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Women, Art, and Power: A Study of Socialist Bulgaria

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Abstract

The thesis aims at creating a nuanced picture of the female artistic position in the context of a socialist state and society. The research focuses on the impact of the Bulgarian socialist system on women's lives and on the artistic context. I explore how this context is an additional dimension to the double regime of female labor in the socialist state. The combination of the traditional motherly role and the modern working role have been integrated by the ideological engineers of the socialist regime, but their integration was difficult. The woman artist presents a challenge to this dual construction. Women have been part of the traditional agricultural society typical for Eastern Europe until the mid-20th Century. The popularization of city life through mass urbanization, as well as the socialist welfare state and its ideological stances on freedom, equality, and women's rights, has opened the doors to female participation in work and the arts. My intent with this work is to first explore the ideology behind the socialist states and its outcomes on women's societal roles in Bulgaria. The policies created by the socialist state can be understood as a product of the original Marxist concepts of society, as well as of the influence of different societal groups. I continue to trace the development of such policies in the context of the Bulgarian Women's Movement's influential cultural role. The last chapter is dedicated to women in the two artistic spheres - cinema productions and fine art creation in the socialist state. These structural perspectives are juxtaposed with the prevalent modernist movement of the 20th Century, characteristic of the Western capitalist world. Through this study of socialist and capitalist modes of shaping the female artistic profession, I finally analyze the general outcomes of socialist policies on women and their artistic contributions.

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Introduction

The cultural and political conditions surrounding the figure of the socialist woman and woman artist, are becoming a relevant topic of discussion in the current times characterized by democracy and universal social rights. By combining detailed research on equality, freedom and female emancipation as they were originally formulated and proclaimed by communist ideology, I aim to synthesize the main themes and contradictions surrounding the “female question” and its relation to the artistic realm. The period of socialism in the Eastern Bloc countries presents a drastically modern social organization, overlapping with the dimension of traditional family values and roles. The clash of imported ideology, national identity, ordinary life and rapid modernization has created a new position for women in society and altered their destiny. By creating the conditions for formal equality and giving new rights to women, socialism has also burdened them with new obligations. Nothing illustrates this correlation better than the accelerated stage of modernization of everyday life and economy during the first years of socialist life. Some feminist scholars have pointed out that women in socialist states have achieved a great number of rights and a level of equality, that were still contentious issues for feminists in the West during that period. It is true that in Bulgaria during the 1960s, one of the most progressive programs for maternity was established, allowing mothers to take care of their children and return to their work, by sending them to free childcare facilities. In socialist states women have been working alongside men in various industries, which has itself created a bright image of the Eastern Bloc in the eyes of western feminists. Some of which have embarked on researching women’s organizations in these countries and their impact in creating more favorable conditions for women to work. From the perspective of capitalist societies, the full incorporation of women into the workforce can be seen as a major achievement. The praises of western feminist circles of these achievements, should be understood in terms of their own societies’ turbulent social movements for rights and equality. The impact of state-socialism on women’s lives lies somewhere in between the perception of women’s emancipation and the deeply rooted traditional life structures. Female integration in the workforce and the comprehensive social support system for mothers have not fundamentally changed women’s orientation to the family life and their identification with the roles of mothers

and wives. One significant difference during socialism was the emergence of art created by women and the new way of positioning the woman as an artist alongside men. Was this possible and encouraged by the system? With this work I strive to investigate the aspects of female work and private life and how the woman artist became a reality in an otherwise traditional society. During socialist time, there was a transition of women from the area of handywork, crafts and occupations in feminized professions such as seamstresses, to the concept of being an artist with its strictly male connotation. Nevertheless, this was not a mass phenomenon, as women strongly continued to be occupied in feminized sectors. What makes this shift more interesting is seeing it in the context of women's roles at the time and how it transgressed the typical dichotomy of woman as worker and mother. I argue this is precisely due to the classical male orientation of the artist profession. The removal of barriers to female education and professional development allowed women to build a new and different perspective inside the established world of art. In this way we can try to understand how certain politics and state ideology influenced the contemporary movement of female economic and artistic liberation.

In the first chapter, I explore the fundamental concepts of Marxism that inform the broader ideological framework of socialist states, focusing on equality, freedom, and the role of women. This chapter lays the theoretical groundwork by discussing how these Marxist principles were intended to shape societal structures and individual lives, particularly concerning women's rights and artistic freedom.

In the second chapter, I examine the Bulgarian socialist state and its policies regarding women. This analysis includes an in-depth look at socialist ideology and policies affecting women's roles in both the public and private spheres. I trace the evolution of these policies and their practical implications, highlighting the intersection between state objectives and the everyday realities faced by women. Additionally, I discuss the influence of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and its contributions to shaping these policies.

In the third chapter, I focus on the specific experiences of female artists in socialist Bulgaria. This chapter delves into the impact of state policies and socialist realism on women's artistic expression. I investigate how censorship and distribution practices affected women in the fine arts and film production. By examining these factors, I aim to

provide a comprehensive view of how the socialist state both enabled and constrained the creative potential of female artists.

In the fourth chapter, I compare the socialist realism and modernist perspectives on women in art. This chapter analyses the evolution of the female form in art by examining both socialist realism and Western modernism and analyzing the representations of women in cinema, both by female and male directors, from People's Republic of Bulgaria and the USSR. I present case studies on films that depict women's lives and roles, highlighting the differences and similarities in representations by directors of different genders and political contexts. This comparative analysis offers insight into the broader socio-political influences on women's representation in socialist cinema.

With this thesis I aim to create a nuanced contribution to the study of the interplay between ideology, policy, and artistic expression in shaping the lives and work of women in socialist context.

Chapter 1

Concepts in Marxism

In order to develop an understanding of women's rights and women's policies in the socialist state, we need to first look at the originating ideas of Marxism. Tracing down those concepts is crucial to a comprehensive view of the socialist ideological reality and how it has shaped its subjects. Key concepts for Marx and Engels are those of equality and freedom. Their formulations are often misunderstood, but ultimately, they remain bastions of the Marxist doctrine/writings. The principle of equality of opportunities and outcomes

1.1. The concept of equality in Marxism

There are some serious critiques and skepticism when it comes to the concept of equality in Marxist literature. Neither Karl Marx nor Friedrich Engels fully proclaimed the idea of equality as a part of their future political agenda. Equality is mentioned nevertheless as a concept related to bourgeois economy and politics, especially in Marx who accentuates the political and distinctly bourgeois value of equality. According to Marx (1970) in the "Critique of the Gotha Programme", all social and political inequalities arising from class distinctions will disappear with the abolition of class. Marx doesn't position equality as a universal right and doesn't believe it can be used to fight class oppression, because it is compatible with the class structure of society (Wood, 2014). He connects it strictly to the system of capitalist labor production of his day, according to which there is a just and fair distribution of resources. Marx doesn't try to argue against this, since the present-day mode of production can only result in such a distribution. For him the legal relations of a society develop from the economic ones and not vice versa. Rights emerge as a consequence of the economic structuring of society and its cultural development (Marx, 1970). What is seen in Marxist literature is that equality and especially in its bourgeois form is not a concern for the building of a new communist society and that inequality itself would be a central point for fair distribution. Equality in its most basic form is seen by Marx as "procedural equality" before the law, meaning that legal systems do not discriminate against and privilege some over the others as it was in the feudal-aristocratic system (Wood, 2014). This type of equality is highly compatible with the capitalist system

of labor and supports class oppression by bourgeois legal and political institutions. Workers continue to be dependent on this structure and cannot see the full benefit of their labor, as the surplus value is constantly being stolen from them.

Wage labor is an aspect of class inequality, as it is a form of slavery which becomes more severe in proportion to the development of the social productive forces of labor (Marx, 1970). This is a likely outcome and explains why Marx doesn't consider capitalist exploitation of labor as unjust. It is based on a contract between formally free economic agents, who are subject to the concept of bourgeois equality before the law. In such an exchange of equal values between free economic agents, there is no unfair practice, as long as it is regulated by the legal institutions. For Marx the rights of the worker are only those connected to capitalist mode of production, so we cannot talk of any far-reaching human rights. The foundation of the economic structure necessitates the application of only those formal bourgeois rights (Wood, 2014).

In the co-operative society the amount of work put in by each person is compensated with the exact same cost in means of consumption (Marx, 1970). The labor employed in making a product no longer appears as its value and "individual labor no longer exists in an indirect fashion but directly as a component part of the total labor" (Marx, 1970, p. 17). Because the phase of co-operative society is a step on the way to becoming a communist one, there is still a prevailing bourgeois idea of equal right. There is an equal standard applied to workers and the amount of funds they receive back for their work. The cost of means of consumption equals the cost of labor of each worker. Such an exchange is unsatisfactory for Marx, precisely because of the equal standard. The inequality between men's mental and physical capabilities means that everyone has a unique productive capacity which requires an unequal distribution of resources. Otherwise, people with different family status and children would do the same amount of labor and receive the same share of the social consumption fund and this would ultimately make one richer than the other. This is why equal right must be "unequal right for unequal labor" (Marx, 1970, p.18). Only in a future communist society where the division of labor and the antithesis between mental and physical labor have vanished, would it be possible to go beyond the bourgeois right and adopt the slogan: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" (Marx, 1970, p.18). Labor is seen not only as a means of existence, but as the aim and subject of life itself. This would ultimately lead to an

organization of society that stands beyond the bourgeois concept of equality. Marx (as cited in Wood, 2014, p.254) includes the “. . . equality of rights and duties and the abolition of class rule” among the aims of the International Workingmen’s Association but ultimately sees “the abolition of class rule” as a much better expression of that aim. Both Marx and Engels (1872) regard the abolition of classes as the only option and reject the possibility of “equalization of classes”. They refer to the latter as a way for capital to set the terms for its relations with labor and create a harmony that would ultimately be beneficial for capital. This equalization is preached by the bourgeois socialists but is not possible and only creates misunderstanding. As every man has different abilities and needs that are hard to measure, there is an innate inequality that cannot be equalized by the application of equal rights.

Engels on the other hand was more lenient towards the idea of equality. In a “Letter to A. Bebel”, Engels (1970) claims it is much more suitable to speak of the abolition of all class distinctions, instead of the questionable idea of elimination of all social and political inequality. As Marx, Engels also supports the view of vast difference between people and societies, which makes it questionable to speak of eliminating all inequalities. The disparity in conditions of life experienced in different parts of the world can be reduced but never fully overcome. He returns to the idea of equality as deeply connected to the French “liberty, equality, fraternity” – an idea that has been relevant for its time but now must be overcome to make way for more precise explanations of the matter (Engels, 1970). When discussing socialism, Engels (1970) says it’s a continuation of the principles of the French philosophers of the 18th Century and rationalism itself as a main drive of the new cultural and political order. In this order, the injustices of the past had to be replaced by “eternal truth, eternal Right, equality based on Nature and the inalienable rights of man” (Engels, 1970, p. 116). The goal is the emancipation of humanity as a whole, but not of its class structure per se. Engels is skeptical of how freedom and justice can be reached without consideration for the oppressed classes and calls the kingdom of reason an “idealised kingdom of the bourgeoisie” (Engels, 1970, p. 116) with its own bourgeois equality and justice. Consequently, the epoch of the French revolutionary minds has shaped and imposed its limits on their concepts of society and right. Engels distinguishes the “equality of rights” from the “real equality” which is a demand for social equality by the proletariat, either against the feudal system of oppression or as an answer

to the bourgeois demand for equality. The latter demand serves as a point from which the proletariat can make more far-reaching claims and use the capitalists' own assertions to fight against them. In both cases the demand for real equality is a demand for the abolition of classes. (Wood, 2014). Equality in terms of the capitalist system of production can be only before the law and any equal rights are a subject of the political structure – the state. For Engels this political equality is nothing more than “the declaration that class differences do not concern the state, that the bourgeois have as much right to be bourgeois as the workers to be proletarian” (as cited in Wood, 2014, p.260).

What can be learned from Marxist literature on the idea of equality is that it has never been a main principle for building a new society after the revolution of the proletariat. It is a challenge to reconcile the Marxist definitions of equality with the ones of the present day. This fact is itself a testament to the idea of equal right as characteristic of the bourgeois society, and not the revolutionary communist one. Concepts of equality are deeply ingrained into the egalitarian thought systems in which the capitalist world order operates. The law of nations and organizations governs the expression of what is called “human rights”, in all their definitions. It presupposes everyone receiving the same treatment from the governmental bodies and legal institutions, which would create an equal society. Marxist ideas of society are not concerned with such a modern understanding of rights, because in that hypothetical society the working class will not be subject to the capitalist market conditions. Only such conditions create the demand for equality of rights among otherwise unequal individuals, leaving them dependent on capital's upper hand in determining the rules. The rights emerging from such an unequal relationship can only secure further the position of the working class as such but will not be enough to erase the class structure of society.

1.2. The concept of the women's issue in Marxism

In a philosophical perspective on women and men, Marx speaks of the human essence as a shared attribute of both genders. They appear as two opposite poles but are the same species and therefore share the same essence, which has differentiated itself (Marx, 2010). This fundamental view on the difference between women and men can be seen as a starting point in viewing the “woman question” in Marxism. Not equal, but not actual

extremes either, the sexes are the attributes of the human essence and therefore need to be seen as one. On a different note, Marx uses the idea of women as private property in marriage to explain the transitional period from private property to an initial stage of communism. There, material property will become so abundant that it will want to destroy everything that is not owned privately. The relationship of private property transforms to “the relationship of the community to the world of things” (Marx, 2010, p. 294). The opposition of universal private property to private property is explained with another opposition – that of marriage to the community of women, where each one becomes communal and common property. Marx calls this type of communism crude and thoughtless, negating the personality of man and exposing him to the entire world of wealth which is in “a state of universal prostitution with the community” (Marx, 2010, p. 294). The essence of this transition can only be compared to the idea of women going from marriage, which is a form of exclusive private property ownership, to the state of general prostitution. This comparison is the key to understanding the stage of crude communism which is the natural development from capitalism and still cannot rid itself from the concept of private property. According to the Communist Manifesto (Marx & Engels, 1848) in the bourgeois society there is a hypocritically concealed community of women, a system of common wives, which is the private version of prostitution. Marriage itself is not different from prostitution since it treats women as private properties, while at the same time creates the conditions for affairs. The bourgeois see their wives as instruments of production and therefore fear that the communists will want to make them exploited in common by everyone. What they don’t see is that communism wants to abolish the status of women as instruments of production. The community of woman, characteristic of the crude form of communism, is used by Marx to describe this type of bourgeois relation to the woman as property and the potential loss of it, which generates envy in men. Seeing woman as the object of communal lust is the metaphor for how man has lost and degraded himself through his relation to the woman. This most natural relation manifests man’s relation to nature, as well as man’s relation to nature shows his relation to other human beings. It therefore reveals the extent to which the human essence of man has come to be his natural essence and has made him into a social being. As the human aspect of nature only exists for social man (Marx, 2010). It is evident that the connection between the natural and the social is essential for Marxism. The issue of

treatment of women finds its roots in the fundamental relation of man with nature. Nature must be recognized and embraced by man as his own human nature, something that is characteristic only to his existence and worldview. To realize his human nature is to realize his social being. The surpassing of the animal and reaching into the human realm means living a life of social bonds and enjoyment in the community of people. As “human nature is the true community of men” (Marx, 2010, p.204).

In "The Holy Family" (1956), Marx discusses the social and legal injustices faced by women. He critiques the lack of legal protection for women against exploitation and contrasts different perspectives on women's emancipation, including those of the philosopher Charles Fourier, who advocates for women's liberation as a measure of societal progress. His writing, cited by Marx, underscores the same view of the importance of women's freedom as indicative of broader human advancement.

