

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2018.042.038](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2018.042.038)

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**SEXUALITY IN THE COMMUNIST FAMILY UNION - CONCEPTS  
ABOUT LOVE, SEX AND MARRIAGE DURING THE EARLY  
COMMUNIST REGIME IN BULGARIA**

**Abstract:**

The paper focuses on the disciplining of sexuality in the family frame during the first two decades of the communist rule in Bulgaria. It analyses legislative documents against divorce, abortion and cohabitation; speeches of high-standing party functionaries on the role of the communist family and the danger from sexual corruption; the media campaigns and early repressive practices against youngsters with loose behavior.

The paper draws the conclusion that both the conceptualization and the legislative actions aiming to preserve family morality perceived sexual practices in Bulgaria during the early communist regime as legitimate as long as they were reproductive sexual relationships between spouses. The pursuit of sexual satisfaction as an end in itself, even within the framework of family life, was rendered unacceptable. In this respect the study uses some of Foucault's reflections about 'the great appropriation of sexual ethic by family morals' but also tries to show the difference between communist and bourgeois family. In its final part the paper makes an attempt to clarify the reasons for the intensification of the repression upon sexuality in Bulgaria under communist rule.

**Keywords:**

communist regime, disciplining of sexuality, communist family, comradeship, repressive hypothesis

**JEL Classification:** P30, J12, J13

## 1. Introduction: The origins

In “The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State” Friedrich Engels analyzed the contemporary monogamous family, pointed out its relative, historical essence and in the end predicted its disappearance. The bourgeois family, Engels claimed, was not a voluntary union between two people, but an economic enterprise. The woman there was a representative of the exploited class, being situated somewhere between a means of production and a tool for satisfaction of sexual needs. “Therefore today I can add - Engels stated – that the first class opposition that emerges in history coincides with the antagonism between man and woman in the monogamous marriage and the first class subjugation is that of the female gender by the male” (Engels, 1975: 58). These were the primal forms of class-gender exploitation of woman that predetermined her further social restrictions – the formalities of divorce, the repudiation of extramarital children, the inequality in inheritance, the impossibility to practice a profession of her choice. Therefore, Engels foresaw that the proletarian revolution would not only destroy the economic relationships of capitalism but also the family connections, thus leading to the liberation of women. In broader terms this thesis was already presented in “The German Ideology” and in “Manifesto of the Communist Party”. Since, according to Marx and Engel, bourgeoisie conceived of women and children as ordinary tools of labour, the dying out of the family was considered a result of the abolishment of private property upon the means of production:

*Destruction of family life! Even the most radical members of our society are outraged by this despicable intention of the communist. What is the basis of the contemporary bourgeois family? It is capital and private profit. Developed to the fullest in bourgeois society, family life exists to benefit this class. The forced celibate of the proletariat and public prostitution are just side effects. Bourgeois family will die away as soon as private property disappears. They will both become extinct when capital is done away with. But you, communists, you want to make women common – the whole of bourgeoisie shouts out in our face. The bourgeois man perceives his wife as a tool of production. He hears that tools of production would be common and thinks that his wife's fate would be the same. He can't comprehend that it is exactly about not envisioning women as simple tools of production (Marx, Engels 1984: 55-56).*

In spite of all extenuating explanations the manifested visions about the destruction of the monogamous family and the common possession of women posed a tough choice to the future communist ideologists – they had to either ground the emerging new society on these, in their essence, socially disruptive views or silently refute the classics of socialism. So attempting to avoid the ambiguous foundation of Marx and Engels' reflections on the “women's and sex question” what Vladimir Ilich Lenin borrowed from them was mainly the negation of the autonomous feminist movement as well as the

realization that the abolishment of household chores should become an absolute necessity in the course of women's liberation. The urges about the destruction of the monogamous family, however, did not find ground in Lenin's ideas.

Despite certain disagreements between the male and female communist activists at the socialist congress in Stuttgart, after the event Lenin resolutely announced that the campaign for Women's right to vote (one of the main claims of the feminist movements of the period) would defend the principles of socialism (Lenin, 1978a: 107). After the victory of the October revolution the class solidarity of women with their gender enemy was rewarded and the new political situation of women enabled Vladimir Illich to expand his propaganda against the capitalist world:

*Take, for instance, the situation of women. There isn't a democratic party in the world, there isn't a bourgeois republic in the world – no matter how developed – that has achieved a tenth of what we've done for a year only. Figuratively speaking, we crashed into pieces all the despicable laws regarding women's inequality, the unnecessary complications to file for divorce, the ugly formalities related to the recognition of extramarital children and the tracing of the father (Lenin, 1978b: 176-177).*

Lenin's pride seemed justified – right after the revolution the first socialist country removed all the factors that already Marx and Engel had pointed out as contributing to women's inequality. Women and men were entitled to equal rights, divorce was legalized, the state passed bills forcing men to recognize their extramarital children. What's more – along with the legal activities there were numerous other measures the authorities took to improve the situation of women. One of the most important aspects was the liberation of women workers from their household chores and the provision of opportunities to integrate in public and political life. Abruptly uprooting women from their typical surroundings, socialist modernization introduced them in politics, production and even in the newly formed militia teams. Quite expectedly, this superficial public activity led to some unintended results. The forced and radical liberation risked transforming into its counterpart – loose moral behavior, uncontrolled emotions and frivolous relationships (Carleton, 2004). The ambiguous statements of Marx and Engel about the commonality of women and destruction of family life created revolutionary havoc and the appropriate ideological atmosphere for the emergence of such phenomena: *„There will be a considerable change in each and every woman's situation... Society will be equally concerned about the wellbeing of all children, be they from marital or extramarital relationships. Thus, the worries about the consequences – the main moral and economic pressures that prevent a girl from living with her beloved man – will disappear. Isn't it a good enough reason for the gradual development of more liberal sex relationships and a more relaxed public opinion about what maid's honor and shame really is?“ (Engels, 1975: 69).*

