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Till Death Do Us Part

“Happy families are all alike, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

*(Leo Tolstoy,
Anna Karenina)*

Introduction

THE FAMILY is an immanent subject of ethnological studies. Ethnographers, folklorists, and educationists have focused their attention on the structure of the Bulgarian patriarchal family as part of the system of kinship since the mid-nineteenth century. The accent has generally fallen on the family's economic and social functions, but predominantly on family rituals revealing the ethnic specificities that are indispensable for the construction of identity. This emphasis on life and beliefs was completely natural in the context of the national liberation doctrine and—at a later stage, after (the partial) territorial and (relative) political liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule in 1878—in the context of the state-construction and the national-unification doctrines.

Following the goal set by the new (post-1944) communist authorities to eradicate harmful bourgeois and religious influences and eliminate their remnants and the retrograde elements, which should lead to the transformation of folk traditions in keeping with the new morality of the socialist man, the majority of the researchers of family life focused their attention on wed-

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ding rituals. This is how a prominent Bulgarian ethnographer, analyzing wedding customs in the Plovdiv region (one of the “most developed agricultural regions in the country”), outlined the conclusions of her research in 1961: “The time is ripe for the organization of the modern rural wedding in a new way, that avoids the remnants of the old religious customs and the traditions associated with class relations, while maintaining the joy of the wedding . . . It should be organized so as to strengthen the links between the newlyweds and the collective rather than between families and relatives.”¹

The commitment of Bulgarian ethnographers² reached the point where they even created scenarios for weddings, whose implementation was entrusted to the employees in the municipal People’s Councils responsible for the “happy” rituals. Not surprisingly, weddings became central to the ideological designs, since family customs were extremely conservative. “Literally or figuratively, as a direct suggestion, as an artistic image or symbol, the wedding is present in the family, calendar and labor rituals; it is part of the stories, songs, beliefs, folk music. The entire model of culture with its spatial and other meanings is reflected in the wedding; it models the world in its fundamental dimensions, as well as in its socio-anthropological plan.”³

Hence the need for “hard” work on the part of all activists and apparatchiks, focused on the following areas:

- To narrow the circle of revelers by not inviting all relatives, friends and acquaintances. This was done in order to limit and if possible even break kinship ties between generations, under the pretext that these were unnecessary costs. This trend led to the appearance of the so-called “komsomol wedding” where only the newlyweds and their wedding witnesses were present.
- To recommend that members of the production collective should be more actively involved in the celebrations, instead of the relatives. For example, the inherited “kumstvo” (family relationship between the newlyweds and their best man and maid of honor, who should be also married to each other) should be substituted by inviting a foreman or party secretaries as wedding witnesses. Thus the young family would naturally relate with the local party leadership.
- To bring the wedding out of the home, and especially out of the religious institution, by making compulsory the civil registration of marriages. For this purpose, grandiose architectural complexes featuring special rooms and halls, richly decorated with works of contemporary artists, were built and ritual participants—who, amid choral performances, “pledge” the newlyweds “after the party and the motherland, to love mostly their companion in life”—were appointed.

- To obliterate the regional ethno-specific features of the wedding, as its main elements were amalgamated in five versions, each designated for one of the five ethnic areas in which the country was divided.

Thus, not only the beauty and the richness of the cultural heritage were taken away, but the elements of a tradition observed for decades or even centuries were also undermined. The continuity between generations was destroyed. Elements of the wedding such as song and dance, which have strong emotional and powerful force, turning the wedding into a lavish and spectacular performance, disappeared.⁴ And if this was adequate for the communist period, the positive evaluation of my colleagues for this “brochure for weddings,” nearly two decades after the changes began in Bulgaria, was completely inadequate. I can only explain it through a similar paradox occurred at the beginning of my scientific biography. Back in 1989 (but before the beginning of the changes in Bulgaria) at proceedings of the scientists from the Institute of Ethnography, when discussing the topic of my Ph.D. thesis, “The Socialization of the Individual through the Traditional Rituals: Childhood and Adolescence,” Strashimir Dimitrov—professor of history and corresponding member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences—apparently not understanding my intentions to reveal the role of traditional rites and rituals in the mechanisms of socialization of the individual and for the translation of culture between generations, hailed the topic as he understood it, i.e. “The ‘socialistization’ of the individual...”

