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2015

https://doi.org/10.25595/1179

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Gadjeva, Katerina: *Between Tradition and Modernisation : Representations of Women in Photographic Illustrations in Bulgarian and Soviet Popular Magazines (1948–1956)*, in: L' homme : Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft, Jg. 26 (2015) Nr: 2, 33-48. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25595/1179.

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Between Tradition and Modernisation Representations of Women in Photographic Illustrations in Bulgarian and Soviet Popular Magazines (1948–1956)[1]

Katerina Gadjeva

1. The Press as Agitator and Collective Organiser

In socialist societies, the aim of propaganda was to substitute a world based on respect for individual values for a reality where only the collective principle existed. The Bulgarian authorities were not satisfied with merely superseding those ideas which obstructed the realisation of their ambitious plan. As Siegfried Kracauer remarked, such "supersedure" would mean that the image of reality would not be completely destroyed but only "banished". In fact, it would continue to work in the unconscious of the masses, thus becoming a constant threat.[2] This is why Communist propaganda was

1 The 5th Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party was held in 1948 under the leadership of Georgi Dimitrov. It set the establishment of socialism in Bulgaria as the party's and the people's overarching task. A clear course was determined for the country's development, which was to follow the key principles of the Soviet system. In the course of rapprochement with the USSR, the Communist Party in Bulgaria adopted Lenin's views on the press as a mass organiser and key propaganda tool for the party's policy. Between 1948 and 1956, the influence of the USSR on the Bulgarian press was particularly pronounced. It was exerted through a number of Soviet propaganda institutions, above all through the circulation of Soviet magazines and newspapers, and the reprint of materials thereof. This process continued until Stalin's death in 1953, and even beyond, up to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR in 1956, where the First Secretary of the Central Committee, Nikita Khrushchev, delivered his famous speech "On how to overcome the personality cult and its consequences". A similar speech was delivered by Todor Zhivkov (General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party from 1954 to 1989) within the framework of the April Plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Even though this study focuses on Bulgarian periodicals, it also offers comments on numerous Soviet examples resulting from the close connections between Bulgarian and Soviet magazines, as well as their almost equal distribution in all parts of the country.

2 Siegfried Kracauer, Propaganda and the Nazi War Film, in: idem, From Caligari to Hitler. A Psychological History of the German Film, Princeton 1966, 273–307, 298.

Online gestellt mit finanzieller Unterstützung der Universität Basel (Lehrstuhl Prof. Dr. Claudia Opitz-Belakhal).

meant to possess the minds of the people even on the level of the unconscious. "Where our opponents said and admitted that we have done miracles in developing agitation and propaganda", Lenin claimed, "this should be conceived not from the outside – that we had many agitators and used a lot of paper, but from the inside – that the truth contained in this agitation has reached the minds. And that no one can escape from this truth."[3]

The 'truth' fabricated by the party was nowhere to be found in reality; it existed only as the idea of a perfect future world in an undetermined and obscure 'elsewhere', far from 'here' and 'now'. But to keep the enthusiasm of the masses alive, evidence for this 'truth' had to be created and presented as actually existing. The socialist authorities were well familiar with various means of agitation and propaganda. The party favoured filmmaking, photography, architecture, sculpture, painting, and poster art, but these propagandistic means had limited distribution and were expensive to produce. This is why other possibilities were sought to reach the broad public. Periodicals (newspapers and magazines), books, textbooks, and manuals became the party's irreplaceable allies in spreading socialist ideas among the masses, even in the tiniest villages and remotest areas. They permeated the daily lives of ordinary people following them from their workplace to their homes.

As newspapers and magazines became the main propaganda vehicle, the authorities sought to ensure their unobstructed distribution into every corner of the country. It has to be pointed out that in Bulgaria both Soviet and domestic print media were available. Every Bulgarian community cultural centre, library, workers' collective, administrative institution, etc. was obliged to hold Soviet periodicals. The distribution of Soviet magazines gradually increased and soon enjoyed no less popularity than the Bulgarian press. Soviet publications served as a compulsory role model for Bulgarian publishing houses. As a result, Bulgarian magazines became more and more similar to Soviet media in both content and layout. Most Bulgarian magazines were in fact replicas of Soviet issues: "България" ["Bulgaria"] (in Bulgarian) of "СССР" ["USSR"] (in Russian), "Жената днес" ["The Woman Today"] (in Bulgarian) of "Работница" ["The Woman Worker"] (in Russian), "Млад кооператор" ["The Young Cooperative Worker"] (in Bulgarian) of "Молодой колхозник" ["The Young Kolkhoz Worker"] (in Russian), etc. Bulgarian periodicals published lengthy articles on the Soviet experience in agriculture, economy, culture, education, and family life. Thanks to such active propaganda, readers would imperceptibly lose track of where Bulgarian reality ended and Soviet reality began.

3 IX конгрес на РКП (б), (март-април, 1920). Из доклада на централния комитет, в: Ленин за пропагандата и агитацията [9th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), March-April 1920. From the Report of the Central Committee, in: Lenin on Propaganda and Agitation], София 1957, 363.

