

*Research*

BORDERS AND BORDER ZONES: DIFFERENCES AND EQUALITIES

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## **MODERNIZATION AND EMANCIPATION: MASCULINE WOMEN IN THE COMMUNIST WORLD (BULGARIAN CASE 1944 – 1956)**

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**Abstract.** This paper is an attempt to show the culturally constructed boundary between women and men and how socialism blurs these boundaries. Women are officially recognized as equal citizens, including creators of the socialist state par with men. How it is possible this combination of male-female traits? How women think and feel about themselves during this period? These are just some of the questions that I try to give an answer.

*Keywords:* boundaries, fashion, gender, communism

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After the adoption of the Dimitrov Constitution of 1947, Bulgarian women received equitable rights with men. This includes access to male jobs, which is part of the emancipation in its socialist version. Women enter in

branches of light and heavy industry. Newspapers, magazines, cinema and literature become active participants in building image of the new women – „masculine women”. “With Dimitrov’s Constitution in front of the Bulgarian woman were opened endless possibilities and bright prospects. It is a full-blooded, highly valued and respectable citizen of our Republic”<sup>1)</sup> - writes Tso-la Dragoycheva, one of the female leaders in the communist world of Bulgaria,<sup>2)</sup> eight years after September 9, 1944. Finally and forever it is believed that the rights of the Bulgarian woman, participant in the new socialist life had already been established<sup>3)</sup> through the adopted on December 4, 1947 Dimitrov’s Constitution, modeled on the Soviet one. Before September 9 women had partial rights,<sup>4)</sup> then after this date they received full equality initially with Decree-Law of 16 October 1944<sup>5)</sup> and endorsed by the Constitution, as it is written that "this equality is realized as the woman is provided, along with the man right to work – for equal work, equal pay, the right to leisure, to social security, pension and education". In the following decades, women have the "freedom" to develop themselves among given equal rights to be as men at least in labor, as a result of this women, at least some of them, who the Communist Party promotes, act in a way irrelevant for many women (Марчева, 2001).

Emancipation of women is part of the Bulgarian modernization of Soviet-style socialism, having its roots and history in the years before 1944. Socialist ideas entered in Bulgaria in early 80s and 90s of the XIX century when the Bulgarian Socialist raised the idea of "women's liberation".<sup>6)</sup> After September 9, 1944 with the equalization of political and civil rights for both sexes launching the process of industrialization and many Bulgarian women entered the sphere of production.

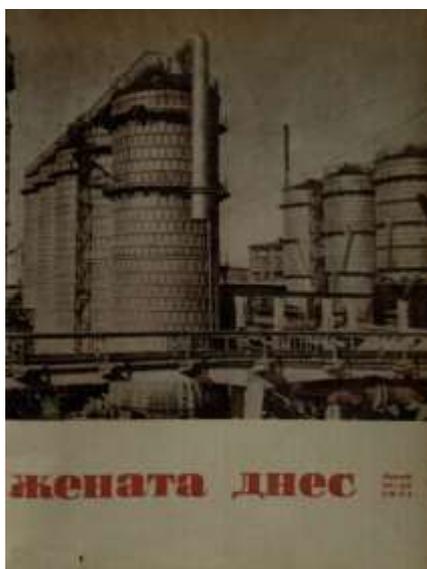
The chosen period overlaps nearly a decade – as low limit is selected 1944 and as a top one is indicated 1956. The focus falls on the magazine „Zhenata dnes” ("The Woman Today")<sup>7)</sup> as the only official women's maga-

zine in the period to 1956 and organ of the Bulgarian People's Women's Union and the Committee of democratic Bulgarian women. The purpose of this article is to examine issues related to changes concerning the new image of the woman and the mechanisms for her construction and emancipation understood not only as a political practice, but also as social positions and attitudes are formed for them in women. The regime itself supports the policy of emancipation as an important to communist modernization (Марчева, 2013). Specific objects of this study are the "new people" and especially the "new woman". Through comparative analysis attempts to reconstruct the image of "masculine woman" to see what positions and roles changed. Important to acquire a more complete picture is discursive analysis - language as socially constructed, but constructed sociality in press media and cinema.

