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THE YOUTH POLITICAL RESISTANCE (1944-1949)

AUTHOR'S ABSTRACT

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The dissertation is developed in a total volume of 258 pages, containing an introduction, eight chapters, a conclusion and a last section consisting of sources and research, totaling 185 of which 168 in Bulgarian, 14 in English, one in Spanish and 4 online sources.

The publications in the thematic area of the thesis are 5 and all are in Bulgarian.

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Subject and Relevance of the Study

The object of study in the presented dissertation is the Bulgarian youth of the second half of the 1940s and the moods and actions they reproduced against the imposing totalitarian power. In particular, the time limits stretch from 9.9.1944 to the very end of 1949. The study is an attempt, on the one hand, to add to the corpus of existing historical text tracing the establishment of the socialist regime and the reactions generated by this process, taking into account the enormous role of youth in this respect. On the other hand, by using the individual life interpretations left behind by the youth of the time, it attempts to draw a relatively clear picture of the private experience of the event of the period, both of the participants in the acts of opposition to the authorities and of the victims of the latter's events and their attitude to the processes of resistance.

Several hypotheses have been posed to direct the avenues of inquiry. First is the assumption that youth occupied a key role in the acts of resistance that unfolded during the period. This expectation is generated by the heightened attention to the youth that characterizes the 20th century in general and is expressed in attempts harness this social force in order to mobilize it in politically desirable directions, which, on the other hand, aims to overcome the dangers coming from it and, in this sense, to "disarm" the same. These processes of political socialization, along with the experience of war, shaped the mental image of the young people in Bulgaria, who welcomed the new power in their divergent involvement in different ideological current and the youth associations they created. In this aspect, the next hypothesis emerges, which leys the expectation that this ideologically diverse Bulgarian youth will begin to unite under their common critical mood towards the established power of the Communist Party, which will lead to the blurring of ideological political differences under the common motive of winning freedom, laid down as a fundamental value for which young people with nationalist, agrarian, social-democratic, etc. political views are ready to pay with their lives. In connection with the expressed high level of motivation to participate in the resistance, the last hypothesis is put forward, assuming that it is from the youth, for a number of reasons conditioned by the specificities of youth in general, that the most daring forms of opposition will come.

The results of the study are based on three types of sources subjected to critical reading and analysis. First of all, this is the periodical press and in particular the opposition periodicals. Its very existence is part of the peculiarities of the first half of the period under study, referred to by domestic-front rhetoric with the term “people`s democracy”. Alongside this, information is drawn from archival material from the Central State Archives and the archives of the Committee of Files. To trace how the archival data and the interpretation of the events of the period correspond with their individual, private experience, the study uses biographical evidence. In this connection, it is also important to note that the discovery in the narratives of the former youths of the assumptions and circumstances fundamental to the study, without being deliberately sought of provoked¹, not only confirms the validity of the reasoning put forward, but also affirms their relevance to the individual experience of the processes under consideration through the choice of focus on them specifically without prior guidance and, as in most cases, over an irreducible temporal distance. ² In addition to the resources mentioned, the research supports its inquiries with already existing research. Some of these are historical and are useful for reconstructing in factual terms the reality of the time, while others are theoretical works related to concepts central to the study. Among these, Hanna Arendt`s ideas are the most significant, and works interpreting them are also discussed.

The aim of the analysis of the sources described in this way is not to reconstruct categorical historical facts, but to recreate the picture of the critical mood towards the government among a significant part of the young people in the country, because the author of the study believes that only this could be deduced categorically from the testimonies so selected, characterized by extreme one-sidedness and subjectivity. The role of the youth in the acts of opposition to the power of the Fatherland Front, led by the Communist Party, already established by history, should be pointed out as the subject of this work. In this sense, the representatives of the youth resistance are clarified, some categorization of the acts of resistance themselves is drawn out and an attempt is made to expose the motives for engaging in it as well as its consequences.

¹ As it would have been if we had worked with interviews organized for the purpose of the research, a task abandoned due to objective difficulties.

² The young people of the time were born around 1930, most of the biographical evidence used was written (and all published) after 1989.

Brief outline of the thesis

The study consists of an introduction, eight chapters and a conclusion.

