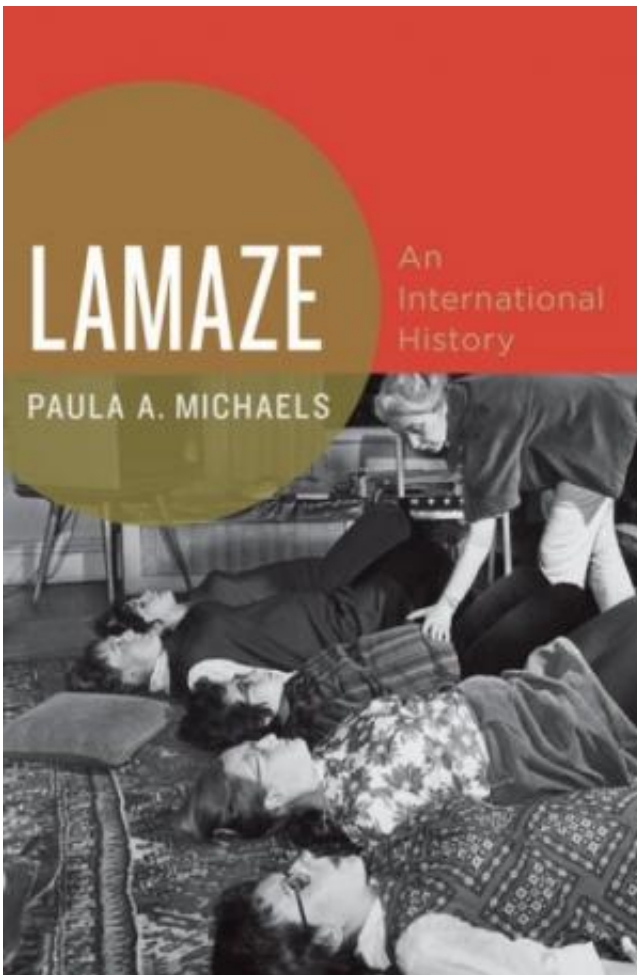


Favourite US birthing technique born in the USSR

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A new book by a Monash University medical historian reveals the roots

of America's most popular method of natural childbirth in Stalinist Russia.

Dr Paula Michaels from the University's School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies uncovered this surprising story after she started researching [childbirth](#) and prenatal preparation when she became pregnant in 2000.

In *Lamaze: An International History*, Dr Michaels explains the origins of the technique, widely thought among Americans to have been developed in France.

"The general belief is that it was developed in the 1950s by French obstetrician Dr Fernand Lamaze as an alternative to medical intervention during childbirth, but my research traces Lamaze's method to its point of origin: the post-war baby boom of Stalinist Russia," Dr Michaels said.

"Soviet psychotherapist I Z Vel'vovskii developed the method, also known as psychoprophylaxis, to manage labour pain without drugs.

"The practice was then brought to France by obstetrician Fernand Lamaze in 1951, and was adopted all over the world, crossing political, social and cultural divides, making its way to the United States amid the Cold War."

Although largely forgotten in Australia, "Lamaze" is still a household word in the US, even as its practice has fallen out of fashion. It is known for its hallmark "hee-hee-hee-hoo" breathing pattern, as featured in just about every child-birth scene in American film and television.

In *Lamaze*, Dr Michaels looks at why the technique's origins may have been played down.

"I turned over in my mind the likelihood that the Soviet origins of what we called the Lamaze method had been deliberately obscured," Dr Michaels said.

"Amid the Cold War, it seems plausible that proponents cloaked psychoprophylaxis's communist pedigree, in part by changing the method's name, to make it acceptable to the American public."

Lamaze: An International History is available through Oxford University Press.

More information: global.oup.com/academic/product/lamaze-9780199738649

Provided by Monash University

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