Whatever Engels envisioned as more liberal sex relationships, the speeches and works of the later communist ideologists silently avoided discussing this delicate aspect of socialist vision and represented its counterpart. What Marx and more specifically Engels saw as a unified liberating pro-feminist discourse, Lenin later on divided into two autonomous paradigms – the energetic activities regarding the liberation of woman from her domestic chores went along with a fierce stagnation of female sexuality. The unifying attempts of the already ruling party required a serious revision of the socialist pre-revolutionary utopian visions on the Women's and gender problem. Already in 1914 in a letter to Ines Armand, which discussed Armand's brochure about the proletarian views on the women's question, Lenin insisted that she should remove the claims for 'freedom of love' from the list of the proletarian demands. He stated that this was not a working-class but a bourgeois desire, which could easily lend itself to numerous interpretations such as promiscuity and exemption from the responsibility to give birth and raise children. What he put among the most significant issues for women was the elimination of financial calculations and material needs in love, the eradication of religious and social prejudices; the prohibition to find the father and other limitations set by legislation, the court of law and the police (Lenin, 1979: 178).

The same opinion of the Soviet leader about the sex question, this time expressed after the revolution, was also quoted by Clara Zetkin in her "Memories about Lenin".

*Although I am far from being a grim ascetic, the so-called 'new sex life' of contemporary adolescents, and in many cases of adults – often seems to me purely bourgeois, it seems to me a variety of a well-maintained brother. All this has nothing to do with free love, the way we, the communists, understand it. Of course, you know the renowned theory that in communist society it is as simple and insignificant to satisfy your sexual needs and drives as it is to drink a glass of water...I believe that this renowned theory about the glass of water is not Marxist at all, what's more, it's anti-social... It is not that with this critique of mine I want to preach asceticism. Communism should not bring along asceticism but cheerfulness and exuberance. I assume, however, that what we observe in contemporary sex life is not cheerfulness and exuberance; on the contrary – contemporary sex life diminishes them... The lack of abstinence in sex life is in itself bourgeois; it is a sign of decay. Proletariat is a rising class. It does not need intoxication, which arouses and dazes. It does not need intoxication through sexual looseness or alcoholic drunkenness... Self – possession and self-discipline are not slavery, they are necessary in love (Zetkin, 1978: 200 - 201).*

In this speech Lenin explicitly stated that the 'free love', the way it was conceptualized by the communists and the free love of some adolescents, had nothing in common. If the former was only implicitly touched upon and somewhat unclearly related to sex life through the ideas of cheerfulness and exuberance; the latter was described in details,

metaphorically presented and refuted as anti-Marxist, anti-social and decadent. Lenin defined communist love in terms of what it was not supposed to be – orgiastic, unrestrained, intoxicating, decaying; for him, however, it was by no means acceptable to relate love to the asceticism of traditional morals. Therefore, the goal of this homonymic word game was not so much a rhetoric persuasion as a gradual sliding of the obviously regressive 'asexual' ideologem towards the emptied from all contents liberal signified 'free love'. Whatever Engels understood by 'free sexual intercourses', the speeches and works of Lenin, and the other communist ideologists after him, silently avoid that delicate aspect of the socialist vision, replacing it with its antipode. The inherent in Marx's and especially in Engels' works single liberating discourse was divided by Lenin into two autonomous paradigms; the centripetal forces of the already ruling party made significant corrections of the pre-revolutionary utopian-socialist outlooks on the 'sex question'.

## 2. Family Ideology in Bulgaria

A few years after the establishment the socialist rule in Bulgaria prime-minister George Dimitrov discussed the topic of sexuality along the lines of Lenin's views. In a speech entitled "The task of Bulgarian people women's union for a political enlightenment and cultural development of Bulgarian woman", held in 1948 at the congress of the women's union, the communist leader criticized the wide-spread among some socialist cadres outlook that family was a bourgeois residue which would gradually die out. On the contrary, according to Dimitrov family turned out to be 'the basic cell of society'. Therefore, family life had to grow stronger, based on equality, mutual respect and moral support between man and woman, care for the children's education and last, but not least, the mutual fight for the fulfillment of the Fatherland Front program. (Dimitrov, 1948a: 102 - 103)

Soon these skillfully modified communist beliefs found their legal expression. In May 1945 the state published a marriage bill which announced civic marriage as the only legitimate form of marriage, while art. 76 of the 1947 constitution stipulated that the state was to protect family and marriage (Constitution of people's Republic of Bulgaria, 1947: 52). Other important communist documents also touched on the necessity to preserve communist morality and fight against its distortion. For example the regulations of the BCP list, among the other responsibilities of the communist, a strict observation of communist morals and fight against moral looseness (Regulations of the BCP, 1949: 17 - 18). Aiming to eliminate all traces of moral ambiguity the collection "Moral code of the builder of communism" – a systematic manual on ethical questions created in USSR in 1961 and repeatedly published in Bulgaria – openly defined the essence of the morals: „The strong and tenacious family has always been and will be the primal core, the brick of

our society fighting for the victory of communism. The concept of 'moral freedom' is incongruous with the concept 'freedom from morals', which means a denial of everything serious in love, freedom from self-possession and self-discipline. Real love relationships predispose spiritual closeness between people, mutual respect" (Vishnyakov, 1965: 93).

Being an organic part of the revolutionary utopia, Marx's and Engels' views on the annihilation of family happened to be totally inappropriate in the new socialist society. As for family's social-ethical aspects, the firm foundations of its efficient functioning were grounded in the reactualisation of the conservative structure of family. Both the conceptualization and the legislative actions aiming to preserve family morality perceived sexual practices in socialist Bulgaria as legitimate as long as they were reproductive sexual relationships between spouses. The pursuit of sexual satisfaction as an end in itself, even within the framework of family life, was rendered unacceptable.