According to the communist ideological machine, the individual was primarily obliged to necessarily and continuously, voluntarily and mandatorily “socialize” him/herself in order to more easily “comunistize” afterwards. And the family was called upon to play a decisive role in these processes, performing its “basic functions: biological reproduction and communist upbringing of the young. Moreover, the interests of the Bulgarian people required at least two children to be born and brought up in each family. Thus it will fulfill its patriotic duty and ensure harmony between the interests of the individual and the interests of society.”⁵

As already evident, for me it is inevitable not to resort to personal experience in such research. This proviso is also imperative in view of the interdisciplinary approach in the use of sources and methods, especially that of reflexive anthropology,⁶ in this study. It is based on biographical interviews conducted with open questions and it interprets the life stories of 10 married couples. They vary in age, education and social status. What unites them is that they all had more than 50 years of family life, the majority of them spent in Sofia in the period 1940–1980.

Love-match

THE WEDDING (especially the first wedding) is the eternal union between two believers, according to the Orthodox tradition. A wedding performed by a priest is a sacrament (invisible reality) in which marital union is sanctified and both spouses receive as God's grace the power to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church in their marriage, according to the words of Apostle Paul. New virtues such as self-sacrificing love, putting oneself in the service of others, appreciation and promotion to the highest possible degree of the other person are added in the Christian marriage morality through the image of Christ. The traditional beliefs of Bulgarians simplify and complement these prescriptions of religion.

What is important when choosing a marriage partner as prescribed by tradition in order to achieve the classical ideal of a successful realization of one's personality? Both members of the young couple have to like, to love and to respect each other. To build together, in a shared effort, a home and a family, to have children, to raise and educate them. To live their old age calmly and with dignity, enjoying their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Faith, morality and life experiences are gathered in one simple story, not canonical but extremely genuine:

And we of earth have become. And into earth should turn. Grandfather Adam and grandmother Eve made the man from dust, they breathed out his soul and he became a man. Then, not to be alone, they made him a female companion. Both lived in the orchard with many apples. The high conscience (the Lord) told them not to eat apples, the man wanted to obey, but the woman insisted and they ate and he banished them to our land, the nether one. Therefore a woman should listen to her husband. There were no divorced people in our time, because the priest has wedded them and only the archbishop could separate them.

In this way the family of Stoyan (born 1905) and Trana (born 1906)—some of the oldest among my respondents, who had over 60 years of marriage—explained how the world and life work during my first ethnographic expedition to several villages in eastern Bulgaria back in 1986. “I was 18 years old when I became old enough to get wiled. Stoyan and I were both orphans and knew our situation well. The Lord also understood us. We asked the priest if there was kinship between us and so we took each other. Was it great love? I do not know. Ask Stoyan. I only know that here in this house I left my maidenhood and here one day I want to die by my husband,” said Trana.⁷

It is well known that in bourgeois Bulgaria, no matter whether you were born and lived in the village or in the city, you were brought up in the spirit of traditionalist and patriarchal views that gave the woman the role of wife, mother and instructor of children, a housewife whose place is in the home and with the family. The man, on the other hand, was the “head of family” charged with the difficult task of ensuring its subsistence and of maintaining the prestige and authority of the married couple.

Of course, “not everything in life is flowers and roses” and love was often subjected to rigorous trials. Most often they were caused by the lack of a home of their own. I must say that the desire to “own a home” is something like an obsession in the life strategy of each of my respondents. Whether because “there was not enough space to bring up the child,” “it was impossible to live with my mother-in-law” or “when we had tenants, for nearly a year I did not want to have sex with my husband, because I thought it would be heard in the other room,” the lack of one’s own home and personal space hindered the intimacy between spouses. Cohabitation, especially with the older generation, is also associated with another unsolvable problem—the conflicts between the young and the old and especially the emblematic conflict daughter-in-law—mother-in-law. In many cases it was one of the leading causes for separation. But there were also happy twists:

With my first husband Penyo we lived very well and understood each other very well. But we did not have children. And my mother-in-law began to grumble that I am very lazy, worthless, even cannot bear a child and more such nag. And one day when my husband went to work somewhere outside the village my father-in-law drove me out of the house. I went to my mother just as I was—in slippers and home apron—and my man did not come and get me, as he in fact was really gutless, and that snake of his mother would have put us both six feet under. What could I do? In the village they were only gossiping about me, so I caught the train and left for Sofia. Nobody knew me there. I had an aunt, so I lived with her. But I became a burden to them too. Hastily they matched me with a widower—Marin—with three children, his wife had died in the last childbirth. And as I am barren at least there would be somebody to look after the kids. But it actually turned out to be my great love. The next year we had twins and so do not ask me how you bring up five children with love, with a lot of love! (Nevyana and Marin)