The years after September, 9<sup>th</sup> are saturated with events - meeting guerrillas, accelerated building, cooperation of land, elections and congresses of the Communist Party, manifestations and brigades movement. All sealed by photojournalists on the pages of newspapers and magazines. In "building socialism" active part takes the woman - she is upstanding to the new factories, imposing enterprises or impressive architectural ensembles (Figs. 1– 3). Changes can be felt in the attitude of the new government to women. They are the new social part of the people involved in this process - "women are a huge force"<sup>8)</sup> (Благоев & Димитров, 1979). Socialists valued the role of the "second sex" as yet untapped array part of the conceptual framework corresponding to the official discourse which idealizes them as a progressive force. Their actions conform to social change and modernization efforts of the state economic objectives.<sup>8)</sup>

Along with the following soviet modernization in Bulgaria woman's emancipation is carried as an essential element of the theory and practice of socialism characteristic of "labor society" (Марчева, 2001, p. 318). Women assimilated male professions - experienced spinners, young agronomists,

raised tractor drivers, responsible combine-operators or steel workers - they appear on magazine's cover deserved (Figs. 4-6). They are the muse of poetry to Bulgarian poets<sup>9)</sup> The magazine is a medium of state's ideology - a true exponent and organizer of the progressive women's movement. Print media begin to serve newly identified concepts. But this means that the individual approach is not tolerated and even the chief editor of magazine "The Women Today" does not have the right to impose her own view.<sup>10)</sup>



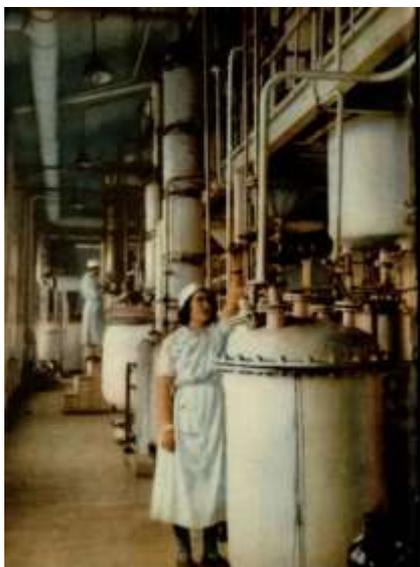
**Fig. 1.** Zhenata dnes, 1951, No.11-12, cover



**Fig. 2.** Zhenata dnes, 1951, No.2, cover

Besides photographic images in magazines particularly relevant stand and screen ones. Especially in the Soviet Union, but not less in Bulgaria stands out image of the woman that embodies the beauty of ordinary people. Therefore, in cinema halls and through weekly newsreel films the regime makes available and live images which it seeks to impose: showing women in their new labor role on the field on construction or in factories. Thus overall is built the image of woman as worker, the image of "masculine girl". The Communist Party is closer to the people and through movies makes acceptable

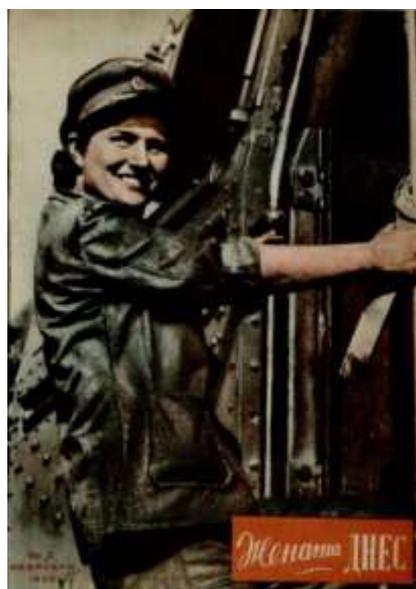
role models in agreement with political line of the Party. Bulgarian film is an instrument which illustrates the contradictory state policies regarding the situation of women in the society.