The first chapter is meaningfully divided into two parts and discusses the concepts of political and resistance. The notion of the political is entirely occupied by Hanna Arendt's ideas, primarily as set out in the *Human Condition* and their relation to totalitarianism, as seen in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. The aim here is to argue for the characterization of youthful acts of resistance against the established totalitarian regime as political acts. The second part, examining the term "resistance", draws out some basic reasoning associated with it in order to try to fit into this definition, principally used by historians of the period to name acts of resistance to the establishment of the new power, the ones previously drawn out as political acts by critical youth.

The second chapter again deals with the definition that enter into the title of the study. But now focuses on the period mentioned and "youth" itself. The study is positioned within the frame making the beginning of the establishment of the Fatherland Front's power through which the socialist rule of the country was realized. The year 1949 is taken as the upper limit of the study and there are several reasons for this. On the one hand, although after the destruction of the opposition and with it the resources to lead a legal resistance, as a result of the parliamentary elections held in that year, and also the trials against Traicho Kostov in connection with the rupture in relations between the USSR and the Yugoslavia, the resistance, and especially on the part of the representatives of the youth, received new stimuli and dimensions specific to that particular year, which are interesting and important to examine. On the other hand, this year marks the history of our socialist past in general with the death of Georgi Dimitrov, whose relationship with youth, modelled in propaganda terms on that between Staling and Soviet youth, permanently shaped the ideological concepts concerning the meaning of youth in general for the period of socialism. It is no coincidence that the Union of People's youth, established in 1947 and particularly important for this study, adopted Dimitrov's surname in its name after his death. This chapter of the study also attempts to outline, in broad terms, the overall significance of youth and the attention it received during the past twentieth century in order to explain the divergent aspiration for its political socialization, to argue for the country's young people's awareness of their own

significance and, in this sense, to derive the motives for their inclusion as an active part in the processes of resistance.

The third chapter presents the historical context in which the acts of political resistance by youth examined in the study took place. This chapter is important because the changes in question, which swept through society and came from the plans of the Communist Party, proved to be the driving force behind the resistance itself. On the other hand, this part of the text, which introduces the reader in general terms to the events of the period, removes the need for further clarification of the historical lineage surrounding the various manifestations and forms of opposition that are outlined in the text. An important point here is to understand the boundary dividing the period under study into two sub-period, namely 1947, when the Paris Peace Treaty was signed and effectively put a definitive end to the existence of opposition in the country. From here on, the only possible avenues of resistance remained the clandestine ones, which in turn changed the face of the clandestine resistance itself, which existed after all even before 1947. From this point on, the authorities already clearly announced the path towards socialism and the establishment of one-party rule, which had been concealed until then behind the Fatherland-front rhetoric, and which had its impact on the youth, most visibly in the ideological concepts associated with it.

A separate chapter in the study is devoted to them, but before it is positioned another one, also in direct relation to the attempts of power-grabbing and “controlling” the youth by various ideological currents and formations. *The fourth chapter* presents the leading political alliances in which young people in the country are organized. They are mainly divided into two groups. In the first are placed the organizations attached to the political parties forming the Fatherland Front. In the first place it is the Workers’ Youth Union, established under the Communist Party. Its presentation is accompanied by an overview of the road it has travelled from its creation to its new life after the 9th of September 1944 and a description of the character and tasks it has been given in these new conditions. An acquaintance with the strategies involved in its development is important, since it thus illustrates some of the ways of building a unified youth organization, one of the main objectives of the Communist Party and a step towards the achievement of socialism, which the study should illustrate convincingly enough. Next, the Agrarian Youth Union and its key importance for the processes of resistance against the regime, beginning precisely through the opposition to the building of such an organization, is presented. The Bulgarian Agrarian National

