

REVIEW

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of a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor", professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences, doctoral program: "Cultural Studies": Youth in Bulgaria: Public debates, social actions, movements and ideologies, political regimes and institutional structures of the late 19th and 20th centuries.

author: Petya Valkova Angelova

topic: Youth Political Resistance (1944-1949)

Research supervisor: Assoc. Dr. Galina Goncharova

1. Presented materials

Doctoral student Petya Valkova Angelova is enrolled as a doctoral student at the "Cultural Studies" department of the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". For the preparation of this review, all documents necessary for the defense have been received, including: dissertation work; abstract; copies of 5 publication materials (articles) on the dissertation, one of which is in print; resume; copy of bachelor's and master's diplomas; a table of compliance with the minimum national requirements, as well as a jury appointment order.

2. Relevance of the topic

The main goal of the dissertation is to investigate the attitudes of "young people in Bulgaria from the second half of the 1940s", as well as the forms of resistance against the "establishing one-party rule" of the Communist Party (p. 5). Such a topic is new for Bulgarian historiography as so far it has only been marked in passing in the studies of Dinho Sharlanov, Lyubomir Ognyanov, Iskra Baeva and Evgenia Kalinova, etc. In them, however, youth resistance goes beyond the main focus of research, leaving a wide white field that the doctoral student tries to fill. If we exclude individual propaganda and highly ideological texts, a product of the regime itself, e.g. the oft-cited monograph of Ill. Dimitrov and N. Genchev (1964), the history of opposition youth still awaits its researcher.

In her presentation, Petya Angelova skilfully draws the reader's attention to a fact neglected in the literature until now: it is the youth who form one of the most active and combative segments of the legal opposition, especially in the face of the Agricultural Youth Union, (pp. 111, 151, 153) , but also among the illegal opposition - mountain gangs, illegal organizations, etc. (pp. 196-197). In this sense, the research opens up a chance to significantly deepen our knowledge about the resistance potential of Bulgarian society in the first years after September 9 and about the forms of opposition typical for this age group (so-called by the author "resistance through the word") . No matter how relative all the figures from this period are, at least for me the information provided by P. Angelova (p. 140) was extremely interesting,

that by March 1945, i.e. at the dawn of the communist regime being built in our country, the pro- and anti-communist sentiments among the organized youth seem to be roughly equal in strength: 73,000 Remsists in high schools against 25,000 Zemsists, about 3,000 members and similar-sized groups of social democrats, democrats, radicals and anarchists. If we add to them the already banned nationalist youth formations - Paterpaisevists, warriors, legionnaires, soldiers, etc., it is very likely that the relative weight of the two ideological wings will reach close levels with a slight preponderance of the Remsists. In confirmation of this observation comes Georgi Dimitrov's report from the beginning of 1946 on the work among students. In it, the "leader and teacher" makes a sharp criticism that the situation in the high schools is serious: "The reaction is advancing, and ours are retreating." While a year ago everyone else "listened, we commanded as we pleased, sometimes rightly, most times wrongly, and now the situation is about to change radically." (pp. 147-148).

3. Scope and structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is 260 pages long and consists of an introduction, eight chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography of 136 titles - monographs, articles and biographical testimonies, as well as 49 archival documents from the Central State Archives and from the Archive of the Commission for Disclosure of Documents and for declaring the affiliation of Bulgarian citizens to the State Security and Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian People's Army (abbreviated Komdos).

4. General analysis of the dissertation work

In the Introduction of the dissertation, the main hypotheses, the sources used and an overview of the upcoming research by chapters and paragraphs are described. It is openly admitted, for example, that Chapter 3 has no contribution value (p. 6), but is important in outlining the context in which the exposition develops. Similar stipulations are made later in the text and regarding the Eighth Chapter (p. 196).

The obligatory theoretical Chapter One for such studies relies on the scheme developed by Hannah Arendt. Meaningfully, it is divided into two parts, discussing the concepts of the political and the resistance, "although the actors of this opposition themselves use traditional rhetoric for the spirit of their time and name their actions above all with the word struggle" (p. 18). It is noticeable that the second key concept for this dissertation - youth - is absent from the First Chapter. It will only be introduced further down in the text (p. 29), but the author will refrain from any clearer definition of it.