The change in a historical epoch can always be determined by women's progress towards freedom, because here, in the relation of woman to man, of the weak to the strong, the victory of human nature over brutality is most evident. The degree of emancipation of woman is the natural measure of general emancipation. (Fourier, as cited in Marx & Engels, 1956)

The views of Marx concerning women can be understood through the system of private property and marriage as an institution allowing ownership. This conceptualization is characteristic of the world in which bourgeois capital and exploitation of the working class is the norm. In parts of his work, we can find the Marx's vision of women and their liberation in the future communist order. Their emancipation is the first step in the way of class struggle and abolition. Regarding their role as changers of the universal order, Marx (1968) strongly supports their participation. The need for engaging women in the revolutionary struggle can be grasped from looking back in history when all social revolutions were made possible with the help of the female part of the population. Similarly, no big uprising in the name of the communist ideal can be realized without the support and participation of all parts of the proletariat, specifically women. In drafting the programme of the French Workers' Party, Marx (1880) proclaims the emancipation of the

working class as that of both sexes and wants to eliminate all the articles which proclaim in any way the inferiority of women to men. He proposes the establishment of equal wages for equal labor for both sexes.

In "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State," Friedrich Engels (1970) explores the family structure prevalent at that time through the evolution of human societies before. The book is based on the notes of Karl Marx and draws heavily on the work of the early anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan on prehistoric societies characterized by communal ownership and matrilineal descent. Engels traces the transition to class societies with private property, patrilineal descent, and the state. This shift plays a pivotal role in the subjugation of women and the development of the patriarchal family structure. Women gradually lost their authority in the administration of the household, which they ruled over and were equally as important and necessary as the provision of food by men.

The very cause that had formerly made the woman supreme in the house, namely, her being confined to domestic work, now' assured supremacy in the house for the man: the woman's housework lost its significance compared with the man's work in obtaining a livelihood. (Engels, 1970, p. 319)

With the invention of the patriarchal family and specifically the monogamian family, the woman becomes a domestic servant. This has led to the separation of families as individual units, dependent on the breadwinner model of wage work. The man in this situation becomes the dominant in the family structure, he becomes the bourgeois, while the wife represents the proletariat. Only with the modern era of large-scale industrial production, is the proletarian woman offered the option of becoming an agent of social production again (Engels, 1970). But then arises the problem of making a choice between being able to take care of her children and family or perform paid labor. As women become workers and enter the industries more and more, the separation between housework in the private sphere and wage labor in the public sphere becomes increasingly pronounced. When women and children become employable by capitalists to further the exploitation of the proletariat, the value of work itself starts to change. For Marx taking the women and children out of the household and assigning them to labor for a socially

organized mode of production is done for the self-enriching of capital itself. The confiscation of the mother, as well as employment of children in the public industry, not only produces the wage to cover their consumption in the household, but also creates a surplus value for the capitalist (Chattopadhyay, 2001).

What Engels (1970) explains is that just as in the capitalist world the domination of capital becomes most evident when equality in front the law is established, the extent of men's domination in the household becomes most evident when there is established legal equality through marriage. Therefore, the first objective of the emancipation of women is for them to be able to enter public industry and the individual family as the economic unit of society to be abolished. The problem of inheritance which has enforced monogamy on women can be resolved with the end of private inheritable wealth and its transformation into social property. Only the social revolution can correct the injustice of how women are treated in the bourgeois society, in which their break of monogamy is regarded a crime, while men's is not. With the economic conditions changing, there will also be a change in the foundations of monogamous marriage, as its function will no longer be. But for Engels, this doesn't mean an end of monogamy, but a new beginning where it becomes a reality not only for women, but also for men. Exploitation in the form of both prostitution and monogamous marriage are seen as two sides of the same coin. The need for them will disappear with the disappearance of the proletariat and wage labor.

And finally, have we not seen that monogamy and prostitution in the modern world, although opposites, are nevertheless inseparable opposites, poles of the same social conditions? Can prostitution disappear without dragging monogamy with it into the abyss? (Engels, 1970, p. 249)

The type of love Engels (1970) describes happens only between free individuals, without subjugation, economic imperative, or family interest for their union. For centuries the realm of "sex love" was usually reserved for those relationships outside of marriage and only for those on the outskirts of society and the oppressed classes. With the expansion of the economic order of the West, the bourgeois in protestant countries started to recognize free contract love marriage as a human right, both for men and women. For Engels, the irony of the historical process lies in how the economic influences continued

to restrict the ruling classes, while the dominated classes began to enjoy voluntary marriages. Only with the full abolition of capital can the property relations in matrimony cease to exist. Engels believes that the key to restoring real monogamy to both parties, lies precisely in the female emancipation by participation in economic production. Women would no longer feel the pressure to tolerate infidelity, due to their economic reliance on the man as the breadwinner and the fear for the livelihood of their children. The achievement of equality for women would create the conditions for monogamy in men and will put an end to their dominating role in the family.

The disappearance of divisions between mental and physical labor is a key idea related to the value of female domestic work and the role of woman in the family. According to Marx (1970), in a higher communist society work becomes the prime aim of life itself and the antithesis between physical and mental forms of labor vanishes. For him, only real and concrete labor is the use value producing labor, and not the abstract value producing labor. The useful productive work performed in the household by women is exactly this type of labor. But in the realm of the capitalist system the labor process of women in the household is not considered as productive labor. Regardless of its status of “real labor” there is no value being produced for the capitalist. This type of direct and useful activity, sustaining human life itself, regardless of the societal conditions, doesn’t qualify as sufficient for capitalist production. The productive labor is not determined by the activity performed by the worker, but by the capitalist who owns the means of production. Even if it means the production of use values that are futile. This makes the vital for the family domestic work useless for capital, and therefore women who perform it are an unproductive laborer. This work lacks the production of surplus value for the capitalist, which is the defining characteristic of productive labor in this system of production (Chattopadhyay, 2001). The gender division of labor and the unequal distribution of private property that has enslaved women in the domestic sphere for centuries cannot be accepted moving forward into the new communist society. The Marxist thinkers of the 19th Century recognized the change in the status of women as imperative in building their dream societies. Engels (1970) writes that marriage as a “free” contract ceases to exist in the communist society and is then replaced by the right of individuals to choose their partners, without economic considerations. As the means of production become common property, the individual family with its subjugation of

women as private housekeepers, is replaced by a social system of care and education for children. The raising of children becomes a matter solved by the community, irrespective of how they have been conceived, in wedlock or outside of it. This substantial change means a new way forward being opened for relationships of love and along with it more unrestrained sexual relations.

1.3. The concept of freedom in Marxism

The concept of freedom according to Marxist thinkers has evolved significantly in terms of its practical implications. If we begin with Engels (1970), we see the rejection of the state as compatible with freedom. The principle aims of capturing the state by the proletariat could only be to hold down their adversaries. Freedom cannot be achieved by that usurpation of power by the state. The idea of having a free state can only mean a state which rules freely with a despotic government. For Marx, the introduction of the socialist order would create the dissolution of the state. There is no need for the use of ideas such as “free state” and “people’s state”, as they do not apply to the commune itself which is not a state in the proper sense. The use of the state by the proletariat can only be momentary and used to capture their adversaries, but it can’t be used in the interest of freedom. Freedom on the other hand is reached only after the seizing of the means of production by society. The worker becomes the master of his life and is not ruled by the production of commodities for capital gain. Engels (1970) proclaims that organization of social production is what will finally set men apart from the animal. Once his needs for survival are met, he will emerge into human conditions of life. As man becomes master of the social organization, he also gains power over nature, and this allows him to pursue his free action. No longer do the extraneous forces that shape history governs his life and organization, on the contrary they come under his control, and he becomes to shape his history. This is the “ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom” (Engels, 1970, p. 150). The ability to decide his own faith and act on his free will is a key characteristic of the man living in the communist order. This includes freedom of thinking, where individuals are not subjected to any universal standards but can rather be social individuals. Marx accepted that ideas elevated to the level of universality should be rejected as ideology that tries to infringe on human freedom in the

realm of thoughts. In a classless society, people would not be subjected to the rule of some specific universal interests, but their own individual will would be respected.

...hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community. In the previous substitutes for community, in the state, etc., personal freedom has existed only for the individuals who developed under the conditions of the ruling class, and only insofar as they were of this class. (Marx, as cited in Wood, 2014, p. 266)

In "The German Ideology," a work written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, there is the formulation of the theory of historical materialism, which suggests that the history of societies is fundamentally determined by the material conditions at their base (Marx & Engels, 2010). In history ideas dominant at any given time should be seen as influenced directly by the conditions surrounding their existence. The power of some classes over others must be taken into consideration in the creation of the dominant ideas of the time. As each new class takes hold of power, they impose their own understanding as an ideal form that serves their own objectives. In order for this ideal to be accepted by everyone, it has to take the form of universality, of that which is of common interest and holds greatest validity for all members of society (Marx & Engels, 2010). This is the bourgeois order in which ideas penetrate the realm of human thought and influence the individual, infringing on his freedom. But the revolutionary class is different in the fact that it comes to oppose the ruling class by representing the whole of society. Its victory is the victory of all oppressed classes. Then finally it is possible for people to participate in a real community, unlike the illusory one of bourgeois class division. In the new communist society freedom is to be obtained by association with the other members of that group (Marx & Engels, 2010). In terms of labor in the bourgeois state, it is considered free in all civilized countries. But this freedom is simply the free competition of workers amongst themselves. What is necessary is not to have free labor but to abolish labor (Marx & Engels, 2010). It is evident that Marx and Engels did not use the bourgeois ideas of freedom as central concepts of their project. Nevertheless, freedom is often formulated by them as a characteristic of the future communist society. This freedom pertains to individuals who are not bound by class restrictions and the capitalist mode of production. For Marx the fulfillment of one's needs in a community of free individuals would

consequently lead to the fulfillment of other's needs. There would not be any distinction between the realization of those needs, as the personal and the communal will be in harmony with each other. Therefore, personal motivation and free will would be at the same time egoistic and altruistic. The individual realizes his freedom as an expression of his human nature, which is also his social nature. And the social structure allows the individual to actualize his free personal development (Wood, 2014).

The Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch argues for the type of freedom which is linked with the human capacity to imagine a better future and to be able to act towards its realization. In "The Principle of Hope", Bloch (1954) writes of his concept of "anticipatory consciousness", which allows people to perceive what is not yet known and work towards their aspirations, regardless of their immediate circumstances. For Bloch, a key part in the achievement of freedom is the ability to participate in shaping the future. The personal agency in imagining and creating revolutionary change is paramount to the consciousness of the free people. By struggling to build a new society and resisting the powers of the day, individuals become truly free. In The Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels (1969) emphasize this need for the proletariat to develop class consciousness, which would ultimately unite them in order to overthrow the capitalist system. The notion of a "class-for-itself" refers to the stage where the working class is not only a class with common conditions and interests, but also a class consciously striving for its own liberation.

For Marxists alike, freedom is reached first and foremost through addressing the material conditions of society. This means the abolition of class structures which allow some parts of society to be subjugated and exploited by others. The capitalist system offers selective freedom to those who participate, but in Marxism freedom must be universal. The desired freedom can only be expressed through unrestricted human actions, driven by the personal ability to envision a future and follow that goal to its end. A crucial mark of the lack of freedom, according to Marxist literature, is the state as a powerful agent of coercion. Ideological superstructures are imposed by the systems of power which have the function of perpetuating the capitalist order. Restrictive norms, ideas and beliefs play a crucial role in supporting the status quo and therefore restricting freedom. There is a sense of common interest when it comes to defining individual freedom by Marxist writers. What is considered best for the community can be reached through individual freedom. There is

no apparent conflict between the proletariat's interest and the personal one, as they complement and build each other up.

1.4. The concept of freedom of art in Marxism

Marxist theories surrounding freedom of art can be useful in understanding the conditions of later socialist and communist states regarding artists. The ways in which art is interconnected with ideology, class struggle and the mechanisms of production are key elements in the work of Marxists. Their discussions of art create the trajectory of its origin and further development in the capitalist system. Engels (1970) uses the anthropological work of Morgan to develop his historical perspective of the origin of the structures of society and its development through the centuries into the capitalist order of his day. He traces the progression to civilization, first through the era of savagery where human-made tools were primarily used to facilitate the appropriation of naturally available resources. The age of barbarism follows with its characteristic development of knowledge in cattle breeding and agriculture, along with techniques to enhance nature's productivity. Lastly, the civilizational period is defined by the acquisition of advanced techniques in processing natural products, developing industry, and the creation of art. The historical periods of blooming art and scientific development are interpreted by Engels (1970) as instruments of the perpetual accumulation of wealth. Civilization is built with greed and the prime aim of wealth. Through the use of artistic creation and scientific discovery this aim has been pursued to reach the current level of enrichment. For Engels art is seen as an instrument in the hands of the wealthy. Marx on the other hand believes in the decoupling of art from religion as a necessary step to achieving a free point of view. He praises Goethe for his artistic creation, which is divorced from the idea of God and is solely focused on the human matters instead. Similarly, the philosopher Carlyle is given as an example by Marx for portraying history as an essentially human narrative. The religious connotations with God are only an arbitrary choice. Life, leisure, and work are ultimately human pursuits and should be portrayed as such. The word "God" is incapable of expressing anything more than the "boundlessness of indetermination" and only perpetuating the illusion of dualism and denial of humanity and nature (Marx, 2010).

One of the core Marxist perspectives on the concept of freedom of art is given by Leon Trotsky (1924), who discusses the role of art following a revolutionary change. As an important figure of the Bolshevik Revolution, his work is valuable in its exploration of art in a socialist context. In "Literature and Revolution", he explores the tension between artistic independence and the objectives of a socialist state, advocating for a position where art contributes to revolutionary and socialist causes without losing its intrinsic values and independence. He argues for art which supports the goals of the socialist state but still preserves relative autonomy to develop creativity and innovation. The state should not enforce a so-called "proletarian" style on its artists with the goal of making art mechanically serve its political objectives. Art should follow its own trajectory and use its own means to define itself, rather than being an instrument for the coercive transformation of society. Trotsky's essays were later suppressed in the Soviet State after his expulsion from the Communist Party. His ideas presented in the book are a precursor for the later debate over the concept of "Socialist Realism" which emerged during the Stalinist period. When speaking of literature of the Revolution period, he describes a transitional art which is related to the Revolution but is not revolutionary and does not contain the ideal of Communism in its content. Artists belonging to that transitional art are called the "fellow travelers" of the Revolution. They do not have a revolutionary past and are not characterized by a radical break with the past, but nevertheless they have accepted the Revolution each in their own way. Their art is populist and without formed political perspective. According to Trotsky this class of artists do not possess the organic axis of creativity and mastery that revolutionary of the future should have in themselves. This art, which is Non-October, or non-revolutionary, has a bourgeois character and it suffers from an impotence to communicate any meaning once the wealth, custom and land which it is associated with disappears. The critic is said to have a key place in the connection between the artist and the audience, as he should analyze and present the artist's work through the facts of his social position. Trotsky suggests that the individuality of an artist can be grasped from knowing his class standing and criticism is that which can bring forward his true character better than the work standing on its own. The common elements between artist and audience are what brings them closer, and not the parts which make the artist unique. Therefore, art has a social basis, which sometimes is hidden, and it is criticism's job to reveal it. The artist always has a specific perspective

to social life which is defined organically early on in his life and does not require much of his conscious decision. “It is impossible to play with history” says Trotsky (1924, Chapter 2). Critical periods such as that of the Revolution do not spare the artist of his necessary contribution in terms of social points of view. The time of revolutionary change demands artists to trouble themselves with the current issues. For Trotsky, those who have been born of the Revolution and try to run away from it and its themes, only reveal their lack of innovation.

