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# A Woman Politician in the Cold War Balkans

## *From Biography to History*

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### ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to shed more light on the topic of state socialist feminism in Eastern Europe by focusing on part of the biography of one of the most visible women's activists and political functionaries in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe after 1944, Tsola Dragoicheva. It should be considered as a contribution to the ongoing debate regarding the character of state socialist measures toward women and the "gender contract" in the countries of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe between 1944 and 1989. It does not pretend, however, to cover and evaluate Dragoicheva's entire life (or to agree with everything she did) or to create an exhaustive picture of state socialist measures toward women in Bulgaria (nor does it underestimate the significance of structured gender inequalities, which often remain unnoticed); rather, it discusses some facts and procedures dealing with "women's issues" that researchers have only vaguely covered so far. The study is based on various archival materials from Bulgarian and international archives, and on the periodical press from the period under consideration, oral history interviews, and scholarly publications relevant to this topic. It is part of an ongoing project on Gendering Balkan Nation-States.

**KEYWORDS:** agency, biography, Bulgaria, Cold War, feminism, state socialism, women's activism



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This article focuses on the biography of the prominent Bulgarian woman activist and political functionary, Tsola Dragoicheva. The broader point it aims to make—together with many other feminist historians and especially with the participants in the Forum of *Aspasia* volume 8—is that, in order to better understand state socialism, we should stop producing the widespread delegitimizing narrative about totalitarian systems, question the simplified dichotomy of East and West that is so prominent in conventional accounts of the Cold War, and instead use "gendering the Cold War" as a lens to interpret the life experiences and agency of both women and men.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, agency is my major frame of analysis. In addition to exploring the agency of my historical



subject, I am inspired by historian Joan W. Scott, who recently wrote that we should show our agency as feminist scholars by using “critique, the constant undoing of conventional wisdom.”<sup>2</sup> We should abandon the customary binary categories, examine theoretical approaches, and integrate concepts of culture and identity with an understanding of political process and institutions as well as with a study of material and strategic interests. Below I will first discuss the historiography and my methodology and sources; then I provide a short biographical account of Tsola Dragoicheva’s life and continue to discuss her communist and feminist politics.

## **Historiography and Sources**

The historiography dealing with (South) Eastern Europe has tended to marginalize women and gender, and women’s and gender history has tended to marginalize (South) Eastern Europe. The research on gendered histories of this region can help us to rethink both of these fields in productive ways and to develop a more inclusive form of historical writing in general.<sup>3</sup>

Within the fields of East European (and Southeast European) history, women’s and gender history has contributed to denaturalizing core categories of historical analysis such as the nation, and has encouraged scholars to historicize gender relations.<sup>4</sup> This development also concerns the study of gender aspects of the two world wars, Stalinism, the Cold War, and international politics.<sup>5</sup>

The relations between East European gender history and the international field of gender research have been more complicated. Western gender studies specialists still easily neglect the works of gender historians about the East European past or misinterpret their findings.<sup>6</sup> Scholarship dealing with gender and gender history of Eastern Europe in particular carries an enormous potential to promote a better understanding of social phenomena in the global context and should be taken into consideration by paying attention to the entanglements of the history of the East and West, Western and Eastern Europe, and to the unequal relationships between the two regions, including the imbalance of political and economic power and the weight of the cultural capital they produce.

### ***Historiography of the Cold War***

Both East European (produced during state socialism) and Western narratives (from both before and after 1989) agree that women played an extraordinarily active role in building the state socialist economies and defending the East European countries in wartime, but these narratives differ sharply over the meaning of women’s participation. Many Western scholars have emphasized economic, political, and cultural factors that have led to the preservation of inequality between East European women and men throughout state socialism up until 1989, while at the same time neglecting the presence and visibility of East European women in many fields that had been exclusively male-dominated in Western Europe and the United States.<sup>7</sup> However, both East European and Western researchers have published work (monographs, edited

volumes, and articles) that tries to deconstruct the monolithic image of state socialism both in terms of time and space, to counter some of the above-mentioned opinions, and redefine the alleged immutable nature of Stalinism and state socialism by emphasizing the agency of local actors.<sup>8</sup>

In the new economic, political, and ideological context after 1989, the proliferation of oral history research in Eastern Europe made visible various points of view of “ordinary” people who—under state socialism—lived in a subjective “Lebenswelt” quite different not only from the one celebrated by the self-congratulatory vocabulary of official state socialist parlance but also from the one presented in Cold War scholarship.<sup>9</sup> By the end of the twentieth century, oral history turned out to be so important for women’s/gender history that some scholars regard it as a specific, feminist methodology.<sup>10</sup> No wonder that during the past fifteen years East European women’s oral history (and anthropological research, as well) have equally countered the premises of both Western narratives and anticommunist post-1989 historiography produced in the region of Central Eastern and Southeastern Europe, by collecting and analyzing polyphonic personal stories of women and men which to a greater extent complicate the simplistic and one-dimensional presentations of the “wicked communist regimes” on one side and “oppressed society” on the other.<sup>11</sup> Women’s self-representations have offered valuable evidence of their own interpretations of women’s emancipation.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that women were not simply the victims of state socialist policies. They could and did also grow new socialist identities that gave them new positions of authority in their respective societies—societies, in which “communism” or “state socialism” was for them not simply an “abstract ideology” or a “failed experiment” but a lived experience. As Sheila Fitzpatrick shows, the conventional wisdom was that everything within the Soviet regimes was decided in the Party Politburo and nothing happened anywhere else.<sup>13</sup> Of course, the Politburo’s decisions operated as laws but—at least from what I have studied so far in the archives and from the oral history interviews I have conducted—it is clear that there were also other spaces and places where things happened thanks to the permeability of state and Party structures and mechanisms, and not least thanks to the personal dedication and stubbornness of many people. This is especially true of issues related to women and gender, which the patriarchal male Party establishment considered to be less dangerous for the regime.<sup>14</sup> Other than that, because all socialist governments were committed to the goal of gender equality, Party leaders were pushed and willy-nilly had to accept (and appropriate as their own) initiatives and politics coined elsewhere: within the Bulgarian women’s organizations and international left-wing umbrella organizations—such as the Women’s International Democratic Federation, or WIDF—to which they belonged. The WIDF was a left-wing organization, established in Paris in 1945 with the French scientist and feminist Eugenie Cotton (1881–1967) in charge; it had a broad political agenda that focused on the struggle against fascism and for peace, democracy, and women’s rights.<sup>15</sup>

### **Biography**

Although interest in biography has existed since the dawn of the social sciences, during the past several years the biographical genre has gained a growing place in

scholarly research. The recent interest in biography is such that some scholars speak about a biographical “turn” in the social sciences.<sup>16</sup> Many researchers now believe that biography can help to deconstruct generalizations based on structural history, which tends to treat the past as a space without people. This biographical trend is particularly helpful when analyzing the history of state socialist Eastern Europe.

Biographical studies are further relevant because, while the major structural characteristics of social construction (gender, race, and class) obviously influence personal identity, they do not automatically create collective consciousness. This is visible from the fact that even people who belong to the same social groups do not react to the social order in the same way.<sup>17</sup>

Taking into account that every individual human life is part of a common human network, the information collected through the biographical method could help the understanding of society as a whole. There is the question, however, of how reliable a picture created by a biographical text, based on a small number of “facts,” can be.<sup>18</sup> Together with a number of feminist historians, I believe that biography is a useful historical tool that can help us to find a balance between treating women from past patriarchal contexts as agents of change or treating them as primarily constrained by specific historical structures. The feminist biographical method is a wonderful methodology for studying women’s experiences and women’s voices that often are not visible/heard or get distorted in mainstream historical narratives.<sup>19</sup> Studying biographies of women in power—both in the East and West—who lived through the period of the Cold War, provides an important window onto the lived experiences of this specific historical time. Biography allows historians to reframe historical narratives away from the broadly political and diplomatic, and grounds historiography in the personal. Biography empowers and celebrates the individuals in history (which actually goes against the Marxist doctrine about “the people” as creators of History).