**Fig. 3.** Zhenata dnes, 1955, No. 4, last cover



**Fig. 4.** Zhenata dnes, 1956, No. 2, last cover



**Fig. 5.** Zhenata dnes, 1955, No. 2, cover



**Fig. 6.** Zhenata dnes, 1953, No. 2, cover

The new discourse of social realism - the image of „masculine woman” can be found in the cinema in the set period. Once for Lenin cinema is the most important of all the arts, and for Stalin it is the most popular art, following the example of the USSR and Bulgaria have a new social model of totalitarian socialism of the Soviet type. It is important for Bulgarian cinema to grow conceptual and artistic on the right path and the right path is socialist realism - officially implemented in Bulgarian cinema in 1952 with Decree № 91 of the Council of Ministers.<sup>11)</sup> As a result, in Bulgaria the cinema became the subject of social engineering whose main mission is to get the audience to accept totalitarian socialism and to identify with it. It is about literal replication of cinematographic techniques by soviet model<sup>12)</sup> which marks the most movies of the early 50s, whose only dignity is political correctness towards communist ideology (Братоева-Даракчиева, 2013).

Such an example is one of the first films of contemporary Bulgarian topic - "Danka". The film is dedicated to "struggles and victories" of working class in Bulgaria. Observing the course of life and fate of a country girl became a textile factory worker in the town of Varna. There she falls under the influence of communist ideas. Described in the press with best manner consistent set of rules - she is "natural smart and perceptive, she quickly navigate in the new environment and clearly recognizes the enemies of the poor and weary workers and who are their true friends" (Нонев, 1952). The main character resists to challenges as a true socialist woman of courage, which would further strengthen the resolve and faith. After September 9 she is even happier with the "impetuous look into the future - already a hero of Socialist Labor." This is a new person, the image of a heroic Bulgarian woman overlapped in cinema.

Cinema addressed its message to the individual viewer. It is particularly valuable as a tool for education and propaganda of the new value system. Every woman can recognize herself in female image on the screen – „as we

see Danka on movie, we see our new textile worker, tractor driver, section leader our new female of Socialist Labor ..."13) The image of the protagonist is somehow closer and own.

The woman constantly proves that she is a "new person" who can be trusted. The Communist Party wants it and she should be like this. Women must be bold, decisive and persistent because the "new time" requesting her. Those women have a role in the socialist transformation of society and everyday life.<sup>14)</sup> Fragile coquettes are not applicable and are not quoted in socialism. Traditional stereotypes of femininity are eliminated. Just a comparison between the journal institution "Woman Today" and exited before 1944 „Ikonomiya i domakinstvo” („Saving and household”) – after this landmark year its activity has been discontinued, would show differences in media and images of women - what is meant by "good and happy life" before and then, what positions and roles changed. Articles in the „Saving and household" cover such topics as – gymnastics, massage, proper diet, which gives strength and beauty. The magazine introduces its readers with the latest methods and guidelines to be able to take care of yourself and family more systematically. Many papers are devoted to fashion - evening and wedding dresses, underwear, knitting, layout and decoration of the house, advertising, cooking, facial and body massage, weight gain. There are no title pages and covers with propaganda photos - without Dimitrov, Tchervenkov, Stalin, Dragoycheva. In the late 40s and 50s the publications in the magazine "The Woman Today" dedicated to female beauty and cosmetics can be counted on fingers (Кръстева-Благоева, 2003). In the press since 1944 has a significant presence of traditional "male" topics such as politics, economics, technology, sports and more. Underlying trend of the editorial team is led by mostly male role clichés. Socio-political reading sometimes filled to 90% of the pages of the magazine - comments on global political processes, reports and essays (essay is among the most popular genres in the period), fiction - mainly Russian.

Theater reviews and exhibitions - attend but not so widely. The housewife and the circle of her thematic areas receive the final two to three pages in the best option in the magazine. Not a single issue of "Woman Today" can be reduced to the function of the practical guide "how to please a husband?" or a manual of desired female - wife, homemaker, mother.<sup>15)</sup>

Public discourse imposed the propaganda image of a strong woman - a worker. Common is the use of masculine when speaking to a woman, in order to highlight her new entity - she is a public figure, fellow participant in the socialist fight (Лулева, 2003). Women are masculinized and this is evident from the texts and photos of them in the media - these are not just photographic images but media ideology.

