

## **REVIEW**

**by prof. Momchil Metodiev, DSc, New Bulgarian University**

**Research Area 2. Humanities; Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology,  
of the dissertation submitted for obtaining the educational and qualification degree  
“doctor”**

**in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, doctoral  
program “Cultural Studies” (Youth in Bulgaria. Public Debates, Social Actions,  
Movements, Ideologies, Political Regimes and Institutional Structures of the Late 19th and  
20th Centuries)**

**by Petya Valkova Angelova with the title “Political Resistance of the Youth (1944-1949)”**

**with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Galina Goncharova**

Petya Angelova's dissertation deals with the important issue of youth resistance in Bulgaria at the beginning of the communist period. The problem is discussed in the historiography, but usually it occupies a secondary place, while in this dissertation it is highlighted as a central research problem. Overall, the dissertation successfully defends its objectives, thanks to the variety of sources used by the author, which gives density and comprehensiveness to the research. The dissertation has a total length of 258 pages and contains an introduction, eight chapters, a conclusion and appendices with sources and literature. The doctoral candidate has 5 publications in Bulgarian on the topic of the dissertation, which meets and exceeds the national minimum requirements for the educational and qualification degree of Doctor.

As the candidate correctly states, the subject of the research is “the youth in Bulgaria in the second half of the 1940s and their attitudes towards the establishment of the one-party rule and all the events resulting from this process” (p. 6). The abstract also correctly states that “the aim of the analysis of the sources described in this way is not the reconstruction of categorical historical facts, but the reconstruction of the picture of the feelings of a significant part of the country's youth critical of the authorities, since the author of the study believes that only this can be categorically deduced from the testimonies selected in this way, which are characterized by extreme one-sidedness and subjectivity” (Abstract, p. 4).

An advantage of the dissertation is the numerous and varied primary sources used by the candidate – in addition to the opposition periodical press in the period under study, the doctoral candidate also used the archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Komsomol organization, and the opposition Agrarian Youth Union. She also uses the archival documents contained in the current Dossier Commission and presented in the documentary collections published by the Commission. A third important group of sources are the biographical narratives, which reveal the personal dimensions of the social, political, and economic changes and the resistance to them. Bringing together these diverse sources can be described as one of the great successes of the study, especially since in all of them the problem of youth resistance is rarely a leading theme, but often occupies a subordinate position to the main narrative of the exposition. In this sense, the search for testimonies and documents specifically related to the main theme of the dissertation certainly required great perseverance and diligence on the part of the doctoral student. The author also knows and uses the considerable historical and theoretical literature on the period under study.

The interdisciplinary nature of the research is an undoubted success, as the author combines classical methods of historical research with oral history, as well as methods from anthropology and cultural studies. In this sense, the dissertation goes beyond an ordinary historical study, since it relies on theoretical models borrowed from philosophy as well as tools from cultural studies.

The overall framework of the dissertation fits into a clear and well-defended theoretical model. It is based on Hannah Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism and, in particular, her arguments developed in *The Human Condition* about the political and the drive to destroy multiplicity, which are central to the politics of the construction of totalitarian society. As the doctoral student points out, “Arendt focuses on the horizontal relations between people in the public sphere and their role for society”, and this is precisely “what she sees as destroyed by totalitarianisms” (p. 13). Part of the theoretical framework is based on Arendt's argument for the *homo sovieticus* as “the perfect product of total domination, of the destruction of the political, because it exemplifies the destroyed plurality of the individual, since this 'new man' is in fact a creature wholly subservient to the needs of the Party” (p. 242). From this perspective, the ideological postulates of the regime, which are aimed at the need to create a “new youth”, are also discussed. The “resistance” of the youth is defined from the same perspective: it is the attempt to “assert and restore the plurality of the politically active youth” (p. 16).

However, the discrepancy between the title and the dissertation as a whole can be noted. The title states that the subject of the study is “youth resistance”, while the thesis itself examines not only the resistance and opposition activities of youth groups and organizations in the period under study, but also the emergence and consolidation of the idea of creating a single youth organization, the Komsomol, which eventually took the name of the Dimitrov Communist Youth Union. It is the creation and establishment of this unified youth organization as the sole representative of youth in totalitarian society that frames the chronological and thematic scope of the dissertation. It can be said that the contradiction between title and content in this particular case is to the advantage of the dissertation – the difficulty, if not impossibility, of disentangling youth resistance from the formation of the single youth organization is fully understandable, while tracing the chronology, processes, and ideological preconditions that led to the creation of the unified state controlled organization is one of the successes of the dissertation, as it fills a gap in the historical literature. However, this does not alter the fact that the content of the dissertation goes beyond the thematic framework set forth in the title and defined in the objectives of the dissertation.