And yet, in spite of the constant references to family life as the basis of society, socialist family was put under a constant political pressure. In this regard the concept of comradeship – central to the socialist understanding of collectivity and individual – presented a point of special interest. Indirectly replacing the specific me-you relationship, closely associated with the categories 'love' and 'friendship', 'comradeship' minimized all irrational elements reducing the vast field of personal connections to an impersonal proletarian membership, to a somewhat twisted and crippled class notion of the nearest and dearest. The concept of 'comrade' entailed the annihilation of difference; it introduced a reciprocity in contacts by uniforming the type and degree of closeness between people. In a similar context, using the metaphor of the 'city-garden' as an anti-utopian allegory of the society of collectivity and total control, Vladislav Todorov – one of the researchers of Bulgarian communism – stated: *"The city-garden introduces the vegetation as the main principle of the communal body. The vegetation is a state of asexuality, of an absolute lethargic drive. Exposed to this communal sun people become plants, their bodies become stems. The only thing they do is transform the sunshine through photosynthesis and thus liberate themselves from the dark forces of the sexual drive. Therefore the city-garden and the city-sun are actually one and the same city. In this city the bodies-stems cling to each other in a comrade way and sink in the lethargic process of vegetative hybridization (asexual reproduction), without devouring each other in ecstatic embraces"* (Todorov, 1991: 48).

In this utopia of equality all bodily and emotional connections appeared to be an assault on the social order. Thus the depersonalized term 'comradeship' was meant to represent the family not as a result of a love attraction and feeling of irreplaceability of the other, but as a strategic union between allies who were together because of common goals, interest and views. The frequent use of the syntagma 'family union' in the socialist press could be interpreted in this line of thought. Thus family happened to be legitimate as long as it

could be inscribed in the large-scale communist structures. *“Only the closely knit socialist collective – the official socialist newspaper pointed out – where all members of the family are ready to sacrifice their comfort and even their life for the benefit of the other family members, as well as for the reinforcement and protection of the socialist regime, can raise children in the spirit of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism. The stability of family life is not a private matter. It is an important public question”* (To support our new socialist family, 1957).

The unfulfilled communist ideal annihilated the realm of the private, the relationships between the private and public were the opposite of what Jurgen Habermas described in his classic work on the transformation of the public sphere. There Habermas defined the modern bourgeois public sphere as the realm where private citizens became a reasoning public whose aim was to oppose official power (Habermas, 1995: 86). According to Habermas subjectivity, which was formed within the space of bourgeois family life, was the counterpart, as well as the necessary condition for the existence of the public sphere. The independence of the private owners from state control and their capacity to manage their property the way they consider right had its existential analogy in the psychological construction of intimacy and completeness in family life. Within the realm of his family the burger became an ordinary human being. It was this general notion of ‘humanity’ that formed the ideological foundation of the public sphere and its essence – the expression of public opinion.

Regardless of what Habermas’s critics say about the inconsistency of such an idyllic representation of bourgeois family life and inclusiveness of the public sphere, it is clear that communist Bulgaria simply imitated public life. The media reproduced party orders, informal civic associations were banned and persecuted, public reasoning that diverted from the authorities’ regulations was merely inconceivable. The collective ownership over the means of production hindered the formation of an independent private sphere. What’s more, the ideologemes about ‘united people’, ‘comradeship’, ‘communist collective as the main unit of society’ blurred the notion of family and the boundaries of family life. In the first 10-15 years of the communist rule a critique of the state coming from the sphere of family life was impossible. The state invaded the unprotected intimate space and observed like a voyeur the gestures of intimacy; it manipulated personal choice, made and broke relationships. For years Pavlik Morozov’s case<sup>1</sup> was an integral part of party mythology. Although similar family relationships never became reality in Bulgaria, the radical communist practices of family construction and manipulation included panoptic observations from within as well as a constant control from without.

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<sup>1</sup> Pavel Trofimovich Morozov (1918 – 1932) was a Soviet youth who denounced his father to the authorities and was in turn killed by his own family. He became a symbol of blind loyalty to the communist regime.

*The Party teaches, – a didactic article about love and family life pointed out – that all members of the Komsomol must be honest people in their working and public life. In addition, they must observe the principles of communist morality in their private and family life. That's way any necessary interventions the family life of young couples, when tactful and reasonable, might prevent the emergence of tense relationships between the husband and wife and establish a normal connection between them. The spouses would behave more responsibly if they knew their private life was part of public living (Kolbanovski, 1951: 2).*

Any activity in socialist society had to have the public good as an end. As far as love was concerned this meant that the ideology had to put a lot of effort into stripping love from its intimacy, deprive sex of egotism and passion and sublimate the erotic energy into a mechanic public service – factory production and human reproduction. Thus, love was degraded to a mere merging of ideal horizons, whereas its physiological aspects were decidedly denounced as if children were made through a sterile asexual production process. “In human society, especially in socialist society sexual education cannot be a physiological education. The sexual act cannot be separated from all achievements of human culture, from the conditions of life of the social person”– wrote Makarenko summarizing the official communist point of view on the ‘sex question’ (Kolbanovsky, 1951: 34). Thus, in socialist society true love inevitably happened to “intermingle with people’s duty towards the future of the children and society in general. Love is closely related to people’s attitude towards labour, politics, economy, culture and public living. People who have different opinions regarding these questions cannot experience true love” (Constantinov 1954).

In fact, at the later stages of the socialist rule the most vulgar ideological formulas about P manual from the early 1960s claimed that “the main reason to get married should be love – good, pure care for each other. The notion of family solidarity, shared goals and respect towards your comrade in marriage – this is the basis of married life” (Galabova, 2015: 105).