The Communist Party needed workforce - healthy and physically strong characters.<sup>16)</sup> Women are encouraged to enter male professions, even to face ridicule from the opposite sex; they overcome difficulties and therefore finally received a deserved award.<sup>17)</sup> Women were interested in "male profession" at least that they told in magazine essays. They dream to drive a tractor, to become engineers.<sup>18)</sup> Exciting heart-stopping moments are at meeting with "the beloved son of the people" Valko Tchervenkov, which is a cause for envy from other women. Dressed in men's clothes and uniforms, picked hair under berets or headscarves, hide her femininity she stands confidently in front of machines - modest, quiet and smiling, deliberate and conscientious, because she knows what she wants and what she is struggling for. Tenacious and relentless in her work performing with dignity male profession, "former petite woman has become broad-shouldered, her gaze confident, her steps calm".<sup>19)</sup> She is talking with love about machines and factory.<sup>20)</sup> These are the new people who master the technique and look forward to a bright future.

Generation of Communist Party female leaders - Tsola Dragoycheva, Rada Todorova and all delegates (Figs. 7-9) with Dimitrov prize which appear on the pages of the press support the spiritual ideal of socialist development

but also they are an example for exemplary look of the socialist woman - gathered hair, following the guidelines of Georgi Dimitrov - "woman to be neat and not disheveled, messy like a scarecrow." Women were dressed in gray, brown and beige suits with high collars and long skirts having cold asexual irradiance.



**Fig. 7.** Zhenata dnes, 1948, No. 4, cover



**Fig. 8.** Zhenata dnes, 1954, No. 3, p 1

Requirements of this ideal archetype symbolizing the communist detachment of female attractiveness with strict suits, amorphous skirts, clothes that fail to emphasize shapes.<sup>21)</sup> Socialist society is trying to escape from clothes, sexualizing the body not only in the work of women, but also in their daily lives. Individuality is denied. It is perceived as disagreement with the imperatives of socialism. It is assumed that the interest in fashion replace real social and political problems (Стойков, 1982, сс. 51-52). Everything which advertises the bourgeois way of life is the passage of western influence, manipulation tool (Стойков, 1982, сс. 51-52, 167). According to Olga Gurova<sup>22)</sup> clothing are part of the mainstream discourse, part of everyday life and the

basic requirements to clothes are to comply with the requirements of everyday life in general. Socialist fashion does not seek to draw attention to it, but only to serve the communist person in the performance of his public duty and tasks (Стойков, 1982, сс. 51-52), fashion should be used for the purpose of socialist society. Bulgarian socialism refrained from resorting from propaganda of fashion. To a minimum are kept women's ability to earn only thanks to the attractive vision.<sup>21)</sup>



**Fig. 9.** Zhenata dnes, 1948, No. 5, last cover

From the beginning of the period, many women enter as workers in industry and particular in the sectors that were previously the preserve of men.<sup>23)</sup> Women commemorate the renovation and modernization of socialist society. Bulgarian magazine "Woman Today" from the first issue of its publishing history propagate the set models in the main visions of women and women's roles, ideal entry into the ideology of the socialist party - "masculine women". Newspapers, magazines, film and literature become active partici-

pants in building the image of the new woman, created homogeneous image equally dispersed in the public domain.

#### NOTES

1. Part of an editorial published in the pages of the magazine "Woman Today" 1952 br.7-8, year VII, p. 2-3.

2. Member of the Bulgarian Communist Party and the first female member of a socialist cabinet in the history of the country. After September 9 took a number of posts, including – member of the Politburo, Secretary General of the Fatherlands Front, member of the National Assembly, member of Council of State. She also was Minister of Post, Telegraphs and Telephones

3. The belief that resolution of „woman question” came automatically with the victory of socialism is embedded in words of Clara Zetkin - feminist and socialist, propagate that women cannot be emancipated without socialism, and the socialism cannot fully achieve its aims without equal participation in it of working women (Даскалова, 2012, p. 172). Lenin condemned housework describing it as "non-productive savage, petty and frustrating to the extreme, debilitating, deadly work" (Лулева, 2003). In private ownership sees no reason for the slave woman's position. Output and salvation for her, he sees in socialism.