The chronological framework chosen may also raise questions. With this in mind, the doctoral candidate defends the chronological framework she has chosen at length, and I must say successfully. While the lower chronological limit, 1944, is undeniable in connection with the establishment of Communist power, the upper chronological limit, 1949, raises questions due to the liquidation of the legal youth opposition as early as 1947, as well as the establishment of the Komsomol organization, the Union of People's Youth, in the same year, which, after the death of Georgi Dimitrov in 1949, was renamed the Dimitrov Union of People's Youth and later adopted the name Dimitrov Communist Youth Union. However, the doctoral student convincingly argues for the stated upper chronological limit with the death of Georgi Dimitrov as the limiting moment associated with the consolidation of the unified youth organization and the stifling of any possible legal or clandestine resistance by the youth.

It could be pointed out that the main weakness of the dissertation is its structure, which is divided into eight chapters. The reason for this fragmentation of the exposition into so many chapters is the doctoral student's desire to follow both a thematic and a chronological approach in the exposition of a researched topic. Dividing the text into eight chapters makes it difficult for the reader to follow the main exposition, and my recommendation would be to unite these chapters

based on a clear separation between a theoretical model and a chronological presentation of the issues under study.

In this work, the theoretical model is presented in chapters one and five; the historical context is divided into chapters two and three; and the results of the actual research work are presented in chapters four, six, and seven, where the legal opposition activity of the youth unions is presented, including the formation of the unified Youth Organization. In the eighth chapter, the clandestine resistance of the youth against the establishment of the totalitarian nature of the regime is aptly presented. This structure of the exposition could be considerably simplified by combining the theoretical models in a single chapter, while the results of the research work on the development of youth organizations could be presented in another chapter, combining both their social composition and the changes in youth organizations during the period.

The results of the actual research are presented in the chapters on the issues discussed in the periodical press (chapter six) and on the history of the youth organizations of the legal political parties, including the creation of the unified Youth Organization, which developed into the Komsomol organization (chapter seven). As already mentioned, this historical reconstruction is based on a variety of sources, including the literature written on the subject at the time, which, although ideologically charged, is rightly used as a historical source.

A major contribution of the study is the tracing of the development of the various youth organizations. The study of the history of the emergence and existence of opposition youth organizations, their interactions and controversies, is an undoubted success, and it can be assumed that this will be the most cited part of this research work. However, even here there is some imbalance, for example, a disproportionate amount of space is devoted to the Anarchist Youth Organization (pp. 57-62), which can hardly be described as one of the most influential youth structures of the period, although it undoubtedly has a place in such a study.

The author's approach from the general to the particular is also an advantage of the work presented. In particular, at the beginning she sets out a clear theoretical model, followed by a reconstruction of historical events, in order to trace, through personal memories and memoirs, how this general historical framework affected the fate of individual carriers of this youth resistance – Petar Dertliev, Petar Serbinski, Tsvetana Jermanova, Nikola Daskalov. In the part related to the periodical press, it is worth noting the successful attempt of the candidate to trace through these

personal memoirs not only what was published, but also what was read, i.e. who were the most popular authors and texts of that period. The author's effort to reconstruct the fate of the old youth structures that were active before September 9, 1944, and how they fit into the new youth organizations is also positive.

On the other hand, among the shortcomings of the study are some controversial, or rather ambiguous, terms and phrases used in the dissertation. I am referring, for example, to the sentence on p. 38, where it says: "In foreign policy terms, it is important to note the deepening conflict between the United States and the USSR, which in 1947 necessitated the placing of the European socialist republics under the leadership of Moscow in order to confront the forces of the West, which in turn necessitated a more hasty move toward socialism and put an end to the 'people's democracies.'" The phrase creates ambiguity because it suggests the possibility of an alternative development of the situation, while contemporary studies assume that the fate of Bulgaria and the whole of Eastern Europe was entirely determined by the outcome of the Second World War. The neutral term "victory over the opposition" is used several times in the dissertation, although from the point of view of contemporary historiography and the overall presentation in the dissertation there is no doubt that it was a deliberate and planned destruction of the political opposition, including its youth organizations, as part of the construction of a totalitarian society.

The abstract attached to the dissertation meets the requirements. It correctly and with the necessary self-reflexivity presents the contributions of the dissertation, first of all stating, quite appropriately, that "the study succeeds in achieving a new narrative of youth social activism in the period immediately after September 9, bringing back into scholarly debate one of the priority topics in the historiography of the socialist regime itself".

The author has five publications on the subject of this dissertation, which, as stated, meet and even exceed the minimum requirements. The most important of them is the publication in the Yearbook of the University of Sofia, Faculty of Philosophy, Cultural Studies. I have no personal impressions of the doctoral candidate, but I should note that I have positive impressions of her research efforts and that I have not noticed any signs of plagiarism.

In conclusion, in searching for a balance between the positive and the negative in the presented dissertation, prevails its successes, related to the establishment of a clear theoretical framework and the inclusion in it of a topic little explored in contemporary Bulgarian historiography, which

are the result of conscientious research work. These achievements outweigh the shortcomings related to the structure of the study and the use of some ambiguous terms.

The topicality of the subject studied, as well as the above-mentioned qualities of the work, lead me to support the awarding of the educational and qualification degree of Doctor in the professional field of 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies to the candidate Petya Valkova Angelova.

Sofia, 29 September 2024.

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