### **My Sources**

The materials I used for this article include the archival collection of the Bulgarski Narodni Zhenski Suiuz, BNZhS (Bulgarian People’s Women’s Union), also known as Bulgarski suiuz na demokraticnite zheni (Bulgarian Union of Democratic Women) and its successor—the Komitet na dvizhenieto na bulgarskite zheni, KDBZh (Committee of the Bulgarian Women’s Movement); some documents from Tsola Dragoicheva’s huge personal archival collection; and minutes of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) from the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s concerning the policies toward women. All these materials are kept in the State Historical Archive in Sofia.<sup>20</sup> Most of the documents of Dragoicheva’s collection have not yet been processed. The published materials I studied include the magazine *Zhenata dnes* (Woman today), the organ of the Bulgarian women’s organizations until 1989, which published most of Dragoicheva’s papers related to women’s policies. The magazine had a huge circulation of 800,000 copies in Bulgaria and twice that number in Russian in the Soviet Union. In 1953 the Central Committee of the BCP decided to intensify “the work among Turkish women” and told the KDBZh to start publishing 2,000 copies of *Zhenata dnes* in the Turkish language, as well.<sup>21</sup>

I also consulted many biographical materials about Dragoicheva that appeared in both Bulgarian and foreign publications. I managed to read some archival documents from the Women's International Democratic Federation, WIDF, kept in Berlin (Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde).<sup>22</sup> Tsola Dragoicheva was a member of the board of this organization since its foundation in 1945. I also read newsletters of the organization and its journal *Women of the Whole World*. Dragoicheva's memoirs provided another source.

Last but not least, I used more than twelve hours of interviews I conducted with Stefan Zhelev, the personal secretary of Tsola Dragoicheva, with one of her nieces, Petrinka Nincheva, and with the sociologist and women's activist Maria Dinkova.<sup>23</sup> The Bulgarian Communist Party appointed Zhelev in 1968 to help Dragoicheva with the preparation and publication of her three-volume memoir, titled *Povelia na dulga* (The call of duty). The trilogy deals with Dragoicheva's participation in the antifascist and anti-bourgeois-state struggles in the interwar period and during World War II.

### **The Life of Tsola Dragoicheva (18 August 1898–26 May 1993)**

Dragoicheva was a Bulgarian state and political figure during state socialism. Her honors and medals as a leading participant in fighting the monarchist regime of Bulgaria under King Boris III and then the Nazis in World War II are so numerous that it would take pages to cover. Dragoicheva was the first Bulgarian woman-minister—of the Postal Service, Telephone, and Telegraph—from 1947 to 1957.<sup>24</sup> Between 1949 and 1952 she was also the leader of the National Peace Committee. In 1957, after the end of her ministerial career, Dragoicheva was appointed chair of the National Committee of Bulgarian–Soviet Friendship and in 1963 she became vice-chair of the National Committee of the Fatherland Front. In 1965 she again became a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, nominated by the new Party leader Todor Zhivkov (according to some this happened at the suggestion of Soviet leaders; Dragoicheva's son disagrees with this interpretation).<sup>25</sup>

In an interview published in the Canadian journal *Magazine Digest* in 1946, she stated: "I refuse to be regarded as an abnormal woman—I was, let us say, merely a forerunner of the Bulgarian woman of today and tomorrow."<sup>26</sup> Was she an exceptional woman at the time?

Tsola was born on 22 August 1898 in the small city of Biala-Slatina: a daughter of farmers ("moderately prosperous," as she said).<sup>27</sup> Both her parents and her siblings were Communist Party members.<sup>28</sup> Her brother Tseno emigrated to the Soviet Union after the September 1923 communist uprising. Subsequently he was educated as a chemical engineer and worked as a factory manager. He disappeared during the Stalinist purges in 1938.<sup>29</sup> Dragoicheva joined the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1919, and in the interwar period she was known under the communist clandestine pseudonym of Sonya Tsvetanova.<sup>30</sup> Her parents scraped together enough money to send her to the Higher Pedagogical Institute in Sofia, from which she graduated in 1921, and became a teacher until 1924. For her communist activities she was expelled from the teacher's position and banned from practicing her profession in the whole Kingdom of

Bulgaria. She was a member of the illegal armed wing of the Communist Party in the 1920s, participated in the September 1923 uprising, and after the communist militants bombed the St. Nedelya church (where several military officials were killed) in 1925 she was sentenced to death for “antistate” activity. The sentence, however, was commuted to lifelong hard labor (because she was pregnant and thanks to international protests). One of her supporters was the French novelist and member of the French Communist Party Henri Barbusse (1873–1935), who had met her while she was in prison and told her story in his book *Les Boureaux* (The hangmen).<sup>31</sup> While in prison, in 1925, Dragoicheva gave birth to her son Chavdar, who was raised in the Soviet Union by the Bulgarian émigré-communists Stela and Natalia Blagoevi. Later Chavdar Dragoichev became a medical doctor, a professor, and a well-known Bulgarian heart surgeon.<sup>32</sup> At age twenty-seven Tsola Dragoicheva thus had the bitter experience of an unsuccessful rebellion, the dream of an imminent revolution, and her first death sentence.

After her amnesty in 1932, Dragoicheva went to the Soviet Union, where she graduated from the International Lenin School in Moscow. She also worked at the International Women’s Secretariat of the Comintern (1933–1935) and was in close contact with women activists such as the Spanish antifascist fighter Dolores Ibarruri (also known as La Pasionaria) (1895–1989), the Romanian communist Ana Pauker (1893–1960), and the Bulgarians Stela and Natalia Blagoevi.<sup>33</sup> After the Seventh Congress of the Comintern (1935), Dragoicheva was sent to France where from January to July 1936 she helped popularize the ideas of the (common antifascist) Popular Front. Later in 1936 Dragoicheva returned to Bulgaria. She worked as editor (1936–1937) of the clandestine newspaper *Zashtita* (Defense) and of the communist periodical *Rabotnichesko delo* (Worker’s deed) (1942–1944), where she published materials dealing with the situation of the political prisoners and political struggles in the country.<sup>34</sup> In 1937 she became a member of the Central Committee (CC) of the Party (and she remained within the CC until 2 February 1990) and of the clandestine Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, in 1940. She took an active part in the activities of the BCP and the armed resistance of the Fatherland Front (the major antifascist organization in the country, established in 1942) to Bulgaria’s alignment with the Axis Powers in World War II. In 1941 Dragoicheva was arrested again and placed in the labor camp St. Nikola (the women’s wing of the Gonda Voda concentration camp near the town of Assenovgrad), from which she managed to escape in December 1941.<sup>35</sup> She was sentenced to death in absentia in 1942 but continued her antimonarchic state activities until the coup d’état on 9 September 1944, when her party came into power.

Already in October 1944, the new communist rulers introduced gender equality in all spheres of life (political, economic, and social).<sup>36</sup> Women were granted full voting rights; civil marriage was introduced and became the obligatory form of marriage for all Bulgarian citizens.<sup>37</sup> These provisions were confirmed in the constitution of 1947. However, the rapid political and economic changes did not go hand in hand with the erasure of patriarchal customs, which changed very slowly. As Bolshevik leader Lenin and later the Slovenian socialist feminist Vida Tomšić argued, legal equality of the sexes is not enough to eliminate women’s subordinate position in society and the family.<sup>38</sup> Still, several historians have already shown that immediately after 1944, for the East European societies, Stalinism was associated mostly with rapid and radical social

and political “liberating” changes that included the reconfiguration of traditional class and gender hierarchies and the creation of new activist roles for women.<sup>39</sup>

From 1944 to 1948 Dragoicheva was general secretary of the National Committee of the Fatherland Front, which to a great extent functioned as the government of Bulgaria. She supervised the Council of Ministers and controlled Bulgaria’s economy. The *Times* of London, emphasizing her extraordinary position within the male world of politics, called her “the real ruler of Bulgaria” and the Toronto-based *Magazine Digest* wrote that her influence “keeps the parties of the Fatherland Front coalition working together.”<sup>40</sup> Her political enemies after 1944 accused her of turning the National Committee of the Fatherland Front into a “preliminary government” — all the problems of the state were discussed there first, before they were introduced for discussion to the Council of Ministers.<sup>41</sup>