4. Although the Turnovo Constitution not treated differently men and women citizens, the latter are discriminated against in education, career development and political rights (Даскалова, 2012, p. 296). Only married, divorced, or widowed women were able to vote, but not necessarily to take advantage of this right. Added to this is that they have no right to be elected and therefore participate in the management of the state apparatus. Still "this time when women will be equal with men and they will participate in solving the political, civil, economic and educational issues," as P.R. Slaveykov wrote, does not occur after the liberation of the country from the Ottoman rule in 1878.

5. Article is dealing with women's rights reads: "Persons of both sexes are entitled to equal rights in all spheres of economic, state, cultural and political life." Those rights found confirm in the subsequent electoral law of June 15, 1945.

6. Socialist ideas concerning the need to eliminate economic dependence of women entering through orthodox Marxist work of August Bebel, "Woman and Socialism".

7. The journal has been published continuously since October 1945.

8. <http://notabene-bg.org/read.php?id=124>

9. The examples are many; one of them is the poem "Strugarkata"/ "The woman spinner" of the Bulgarian poet Paulina Stantcheva. The woman in the poem is doing work on par with men: "So what, she is single woman / Among men working of endless hell of a bang. / In her green eyes lies light and / hardness – in both hands smudged with oil. / Two standards every day she produces here. / For the new machine - two standards constantly. / Along her works loudly lathe to lathe / Comets of sparkles blaze on the emeries."

10. An individual approach is not tolerated and even sanctioned - "The problems came from the Committee. Tsola Dragoycheva and Rada Todorova began to criticize my every attempt to do things as I understand them. I wanted to invite contemporary authors. But in one meeting they condemning me precisely because I invited Dobri Zhotev ... I was not allowed independence, they constantly taught me. They do not bore my willfulness, I did - their interference. So finally this ruined our relations. I lasted less than a year. "Interview with Zhana Avishay, chief editor of "Woman Today " for 1956, published in „Zhenata dnes”/"Woman Today", 2005, p. 118.

11. The purpose of the Decree № 91: "Bulgarian cinematography to focus the main attention on the production of films dedicated to socialist construction of our country, to reproduce the screen images of the new people - the heroes of labor from factories, mills and mines of machine- tractor stations and labor co farms of our glorious border guards, the heroic Dimitrov youth and working people in our socialist culture. These films should educate workers in Bulgarian citizens with new moral qualities, a new attitude to work, develop their socialist patriotism and willingness to defend their socialist homeland, strengthen fraternal friendship with the Soviet Union and the struggle for peace."

12. Artistry is subject to ideology, and works to create a certain set canon, in this case imports from the Soviet Union - "Our young cinema evolve ideologically and artistically on the right path. It implements socialist realism as its artistic method study of Soviet cinema genius ... ", Nenov, B. "The new film "Danka" (Нонев, 1952).

13. „Woman today” 1952, № 4, p. 19

14. <http://notabene-bg.org/read.php?id=124>

15. <http://liternet.bg/publish4/llipcheva/zhenata-dnes.htm>

16. "Communism needs healthy and beautiful people" - the title of the essay published in 1954 in the journal "Woman Today" is indicative as "beautiful" in this case is more synonymous with "healthy" - they are beautiful because they are healthy.

17. "- This is not women's work - passing her throw comrades. - Soon, she'll go away! Then her eyes flashing with a new force and her arms faster and more secure locking screws. Offensive was to the girl that mistrust. It was heavy to hear such toss. But to give up means to admit that they are right. No, Stoyanka is a decisive and courageous nurtured between people who are not afraid of difficulties. She will stand."- at the end of essay Stoyanka's brigade became leader (Woman today, 1954 № 7, p. 6).

18. "Engineer - girl is thinking - it is also possible and real, but first a tractor driver, good tractor driver" ("Woman today” 1954 № 7, p. 5)

19. „The Woman today” 1953, № 1, p. 8

20. " I love my machine! Especially when rattled as a machine gun. When pounding and I feel her heart and my eyes are in it. In fact, the machine is a living thing ... " („Woman today”, 1952, № 3, p. 15)

21. <http://grosnipelikani.net/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=334>

22. <http://www.fedy-diary.ru/html/sovniz.html>

23. In 1909 - 22% of workers in the industry are women, and in 1944 - are 36% (Тодорова, 2010).

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