Union was the main obstacle to the communists' plans and already in 1945 part of it left the Fatherland Front government and went into opposition. This act was immediately supported by the Agrarian Youth Union, which came out firmly in defense of the leader of the oppositional agricultural union, Nikola Petkov, and that of the young agrarians, Peter Sarbinski. The following describes the processes of formation (through the seizure of certain acquisitions of the organization such as redaction of the newspaper, local clubs, archives, seals, etc.) of a censorial agricultural youth organization that adopts the position of the Fatherland Front and serves as a screen for the "youth unity" so touted by the authorities, but fails to attract the agricultural youth to its side, in which both the documents coming from the party and the archives of the Agrarian Youth Union itself are categorical. Soon after a section of the Agrarian National Union went into opposition, so did a section of the Social Democrats led by Costa Lulchev. They were also supported by their youth structure, the Union of Socialist Youth. The opposition youth organizations work in cooperation, but the socialist youth in opposition does not gather a similar number of supporters among the youth and does not develop a resistance potential similar to that of the agrarians, although it always declares itself in support of them. What is most evident in the collaboration between the two opposition youth organizations is what the study seeks to highlight, namely the stripping away of ideological differences in the name of pursuing common goals, the pinnacle of which is proclaimed to be freedom. The last youth organization estranged under one of the parties forming the Fatherland Front government is the Youth Union "Zveno", which finds itself in a specific situation. Analogous to the "Zveno" party itself, the youth of the organization formally support the government, do not openly oppose its measures/ However, as the documents and not infrequently the opposition periodicals categorically state, the young and adult members of "Zveno" are in their majority negative towards the Communist Party that has seized power in the Fatherland Front, and therefore, along with the opposition and the resistance supporters, they are waiting for a future intervention from Western Europe in order to overthrow the government. This balancing act between formal support and covert dissent is curious and appears at certain points in the plot of the study. The other ideological formations embraced by the country's youth are placed in the "Other" category. It includes the Union of Young Radicals, the Democratic Youth Union, the youth of the organizations banned as fascist after September the 9th and the anarchist youth. The latter two are most curious because they occupy a special place in the field of youth resistance. The activities and the fate of the youth of the organizations declared fascist by the new regime can

be summarized in several ways. Some of them were sent to prisons and concentration camps, the most radical sought ways of resistance and set up clandestine organizations, but the most numerous former “legionaries”, “rants”, “bratnics”, etc. tried to integrate themselves into the new conditions and began to join existing political youth organizations. Due to the nature of the above-mentioned banned organizations in the time before the 9th of September, their members were numerous, but far from all of them ideologically convinced and active. In contrast, the anarchist youth cannot boast of being numerous, but they are nevertheless characterized by a particular activism and position-taking in relation to current socio-political processes and, as the research reveals, in conditions of existing opposition they often interact with some resistance activities, coming first of all from the agrarian youth union, and after the destruction of the conditions for legal resistance, their representatives made an impression with their activities both in the organized armed resistance and in the one that had speech as its instrument.

Chapter five now sets out to derive the ideological paradigm for youth formed by Fatherland Front and later overtly communist propaganda, trying to clarify how this corresponds, on the one hand, to Hanna Arendt’s ideas of political and totalitarian attempt to destroy it, and on the other hand, and above all, trying to examine how the ideological concepts presented relate to the actual life situation of the formerly young. The first part of this chapter presents the soviet idea of the birth in the conditions of the new society of a new type of man (homo sovieticus), which corresponds closely to the ideas laid down by Arendt about the destruction of the key condition of the political – the condition of plurality of individuals, since the expectations of the “new man” is that he should be handle a predictable complex of feelings and reactions, that he should possess a very specific set of qualities, the most important of all of which should be his “partisanship” – the devotion to the ideas of communism to which his whole being should be subordinated. After presenting this particular idea, the text sets out to examine how it corresponds to the Bulgarian situation, first of all by presenting the ideological concepts of youth in the time of the so-called “people’s democracy”, when the use of such ideological borrowings from the USSR was deliberately avoided in public discourse. After the victory over the opposition and the now open beginning of one-party rule, the idea of the new people, which turns out to be closely related to youth, was adapted to the Bulgarian context. The study demonstrates how a propagandistic framework of homo sovieticus was transferred to the Youth Brigades movement and thus acculturated the emergence of the “new youth”, seen by the author as the highest form of the Bulgarian “new man”.

Further on, the real significance of this idea of the new youth, whose set of qualities, emotions and feelings, driven by devotion to the Party, create a concrete template that should regulate access to quality participation in the new society envisaged for these new people, is brought out, with education as the key means.