2. Aims, Sources and Methodology

This article will focus on one particular type of visual agitation: richly illustrated magazines with a wide circulation. General object of analysis will be photographic illustrations of socialist women and their various activities such as work, political activism, maternity, etc. I will examine how concepts of "tradition", "homeland", "past", etc. are visualised and connected to representations of femininity and in which way women are depicted in the transition process from the past to the present, between tradition and modernisation.

Studies of cultural history often demand a wide array of research methods. As this text focuses mainly on photograpic images, it uses iconography as the main method to establish the meaning of a photograph at the time. In order to address the peculiarities of socialist photography as well as of totalitarian art as a whole, with its deeply symbolic character, the semiotic method is also indispensable. Furthermore, semiotics is not just about signs and symbols – it is equally about ideology and power. Although this article is not going into political and historical details, it is not possible to interpret the images outside of the ideological, historical, and political context from which they emerged. That is why historical contextualisation is of great importance to this analysis.

The visual material investigated here has been mainly taken from popular Bulgarian and Soviet magazines such as "Жената днес" ["The Woman Today"][4], "Наша родина" ["Our Countryland"][5], "България" ["Bulgaria"][6], "Советская женщина"

4 "The Woman Today" ["Жената днес"]: Bulgarian illustrated monthly magazine for social, political, and cultural education of women. On print: since 1945. During the 1950s issued by the Bulgarian Democratic Women's Committee with editor in chief Rada Todorova. In the meantime Rada Todorova has become minister of Labour and Social Affairs and vice president of the Women's International Democratic Federation. Nevertheless, the magazine was strictly controlled by Tsola Dragoicheva – an influential politician from the Bulgarian Communist Party, first female minister (of Mail, Telegraphs and Telephones) in Bulgarian history, Hero of Socialist Labour, Hero of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, long-standing member of the Bulgarian Politburo.

5 "Our Countryland" ["Наша родина"]: Bulgarian illustrated monthly magazine for social and political education, literature and art. On print: 1954–1969. Issued by the Bulgarian Communist Party. Editor in chief was Bogomil Nonev – Bulgarian writer, journalist, and diplomat (prior to this president of the Script Commission in Bulgarian Cinematography; afterwards general executive of Bulgarian Radio and Television). There were no women on the editorial board.

6 "Bulgaria" ["България"]: Bulgarian illustrated monthly magazine with social, political and cultural content. Also available in Russian, German, Italian, French, English, Spanish, Esperanto, Arabian, and other languages. On print 1950–1958. Issued by the Bulgarian Communist Party. Editor in chief was Todor Cenkov – Bulgarian writer and translator, collaborator to the section "Foreign Policy and International Affairs" under the control of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. There were no women on the editorial board.

["The Soviet Woman"][7], "Работница" ["The Woman Worker"][8], distributed between 1948 and 1956. These magazines used mainly black and white photographs – colour images are to be found only in special issues or arranged on separate pages and on magazine covers. For this article, illustrated magazine covers in colour will be the prime source of the analysis, since they can be viewed as representative of politically sanctioned notions of femininity.

3. Photography in Press

Socialist authorities used photography in exhibitions, on propaganda posters, wall newspapers, postcards. However, the most effective way to employ photography in order to systematically influence people's daily routines was to publish them in periodicals. "Photographic illustration in the press, if properly used, is the most powerful agitation and propaganda tool", claimed the Russian newspaper "Pravda" on 24 October 1931.

> A picture's illustrative and convincing concreteness, paired with an 'appropriate caption', arms the press with one more tool to mobilise and organise the masses. It is the responsibility of proletarian photography to tell and show the entire world the particular victories of socialism; it has to visualise and narrate them in the concrete and unassailable way which is far more characteristic of photography and film than of any other art, and which is accessible to the vast masses.[9]

Photography had one advantage that made it the preferred medium for the representation of both current and staged situations, and this was its (alleged) documentary nature. A photograph led the audience to believe that everything it depicted represented an incontestable *fact*. It was in the interest of ideology to claim that everything captured by the camera was true, a reality which spoke for itself and did not need to be commented. Often quoted were Maxim Gorky's dicta "Thought follows fact", "Ideas grow from facts and feed on them", and "Facts are far better teachers than ideas".[10]

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7 "The Soviet Woman" ["Советская женщина"]: Soviet illustrated monthly magazine for social, political, and cultural education of women. On print: 1945–1991. One of the most popular magazines in the USSR. Available in twelve languages.

8 "The Woman Worker" ["Работница"]: Soviet illustrated monthly magazine for social, political, and cultural education of women and families. On print: since 1945.

9 Григорий Болтянский, Очерки по истории фотографии в СССР [Grigoriy Boltyanskiy, Essays on the History of Photography in the USSR], Москва 1939, 114–115.