Anticommunist publications until today state that she participated in the fight against the “bourgeois opposition.”<sup>42</sup> They also insist that she supported the execution of leading activists of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union (Nikola Petkov), and the Bulgarian Communist Party (Traycho Kostov), as well as other “enemies of the people,” and acted as a censor of culture and arts. Interestingly enough, however, in 1948 she was “released” as a member of the Politburo of the CC of the BCP. According to some sources, this was done by the communist leader Georgi Dimitrov under the influence of his wife Roza Dimitrova; he suggested Dragoicheva for candidate-membership of the Politburo.<sup>43</sup> Dragoicheva took her demotion as a humiliation.<sup>44</sup> Other documents, however, show that Dimitrov valued her a lot. On 6 May 1941 he wrote in his diary that he had sent the Soviet diplomat Arkady Sobolev the following letter:

In the interests of avoiding such unpleasant misunderstandings as occurred with the tendentious message from Todor Pavlov, please, inform com[rade] Lavrishchev that Tsvetanova [Dragoicheva] is the person in our party leadership’s confidence in Bulgaria and she alone is entitled to communicate the opinions and inquiries of the party leadership.<sup>45</sup>

In a letter to her of 12 October 1944, Georgi Dimitrov wrote that he was very happy because, no matter how dangerous her life had been, she managed to survive as “a true national heroine.”<sup>46</sup> He added: “Spanish people have their Dolores, we have our Sonya.”<sup>47</sup> After the war, Dimitrov followed Tsola Dragoicheva’s international activities and especially her participation in the work of the WIDF with great interest.<sup>48</sup>

Several files from the *Komisija po dosietata* (Commission of dossiers), kept by the Secret Police, contain information regarding Stalinist purges in Bulgaria during the late 1940s (the trial of the above-mentioned Traycho Kostov who was sentenced to death and executed) and early 1950s; they show that Dragoicheva was interrogated by the communist regime and that there was a clear campaign to discredit her. Interrogator N. Dvorianov concluded on 21 August 1950 that “undoubtedly” Dragoicheva had been a member of “the anti-Party clandestine organization of Traycho Kostov” but because her “harmful activity [was] not fully documented” he suggested Dragoicheva be expelled from the Central Committee of the Communist Party and fired as minister of the Postal Service, Telephones and Telegraphs.<sup>49</sup> She managed to keep both positions.

(According to Chavdar Dragoichev, his mother was saved thanks to Stalin's personal intervention.<sup>50</sup>)

Only a few Bulgarian researchers have paid attention to these materials so far.<sup>51</sup> An American publication from the 1980s, however, mentions that within the Party, Dragoicheva "suffered several reverses," emphasizing that in January 1948 "she was demoted from full to alternate membership in the Politburo and in December, after the Party purges had begun, she lost her membership in the Orgburo [Politburo] and remained a member of the Central Committee only."<sup>52</sup> Her son Chavdar also writes that in 1949 she was in huge danger when Soviet colonel Filatov—Lavrentiy Beria's messenger in Bulgaria—initiated an attack against her.<sup>53</sup> This was a truly dangerous period for Dragoicheva. The American source mentioned above also points out that after de-Stalinization, which followed the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, Tsola Dragoicheva criticized Vulko Chervenkov, then secretary-general of the Bulgarian Communist Party. All of this means that many aspects of Dragoicheva's activities and participation in Bulgarian political life during the first decades of communist rule are still unclear. The portrait of her that I have built so far is still fragmented and contradictory, and it is difficult to evaluate her role in the political repressions of the time. Clearly, at the time she was a militant communist and although she declared that communists were against violence, Dragoicheva thought that until the new order was built the use of force was inevitable.<sup>54</sup>

In 1973 Dragoicheva published the first volume of her memoirs, *Povelia na dulga*, in which she discussed her first years within the communist movement (1923–1925; 1925–1932). Some Party leaders, including Boyan Bulgaranov (1896–1972), of the Politburo of the CC of the BCP tried to censor and ban the book.<sup>55</sup> Thanks to the support of some intellectuals (old communists, such as Todor Pavlov and Kiril Vasilev) this did not happen and *Povelia na dulga* appeared in the bookshops. According to her son Chavdar Dragoichev, the book was a real best seller and received many positive reviews.<sup>56</sup> One of the reviewers even compared it with one of the emblematic memoirs dedicated to the most heroic event of the Bulgarian national revival—the April 1876 uprising against the Ottoman rule—written by Zahari Stoyanov.<sup>57</sup> The huge correspondence that Tsola Dragoicheva received about her book, letters not only from communist activists but also from "ordinary people," both Bulgarians and foreigners, confirms Dragoichev's statements about its success.<sup>58</sup>

Dragoicheva stayed within the Politburo until 1984 when she stepped down for reasons of health. (She remained a member of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party up to 1990.) Thus, she was part of the communist establishment for more than fifty years: from 1937 when she was appointed for the first time as a member of the Central Committee of the BCP until the end of her long life in 1993. Dragoicheva's activities spanned two crucial twentieth-century historical periods: the interwar era in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe, and the Cold War period. During the first period her proletarian social origin, clandestine revolutionary life, and imprisonment experience turned her into a militant communist activist and fighter. During the second period, as a member of the Bulgarian state socialist political power/*nomenklatura* she actively participated in the work to enhance women's rights and status, both nationally and internationally.<sup>59</sup>

## Gender

Tsola Dragoicheva was among the influential people within the Bulgarian (male) state and Party establishment. She was probably the most powerful woman within the male dominated political landscape and I am tempted to say that—not unlike several other East European women-politicians at the time—she was hated because of her gender, for being a successful woman in politics.<sup>60</sup> Gender as an issue did have activists and an audience in the interwar period, not just in the political sphere, but in social and cultural life as well, and this audience survived World War II. No wonder that one of the new regime's first actions was to expropriate the old "bourgeois" Bulgarski Zhenski Sujuz, BZhS (Bulgarian Women's Union, BWU), led from 1926 to 1944 by the lawyer Dimitrana Ivanova (1882–1960) and to rename it Bulgarski Narodni Zhenski Sujuz, BNZhS (Bulgarian People's Women's Union) with Tsola Dragoicheva in charge.<sup>61</sup> Actually, the communists expropriated the old BWU by removing not only the former, precommunist/"bourgeois" president, but all members of the board of the organization as well, and by appointing women belonging to the antifascist Fatherland Front in charge of the union.<sup>62</sup>

During the Cold War period there was a complete erasure of the achievements of the precommunist feminist women's movements everywhere in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. The fact that the communist emancipation of women was built on some already achieved rights of women during the pre-World War II period was conveniently forgotten by the new rulers.<sup>63</sup> This is just one example of the effects of the Cold War on history and memory. The Cold War period influenced the way women in Eastern Europe dissociated themselves not only from the precommunist women's history in their respective countries but also from women in the West (and from historical women's networks such as the International Council of Women, the International Alliance of Women, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom). However, women in the East and women in the West were not completely isolated from each other; they met and worked together in important new international organizations, such as the leftist WIDF.