The lack of or poor career development of one or both spouses, which was related to their material well-being, created at least the same amount of difficulties as the abovementioned:

I was a dentist and my husband was an engineer. But we both were “marked” by the new regime as “politically unreliable” because my father had been an eminent merchant from Varna whose shops were confiscated, and my father-in-law had the “imprudence” to graduate from university and to remarry in Germany and by this marriage we had relatives in the Federal Republic of Germany. Well, there was no constant or prestigious job for us. They appointed me always according to art. 68 of the Labor Act (which provided temporary assignment and an unstable employment contract) and my husband learned to fix stoves and refrigerators in the homes of people in order to provide for us. We had only one child. Otherwise, it would have been impossible to feed ourselves. Do you believe me that we continuously lived “on loan,” from payday to advance? I sold or pawned everything valuable that reminded me of my dad. I traded my memories for such simple things as a stove, a refrigerator and a washing machine. (Violeta and Todor)

This is totally understandable given that the demonetarized economy and the continuous shortage of goods and services were a constant source of corruption, cronyism and bartering of services, of an all-embracing gray economy. The universal communality of thinking raised the invisible but effective mental barriers of egalitarianism. “Like many other aspects of our economic life, the Bulgarian corruption culture is a culture of poverty.”⁸ “Back in time, before the 9th (of September 1944, the day of the communist coup d’état in Bulgaria) my mother fled to a neighboring village, because she was not allowed to wed my father for some feud between the families. She eloped but never regretted it because they took each other for love. And she never hid her origin. I fled to the city and married for residency and I always hid the ‘kulak’ origin of my parents.” So begins the story of Dimitar (Dimitar and Veneta).

This brief example requires some terminological clarifications. It becomes more comprehensible if we use the recently published research of Prof. Vasilka Aleksova on wedding terminology in Bulgarian and Romanian. The main Bulgarian and Romanian approaches to naming marriage show that the terms are motivated by some important characteristics of marriage and its symbolism. For example, the term “vzemam”/“a lua” (to take) assumes that the bride will move to live with her husband but it also takes into account the ancient view on marriage as a transaction. The Bulgarian and the Romanian verbs for “zhenya se, omazhvam se”/“a se însura, a se mărita” (to marry) can also be seen as expressing the understanding of marriage as the acquisition of a woman or a man. The verbs “venchavam se”/“a se cununa” (to wed) are derived from the respective terms for “crown” and must have come into use after the two neighboring countries adopted Christianity. “Zadomyavam se”/“a se căsători” (to settle in one’s own

household; to acquire a home of one's own) represent a model known within a broader Balkan-Mediterranean area, which could have arisen (in Bulgarian) or been re-introduced (in Romanian) under the Ottoman influence.

But where does the term “brak” (wedlock) come from? It can be found in a number of Macedonian dialects and according to some etymologists it is borrowed from Church Slavonic. However, its presence in these dialects is more likely a remnant of the Old Bulgarian language, and “brak” (wedlock) comes from the zero degree of the root “bera” (pick up) with the initial value “vzemane, grabene” (claim, grabbing), which is compared to “to take” (someone for a wife).⁹

In the region around the town of Struga, “brak” (wedlock) is equal to “svatba” (wedding). Perhaps from Old Bulgarian this term entered Russian and from there it returned as a modern Bulgarian language norm. In any case, it was rarely used in the early twentieth century and had primarily a regional dialectical character. But precisely this term became dominant in the years of communism in Bulgaria. Perhaps because it is totally “clean” of any kind of religious, ritual or symbolic content. It is interpreted as a coexistence between a man and a woman as spouses, officially legitimized by a formal act. However, the word also has the meaning of “rejects, scrap.” The term “scrapped oneself” was frequently used in spoken language precisely to emphasize this anecdotal difference between the free bachelor life and the new state of dependence of the individual.

Marriages of Convenience

AS AN organic part of a revolutionary utopia, the views of Marx and Engels on the destruction of the family turned out to be definitely inappropriate in the new socialist society. Encapsulated in a manic paranoia towards the non-socialist world, it owes its political survival to the curtailment of civil rights and the expansion of the repressive and disciplinary mechanisms of power. In social terms, the solid foundation for its development came from updating the conservative structure of the family.¹⁰

The nuclear family was not only announced as the dominant model, it was defined by law as the only possible form of life together. The decree for “Guidelines for the encouragement of births” was published in 1951, and in keeping with it all unmarried men aged 21 to 50 and childless women aged 21 to 45 were subjected to the so-called “bachelor tax,” which amounted to 10% of their income. And even if they were married, but did not have children for more than three years after the marriage, childless spouses had to pay a 5% tax on their income. The decree was repealed only in 1990.