In art as well as in politics – and in some respects art is like politics and politics like art, because both are art – a “realist” may look only at what is under his feet, notice only obstacles, minuses, holes, torn boots, broken dishes. Then politics will be in fear, evasive, opportunistic, and art will be petty, eaten with skepticism, episodic. (Trotsky, 1924, Chapter 2)

The time of the Revolution presents a difficulty to the artistic approach. Trotsky (1924) believes only those who possess the inner understanding of its episodic character will be able to reveal the historic axis that is crystallizing in the heart of the Revolution. This art needs to be purposeful and directed towards the building of a never-before-seen construction. It can be achieved by the artist only when creating in a conscious manner to expose the underlying idea of the epoch.

Trotsky (1924) warns of the danger of “fellow traveller” authors having a false historic point of view, which results in a deviation from the vital aspects of reality and a reduction of life to the primitive and barbaric. This approach has the effect of further roughening the artistic methods and leads to a mystifying and romantic look at the Revolution. Constructing a legend around the events of that time as they are happening is contrary to the purposes of real revolutionary art. By calling himself a romanticist, the artist only reveals that he is a frightened realist who lacks a future horizon. The strength of the Revolution lays in its rational and strategic character, which does not necessitate a romantic viewpoint. Trotsky prefers a successful revolution, over the one which is praised in the art of the romantics. As they would only be able to recognize a violent and

catastrophic revolution which doesn't possess the element of calculation crucial for achieving victory.

One of the most severe criticism Trotsky (1924) poses at the transitional authors is of their inability to purposefully grasp the meaning of the Revolution and look at it from a distance that would create an artistic perspective. Their art often portrays the peasant, which doesn't allow their art to become truly revolutionary. The richest peasant – the kulak – is blamed for trying to destroy the city economically, while the “fellow traveller” for trying to destroy it artistically. Without the leadership of the city, Peasant Russia is doomed to retrogression and political domination by world imperialism. Nevertheless, this expression of art reveals a necessary truth about the period of revolutionary change. Neo-populism is characteristic among the “fellow travellers” because they are often representative of the non-Communist intelligentsia and they idealize the life of peasants, seeing them as their greatest ally. A historically progressive work of art is that one which tries to create a necessary union between the working class and the peasants. This will strengthen the link of cooperation between the city and the village and will help the peasantry to move towards Socialism. On the contrary, a work of art which emphasizes the organic, age-old “national” character of the village and opposes it to the city, is reactionary and incompatible with the historical progression towards Socialism and Communism. This art only deals with reminiscing the past and is not useful for the purposes of the revolution. Trotsky (1924, Chapter 2) says the matter of creating art “is a question of a life attitude, therefore also a question of great art, and on this question one must pause”. He argues for moving forward to a new more profound life and art that will come later after the revolutionary break with the past, the Asiatic and Holy Russia. It entails a restructuring of the material conditions in order for the nation to move in rhythm with the civilizational process. The true poet of the Revolution is that who is able to comprehend it in its entirety, with all of the steps and retreats on the way to victory, seeing the undying force of it building up in the process and grasping its pathos and poetry. This time is educational for the artist, demanding of him to develop his art in a precise way to serve its further purposes.

The October Revolution is profoundly national. But it is not only a national element – it is a national academy. The art of the Revolution must pass through this academy. And it is a very difficult course. (Trotsky, 1924, Chapter 2)

The art created by the Revolution is yet to be realized, fed by its sentiments, and predicting of the future to come. Trotsky (1924) describes the possibilities of Futurist art, which he believes tries to express the chaotic dynamics of the Revolution through the chaotic dynamics of language. This style of art is juxtaposed with Neo-Classicism, which presents a much more restricted outlook, a longing for peace and stability in terms of words, as well as in actions. While Futurism's internal strive to grasp the essence of the Revolution is parallel to the revolutionary essence itself, Neo-Classicism is the "revolutionary conservatism", an attempt to stay still and preservation after a time of turbulence. Futurism is elevated by Trotsky as the first conscious art form and the Formalist school as the first scientific approach to art. He believes that Futurism is one of the movements which would present the art of the future. This art will be defined by the Formalist school, according to which the words of poetry and the colors of a painting are fundamental elements of art and should be used according to the laws of verbal and color combinations. The formalist explores the limits of these laws, clarifying the artistic and psychological aspects of the art form. This allows him to experience the world and establish his relation to the social environment. Nevertheless, Trotsky criticizes the Formalist school for the superficiality of its methods and for not successfully developing their idea of art by ignoring the importance of mood. Approaching art through precise criteria and rules often blinds perception, fostering subjectivism and superstition. What Trotsky describes as the actual path of art creation is that of the initial artistic idea expressed through a personal feeling or vague mood. This idea strives towards materialization and consequently becomes stimulated and developed by artistic form into often unforeseen territories.

This simply means that verbal form is not a passive reflection of a preconceived artistic idea, but an active element which influences the idea itself. But such an active mutual relationship – in which form influences and at times entirely

transforms content – is known to us in all fields of social and even biologic life. (Trotsky, 1924, Chapter 5)

Trotsky (1924) defines art from the viewpoint of materialistic dialectics as being always instrumental for the purposes of the historical process, regardless of its purity or tendentiousness. It is an educational tool for the masses, expressing a variety of moods and a depth of feelings. Marxism strives to expose the social roots of art, to raise questions about the order of feelings and their origin. It traces down the significance of feelings and thoughts and connects them with the development of society and class, in order to reveal the role of art in the social process. Marxist ideas of art and its relation to the social fabric do not entail dominance by law over the sphere of art. For Trotsky the new art has its right to exist in the personal expressions of emotions, even as the proletariat sits in the center of that art. The form largely remains an independent decision of its creator, but the psychological unity between his creation and the perception of the spectator remains paramount to art.

The proletariat has to have in art the expression of the new spiritual point of view which is just beginning to be formulated within him, and to which art must help him give form. This is not a state order, but an historic demand. Its strength lies in the objectivity of historic necessity. You cannot pass this by, nor escape its force. (Trotsky, 1924, Chapter 5)

Art as seen through the prism of Marxism is produced as an attempt to find similarities in societal conditions. This emphasizes the role of natural and economic factors in the creation of folklore and explains the tendencies of certain art to emerge at a specific point in history. The art of the Revolution is proof of the way in which art is generated from the spirituality and material conditions of social groups. Trotsky (1924) compares it to a handmaiden, inseparably linked to the surrounding social life and environment of man, and not just an independent element of creativity. The proletariat must make its own mark on culture by the creation of art, contrary to the past where culture was created by the dominance of the slave-owners and later the bourgeois. But this creation must spring forward from a profound change in social conditions and therefore also the development

of culture. Proletarian art which only takes inspiration and methods from the bourgeois intelligentsia's art can be talented but cannot be representative of the world of the proletariat. Trotsky poses the question of who best fit is to create proletarian literature. On one hand the proletariat lacks artistic culture and has its energy occupied by the revolution, while on the other, the intelligentsia such as the "fellow travellers" produce art which is not a fully faithful reproduction of the revolutionary time. The purely proletarian art will be able to support the development of peasant art forms and sustain it on the course to Socialism. Such art does not yet exist according to Trotsky, but once it does it will have the capacity to supply artistically both the demands of the city and the village. The party, he says, is not fit to command the domain of art itself, but Marxist methods can give a way to view art and estimate its development.

The domain of art is not one in which the party is called upon to command. It can and must protect and help it, but it can only lead it indirectly. (Trotsky, 1924, Chapter 7)

The party has the role of protecting the interest of the working class and doing so by merely supporting the artistic groups as the "fellow travellers" who accompany and move forward the historic process in the creation of art in a time of transition. Their role might be episodic, but nevertheless must not be banned, as they prepare the upcoming socialist culture. When art coming from intelligentsia circles tries to bridge the gaps between them and the working class, the city and the village, the party member and the nonpartisan, the party must not banish this point of view. Nevertheless, it will deal with that art which is destructive and poisonous to the Revolution and will watch over the creation of the new culture. The standard for official criticism and selection of this newly developed culture is political and imperative in nature, with a clearly defined activity. Trotsky concludes that there is a need for a revolutionary censorship which is vigilant, complemented by "a broad and flexible policy in the field of art, free from petty partisan maliciousness" (Trotsky, 1924, Chapter 7). The decision of what and when should the party interfere in the field of art is a difficult one and must be based on the development of proletarian art into its own form. This process of acquiring an independent perspective and craftsmanship of art is done by creating a continuity with the previous art movements. Proletariat art acquires its aesthetic education by absorbing elements of old cultures in the

history of art. Establishing a continuity of creative tradition means warming up with the bourgeois intelligentsia, which is compelled to seek support from the new ruling class – the proletariat. The Party must determine its policy on art based on the complex process of assimilation and transition between bourgeois and proletarian art. For Trotsky (1924) there is no defined formula that can guide this policy and he sees no necessity for strict regulation. It must evolve on its own during the course of establishing the proletarian artistic tradition.

During the 1930s with the appearance of The Frankfurt school of thought, Marxist theory is taken to a new level and intermixed with psychoanalysis, sociology, and philosophy to create a field on its own. This interdisciplinary approach is now known as critical theory and utilizes Marxist economics to analyze the effects of capitalism, technology and industrialization on society and culture (Britannica, 2024). As representatives of that school, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer criticize the way in which culture infects the artistic realms of film, radio, and magazines with sameness. In their joint work “Dialectic of Enlightenment” (2002) culture is compared with the political system which also spreads uniformity and inflexibility, even throughout the aesthetic manifestation of political opposition. The commodification of life has brought the spread of standardized behavior through the agencies of mass production and its culture. Individual life is influenced by those channels, saying what the natural, decent, and rational choice is. Schematism is prioritized in the production of culture and art, and it is imposed on the consumer. Cyclically recurring ideas and forms dominate the realms of music, stars and television and make the cultural details interchangeable. Clichés serve the purpose of confirming the dominant schema, while the detail has been elevated to a position higher than the overall form and composition.

The whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry. The familiar experience of the moviegoer, who perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he has just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perception, has become the guideline of production. (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, p. 99)

Adorno & Horkheimer (2002) describe a world in which every single individual is consuming the products of the culture industry, which on the other hand are modelled on economic machinery. Manifestations of the culture industry are bound to reproduce human beings in the model of the whole, while all its agents make sure to not lead the reproduction to an expansion of the mind. The cultural industry works similarly to its adversary - the avant-garde, as it has its own rules of prohibition to define its own language. Critics, specialists, studio hierarchies, production managers and arrangers all form a structure which limits by exclusion the creation of certain forms of cultural products. Their control is so expansive that it also defines the small area left free and controls it. A merging of roles occurs, as the producers are also experts and the ability to adhere to the idioms of naturalness is the deciding measure of expertise. What the specialist still holds as a residue of autonomy in terms of the reputation in his field, coincides with the business policies of the church or the industrial producer of culture commodities. The distinction between genuine and artificial style are made obsolete, as every subject matter springs forward from the same apparatus that gives birth to the intended jargon of the form. Internal interests rule the culture industry, rather than any consideration for style and aesthetics. As a result, the style of the culture industry remains without an opposition to overcome and at the same time style is negated. For Adorno & Horkheimer pure works of art are still always commodities, even as they follow their own inherent rules and negate the commodity character of society (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002).

Everything has value only in so far as it can be exchanged, not in so far as it something it itself. For consumers the use value of art, its essence, is a fetish, and the fetish – the social valuation which they mistake for the merit of works of art – becomes its only use value, the only quality they enjoy. In this way the commodity character of art disintegrates just as it is fully realized. (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, p. 128)

In “Dialectic of Enlightenment” the utility of the market is what always subjects and conditions art. Even freedom of art is nevertheless subjected to the commodity economy. Modern mass production only further changes the commodity character of art, making it

admit to its own commodification and present itself as a consumer good. In bourgeois art, the autonomy of the artist and the will of the market form a unity. Those artists who fall under the rule of ideology successfully conceal that contradictory unity, instead of subsuming it in their art (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002). Freedom of art is therefore seen from a critical perspective, unable to exist on its own in the world of bourgeois capital. Just as in the realm of politics, the culture industry gives rise to different variations of the same product and feeds it to its consumer base. There is a symbiosis between the consumers and the industry itself, as cultural products are created to satisfy any taste and simultaneously to define those tastes. The illusion of choice sits at the core of this system which subsumes all ideologies and art into itself. The economic interests of certain powerful groups are the leading factor in the development of any cultural product inside the capitalist system.

Chapter 2

The Bulgarian socialist state and the role of women

For my research, I will examine the most significant changes in social relations and policies of the socialist era in Bulgaria over the past century. This investigation will particularly focus on how social policies and relations have initially emerged and evolved during these times. By tracing the development of women's work and care in the family and outside of it, it's possible to discern how gender roles have changed within the Bulgarian context. Understanding the motives and outcomes associated with the distribution of various types of social assistance is a crucial step in the analysis of the socialist system and its relation to women. My aim is to reveal some of the moral, economic, and social imperatives which have driven the establishment of specific ideologies and policies regarding women's lives. Additionally, this will help to explore the phenomenon of reinforcing gender roles in caregiving responsibilities.

At the outset of the 1940s, Bulgaria was one of the least urbanized nations in the Eastern Bloc, second only to Albania (Deacon, 1987). The significant urban migration that

followed reflected a profound transformation in the social structure of the country, necessitating a robust set of social policies to manage the demographic and economic shifts. The government implemented a socialist mode of distribution during this period, aimed at laying the groundwork for a fully developed communist society where resources would ideally be allocated based on individual needs. The socialist policy framework was designed to support the massive structural changes taking place and to stabilize the rapidly transforming society, ensuring that the distribution of resources aligned with the broader goals of socialist development.

In the 1950s, Bulgaria experienced a transformative period of forced collectivization that drastically altered the rural landscape. A significant portion of the peasantry was eradicated, as people were compelled to relocate to urban areas, where they began employment in the newly formed state-owned agro-industrial complexes. This migration was part of a broader strategy to centralize agriculture and enhance production efficiency. The era was characterized by rapid industrialization and urbanization, which were pivotal for the country's development. By 1980, an overwhelming 90% of the agricultural land was under state control. The percentage of the urban population escalated dramatically, growing from 25.6% in 1950 to 68.6% in 1985 (Deacon, 1987).

2.1. State ideology regarding women

During the socialist era in Bulgaria, women's roles as mothers were emphasized with the implementation of specific rights and financial aid, aimed at ultimately nurturing the family. The family was seen as an institution which is fundamental to the whole of society. Any policy actions aimed at the betterment of the family at that time were indirectly seen as supporting the socialist state's functioning. The very core of that structural element was the mother who had the responsibility of raising the children of the future communist society.

On the other hand, the socialist economy's growth during this period was also dependent on women's labor. Women were given equal rights to work and gained a level of emancipation, further supported by the nationalization of private care services. Nevertheless, gaining financial independence and having access to free childcare did not

necessarily mean that the patriarchal family was destroyed. The extent to which women's role in the labor force influenced expectations around family caregiving remains a debatable issue.

Kristen Ghodsee and Julia Mead (2017) discusses how during the socialist period in Bulgaria, gender roles were distinctly emphasized while simultaneously women were assigned a new dual role. Contrasting with the previous strictly domestic sphere of work, women had to learn to balance the natural nurturing abilities in the family with their position in the workforce. This shift must not be mistaken for a direct path to "emancipation" in a socialist context, as such a conclusion would be detached from the actual events. This study aims to illustrate how state-organized changes in women's lives during socialism were manifested and could possibly influence their choices.

A fundamental objective of state socialist programs was to liberate women from economic dependence on men. Consequently, postwar communist regimes across Eastern Europe established full legal equality for women, modernized divorce laws, secured reproductive rights, and increased social support for single mothers and children born outside of marriage. Women were granted the right to keep their maiden names, access to all levels of education, and encouragement to enter traditionally male-dominated fields (Ghodsee, 2014). In the first decades of communism in Bulgaria, the government prioritized increasing women's literacy, enhancing their educational and vocational training, and integrating them into the workforce. These efforts were partly driven by the need to address postwar labor shortages and to meet the demands of rapid industrialization planned by the state. However, these initiatives were also inspired by the ideological principles of early socialist thinkers such as August Bebel, Vladimir Lenin, Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Alexandra Kollontai (Ghodsee, 2014).