To a certain extent love became personalized, it shaped a fragile private space, whose thin boundaries were in constant risk of being disrupted. The relationships between the two genders were already interpreted as elevated, pure, sensitive. While this psychologized discourse on love could not dismantle the dogmatic of the public good, it simply got synchronized with it. In spite of the subtle transformations, which no longer defined family life merely as the legitimate place for production, child rearing and education, but as “a place for pure love and respect”, the persisting ideologeme of family as a union where individual needs had to be curbed and controlled survived throughout the period. The wide-spread socialist metaphor of the family as ‘a basic cell of society’ brought about the positive connotations of organic naturalness. On another plane,



however, this metaphor was by no means an innocent expression of its 'safeguarding' functions.

### 3. The legal restrictions

Along with the pejorative ideological conceptualization, the various aspects of intimate life were subjected to quite real legislative sanctions and restrictions. As a paradoxical heritage from the undesired past, sexuality was stagnated within the framework of the monogamous family, a process, described by Foucault as 'the great appropriation of sexual ethic by family morals' (Foucault, 1996: 135-136) and designated as representative of the bourgeois society of XVIIth century. As Foucault points out, at that time society was fascinated by the idea that "virtue is a deed, which could be realised through the state; which could be imposed through decreese; there could be a force which would guarantee that virtue be observed" (Foucault, 1996: 116). There was a number of legislative and normative acts which inferred that in many of its manifestations socialist family morals did not differ much from the bourgeois principles, the way they were exposed by Foucault and, interestingly enough, criticized much earlier in Marx's and Engels' works. Neither these obvious analogues, however, nor the congruence of communist ethics to modern ethics exhausted the socialist attitude to the individual body and its sexual impulses. In its essence this attitude was authentically socialist – the body was not perceived as an individual but as a public property. Thus, its desires and needs were apriori denied in the name of the general good. Hedonistic sex or other modes of sexual satisfaction and arousal (masturbation, pornography, etc), aiming at achieving personal pleasure, were a specific form of individualism, which by its nature was incongruous with public interests. So the intimate predispositions and sexual propensities not only led to a social stigmatization of the one who practiced them, but they were also explicitly incriminated by law.

Right from the outset of the communist rule pornography was criminalized (Criminal Law, 1951: 26); the sanctions against those possessing or distributing pornographic materials continued throughout the socialist period. The press of the time equaled pornography to fascism and weapons of mass destruction. It was conceived of as an ideological diversion – powerful enough to evoke "moral corruption" and having many side effects such as apolitics, asociality, "a life, excluded from the sublime social goals of the epoch"; it could affect the socialist citizen and create "morally unstable and aesthetically insensitive people who would be susceptible to negative influences" (Iliev, 1964: 66-68).

Until 1956 voluntary abortions were also strictly forbidden (Criminal Law, 1951). After this period they were not entirely excluded but there were a lot of difficulties that a woman

had to go through in order to get an abortion – numerous administrative complications and humiliations; what's more, the abortion was often carried out without anaesthesia (Pramataroff-Hamburger, 2015: 257-269). As the communist ideology denied the Christian conception of human soul, this prohibition was by no means related to the religious reasons for the prohibition of abortion.

Although criminal laws and codes incriminated only procurement, prostitutes were also pursued by the law of labour-correction institutions, the law of labour mobilization of idlers, and the law against hooliganism. "The People's Militia Act for forceful deportation of persons with non-labour incomes" (People's Militia Act, 1958) also included prostitutes as objects of persecution. According to Michail Gruev's research on prostitution in socialist Bulgaria in 1945/46 a number of prostitutes were already mobilized to work in agricultural farms or were deported in "Rositsa" labour-correction camp. There they formed a female brigade that took part in the construction of the local water reservoir. In the period between 1949 - 1962 the bigger part of the female teams in the labour-correction institutions in Belene and Skravena consisted of prostitutes. After the closure of these places, the women were often relocated. (Gruev, 2015: 234-256).

While after the Liberation<sup>2</sup> sexual activities between men saw relatively mild punishment, the Criminal Law from 1951 provided three-year prison sentence for homosexual activities (Criminal Law, 1896; Criminal Law 1951: 25). More often than not, however, homosexuals ended up in labour-correction institutions labeled as hooligans and idlers (Sugarev et al., 1991).

The Act for birth encouragement, published in 1951, taxed all single or childless men, aged 21 to 50, and all women, aged 21 to 45, with the so-called 'bachelor's tax' (Act for birth encouragement, 1951).

In 1956 the new Criminal Code explicitly indicated 6-month prison sentence or up to 1000 leva fine, as well as a public reprimand for husbands who left their families and started living with another person. The law provided the same punishment for the person who the husband started living with; in case of relapse the punishment was three-year prison sentence (Criminal Code, 1956). Synchronised with the legislation, there were various other regulations and acts that banned extra-marital relationships. Thus, for example, unmarried couples were not allowed to check in the same hotel room.

The introduced in 1945 mutual-agreement divorce was removed from the changes in "The law of People and Family" from 1952 and 1953. Ironically enough, the law of People and Family (1956) covertly opposed Marx's and Engels' views, which claimed that the

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<sup>2</sup> What I mean here is the Liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule in 1878. The legislative system of the Principality of Bulgaria came as a result of it.

ban on divorces in bourgeois society was one of the main factors contributing to the humiliating situation of woman. Along with the removal of the mutual-agreement divorce, there were other legislative changes which denied divorce to the spouse guilty of the deterioration of the family relationships, as long as the other spouse insisted that the marriage should be kept. In such situations divorce was given only if “important public considerations” demanded it (The law of people and family, 1956).