In the First Chapter, the subtle author's view and the indicated etymological difference between resistance and resistance should be especially noted, emphasizing the active action of the Bulgarian concept of difference from the English one, where we have greater passivity (p. 16). When delineating the boundaries of the concept of resistance, Petya Angelova adopts a much more inclusive approach, including in it "all acts of political opposition against the new regime, regardless of whether they have a legal or illegal nature" (p. 18)

In Chapter Two, the time limits of the research are outlined. And if there is no ambiguity about the lower limit (September 9th), then 1949 at least seems problematic to me. The given explanations of the author's hypothesis (Georgi Dimitrov's death in the same year) fail to convince the reader why another, much more

logical watershed was not adopted. The statement that "no other Bulgarian communist leader [after Georgi Dimitrov], including Todor Zhivkov, was able to play this role not just of a leader, but of a father, skilfully adapted from the Stalinist model" sounds unconvincing. . 25). The additional explanations given, related to the municipal elections, which were actually held every four years, as well as the trial against Traicho Kostov from the same year 1949, seem even more controversial. Much better options, it seems to me, would be 1947/48 (mentioned , but also rejected by the author as an alternative) or 1953/55/56 with the death of Stalin, the end of collectivization and the rise of Zhivkov. My studies of post-September 9 Bulgarian history lead me to think that the most active and massive resistance was in 1950-1951 and again in 1953-1954, when the mountaineer movement, escapes across the border and open protests against collectivization reached their clearly visible climax.

As already mentioned, it is only here, in the Second Chapter, that the concept of "youth" that is key to the thesis is considered. Surprisingly for the reader, the author states that she "does not consider it necessary to develop a single final and clear definition clearly delineating their boundaries", since "the understanding of it is initially too fluid and difficult to place within narrow limits" (with . 29). However, just a few lines down on the same page, P. Angelova still offers a definition: "All those who are members or of an age allowing membership in the relevant unions, including student ones, will be accepted as youth." (p. 29). On the condition that persons between the ages of 14 and 28 are admitted as members of the SNM/DSNM/DKMS, it remains unclear to me, at least, what the initial claim is due to, that the concept of youth was fluid and could not be placed within "narrow limits" .

Again, here, in the Second Chapter, it might be the place to justify the separation of the youth from the all-Bulgarian resistance against the totalitarian regime being built. As already mentioned, there are many arguments in support of the more active participation of young men and women in the legal and illegal struggle against the OF-government (p. 111, 151, 153, 196-197), but they are messy throughout the text, instead of being meaningfully separated in the introduction or in Chapter Two.

The third chapter "presents the historical context in which the acts of political resistance by the youth discussed in the study take place" (p. 7, Abstract). It is intended as a historical foundation of the narrative, introducing the reader to the events of the period 1944-1949 and the watershed role of the events of 1947 in it. However, it cannot fail to make an impression that the exposition of the Third Chapter lacks reference to literature, a widely applied practice in the previous Chapters One and Two. The section begins with the contentious claim that "the years between 1944 and 1949 are sufficiently well studied by historians" (p. 31), which, if true, would take away much of the strength of the PhD thesis itself.

Starting from the author's definition of youth – "member[s] or of membership age in relevant [youth] unions" – Chapter Four contextualizes the history of various youth and student organizations in the second half of the 1940s. The lives of: the Workers' Youth Union (RMS), the Agricultural Youth Union (ZMS), the Socialist Youth Union, the MS "Zveno" and the unions of young democrats, radicals and anarchists have been traced. Although briefly, the activities of the now-banned Father Paisians, warriors, legionnaires, militiamen, etc., are also presented. For obvious reasons, the history of the RMS has been studied in the most detail of all of them. A historiographical fact that, despite the ideological content of the texts, is not

reflected in the dissertation at all. For example, Tonchev, J. Creation of the RMS and its first struggles against fascism do not find a place in the RMS subsection; A brief history of RMS; Alexandrov, Iv. Influence and popularization of RMS; Alexandrov, Iv. The Working Youth in the Class Struggle (1925-1934); Racheva, A. DKMS in resolutions and decisions, etc. Similar historiographical deficiencies can be found in the remaining subsections. In several places, the memories of St. are used as a source. Bochev, but along with him memoirs were published by a number of other Zemsov figures: Milan Drenchev, Petko Ogoiski, Krum Horozov, Nikola Penchev, h. Atanas Popov, Ivan Todorov. The memories of the young anarchists are also unknown: Slaveyko Pavlov; Ivan Drandov; Hristo Kolev-Golemiya, Georgi Konstantinov and others. (although the interview with Tsv. Germanova is widely cited). Instead, documents are used (almost exclusively) from Komdos' documentary collections "DS and Anarchists" and "DS and Political Parties". However, this leads to repeating some of the false statements in them. Uncritical use is made of the definitions from State Security reports, according to which the National Assembly "Zveno" was an "extreme right-wing political formation" (p. 51). The given number of 71,000 Zemsists in 1946 (p. 46) also seems problematic to me, given that by 1947, according to Dinyu Sharlanov's estimates, all Nikolapetkovists were 79,000 (p. 36).