Women's roles in society were ostensibly equalized with men through their participation in the workforce and access to equal pay. Nevertheless, distinctions persisted between "feminine" and "masculine" occupations, often relegating women to lower-paid positions (Ghodsee, 2004). However, for the first-time women did not need to become economically dependent on men. As paid workers, women enjoyed various employment benefits, including pensions, access to credit through co-operative workplace savings schemes, paid vacations, and use of company-owned hotels and holiday centers. This

formal standard under socialism helped establish a partial equalization of gender roles (Ghodsee, 2004). Giving new privileges to women in the workforce meant a sense of newly achieved personal fulfilment. While the ultimate purpose of such equalization was aimed at the realization of the common good and prosperity for the nation through the employment of everyone. Moreover, this process was accompanied by the ideological emphasis on personal virtues necessary for the betterment of society. It required from women to fulfil their social roles as part of the planned economy, additionally to being mothers. In 1954 a Bulgarian documentary called "*I am a woman tractor driver*" highlighted a women's tractor brigade in Pazardjik, promoting the idea that under communism, women could choose any career, regardless of family objections. Directed by a woman, this 25-minute film depicted young, independent women contributing to the development of a modern, industrialized economy—an empowering narrative for many women at that time (Ghodsee, 2014).

In the pursuit of supporting women in their "new" societal roles, the socialist state introduced various policies designed to socialize domestic responsibilities as much as possible. Public canteens, childcare facilities, generous maternity leaves, child allowances, and early retirement benefits were established to facilitate this support. However, Barbara Einhorn has highlighted a critical issue with this approach: it discursively framed women as both workers and mothers, whereas men were not similarly characterized as both workers and fathers. The state enforced a model where women were expected to assume public responsibilities without a corresponding shift in private responsibilities for men. This aspect of socialist ideology on women's liberation was fundamentally skewed, suggesting that women's freedom could be achieved without altering men's roles and responsibilities. This imbalance led to what has been described as the "double" or "triple" burden for women under communism, where they were expected to excel as wives and mothers, workers, and community members simultaneously (Ghodsee, 2004).

For both men and women, fulfilling their duties was integral to maintaining and strengthening the socialist community, which guaranteed their equality. Women's new roles in the workplace supplemented their traditional roles at home but did not replace them. The dual responsibilities of work and home had to be balanced in various ways in women's lives, a pattern that persisted during and after socialism. Mead and Ghodsee

(2017) underscore how socialist ideology and emancipatory attitudes supported by the regime had a more profound impact in larger urban areas, but nevertheless were kept under suspicion and countered by the prevailing patriarchal models. The position of women in society was still seen as responsible for specific duties, which included preserving the mother role as nurturer and supporter of the family and community.

The widespread ideal of a woman in socialist society was one who takes care of the family and in this way supports the basis of the social order. Her nurturing effort strengthens the structures of the state through the upholding of the family institution. The commitment to her double duty as worker and mother is essential to building the future communist society, both through physical contribution as well as moral upbringing of the children of communism. For Borovoy and Ghodsee (2012) the home was distinctly regarded as an integral part of public life in socialist Bulgaria. Therefore, women's "independence" was not about escaping the home, as seen in American second wave feminism, but rather about gaining support for making a social contribution as wives and mothers, while also balancing this with wage-earning work in the context of Eastern Europe. It was central for the Party to underscore the importance of women's work and responsibility of raising offspring. Therefore, it began an ongoing collaboration with the national women's organization to regulate women's lives effectively.

By the mid-1960s, Bulgarian women had significantly advanced in literacy, education, and workforce participation. In "The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism and Post-Socialism on the Black Sea", Ghodsee (2005) notes that women became a dominant force in professional fields such as law, medicine, education, and banking. Their skills were a valuable resource for the socialist economy, and the outcomes of mass literacy campaigns and investments in women's education and vocational training gave their intended results. However, some communist nations prematurely claimed to have resolved the "woman question" and shifted focus to other issues. The drive for women's emancipation in communist countries led to a substantial decline in birth rates, prompting a reevaluation of women's emancipation under socialism by nearly all East European Communist Parties due to looming demographic concerns (Ghodsee, 2014).

2.2. Socialist policies regarding women

The importance of the State in shaping the wellbeing and prosperity of the nation is a key element of socialism. Centralized programs connected to housing, maternity benefits, family life and daycare have left a significant impact on the lives of people but the motivation and methods of these types of policies are debatable. According to Aidukaite (2009) in the Soviet state, the main goals of improving material well-being, everyday life of families, women and children, healthcare, and longevity of the population, were largely left unfulfilled at the collapse of the communist system. Nevertheless, the various policies implemented across the Eastern European states had different levels of effectiveness and cannot be characterized fully as successful or unsuccessful.

The overall ideology of the socialist regime in Bulgaria can be analyzed as a type of social engineering implemented to fulfil strict criteria for health, prosperity, and growth. This pursuit was used to justify any particular social policy, which also served as an instrument for wider economic, demographic, or political purposes. For Aidukaite (2009) the definition of welfare state can be revised to apply to such a socialist system, even though the concept has long referred to studying affluent capitalist democracies. Therefore, it has often excluded the Eastern European states, although they have developed some of the most ambitious kinds of social policy. Titmuss (1974) posits that social policy serves as a critical influence on individual behaviors and choices. He argues that social policy is intrinsically linked to the underlying values and decisions that define an ideal society, its organizational structure, and a community's readiness for change (Aidukaite, 2009).

To understand the material conditions surrounding the family and women's lives during socialism, we need to investigate the topic of maternity, childcare and abortion policies in Bulgaria. This time was characterized by drastic changes to the economic conditions and overall social policies of the country, including all state activities affecting the social fabric and life opportunities of families, individuals, and social groups. More specifically, the maternity, childcare and abortion policies were some of the most advanced among socialist states. The system of state socialism has its own ideological set of motivations for implementing widespread social programs, and in the case of Bulgaria this has been demographic and economic growth, along with a redefinition of the traditional

motherhood concept to fit with the socialist ideal. Borovoy and Ghodsee (2012) observe that the wage was not viewed as the sole basis for women's equality at the time. Instead, especially in the decades right after World War II, it was the nationalization of domestic life that was considered crucial for securing women's status.

There is a fundamental difference between a state which takes the responsibility of providing essential social services and the state which leaves the performing of these services to the free market economy. The former puts the wellbeing of its citizens as its main objective and works to satisfy its basic needs like healthcare, childcare, elder care, and education. The latter relies on the free economic conditions which allow citizens to perform and purchase social services, but neglects to recognize the inequalities which deepen and become more ingrained in society. In a socialist state there is an understanding that a free market economic system, left with the responsibility of providing maternity leave and benefits, is unreliable to answer the needs of working mothers. This sentiment was evidently popularized and exported across the Soviet zone of influence on the continent and beyond.

The work of the American ethnographer and professor of Russian and East European studies Kristen Ghodsee offers one of the more extensive looks at the lives of Bulgarian women in the time of socialism. Her interest in post-socialist Eastern European states leads her to investigate how policies have influenced the daily lives of people during and after the fall of the regime. In her work on the historiographical challenges of exploring Second World–Third World alliances in the international women's movement, she traces the transaction in social policies between Bulgaria and other states. The evidence she finds points to an extensive collaboration between Bulgarian Women's Movement (BWM) and women in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The prioritization of mothers' rights and wellbeing was setting an example for newly liberated countries in Africa, which were also developing their systems under socialist influence. In the period between 1975 and 1985, the members of the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement (CBWM) and the Zambian United National Independence Party maintained relations of socialist solidarity and exchange of social policies aimed at women and families (Ghodsee, 2014).

Elena Lagadinova, who was the president of the CBWM, believed in the advantages of the socialist system over capitalism, especially in poor countries which experienced long periods of colonialism. According to her, such countries were able to develop economically through state ownership of the means of production and economic planning. Regarding women, she believed the socialist state intervention is more suitable to address their problems adequately, compared to non-governmental organizations that lack legitimate power and resources (Ghodsee, 2014). The influence of social policies of Eastern bloc states is palpable and can be seen in the development of such policy structures and organizations around the world, as well as in these states' own social systems during the transition to capitalism.

The objective of the communist or socialist state is to ensure the social well-being of its citizens, and within such a system, this is possible through negotiations with trade union officials and representatives of women's organizations. In the case of Bulgaria, researched by Ghodsee and Mead (2017), The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement was a very influential organizational structure, that initiated some of the most innovative welfare policies in the period from 1968 to 1990. In 1969 the Committee supported a poll among subscribers of the official women's magazine "*Zhenata Dnes*", titled "Women in Production, Social Life, and the Family". It was conducted to investigate the reason behind the falling birth rate, which was concerning the socialist party and the realization of its economic and demographic goals. The results showed that Bulgarian women wanted to have more children than they currently had. However, a major obstacle was the difficulty in finding institutions to take care of children while their parents worked. Only 22.8% of children under the age of 7 attended state-funded kindergartens and nurseries, while 8% were left alone during their parents' working hours. The study also revealed that, even with assistance from grandmothers, grandfathers, and husbands, mothers carried out most of the caregiving for adolescents. According to Ghodsee and Mead (2017), this prevented families from having more children. The decision to forgo additional children was largely due to family women being exhausted by their multiple responsibilities, inside and outside of the home.

The double burden of the socialist working woman is expressed in this combination of housewife responsibilities, still predominantly performed by women, with the newly established work shift. In the pursuit of economic goals, the state had to balance out the responsibilities of family and work life in order to stimulate the birth rate. Knowing that the task of redistributing responsibilities within the private sphere of the home would be challenging, the editors of the magazine suggested the creation of a centralized approach to tackle this issue. To facilitate this, a political action to establish free childcare was embarked on (Mead and Ghodsee, 2017). Only institutionalized daycare facilities could adequately support the work-life balance of families during socialism, while promoting demographic growth, the rapidly developing economy, and its goals.

There was a gradual introduction of social policies to support mothers, most of which were established by law in 1973, thanks to the efforts of the CBWM. The Bulgarian economy needed the participation of the female workforce to achieve the goals of the rapid industrialization program. The CBWM proposed the extensive socialization of domestic work, suggesting that the state should build enough new kindergartens and nurseries. Another point was advocating for child benefits given on the birth of the baby, as well as building workplace cafeterias where mothers can receive a home-cooked meal after long factory shifts (Mead and Ghodsee, 2017). The new law on maternity leave allowed a woman to use paid leave of 120 days before and after the birth of a first child, 150 days for a second child and 180 days for a third child. As well as an additional paid leave for 6 months for the first, 7 months for the second and 8 months for the third child upon receiving the minimum wage. Children were guaranteed a place in a kindergarten, while the mother could return to her work position which the institution was obliged to keep for her. The time spent in maternity, whether paid or unpaid, counted as labor towards pensions. In case the woman decided she wants to return to work earlier, she could transfer her maternity leave to her husband, grandmothers, or another close family member. That person received the right to use the remainder of her paid leave. Apart from the availability of nurseries and kindergartens, mothers could rely heavily on older women in the family who had the opportunity to retire earlier in life (Ghodsee, 2014).

In the period up to the 1980s, Bulgaria was already one of the socialist countries with the

widest network of childcare institutions. They were all tied to state enterprises, factories, and agricultural cooperatives where parents worked. Kristen Ghodsee (2014) describes the importance of the Bulgarian Women's Movement in the initiation and shaping of maternity and childcare policies. The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement closely monitored the construction and development of each of the kindergartens and nurseries, from the interior decoration to the quality of toys provided to the children. The members of the CBWM exercised their supervision and control over the childcare institutions by constantly communicating with the Central Party Committee and other state agencies. They lobbied for various kinds of improvements in conditions, expansion of the construction of new institutions, increased production of toys and basic improvements in food and working conditions.

Another signature of the progressive character of socialist policies in Bulgaria were abortion rights. This issue of health and social policy is nowadays often regarded as typical of liberal feminist programs and developed democratic conditions. In the case of the Eastern Bloc, abortion policies exemplify the ways in which common western feminist goals were established by socialist states but had a different motivation and reasoning. The idea of abortion related to women's body autonomy differs from the idea of abortion in the socialist context. In this case abortion was understood as a social necessity and was used as a tool of demographic control and promoting the socialist standard of living. The important value of childrearing was central to the creation of a good socialist society, and it was seen as dependent on the ability of mothers to combine work and family life.

According to the American Journal of Public Health in 1967, after the implementation of pronatalist policies during the 1960s, Bulgaria ranked among the three most liberal countries in terms of abortion (together with the USSR and Hungary). This is because abortion policies were aimed to regulate the results of increasing birth rate policies. The idea of the Party was to increase the population without harming social stability and economic well-being. Abortions were available to all unmarried women, women over forty, those married with more than one child, as well as women with children from previous marriages, and women taking care of children of relatives. More than two

children in the family meant difficulty in giving them adequate care. Raising unwanted children was recognized as a burden for families, children and, subsequently, for society (Borovoy and Ghodsee, 2012). The responsibility of the state to provide children with education and employment therefore meant that maternity allowances increased up to and including the third child but became significantly reduced afterwards. Even while socialist states like Bulgaria struggled to increase birth rates, it was widely accepted that women could not be productive members of the labor force while taking care of more than five children. As a result, married women with one or two children had the highest rate of abortions. Again, this type of social policy demonstrates the state's intervention on individual fertility decisions and emphasis being placed on the wider picture of developing healthy society and demographic growth (Borovoy and Ghodsee, 2012).

2.3. The Bulgarian Women's Movement role in socialist policies

The organizers and active members of the Bulgarian Women's Union had a twofold function in their work throughout the years. On one side, their efforts were coordinated with the Party and aimed at fulfilling a key educational role for shaping the ideal socialist Bulgarian woman. On the other, they had the ambition to effect positive changes in women's lives, both within the socialist policy framework and on a more personal level in each woman's domestic life. Their mission to balance the male and female roles in society, as well as in personal relationships and in the family proved to be significantly challenging.

The topic of women's organizations during socialism is significantly developed in the works of Kristen Ghodsee. In their publication titled "Gender Discussion in Women's Socialist Journals: The Cases of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia," Ghodsee and Mead (2017) examine several key policy ideas originated by the efforts of the CBWM in the socialist state. In result women's lives were impacted by the interplay of various new social policies and their direct effect on family relations. Women's positions in the labor market translated into newly formed household dynamics and this inevitably affected traditional family roles. Ghodsee's research on the state of women's lives in socialist states and the influence of women's organizations in policymaking is crucial to understanding the complex position of the woman in socialist society. Her extensive work in the archives of the Bulgarian Women's Movement as well as those of other socialist

states has been central to forming her ideas on gender in the socialist context. By examining her writings, we can formulate a clearer concept of how significant the women's movement was in shaping women's lives during this time.

Contrary to the popular preconceptions about communist women's organizations, Ghodsee (2014) wants to demonstrate that the CBWM maintained a degree of autonomy from the socialist government and genuinely championed policies that enhanced gender equality and improved the material circumstances of women's lives. The CBWM often functioned independently from the male-dominated leadership of the Politburo and Central Committee, focusing earnestly on bettering the lives of Bulgarian women. The CBWM was financially supported by the revenues from subscriptions to the magazine "*Zhenata Dnes*" (Woman Today). Despite its costly subscription, the magazine's wide circulation provided enough funds, allowing CBWM to set its own priorities. These resources enabled the CBWM to engage in both domestic and international efforts, supporting policies and initiatives aimed specifically at promoting women's rights, while often facing resistance from the predominantly male Bulgarian political hierarchy (Ghodsee, 2012).