In 1950, the Bulgarian People's Women's Union was transformed into the *Komiteta na Dvizhenieto na Bulgarskite Zheni*, KDBZh (Committee of the Movement of Bulgarian Women), with Dragoicheva again in charge, which continued to represent Bulgarian women in the already mentioned WIDF. First the KDBZh was affiliated with the National Committee of the Fatherland Front (1950–1952); subsequently it existed as an independent structure, with its own budget.<sup>64</sup> It is necessary to underline that parallel to the Committee of the Movement of Bulgarian Women several other structures existed in the country that dealt with women's issues: thus, between 1951 and 1957 there were special "women's departments" within the structure of the Central Committee of the BCP, of the regional and town Party structures around the country; there were also women's commissions affiliated with the National Council of the Fatherland Front and the National Council of Trade Unions. All these structures were formally under the control of the "Women's Department" of the CC of the BCP.<sup>65</sup>

However, thanks to Tsola Dragoicheva's high position within the communist hierarchy, her dynamic and iron character, and the symbolic capital she possessed as an anti-

fascist fighter and activist within the WIDF, her endless initiatives and pro-women's activities were the most visible in the public space and she expected to be considered the real leader of Bulgarian women. No wonder that the communist male establishment of the country after 1944 tried to control her self-expression and punished her for what they regarded as her individualist attitude toward various political issues. Thus at a Politburo meeting in May 1945 Georgi Chankov postulated: "Nobody has the right to speak publicly before their speech has been checked by the Agitprop. I have in mind Tsola," and Vulko Chervenkov insisted that the "Politburo should act unanimously. No one should pursue their own politics."<sup>66</sup> Even Dragoicheva's comrade from the clandestine past, Traycho Kostov, criticized her for not keeping the "Party secrets" and threatened her with punishment.<sup>67</sup>

Dragoicheva had to deal not only with the above-mentioned episodes of male attacks and gender tutelage. Some preserved evidence demonstrates the existing tensions and power struggles among the different women's units and personalities within the communist state and Party structures. For example, on several occasions, the leaders of the Women's Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party managed to impose their own opinion and neglected the suggestions coming from the KDBZh, that is, from Tsola Dragoicheva.<sup>68</sup> The sociologist Maria Dinkova, who belonged to the younger generation activists and worked for the organ of the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement, the journal *Zhenata dnes*, also revealed some conflicts and power games that existed among the women's activists.<sup>69</sup>

In this section I have argued that within the transformations after 1944, the Bulgarian communists wanted to "liberate" society not only from all burdens connected with the "bourgeois" system but also from the memory of the achievements and networks of the old, precommunist women's movement. This process of forgetting, however, went—for women's activists like Tsola Dragoicheva—hand in hand with the building up of new networks, solidarities, and connections, especially within the WIDF.<sup>70</sup> Such connections and friendships strengthened Dragoicheva's gender (I would even say, feminist) consciousness and sensitivity and bridged her loneliness within the male-dominated political structures where she was dealing not only with the sexism of the male Party bosses but also with the disagreements of various women's units and activists. Dragoicheva's strength in this context came from the left-wing women's sisterhood (though sometimes problematic) within the WIDF and her feeling of belonging to the family of the progressive "women of the whole world."<sup>71</sup>

## What Kind of Person Was Dragoicheva?

Already in 1946 the Canadian journal *Magazine Digest*, published in Toronto, called her—with a hint of admiration—"Bulgaria's Lady Stalin" (*stalin*, i.e., steel, also implied her iron character).<sup>72</sup> In his memoirs Todor Zhivkov wrote that Dragoicheva often frightened people around her with her contacts with people in the highest positions of power (not only in Bulgaria but also abroad).<sup>73</sup> The well-known Bulgarian Marxist philosopher and intellectual (also member of the Politburo of the CC of the BCP) Todor Pavlov, a friend and an old comrade from the Resistance, once told her: "Tsola, I do not

know the reason, but Todor Zhivkov hates you zoologically."<sup>74</sup> Dragoicheva herself admitted that this was the case.<sup>75</sup> The rights and mandate she had as a leader of the Fatherland Front after 1944 gave her self-confidence and hardened existing features of her character. Some of her actions also gave her political enemies grounds to speak about her "political cruelty."<sup>76</sup> Dragoicheva's women-comrades (even Rada Todorova, with whom she escaped from the women's concentration camp in the early 1940s) from the Bulgarski Narodni Zhenski Sujuz and later from the Komitet na Dvizhenieto na Bulgarskite Zheni complained about her *fürersko* (the behavior of a führer) attitude toward them.<sup>77</sup>

Later, in the 1970s, women who met her after the publication of her memoirs *Povelina na dulga* were impressed by her steadfastness, the wealth of impressions, and the optimism that gripped them in her presence.<sup>78</sup> According to an interviewer who talked with her in the early 1980s, "she was charming and quite straightforward in her answers."<sup>79</sup> A recent article dedicated to Dragoicheva romantically outlines her as a "tragic iron person" who melted with the seductions of power and survived the denial of the communist ideal.<sup>80</sup> Speaking about her character, a journalist once mentioned: "no idea, however noble, can endure unless the character absorbs it and gives it meaning. And no character, however militant, can expand and manifest itself if there is no idea to light its way."<sup>81</sup> Tsola Dragoicheva, according to this journalist, had "both natural strength and boldness of mind coupled, since early youth, with an ideal: to fight for the people's well-being," for both women and men.<sup>82</sup>

### Dragoicheva Was a Communist—Was She Also a Feminist?

Dragoicheva's son Chavdar, while speaking mostly about her revolutionary struggles and Party work (and presenting her as a person responsible and dedicated to the communist idea), emphasized that she was an "unbelievable feminist" (*nepopravima feministka*), as well.<sup>83</sup> (His opinion was confirmed by the interviews I conducted with her niece, Petrinka Nincheva, and the sociologist Maria Dinkova.) Why is it important to raise the question of whether Dragoicheva was a feminist? There are at least two reasons: one is theoretical and one is practical.

The theoretical or scholarly one is related to the ongoing debate within East European women's/gender history about the character of the state socialist measures toward women. We started this debate in the first volume of *Aspasia* with the provocative entry of my colleague and friend Mihaela Miroiu, a Romanian feminist philosopher, who insisted that state socialist measures toward women were not "state feminism" but state patriarchy. As I see it, such opinions rely on existing gender-blind theories about totalitarian states, which see these regimes as monolithic, fixed, and unchangeable. Not all historians and anthropologists, however, would easily agree to use only the label of state patriarchy, which may obscure the diverse and ambivalent character of state socialist policies toward women.<sup>84</sup>

The practical or political reason for my engagement with this discussion is the negative image of feminism, which, for many reasons, still persists in East European contexts and because of this, knowledge about feminism's past cannot serve as a pos-

itive example within the process of identity building of new generations of citizens. However, for many reasons, it is a difficult task to prove the feminism of Dragoicheva (and other Bulgarian state socialist women's activists).

First, since the end of the nineteenth century, socialists had stigmatized the feminist movement as "bourgeois" and hypocritical.<sup>85</sup> When bolshevized socialists, that is, communists, came into power in Eastern Europe after 1945 they brought their negativism toward feminism and turned this rejection into state policy.

Second, the notion of feminism was therefore not officially used in Eastern Europe during state socialism, and when it was used, then usually in pejorative terms, in order to stigmatize the old ("bourgeois") feminist movement prior to World War II and to make a caricature of contemporary Western "second wave" feminism. It is clear that this negativism toward feminism has been not just a Bulgarian idiosyncrasy.<sup>86</sup>

The third reason that it is difficult to prove Dragoicheva's feminism is the already mentioned opinion—based on existing theories about communist states as totalitarian—that state policies toward women during state socialism in Eastern Europe should not be called "feminism" but "state patriarchy."<sup>87</sup> Such views also include the belief that "communists" from the WIDF were not really interested in women's rights, as Francisca de Haan has argued.<sup>88</sup> Although there is a growing body of work dealing with these issues, such views are only beginning to be contested.<sup>89</sup>

The fourth reason is the lack of a unifying opinion about what feminism was or is. Without going into detail, I will say that for my analysis here, I accept Karen Offen's typology about the historical existence of two feminist styles of argumentation in Europe since 1700.<sup>90</sup> She calls them *relational* (emphasizing gender differences, women's reproductive roles, and their motherhood) and *individualist* feminisms (which neglects differences, emphasizes the common intellectual qualities of women and men, and highlights personal autonomy). I would like to add here that every classification is "reductionist" and a simplification, and from a cognitive point of view, every perception (scholarly included) is an issue of selection and focusing.<sup>91</sup>

Taking all this into consideration, is it possible to find evidence about pro-women actions of women's movements leaders in Eastern Europe that could be called feminism/feminist? In my own work on the Bulgarian case, I was able to see minutes of the meetings of women's activists (held during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s) that make it clear that these women were able to articulate and send to state officials (Women's Department of the Central Committee, Politburo, and Council of Ministers) various suggestions aimed at the betterment of the situation of women and children, which sooner or later were taken into consideration and turned into state policy.<sup>92</sup> The two already mentioned organizational structures of Bulgarian women after 1944—BNZhS and KDBZh—not only had the duty, responsibility, and initiative to help design state measures for solving the problems of women, children, and the family but they were also expected to contribute to the state bodies in carrying out and applying these policies.<sup>93</sup>