10 Евгений Добренко, Потребление производства или иностранцы в собственной стране, в: Ханс Гюнтер и Сабине Хэнсген (сост.), Советская власть и медия [Evgeniy Dobrenko, Consumption of the Production or Foreigners in their own Country, in: Hans Günther and Sabine Hensgen eds., The Soviet Government and Media], Санкт Петербург 2006, 164–187, 166.

Being one of the main tools for agitation and propaganda, the socialist press had the responsibility to report – through writings and illustrations – those accomplishments of the new system which most convincingly revealed the power of the communist ideal. Pictures of impressive factories, canals, power plants, landscapes, architectural ensembles and scenes from various production processes became leading themes in the magazine illustrations. Photo journalists competed in extolling everything that had been achieved supposedly thanks to and in the name of the party. But the culmination of their stories and the highlight in each edition was the image of the creator of these material and cultural achievements – the 'new human', the builder of the communist society. The authorities proclaimed that each citizen of the socialist state who worked hard and followed closely the way laid out by the party, deserved to be seen as a role model. The pages of the periodicals thus told his story. The only detail left unmentioned by the party rhetoric was that this communist role model was also expected to have a characteristic appearance: neither too fat nor too thin; neither too short nor too tall; neither too dirty nor too clean; neither cheaky nor too serious. How many real people could meet all of these requirements? Photographers knew well how difficult it was to rely on reality to produce effective images that served this purpose. Therefore, just like writers, they did not bother to search for such perfect individuals, but to create them. It would be unthinkable for the subjects promoted as role models to be unclean, unkempt or poorly dressed – such shortcomings in their appearance could be interpreted as defects of character and proof of negligence, lack of organisation, and self-criticism, etc. Portraits were meant to show the individual at his best and to play an educational role in nurturing and strengthening the idea of a new human being free of weaknesses: "The opinion prevails", Anton Makarenko[11] stated, "it is normal for a human being to have certain shortcomings ... But I say: there should be no shortcomings! Why should there be? It is my duty to perfect the collective until not a single shortcoming is left. And what do you think? That we get a clichéd stereotype at the end? No! What we get is a wonderful person brimming with originality and with a private life as vivid as can be."[12]

4. Photography and the Socialist Woman

Official Communist photography glorified all aspects of the socialist way of life – collectivism, work competition, free education, cultivation of physical and emotional

11 Anton Makarenko was one of the founders of Soviet pedagogy. Cf. Georgii Filonov, Anton Makarenko, in: Prospects: the Quarterly Review of Comparative Education, 24, 1/2 (1994), 77–91, at: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/publications/ThinkersPdf/makarene.pdf, access: 15.6.2015.

12 The quotation is from: Владислав Зименко, Советская портретная живопись [Vladislav Zimenko, Soviet Portrait Painting], Москва 1951, 91.

strength, building of new factories, cooperative farms, towns, nurseries, holiday homes, etc. In this context, the woman became one of the most important icons of socialism – as well as the most popular subject of interest.[13] The image of the 'new woman' was supposed to prove the socialist system's obvious achievements: it was no longer a matter of the future, but already a fact of the present. "Never and nowhere in living history has the woman been surrounded by so much attention and care by the state and the nation as she is now in socialist society",[14] claimed the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Canteens, nurseries and kindergartens, the canning industry and full shops – everything was done in the name of the woman and her liberation from the domestic 'chains'. "The time has come to once and for all put an end to the medieval understanding, which is still far too popular in this country", Georgi Dimitrov[15] remarked, "that the woman belongs with the hearth and home, and her duties are limited to the care for her husband, children, and home, or that a woman is 'long of hair but short of mind'".[16] According to this view the new political circumstances had not only changed the woman's personality but also her outer image since she had "turned her back on her inherent bodily traits to bravely plunge into the ocean of a primitive sexlessness".[17]

The sober expression on female faces and the strong, solid bodies in magazine photographs epitomised these new traits of mind and character. The socialist woman not only mastered male jobs but also adopted, to a great extent, male attitudes. She was a

13 There are many contemporary studies about socialist women and the problems of gender politics in Bulgaria during the socialist era. For example: Ana Luleva, 'Die Frauenfrage' im sozialistischen Bulgarien – Ideologie, Politik und Realität, in: Klaus Roth ed., Sozialismus: Realität und Illusionen. Ethnologische Aspekte der Alltagskultur, Wien 2005, 129–155; Krassimira Daskalova, How Should We Name the 'Women-Friendly' Actions of State Socialism?, in: Aspasia. International Yearbook of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History, 3 (2007), 214–219; idem ed., Voices of Their Own. Oral History Interviews of Women, Sofia 2004; idem, Bulgarian Women's History and Socialist Myths, at: http://admin.cwsp.bg/upload/docs/history_and_myths_en.pdf; access: 20.5.2015; Ulf Brunnbauer and Anelia Kassabova, Socialism, Sexuality and Marriage. Family Policies in Socialist Bulgaria (1944–1991), in: Sabine Hering ed., Social Care under State Socialism (1945–1989). Ambitions, Ambiguities, and Mismanagement, Opladen/Farmington Hills 2009, 35–55; Katia Vladimirova, Les femmes bulgares: de "emancipation" proclamee a "l'egalite des Chances", in: Josette Trat, Diane Lamoureux and Roland Pfefferkorn eds., L'autonomie des femmes en question. Antiféminismes et résistances en Amérique et en Europe, Paris 2006, 133–148.

