

Aleksandra Matyukhina, *W sowieckim Lwowie. Życie codzienne miasta w latach 1944–1990* (In *Soviet Lviv. Everyday Life in the City in 1944–1990*), Kraków 2000, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 173 pp.

This is an ethnological study but its subject is for many reasons also of great interest to historians specialising in recent times. First, because it enables us to compare life in Lviv with that in Polish towns; in Poland too the population of many towns was formed practically from scratch in a long-drawn-out integration of elements of different geographical provenance and sometimes also of different ethnic origin. Secondly, because the author discusses a city which only half a century ago was cleansed of the formerly prevailing Polish population (in 1931 out of the city's 312,000 inhabitants over 157,000 were Roman Catholic, some 50,000 belonged to the Greek Catholic Church, and some 100,000 were of the Judaic faith), a city in which Poles are now a vestigial group. Thirdly, because the author depicts the role played by neighbouring Poland in the city's cultural transformations. And fourthly, because the book brings to mind life in Poland during that period. Each of these reasons would be enough to make the book interesting to Polish readers.

Being an ethnological study, the book differs from historical works, the chief difference being that it is based mainly on the observations and even recollections of the author who describes her role as "participating observation"¹. This does not make the book less interesting for historians. Matyukhina's study was published and, as the author says, also inspired by the Jagiellonian University's Institut of Ethnology and its publication was made possible thanks to the Mianowski Fund. One cannot help feeling that Matyukhina's close contacts with Polish scholarly circles must have exerted an influence on the content of her study. This is probably why Polish-Ukrainian antagonisms and conflicts have hardly been mentioned in the book, even in its last part which deals with the positive myth of Poland spread in Lviv in those years by the Polish press, films and television. And let us remember that Lviv was, and still is, the main subject and the main scene of these conflicts.

The author deals only with a small section of a vast subject, a section which is typical of ethnological studies and is also characteristic of the culture of everyday life. She discusses feasts and celebrations as well as clothes and fashions. These two subjects are supplemented by the already mentioned text about the Polish myth in Lviv. All these questions are the most tangible elements of social culture in general.

The main subject of the first two (in fact of all three) essays is a comparison of Soviet culture, promoted by the communist party and the government, with the spontaneous cultural trends and currents, especially those manifested in the Lviv population's daily life. The author speaks of the groups and remnants of Lviv's former population (mainly of Ukrainians, only to a small extent of Poles), of the immigratory population from western Ukraine, chiefly from villages and small towns, of the population which flowed in from Greater Ukraine beyond the Zbruch (mainly from large and small towns) and also of Soviet specialists and functiona-

¹ Polish historical books concerning Lviv have not been mentioned in the bibliography. I have in mind in particular the book by Grzegorz Hryciuk, *Polacy we Lwowie 1939–1944. Życie codzienne* (Poles in Lviv 1939–1944. *Everyday Life*), Warszawa 2000. But the book was probably published too late to be included in the bibliography.

ries and their families, who came mainly from Russia but also from other republic of the Soviet Union. The most important social strata in the city were: the common people, mainly of peasant origin, the intelligentsia and experts with a university education, including the military and the party apparatus, as well as technicians, scientists, scholars and artistic circles. The author singles out the youth, in particular students, and also young people from circles privileged by the then existing system, that is persons who could indulge in moral, financial and even political extravagances which would have brought other people to trouble and punishment. She describes in detail the role of men and women and their social position, and depicts even more exhaustively the differences in their dress style; she seals separately with the garments of children and young people of various social classes.