Chapter six is devoted to the periodical press, beginning with the opposition press, which is an important feature of the so-called “people’s democracy” as it presents an alternative narrative to the Fatherland front one about reactions and attitudes towards the new government. For this reason, opposition periodicals are also one of the most significant resources of the study presented here. In order to illustrate this polarization of narratives, a comparative analysis between the government agricultural periodical and the opposition one is resorted to. The following subsection similarly juxtaposes the image of the young agricultural in the two types of sources in order to infer from there how similar ideas, or rather ideal models, associated with agricultural youth, and youth in general, are used by both poles to engage youth who have internalized the concept in question in virtually completely opposite behaviors. The final section of this chapter is devoted to youth opposition periodicals and should serve as evidence of the importance of youth resistance and, by extension, the necessity of its suppression as a condition for socialism to happen at all. The youth opposition newspapers together with the anarchist one was the first opposition newspapers to be stopped from printing for political reasons. The contents of the few and very poorly conditioned youth newspapers strongly confirm the daring determination and sacrifice of the opposition youth to fight for the preservation of their freedom. The heated debated initiated by the opposition within the Grand National Assembly eventually crystallized the idea, too important for confirming the hypothesis of the study, that the youth opposition periodicals were not simply stopped for political reasons, but that the “disconnection” of the youth, of which it is accused, i.e. the violation of the condition that entire youth periodical should be maintained in a Fatherland front spirit, is an obstacle to the unification of the youth so south by the authorities, that is to say its institutional organization within a single organization, which in turn has the task of forming the new people.

The seventh chapter may be judged as having the greatest contribution value. It deals with the description of hitherto unexplored historical processes leading to the establishment of the Komsomol in Bulgaria, and in this direction the importance of active youth resistance to the attempts to build this organization should clearly emerge. In the sense set out in the first chapters,

the youth actions described clearly stand out as political. The chapter itself is divided into eight parts. The first presents the establishment, short-lived and in that sense unsuccessful, of the much-vaunted United Youth Organization, which was opposed primarily by young agricultural even from the period before the secession of the opposition in the country. The strategies for the creation of the structure in question, which was ostensibly to be a non-partisan alliance of youth organizations created by the parties forming Fatherland front government, are outlined here, but even at this stage the desire on the part of the Communist party to neutralize the other political ideologies is transparent, which is why this idea of the united youth organization, especially after the formation of the opposition, was quickly abandoned by the authorities, or more accurately, put on hold for a later stage. Nevertheless, there were still attempts to control the youth through the Committees of Democratic Youth (or Fatherland Front Youth Committees), which were also formally declared “democratic” and “anti-fascist”, but were completely dominated by communist youth. They also come under fierce attack from the opposition youth unions, who initially join them but quickly leave them, leaving only representatives of the government youth organizations, who have the role of simulating “non-party youth unity”. The study goes on to present two more structures of a similar nature, but now in the field of education. These are the United All-student Youth Union and the All-student People’s Union. The very idea of creating such organizations, which have the task of organizing student youth without regard to their political affiliation, and even sometimes understood in their capacity as non-government structures as a means of quelling ideological tensions between youth union, initially met with strong support from the agrarian and social-democratic youth organizations. Very soon, however, it became clear that this was another means of controlling and projecting the ideological influence of the Communist Party over the youth. The school organization quickly became one of the most prominent targets of criticism on the opposition press, which declared it a front for the One-party youth organization and continually exposed the various forms of violence and discrimination directed at youth who refused membership in the organization. The documents are explicit about the critical sentiments among the high school youth and the resistance to the all-student organization, especially during the 1945-1946 school year. The situation was similar with the university youth. The part of this chapter that presents the All-student Union and the resistance to it is separated into several subparts, as there are features in this regard that are important to mention. First of all, these are the student organizations active within the University, which were established under the opposition parties of the agrarian,