"*Zhenata Dnes*" was the official state women's magazine in socialist Bulgaria, initially published in 1945 and overseen by the CBWM. The title meaning "The Woman Today" was adopted in 1968, following a reorganization of its operations and leadership, aligned with a new objective set by the socialist party. This objective was linked to addressing the demographic crisis of the late 1960s, aiming to stimulate birth rates while also maintaining women's full participation in the workforce. Bulgarian women were granted this right in 1944, and since then, various changes occurred in the ways in which they organize their daily lives. As both partners in the family became engaged in paid work outside the home, it became more obvious to women that they should not be solely responsible for maintaining the domestic sphere. The unequal distribution of responsibilities in the household between men and women became difficult to ignore. This issue was central to the evolving reality of family structures, and it did not remain a taboo topic, thanks to the efforts of the CBWM. Under their supervision, the writers of "*Zhenata Dnes*" addressed this imbalance numerous times (Ghodsee and Mead, 2017).

During the 1970s, the circulation of the magazine reached 400,000 in Bulgaria. It primarily covered trivial topics from the daily lives of its readers, while aligning with socialist ideology and highlighting the achievements of socialist parties both domestically and internationally. Since 1968, the CBWM and the magazine focused on promoting pronatalism in the country. This goal became part of their policy agenda, but Ghodsee notes that the organizers wanted to link it to another specific objective. They wanted to showcase a modern perspective of women, who are not solely responsible for raising children, on the pages of their magazine (Ghodsee and Mead, 2017).

The editors of "*Zhenata Dnes*," along with the CBWM's leadership, believed that the double burden in women's lives was significantly linked to the declining birth rates. Through the magazine's publications, they launched a campaign to persuade the public that men should also take an active role in child-rearing, thereby easing some of the woman's burden. These efforts were delicately framed around pronatalist policies, rather than drastic modern feminist ideas. The campaign argued that men should assume some of the domestic responsibilities traditionally assigned to women, without challenging fundamental notions of constructed gender roles (Ghodsee and Mead, 2017). Equality in formal employment meant a potential for fostering a new form of equality in the home. The editors believed that an alignment of roles in the public sphere presented opportunities for a new balance in family relations.

In 1968 the magazine published an article titled "Fathers," featuring photographs taken on Bulgarian streets showing men holding their children by the hand and pushing strollers (Ghodsee and Mead, 2017). This new type of images, with captions like "I am the father" and "This is my son/daughter," were accompanied by thematical questions from the magazine's editors. The article described the various aspects of raising a child and noted that the responsibility usually fell on the mother, but it also expressed a cheerful outlook toward the unusual sight of a father pushing a stroller. Ghodsee and Mead (2017) suggest that such images were more shocking for women living in areas far from the larger cities, where most people still considered this type of activity "unmanly." The article questioned whether policy could reshape private relationships within the family or if the attempts at reaching "equality" only impacted the public sphere. The article ended on an optimistic note for young fathers-to-be, suggesting they might differ in their approach to household chores. Fathers that shared the chores in the domestic sphere would be praised by their

wives and children and respected by society. Highlighting these "benefits" was part of the magazine's approach to present the advantages of sharing care responsibilities between genders.

In 1970, Maria Dinkova authored an article in *"Zhenata Dnes"* on the topic of women's double burden of responsibilities. Dinkova referred to data from a 1970 survey called "What Type of Woman Am I?" to make the conclusion that women have become active contributors to their own oppression by adhering to outdated gender roles and hesitating to seek help from their male partners at home (Ghodsee and Mead, 2017). The surveys conducted by the magazine demonstrated that women desired both motherhood and employment but showed little interest in remaining a stay-at-home mother. The socialist state system simultaneously elevated motherhood to a revered status while attempting to influence traditional views on the division of household chores. The use of multifaceted approaches aimed to achieve the desired demographic effect. However, Ghodsee and Mead (2017) make the observation that in the course of the subsequent decades there were no significant changes in the distribution of caregiving responsibilities in the family. The efforts of the CBWM and the magazine *"Zhenata Dnes"* did not have the intended lasting cultural impact within the private sphere. The state and its ideology tried to function as an arbiter between traditional and modern ideas, but it was challenging to break the patriarchal value system embedded in each family institution. The state recognized the need to create an environment where women felt more inclined to have children. This required re-emphasizing childbirth as an integral part of women's roles. However, a redistribution of household responsibilities was not a feasible goal for the state. An external structure was necessary to provide childcare for all families. Such an organization could partially substitute the caregiving role of working women.

Following the conducted studies by *"Zhenata Dnes"* and the CBWM, new social policies to support mothers were gradually introduced, with many of these established by law in 1973. Ghodsee and Mead (2017) emphasize that these achievements can be attributed to the members of the CBWM, who proposed several policy innovations during the 1970s. At that time, no other socialist country had such generous maternity provisions, including the USSR, where comprehensive maternity leave legislation was only enacted in 1981. The Bulgarian government needed the full participation of women in the workforce to meet the goals of its rapid industrialization program. Consequently, the CBWM, aligning

with the political objectives of the administration, did not propose any solutions that would affect women's work outside the private sphere. The legal changes proposed by the CBWM were centered on expanding state support for mothers. They advocated for the broad socialization of domestic work, specifically recommending that the state build enough new kindergartens and nurseries. They also suggested implementing a policy of providing child benefits immediately after birth and establishing workplace canteens where mothers could collect prepared meals after long shifts (Ghodsee and Mead, 2017).

The 1973 legislative decision by the Politburo on enhancing the role of women in the building of a developed socialist society contained words aimed at the Bulgarian men. Influenced by the activities of the CBWM, the decision reiterated the main point demonstrated throughout the surveys and articles of "*Zhenata Dnes*." The text urged men to share the family responsibilities with their wives, rejecting outdated views, habits, and attitudes toward the distribution of work in the home. This appeal was not limited to alleviating women from their double burden, but also to educate and prepare new generations of men from an early age to participate in household work (Ghodsee and Mead, 2017). In the following years, "*Zhenata Dnes*" continued to publish articles and conduct polls aimed at showcasing examples of men in Bulgarian society. The magazine highlighted stories related to men's children and families, their attitudes toward women's choices, as well as their views on traditional gender roles and the responsibilities associated with them. The interviews and accompanying photos of men caring for their children aimed to present a more positive and modern image to the readership (Ghodsee and Mead, 2017).

At the same time the magazine addressed shifting gender roles in the country by asking women to place themselves in one of four types. In a series of polls, readers were asked to identify themselves as traditional, modern, professional, or transitional wives. Based on this study, in 1975, Maria Dinkova wrote an article titled "Discourse Around the Problems of Modern Family Life: The Modern Wife," exploring how Bulgarian women self-identified. The findings showed that the largest group at 39.9% saw themselves as modern women, valuing their roles as mothers, housewives, and working women equally. The second largest group, at 30.3%, identified as being in transition between traditional and modern. The fewest at 1.2% identified as professional women, while traditional women were slightly higher at 12.8%. Among the "modern wives," 42.5% were white-

collar employees, 29.8% were blue-collar workers, and 26.8% were agricultural workers. Dinkova concluded that the more educated and experienced women were, the more important it was for them to balance being both housewives and workers. This group of women was more influenced by socialist ideas about gender roles, striving to align with the ideal woman, who excelled in both aspects of her social role (Ghodsee and Mead, 2017).

At the end of 1979 and the beginning of 1980, journalist Pavlina Popova published three articles based on interviews and surveys among men about the meaning of masculinity and fatherhood in Bulgaria. In trying to explore the evolving opinions of modern Bulgarian citizens, Popova highlighted the new social expectations of men to be active in the household. Her findings demonstrated that some Bulgarians, both men and women, feared that modern society was eroding traditional masculinity and femininity. The articles marked the developing anxiety caused by the fast changes in cultural perspectives. Popova purposefully described male involvement in childcare and household care as a "social need." She argued that fatherhood should not be reduced to a mere "biological necessity" for men, but rather should involve taking on responsible parental roles. Consequently, she highly praised the moral strengths of husbands who transformed blind instinct into conscious nurturing. Popova emphasized that men involved in raising children did not compromise their masculinity. Despite the equality in decision-making, partners should still maintain their gender roles (Ghodsee and Mead, 2017). Another study by the magazine in 1983 indicated that, while men were generally willing to help with raising children, they tended to view other housework as solely the domain of women (Ghodsee and Mead, 2017).

In summary, socialist state policies aimed at working women, mothers and their children were a main area of concern for the development of a healthy socialist society. The demands and suggestions of the CBWM were seriously regarded and allowed to be heard at a high level in the party structure. Nevertheless, progressive abortion and childcare policies were organized around the production of economic value for the state. The primary idea of such policies was not empowering women to make their own decisions regarding their bodies and lives, but rather directing the most favorable economic and ideological outcome for society. While these policies supported the efforts of the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement in their attempts to improve the quality

of life for families and working women, extensive efforts to culturally reeducate and raise awareness through the pages of the prominent magazine have given mixed results among the male population. The overall push for increased awareness and responsibility among family men did not achieve the goal of redefining gender roles and their associated caregiving duties.

With the end of the socialist period, free access to social services disappeared and a new private sector started to emerge to satisfy that market. The post-socialist period of transition was not engaged in any serious reevaluation of the state-sponsored social policy campaigns deeply entwined with the previous economy. The concerns of the Bulgarian Women's Movement about the inability of the free-market system to address women's issues adequately came to life with the failure to preserve any of the progressive social structures in the new democratic society. Ghodsee's initial research on women's labor in post-socialist Bulgaria highlighted the intense debates over whether transitioning to competitive labor markets would disadvantage women (Borovoy and Ghodsee, 2012). A major question following the end of communism in 1989 was whether the Bulgarian government would retain its maternity leave policies from the communist era. In the late 1990s, some Western and local feminist organizations, alongside gender experts at the World Bank, contended that these maternity leave provisions disadvantaged women in competitive labor markets (Borovoy and Ghodsee, 2012).

Liberal feminists were concerned that such benefits would hinder women's competitiveness and lead employers to discriminate against women of childbearing age to avoid the inconvenience and costs associated with maternity benefits. In contrast, Bulgarian women, along with several prominent politicians, argued that potential labor market discrimination against women was preferable to forcing women to choose between work and family. The liberal notion that motherhood was an individual choice, a private matter to be supported by personal means, or an option to be sacrificed for a career, was considered unrealistic in the Bulgarian context. Instead, women asserted that motherhood was a social contribution and, therefore, it was the state's duty to support women's dual roles. Resolving this issue was highly symbolic in the post-socialist context (Borovoy and Ghodsee, 2012).

Chapter 3

Art and Women in Socialist Bulgaria

In this chapter, I examine the role of women in the artistic landscape of socialist Bulgaria. The focus is on how state policies and socialist realist ideology influenced their work and what were the broader implications for artists. This chapter builds on the previous discussion of Marxist ideology and socialist economic policies by exploring their impact on cultural production, particularly in relation to women's involvement in the arts.

3.1. Socialist realism

The term 'socialist realism' refers to the state-mandated style of art that dominated Soviet and Eastern Bloc countries during the mid-20th century. Socialist realism, as developed in the Soviet Union, relied on grand narratives, and emphasized morale over individual fragmented realities. This style often involved the use of familiar fables and symbols of socialist morale to convey a clear message to the audience. Traditionally labeled as "propaganda," this type of art is often perceived in the West as dull, lifeless, and overly instructional (Efimova, 1997). In his 1957 article foreshadowing the First Congress of Soviet Artists, the painter Konstantin Yuon writes that the aesthetics of the time and the concept of beauty should be represented in every painting, becoming the central element of Soviet art, which compellingly draws the viewer in. Yuon's assertion that Soviet art must "powerfully attract" rather than simply teach or inform indicates a deliberate aesthetic aim that challenges the perception of socialist realism as dull and didactic. Soviet artists were expected to captivate viewers with a strong, magnetic appeal (Efimova, 1997).

It is commonly stated that Andrei Zhdanov and Maxim Gorky were the writers who officially articulated the ideas of Socialist Realism as the style for Soviet art and literature at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. The process by which individual artists adapted and interpreted this code created their distinct visual style and critical discourse. This adaptation was not straightforward or merely a transparent application of official decrees. The doctrine came to legitimize aesthetic preferences in literature and visual arts that had been gaining support for years before the Congress. The enforcement of the

doctrine allowed for personal interpretation, which made individual artists susceptible to accusations of ideological failure (Efimova, 1997).

Between April 1932, when the decree on the dissolution and restructuring of literary and artistic organizations was passed, and August 1934, four hundred texts on Socialist Realism were published. These texts included debates and discussions about what kind of realism would be suitable for the new aesthetic and if the term "realism" itself was suitable to the romantic tendencies toward the epic and monumental. The sheer number of texts on Socialist Realism during these years and before that contradict the widespread assumption that Socialist Realism suddenly appeared formulated by leaders like Gorky, Zhdanov, and Stalin (Efimova, 1997).

During the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, the writer Andrei Zhdanov quoted Stalin's description of writers as the engineers of human souls. He explained this demand as the need to thoroughly understand life in order to represent it authentically in art. This representation should not be in a scholastic or lifeless way, or merely as "objective reality," but a portrayal of reality in its revolutionary progression. Additionally, the authenticity of the artistic depiction should have the objective of ideologically transforming and educating the working people in the spirit of socialism. This approach to literature and literary criticism is referred to as the method of socialist realism (Becker, 1963).

Georgy Malenkov, at the Nineteenth Party Congress in October 1952, spoke of the concept of the 'typical' in the Marxist-Leninist framework. For him the 'typical' goes beyond what is merely common and does not represent a statistical average but aligns more closely with the essence of the prevailing social-historical phenomena. It encompasses those aspects that most fully and accurately express the nature of existing social forces. Malenkov points out that typicality in art includes consciously exaggerated or emphasized images that help reveal and underscore the underlying truths more effectively. Thus, the typical serves as a crucial field for expressing the party spirit within realistic art, making the exploration of typicality inherently a political issue (Becker, 1963).

Ralph Fox, a significant English historian of the first half of the 20th century, states that the absence of dialectic and a philosophy among modern realists has misguided them and

prevented them from truly understanding and perceiving the world. He notes that in contemporary times, the ultimate disgrace for an artist is to be uncertain about their thoughts on life. Marxism addresses this shortfall by providing a framework for understanding, but it does so at the expense of aesthetic diversity and with a philosophical inflexibility (Becker, 1963). In 1959, a book titled “On Socialist Realism” was secretly released from Russia, offering a critical perspective by an author using the pseudonym Abram Tertz. He argues that socialist realism begins with an idealized image and molds living reality to fit this ideal. This approach, which shows what ought to be rather than what is, transforms it into a form of romanticism—referred to as “revolutionary romanticism” or “active romanticism” by Maxim Gorky. Tertz points out that socialist art cannot be made by using the 19th century literary method of realism. A truly faithful depiction of life is unattainable when founded on a dialectic driven by teleological ideas. Consequently, if socialist realism aims to attain the status of great world literature, it must abandon the realism model, cease to aspire to the greatness of 19th century Russian masterpieces, and instead explore the realms of the epic and the mythic that are inherent in its foundational premises (Becker, 1963).

Maxim Gorky emerged as one of the most prominent literary figures in Soviet Russia from the time of the Revolution until the Second World War. His statements from the beginning of the century until the 1930s highlight a meaningful shift from strict realist objectivity towards viewing the writer as engaged in purposeful social activity.

Personally, it seems to me that realism would best cope with its task if, in analyzing an individual in the process of finding his true place on the road from petty bourgeois, animal individualism to socialism, it would describe man not as he is today, but also as he must be—and will be—tomorrow. (Gorky, as cited in Becker, 1963, p. 487)

For Gorky, revolutionary romanticism is a term that can be used interchangeably with socialist realism. It is primarily aimed not just at critically portraying the past, but more importantly, at fostering the consolidation of revolutionary gains in the present and enhancing the vision of the grand goals of a socialist future. He believes that a blend of

realism and romanticism is essential, and one should not be merely a realist or a romantic, but both (Becker, 1963).