14 Обращение Партии по случаю международного женского дня, в: Иван Курганов, Женщины и коммунизм [An Appeal of the Party on the Occasion of International Women's Day, in: Ivan Kurganov, Women and Communism], New York 1968, 64.

15 Georgi Dimitrov (1882–1949), first communist leader of Bulgaria and general secretary of the Communist International under Joseph Stalin.

16 Георги Димитров, Жените са огромна сила (до делегатките на първия конгрес на БНЖС 1945), в: Георги Димитров и Димитър Благоев, За жената и семейството [Georgi Dimitrov, Women are a Great Force (to the Delegates at the First Congress of the Bulgarian National Women's Union, 1945), in: Georgi Dimitrov and Dimitar Blagoev, The Woman and the Family], София 1979, 244–252, 248.

17 Николай Бердяев, Ерос и личност [Nikolay Berdyaev, Eros and Personality], София 1992, 30.

person of action and not of thoughtful reflection. Her physique was clearly different from the Christian ideal of the ascetic saint or the fragile and melancholic aristocrat, which had been popular representations of femininity in the pre-socialist era. A cover of the magazine "Наша родина" ["Our Countryland"] from July 1954 shows a young woman harvester-operator (see coloured version p. 129, illus. 1). She has a firm and muscular body typical for the aesthetic ideal of the time: small chest, slender waist and strong shoulders. Her rounded face is not beautiful, but healthy looking – it expresses steadiness and self-confidence, which is reflected by her upright posture and concentrated gaze and, not least, her position behind the wheel of the harvester. The low angle shot emphasises this expression of female strength. Here, the woman is not only an emblem of the new system and living 'proof' of its achievements, but also a symbol for a modernised country which had left behind its past, as the beginning of the first article in this issue claims: "There are no longer old ploughs in the fields – new machines are tilling our fruitful land." In these compositions male presence is rare and almost always of secondary importance. It is replaced by farming machines for which the women display affection and even love. Under their feminine hands the machinery seems to come to life. Like real living creatures tractors and harvesters can sing, play, laugh and suffer.[18] Another example for this close connection between woman and machine is shown in an illustration in the same women's magazine titled "Tractor operator Yanka Spasova from Sofia" (see coloured version p. 129, illus. 2). The young woman next to a tractor is dressed in loose and dirty working clothes that hide her female body contours. Her left foot is resting confidently on the front wheel which indicates that she is in command of the big machine. Her smiling face contrasts with her dark clothing and the large, dirty tractor and conveys a sense of joy. It is worth mentioning that in this photograph the woman's hands are dirty, which is rather uncommon in portraits like this, but here underlines the authenticity of the picture.

In struggling with the disastrous forces of nature and in transforming it, people in the socialist society, as the above picture illustrates, were beautified by work alone. Their beauty arose from exposure to wind and water, from operating machines (or gymnastics apparatuses). The authorities were well aware that this rather rough image of women was increasingly deviating from the common notion of femininity, and so they kept it regularly 'updated' as they saw fit: "The socialist woman has her own special way of being feminine. She knows how to transform and use a masculine character as an eternally feminine one. She emanates such internal harmony where both the eternally feminine and the eternally masculine meet in order to strike the desired

18 For example cf. the article with the title "Machines are their Lungs". The main story is about Maria – a beautiful tall girl with blond hair and blue eyes and a harvester (her best friend), which is broken and needs repairing: Маня Белчева, Машините са им белите дробове, в: Жената днес [Manya Belcheva, Machines are their Lungs, in: The Woman Today], 9 (1951), 5–8, 6.

balance."[19] The temptress, with her inviting eyes, was incompatible with socialist ideals, which left no room for sexuality and attraction. In socialist ideology the fulfilment of human desire (carnal desire included) was projected into a distant and indeterminate future. As Boris Groys wrote, communist ideology "required subdued emotions, patience, and relinquishment of the immediate satisfaction of desire for the sake of a collective future happiness".[20]

5. Compositional Patterns in Magazine Illustrations

Most popular magazines, although never explicitly labelled as such, aimed at a female audience – "Наша родина" ["Our Countryland"], "България" ["Bulgaria"], "Млад кооператор" ["Young Cooperative Worker"], "Народен турист" ["National Tourist"]. This was mostly due to the fact that, on the one hand, women were more regular and serious readers resulting from their new status in the socialist world and their active involvement in public life. On the other hand, the party itself was well aware of the importance to keep the attention of the female readers in particular, since women were a useful and productive workforce in need of regular recognition and encouragement. They were considered valuable communicators, who would pass on socialist ideals to their husbands and children. Their sound party education would thus ensure the right orientation of other members of society. In addition to being the main addressees of magazines in this period, women were also the main subject of their content. Depictions of women in various roles were more frequent than any other topic of illustration. A cursory look at the Bulgarian popular magazine "Наша родина" ["Our Countryland"] shows that ten out of twelve issues in 1956 displayed images of women on the front cover. There was, for instance, a group of photographs centred around the notions of 'motherhood' and 'care', depicting scenes of affection such as maternal care, women at schools and kindergartens, women as educators in their families and the broader community. Although she was expected to have children, the ideal socialist woman also seemed 'forever childless' since her love was not limited to one human being. Illustrations showing women as good listeners and friends, loyal partners and respected and responsible citizens of the socialist society also belong to this thematic group. The visual compositions highlight qualities such as compassion, composure, care, and self-