Normal practices such as a man and a woman (not a married couple) booking a hotel room or renting a house together were absolutely impossible, and even living in somebody else's home for more than 24 hours without registration in the so-called "home's book" was punishable. On the other hand, even if you wanted to register a friend or fiancé, the chairman of the tenants' council would refuse you because you were not married. There was no free love. It was considered a relic of the old order. "Vigilant citizens" were authorized under the 1961 "Comrades' Courts Act" to impose and to supervise compliance with certain moral standards, to enforce a "new socialist morality and norms of behavior."

In the terminology of the Bulgarian communist leaders, reflected in the legislation and the regulations that guided people's daily lives, the family was "the primary cell of society," as a healthy and hearty family had always been and remained the "nucleus," the "cornerstone" of "society, struggling for the victory of communism." If you look into a Bulgarian encyclopedic dictionary for the meaning of the word "kletka" (cell), you will find that in a literal sense this is an enclosure for wildlife, surrounded by iron or wire mesh, or a cage for birds. In the specialized literature this is the term for the main structural unit of a living organism and figuratively it is each of the units into which a space is divided.

The everyday life of Bulgarians during communism suggested a confinement (voluntary and when necessary even compulsory) to this "cell." In the biographical stories of almost all respondents there are fixed life choices driven not by personal motives, but by the provisions of the Law, in the service of the Ideology.

First came the question of the family background of the individual. It was extremely bad when somewhere in your personnel file you were branded with a definition like "politically unsound," "cannot be trusted politically—could be used by the enemies." In such cases personal development through free choice became a "mission impossible." Biography, characteristics, reference file, recommendation, personal card—these were the documents accompanying each event in life—from enrollment in the first grade to the "purchase for eternity" of a burial place. These documents were produced and supplemented by the local leaders of the pioneer, komsomol and Party organizations, comrades' courts, neighborhood organizations of the Fatherland's Front, volunteer groups of workers performing militia functions, etc.

"The discrimination based on origin is one of the most inhumane aspects of the communist regime."¹¹ The "magic of blood" manifested itself in communist practice as the persecution of people because of their social background. "What love are you talking about? I'm of bourgeois ancestry, so I had to find someone with peasant roots or proletarian 'toughening up' somewhere. And my late husband was exactly that—from a poor and numerous peasant family. My parents,

with their bourgeois background, had to align with the in-laws, the ‘garlics,’ as they called them, because they were illiterate although naturally intelligent” (Lily and Pancho).

But it was not easy to be a peasant in communist Bulgaria, either. The land collectivization process led to the gradual disappearance of the traditional peasant, turning him into a cooperator and ultimately into a state laborer on his own land or a proletarian in the Marxist understanding of this concept.¹² Collectivization became a great social trauma. The internal rejection of many of the new conditions of rural life and the labor force needed for the large “republican constructions” led to several waves of mass migration towards the construction and industrial sectors, and implicitly to the cities that were called upon to acquire a “socialist” appearance. Given the circumstances of their de facto serfdom (the newly created cooperator could change his/her place of residence and work or could go to university only after receiving authorization from the Party secretary and the municipal administration), for many people, mostly youths, migration was not only a forced, but also a welcome step, acquiring the meaning of escape or liberation.¹³

The collectivization created an army of “politically unreliable” people deprived of their livelihood, marked by the label “kulak,” borrowed from the Soviet practice. In their characterizations they were most often described as “enemies of the people” who “do not accept the measures of the people’s rule.”

According to the Law on Higher Education in Bulgaria in force till 1958, all Bulgarian citizens had the right to go to university except those convicted of fascist and anti-popular activity, persons belonging to the exploiting classes and their sons and daughters. “They did not give me a note from the Fatherland’s Front and I could not enroll as a student in Sofia. Could not live in the village either—they took everything: land, cattle, threshing machine. Better in the city. But how to settle there? The only way was to find a ‘shop-soiled’ lass and marry her. It is true that my wife was not a lass, but had higher (education), and most of all—she was from Sofia!” (Ivan and Maria).