To go back to Tsola Dragoicheva specifically and answer the question about her feminism we need to take the perspective of the "resisting reader/reading" against the existing monolithic mainstream narratives about the state socialist period in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe.<sup>94</sup> We need to take a critical stance and write a crit-

ical feminist history of state socialism (in the spirit of “critical history” articulated by Joan W. Scott).<sup>95</sup>

In her capacities as general secretary of the National Committee of the Fatherland Front, president of the *Bulgarski Narodni Zhenski Suiuz*, BNZhS (1945–1950), and later leader of the *Komiteta na Dvizhenieto na Bulgarskite Zheni*, Dragoicheva wrote various texts and speeches. Analyzing their language can help us to understand her way of thinking and emancipatory ideas. Below I provide just a few examples from the 1940s and 1950s, when she was in charge of the women’s movement in the country, persistently popularized the ideas and decisions of the WIDF, and formulated the steps to be undertaken and followed by women’s activists in Bulgaria.

In August 1945, just a couple of days before the new parliamentary elections in Bulgaria, Dragoicheva spoke at a rally. In tune with the existing Marxist traditions, she articulated the (class) limits of the feminist understanding of gender equality and emphasized the role of the communists for the implementation of full equality between Bulgarian women and men, both civic and political.<sup>96</sup> Following the antifascist and popular front phraseology of the day, Dragoicheva pointed out that the full political and professional rights Bulgarian women received after September 1944 were a logical outcome of women’s participation together with their male-comrades in the antifascist struggles, and she tried to mobilize women for future actions for gender equality within the newly established BNZhS. As a true communist, Dragoicheva neglected the long feminist tradition in the country and the achievements of the “bourgeois” women’s movement before 1944.

In November 1945, Dragoicheva led the Bulgarian delegation to the founding congress of the WIFD, held in Paris. (At one of the next congresses of this organization—in 1949—Dragoicheva was celebrated, together with Anna Pauker, as an exemplary woman antifascist fighter.<sup>97</sup>) She spoke about the achievements of the new Bulgarian regime in terms of the “restoration of democracy” and consolidation of the peace process, about women’s participation in the social life of the country, and the great changes in their everyday life. She emphasized the establishment of a new solid women’s organization, the BNZhS (with 250,000 members already), which was expected to play an important role in the future life not only of Bulgarian women, but of society at large.<sup>98</sup> Dragoicheva proudly announced that in November 1945, all Bulgarian women ages eighteen and older were able to vote for the first time in the parliamentary elections, and that sixteen women members of Parliament had been elected.<sup>99</sup>

Two years later (March 1947), in a paper prepared for a meeting of the BNZhS, Dragoicheva spoke about the new economic role of women as workers and professionals, and their participation in the building of the new society. Like Alexandra Kollontai, who in 1922 had complained that “the Soviet state was run by men” and “women were to be found only in subordinate positions,”<sup>100</sup> Dragoicheva pointed to the “unmotivated fear” of various male “comrades”—“social” (and political) activists—who did not put women in high and prestigious positions. In tune with the major concerns of the WIDF, the leader of the Bulgarian women also articulated the need to open more kindergartens, preschool institutions, and kitchens for the children of working mothers and the need for social measures to support pregnant women.<sup>101</sup>

Dragoicheva used every possibility to propagate the major aims and activities of the WIDF. The paper she presented at the National Congress of peace supporters in 1949 (as already mentioned, between 1949 and 1952 she was leader of the National Peace Committee) was actually a celebration of the WIDF's antimilitarism and the achievements of "democratic" women around the world. Dragoicheva emphasized the major priorities of the Federation: the struggle for "peace and democracy"; the struggle for women's economic rights—"equal pay for equal work"; for women's admission to all professions; for gender equality in the whole social, political, economic, and cultural life of each member country of the Federation.<sup>102</sup> Her later report about the International Congress of Women held in Copenhagen in June 1953, the third WIDF Congress, emphasized the major rights of women as mothers, workers, and citizens. She also articulated women's and children's rights in the context of the peace movement.<sup>103</sup>

The newsletters of the WIDF (and their translation into Bulgarian) and the publications of the Bulgarian women's movement, among them the journal *Zhenata dnes*, permanently demonstrated the changes in women's situation around the globe and helped construct a feeling of belonging to the family of emancipated women of the world. Dragoicheva always emphasized the need for solidarity among women to reach their various goals—to fully secure their own social and political rights, the happiness of their children, and peace for the whole world. This also strengthened Bulgarian women leaders in their actions to gain more social benefits for ordinary Bulgarian women.<sup>104</sup>

Dragoicheva participated in almost all meetings of the WIDF from 1945 until the early 1960s. After each congress and board meeting of the WIDF, she wrote reports for the Bulgarian women's organizations and society at large to inform them about the major discussions and decisions of this international organization, and about the new initiatives concerning women and gender relations to be undertaken in each national setting.<sup>105</sup> While the documents of the women's congresses show that all national delegations of women articulated the national interests of their respective countries, some of the materials clearly declared that women are "a great force for peace and progress" and that women would no longer accept being treated as inferior members of their own societies.<sup>106</sup>

Within the internal Bulgarian context, even later in her political career—after she was reestablished as a member of the Politburo in the mid-1960s—Tsola Dragoicheva continued to think about and support the women's movement in the country. Thus she helped to strengthen the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement as a united and (relatively) independent ruling organ of women in the country (within the structures of the mass organization the Fatherland Front).<sup>107</sup> During her whole life Dragoicheva believed in the communist ideas for a better life and advocated for women's empowerment and rights while referring to the broader program of social change. Her ideas and actions clearly show that a communist mindset and feminist emancipatory activities were not mutually exclusive.

While trying to answer the question about Dragoicheva's feminism, we should take into account the character of the WIDF and its leaders as a whole. Were Eugenie Cotton, Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier, Irene Joliot-Curie, Dolores Ibarruri, Freda Brown, and other leading WIDF women feminists, that is, apart from the fact that many of them were left-wing activists and Marxists? What was the WIDF's agenda? Last but

not least, what was the impact of the Cold War on our knowledge about the WIDF (or, on our having only partial and generally biased knowledge about this organization)?

Francisca de Haan, the historian who has published most widely on the WIDF in recent years, claims that although politically the WIDF supported the Soviet Union, this support does not mean that “the Federation was a ‘Soviet front’ organization with goals other than professed nor that it was ‘not really’ interested in women’s rights, as the US House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) stated in its 1949 report about WIDF and its American branch, the Congress of American Women (CAW).”<sup>108</sup> As the accusations of the HUAC have been very influential, in both the history of the WIDF and the historiography, no wonder that up to now the WIDF has been rejected in the West as a “Soviet tool.” The negative campaign of the HUAC was so successful that the WIDF “has largely disappeared from Western feminist historians’ mental map,” the organization continues to be treated with suspicion, and its actions in support of women’s rights are disregarded, neglected, or mistrusted.<sup>109</sup> Here is what De Haan concludes about the character of the WIDF: “Based on my reading of the organization’s documents, I would characterize WIDF as a progressive, ‘left feminist’ international umbrella organization with an anti-colonial and anti-racist agenda.”<sup>110</sup>

The argument is thus that the WIDF was a left-feminist organization, and most of the WIDF activists fit what Karen Offen would call “relational feminists.” Their feminism is visible in both the language of the documents those women created and in the actions they undertook and organized: in defense not only of women’s political, professional, and economic rights but also of their struggles to change the situation of mothers. Dragoicheva’s very active involvement in the WIDF, her many activities on behalf of women in Bulgaria, her support and admiration for the achievements of all women, not only in Bulgaria but also abroad (as testified to by her son and people who have known her),<sup>111</sup> all support the claim that she was not just a communist but also a feminist.

