

GENDER AND TRANSITION, 1938 - 1958

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Part I Women in Social, Economic and Cultural Life (1938 - 1958)

Changes in the Economic and Social Status of Women in Bulgaria, 1938 – 1958

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The period 1938 – 1958 is extremely interesting for Bulgaria's development and very indicative for the changes in the economic and social status of women in the country. Within this very short period from history point of view three very important and contradictory, even turning-point sub-periods chronologically happen: *first*, the late 1930s, which are relatively favourable years related to the economic progress of the country; *second*, the first half of the 1940s, which are the Second World War time, and *third*, the after-war years up to 1958 when the new political and economic system emerges, named state socialism with a centrally planned economy. Additional interest provokes the possibility to make some parallels with the recently finished 20-year transition to a market type economy in Bulgaria. Doers of all these changes are both men and women. But what is going on with the status of women?

The purpose of the paper is: given available relevant statistical data to present and analyze the main changes in the economic and social status of women in Bulgaria in the context of the whole country's development during the period 1938-1958. The idea about the interdependence between the economic and social spheres is presupposed.

On the basis of the presented data important changes of the economic and social status of women are outlined, namely:

- Until the end of the Second World War rural population in Bulgaria represent over 80% of the total population. The rural woman status is predetermined by the backward agriculture, low income and low level of material and spiritual culture.
- The political and social changes after the Second World War are aimed at modernizing the economy and building industrial society. One of the most drastic changes is the mass entry of women in paid labour, which is related to enhancing education and obtaining professional skills.

- Mass migration of rural people to the towns (the so-called urbanization) changes the lifestyle of the Bulgarian ex-rural families. Moving to the towns women change not only their economic and social status but also their attitude towards reproductive behaviour. As a whole the changes leads to positive changes in the gender equality.

Transition and Family Legislation in Bulgaria (1930s–1950s)

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The article looks into the transformations of Bulgarian family legislation in the period before and after 9th September 1944 – the date traditionally marked as the watershed between capitalism and socialism in modern Bulgarian history. It follows the adoption and implementations of various laws regarding children and the family against the background of Bulgaria's peculiar demographic model – the latter compressing a transition from high, traditional birth rates to twice lower birth numbers within an extraordinary short of period, accompanied by high infant mortality rates and almost universal nuptiality.

The paper examines the logic of the pre- and post-1944 legislation against the radical political and socio-economic shift in the Bulgarian society, by focusing on its continuities and changes in the socialist past. Within this framework, the analysis establishes a clear legal transition from a pronatalist model imbued with much social concern about the population's welfare before 1944, to a “purely” pronatalist model in the immediate 1944 aftermath dominated by political requirements for a rapid increase in the population. Both models – each in its own way – served the interests of the state. However, if the pre-1994 legislation lived up to the requirements of a war-stricken nation, the post-1944 legislation came closer to a mobilizing vehicle for the construction of a new, ideological order. Against this background, the gender implications of the legislation changed, too. It quickly evolving from a gender-neutral form into a strongly politicized body of laws, highly focused on women. While granting women numerous privileges, they were addressed exclusively in their reproduction and labour capacities meant to provide more citizens and an additional labour force for the socialist state.

Women in Bulgarian Prize System (1930-1950s)

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The paper examines unexplored issue in Bulgarian historiography - the award of the Bulgarian women with government awards (orders, decorations, and medals) during the 20th century. Emphasis is put on the period of political and social transition (1930-1950s). The main purposes of this paper are to examine the process of inclusion of Bulgarian women in reputational elites and factors that affect this process (political framework, social background, ethnic, religious and political affiliation); and to study whether (or not) women that had received national awards obtaining power. The text also seeks the place of women's educated elites in national reputational elites. The paper is based on historical, statistical and prosopographical analysis of mostly unknown archival sources, of periodicals, and of memoirs.