19 Cf. Олег Рябов, "Матушка Русь": Опыт гендерного анализа поисков национальной идентичности Росии в отечественной и западной историософии [Oleg Ryabov, "Mother Russia": A Gender Analysis Approach on the Pursuit of National Identity in Russia in Domestic and Western Philosophy of History], Москва 2001, 125.

20 Борис Гройс, Тоска по секс-дизайну, в: Алексей Лигонов и Павел Хорошилов (сост.), Обнаженные для Сталина, Советская фотография 1920–1940-х годов, Альбом [Boris Groys, Yearning for Sex-Design, in: Aleksey Ligonov and Pavel Horoshilov eds., Naked for Stalin, Soviet Photography 1920–1940s, Album], Москва 2004, 4–11, 4.

lessness. A photograph on the cover of "Наша родина" ["Our Countryland"] depicts a group of pioneers[21] visiting Vyara Hristova, a distinguished weaver at the "Textile glory" factory (see p. 129, illus. 3). This illustration is typical in that it expresses key ideas of the socialist ideology such as 'shared experience' and 'the socialist woman – mother of all children'. These pictures should inspire ordinary people (especially the youth[22]) to emulate the achievements of these ideals, whose faces could be seen in the press as well as in the streets. The individuals used by the authorities as role models due to their courage, selflessness, and hard work were given the title 'hero', which also implied qualities such as 'affiliation with the party', 'loyalty', etc. The party thus defined the eligibility criteria for the title of a hero. Such prospective heroes were the 'new' human beings created by the socialist system, pioneers in industry, agriculture, and culture.[23] These heroes stood out with their decorations, medals, ribbons, and other insignia, which served as specific signs in social communication.

Widespread were images of female artists (actresses, musicians, painters, architects), scientists, and students and those of women reading or writing, going to the theatre or visiting exhibitions and concerts in their free time. Whereas the radio was a frequent detail in Nazi art, the book was far more popular in socialist photography and art. It was often found in female hands as evidence of the changed situation for women and the transformation of the society as a whole. An illustration from the Soviet magazine "Работница" ["Working Woman"] shows stakhanovite[24] Valentina Fomina, Stalinist prize-winner from the Lazar Kaganovich foundry factory in Liublino (now in Moscow). In this representative portrait she poses holding a closed book with red cover and the title "Lenin", volume 4 (see p. 130, illus. 4). Despite the fact that her work is hard

21 A pioneer movement was an organisation for children operated by the communist party. It was similar to the Scout movement – both organisations had some common principles and aims. The main difference was that the pioneers were strictly and exclusively controlled by the party. The youngest children, which later became pioneers, were organised in a "chavdarcheta"; they wore blue scarfs, pioneers red ones.

22 According to some reports, the magazine was used for educational purposes. Cf. Вероника Димитрова, Жената, здравето, болестта и хигиената в София: към социалното конструиране на тялото на гражданина. Сравнителен анализ на списанията "Икономия и домакинство", "Модерна домакиня" и "Жената днес" през периодите 1927–1934 и 1949–1956 [Veronika Dimitrova, Women, Health, Illness, and Hygiene in Sofia: Toward the Social Construction of the Citizen. Comparative Analysis of the Magazines "Economy and Household", "Modern Housewife" and "The Woman Today" during the Periods 1927–1934 and 1949–1956], at: http://rcss.eu/index.php?section=33&sub_category=1&display=126&id=205; access: 25.6.2015.

23 "Hero of Socialist Labour" was the highest reward for exceptional achievements in Bulgarian economy and culture. Originally, Heroes of Socialist Labour were awarded with a "Hammer and Sickle" gold medal, a medal "Georgi Dimitrov", a certificate and, last but not least, a good round sum of money.

24 Stakhanovite (from the name of the hard-working Soviet coal miner Aleksei Grigorevich Stakhanov (1906–1977), a worker who regularly surpassed production quotas and was specially honoured and rewarded.

and involves machines, steel, and cast iron, Valentina is well dressed, her long chestnut hair is loosely pinned together and her lips are lightly coloured with lipstick – details, which are not common features of ordinary women workers. Stakhanovites were often shown in static poses, displaying self-confidence and composure, thus underlining their high social status. They differ from others not only through their physical strength, abilities, and promptness, but also through intelligence and erudition. That is why books – usually Lenin's or Stalin's writings – are of great importance for these compositions. They are, first and foremost, a symbol for the close connection between the party and the labour heroes. The depictions of female stakhanovites in magazine illustrations are very similar: they define the new socialist woman ideal as young (but mature), good looking (but not beautiful), tidily dressed (not showy), hardworking (but happy) and educated (ready to put her knowledge into practice).