## Conclusion

Based on extensive primary research, this article has tried to help deconstruct the monolithic picture of a “lacking” feminism on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain. Regarding Dragoicheva, I have argued above that she was a feminist. To be more precise, she was both a communist and feminist, perhaps more a communist than feminist, but keeping in mind the combination of patriarchy and official Marxism in the Bulgarian context after 1944, this comes as no surprise.

Feminists of the past were not always unproblematic personalities (as is true for historical figures in general). But as the well-known US social historian Linda Gordon recently stated, “we have to operate with a capacious and open definition of feminism,” even if we might not like some of the feminists (as there were—so Gordon emphasized—feminists working even within Stalinist and Nazi systems). More than that, “any historicized definition of feminism, meaning a political movement to advance women’s rights and welfare, must recognize that it can range from Right to Left. We need to avoid using the word ‘feminism’ as an imprimatur of political correctness.”<sup>112</sup>

Some of the skeptics among gender scholars continue to emphasize that women's organizations during state socialism fighting for social welfare were not treated by the state as partners in shaping gender politics, but mainly as instruments by which to promote its own political aims among women and to establish control over women's bodies, and that socialist states explicitly did not want such organizations to act from a position of advancing women's interests.<sup>113</sup> Whatever intentions socialist states had, however, in the end they had not only to accept the globalizing agenda of leftist women's organizations, such as the WIDF, but also to contextualize and respect it. Women activists of the former state socialist countries may not have planned on leading lives of leadership and feminist actions but they have ended up living them anyway: they were feminists despite themselves.<sup>114</sup>

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### ◆ Notes

1. Francisca de Haan, ed., "Gendering the Cold War in the Region: An Email Conversation between Malgorzata (Gosia) Fidelis, Renata Jambresic Kirin, Jill Massino, and Libora Oates-Indruchova," *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 162–190, esp. 163–164.

2. Joan W. Scott, "Against Eclecticism," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2005): 114–137.

3. For an extensive analysis of historiography dealing with East European women's and gender history, see Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann, "Women's and Gender History," in *The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700*, ed. Irina Livezeanu and Arpad von Klimó (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

4. Examples include Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: Pennsylvania University Press, 2002); Krassimira Daskalova, "Women, Nationalism and Nation-State in Bulgaria (1800–1940s)," in *Gender Relations in South Eastern Europe: Historical Perspectives on Womanhood and Manhood in 19th and 20th Century*, ed. Miroslav Jovanović and Slobodan Naumović (Belgrade-Graz: Udruženje za drustvenu istoriju, 2002), 15–37; Faruk Birtek and Thalia Dragonas, eds., *Citizenship and the Nation-State in Greece and Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2005); Efi Avdela, *Le genre entre classe et nation: Essais d'historiographie grecque* [Gender between class and nation: Essays in Greek historiography] (Paris: Edition Syllepse, 2006).

5. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *Aftermaths of War: Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918–1923* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

6. A recent example is Nanette Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21 (November 2014): 344–360. The major problem I have with Funk's article is about knowledge production and domination (who is entitled to provide "THE definition" of feminism/s), a profound problem in the way gender theory is usually done. On this see, the fine analysis of the Australian scholar Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory: Social Science and the Global Dynamics of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007). From the position of the (Balkan) "semiperiphery," this problem is powerfully articulated by the Serbian sociologist Marina Blagoević, *Knowledge Production at the Semiperiphery: A Gender Perspective* (Belgrade: Institut za kriminoloska i socioloska istrazivanja, 2009). See further the Forum in this issue.

7. An example of the first is Melanie Ilic, ed., *Women in the Stalin Era* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), 6; on the impact of the Cold War paradigm on gender history, see Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organizations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (2010): 547–573. For an illuminating and engaging account of Cold War partnership between, on the one hand, American academic feminisms and feminist scholars, and, on the other—American state and private foundations, and for more information on how this partnership shaped and legitimized certain frames for studying women, see Kelly Coogan-Gehr, *The Geopolitics of the Cold War and Narratives of Inclusion: Excavating a Feminist Archive* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). For more general and subtle reflections regarding the method of studying the former Soviet system, see Sonia Combe, *D'Est en Ouest, retour à l'archive*, suivi de *La langue de Rameau* [From East to West. The return of the archive, followed by *La langue de Rameau*] (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013).

8. Examples include Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*; "Forum: Is 'Communist Feminism' A Contradictio in Terminis?" *Aspasia* 1 (2007): 197–246; Malgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. 10; Kristen Ghodsee, "Rethinking State Socialist Mass Women's Organizations: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and the United Nations Decade for Women, 1975–1985," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 4 (2012): 49–73; Magdalena Grabowska, "Bringing the Second World In: Conservative Revolution(s), Socialist Legacies and Transnational Silence in the Trajectories of Polish Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 2 (2012): 385–

411; Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia," *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 1–25; "Forum: Gendering the Cold War in the Region."

9. About this, see, for example, Francisca de Haan's introduction to the "Forum: Gendering the Cold War in the Region," 162–163.

10. On this, see Emily Honig, "Striking Lives: Oral History and the Politics of Memory," *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 138–157; Krassimira Daskalova, ed., *Voices of Their Own: Oral History Interviews of Women* (Sofia: POLIS, 2004), 7–16; Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization*, 14.

11. For a discussion, see Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimiou, and Stefan Troebst, eds., *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Relations of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2014).

12. See, for example, Daskalova, *Voices of Their Own*; Jill Massino and Shana Penn, eds., *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Daniela Koleva, "'Normalnata biografia' prez pogleda na durzhavata i na zhenite (vtorata polovina na XX vek)" [The "normal biography": Seeing like a state, seeing like a woman (second half of the 20th century)], in *Zhenite i Modernizatsiata* (Izvestia na regionalen istoricheski musei, Rousse. Kniga XVII), ed. Reneta Roshkeva and Nikolai Nenov [Women in modernity: Proceedings of the regional historical museum of Rousse. Book 17] (Rousse, 2013), 181–195.

13. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *A Spy in the Archives: A Memoir of Cold War Russia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2013), 183.

14. About the patriarchalism of socialist male functionaries, see Marilyn Boxer and Jean Quataert, *Socialist Women: European Socialist Feminism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Elsevier, 1978).

15. Francisca de Haan, "Hoffnungen auf eine bessere Welt: Die frühen Jahre der Internationalen Demokratischen Frauenföderation (IDFF/WIDF) (1945–1950)" [Hopes for a better world: The early years of the Women's International Democratic Federation], *Feministische Studien* [Feminist studies] 27, no. 2 (November 2009): 241–257; Francisca de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda, and Contributions, 1945–1991," in *Women and Social Movements International Archive/Database* (2013), ed. Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, <http://alexanderstreet.com/products/women-and-social-movements-international> (accessed 9 August 2015). Among the few publications dealing with the WIDF (about its Soviet member organization), see, Melanie Ilic, "Soviet Women, Cultural Exchange and the Women's International Democratic Federation," in *Reassessing Cold War Europe*, ed. Sari Autio-Saraso and Katalin Miklossy (New York: Routledge, 2011), 157–174.

16. For a brief discussion of these developments, see the concise analytical essay by Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). About the "biographical turn," see esp. 19–23.

17. Michael Erben, "Introduction," in *Biography and Education: A Reader*, ed. Michael Erben, (London: Falmer Press, 1998), 2.

18. That is, the information that could be verified by other people, apart from the author of a biography, in order to be able to clearly differentiate between historical texts and literary works.

19. About such a case, see the fine biography of the Romanian communist Ana Pauker by Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

20. Tsentralen Durzhaven Archiv, TsDA (Central State Archive), f. 417 (Komitet na dvizhenieto na bulgarskite zheni, KDBZh); TsDA, f. 557 (Tsola Dragoicheva); TsDA, f. 1B (Politburo).

21. See TsDA, f. 1B, op. 26, a.e. 9, pp. 1–2.

22. I thank my colleague Francisca de Haan for pointing out the location of these materials. I am also grateful to Gisela Bock for supporting my DAAD research stay in Germany, which gave me the opportunity to unearth some important documents in the Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde.