social-democratic and democratic parties, respectively the Bulgarian Agrarian Academic Union, the Socialist Academic Youth “Jean Jaures” and the Democratic Academic Club. The activities of the three organizations were registered as alarming in the reports of the State Security Service as early as the end of 1945, and as the repressive mechanisms of the emerging dictatorship intensified, leading in turn to increasingly active resistance, their activities expanded, but still remained primarily in the sphere of legislation in the field of university, even though the rhetoric of their resistance proclaimed in the organizations’ goals in a similar way a sacrificial commitment to the freedom of the entire Bulgarian nation. Within this extremely limited form of presentation of the thesis, it is nevertheless appropriate to note two important circumstances in this regard. The first has to do with the activities of the Democratic Academic Club, which represents, in the opinion of the author of this study, the most prominent form of resistance on the part of the youth involved in supporting the Democratic party. It is in this connection that the other circumstance of note is to be found, and it concerns the characteristic camaraderie and cooperation among youth critical of the government but organized in various ideological organizations, and here the particular activity of the anarchist should be noted. However, unlike the Fatherland front committees (commissions), which are nevertheless in their overall conception and the way they openly define themselves, they are governmental organizations, although they claim to be equal between the different political strands of the Fatherland front parties, whereas the student organization should be entirely politically neutral and aimed at securing the interests of the youth in the field of education, which is why they enjoyed increased youth interest in their early life. As it turns out, however, these educational structures play an even more crucial role than overtly governmental ones, since membership in them begins to serve as a tool of power to shape the desired image of society by isolating “untrustworthy” individuals. The last part of this chapter presents the creation of the Komsomol ultimately due not to the occurrence of any change in sentiment among the youth, but to a change in political perspective. The creation of the Union of the People’s Youth, which after the death of Georgi Dimitrov in 1949 was renamed in Dimitrov Union of the People’s Youth and in the 1950s was renamed anew into what is now most recognizable as the Dimitrov Communist Youth Union, occurred after the defeat of the opposition in 1947, when the political course towards socialism was already openly stated. However, in spite of the favorable horizon for the authorities, who were no longer committed to fighting the youth organized in separate political fractions, they

failed to achieve youth unity, and resistance among the youth did not subside, even though it had largely lost the conditions of its existence and its repertoire.

After the victory over the opposition, the only possible form of resistance remains the clandestine one. The last *Chapter Eight* is devoted to it. It is divided into two parts, the first of which deals with organized armed resistance, i.e. clandestine organization, such as arose in many places in the country and carried out a variety of activities, and also with militancy. The aim of this chapter is to extract, mainly from existing research on the subject, some generalized picture of youth participation in this form of resistance, in order, on the one hand, to confirm the high level of motivation of youth to participate in it, together with verifying its assumption that it should be young people who are most daring in their actions. Furthermore, through the diversity in the political poles of the different organizations, whose motives and ultimate goals, however, bring out very similar patterns that can be summarized to victimhood in the name of freedom, to “freedom or death”, another important hypothesis is confirmed, that of the melting of ideological differences under the pressure of the communists’ anti-liberal policies. The Goriani bands were a distinct form of organized armed resistance. In the second half of this section, the most significant and well-known in history groups of “goriyani” of the period of the present study are presented in a similar way in order to register the active presence and ideological diversity of the youth in this respect as well. To support the hypothesis of a high level of motivation among the youth to participate in the resistance, narratives of unfulfilled youth aspirations to join the goryani are woven in, which have the function of illustrating the pull of the letter, coming also from the need to participate in a community, which clearly declares itself on the side of righteousness, and, moreover, in a sense represents a kind of adventure, shrouded in mystery, in the eyes of the young man who, because of the specifics of his life phase, is predisposed to adventurism. The second part of this chapter is devoted to resistance, the instrument of which is speech. These are the practices, very widespread among young people critical of the authorities, of writing slogans in public places, of spreading slogans, rumors and also a kind of amateur humorous creativity – all acts that shake the stability of the government, because they act (undoubtedly politically) against the mechanisms of totalitarian power described by Hannah Arendt, since they succeed in overcoming fear and, in this sense, in preserving the horizontal connections between individuals, their multiplicity and their situatedness in the world.