**Female Municipality Social Advisors Between Charity and Social Control
in the End of the 30es – Beginning of 40es of 20th century**

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In the time 1910 – 1939 women created a large space for various activities for social support which became legitimate places of speaking about social problems. In the 30-es this activities existed parallel to each other. Volunteers and professionals: Samaritan women, visiting nurses, teacher – advisors, municipality social advisors made the social assistance a common practice. This contributed to an enlargement of the public role of women in Bulgaria in the both urban and rural space. As a female work social work was based on the social maternity ideological views demanding from professional and voluntary social workers devotion to their work, empathy and specific communicative skills. Women of a large scale of social and educational background took part in these activities crossing regularly class and spatial borders. The female social work became a common practice, which established relationships where power and trust were negotiated.

The article is based on cases of social support documented in Sofia Municipality social department archives which present the statements of the female social advisors and their attitude to the poor citizens of Sofia outskirts.

Women Agronomists and Teachers in Rural Household in the “Model Village” Program (1937 – 1944)

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After World War I the reformatory state policy concerning the rural population, that was predominant in Bulgaria at that time, considerably enlarged its scope. In 1920s the movement for economic and cultural rise of the village turned into a social trend and public ideology, and in the 1930s the improvement of the conditions of life in the village became the leading motif of the movement. Gradually some important problems were brought forward: those were problems dealing with the rural areas living standards, the educational and cultural sophistication of the peasants, the turning of the farm labor into a professional occupation, etc.

In the beginning of 1937, as a part of the highly popular movement for economic and cultural rise of the village the ‘Model Village’ project was launched in 11 communes. Within less than five years the program had already covered more than 110 rural communes on the territory of the whole country, and until the beginning of 1944, it was at its height. Together with the change of the political regime in the fall of 1944, the enthusiasm about the whole Modelvillage idea started to fade away until it finally died out around 1948.

The key objective of the program emphasized the need of the village inhabitants (especially the young people) to adopt the then modern hygienic habits and the rules of eating healthy, and to recognize the farm work as a professional activity. The set of measures that would ensure a better atmosphere not only in one’s home, but also in the whole village, include meliorating the infrastructure, providing for sewers and bettering the water-supply, exploring the possibilities for at least partial electrification, building public health centers as well as health consultative stations, bakeries, kindergartens, playgrounds and summer resorts. There were made provisions also for the establishment of a practice-orientated educational system in the villages.

Suitable for the village boys and girls was seen in the enlargement of the network including so-called additional farming schools. At those schools young graduates from junior high school, underwent a two-year course of training and education. They were later supposed to be dealing with agricultural production and household activities. About 80 000 graduates

from those additional farming schools became the most important experts who were expected to carry out the 'Model Village' project.

Tradition and Innovation in the Life of Rhodope in Transition (1938-1958)

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This work is dedicated to the changes and transformations in everyday life and culture of the woman from Rhodope region in a period of changing complex processes of political, ideological and cultural character. Although the Rhodope region to be included within the free Bulgarian state in 1912, the course of its development followed, albeit more slowly and those specific trends that relate to the entire Bulgarian national community. They are marked by strengthening the role and importance of legitimate government institutions with new functions in the free state work for Bulgarian ethno-cultural and national development. Compared to the general socio-political and societal changes strengthen processes with varying degrees of intensity, consistency, social and ethnic range of varying lengths in their development, but with a common focus for all - revival and consolidation of the Bulgarian nation. Regulated relations between church and state and the increased role of secular institutions overcome the cultural backwardness of the Bulgarian ethnic territories liberated in Bulgaria, increase their social activity away it from it to the moderating influence religious tradition, even in the circle of her family. The process is not unique for all social strata female population, women of the town and village women from the Rhodope region. Tradition and innovation in the life of Rhodope have reason to hold its specificity arising from its ethnic and religious affiliation as a Bulgarian Christian and Muslim Bulgarian, Turkish and Gypsy. And independently or in parallel with the government policy of inclusion in the social system of relationships, their ethnic and religious diversity, piety or not to education and occupation are important prerequisites for their place in the Bulgarian national community.