This formulation of the law allowed a loyal to the communist regime husband to divorce his wife because of ‘important public considerations’ – for example, because the ideological attitude of the wife discredited the husband. On the other hand, the passed law gave unlimited access of all sorts of public activists to the intimate world of the spouses, thus multiplying uncontrollably the panoptic apparatus for observation. The changes in the law were accompanied by a powerful campaign against ‘the irresponsible marriage dissolution’. Narratives about abandoned honest wives who refused to divorce their unfaithful husbands in the name of the children became more and more common. The press published numerous journalist investigations and summaries of court trials, telling shameful stories about spouses’ life; reports of morally degraded women who oodestroyed families; urges for an immediate public intervention to support the fight against divorce and measures “against those who destroy our socialist family by exposing their immoral actions and by timely and adequately supporting our workers to develop kind family relationships”. (Zlatanova, 1950: 20; To support our new socialist family 1957; The adulterer in front of the communist court). The public renunciation of divorce reached the levels of a lustful voyeuristic digging into the problems of families and satisfaction of the lowest moralizing instincts of neighbours, colleagues and public functionaries:

*A prominent scientific worker was romantically pursued by a young woman working in the same institution. The problem is that he has been married for 28 years. Under the influence of the young woman he filed for divorce, which, quite understandably, was denied by the court since the grounds were unjustified... The head of a cultural institute filed for divorce after 25 years of married life. In spite of the compliant testimonies of the mobilised by him witnesses – his employees – the court realized that the claim for divorce was provoked by a extramarital relationship with a younger woman and denied the claim: „As for his newly found love – it is a belated adventure of an ageing man” – Sofia County Court pointed out in its motives (Zlatareva, 1960: 7).*

Answering a reader’s letter regarding the ban on mutual-agreement divorce, the long – term editor in chief of “Zhenata dnes” (the Woman Today) Rada Todorova replied that there was a great gap between the personal egotistical whims of the parents and the interests of the children. It was exactly this gap that the law had to fill: *“That is how, my dear reader, the ban on mutual agreement divorce will, on the one hand, limit any thoughtless marriages, and on the other, hinder the process of divorcing, thus protecting*

*the interests of the children who will no longer be victims of their parents' egotistical whims and infatuations"* (Todorova, 1952: 2).

Another of the numerous articles published in the journal to discuss the issue also saw the ban on mutual agreement divorce and on request of the guilty spouse as a necessary instrument to protect and safeguard the greatest "capital" of socialism – children: *"The adequate solution of the divorce issue is crucial for the further development of family life, as well as for the right education of children. Since children are public capital, the ending of a marriage cannot be left to the considerations of the divorcees only. The ending of a marriage seriously damages the children's interests, therefore both the processes of making and breaking a family are of general public concern. Under socialism divorce must become a rarity"* (Dobrevva, 1952: 21).

All these restrictions formed the founding element of specific biopolitics. Not only did these biopolitics pursue demographic and political goals, but they also obsessively strove to reach the aim of anti-erotic sex.

#### **4. The repressions – the brigade youth and its negatives**

These biopolitics are even more evident in the communist attitude towards young people. Fundamentally the socialist rule brings about major changes in the life of young people. Basic education is now free and available for the masses, the study materials are supplied by the state. The state also provides jobs for secondary-school and university graduates; there is a considerable improvement in children's healthcare; the authorities guarantee longer maternity leave; they build numerous kindergartens, pre-school institutions and ensure after-school activities; children and adolescents have plenty of affordable places where they can relax and develop their talents (Law of public education, 1948; Constitution of People's Republic of Bulgaria, 1947: 52). This considerate attitude to youth, however, is not a simple aspect of the practical implementation of a social project. In fact, as youth is generally associated with the future and is endowed with qualities like idealism, inexperience, innocence, intolerance to evil, lies and so on, the construction of an image of healthy, lively, happy young people is often used for propagating purposes. The efforts to win young people over as advocates of a particular political cause has an extensive history (Hitler Yunge, Scout organizations); in the years of the Cold War these efforts become an essential element of the ideological battle between the two worlds.

In the youth program, however, the socialist ideologists set considerably further-reaching goals than to simply construct an appropriate propagating image or to politically enlighten young people. Youth is considered to be the future brigade of communist-society

builders. This status shifts the focus of the ideology – youth is not only to be won over but also ‘trained’ in the spirit of the communist cause. Youth is approached with a particular care; this care, however, is also mixed with a lot of caution. Due to the specificity of the age and the exceptional susceptibility to bodily temptations, youth is conceptualized both as an important human resource and a possible channel for ‘ideological diversion’ that has to be controlled. The brigade movement is one of the first attempts in that direction.

The 5th August 1946, when the First National Youth Building Brigade “George Dimitrov” is founded, is considered to be the start of the brigade movement. It takes a very short time for the brigade to expand to 250 000 members (at least according to the party leaders and the propaganda). Although this information might be slightly exaggerated, for less than two years the brigades build numerous railways, tunnels, passes, roads, factories, electric power stations, dams and even towns – Dimitrovgrad is a fine example. The rough estimation of the work completed between 1947-1948 comes up to 3 billion leva, 1,5 billion out of which is economized by the state. The importance of the brigade movement, however, is by no means merely economical. It demonstrates one of the main functions of labour – labour educates. In the heyday of the movement – in May 1948 – its patron George Dimitrov makes a speech to a youth brigade delegation that visits him to hand in a promise, signed by 600 000 people. In the speech Dimitrov states:

*I place great importance on the brigade movement. Not only because it turned out to be a major factor in the construction of our People’s Republic, a serious action towards the realization of the socialist society in our country, but especially because it is an indispensable school for young people’s education ... young people leave this movement as individuals that love labour, individuals with patriotic feelings, improved and strong (Dimitrov, 1948b).*

The speech of the Prime Minister does not simply summarise the results of the youth brigades, it also outlines the directions of a new political attitude to young people. This attitude sets new requirements, envisions new roles, assigns new tasks and lifestyle. In spite of their tender age, for a few weeks the brigadiers live in camps that provide very primitive accommodation, their work is extremely tough, predominantly manual – their tools are shovels, pickaxe, sickles. The brigades are a disciplinary space, meant to train young people, to extract maximum production results from their bodies and to bring up their souls in the spirit of communist values. Adolescents are expected to turn their backs on their previous biases, inclinations, friendships, interests and to merge into one big army, where the person gains importance only as part of the whole, as an element of the labour machine. Although the young brigadiers are supposed to live together for a while, love relationships are strongly discouraged. In the above-mentioned speech George Dimitrov says: „Careless and irresponsible relationships between young men and women are inappropriate and unacceptable... These brigades must develop an authentic strong

comradeship between boys and girls, as well as shared love for labour and for our country” (Dimitrov, 1948b).