To reconstruct the process of the aesthetic system that emerged, Efimova (1997) looks past the official tenets and vague definitions of Socialist Realism and explores more obscure sources, such as artists' statements, memoirs, and critical debates in art magazines. She uncovers persistent motifs in artists' work that reveal their personal concerns, separate from the official doctrine. One peculiar understanding of realism shifts the emphasis from the truthful representation of reality to making the viewer feel "real"—alive and sensually responsive. This unusual neurological discourse on realism was accompanied by the invocation of the word "life" (*zhizn'*), suggesting that producing a feeling of aliveness was the most urgent desire of the artists and critics. Goals such as "stirring up," "awakening," and "touching" took precedence in this discourse over methods of ideological doctrine. Art that seeks to find something raw and alive presupposes a certain kind of desire in the viewer to feel and to be de-anesthetized (Efimova, 1997).

An essential text which reevaluates Soviet life under Stalin from an aesthetic perspective is the book "The Total Art of Stalinism" by Russian émigré art historian Boris Groys. He interprets the socialist realism of the time as the truly successful continuation of the failed avant-garde project. The text explores the merging of aesthetic and social categories under socialism, specifically interpreting social processes through the lens of aesthetic concepts. Groys makes a claim for an artistic examination of the Soviet regime as a form of state art. He believes this can unveil many aspects of the system that are otherwise inaccessible. This method can be seen as rooted in Nietzsche's claim that the world can only be justified aesthetically (Efimova, 1997). In 1896, Georg Simmel, one of the pioneers in modern experiential theory, published "Sociological Aesthetics" where he proposes a link between aesthetic forms and social organization. He suggests that symmetrical structures of social organization aid in the governance of many from a single point. In the views of Groys, the aesthetic is a comprehensive, unified vision of society imposed by its leadership in the face of the totalitarian model, which is compared to an artist's pursuit of control and stylistic consistency in their artwork (Efimova, 1997).

The approach of merging the aesthetic and social aspects in the construction of Soviet-type societies is advanced by Bulgarian philosopher Vladislav Todorov. In his book "Red Square, Black Square," Todorov claims that communism ultimately established effective aesthetic structures but flawed economic ones. Factories were not designed to produce commodities; they created symbolic meanings, representing industrialization. Society became a poetic work, generating metaphors rather than capital. Art and politics in this context collaborate as a doctor-engineer surgically intervening in the organism of life and using the instrument of aesthetics. (Efimova, 1997).

3.2. Art education, production and censorship

State socialist countries, in this case Bulgaria, set a precedent for women in art by creating opportunities for their specialized education and advancement in the field. The socialist approach to women's education and professionalization led to better chances for female artists to progress. Changes in the workplace, education, healthcare, and infrastructure for redistributing care responsibilities marked monumental shifts on the global stage at the time. These changes enabled women not only to lead more balanced and equal lives but also to evolve and redefine womanhood beyond traditional views. Consequently, the modernization of women's lives, including their increased participation in public spheres, led to modernist expressions of women through art.

As life serves as the fountain of creation, new generations of women entering male-dominated fields were able to articulate both higher artistic ambitions and everyday concerns through art. This allowed them to contribute with new depictions of femininity and masculinity in art and film production. Some of these depictions aligned with the demands of socialist realism, while others challenged these boundaries and were therefore marginalized or banned.

With the increasing educational and employment opportunities in socialist Bulgaria, more women began working in cinema and creating portrayals of female characters. Women were directing and writing films, while some studied abroad in Soviet film academies to learn the techniques of socialist realist cinema. Their goal was to return and produce culturally enriching films which aligned with the ideology. While having the opportunity

of working and being funded by the state, directors had to be cautious of creating films that can be censored. However, even in straightforward narratives, there were opportunities to insert various meanings, either intentionally or unintentionally, by the creators. There were ways to incorporate subversive elements within surface-level socialist realist films. These strategies for depicting alternative ideas and realities were partially intertwined with ongoing modernist movements abroad and aligned with ideas of the women's movement.

This era facilitated the emergence of modernist art from the daily lives of women, incorporating actual feminist themes, even if these were not explicitly labeled as such by artists or institutions at the time. During the latter half of the 20th century, feminism was considered unnecessary and dangerous within the socialist context due to its bourgeois connotations. Nevertheless, it began to gain traction and fed into the growing awareness among women, supported by education and culturally disseminated ideas of gender equality.

Women artists, writers, directors, actresses, and other professionals from both traditionally female and male-dominated fields were inspired by the spirit of modernism that infused their creative desires and aspirations. Modernist approaches to expression and conceptualizing the world were crucial for those established in their careers who sought to expand and diversify the representation of women in art and popular culture. Some challenged the limits of what was deemed acceptable under socialist realism, which was often ambiguously interpreted and evaluated by official art councils and politicians.

However, the issues facing women did not vanish with socialist emancipation; they continued to be explored creatively within the context of their realities. Access to artistic creation, albeit sometimes restricted, allowed women to channel their anxieties and personal, often considered uncomfortable, "female subjectivity." Topics that were of interest to women could be viewed as taboo within the confines of socialist realism, which was intended to reflect the collective struggles of society against a backdrop of socialist ideals and aesthetics. This expectation of conformity provided limited scope for the full expression of individual perspectives.

Yet, this era also emphasized the educational qualities of mediums like cinema and mass publications, which were now open to contributions from women who brought different

perspectives based on their evolving roles and shifting attitudes towards traditional gender norms.

3.3. Women in art production

The portrayal of women in Bulgarian art during the 19th century enforced the ideal of the female body, along with the characteristics of kindness, gentleness, and caring predisposition. This image was prevalent in folklore, urban love songs, as well as art. Young women were seen as the embodiment of physical health and beauty, ensuring the continuation of the lineage, and fulfilling traditional roles. In contrast, depictions of mature women showed beauty transformed by the marks of hard work and sacrifice, such as wrinkles, harsh skin, headscarves, and rolled-up sleeves. This image was the epitome of the female martyr (Popova, Vodenicharov, & Dimitrova, 2002). The elevation of traditional values such as female modesty can be seen as connected to the shame around the portrayal of the female body.

Eventually the visual representations of innocent young women and maternal figures were transformed and challenged by the art of women artists in the 20th century. They explored both traditional themes and new, innovative subjects, venturing into an art world previously dominated by men and asserting their identities as women. Their work was often viewed and critiqued as "feminine" both during and before the era of socialist realism. Whether restricted or elevated, their careers reflect the characteristics of the era and their individual personalities.

At the dawn of the 20th century, the Bulgarian art world was evolving along with the contemporaneous European influences. These changes were impacting Bulgarian women also, providing them with new institutional opportunities to pursue careers in art and sustain themselves through work in art. These opportunities were conditioned by their personal life circumstances as well as their ethnic and religious backgrounds. Women artists shaped their identities and work in relation to their class and cultural environments, as well as the framework of Bulgarian legislature and social norms. These norms intertwined into the public and private lives of women artists. For some, national cultural

identity, along with ethnic and religious aspects, were visibly reflected in their art, while for others, these elements remained secondary to their female perspective.

Art historian Irina Genova says in the early 20th century in Bulgaria women could attend the state drawing school, which offered applied specialties such as ceramics, basketry, needlework, and lace knitting. Teresa Holekova from the Czech Republic became the first female teacher at the time, teaching lace knitting. Women's training in these feminized specialties was not seen as challenging social norms or professional conventions for women. At this stage, female artists were not involved in financial decisions, art purchases, or public exhibitions and critiques. Over the years, the number of scholarships awarded to women progressively increased, expanding into fields like sculpture and graphics, initially considered atypical for female artists. Nevertheless, in Bulgaria, as in the rest of Europe, women who had the opportunity to study and create art generally came from wealthy families (Genova, 2017)

The Female Artists Section (FAS) was established in 1928 as part of the Society of Bulgarian Women with Higher Education (SBWHE). After 1944, it was integrated into the newly founded Union of Artists in Bulgaria, which became the Union of Bulgarian Artists (UBA) in 1959 during the socialist regime. From 1928 to 1941, the FAS facilitated the participation of Bulgarian female artists in 13 domestic exhibitions and 2 international ones. After 1947, its activities were limited, and it was formally abolished following the closure of SBWHE in 1950. During this period, some female artists were temporarily excluded from UBA. In the early 1950s, many artists were labeled as fascists. In the meantime, UBA established a monopoly over artistic life, offering career development opportunities, exhibition participation, and selling paintings in exchange for membership. UBA also had the newly relegated responsibility of enforcing adherence to socialist realism in the work of artists (Nazarska,2018).

Informal contacts among the remaining active female artists from the FAS continued over the following decades, with former members occasionally participating in joint exhibitions. In 1956, the first collective exhibition of female artists was organized in collaboration with the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement, involving the core members of the previous FAS. This event provided a platform for these artists to showcase and sell their works, helping them emerge from a period of anonymity. The

exhibition's main themes centered on socialist realism, depicting images of working women as socialist heroines. These themes persisted in subsequent exhibitions until the 1970s, after which this initiative ceased to exist (Nazarska,2018).

During this period, critics were harshly accusing female artists of formalism and an obsession with individualism and following of fashionable trends in art. After the fifth exhibition in 1964, significant criticism was directed at the perceived lack of art adequately reflecting socialist reality. Artist Ekaterina Savova-Nenova wrote a letter to the Committee for Art and Culture and to the UBA, accusing the exhibition jury of evaluating the works based not on their artistic qualities but on the personalities of the artists (Nazarska,2018).

The next exhibition, held six years later, introduced a new judging process involving a large committee of female artists and art critics from educational organizations. Unlike the earlier, smaller exhibitions, this one was marked by a specific importance due to the announced visit of the president of the International Federation of Democratic Women (IFDW). The jury deemed some works incompatible with the exhibition's conceptual guidelines, leading to the exclusion of many female artists. Conversely, the works of art chosen to be displayed were praised for highlighting the progress of women in socialist society and celebrating them as creators of the world (Nazarska,2018).

One of the brightest names among women artists in Bulgaria is Sultana Suruzhon who became known for her depictions of female nudity. Her art serves as a counterpoint to the prevailing images of the idealized woman-mother and her traditional life path. Born in 1900 to a Jewish family, Suruzhon developed an appreciation for art and graduated from the State Art Academy in 1927 to later join the Society of Women Artists. During the interwar period, she participated in exhibitions organized by the SBWHE and some featuring Jewish artists (Pavlovitch, n.d.). The central focus of her art is women and the nude female form. She often selected subjects from her surroundings, particularly other Jewish women like her mother. Milena Balcheva-Bojkova (2015) notes that themes of nudity were unconventional and generally avoided by female artists at the time, making Suruzhon's series of nude female figures particularly remarkable and outstanding for its time. She ventured into this new aesthetic territory, exploring its complexity through personal, as well as common perspectives. Sofia Suruzhon (2000) describes her sister

Sultana's portraits, along with her fewer landscapes and still lifes, as reflections of her kindness and childlike spirit. These works are filled with light and pastel colors. Suruzhon eventually left Bulgaria in the first years of socialism and continued her career in Israel (Pavlovitch, n.d.).

Lika Yanko was born in 1932 in Sofia to a family of Albanian immigrants. She graduated from the Art Academy in 1952 and held her first exhibition in 1960, participating in the "Women's Exhibition" during the time when socialist realism was academically imposed by art institutions. Yanko did not conform to these artistic formulas and was consequently censored and repudiated by the official socialist aesthetic for many years. Her artwork features coastal and mountain scenes, as well as portraits of loved ones. Over time, her paintings began to incorporate mythopoetic elements, which Dimitar Avramov (1998) describes as evoking collective archetypes such as the sun and love, the Annunciation and motherhood, faith and hope, self-sacrifice and destiny, humanity, the sea, and the cosmos. According to Irina Genova (2017), Yanko's self-portrait from the 1960s reflects a sense of self as a child, depicting a little girl holding a brush in one hand and a toy in the other, surrounded by chickens and wasps.

Her paintings have faced controversy during the rare occasions when they were displayed. In 1963, an art professor commented on Yanko's work, stating that "Lika Yanko's art has been taken to a level of painful sophistication. As a result, the image has become schematic, evoking pity rather than touching the viewer" (Avramov, 1998, p.27). In 1968, her first solo exhibition was forcibly closed on the sixth day after sparking a scandal among cultural figures. Rusin Ginev (1993) describes the subsequent period in Yanko's career, noting that juries at general exhibitions often returned her works to avoid having to provide detailed explanations or, at best, placed them in poorly lit corners where the paintings were effectively "buried." Prominent advocates of socialist realism actively organized efforts to undermine her work.

Yanko stopped publicly exhibiting her work and for many years relied on sales to foreign diplomats for financial support. The state showed little interest in her art for a long time, but eventually, her work gained significant value among private buyers. Yanko was never included in the general exhibitions of the Union of Bulgarian Artists. Reflecting on her role in Bulgarian contemporary art from the 1960s to the end of the century, she remarked

that she did not see herself as part of any major trends, nor did critics categorize her within them (Ginev, 1993). Avramov (1998) links the sensibility and technique of her art to certain directions in the Western European avant-garde, as well as to the Byzantine tradition, which had influenced Bulgarian art for centuries. This connection also explains the presence of various icons in Yanko's work. She adorned her Madonnas with Bulgarian embroidery, depicted nature from the Rhodope mountains to the Black Sea beaches, and explored themes related to the Bulgarian land and soul (Ginev, 1993).

3.4. Women in film production

Despite the ongoing feminization of caregiving professions and the persistent hold of patriarchal values over women's private lives, art was evolving to portray more progressive female characters. Some were written, directed, and performed by women, though their interpretations and reception were influenced by critics and state officials.

Film expert and professor of Film Studies at the University of St. Andrews Dina Iordanova (2009) recognizes the amount of Bulgarian female directors who have been neglected by the history books and left unknown to the public currently. She writes of the lack of recognition by film society in the Balkans, compared to the years of socialism. According to her these female directors existed, produced work that was then seen and recognized, as they had a visible public presence both domestically and internationally. This raises the question of whether Bulgaria differed from the general perception of the Balkans as offering limited opportunities for women. Iordanova (2009) describes growing up in Bulgaria during the 1960s and 1970s and never feeling restricted in her interests or professional choices. She claims that these opportunities make Bulgaria a key case study of female creativity in cinema.

By retrospectively studying women directors in Bulgaria, Iordanova (2009) says that their position over the decades has not significantly differed from that of male directors. Like their male counterparts, women working in the 1960s and 1970s had opportunities to make feature films, and some of their films were also shelved. For example, Binka Zhelyazkova faced challenges with her debut feature "And We Were Young" (1961) and her esoteric film "The Tied Up Balloon" (1967), which had a very limited release.

Similarly, Russian-born Irina Aktasheva's film "Monday Morning" (1965) was shelved and only released in 1990. Despite these setbacks, both women continued to make films, and the censorship they experienced did not have a lasting impact on their careers, much like many male directors of the same era (Iordanova, 2009).

Female directors who entered the profession in the 1970s had, like their male counterparts, the same level of access to decent funding and were able to make films much more frequently than they could in the post-1989 period. The end of state socialism brought difficult times for the whole industry, so women-directors who happened to be at the height of their active careers during this time, inevitably suffered – like their male counterparts – from the reduced levels of centralized funding, the chaos in the industry, and the identity crisis that came along. Women were able to complete projects much less frequently now and those younger female filmmakers who were set to enter the profession after 1990 had to wait for much longer for their debut features. They managed to release feature debuts only in their late 40s and are often referred to as the ‘lost generation’ of Bulgarian cinema (Iordanova, 2009).