The women in the concentration camps:

About the collective memory of one generation

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Times of radical historical and political changes leave a brighter traces in the collective memories than those passed quietly in the routine of everyday life. The periods of the WWII and the imposition of the new political regime after it's end are such a turning time in the Bulgarian history and in collective memories. The article deals with memories about the period of two groups of women who were not in the focus of the research interest until now, but who deserve special attention from the perspective of the history of memory of the Bulgarian society. These two groups of women belong to one and the same generation - they have survived the time of war and the first years after it in their young age. They were victims of two political regimes – the first one, because of their leftist political views were in so called “concentration camps” (1941-1943); the second – members of the oppositional Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union - were in work camps after September 1944. The last communist labour camp was closed in 1962.

The article explores how the camp's past is remembered, narrated, integrated in the personal and collective identity of the witnesses, how it is commemorated, what is it's relation to the group's memory and it's dynamic.

The methodological issues of the epistemological value of the category “generation” in the study of memory, of the relationship “generation/generational unit – collective memory” in the context of the Bulgarian political transition after 1944, the importance of the category “gender” in constructing of generational memory and identity are also discussed.

**The Cadres' Dossier of a Female Archivist in the Studio for
Chronics and Documental Films(June 1949 – May 1951)**

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The dossiers of cadres as a rule were created in the structures of “Personnel” and were developed for all employees. In the cases of leaving a job and applying for another job the cadres' dossier was forwarded to the new “Personnel”. The dossier consisted of a personal blank, autobiography, three recommendations, records from mass and party organizations, a proposal to the chief of “Personnel” and an office record. The dossiers were

kept to five years after person got pensioned. After that period an expertise was carried out for evaluating the dossier according to the common in the archive practice criteria to decide should the dossier been transferred to the state archives for permanent store to be used for historical research. In this way in the archive fund of the Bulgarian Cinematography were kept the cadres' dossiers of employees and artists. They were distributed in three big groups: "The cadres' dossiers of reliable persons" (7 archive unities), "The cadres' dossiers of the ones expelled from the Communist Party" (1 archive unit), "The cadres' dossiers with records for politically unreliable employees and artists" (7 archive unities).

Among the cadres' dossiers with records for politically unreliable employees and artists of the Bulgarian Cinematography the dossier of Maria K, the head of the archive and film store to the Studio of Chronics and Documental Films, was kept. It consists of 14 documents – an autobiography, a compulsory office record, three orders (two for penalties and one for a job dismissal) and nine personal data and records. Those documents testify for a personal drama, for blackmailing and social stigmatization of a woman of 33 years convicted of "stormy debauchery" "Bohemian life", "lesbian connections with her friends", financial misuse, alcoholism and for that reasons got fired from her job a year and a half after the first "signal" against her was deposited in the Office of Cadres of the Cinematography.

Women in Labour Collective Agriculture Farms or how Gender Equality Policy in Bulgarian Villages is Realized

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The purpose of this article is to show how the policy of equality between men and women in the cooperatives is promoted and perceived. The research is based on the example of two cooperatives in Brestovitsa, Plovdiv region, and in Mezdreya, Montana region, and on the content analysis of cooperative archive documents which testify about the social and power relations within them. The atmosphere and the context in the villages are presented in a comparative perspective between the two villages, and the archive data sources are supplemented with biographical interviews. The article focuses on the public debate on providing equal gender rights in the cooperative farms and on some aspects of the changing

attitudes towards women that occur in the first years of cooperation. It aims to show to what extent the ideal of gender equality is accomplished in the context of cooperative farms.

**Expansion of the “Private Space” in the Public Sphere
(Magazine “Woman Today” 1954 – 1958)**

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This article is a modest attempt to trace the development of the relations within the family and in particular the relationship between husband and wife. Relationship which are strictly dominated by the patriarchal tradition, where the husband is the leading figure in the family and the wife and children are obliged to obey his orders. Strictly patriarchal family relationships began to change after the liberation. This process is even more intensified after the Communist Party comes to power and starts proclaiming equality between men and women and liberation of the woman from man's yoke. The author tries to see how “Woman today” magazine discusses the relations between spouses, the division of the roles and responsibilities. Several headings dealing with family's private space and the relations within the family have been analyzed. In these headings women-readers share their experience and problems with their husbands and ask the editors for help and advice. The analysis of these headings in letters is an attempt to create a temporary picture of the reality as it is, reflecting the dynamics of matrimonial relations, which develop under the influence both of the official policy and the tradition.