23. Historians usually refer to these types of interviews as “oral history.” Maria Todorova, however, calls them “salvage ethnography” (an appeal to gather and save as much information as possible from eyewitnesses in various historical contexts). Maria Todorova, *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010), 14. Kristen Ghodsee, a US anthropologist working on Bulgaria, also emphasized the complexity of people’s lived experience under state socialism and urged scholars to do their job without a priori accepting “the assumption about the essential evil of communism.” Kristen Ghodsee, “Subtle Censorship: Notes on Studying Bulgarian Women’s Lives under Communism,” *Journal of Women’s History: Beyond the Page* (2012), [http://bingdev.binghamton.edu/jwh/?page\\_id=707](http://bingdev.binghamton.edu/jwh/?page_id=707) (accessed 27 November 2013). She also does this in her new book, *The Left Side of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

24. About women’s work during the Cold War in the “East” and “West,” see Francisca de Haan, “Women as the ‘Motor of Modern Life’: Women’s Work in Europe West and East since 1945,” in *Women and Gender in Postwar Europe: From Cold War to European Union*, ed. Joanna Regulska and Bonnie Smith (New York: Routledge, 2012), 87–103.

25. Chavdar Dragoichev, *Dragoichevi — maika i sin* [Dragoichevi — mother and son] (Sofia: IK Zemlia Press, 1998), 65.

26. The interview was commissioned by the US secretary of state (1945–1947) James Byrnes (1882–1972). Byrnes sent Mark Ethridge, the publisher of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, to “cover” this “troubled Balkan nation for him.” See Peter Labon, “Bulgaria’s ‘Lady Stalin,’” *Magazine Digest*, 33, no. 1 (January 1946): 113–116.

27. *Ibid.*, 113.

28. Tsola had three sisters (Maria, Gena, and Stefka) and two brothers (Tseno and Hristo). Hristo was the father of Petrinka Nincheva, whom I interviewed and who gave me details about Dragoicheva’s family.

29. During the last years of his life, Tseno was director of one of the biggest Soviet enterprises for glass production, situated near Moscow. For about twenty years after Tseno’s death, Dragoicheva tried in vain to find any information about her brother and his family. In 1956 Dragoicheva received a letter from the Central Committee of the BCP stating that her brother “Tseno Ninchev Dragoichev was fully rehabilitated posthumously” (personal archive of Petrinka Nincheva). She managed to get in touch with Tseno’s Russian wife Iraida Petrovna only in 1958.

30. Ivo Banać, ed., *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933–1949* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 161.

31. Henri Barbusse, *Le Boureaux* (Paris: Flammarion, 1926). This documentary book was a result of the investigation done by Barbusse and two others — Leon Vernochet and Paule Lamy, who traveled together with him to the Balkans. The book was translated into Bulgarian by the feminist leader of the Bulgarian Women’s Union at the beginning of the twentieth century, Ana Karima, and published in 1928 under the title *Palachite* [The hangmen].

32. A couple of years after he was born, cruel circumstances separated them and deprived the mother and son of the right to be together in good and bad times. Communist friends (the spouse of Traycho Kostov — Ljuba) brought (via Berlin) the five-year-old Chavdar to the Soviet Union, where he went to school and studied medicine. Chavdar was brought up in Moscow by Stela and Natalia Blagoevi (daughters of Dimitar Blagoev, the founder — in 1891 — of the party of Bulgarian socialists and his wife Vela Blagoeva, a feminist, teacher, journalist, and writer). Both

Stela and Natalia worked for the Comintern. He writes about all this in Dragoichev, *Dragoichevi—maika i sin*, 22–28. About their socialist feminist mother Vela Blagoeva, see Krassimira Daskalova, “Vela Blagoeva,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms, Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, and Anna Loutfi (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 62–65.

33. Chavdar was a close friend of Ana Pauker’s daughter, Tania, and Dolores Ibarruri’s daughter, Amaya. Dragoichev, *Dragoichevi—maika i sin*, 155.

34. About her journalistic works and her authorship in general, see the bibliography of her publications, prepared by Elena Savova, *Tsola Dragoicheva, Bio-Bibliographia* (Sofia: BAN, 1974).

35. About the Bulgarian concentration/labor camps before and during the communist rule, see the bilingual (Bulgarian-German) book by Ana Luleva, Evgenia Troeva, and Petar Petrov, *Prinuditelniat trud v Bulgaria (1941–1962). Spomeni na svideteli/Zwangsarbeit in Bulgarien (1941–1962): Erinnerungen von Zeitzeugen* [Coersive/Forced labor in Bulgaria (1941–1962): Memoirs of eyewitnesses] (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo Marin Drinov, 2012). Between 1941 and 1943, about 150 women spent different terms as political prisoners in the women’s camps; between 1944 and 1962 the number of women in the camps was 2,933 out of the total of 23,531 people. *Ibid.*, 60.

36. *Durzhaven vestnik* [State gazette], no. 227 (16 October 1944).

37. The Interwar Bulgarian Women’s Union, however, under the leadership (1926–1944) of the lawyer Dimitrana Ivanova (1881–1960), had its achievements: for example, in 1937 married, divorced, and widowed women from twenty-one years old were enfranchised; the Union demanded equal educational and professional rights for women and helped to shape social and ideological trends in the country. For more detail, see Krassimira Daskalova, “Dimitrana Ivanova,” in de Haan, Daskalova, and Loutfi, *Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms*, 182–184; Krassimira Daskalova, “The Women’s Movement in Bulgaria in a Life Story,” *Women’s History Review* 13, no. 1 (2004): 91–103.

38. Vladimir I. Lenin, *On the Emancipation of Women* (Moscow: Progress, 1977), 61. He emphasized that “it is a far cry from equality in law to equality in life.” Cited by Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 27. I am grateful to Francisca de Haan for this reference. Vida Tomšić, *Women, Development and the Non-Aligned Movement* (New Delhi: Centre for Women’s Development Studies, 1988), 12.

39. Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization*, 9; Elena Shulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Women and State Formation in the Soviet Far East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 12–23. On the “socialist way of life” in Bulgaria, see the important study by Ulf Brunnbauer, “*Die sozialistische Lebensweise*: Ideologie, Gesellschaft, Familie and Politik in Bulgarian (1944–1989) [“The socialist way of life”: Ideology, society, family, and politics in Bulgaria (1944–1989)] (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2007).

40. Cited by Labon, “Bulgaria’s “Lady Stalin,”” 113.

41. *Komisija po dosietata* [Commission of dossiers], f. 10, op. B, a. e. 3, t. 39, p. 58.

42. Tsocho Biliarski, “Istinskite pokazania na Tsola Dragoicheva za atentata v tsurkvata ‘Sveta Nedelia’ prez 1925 godina” [The real testimony of Tsola Dragoicheva about the bombing of St. Nedelia church in 1925] (Internet resource, last visited on 6 February 2015; the source no longer exists). In his biography of the oppositional leader G. M. Dimitrov (known in Bulgaria as “Gemeto”), Charles Moser, a US historian (and the husband of Gemeto’s daughter Anastasia) wrote that Tsola Dragoicheva was G. M. Dimitrov’s “consistent antagonist.” He also cited Maynard Barnes’s report, according to which Dragoicheva thought that people from the right spectrum of political life were of two categories: (a) fascists, who had to be liquidated; and (b) nationalists, who had to be reeducated. See Charles Moser, *Dimitrov of Bulgaria: Dr. Georgi M. Dimitrov* (Ottawa, IL: Caroline House, 1979), 202, 216. These pages in Moser’s book are based

on G. M. Dimitrov's memoirs, kept in the Hoover Archives at Stanford University, California. See, Hoover Institution Archives, Georgi M. Dimitrov "Spomeni" (Memoirs), Box no. 1, Folder 6, pp. 154, 228.

43. Dragoichev, *Dragoichevi—maika i sin*, 86–91. I also found some documents from 1947—letters from Georgi Dimitrov—which explicitly show that at the time she was already under attack. See TsDA, f. 557 (Tsola Dragoicheva). This is also mentioned in Iliana Marcheva, "Bulgarskata 'Lady Stalin': Tsola Dragoicheva" [Bulgarian "Lady Stalin": Tsola Dragoicheva], in *Bulgarski durzhavnitsi, 1944–1989* [Bulgarian statespersons, 1944–1989], ed. Maria Radeva (Sofia: IK Skorpio, 2005), 117–130.