Many female filmmakers from Eastern Europe do not identify as feminists and often distance themselves from feminist agendas. These women often collaborate closely with their male partners and balance professional careers with household responsibilities, embodying the "double burden" described in feminist literature. For instance, Binka Zhelyazkova worked closely with her scriptwriting husband, Hristo Ganev, and their daughter, Svetla Ganeva, a director of photography, was married to animator Anri Kulev. Similarly, Irina Aktasheva, Mariana Evstatieva-Biolcheva, Milena Andonova, and Eli Yonova have had significant collaborations with their husbands or male family members in the film industry (Iordanova, 2009).

According to Iordanova (2009), while some may view this as a form of patriarchy, these women have nonetheless developed sustained and successful creative careers. Another notable aspect that Iordanova mentions is the significant role of male mentors in female filmmakers’ careers. A prominent example is the director Georgi Dyulgerov, who has played a crucial role in the careers of many women filmmakers. Many of these women have been his students, while others have been cast in his films, worked as assistant directors, or benefited from his support as a producer (Iordanova, 2009).

Iordanova distinguishes four generations of Bulgarian female filmmakers. The first one is the oldest generation with directors like Binka Zhelyazkova (b. 1923), Irina Aktasheva (b. 1931), and documentarian Nevena Tosheva (b. 1922). The next generation consists of still active filmmakers born around 1940 who entered the profession in the 1970s, completing various state-funded projects before 1989. They have sometimes enjoyed privileges and sometimes have faced censorship. After the end of communism, their success in securing funding for new projects varied and they remained active at a slower pace. Directors from this generation include Mariana Evstatieva-Biolcheva (b. 1939), Ivanka Grybcheva (b. 1946), Roumyana Petkova (b. 1948), and documentarian Adela Peeva (b. 1947). Peeva is likely the only one from her generation who seems to thrive, despite facing censorship for some of her documentary projects in the 1980s and only managing to release a film every few years. (Iordanova, 2009).

Iordanova (2009) suggests that even the most successful women from this generation cannot maintain the fast pace of work they had in the 1980s. The reasons are varied, including the presence of difficult conditions in Bulgarian cinema during the 1990s. Directors like Grybcheva, perceived as favorites of the communist regime, may have faced a backlash due to the preferential treatment they supposedly received before 1989. The author believes the more serious issue is that when documenting the history of Bulgaria's national cinema, the contributions of these women are often overlooked and rarely included in the final narratives (Iordanova, 2009).

The female filmmakers from the next generation, born around 1960, were educated primarily through the film directing program introduced in Sofia in the late 1970s. Most did not make their feature debuts before 1989. Their films emerged during the post-communist era, marked by the funding scarcity of that period. Throughout the 1990s, they predominantly worked on shorts and documentaries, experiencing long gaps between projects and relying heavily on international programs for financing. They typically made their full-length feature film debuts in their mid-40s and have faced difficulties in pursuing further projects (Iordanova, 2009).

Reflecting the moral concerns of 1980s cinema, women from the older generation focused on female-specific issues such as divorce, empty nest syndrome, abortion, love, emancipation, independence, and career. These movies often featured popular actresses

of the time. Roumyana Petkova is an example of a female filmmaker whose films typically involve an all-female team and address women's themes. In this she is perhaps the closest to embodying the concept of a feminist director (Iordanova, 2009). A notable area dominating the work of several female directors from the older generation is cinema for and about children. One example is Mariana Evstatieva-Biolcheva whose films have been mostly for children. Ivanka Grybcheva has also consistently focused on the psychology of children in the films "Children Play Outdoors" (1973), "To Neither One" (1975), "Exams at Odd Time" (1974), "Porcupines' War" (1978), and "Prince's 13th Bride" (1987). Although some of the best-known Bulgarian films about women, such as "A Woman at 33," were made by men, female filmmakers consistently showed a strong interest in themes related to women's lives.

Chapter 4

Women in art: the socialist and modernist perspectives

In the 19th century, the rise of art academies and the professionalization of art provided more opportunities for women, but institutional barriers still existed. This started to change in the early 20th century when the concept of the female artist emerged stronger than ever with the modernist movement. This concept began to solidify as women were increasingly taking their place in avant-garde art. The feminist art movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the next step in challenging the male-dominated art world and sought to highlight and celebrate women's contributions.

The creation of visual art which redefines the approved socialist image of the woman can be seen as related to the practices of modernist art in the West. This type of comparison can be made once we adopt a broader concept of modernism that extends beyond aesthetic concerns and considers art within the context of resistance movements. Art which stands up against traditional systems and ideologies in different political and historical settings can be considered modernist in its nature. In her book "Gendering Modernism", Maria Bucur uses the definition originally formulated by Roger Griffin, which views modernism as a mindset that "encourages the artist/intellectual to collaborate proactively with

collective movements for radical change and projects for the transformation of social realities and political systems" (Bucur, 2017, p. 4). In this framework, I examine the deliberate intentions of artists to challenge and disrupt dominant culture, as well as some works of art created with different motives and circumstances, but still having similar effect.

4.2. Women in modernism

The departure from realism characteristic of modernist art stems from an individual rejection of reality. Freedom in modernist art is achieved through creative expression, rebellion against academic art conventions, and the fragmentation and expansion of time and space through emotional and psychological interpretations of real life, rather than through straightforward narration. Bucur (2017) writes of the inherent contradictions and gender biases in the history of modernism. Originating at the turn of the 20th century in Europe, modernism often utilized the female image, particularly through the rebellious and unconventional depictions by male artists.

Modernist art was characterized by portrayals of unorthodox female figures, which were seen as abnormalities and fictional constructs within its aesthetic framework. Bucur (2017) presents an early example of two symbolically contrasting images from the first and last issues of the French publication "The Surrealist Revolution." The first issue from December 1924 features a page with the mugshot of Germaine Berton, a prominent female anarchist who was acquitted of murdering a right-wing leader. The large and imposing mugshot of Berton, with her piercing gaze, is centered and surrounded by headshots of notable surrealist artists, including Picasso. The image is accompanied by a quote from Charles Baudelaire: "Woman is the being who projects the greatest shadow or the greatest light in our dreams." The image serves to symbolize both the admiration and artistic potential of the male artists who align with the rebellious and untamable spirit of the female anarchist.

The last issue of the same publication from December 1929 presents a contrasting image of femininity, suggesting that the rebellion against the established order, and by extension, patriarchy, was no longer as prominent a cause for modernist circles. The picture of a

nude woman drawn by Magritte looks down and away from the viewer. She is depicted in a modest yet provocative pose, surrounded by dressed up in suits surrealists with their eyes closed, indifferent to the view. According to Bucur (2017) this piece is an attempt to transform women back into an object of male desire and anxiety, relegated to the role of objects, lacking inner life. By exploring the subconscious and desire through highly gendered imagery, the surrealists focused almost exclusively on their understanding of masculinity in crisis, with women, or more often "woman" as a generic symbolic figure, cast as a castrating, emasculating, and overpowering force they could not escape.

There are numerous examples of transgressive or revolutionary portrayals of women in modernist art, not due to their own philosophical, social, or political beliefs and actions, but because of the visual perception of their femininity, or lack thereof, depending on the context. André Breton was a leader of the surrealist movement who supported Frida Kahlo's exhibitions in the United States and France, while trying to impose a patronizing narrative on her art. He recognized her as an important artist in surrealism, but this recognition didn't bring her closer to the dominant surrealist circles in Europe. In his description of her art catalogue, he portrayed her as unoriginal, with her style being "spontaneous" and innocent, rather than "premeditated". Her art was not considered in the same way in which modernist art by men was seen as deliberate and with a specific purpose. The various explorations of themes like gender, motherhood, death, race, and modernization coming from a female perspective were not intellectually and ideologically recognized by Breton (Bucur, 2017). Kahlo's artistic vision was inescapably entangled with the idea of femininity, naturalistic and unpredictable.

4.3. Women in socialist realism

By focusing on the works of both female and male artists of the socialist era, we can synthesize an image of the feminine and its various incarnations during this long cultural period. I explore some of the bright examples of visual works created during the time when socialist realism was the state-sanctioned form of art. Despite the ideological climate, the products of art presented varied outcomes and can be analyzed through the prism of modernist and even feminist art. The representations of women in the popular art forms should be explored alongside their inclusion in official and unofficial art

discourses of the 20th century. This double exploration creates a more fully complete picture of the “woman question” of the socialist period. It also provides a basis for comparison to the current feminist discourses about women’s creation of art and structural inclusion. Lastly, by connecting the realms of socialist and modernist art, I want to present a different perspective on the woman artist as a precedent and eventually the vanguard of modern womanhood.

The hypothesis I explore is that the modernist spirit can be found in art created under various aesthetic and narrative guidelines, including the official directives for achieving socialist realism in the art of Eastern European states. I trace certain ideas related to feminism and modernism which artists successfully implemented while creating art in the time of socialist realism. A key point of this part is to examine both artworks considered radical, some of which were banned or restricted, and officially approved examples of art, which can also be analyzed for their subversive subtext.

The portrayals, style and context of cinema can be analyzed through historical and cultural lenses, giving insight to the political regime and social conditions of the time and place of their narratives and creation. Furthermore, by contextualizing the films’ overall messages, genres, critic and audience receptions we can understand more about the artistic work’s significance and historical impact. A common theme for socialist realist cinema is the woman between work and the family. Films of the period often center the lives of women and their relationships in the public and private sphere. Set on their paths of socialist womanhood, they must integrate their social roles, by mastering the responsibilities of work life and family creation. The issues that arise along their ways revolve around relevant themes of the “woman question” as they occurred in the specific national context. The general idea of the woman’s new role in society involves women’s education and work outside the domestic sphere. This state-approved concept encourages women to perform both feminine and masculine traits in accordance with the context of the private or public spheres. Yet women have continued to face patriarchal structures, regardless of how well they were able to embody the new emancipated roles in society. The comparison of films from different points of the socialist era and different countries gives way to some varying ideas about women’s actual disposition to the socialist reality and their roles. Female characters can have similar life trajectories, conflicted between their new and old societal roles, but contrasting attitudes which bring them to their

individual endings. While what is expected of women is fulfilled with great dedication by one character, others might generally reject it. The woman persisting to be fully committed to her purpose can be contrasted by another's decision of a feverish escape from reality and total disavowal of all societal norms.

In Bulgarian cinema, female directors were not uncommon during the later years of state socialism. For example, the film "Monday Morning" (1966), directed by Irina Aktasheva and Hristo Piskov, presented an unconventional image of a woman at this time. The main character rebels against societal conventions and patriarchal systems, as well as the socialist order itself. The movie uses a modernist style to depict revolt as it focuses on the rebellion of the female character. Its style bares comparisons to New Wave cinema, due to painting her as the quintessential rebel, a free-spirited symbol of the West, characterized by her modern bleached haircut, black dress, and dancing to Italian songs. Her behaviour is characterized by an overall free spirit, wandering the city on screen with no boundaries. Her protest is spontaneous and unplanned, rather than engaged in an intellectual critique of the patriarchal structures and the façade of socialist gender equality. Contrary to some critics' interpretations, the character is not merely a stand-in for youth rebellion against the formalities of socialism. Instead, she is in a constant state of rejection of patriarchal norms and paternalistic structures in everyday life, her relationships, and at work. The female character depicts both a personal statement of a revolutionary attitude toward life, as well as a universal depiction of a woman's battle between work, love, family, and her own sense of freedom.

"Monday Morning" was filmed in 1966 but was initially banned because it didn't correspond to the ideological line of socialist realism and was officially released 20 years later in 1988. After the movie's release in the end of the socialist period, it became widely associated with the modernist vanguard of Bulgarian cinema. Ingeborg Bratoeva-Darakchieva (2013) writes about the significance of the film, with its plot and dialogue being an unprecedented criticism from the politically left, openly attacking the very functioning of the socialist system, in terms of its deviation from the communist ideals.

The heroine Toni is depicted wandering around the socialist city, the bars and cafes, alone or with friends, singing and dancing. She enters the story without a home and an occupation, therefore escaping the socialist duality of womanhood, characterized by the

rights of equality of women and men in education and work (Daskalova & Kmetova, 2011). That is how she meets the brigade worker Dancho and is given the chance to work in the shipyard with him. The idea of involving her in the work is motivated by the goal of facilitating the transition of the brigade to a real communist one, where women are presented as integrated with men at a traditionally male occupation. But for the men in the brigade Toni presents a “bourgeois element” and eventually threatens to tear them apart. She has been expelled from the Komsomol (the official youth movement of the socialist state) for domestic decay, a fact that Dancho refuses to believe and sees as slander by his friends. She admits to her crimes and doesn't show remorse or shame, contrary to his expectations and the socialist morale. She continues to break the order, by escaping and rejecting him, as he continues his attempts to reform her with work and force an engagement. He gives her responsibilities and structure in order for her to settle down and take the female role in a family, as well as in socialist society. During a scene the men come together in the living room, playing cards and talking about life, freedom and cinema, while women gather in the kitchen talking about their domestic responsibilities, looking after children and doing home renovations. Toni refuses to be in the kitchen with the women and escapes to be surrounded by men in their world.

A main issue is how Toni is referred to as an element that the communist brigade needs to assimilate. The movie asks the question if the state socialist mechanisms that were being implemented for inclusion of women in male dominated spheres were able to work. The concept of women's equality entered the popular discourses long before it entered the real world of women. The popular socialist media propagated how equality between sexes can make women in male professions visible. (Daskalova, Kmetova, 2011) Toni is a portrayal of the disappointment stemming from this unkept promise of facilitating the emancipatory status of women. She is expected to easily fit in the structure of the brigade and the community of men, but she faces their resistance. criticized for being contrary and isolated from the world, accused of lacking interest in both the spheres of work and family life. The socialist regime is engaged in sustaining the optics of emancipation and equality for women, without a concern for those of them who are prescribed new societal roles but fail to adapt.

Toni's portrayal appears radical next to the popular depictions of women in Bulgarian culture and art during the 1960s. She explores and chases excitement, the frivolities of

life, leisure and love. which are incompatible with the ideal representations of the working woman and wife on screen. She doesn't hide her disinterest in the brigade's work but understands that she must participate in labor as everyone else. Nevertheless, her natural opposition to traditional as well as socialist values creates a cloud of fatalism around her character, as she appears on the verge of running away at any time. The restrictions of the socialist realist artistic method are transgressed when she finally decides to escape, rather than exist in the socialist reality imposed on her.

The ordered and harmonious surface of socialist life is ruptured by the presence of a woman with no home, no purpose and no responsibilities. She revokes the conventions of work, family, patriarchal relations, civil responsibilities and codes of conduct. Through the eyes of the men in the film she is seen as destructive and sinful, not capable of adapting to the workplace, nor the family. Toni tries to assert her individuality and human desires, but she remains misunderstood. Her similarities with the men are what further make her unworthy of their respect. One of the workers tells her the reason he dislikes her is precisely their similarity, with the only difference being her inability to work hard and be patient, waiting for things to be handed to her. The film purposefully rejects the romantic plot, as Toni declines to receive the man's love through his protection and commitment. She refuses to be fully known, doesn't tell her past, and remains open to the future. The unraveling of the love relationship as well as the work relationship in the brigade, is shown as the degradation of the honest simple working man under the influence of the corrupted woman. At one point a comparison is drawn between Toni and the heroine of the opera "Carmen", who seduces the main character and later breaks his heart.

