the dissolution of *zhenotdel* (feminine section of the CPSU) in 1930, the Stalin regime launched several mobilisation campaigns with a gender connotation. The more visible ones concerned the many calls to women to participate in efforts of collectivisation of the countryside and the launch of a large-scale industrialisation policy, by developing, for example, the *obshchestvennitsa* ("female social activist"),² while progressively abandoning the image of the female activist of the 1920's. Parallel to this part of propaganda aimed at women, a discourse is built up of a hyper virile male model described as the soldier of socialism: the nearly systematic use of military images in these discourses creates a dynamic of a "wartime mobilisation" society. In the 1930's, the regime's politics, confronted by what historiography calls the "gender problem", are therefore as varied as the feminine and masculine models, which underlie them.

The role of the Kremlin Circle in setting up these policies is important, due to its central position in the Soviet system, and thus gives the impetus to start new propaganda discourses. The aim of this research is to reconstruct the power and domination relationships within Stalin's Kremlin, especially in the "First Circle" around him, from a gender point of view. My questioning concerns particularly the gender representations of the protagonists of this Circle, which fuel the discourses on gender difference (prescripts). Therefore, the main and most central point concerns the policies, which these discourses put into practice, modify or subvert (scripts). By employing the approach of historical anthropology, which puts family and social connections between the members of a group into its main focus, and taking into consideration the gender aspect, I am seeking to reconstruct the inter-individual links connecting these various protagonists, showing a different community structure than the results obtained by a political history analysis. From a micro-historical angle, the main point of my research consists in the analysis of the moment of crystallisation, which allows the reconstruction of the context in which the historical protagonists act. As for the Circle's analysis, these are moments of group exclusions that lead to the reconsideration of the internal hierarchies.

However, some of these exclusions can be analysed from a gender point of view which is considered here, according to Joan Scott,³ as a relational category functioning on several levels: symbolical, normative, structural and institutional, and finally on a subjective and individual level. If gender is a central category, it is however not exclusive: it intersects with other categories (ethnic group, generation, milieu, sexuality).⁴ This allows the rebuilding of the mechanisms of power in the Circle and the analysis of its hierarchies. By focusing on gender, my research's aim is to give a new dimension to the analysis of these exclusions, to

¹ Under the direction of Prof. Brigitte Studer (Bern University) and Yves Cohen (EHESS, Paris).

² For *obshchestvennitsa*, see e.g.: Mary Buckley: The Untold Story of *Obshchestvennitsa* in the 1930s. In: *Europe-Asia Studies* 48 (1996), 4, pp. 569-586.

³ Joan Wallach Scott: Gender: A Useful Category for Historical Analysis. In: *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986), 5, pp. 1053-1072.

⁴ Gudrun-Axeli Knapp: Achsen der Differenz. Gesellschaftstheorie und feministische Kritik 2, Münster, Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2003. Cornelia Klinger, Gudrun-Axeli Knapp, Birgit Sauer (eds.): Achsen der Ungleichheit. Zum Verhältnis von Klasse, Geschlecht und Ethnizität, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 2007.

reflect differently about the high level of violence inside the Kremlin Circle, as well as to provide a fresh look on the personality cult of Stalin.

Owing to the fact that filing was a well-implanted habit amongst the Soviet rulers, historians have an important mass of ego-documents available, in spite of possible "omissions", "selections" or "cleansing operations" on the part of these rulers. Most of the archival materials are located in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI) in Moscow and are comprised of personal fonds of the leaders. The corpus consists of five categories: 1. Correspondence between the different historical protagonists. This is an essential part, since they were the privileged means of communication, especially in the 1930's. 2. The *dnevniki* (personal diaries). 3. Statements of self-criticism (*samokritika*) and autobiographies (*ankety, avtobiografii*). 4. The memoirs of some of the members of the Circle. 5. The *zapiski*, which are short informal notes written during various meetings.

More specifically from a gendered point of view, in my research four moments of exclusions are particularly enlightening. The first one concerns the arrest, conviction and execution of Nikolai Bukharin (1888-1938), star defendant of the Third Moscow Trial. The analysis of this affair leads to the reconstruction of relationships within the Kremlin Circle, as an arch homosocial group, and to understand the building of masculine friendships within the group. The second affair deals with the downfall, arrest, trial and execution of Nikolai Ezhov (1895-1940). This case is important for the understanding of gender relationships within the Circle. First of all, I follow the setting up of a true instrument of power in the hands of Stalin: using one's wife to fight a member of the Circle. This method would be used later against Kalinin, Andreev and Molotov. Finally, two subjects allow us to raise the question of the construction of virility within the Circle. While admitting to his alcoholism and his homosexuality during his trial, Ezhov "betrays" a certain conception of Stalinian masculinity. The third case concerns Polina Zhemchuzhina (1897-1970), the wife of Viacheslav Molotov (1890-1986). After a long process of denigration she is deported in January 1949. This affair shows the efficiency of the instrument of power already stated above. But above all, it shows the intersection of the categories of gender and ethnic group at different levels. Polina Zhemchuzhina was condemned for her Jewish nationality and for her status as Molotov's wife. Finally, the last case explores a rather understudied sector of the life of the Circle: the gradual exclusion of the couple Kliment Voroshilov (1881-1969) and his wife Ekaterina Davydovna (1887-1959). Indeed, it is rare to find such a high quantity of ego-documents of a Kremlin's wife in the archives. The corpus of documents about Ekaterina Davydovna represents somewhat of an "under-*opis*" in the personal fonds of Voroshilov. Moreover, it belongs to Voroshilov's habits to speak largely about "private life" (hunting, health, rest, and so on), which, in such a large scale, is exceptional for the Kremlin Circle. Thanks to these sources, it is possible to reconstruct the life of a Kremlin couple and its gradual eviction and self-eviction from Stalin's circle.

This research therefore raises the question of extreme violence in Stalin's Circle from an anthropological point of view and by introducing a gender component. It also enlightens the personality of Stalin within his group (at a micro-social level), as well as his personality cult (at a macro-social level). Understanding him thanks to these issues helps understanding the gender component. This work will therefore enable to complete the picture of the functioning of the Kremlin Circle under Stalin: owing to the approach of micro-history and historical anthropology, this research brings a new reflection on this group by using the gender angle.