Mention should be made here of the completely unconstitutional legislative act regulating the right of residence in the capital. Until World War II, like today, this problem did not exist. A Sofia resident is anyone who settles and works in the capital. The change of residence is not associated with any restrictions and is only registered with the municipality. But in the period between 1962 and 1990, regulations and decrees that “temporarily limit the acceptance of new residents in large cities and some other places” were enforced. These acts prohibited settlement in the capital and enumerated in detail the exceptions to the rule. These exceptions can be divided into several groups, the most frequent of which were:

- assignment to managerial positions (not only professional, but also Party);
- recruitment of needed workers and professionals;
- marriage with a Sofia resident.

Marriage with a Sofia resident was the most common reason for acquiring a Sofia permanent residence permit. It was valid in about a third of the cases.

The restriction on the free choice of residence, especially in large cities and in the capital, is considered one of the peculiarities of totalitarian socialism. It was a logical consequence of the desire of the state to plan and manage the entire economic and social life. This directly related to its attempts to solve all social problems administratively.

The following joke was told in communist Bulgaria: every Bulgarian girl entering university knows that the silly ones get married during the first year, the pretty ones—during the second, the smart ones—during the third, while those who marry during the fourth do it by placement. This system of placement that required each university graduate to go for three years to a corner of the country distant from his/her birthplace, to “devote his/her strength and youth to the adoption and implementation of the acquired profession” shattered more than a few human lives. This type of regulations (placement, residence permits, compulsory military service) created the belief that the individual was absolutely powerless in regard to the almighty regime in all areas of public and private life. Mired in paperwork, sent from office to office, caught in the trap of bureaucratic indifference and administrative stupidity and inertia, Bulgarians during communism realized the simple truth that the words of Maxim Gorky “Man: that sounds proud!” must be rewritten as “Document: that sounds proud!”

“The communist reality awakens in each observer, especially in its victims, a feeling of a terrifying demonic diabolical world. The demonic can be recognized in the basic structures of the communist system. They are designed so that for the individual there cannot remain any way out. We gain the impression that everything in it is calculated. All possible workarounds are foreseen and all possible countermeasures taken.”¹⁴ This even when it came to the most intimate, the innermost elements.

The satisfaction of the “biological-psychological” needs (as the communist theorists of the family defined sexuality) of the individual should be carried out primarily within wedlock, because the socialist family was “the most honest and best form for the realization of reproductive growth.” The same theorists warned that this “growth” could be prevented by phenomena such as homosexuality (sexual relations between persons of the same sex were prohibited and until 1968 were punishable by up to three years in prison) and even masturbation (which was also considered reprehensible). Not to mention adulterers! In

1956 the new Criminal Code of the People's Republic of Bulgaria explicitly stipulated imprisonment for up to 6 months or a fine of up to 1,000 leva and public reprimand for any husband who left his family and started living with another woman. The same punishment awaited the person with whom the husband lived. For repeat offenders the Code provided for imprisonment of up to three years.

Divorces were also an obstacle to "growth." So the state intervened with a firm hand and forbade divorce by mutual consent. Never mind that according to the "genius" views of Marx and Engels the prohibition of divorces in bourgeois society is one of the most important factors for the humiliating position of women. In socialist Bulgaria the divorce procedure was as complicated as possible. There were special committees for the reconciliation of the spouses.

My husband and I were among the "morally putrid" because we fell in love when he was still married. First, he was expelled from the party because his wife slandered him before the party secretary. The court awarded her the apartment although it was inherited from his parents. She did not allow him to see their son. As to me, they summoned my mother and my father before the Fatherland's Front organization, to admonish them for having brought up such a dissolute daughter who "is going out with a married man." (Ina and Bobby)

In terms of the reproductive function of the family a total administrative approach was imposed in communist Bulgaria. Procreation was guided by regulations, decrees, orders, circulars, which directly descended from "high up," not necessarily accompanied by any explanation. They became commandments that had to be followed.

This affected women's right of choice. Abortion was prohibited in Bulgaria till 1956 under the provisions of the Criminal Code. After this period, they were not absolutely ruled out, but they were performed only on medical grounds. This forced many women (not only adolescents, but also adults and married women) to resort to the so-called "criminal" abortions, which often had fatal consequences for their reproductive health.¹⁵ These regulations had yet another dark side called "marriage for medical reasons." It turned an unplanned (and eventually unwanted) pregnancy which could not be interrupted because of the regulations into an unwanted (and certainly unplanned) marriage.

