

OPINION

On the dissertation of Petya Valkova Angelova
“Youth Political Resistance (1944-1949)”,
by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gergana Mirolyubova Popova

Petya Angelova's dissertation is 258 pages long and consists of an introduction, eight chapters, a conclusion and a final section that includes research, biographical sources and archival units with a total number of 185 titles, of which 168 are in Bulgarian, 14 in English language, one in Spanish and 4 online sources. The abstract and publications fully correspond to the educational and scientific criteria for the degree "Doctor". The Introduction presents the working hypotheses of the work, its object and subject, tasks, method and sources. The dissertation sets itself the ambitious task of filling a certain theoretical void in the studies of the communist past, namely, the study of youth political resistance in the first years after September 9. In the thematization of this problem, Petya Valkova formulates three starting hypotheses: that in the context of the socio-political processes of the 20th century, the Bulgarian youth will have a key role in the acts of opposition against the new government; that her forms of resistance in the face of intensifying repression are characterized by particular audacity; that despite the political disintegration of various youth organizations until September 9, in their acts of resistance, the youth entered relatively united in a sometimes manifest, sometimes unrecognized cooperation against the power of the Communist Party. In order to prove the validity of the above hypotheses, the doctoral student also conceptualized her sources: articles in the opposition press from the researched period, archival materials and biographical narratives. The first chapter is devoted to the concepts of political and resistance central to the thesis. In clarifying the first concept, the study adheres to the views of Hannah Arendt, developed by her in relation to the analyzes of totalitarianism and, accordingly, to her understanding of the "multiplicity" of individuals as a condition of the political, that is, of that human activity thanks to which political agents interact and thus constitute and change the world. In such a perspective, the striving of totalitarian regimes to unify individuals is thought of as a collapse of the political, and in turn, attempts to preserve plurality are acts of political resistance. In this sense, the conceptualization of the term political through the lens of Arendt provides the necessary theoretical platform of the dissertation, on the basis of which the oppositions of the Bulgarian youth against the actions of

the authorities, aimed at destroying their ideological and political diversity, can be interpreted as political resistance. In the next chapter, the exposition focuses on defining the subject of the dissertation - on specifying both the concept of "youth" and the time frames of the research. Here it is appropriate to note the justified shift of the upper limit of the study from 1948, which is usually the year with which most works dedicated to the first years of the socialist past in Bulgaria end, to 1949. This year, as the doctoral student points out, is important for the Bulgarian youth in several aspects: on the one hand, the death of Georgi Dimitrov, with whose name the socialist youth is inextricably linked, marks the end of the constitution of the unified youth union in Bulgaria. On the other hand, the trial against Traicho Kostov generated new incentives and specific forms of resistance among the youth opposed to the communist power. Another achievement of this part of the dissertation is the comparison of the attitudes of the youth in Bulgaria, their representations and self-perceptions with the attempts at ideological mobilization of the youth and its propaganda uses, characteristic of different political regimes of the last century. Chapter three offers a brief historical overview of events in the study period. The doctoral student argues that this period is divided into two sub-periods, which to a certain extent correspond to the typology of two forms of resistance: legal and illegal. The fourth chapter, in turn, presents a historical picture of the main youth organizations, divided into two groups. The first group that Petya Angelova focuses on covers the organizations of the political parties forming the Patriotic Front. In the second, the Union of Young Radicals, the Democratic Youth Union, as well as the youth from banned after September 9 such as fascist organizations and the youth anarchists are included. The main emphasis is placed on the last two and the specificity of the modes of resistance that their members deploy.

The fifth chapter occupies a central place in the dissertation, insofar as it translates Hannah Arendt's views on the destruction of multiplicity and the political stake of its preservation in the context of communist social engineering aimed at creating a new human species. The doctoral student analyzes the communist vision of the "new man" and its practical implementation, emphasizing the attention of the Soviet, and later the Bulgarian, ideologues towards the youth - attention, understood in the double sense of care and suspicion. Mastering the youth, for obvious reasons, is also a major factor in building the new man, and in this ideal type of communism, as well shown by the analyzes of the dissertation, the idea of the unified individual, whose main quality is devotion to the party, is embedded. In a similar aspect, the

aspirations of young people to preserve their diversity, both politically and personally, are important forms of resistance against the communist regime.

The sixth chapter is focused on one of the main sources of the dissertation - the periodicals of the relevant period. This part represents a precise and large-scale study of the materials in the press that present the attitudes of the representatives of the opposition organizations. The doctoral student compares the conflicting narratives of the cational and oppositional press, in which two opposing visions of the youth crystallize, respectively providing different perspectives for evaluating their views, goals and actions, including their reactions against the people's power.

In addition, the review of the content of the few youth opposition newspapers leads Petya Angelova to the conclusion about the boldness in the determination of the opposition youth to fight for the preservation of their freedom, which confirms one of the starting hypotheses of the research. The ban of the opposition periodical, in turn, was read by the doctoral student as a purposeful effort by the authorities to remove the obstacles to the unification of the youth through their institutional organization into a single organization.

The next chapter, dedicated to the creation of this organization, has a significant contribution character, inasmuch as in it the doctoral student describes the hitherto unexplored historical processes that led to the formation of the Komsomol in Bulgaria. The Unified Youth Organization, the Unified Youth All-Student Union, the All-Student People's Union, and the People's Youth Union have been examined successively. A special emphasis is placed on the student organizations created for the opposition parties and their actions against the attempts to build a unified youth organization in the context of the basic theoretical intuition about the preservation of plurality as a condition of the political.

Chapter eight thematizes the illegal resistance after the victory over the opposition. The chapter is mainly focused on the organized armed resistance of the illegal organizations that have arisen in various places in the country, including the “goryani” movement. The research on the “goryani” groups that the doctoral student uses, and the biographical narratives of the realized or unrealized participation in the illegal armed resistance support the basic hypotheses about the importance of youth participation in the resistance against the communist power.

The Conclusion summarizes the main theses and conclusions of the research.

Petya Angelova has five publications on the subject, which are quite enough to award the degree of "doctor". The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation and fully complies with the required standards.. The contributions the PhD student lists are real. The remark I can make about the dissertation is about a certain imbalance in the volume of chapters.

In summary, Petya Angelova's dissertation is a serious and original study that contributes to the illumination of little-known phenomena from the socialist past. The conscientious handling of sources can be noted as a significant achievement of the dissertation: the intersection of data from biographical narratives, archival sources and press materials allows a reliable reconstruction of the attitudes and acts of the youth of the researched period. In addition, the doctoral student is credited with subordinating the huge corpus of historical sources to an extremely important theoretical idea – the preservation of the diversity of individuals as a condition of political life. Everything listed so far gives me reason to warmly support the awarding of Petya Angelov the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction - 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences

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Associate Professor Dr. Gergana Popova