The fifth chapter sets itself the task of outlining the ideological paradigms for the youth of the second half of the 1940s. Although the chapter is entitled "concepts", it actually deals with only one concept - that of the Communist Party and the "new man" defined by it. I have two criticisms here. First, it would be much more appropriate for the communist paradigm to be confronted with alternative views on the youth of the opposition BZNS and SSD. If none are found, then at least the comparison could be made along the pre/post-1944 lines, comparing the "new man" with the concepts of the right (eg "Young Bulgaria"). And secondly, to me, devoting a separate chapter to the concept of youth seems an "overambitious" undertaking, i.e. one that goes beyond the scope of the dissertation. And that, I recall, is the youth resistance against the totalitarian regime. In such a study, the ideological paradigms for the youth (mandatory in the plural, not as now – in the singular) should be condensed to a subsection in the Second Chapter. In general, the preparatory, contextualizing and theorizing first five chapters seem to me to be disproportionately long - almost half (111 pages of a total of 248 pages of text) - which dilute and defocus the exposition and reduce its contribution rather than serving as merely an explanatory introduction to the main a narrative of resistance.

The last sub-paragraph of Chapter Five: "The New Youth as a Product of Total Dominion" I would recommend merging with "The Birth of the New Youth" as it is too short and in its current place sounds detached from the rest of the text.

The sixth chapter Petya Angelova defines as "an attempt at a superficial [?!] comparative analysis between the two agricultural newspapers - the cational one "Agricultural Banner" and the most widespread opposition newspaper "Narodno Zemedelsko Zname" (p. 107). However, it is inexplicable to me why the main official "Worker's case" is excluded from the analysis here. In over-presenting the concept of the Soviet "new man", to which the entire Fifth Chapter is devoted, one would expect "Workers' Case" to be the main counterpoint to "People's Agrarian Banner". If we exclude this unexplained by the author her

choice, the analysis in the chapter quite precisely delineates the parallel images of the "new youth" (communist), the "Borcheska zemsova youth" in two variants (casionist and oppositional).

The subsection "Students vs. OF notes" seems particularly helpful to me. The phenomenon of the so-called "OF notes" is already relatively familiar in the literature through its reading from the point of view of the administration (Boyadzhieva, 2010) and the victims (Ivanov, 2023). What the dissertation does is to significantly condense the second point of view - that of young men and women discriminated against by political criteria. The testimony gleaned from the opposition press is also valuable, that at the beginning, when in 1946-1947 the party sieve system was still being built throughout the country, 8,250 Bulgarians were accepted as students out of more than 50,000 student candidates (p. 171)

In the Seventh Chapter, partly omitted in the corresponding paragraph of the Aftoreferata, the author goes into the essence of her research. In it, she offers us a new, completely non-ideological reading of the events surrounding the creation of the SNM/DSNM/DKMS, for the first time since the essentially propaganda monograph of Il. Dimitrov and N. Genchev. (1964). Special mention should be made of the last section of the chapter, in which the youth and student opposition press is studied in detail (the newspapers "Mladezhko Zedelsko Zname", "Sewer", "Socialist Tribune" and "Worker's Thought". The content of the few and located in too poor state of youth newspapers "categorically confirms the daring determination and willingness to sacrifice the opposition youth to fight for the preservation of their freedom" (Abstract, p. 11).

If the focus of Chapter Seven is the legal resistance of the youth, the final Chapter Eight shifts the spotlight to the illegal struggle. Here, the narrative follows almost entirely the well-known studies of Dinho Sharlanov (2009) and Rajchevski and Kolarova (2022) as, according to the author's frank admission, "the dissertation does not contribute to the already studied phenomenon of mountaineers" (p. 196). Somewhat mechanically, a large part of the mountain gangs and illegal groups known to science have been inventoried, without, however, showing the youth participation in them everywhere. In general, if we trust Marijan Gjaurski and Konstantin Kasabov (2012), and not the authors of the collective work Bulgaria Under Communism (2019), as P. Angelova inaccurately claims, the age profile of the Gorani is not youthful at all. On the contrary, the documents preserved in the Komdos archive convincingly show that the mountain bands consisted mainly of middle-aged people. This fact is key to the construction of Chapter Eight and, in my view, is clumsily sidestepped by speaking of the "wide age range" of the armed resistance, the "active, radical part" of which was, however, "made up mostly of youth" (with . 197).