Key findings and directions for future research

The results of the study convincingly confirm the underlying hypothesis, clearly establishing the presence of strong critical sentiments towards the government among the country's youth in the years between 1944-1949. Under the ever-increasing constraints that prevented the realization of any socio-political changes coming from the various ideological currents, the possible resistance practices also shrank to a certain minimum. It follows that resistance itself is beginning to be given an existential significance, well reflected in its rhetoric, in which remarkable similarities can be observed between adherents of radically different ideological currents. "The melting of ideologies", as it is established as an expression in the study, does not only occur on the stage of negotiating resistance, but refers, as demonstrated in the text, to common practices of resistance, either affirmed through alliance and request for cooperation, or unrecognized or unconscious, but visibly driven by a common impetus and guided in a common direction. Other "discoveries" of the study relate to the curious form the Soviet idea of the new man took in the context of Bulgarian society, thus giving rise to the propagandist idea of the "new youth", which apart from objective circumstances such as the need to stimulate the forces contributing gratuitously to the "construction of socialism", was also the result of the undeniably increased attention and ideological concern for youth on the part of the Communist party, which should also be well expressed in the study. There are many avenues for possible future research in relation to the topic of this thesis, and these are alluded to some extent in the conclusion. On the one hand, it would be valuable to explore in depth the art representation associated with the idea of the "new youth", within which gender specific qualities and characteristics could also be drawn out. In relation to the latter, on the other hand, it would be possible to represent female participation in resistance processes. As it has been mentioned more than once, this dissertation does not deal with the experiences of resistance actors during their stay in the concentration camps, not because it does not find it significant, but on the contrary, precisely because it considers such a study to be valuable and in order to clarify the possibilities for and the realization of resistance actions in this spaces of "total domination". Such an undertaking, however, presupposes a separate study. The role and significance of the Komsomol organization created precisely in the years covered by this thesis, together with processes described in text that led to its formation, also have the potential to

generate a significant study, also related to the representation of the everyday horizons of life in socialist society, of the specific festivity and ritual of the regime and so on.

Contributions of the dissertation

- The study succeeds in achieving a new narrative of youth social activism in the immediate post-9/11 period, bringing back into scholarly debate one of the priority topics in the historiography of the socialist regime itself.
- The above is part of a relatively new trend in scholarship on the recent past³ and in particular the early years of socialism in Bulgaria, dealing not with the repression and consequences of the imposition of the new power, but with reactions to it and acts of resistance.
- An essential contribution is the tracing of the paths that led to the building of the Komsomol in the country, and the significance of resistance from the youth, articulated by the government itself as a fundamental obstacle of achieving socialism in Bulgaria.
- The dissertation places these historiographical findings in close relation to key ideas of Hannah Arendt, demonstrating on the one hand how totalitarian power is born through the gradual deconstruction of the political, but also illustrating on the other hand how young people attempt to preserve or restore it through the means of their resistance.
- This was achieved as a result of the inclusion of previously unexplored materials – youth periodicals, the archive of the Agrarian Youth Union, as well as supporting the thesis of the research with the memoir testimonies collected for the “This is my past” competition.
- The ideological conceptions of youth in the period under study are illustrated, and the contributions here are twofold. On the one hand, it is presented how persistent phases, well internalized by ideology, could serve during the years of so-called “people`s democracy” as drivers of opposing modalities of socio-political activism among youth. On the other hand, it is traced how, with the establishment of soviet-style governance and the transfer of ideological model from the Soviet Union to Bulgarian society, the power focus on youth led to the emergence of the idea of the new youth.

³ The exception here is prof. D. Sharlanov.

Publications on the research topic:

Angelova, P. (2022). "For a United Democratic Youth Union". *NotaBene*, issue 55, <https://notabene-bg.org/read.php?id=1255> last accessed 08.06.2024

Angelova, P. (2022) The image of the agrarian youth and its political uses in the Bulgarian periodicals (1944-1947). *RhetoricaOnline*. Issue 5, <https://rhetoric-bg.com/2022/12/20/образът-на-земеделската-младеж-и-поли/>

Angelova, P. (2023). The Opposition Periodical Press and the Narrative of Reactions Against the New Government (1944-1947). In Petrova, T., N. Debrunet (eds.), *Multifaceted Science. Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Doctoral Readings of the Department of Culture, Historical Heritage and Tourism at the University of Library and Information Science and Technology*, Sofia: For the Letters, pp. 81-95

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Angelova, P. (2024). The New Socialist Young Man: Ideological Concepts for Youth in Bulgaria During the Second Half of the 1940`s, In: *Doctoral Readings of Faculty of Philosophy 2023* (under press)