The ideological control is only a supplement to the seven-hour workday and the compulsory physical exercise. All these measures significantly limit the possibility for any sexual contacts. The universality of the uniforming comradeship that has to unite individuals in one class of people with common goals and tasks replaces the idea of a personal attitude – one that evolves from individual biases, inclinations or affinities. Future families of brigadiers are never seen as a result of dedication to a specific person but as a union of – more or less – replaceable people, “who have joined their hearts in labour, in creativity, with youth enthusiasm and mutual respect.” (Dimitrov, 1948b). The youth brigade movement gradually recedes, engendering labour rhetoric rather than labour activity. Nevertheless, it remains the first successful implementation of the authorities’ vision for the ideal type of socialist youth – an enormous collective with common goals, united will, conscience and a value system, an imposing machine of various connected working mechanisms.

But in the first months after 09.09.1944<sup>3</sup> not only did the new rule begin to construct the positive image of the brigade youths but also its negative counterpart. The socialist propaganda quickly and resolutely defined its enemies – globally the class enemy was represented by the Western capitalist world while locally it was seen in the remnants of the fascist-like bourgeoisie; it also persisted globally in the western capitalist world as well as in the surreptitious, silently sabotaging the socialist construction ‘non-working’ elements. These personages commonly merged into the image of the ‘bourgeois-like decadents’, who had a decaying lifestyle and excluded themselves from the enthusiasm of communist creativity.

Strict measures against these people were taken in December 1944 when the ‘Bill of labour correction institutions’ was published. This Bill legitimized the foundation of labour-correction institutions – better known as labour camps. Along with criminal recidivists these camps detained prostitutes, ‘girls with loose behavior’, procurers, souteneurs, gamblers, vagrants, idlers. The goal of these camps was to divert those sent there from their ‘immoral criminal intentions and habits, to teach them to work hard and to heighten their moral and intellectual awareness”.

A few years later the regime took measures to implement the “Bill of labour mobilization of idle people”. It envisioned obligatory labour service for the ones who were reluctant to participate in the widespread working campaigns; it targeted vagrants, ‘women that have turned their backs on normal life’, as well as the loitering and intellectual-like young

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<sup>3</sup> 09.09.1944 was the date when the communist party took over the power in Bulgaria

people whose conduct was defined as the first step to criminality, espionage and ideological diversion. After the August 1946 bill was passed these categories of Bulgarian citizens were forcefully engaged in the construction of the new socialist society – the building of roads, factories, railways, residential homes and bridges. The ones trying to get away with labour service were sentenced to prison or fined.

These two bills, along with the propaganda machine, transformed the ‘idlers’, ‘loafers’ and ‘girls with loose behaviour’, presented mainly through the images of ‘swings’ and ‘zozas’<sup>4</sup>, into key notions of the period. They designated the negative image of the workers, the stigmatized counterpart of the young brigadier. The positive and the negative image opposed joy to sexual corruption, labour heroism to card and backgammon games, cultural dances (folklore and classical) to moronic twisting, self-sacrifice to dishonest flirts and one-night stands. Brigadiers embodied the socialist ideal of youth – they were eager to sacrifice their personal interests for the common good, whereas ‘zozas’ and ‘swings’ were degenerated individuals who placed the needs of their private, egotistical bodies above the demands of the society. Political resistance/apoliticity, ideological diversion, idleness and moral decay were mutually replaceable notions. “Women with non-labour incomes” were not simply marginalized by the socialist hierarchy of ideal images of women; swings and zozas were not simply too lazy to take part in the brigade movement and too eager to listen to imperialist music, to twist with movements that resembled ‘erotic bacchanalia’ (Krastev, 1952: 57). They were considered socially unsound people who threatened the socialist state and whose correction through labour would transform them into normal, socially reliable citizens. According to the two above-mentioned bills – the bill of labour mobilization of idlers and the bill of labour correction institutions – labour was seen as a basic value in the communist society. Not only did it have pragmatic influence on reality, but it could also treat and cure those who, unaware of the danger of their disease, wanted to avoid labour activities. In order to be cured these ignorant people were forced to build factories, plants, roads and sometimes even happened to be sent to labour camps.

This attitude towards the idling youth was a specific feature of the 1940s and the early 1950s. Directed to youngsters, labeled with various names, it persisted for almost two decades after the beginning of the communist rule. Broadly speaking, what characterized the 1950s, in terms of attitude towards the youth, was the fight against ‘hooligans’, who, similarly to ‘zozas’ and ‘swings’, liked western fashionable trends, hung around in the streets, had fleeting relationships with young girls and showed disrespect to their elders. In their memories many labour camp inmates narrated that they had been detained and

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<sup>4</sup> “Swings” and “zozas” became increasingly popular in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The term ‘swing’ came from the popular in the 1930s musical style, but in Bulgaria ‘swing’ was generally associated with dandy boys that had a bohemian lifestyle. The word “zoza”, however, has an unclear origin. It is considered to be the female version of the ‘swing’.