As the movie progresses, it becomes apparent that the socialist ideals professed by the men in the brigade are not as important to them as they initially seemed. They are portrayed as flawed humans who lie and chase their egoistical goals. The film points out the men's cynicism of relating the socialist ideals of collective work to the achievement of material desires like money, motorbikes and television. Bratoeva-Darakchieva (2013) describes the film's portrayal of the working class as shocking in its bluntness. Instead of being depicted as the most progressive social force, the directors see it as common folk with their petty bourgeois worldview. The exemplary shipbuilding brigade is shown as a group of people, united only by their material ambitions. This perspective on the working class is also evident in the directors' previous film "There is No Death" (1963), which

was also taken off screens four days after its premiere. In "Monday Morning," the directors focus specifically on the materialistic values of the workers. According to Bratoeva-Darakchieva (2013) they draw a parallel between the socialist idealization of materialism and Western consumerism that has never been done before in Bulgarian cinema. This is evident in one of the originally censored lines spoken by Toni: "They built your kind of communism in America long ago." The line can be found in Neda Stanimirova's book "The Cinema Process: Temporarily Frozen" (2012), where she compiles the corrections suggested by the directors of the Bulgarian Film Artistic Commission, responsible for providing guidelines and censoring movies during the socialist period.

By the end of the film, the woman's integration into the brigade appears to be impossible. Only Dancho maintains his hopes for the realization of the socialist ideal, which means keeping the woman both in the family and in the brigade. Disappointed by the discrepancy between the socialist slogans proclaimed by the men and the mediocrity of their values and behavior, the heroine leaves the communist brigade and her lover, who also finds himself hopelessly trapped in this mediocrity (Bratoeva-Darakchieva, 2013). He becomes aware that there is nothing holding her with him anymore, now that she is not bound by the obligation of a job or marriage. His attempts to make her adapt to the double role of the socialist woman are finally hindered.

Bratoeva-Darakchieva (2013) writes that the style of socialist realism penetrated the sphere of cinema from the 1950s with only a few exceptions which were usually banned or censored. According to her during the 1970s, the myth of the wonderful present and even brighter future continued to proliferate on screen, albeit not as naively as in the 1950s. A sense of false optimism continued to emanate with an example being the film "The Best Person I Know!" (1973), with screenplay written by Lilyana Mihaylova. The film showcases a female character who challenges stereotypical definitions while at the same time conforming to the moral-teaching narratives typical of socialist realist cinema. The protagonist of the movie is employed in the traditionally female-dominated teaching profession and is facing the challenges of encountering students coming from different life circumstances. The plot contrasts the woman's previous experience of teaching children with her new role instructing men who work in predominantly male industries such as mining, metallurgy, and mechanics. Filmed in Pernik, a major coal mining hub,

the film places the heroine in a pivotal role as both an educator and confidant to students engaged in traditionally masculine labour. As her significance in their lives grows, the film highlights the difference between the female caregiving role and the world of harsh physical work. Among the conflicts being created, the movie tries to evoke a compassionate view of the community bonds being formed. The narrative depicts a woman intertwined with the daily struggles and adversities of ordinary people and how those relationships grow through genuine interactions. The female character is portrayed with dignity, and her influence in the lives of others is shown not through private sphere roles of motherhood or homemaking but through her substantial personal and professional engagements. The themes of socialist realism are apparent in the film, as it delves into the personal aspects of individual hardships, emotions, and compassion shared among members of a community. The movie offers both dramatic and optimistic portrayals of life during that era and importantly, engages with the socialist themes of female work and emancipation, the recognition of women's reproductive rights and the distinction between their private and public lives.

The movies discussed are created fully or partly by women and signify a certain sense of commitment to the female perspective on life, freedom and personhood. A particular example of socialist realism centring women's experience can be also found in the works of famous male directors of the time, such as the Soviet classic "Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears". Written by Valentin Chernykh and directed by Vladimir Menshov, it presents a different perspective on the "woman question". By taking this film into account, we can contrast the ideological strength of socialist realist cinema when coming from the cultural and artistic centre of gravity – the Soviet Union.

"Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears" premiered in 1979 and was shown across cinemas in the Soviet Bloc, gaining significant popularity. It takes its name from a Russian proverb, used to denote the indifference of the big city life towards the sentimental. In the context of the film, it is connected to the idea of the strong woman who can fight her own battles, being a worker and a mother. The symbolism of the tears can point to the traditional weakness of the female character, which is now transformed in the big city life. This is where the female protagonist achieves success by becoming a director of a factory, but also where she is put through most difficulties. For the socialist woman this is a place of both aspiration and hostility, and she must prove herself in order to reach her

intended place in society. Only after that she will have to learn the final lesson of being a woman, which is humility and her place in relation to the man. The conclusion of the movie is when the woman of socialist ideals meets her match in the face of love. The final scenes show the female protagonist being close to shedding a tear in front of the man she loves in an emotional release coming after stoically overcoming all obstacles on her own. She is an example of perseverance and growth in the face of misfortune and coldness of modern life. Nevertheless, the Soviet melodrama creates a happy ending where the emancipated woman of socialism achieves her double role of mother and worker, and then finds the love of a man, more representative of a long-lost past.

The movie is part of the popular at the time melodramatic genre, which compliments the overall socialist realist theme of the single mother with a love story. The first half of the movie is set in 1958 only five years after the death of Joseph Stalin. This period of de-Stalinization was characterized by the efforts of the socialist state of decentering “the cult of personality”. Under the new policies of mass housing and the process of ending forced labor, there was a political strive for differentiation from a past of fear and dictatorship. The new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev with his notable speech "On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences" set a theme of rejecting desperation and insecurity and reestablishing beliefs in the future of communism. In 1959 Khrushchev described the “communist way of life” as the outcome of giving citizens separate apartments as well as showing them how to properly use the public goods provided in society (Harris, 2015).

The paths of the young women in the movie cross when they start living together in the workers’ dormitory room. Having a separate apartment was an aspiration for many who have lived in small and overcrowded dormitory spaces. Katerina and her friends come from small towns and are united by their aspirations to work, study and find husbands, as well as their desire to get out of the dormitory. Katerina meets the cameraman Rudolf, by who she later becomes pregnant, but is left to take care of the child on her own. The reason is his mother’s disapproval and protection of the apartment which the family has acquired, where four people already must live in two rooms. The campaign of building and distributing apartments was problematic and slow, as people would be put on long waiting lists to receive their permits. Christine Varga-Harris (2006) argues that getting a separate apartment under Khrushchev was a key entitlement in a renegotiated social contract between state and society that had lapsed under Stalin. She examines letters directed to

state authorities of the period from ordinary citizens to point the stark contrast of their desperate attempts at bettering the conditions of life and the official press highlighting the joy of citizens moving into new apartments.

The transition to mass housing estates was aspirational for many but at the same time it was bringing a nostalgia. The old communal apartments were the symbol of a way of life that was slowly disappearing and creating anxiety for future changes. A reoccurring theme of the film is the modernization and the antisocial patterns which they produce, keeping men and women in a state of disagreement and corrupting family values. Facets of modern life like loneliness and social atomization are threatening the unity of families and of the socialist whole. These concerns are expressed in different scenes, as the characters balance life between the past and the present. Steven Harris writes that during this time, the Soviet press was comparing communal spaces to sleeping cabins that were no longer benefiting the socialization of personal life. Families of the Khrushchev period aspired to lead the communist way of life by having a separate apartment and enjoying their privacy. Conveniences, comfort and consumer items of modern urban life were brought to the forefront of achieving harmonious community and family life (Harris, 2015).

The film portrays some of the more pressing women issues of the time, as Katerina moves in the ranks of the factory to eventually become the director. She gives birth after not being able to get an abortion after the 12th week of pregnancy. The narrative continues 20 years later in present-day 1979 when Katerina has succeeded professionally and raised her daughter. They live in an apartment, and she drives a car to work, while sleeping on the living room couch. Harris (2015) writes that inhabitants of new residential buildings were organized in new communities, based on the common obstacles of living in unfinished apartment complexes. Residents' strategies for community building and combatting hooligans and drunkards were supported by the state. There was a call to involve people in neighborhood patrols that would essentially seek out the antisocial and parasitical behavior among residents and marginalize them. This rationality persists in the film's narrative where men are the involved citizens, bearing communal responsibility. Few of them, like Gosha and Nikolai are shown taking action and solving issues, while others are portrayed as corrupted by the individualism of modern life – television, alcoholism, adultery, violence. Gosha, Katerina's love interest, decides to deal with the boys who have threatened to beat up her daughter's boyfriend. He takes it upon himself

to do what he thinks a man should do and fights the boys to teach them a lesson, without talking to Katerina who is opposed to getting involved in the conflict. For him the principle of resolving your own issues is the only responsible way for the common good of everyone. His involvement in the personal life of the family and making decisions concerning Katerina's daughter is his way of taking the role of a father, husband, as well as exemplary citizen.

Katerina's past is riddled with difficulties, from her underpaid position in the fabric, life in a communal dormitory, or the unplanned birth of her daughter. They are all steppingstones for her to realize her full potential - as a woman, mother, worker and citizen. Her transition from a simple worker to a high-ranking position signals the change of times for women in socialism. The social system allows her to work and succeed, taking control of her life and taking care of her child alone. Female emancipation is presented as seamlessly fitting with the society's design, while still allowing the woman to retain her femininity. The virtuous socialist woman is supported and elevated in society, but her personal life tells a different story. Evidently the biggest issue, standing in her way of happiness and fulfilling her role is the lack of traditional family. The man who left her and her child works in a television channel and Katerina is first fooled by his impressive depictions of a future where television will be everywhere. He is symbolically positioned at the center of modernity and moral decay, the new-age man who eventually brings disappointment in the woman's life. The threat of the uncertainty of innovation transforms into the anxiety that would necessitate the return of the traditional man in the face of Gosha.

The emotional charge of the storyline is contained in Katerina finally finding love and then being faced with the question of the function of the man in contemporary socialist society. If he is not the essential provider in the family sphere, then there is an eroding sense of what masculine identity is. During the late stages of state socialism, this discrepancy was becoming more and more a source of insecurity for men. The Russian film director Ivan Dykhovichny began his career during the 1980s and later created the historical drama "Moscow Parade" (1992), a film about the nostalgia for the lost time of the fathers. The director, who was a contemporary of the dawn of socialism, is famous for expressing his strong position on the destroyed masculinity of the Soviet man. His artistic

work and ideas serve as an insight into growing up in the Era of Stagnation and the trend of resurfacing traditional attitudes. In a 1992 interview he has said:

When you lose your dignity, providence punishes you-it takes away your sex. Our country in that respect is a typical example of how you always have to pay for your sins- we are a sexless society. This is especially true of men.... The Bolshevik idea began with the destruction of sex. Orwell understood that in theory, and we experienced it in practice. It's amazing that our fathers' generation preserved their masculine dignity, in spite of everything. (Dykhovichny, as cited in Larsen, 2000, p.13-14)

In “Melodramatic Masculinity, National Identity, and the Stalinist Past in Postsoviet cinema”, Susan Larsen (2000) analyses this sentiment as a praise of the very few men who have preserved the masculine characteristics that tyrannical regimes have tried to strip from them. The late-stage socialist idea that men have mostly lost their status, was complimented by the fear of women’s emancipation gone too far and stripping them from their essential characteristics. The movie resolves the anxiety caused by modernization of the post-Stalinist period by presenting the traditional masculine precedent - the man of late Communism. He is ordinary but respected, stable and principled, proud and content with his profession as a mechanic. He loves his work and his friends and doesn't have big aspirations. He believes in the differences between a woman and man in the family and that man should be the one earning more money. All of this makes the character representative of the time of the film's release and can point out the reason for its notoriety and positive reception.

Conclusion

With this thesis I aimed to explore the interaction between Marxist ideology, real-life socialist policies and cultural developments in the lives of women during the socialist period, with a specific focus on the creation of art and the case of Bulgaria. The historic

events and ideological conflicts which have arisen as a consequence of communist political thought can be seen as equally important to the present day and age. By defining the political side of important cultural changes and contextualizing the ideological aspect of the political restructuring of socialist societies, we can visualize the realm of everyday life as it was evolving.

Marxist theorists often debated the importance of the topic of art creation in terms of building the new communist system and developing the consciousness of the proletariat. Class struggle is interconnected with the ideological implementation of art and facilitates new methods of creation which correspond to the realm of revolutionary thought. This structuring of art as educational and moralistic gave way to the eventual formula of socialist realism, which was a guiding principle of art policy for the Soviet and other socialist regimes for decades to come. Art became engaged with the purposes of the revolutionary struggle, the future of communist development and the elevation of the mundane human experience, as opposed to the bourgeois concepts of art. Eventually state socialist art policies gave rise to a complex interplay of ideology, state objectives and the personal strive for artistic independence. The category of women artists which emerged as a legitimate part of socialist society was subject to the demands of this interplay and continued to struggle for its creative independence during years of censorship.

Through the conceptualization of Marxism by its most pronounced figures, the role of women in society was instrumentalized for the purposes of building a brand-new structure. The idea of women's liberation did not equal the bourgeois concept of equality that would penetrate the Western world during the 20th Century. Women were instead positioned as integral elements of the communist future to come and later this significance became evident in the socialist policies of countries such as Bulgaria. Class distinctions remained the real enemy of true individual freedom and meaningful equality, which isn't simply an instrument of capitalist control and subordination. The "woman question" was approached by Marx in a truly progressive manner, suggesting the full transformation of private property including women into communal property, that would facilitate the liberation of the working class. Nevertheless, the development and conceptualization of the "woman question" into the political sphere of socialist countries was not as unequivocal. While the idea of women as private property was in the past, the role of women went through significant expansions to finally encompass both the private and

public spheres. Marx and Engels positioned the community of men as the only way of satisfying the demands of a truly free society, but the reality of this concept proved to be quite challenging for traditional societies and family institutions.

By exploring the role of the Bulgarian Socialist State in shaping the new roles of women, I wanted to underline some of the main considerations regarding this process of modernization. Characteristic of the ethos of the 20th Century, the “woman question” became a symbol of successful policies during the years of socialism. Bulgaria’s contribution to this development was through the implementation of progressive maternity policies and building of infrastructure to facilitate women’s expanding role in society. As the double responsibility of mother and worker continued to grow and leave its mark on women’s lives and personal choices of having a family and children, the socialist state had to intervene with a series of moralizing campaigns. The importance of the The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement can be seen in their role of consulting and suggesting policy solutions to the Bulgarian Communist Party. Their suggestions facilitated the successful participation of women in the workforce and education, by trying to neutralize the casualties of the modernization process on family life and childbearing. By balancing the fundamentals of traditional society with modern life, the organization contributed to the perseverance of the socialist structure.

Furthermore, I analyze socialist realist principles of art creation in the context of policies, institutional structures and barriers for women artists. Here again the socialist state proves to assume the role of arbiter between ideology and general societal progress. While women were provided with open access to educational and professional opportunities in the sphere of art, the process was nevertheless controlled and sanctioned by official art institutions. Ideological control and censorship of the content of works of art were common occurrence which made women artists navigate the artistic realm with caution, while sometimes incorporating subversive elements into their work. Women’s increased involvement in the sphere of art created new representations of femininity and masculinity, reflecting on the changing times and the socialist ideals. Despite censorship, women artists managed to create contributions to art that would fit into the modernist movement characteristic of the European continent at the time.

Finally, I explored the varying perspectives of socialist and modernist art on the topic of the female representation. By focusing on several case studies of film from the Bulgarian and Soviet socialist realist period of cinema, I suggest that the topic of the “woman question“ was centrally developed by both women and men directors coming from different backgrounds and points of view. Regardless of the manifold restrictions to freedom of expression and the ideological education of the masses, individual artistic contributions persisted in the true spirit of revolutionary art, as discussed in previous chapters. Portrayals of complex and controversial female characters on screen during this time of proliferation of the cinematic language, meant an expansion of cultural horizons at large. The tensions between the private and public spheres finally took center stage in the works of women artists and contributed to the societal evaluation of modern life and socialist principles. Despite the constraints of socialist realism, this time in history provided a platform for depicting the new realities of women in society and ultimately gave a bright example, shaping the next generations of women artists.

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