Universities, factories, cooperative farms, high-ranking positions: a whole array of opportunities opened up to the free-willed socialist woman. Like Cinderella she was a character in a fairy tale, who underwent a series of metamorphoses (e.g. the transformation from a poor and miserable peasant woman to a modern, independent urban lady) with an inevitably happy end. In this fairy tale, Stalin was the prince, and the Kremlin his palace.[25] One of the most powerful myths created by Stalin was that of the 'one big family' where the leader was presented as the father. In this capacity, he would take over traditional male functions – granting protection, earning a living, fighting for a better life and taking care of his 'children'. This socialist leader was manliness incarnate: he had power, authority, and wisdom. He was metaphorically 'married' to the country and was, therefore, every woman's husband. His presence could be felt even in the tiniest detail, unlike that of ordinary men who were mostly 'unnoticeable', even when they filled the entire frame.

Love for the socialist leader was the main theme of many photographs showing crowds of rejoicing women at demonstrations and celebrations. On the cover of the magazine "Наша родина" ["Our Countryland"] we can see the image of exalted women (there are no men in the group), apparently participants in a rally (see p. 130, illus. 5). These women were presumably either university students or teachers. It is worth mentioning that on the red banner behind them we can see the caption "Да живее 24 май – празника на културата!" ["Long live the 24 May – the holiday of the culture!"]. Socialist photography was used not only as a document, but also as a means to create and shape reality.[26] It was common practice to manipulate photo-

25 This is a popular theme in photography as well as in literature and cinema. Cf. Lynne Attwood, Red Women on the Silver Screen. Soviet Women and Cinema from the Beginning to the End of the Stalinist Era, London 1993, 65.

26 Maxim Gorky put it bluntly: "The new life cannot be reproduced with the means of realism. Such means do not reflect the pathos of the new reality. Realism and pathos are not compatible". Cf. Борис Бялик, Горки и социалистическият реализъм [Boris Byalik, Gorky and Socialist Realism], София 1948, 12.

graphs. One particularly efficient tool for creating a parallel illusory reality was photo editing.[27] In this compositional process the laws of perspective (for example, see the absurd flower in no one's hand in the background) were sometimes sacrificed to reinforce the main political idea. This edited illustration conveyed two key messages: first, women in socialist societies were able to participate in the sphere of education and culture, and second, they were deeply grateful to the party for these opportunities and expressed their gratefulness through their love for the party leader, Valko Chervenkov (see the flag in the background with his portrait).

The new way of life, the new social status and different appearance turned women into one of the most powerful 'weapons' of the socialist authority. They had many important tasks to fulfil, for instance bringing up children in the spirit of socialist ideology, working hard with the utmost efficiency, reading and studying every day. At the same time, they had to be perfect housewives and spouses, dressed modestly and tidily, with active social and political lives. However, among all of their responsibilities, one was of particular significance – the women represented the link between the dark, reactionary past of the country and its bright socialist present (and future), between tradition and modernisation. As the party doggedly criticised the remains of the 'peasant' way of life, typical of the times before the socialist revolution, which obstructed social progress and hindered the fulfilment of short-term and long-term plans, the only way for traditional art to become part of the country's official culture was to present this art as 'reborn' and 'reviewed' in the light of the new cultural and economic situation. Who could be more suitable to show, to explain and to represent all these ideas than the new socialist woman?

6. Tradition and Modernisation

In search of the nationally specific, socialist culture accumulated various elements from folklore, which were further processed and universalised.[28] The party proclaimed the mandatory requirement for each work of socialist art to be 'national in form and socialist in content'. The 'national form' suggested accessibility and realism – two features meant to satisfy the aesthetic and creative needs of every member of society. Maxim

27 Photo editing produces a fused image out of numerous negatives, other pictures or picture parts, which are put together in a single compositional entity, made through cutting and pasting, reproducing, or copying on photosensitive paper.

28 On the problem of building of national identity and the use of photographic representations of Bulgarian folk traditions and tradition costumes before World War II cf. Anelia Kassabova, Inclusion and Exclusion: The Role of Photography in the Nation-Building Process in Bulgaria from Approximately 1860 to World War I, in: Dagnoslaw Demski, Ildiko Sz. Kristóf and Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska eds., Competing Eyes: Visual Encounters with Alterity in Central and Eastern Europe, Budapest 2013, 112–139.

Gorky promoted an understanding of folklore as "the creation of the working people", able to provide the purest expression of the people's feelings and thoughts.[29] The Soviet propaganda never ceased to further enrich this idea by using it predominantly to unify the various traditions and mentalities of the people in the different regions of the country's vast territory by representing art as varying in national form, but unified in its socialist content. In Bulgaria, one of the aims behind the promotion of folklore was to use it to overcome the isolation of the villages and their reputation as underdeveloped relics.