sent to correction institutions for being members of hooligan groups, wearing tight jeans, having sideburns, listening to western music and attending dancing parties:

*It was a Saturday at the end of December 1956. I was at one of these dancing parties that were very popular at the time, they were held in the youth club in the Pozitano Street in Sofia. I was wearing the fashionable for the time clothes- tight trousers, pointed shoes and a custom- made shirt with two buttons on the collar. Militia men found this extremely irritating. However, I had no idea that being fashion- conscious could send me to the labour camp. (Paskov, 1991: 180)*

*In the period of 1959-60 I was unfortunate enough to be taken to the headquarters of the Ministry of Interior at 5 Moskovska Street seven times. The reasons? Well, I wore tight trousers, listened to Western music and danced western dances. (Petrov, 1990: 180).*

In spite of the “thaw” after Stalin’s death, but on the other hand, quite expectedly – due to the 1956 events in Hungary – the activities against hooliganism reached its peak in 1957-58. On 16th December 1957, attending a youth election meeting in Sofia, the General secretary of Bulgarian Communist party Todor Zhivkov pronounced his speech “To weed out the poison of bourgeois influence among our youth”. There he said:

*Unfortunately, there are still some boys and girls who follow foreign ways, have inappropriate, loose behavior, something untypical of the Bulgarian way of life and high moral standards. What I’m talking about are the so-called hooligans, who we see here and there, especially in cities like Sofia. They imitate and spread the western ‘fashionable trends’ in clothing, attitudes and loose behavior.... Along with strict educational work, there is one more efficient tool that can bring awareness– that is physical labour. These youngsters should spend some time working hard. That will reeducate and alter them, they’ll become useful to our society. (Zhivkov, 1957: 164-165).*

After this speech, and more importantly – after a tram worker murder, committed for ‘hooligan reasons’ – the authorities initiated a massive campaign against hooliganism, publishing editorials and letters of concerned readers that urged the organs of the BCP and the Komsomol to take strict measures and stop the decadent activities that ruined the Bulgarian youth. Similarly, in January 1958 Todor Zhivkov delivered a speech, called “For a more intensive work against hooligan activities” in front of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the BCP. As a result the minister of Interior took the decision „to reeducate by forced labour all radical and disrupting the public law and order hooligans, thieves, hardened criminals and other decaying elements” (Protocol „A” №33 of the Sitting of Politburo of the CC of the BCP from 21.I.1958: 228).

What followed was a series of mass detentions, known as the ‘hooligan action’, when more than 2000 people were arrested. About 1 400 men and 250 women were detained



in the labour camp of Belene. 170 of them were underage, the youngest being 13 or 14 years old. In 1959 most of the labour camps were closed down but a large proportion of the detainees were removed to the newly opened camp in Lovech (Skravena, for women). It functioned till 1962 and its aim was to isolate from the society all thieves, tricksters, drunkards, elements with loose morals and 'other irredeemable non-working elements who should be sent there without conviction and sentence and submitted to the hardest working regime" (Information about the result of the inspection of the labour regime in the labour group near Lovech 1962: 237). There was no written document discussing the establishment of this institution; the questions regarding its opening and management were referred to the Ministry of Interior. Nor were there any internal rules about the functioning of camp. A document stating what kind of daily routines should be followed there appeared only after some signals about the extremely tough situation in the camp (Information about the result of the inspection of the labour regime in the labour group near Lovech 1962: 237).

It is unlikely that every youngster who wasted his time flirting with girls and boys, taking unusual care about his or her appearance, walking in tight trousers or dancing twist at parties was sent to a labour camp. Also, we could assume that some of the ex-camp-detainees' narratives about the atrocities and pain they experienced there might be slightly exaggerated; some of the innocence claims of the ex-convicts might bend the truth. In spite of all these considerations, however, what we see in legal documents, speeches and presentations of statesmen and functionaries of the regime at that time can lead us to the conclusion that in many cases, simply erotic behavior and appearance, flirting, showing your taste in music or interest in fashion trends was seen as a crime.

The detainees formed a heterogeneous mass consisting of at least three separate groups. The first comprised hardened criminals; the second – political offenders: ex-political leaders; representatives of the agricultural movement, who opposed to being included in the cooperative unions; even communists and active fighters, who were dissatisfied with the party politics – all these were politically aware individuals who were ready to take responsibility of their anti-communist activities. The third group consisted of people who could not predict the consequences of their bohemian lifestyle, of their parties, fashionable clothes, swing and twist or rock'n' roll dances; or women, who tended to take advantage of their appearance in order to earn the so-called 'non-labour incomes'. It was precisely these young people that were subsumed under the rather broad, flexible and easy to manipulate categories 'idlers', 'hooligans' and 'other decaying elements'. The organs of the Ministry of Interior Affairs directly determined their destiny while neglecting all human rights – the presumption of 'innocent until proven guilty', the right of legal defence, the separation between executive and legislative power. Many of the 'idlers' and political offenders preferred to plead guilty of a criminal offence, so that they could serve a short period of time in prison rather than be sent for an unlimited period of time to a

labour camp without any court decision. The detention in labour camps was supposed to last 6 months but it could repeatedly be extended with a new order. (Bill of labour correction institutions, 1946).