Of course, children were common socialist property and from this perspective raising them in children's homes and kindergartens was only natural and appropriate, but there was another ideological reason for that—raising them in a domestic environment would seem a step backwards in terms of the emancipation of the Bulgarian woman. It would have diverted her from the performance

of her Party and professional duties, would have taken her back to the time of housework and of the natural immediate attachment to children and family.

There was this word “emancipation.” It was the greatest achievement of socialism for women. It meant the following: every day you work for 8 hours; at lunchtime you run to the shops because they have “released” peppers at the greengrocery; as you get back home you cook the peppers, do the housework, check the homework of the children and in the evening you go to the meeting of the Fatherland’s Front organization where they tell you how good it is to be a worker, wife, mother and public figure. Well, it was not good for me! (Penka and Dimo)

25 Years Later—or the Poisonous Fruits of Socialism in Bulgaria

STORYTELLING IS a fundamental form of human communication. It can play an important role in our lives. We often think in the form of history, talk in the form of history, and bring meaning to our lives through history.

Not coincidentally “I lived socialism”—one of the first projects that attempted to reconstruct the memory of socialism—relies on stories by different authors collected between 2004 and 2006 (on the Internet).

Here is one of the stories that impressed me the most:

One of my earliest childhood memories is associated with the Pavlovo residential area at the foothills of Vitosha where my parents rented a small attic apartment. To this day I remember the gurgling of the brook in the ravine, passing through the neighborhood, and the greenery of the nearby meadow where I loved to run.

One day, as I strolled along the mountain path with my mother, we met an old woman. I did not understand what they were talking about, but then my mother took my hand and quickly took me home. After a year we moved to live in a block of flats away from Vitosha and the lush meadows. Much later, my mother told me about the importance of this childhood memory of mine. The old woman was the mother of a soldier who had entrusted her with a secret that our rulers had not considered necessary to make public. The dewy grass on which I used to run was dangerous! It was April 1986.

Today I am a sophomore in Environmental Science at Oberlin College, Ohio. What I learn here about the Chernobyl disaster painfully reminds me of the lie that weighs on the conscience of our socialist rulers. In my travels I have met young people of my age from the former socialist bloc who suffer directly from the tragedy. Alas,

*my generation has also a bond with the time of socialism, a bond which is going through its half-life in our bodies. Therefore we must remember...*¹⁶

Metaphorically, this “half-life” is especially the case of the contemporary Bulgarian family. The demographics are more than obvious: according to the report of the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria in 2014 were born a total of 66,578 children, of which 39,375 are illegitimate. Marriages total 21,943, of which 17,047 in the cities and 4,896 in the villages. These figures are an illustration of the demographic decline that started in the last decade of the last century, when the population growth became negative and due to which the country’s population is shrinking. Just for comparison, in 1990 there were about 60,000 legal marriages.

In the period 2003–2010 I had the opportunity to be a consultant of the first *School for Pregnant Women* in Bulgaria and to talk to dozens of them who lived without being married to the father of their expected child.¹⁷ They precisely defined the reasons for their reluctance to marry: a revolt against the institution of marriage in the context of the rebellion against all social institutions in Bulgaria, a refusal to comply with a tradition which does not match their perceptions of modern society, but mostly the artificiality, insincerity and lack of happiness that they experienced in their own families when they were children. They heard their parents repeating like a mantra the key phrase “You, children, are the only reason why we did not get divorced,” which obliterated the idea of the family as a shared intimate space in which reigns love, understanding and support. Alienation from parents becomes alienation from family values; the false morality preached in the name of “new socialist model family” led to non-acceptance and in some cases even to a complete rejection of the institution of marriage.

In the first interview after his inauguration in 2013, His Holiness the Bulgarian Patriarch Neophyte declared his concern about the fact that “more and more young people live together without marriage and neglect the proper bringing up of children in stable families, set by mutual love and commitment for life in the sound church and popular virtues. From this we all lose as a nation and as individuals, because God created man to live in the community, and thus through self-sacrificing love to grow in perfection.”¹⁸ This is the price we all pay for the attempts of communism to transform the family from the “small Church of Christ” into the “basic cell of society.”



Notes

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Abstract**Till Death Do Us Part**

The article provides an ethnological reading of some aspects of the everyday life of ordinary families in Bulgaria during the communist regime. The influence of communist ideology on the life and on the personal relationships between spouses is analyzed based on biographical interviews with 10 married couples having more than 50 years of family life. The role of the state, which expropriates all relevant functions of the family as an institution, leaving it only the role of a basic cell for biological reproduction, is thus revealed.

Keywords

wedding, marriage, family, communism, socialism, everyday life