Part II Organization of Women and Women in Organizations

About the Tutelary Representation of Women in Bulgaria 1944 – 1958

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The article deals with the establishment, tasks, functions and subordination of the agencies and organizations that represented women and at the same time guarded them in accordance with the goals of the Communist government to control society, to get the so

necessary legitimacy and also to prepare women for their new social roles as active participants in public and production life. These are specialized organizations as the Bulgarian National Women's Union (BNWU) 1944-1950 and the Democratic Bulgarian Women's Committee (DBWC) (1950-1958) and departments of the Central Committee of Bulgarian Communist Party and of the National Committee (later National Council) of the Fatherland Front (FF), women's commissions of the General Workers' Professional Union (later Bulgarian Professional Union), lower organizations of the party and committees of FF.

The picture of the interaction between all these organizations shows that after the BNWU experiment (1944 – 1950), connected with realization of “people's democracy”, the old Communist tradition for representing women began to re-reproduce. The women's organization was abolished and DBWC, existing between 1950-1958, had no structures of its own but was dependant on other public organizations and political structures. Through women's commissions in these structures (not counting the youth's ones) women, especially in the countryside and from the minorities, got their perfunctory but obligatory “tutelary” representation.

However, it was predominantly aimed at incorporating politically indifferent women to the tasks of power. These women were a majority at that time – peasants, women from the minorities, town housewives. Thus it is fully justifiable to define such women's representation as guardianship. It indisputably helped women adopt their new social roles as the regime needed it – publicly active persons in the public production who had left home. Special attention was paid to the international representation of Bulgarian women in the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) The system of structures mediating between women and authority, defining politics towards them was established in the period 1944-1958 and was rather complicated. This feature made women's structures ineffective in the period 1950-1958. They failed to get support for land cooperation among peasants and women from the minorities, neither were they able to stop the decline of woman activity and representation in the existing political and state structures.

**Women's Societies during the Second Half of the 1940s –
a Male Initiative for a Female Emancipation**

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The article deals with the mechanisms of founding female societies immediately after the communist take over of 9th of September 1944 as form of misusing women for political purposes promoted as a straggle for women's rights. The activities of several societies from South-West Bulgaria have been considered in details. The mechanisms of agitation and propaganda aimed at women and the involvement of women in the first political and social events (elections, referendum for a republic) especially important for the Communist party to hold the total power in Bulgaria have been analyzed.

The marginalization of women in the “Unions of the fighters against fascism” in the 1940s-1950s – the old patriarchy in a new antifascist rhetoric

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The aim of the research is to follow how the political establishments after the 09.09 1944 led to the rewriting of the (auto)biographies of the members of the “Unions of the fighters against fascism” which turned them into male power networks of Communist Party patrons and their loyal clients. Highly involved in the antifascist struggle women were marginalized by being misrepresented in the Unions or being appointed, if at all, to peripheral “social motherhood” jobs. The author uses the written autobiographies and biographical questionnaires – declarations of men and women applying for membership in the Unions and the statistical analysis of the social background and the pointed types of “contributions to the antifascist fight” of the members of the Unions.

Women's movement in the town of Rouse in transition (1939-1950s)

Reneta Roshkeva, The Rouse Regional Historical Museum

This contribution specifically focuses on the ideology and actions of one of the oldest women's organizations in Bulgaria during the transitional period after 1944 when the communists took the political power in the country. The author discusses the strategies used by the new rulers in order to change the management, the character and the orientation of this organization turning it into a voiceless marionette of the new regime.