To a certain extent the authorities were more tolerant to criminal offenders. In general, criminal offence was interpreted as a private crime, while the crime committed by the idler was directly aimed at disrupting the order of the state, respectively aimed at undermining socialism. The former was a crime against the person; the latter – a crime against society. The lenience towards the criminal offender had its specific reasons – the offender was to be punished for a singular offence; on the contrary, what had to be penalized in the political misdemeanour was not the single act but the whole conduct. It is by no means accidental that ideological offenders were compared to hardened criminals. ‘Hooligans’, ‘prostitutes’, ‘idlers’ and ‘decaying elements’ were sent to labour camps not because of what they had committed but because of what they were; not for actions but for propensities, inherent to their lifestyle, their habits and modes of embodiment. These people were suspicious because their crimes could not be reduced to the external action. Their deeds symbolized the internal moral devastation. The individuals from this group were conceived of as infected by moral and ideological contamination. Therefore, internment, compulsory labour service and detention in specific places were seen as significant functions to protect the public. Above all, they limited the range of the epidemics; secondly, the compulsory labour activities and abstention taught these people out of their ‘immoral habits’; thirdly, they served as a warning about the dangerous consequences of such behaviour. What these labour camps provided for the less infected was a variety of treatments (the official interpretation was that this was a correction through labour, in reality this involved work in harsh conditions and regular beatings; in more extreme situations the offenders risked never leaving the place (Sugarev et al., 1999: 237 - 239).

## 5. Conclusion

It seems important to be mentioned here that the representative of communist countries censorship not only does prohibit the publication of contemporary western right-wing authors from the fields of the humanities, philosophy or cultural studies because of their ‘idealistic’ or ‘individualistic outlook’, but it also decisively blocks the infiltration of all authors influenced by the psychoanalytic movement. Years after the psychoanalytic boom in the West, the name of Sigmund Freud remains a taboo in socialist Bulgaria; psychoanalysis is only occasionally mentioned, only in order to be denounced as a bourgeois theoretical tool – a manifestation of rough naturalism. The causes for this taboo have its roots in the foundations of the psychoanalytic theory – the role that it ascribes to the sexual instincts in the psychic organization of the human being, the privileged position of the biological over the social determination of the individual; the

conceptualization of labour as a repressive activity, blocking the satisfaction of sexual impulses and thus leading to suffering. The total denunciation of the psychoanalytic theory from the socialist regime, however, results in a reverse perspective on the relationship between sexual satisfaction and labour. The studies of the psychic structure of the person and his biological instincts take Freud and his followers (especially Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich) to the conclusion that society has a repressive organization. Contrary to this conclusion, the socialist ideological literature demonstrates an extremely rigorous attitude to sexual needs and sexual satisfaction as for it communal interests have decisive priority over individual interests. Above all, sexual needs must be denounced precisely because they have a distractive nature – they divert the individual from his labour responsibilities. The psychoanalytic incompatibility between sexual pleasure and non-libidinous labour for the general good can be traced not only in the socialist legislation but also in the enormous corpus of propagating literature and press.

The motif of the antisocial individualistic character of erotic manifestations is usually intensified by the typical of socialism rhetoric about disease and decay. The communist reflections on sexuality in Bulgaria possess a specific ambiguity. The party ideologists decisively deny the sensual needs of the body, while at the same time they openly support the materialistic – antichristian, anti-ascetic and anti-idealistic outlook. This contradiction is resolved by focusing on those aspects of the body that allow its perception, on the one hand, as a bodily mechanism, a body-machine, and, on the other hand, as a natural body, a body-organism – an innately deprived of any vices and passions vegetative organism, which might later be transformed into a vessel of animal passions only because of its secondary distortions.

So health, agility and cheerfulness are ascribed to the ‘working mechanism’, as well as to the natural body, conceived of as a specific metaphoric antipode of the sexually unrestrained flesh. Disease, distortion and decay are, on the other hand, related to the sensual vices of bourgeoisie and local public enemies. In the communist institutions the organismic character of the body does not involve any sensual aspects; on the contrary, these two notions are inversely connected. The more intense the instincts, passions and the drives to pleasure are, the more wasted and sick the body is; respectively, the more agile and cheery the body is, the more suppressed its sexual drives are.

Thus the sexuality is conceived of as a hostile element, a powerful anti-social passion that destroys comrades’ relationships and disturbs the communist moral order. This tendency, dating back to Lenin’s lectures on sex life, can be delineated throughout Bulgarian socialism. The utopian equation between sexual and political liberation by Marcuse is negatively conceptualized in Bulgarian socialist society. There most sexual activities and gestures are interpreted as political acts, the outright sexual conduct is perceived as an antisocial way of life. That is why from its very seizure of power, the

socialist rule battles against sexuality. It uses various restrictions, sanctions and taboos in order to take control of or even efface the numerous expressions and characteristics of sexuality.

Such repressive mechanisms are far from being new. Although they are edited, reconsidered and reconceptualised in a new fashion, which can be inscribed in the framework of the socialist ideology and practice, these mechanisms are studied in-depth in “The Will to Knowledge” by Foucault. He terms them as ‘the circle of prohibition’ and ‘the logic of censorship’ (Foucault, 1993: 115-116) and interprets them as repressive techniques that stem from a one-dimensional juridical-discursive mode of power. The only thing they can do is to reduce the numerous opportunities that power resources give to the singular skill of denial and prohibition. In “History of sexuality” Foucault derides the Marxian-Freudian observations – he unifies them in the common conception ‘repressive hypothesis’ as they are all based on the general abstraction of modern repressive power. According to these observations, Foucault says, industrial society suppresses sexuality in order to transfer libido to labour. The simplified version of these observations, then might lead to the conclusion that as soon as the taboo over sex is revoked and the transfer of sex to labour overcome, individuals will be liberated and the foundations of the world as we know it will be totally undermined. Paradoxically, the communist rule in Bulgaria does not seem to go beyond the limits of the ‘repressive hypothesis’ and to a certain extent, though describing it in a negative way, endows sexuality with the power its most fervent apologists – from Reich to Marcuse – ascribe to it.

Envisioning sex as a potential threat – firstly, because it decentralizes human energy from the labour and social tasks and, secondly, because of the irrationality of the generated by pleasure interpersonal relationships and orgiastic conditions, which can blast the social order – the power in totalitarian society intensifies the silence to the extreme, it augments the sanctions and multiplies its foundations. Thus, the panopticum reaches the levels of perfection.

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