Throughout the book Matyukhina stresses the role of Lviv's pre-1939 cultural tradition spread by the native inhabitants of the city. She probably means the Ukrainian population, a minority in pre-war times. After the wartime migrations, flights, evacuations and deportations, the native Ukrainian population could not have constituted a large group. The author herself speaks of "a handful of people" (p. 152), and it seems that this category also includes Poles, who soon left for Poland, only some ten to twenty thousand remaining in Lviv. The immigratory population from eastern Ukraine and other Soviet republics is portrayed by Matyukhina as the main force spreading Soviet culture, a culture formed under the pressure of the communist party and the authorities, but partly internalised. There was also a third element: the Ukrainian population from the territories which belonged to Poland before 1939; this was a group which retained many elements of Ukrainian folk culture and which was only minimally Sovietised. According to the author, the folk elements of Ukrainian culture evoked a sympathetic response also among some newcomers from the Dneper region, despite their superficial Russification. The old inhabitants of the city gradually left or passed away, and since the predominating new population was on a low level of culture, Lviv, once a central European city, became a provincial Soviet town (p. 152). This judgment is at variance with the frequently repeated assertion that Lviv was different from the purely Soviet towns in the USSR. There are many more such contradictions in the author's evaluations but they partly reflect the discrepant trends which did exist in fact. According to the author, it was only the gradual rise in the cultural level of these primitive masses as well as Western, including Polish, influence that led to integration and to resistance to the imposed system, making Lviv a unique, specific city.

As regards the celebration of feast days of various kind, the subject of the first essay, time brought a symbiosis of the population's wishes and desires with the imposed calendar of state and official holidays. Some of the festivities organised by order of the superior authorities were lifeless and participation in them was regarded as a painful duty. But others were assimilated by the population and became semiprivate (spontaneous celebrations in work places) and private events (society functions and even more so participation in popular open air festivals and the like). Family and similar feasts were a strictly private affair and as time went on, the authorities relaxed and finally abolished their control and restrictions (on music and dances). At the bottom of the structure were people's festivals usually connected with a religious celebration and purely religious events. Until the end of the Soviet regime the last-named category was combated by the authorities, very fiercely at first, then with less force. In the last few years of the Soviet Union the growing national aspirations of the Ukrainians were reflected in the cult of Ukrainian folk customs and folk symbols, a development which the authorities distrusted and tried to hamper. The author follows all these changes from the post-war Stalinist period in the 1940s and 1950s, the "thaw" of 1956, Khrushchev's later reactions and the fluctuations in the long, wearing Brezhnev "period of stagnation". That was the period when due to the deteriorating functioning of the whole system, the authorities were losing the

possibility of controlling the population, a period when the cultural influence of the West was increasing, a development in which Poland played by no means an insignificant role. Finally the regime collapsed. The subsequent ethnological remarks on the culture of Lviv and western Ukraine since 1991 will probably be discussed by the author in another study.

Two questions stand out in the author's rich material, but they cannot be discussed here in detail. One is the rapid growth of alcoholism, which in the 1970s spread from the lowest social strata to more educated circles and the intelligentsia. Andropov and Gorbachev did their best to combat this, but their efforts were in vain. The author may have been over-zealous in ascribing the whole guilt to the Soviet system (pp. 56–57). She makes the same mistake with regard to several other dubious questions, but there is some truth in her assertion: excessive drinking, which had been widely practised by the common people in Russia long before the Soviet era, was hindered during Stalin's time by poverty and low wages. In the 1970s prosperity rose and the old brake ceased to be effective, but household investments, which could have prompted people to save and limit the consumption of alcohol, were still limited, being usually beyond the means of an average family. The other factor stressed exaggeratedly by the author, the boorishness of the population or, to be more objective, its rural provenance and the infiltration of the educated strata by common people, explains even less.

Let me pass on to a second remark, the increase in the determinants of inequality in Soviet society, with Lviv serving as an example. The elite's rude customs were not caused by the penetration of people from the lower strata for this penetration was very restricted at that time. What is noteworthy is the opposite phenomenon, known from tsarist days: the realisation of deep social differences and the emergence of an exclusive elite (senior military and state officials and, of course, the aristocracy and landowners in tsarist days, and party, state and military officials, top scientists, scholars and artists in Soviet times), and their contempt for the lower strata. As prosperity grew, the barriers separating the individual social strata increased; this was furthered by the lack of a democratic tradition not only in public life but also in relations between people and social strata. The book presents a very concrete documentation of this fact.