The Women in Red: The Committee of the Movement of Bulgarian Women and the Development of Progressive Women's Movements in Africa and Asia, 1980-1985

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The paper is focused on the period of the Cold War which was an important backdrop for the development of the international women's movement between 1970 and 1990, with East and West using women's issues to compete for influence among the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Superpower rivalry influenced gender politics on a global scale, and there is no doubt that Bulgaria was a key player organizing the mass women's organizations of the socialist bloc to more effectively support the aspirations of women's movements from the developing world.

Part III Interpretations

Enlarging the labour field for women: reproduction and career fulfillment

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This entry explores the important changes for Bulgarian women immediately before, during and after the Second World War taking place in society and mostly in labour relations. The changes were radical not only for women but also for the society. Aside their traditional tasks related to reproduction, caring responsibilities and unpaid domestic farm work, they also entered the labour market, joined in large numbers the paid industrial and agricultural labour, education and also – although in a lesser degree, - governance and political life.

Transformations in labour were radical: from low-qualified agricultural work to industrial labour that required education and vocational skills, development and maintenance of qualification levels; active involvement of women and therefore, increase in their economic independence and opportunities for growth and development.

Women's massive inclusion in paid labour (agricultural and industrial) in those decades led to development of childcare facilities and mainly full-day kindergartens in cities, towns and villages, creating new workplaces mostly for women.

Quite rapidly, men and women managed to share paid labour. Men accepted that fact but a change in household labour did not follow. Unpaid household labour remained largely for women and transformations there were very slow and invisible. In that manner, women paid quite a high price for the chance for development, participation in paid labour, access to education and professional career. The developing policies for equal rights, women's growth and development, emancipation, equal opportunities and practices for changing, reconciling, complementing, optimizing the conciliation of tasks and prolonging women's work life that started in the 1970s and continued as part of EU policies for reconciliation of professional and private life still do not give significant results.

The Overcoming of the Gender During the First Decade after 9th of September 1944 – the Utopic Culmination of the Marxist Feminism

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The paper analyses the changes in the social status of the Bulgarian woman during the first decade after 9th of September 1944. These changes cause radical transformations in her behavior as well as in her public representations. In the first place the research traces out the genealogy of the socialistic emancipation presenting in brief Marx's and Engels's views on the woman question and these views' further interpretation in the Soviet Union. Then the emancipation of the Bulgarian woman is analyzed as an essential part of the communist project. One of the main goals of this project is not only to reduce the elaborate taxonomy of various kind of women – the proletarian, the intellectual, the lady, the actress, the coquette, the courtesan, the housekeeper, the countrywoman - to the married hard-working woman but to equalize and even to merge the figure of the woman with the man in an universal subject of labour that gradually loses the distinguishing features of the sex. In this context the paper focuses on the elevated hierarchical position of the industrial woman, deprived of the outward signs of her femininity and involved in some production branches which are hardly compatible with her physiological characteristics and anatomical construction.

Socialist Masculinities and Socialist Femininities: Heroes and Simulations

Ralitsa Muharska, lecturer

This text is an attempt to look at some familiar and therefore seemingly obvious aspects of the socialist experience from a new perspective. It looks at the images of socialist labour heroes through the lens of masculinity / femininity, the relationships between them, and the way the gender regime of socialism makes use of much older systems of mindsets and stereotypes for the purposes of making the ideological indoctrination of the population more efficient.

The text makes use of a combination of theoretical approaches in the analysis: those associated with masculinity and simulation / simulacra. Masculinity is not only employed as an analytical tool, from a discursive perspective, but is also considered as a set of identity-forming stereotypes, experiences and ways of thinking.

Discourses of heroism and masculinity, of heroism and femininity and the wider context of official / public discourses of socialism are considered from the perspective of simulation – which transpires in the process of analysis as one of socialism's most important cultural practices.

"State feminism" of state socialism: contradictio in terminis?!

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The text discusses some aspects of the recent debates among East European feminists and gender researchers dealing with the character of the "women-friendly" actions of the state socialist countries. The author insists that a lot of new comparative historical research should be done in order to be able to properly answer this question.