Recourse to folklore was particularly useful in establishing the dichotomy of 'native' versus 'foreign' which was crucial for the socialist state. Illustrations showing elements of traditional culture focused on generic features, peculiarities, and characteristics. Photographs propagating the 'Bulgarian national style' were supposed to show the collective experience of the individual within the community, thus contributing to the elimination of sexual, educational, or geographic differences.[30] It goes without saying that the return to traditions of the past was highly selective. As Gorky remarked, knowledge of the past was needed, yet not as it had already been told, but interpreted in a new way, in the light of the teachings of Marx/Engels/Lenin/Stalin. Only a past that was approved by the communist party as 'true' was of value. A strictly partisan, differentiated approach to cultural heritage was promoted. In this, only the authorities had the right to identify the progressive phenomena which were to be incorporated in the 'golden' fund of socialist culture and to distinguish them from those that were mere reflections of the old way of life. Socialist art being the art of synthesis and generalisation, the choice of characters, objects, and surroundings was not meant to offer documentary evidence, but rather to construct a reality beyond time and chronology. Costumes made of irreconcilable elements, jewels taken out of their original context, a mixture of traditional and modern details, ornaments, materials, etc. – such incongruity was by no means accidental but a defining feature of socialist art. The cover of the magazine "Жената днес" ["The Woman Today"] from October 1952 with the title "Гроздобер" ["Grape harvest"] (see p. 130, illus. 6) illustrates this. It depicts a young woman (a worker from the cooperative farm of the village of Suhindol) in a coquettish posture, with one hand on the hip and the other balancing gracefully a rather heavy looking basket filled with grapes on her shoulder – an image more fitting a fashion model than a grape picker. She has her hair pinned up tidily, and even wears make up. Her modernised traditional costume is typical for socialist aesthetics – a white blouse embroidered with national motifs in red colour, yet with shoulder pads. Her black skirt is decorated with a long woven rectangle with stripes and roses in the front, which

29 Бялик, Горки, see note 26, 33.

30 Ирена Бокова, Културна идентичност – образи на отъждествяване и оразличаване, в: Български фолклор [Irena Bokova, Cultural Identity – Images of Identification and Differentiation, in: Bulgarian Folklore], 1/2 (1998), 4–21, 17.

looks like an apron. The most impressive detail is a belt with 'golden' clasps. There is no doubt that the woman could not have picked grapes dressed in clothes like these. Rather, the image has symbolic meaning and conveys notions of fruitfulness, fertility, the beauty of the countryside, the union between tradition and modernisation. The bunches of grape in the basket are not just beautiful; they epitomise the socialist system itself – abundant, rich, sweet, succulent, and perfect. These images were meant to educate viewers in the principles of the new aesthetics where folkloric elements continuously reminded the magazine reader of the nationally (ethnic Bulgarian) specific, which enriched everyday life with solemnity and festivity.

In photographic illustrations of this period almost all characters dressed in national costume are women or girls; the presence of men is mainly associated with the passing on of crafts or traditions from the elderly to the young. The female (maternal) aspect is mostly associated with the notion of country and with ideas of 'nature', 'land', 'nation', 'irrationality', etc. In contrast to this, as Oleg Ryabov remarks, the paternal aspect evokes associations such as 'history', 'politics' and 'the rational'.[31]

The photographic illustrations showing elements of traditional culture can be divided into two categories: images showing scenes and situations especially staged to be captured by camera, thus constructing a reality which only exists in the picture; and images reflecting traditional elements in the daily routine regardless of the moment of capture. In the first category, photographs of women in national dress are in the majority. Some of the pictures show that lots of efforts were made to prove the authenticity of the national costume by displaying various elements in great detail: kerchiefs, socks, belts, jewellery, etc. Others only use some aspects of the national dress combined with modern hairstyles, accessories, etc. When the frame depicts a monofigural composition, mostly representing a woman or a young girl, the posture is static and the eyes are directed on the viewer. The background is usually a tree carrying fruit or in blossom, a field, wheat ears, or roses. The symbolism points at the female principle – the land, the mother country, fertility, and abundance – as national features. Less frequently the model is captured while doing something, usually picking fruit, roses, or vegetables. Illustrations showing women in national dress engaged in direct contact with officials represent a partial break with the symbolism mentioned above: a child welcoming the head of state and party functionaries; a girl offering bread or a basket of fruit; women carrying wheat ears during 1st of May marches. In these images, the national (ethnic Bulgarian) costume stands for the entire nation that expresses its veneration and gratitude to its rulers.