The second essay, which concerns the way of dressing and fashion, also contains much concrete material. The development in this sphere was similar: the imposed standards and the wish to control also people's outward appearance, combined with poverty and a low level of culture in everyday life (a result of boorishness) and, on the other hand, the influence of tradition and especially the ever stronger influence of western civilisation resulted in a conflict which led to an erosion of the imposed models, to imitation of foreign countries and to the individualisation of dress style. In this respect the defeat of the official, imposed Soviet culture was much more clearly visible and the attempts to keep a tight rein on the people were even more grotesque and futile than in the sphere of festivities. School uniforms were obligatory; of course they were not a Soviet invention but were introduced earlier in Russia and in some foreign countries. The author wittingly describes women's underwear in the 1950s (it was rumoured also in Poland that after her return from the Soviet Union Simone Signoret organised an exhibition of Soviet lingerie in Paris), and the garments of "party ladies", that is women functionaries, with their characteristic suit and black oxfords. We can also read about the notorious teddy boys who were regarded as oppositionists, since there was no other opposition or perhaps there could not be any. Anyhow, the inevitable direct and indirect contacts with foreign countries (through the radio, television, press and literature) and the rise in living standards after the misery of the postwar years led to a gradual erosion of the coarse Soviet communist model. Even the mass production of clothes began to imitate world, that is western and American, trends, though with delay and frequently with grotesque ineffectiveness. But the aspirations of individual groups, especially of young people and artistic circles, went much farther. In this respect the young

people's resistance became increasingly effective and finally the Soviet girl model and the respective male model suffered complete defeat; differentiation, individualism and western fashions triumphed.

Alongside clothes and the style of dress the author also discusses such questions as personal hygiene, toilet articles and cosmetics. This was a field in which Poland also played a role for its products (e.g. cosmetics), more accessible than West European ones, were considered to be of good quality. The long period dealt with by the author shows us not only a conflict between the official style, imitation of the West and individualism but also a gradual rise in the living standards of broad masses of peasant and working class origin whose aspirations in the field of hygiene and cosmetics, once very primitive, greatly developed in time. Like other similar aspirations, they inconvenienced the system which was not prepared to satisfy such demands.

Also in the field of clothing the last few years of the Soviet system saw signs of a conflict between trends to emphasise national values, e.g. the national Ukrainian costume in this case (but the trend was not confined to Ukraine) and the official party which continued to back the mythical "Soviet nation" in which all nationalities of the USSR will melt and create a community in which Russian culture will dominate and the Russian language will be used not only as *lingua franca* but also as the language of all daily social contacts. That is why for many years ostentatious use of national costume or national symbols could cause trouble and even lead to reprisals. Nevertheless, national symbols were gaining increasing popularity in Lviv.

The last study, the already mentioned essay on the myth of Poland in Lviv, makes no mention of Polish-Ukrainian conflicts. Let us however remember that the historical side of these conflicts was little known to the immigratory population from Greater Ukraine and Russia and probably also to the whole younger generation. The author stresses that this Polish myth was completely independent of historical experiences; it arose thanks to the relative accessibility of Polish goods and elements of Polish culture which, though Poland was part of the Soviet bloc, departed far from the official Soviet culture and attracted all people dissatisfied with the official model. The author points out very discreetly that the myth exerted a weaker influence on people from western Ukraine which before the war belonged to Poland and in 1941-1944 to the General Government (pp. 167-168). The myth faded in the 1980s when a host of Polish dealers began to buy up the goods which were always in short supply in the USSR and which at that time were unobtainable in Poland. The present dislike of Poland, characteristic of some circles of Lviv and of the present western Ukraine must have been kept in a Soviet freezer and survived the period described by the author when there was neither the possibility nor a direct incentive for it to explode.

It is with great regret that I am parting with Matyukhina's study whose descriptions of social and cultural phenomenon call forth memories of our own experiences. The publication of her book is most welcome. Let us hope that the author will soon publish new books of equal interest to the historian.

Janusz Żarnowski