Along with the criticisms, the chapter deserves several positive evaluations, related first of all to the unknown, at least to me, mass sentiments in support of Traicho Kostov among the Turks and the peasants (p. 234, 236-237). to believe that Kostov initially had so many admirers..., [and] the described reactions rather follow the principle "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" and show once again the extremely critical attitude and above all mistrust of the authorities " (p. 238). In the second place, the final subparagraph of Chapter Eight is very strong, in which the cases of expressing disagreement through the word are described. Through them, the author makes "his contribution to the formation of a more detailed idea of the appearance of youth resistance, presenting the diversity and "varieties" of its repertoire" (p. 243).

The conclusion summarizes the most important observations from the preceding chapters. One of the main conclusions of the study is that the struggle for basic values - freedom of speech, of the press, of meetings - unites the opposition youth and largely erases its ideological specifics (p. 240). He, for his part, refers to the observation already stated in the introduction about the special attractiveness of the ZMS, both for the youth who are not organized in other unions, and for those who participated in already banned organizations such as "Father Paisii", "Ratnik", etc. The common enemy in the face of the BRP(k), he melted the ideological differences between them and formed a united front against the regime (p. 39-40, see also p. 158). For me personally, taken together these two centripetal lines clearly testify to the high consolidation potential of the non-communist opposition. An important fact that should be more clearly emphasized in the text.

5. Degree of knowledge of the state of the problem

A careful reading of the dissertation shows that the author knows a great deal of the literature on the subject. The bibliography at the end of the text contains 136 titles - monographs, articles and biographical testimonies, as well as 49 archival documents from the CDA and Komdos. The use of some unpublished interviews from the archive of the Institute for the Study of the Recent Past makes a good impression. However, some omissions of titles have been noted above, the inclusion of which would only enrich and thicken the narrative.

6. General analysis of the dissertation work

One of the main impressions left by doctoral studies is the unevenness of its construction. There is a lack of good balance between (1) the place given in the text to the communist concept of youth and (2) the topic of the study - youth resistance against the post-9/9 regime. As I have already had occasion to point out, the preparatory, contextualizing, and theorizing first five chapters seem to me disproportionately long, blurring and defocusing the exposition rather than serving as an explanatory entry into the main narrative of youth resistance. Too much of this first part of the dissertation, moreover, is devoted not to the resistance declared as the main subject of the study, but to the ruling Communist Party, its youth proxies, ideological concepts and youth policies. In addition, the upper chronological limit of 1949, instead of the much more convincing 1953 (or 1955/6), remains controversial.

These and other compositional problems could be attributed to the lack of sufficient experience and certain gaps in directing the graduate. However, they should not belittle the enormous investigative and analytical work that Petya Angelova has done. The important conclusions about the very active role of the youth in the anti-communist resistance and about the consolidation of the various ideological and political currents among the youth are an indisputable contribution of the work, which could subsequently be further developed.

7. Contributory moments of the dissertation work

In the relevant section of the Abstract, Petya Angelova lists six of her contributions. Among them are: "the achievement of a new narrative of youth social activism"; "fitting into the new trends in the scientific studies of the recent past"; "tracing the paths leading to the construction of the Komsomol"; "involving

unresearched materials into scientific circulation", etc. The dissertation is an original study and there is no evidence of plagiarism in it.

8. Evaluation of the abstract and publications on the dissertation

The abstract is prepared accurately, meets the regulatory requirements and correctly presents the results and content of the dissertation work. The publications cover key sections of the dissertation and also meet regulatory requirements.

8. Conclusion

Having familiarized myself with the dissertation work presented in the procedure and accompanying documents and based on the analysis of their significance and the scientific and scientific-applied contributions contained in them, despite my many recommendations, criticisms and remarks, I confirm that the presented dissertation work "Youth Political Resistance (1944-1949)", as well as the quality and originality of the results and achievements presented in it, meet the requirements of the ZRASRB, the Regulations for its application and the relevant Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions in SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for the candidate's acquisition of the scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences. In particular, the candidate satisfies the minimum national requirements in the professional direction and no plagiarism has been found in the scientific works submitted for the competition. Based on the above, I recommend the scientific jury to award Petya Angelova the scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences.

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