Multi-figure compositions almost always show their models in action: working, talking, reading, getting dressed and putting on jewellery, etc. The inconsistency between dress and activity, the unnatural posture and staged situations made this category of illustrations the subject of criticism and discussion. Publications from the 1950s raised

31 Рябов, "Матушка Русь", see note 19, 46.

the question of how appropriate and even admissible such "polishing of reality" in photography and cinematography was.[32] Scenes depicting women (girls) in their best national costume milking cows, digging, reaping, reading, examining gifts under the New Year tree, were not even remotely close to the traditional use of the festive costume worn only at special occasions. Yet, the purpose of showing the traditional dress in such compositions was to valorise labour as crucial to socialist ideology – images of dirty labour heroes, hidden under caps and hard hats, wearing their modest work clothes would not have served this purpose. It was equally important to convey the idea of hard work as a national feature of the people, which, under socialism, had presumably found the most fertile soil.

The second large group of illustrations in socialist periodicals comprises images that depict traditional elements in everyday life. By showing textiles with traditional patterns in administrative buildings, modern household goods in traditional shapes, modern clothes with characteristic embroidery, jewellery with specific decorative elements, magazine covers turned into shop windows that illustrated how in the socialist world the term 'folklore' took on new forms, was even reinvented, both in terms of quality and content. Another example are images of elderly men and women passing on traditional crafts such as pottery, weaving, wood carving, embroidery, etc. The children in these pictures symbolise the new country that, just like them, relies on the wisdom and experience of the past. At the same time, these traditional skills are 'updated' to meet the needs of the new time. Illustrations of this category are always characterised by dichotomous elements: a traditional earthen jug on a shelf in a modern apartment; a young girl embroidering the neckline of a modern blouse, a female member of parliament wearing a suit with traditional patterns; a woman director in her office, reading a newspaper with a woven wall panel in the background. An illustration from the Soviet magazine "Работница" ["Rabotnitca"] shows three young women at the national crafts exhibition (illus. 1, below). The caption under the photograph explains that these women are workers from the factory for electrical lamps in Lvov visiting the gallery during their free time after work. The objects exhibited were not made by unknown national craft masters – they were products of the state cooperative and that is why they served as a good example of 'modernised traditions'. The vessels could be used as home decorations or as contrasting accents in workers' modern homes, but not in their intended original function. The photograph shows the three women in their new status as independent and modern workers, in marked contrast to the traditional objects typical of the past, which now have merely aesthetic and symbolic value.

32 Cf. Георги Генчев, Творчески въпроси на документалния филм, в: Киноизкуство [Georgi Genchev, Creative Issues of Documentary Filmmaking, in: Cinemaart], 7 (1955), 4–19; Румен Шоселов, Против бягството от същността и силата на документалния филм, в: Киноизкуство [Rumen Shoselov, Against the Evasion of the Essence and Power of Documentary Filmmaking, in: Cinemaart], 5 (1955), 13–26.

Illus. 1: Workers from the Factory for Electrical Lamps in Lvov among the national crafts exhibition. Inner cover of the Soviet Magazine "Работница" [The Woman Worker], 9 (1950)

The call to 'modernise tradition' became the driving force behind everyday life in this time. Photography was supposed to promote new tastes and help uproot obsolete habits such as the use of outdated objects, clothes, etc. Thus, women in ethnic Bulgarian costumes became the most appropriate 'face' of this process – their new public roles and appearances were a perfect platform. Photography helped to visualise the amalgamation of modernity with tradition through female representations: during her working time – in politics, the public sphere, education or production – women wear simple clothes with delicate folklore accents like embroideries, metal or wooden brooches, head-cloths, etc. At home they use modernised traditional household accessories like pitchers made of plastic or machine-woven or -knitted tablecloths; during their free time they do needlework. It is important to note that only ethnic Bulgarian tradition

was incorporated in this process of modernisation. In contrast, the Islamic tradition was shown as backward and an obstacle to the country's progress.

7. Conclusion

"Leaning towards the beautiful and powerful creature, towards the complete organism in which life and rationality will celebrate victory over the elements"[33] – this appeal by Anatoly Lunacharsky[34] gives clear expression of the authorities' ambition to create a new human race, a race that would bridge the gap between desire and reality, and thus ensure the triumph of the socialist system. Although Karl Marx had embraced Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, the idea of the 'superman' went hand in hand with abandoning natural law: the evolution of the new individual would be influenced not only by external factors but by the will, desire and creative drive of the individual himself. The effort to overpower nature in fact anticipated the gradual elimination of the male/female dichotomy and the emergence of the new human to celebrate the victory of conformity over difference. The party proclaimed the idea that there was no distinction between female and male emotionality, sensibility, experience, sexuality, needs. The socialist woman measured, designed, dug, built, read, and practised sports. She would not rest due to fatigue, cold, hunger or attraction to the opposite sex. Her new outward appearance reflected one of the most important concepts of the socialist ideology: that the past should be re-examined, rethought, modernised and filled with new socialist content.

33 Margarita Tupitsyn, Superman Imagery in Soviet Photography and Photomontage, in: Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal ed., Nietzsche and Soviet Culture, Cambridge 1994, 287–310, 305.

34 Anatoly Lunacharsky (politician, writer, translator, critic and art historian) was Commissar of Education in Lenin's first government.