44. *Komisija po dosietata*, f. 10, op. B, a. e. 3, t. 39, pp. 22–24, 29.

45. Banać, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933–1949*, 161.

46. Cited by Todor Pavlov, "Za avtorkata i za knigata" [About the author and the book], in Tsola Dragoicheva, *Povelija na dulga* [The call of duty], *Kniga purva Neslomimite* [vol. 1, Unbending] (Sofia: Partizdat, 1980), 8.

47. Dragoicheva, *Povelija na dulga*, 8.

48. On 11 July 1946, Dimitrov wrote in his diary about Dragoicheva's trip and participation in the meeting "of the executive body of the International Women's Federation in Paris." See Banać, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, 408.

49. Some of the people who were interrogated and were eyewitnesses in the campaign against her presented Dragoicheva as part of "the leadership of an anti-Party clandestine organization." See *Komisija po dosietata*, f. 10, op. B, a. e. 3, t. 39, pp. 27, 43, 56–59, 66–71, 114, esp. p. 71.

50. Dragoichev, *Dragoichevi—maika i sin*, 61–63.

51. Iliana Marcheva only mentions this episode: Marcheva, "Bulgarskata 'Lady Stalin,'" 117–130.

52. Branko Lazitch and Milodrag M. Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 102–103.

53. Dragoichev, *Dragoichevi—maika i sin*, 61–63.

54. *Ibid.*, 134.

55. During the 1930s in the Soviet Union and later in Bulgaria, Tsola Dragoicheva and Boyan Bulgarianov were a couple; they lived together but were not officially married.

56. Dragoichev, *Dragoichevi—maika i sin*, 50–53, esp. 51. According to Dragoichev, the first volume was the best one because it was not censored. This was not the case with the following two volumes, which presented "the antifascist struggles," however only up to September 1944. The next, fourth volume of the memoirs never appeared because Dragoicheva was not allowed to use the secret archival documents of the Communist Party. On Dragoicheva's "authorship" of these memoirs, see Krassimira Daskalova, "Avtori ne-avtori i pisateli fantomi" [Authors-non-authors and phantom-writers], in *Neslucheniat kanon: Bulgarski pisatelki ot 1944 godina do nashi dni* [The canon that did not happen: Bulgarian women writers from 1944 to the present day], ed. Milena Kirova, (Sofia: Altera, 2014), 345–361.

57. Zahari Stoyanov, *Zapiski po bulgarskite vustania* [Memoirs of the Bulgarian uprisings] (Sofia: Bulgarski pisatel, 1977). See also Hristo Hristov, "Zhivot, posveten na revoliutsiata" [A life dedicated to the revolution], in Dragoicheva, *Povelija na dulga*, *Kniga treta Pobedata* [vol. 3, The victory] (Sofia: Partizdat, 1980), 659.

58. This correspondence is kept in her personal archival collection at the State Historical Archive in Sofia. TsDA, f. 557 (Tsola Dragoicheva).

59. About the *nomenklatura* system, see the work of Alexander Vezenkov, *Vlastovite strukturi na Bulgarskata komunisticheska partia (1944–1989)* [The Power structures of the Bulgarian Communist Party (1944–1989)] (Sofia: Ciela, 2008).

60. About similar attitudes of the male Stalinist establishment toward the Romanian Ana Pauker, see Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 207. The Soviet rulers told the Romanian Politburo: “we don’t need women in the hierarchy” and insisted on the immediate replacement of Pauker as a foreign minister (according to them, foreign “dignitaries” and ministry personnel were too embarrassed to work with her). She was purged from the Romanian Communist Party in 1953. Ana Pauker was also the founding president of the Union of Democratic Women in Romania. See her report about the establishment of this organization, in Raluca Maria Popa, “Comrade Ana Pauker’s Report, 11 February 1946,” *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 150–161. But such a misogynist attitude toward women in politics at the time was not a totalitarian idiosyncrasy. Another European “iron lady”—Margaret Thatcher—also experienced difficulties and animosities when entering British high politics. On this, see, for example, Patricia Murray, *Margaret Thatcher* (London: Howard and Wyndham, 1980), 55, 67, 68, 69, 166.

61. About the “bourgeois” Bulgarian Women’s Union under Dimitrana Ivanova, see Daskalova, “The Women’s Movement in Bulgaria in a Life Story,” 91–103. Dimitrana Ivanova was arrested by the communists in September 1944 and barely escaped a death sentence. A similar Czech case involved the leader of the Council of Czechoslovak women, Milada Horakova, who, however, was executed in June 1950. See Denisa Necasova, “Women’s Organizations in the Czech Lands, 1948–89: A Historical perspective,” in *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism*, ed. Hana Havelkova and Libora Oates-Indruchova (London: Routledge, 2014), 125–182. For the end of another “bourgeois” organization in Bulgaria after World War II, see Georgeta Nazurska, “The Bulgarian Association of University Women, 1924–1950,” *Aspasia* 1 (2007): 153–175. See also Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 195–211; Melissa Feinberg, “Battling for Peace: The Transformation of the Women’s Movement in Cold War Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe,” in Regulska and Smith, *Women and Gender in Postwar Europe*, 16–33.

62. The following women were also on the board: Rada Todorova (communist), Vera Zlatareva (Bulgarian Agrarian National Union), Mara Kinkel (of Zveno), Richka Krustanova (of the social-democrats). On this, see Iliana Marcheva, “Zhenskoto dvizhenie v Bulgaria i negovata sudba prez perioda septemvri 1944–juni 1945” [The women’s movement in Bulgaria and its fate between September 1944 and June 1945], *Minalo* 1 (1995): 63–73, esp. 72–73. By May 1945 BNZhS already had 200,000 members, organized in 2,373 local associations—300 in the towns and 2,073 in the villages. Thus, the BNZhS united 35 percent of town women and 65 percent of peasant women.

63. For an identical communist approach toward pre-1944 social policy activities of the Bulgarian state and organizations, see Svetla Baloutzova, “‘Golemiat vzriv’ v detskoto sotsialno zakonodatelstvo v Bulgaria: reprezentatsii v sotsialisticheskata nauchnopopuliarna literatura, 1944–1989 г.,” [“The Big Bang” myth in child welfare legislation in Bulgaria: Representations in popular socialist literature, 1944–1989], <http://lib.sudigital.org/record/18827/files/SUDGTL-BOOK-2011-094.pdf> (accessed 9 August 2015).

64. TsDA, f. 1B, op. 6, a.e. 8, p. 12–15.

65. On this, see Iliana Marcheva, “Za opekunskoto predstavitelstvo na zhenite v Bulgaria, 1944–1948” [About the patronizing representation of women in Bulgaria, 1944–1948], in *Pol i prehod, 1938–1958* [Gender and transition, 1938–1958], ed. Krassimira Daskalova and Tanya Kmetova (Sofia: Center for Women’s Studies and Politics, 2011), 203–221.

66. TsDA, f. 1B (Politburo), op. 6, a.e. 50, p. 3.

67. *Ibid.*

68. Other minutes of the Politburo (from 1945, 1947, 1948, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954) also show the gender tutelage of the male rulers who were trying to impose their own vision about the

“work among women.” TsDA, f. 1B, op. 6, a.e. 50, p. 7–9; a.e. 430, p. 1; a. e. 599, pp. 1–10; op. 26, a.e. 1; a.e. 3, p. 1,9; a.e. 5, pp. 5–14; a.e. 6, pp. 1–2; a.e. 12, pp. 9–12; a.e. 15, pp. 1–6. See also TsDA, f. 1B, op. 6, a.e. 2194, pp. 1–4; a.e. 2802, pp. 2, 5–7.

69. Maria Dinkova was one of the Bulgarian gender-sensitive scholars before 1989, who participated in the creation of the state policy toward women. In the interview I conducted with her (on 10 April 2015), Dinkova proudly told me she was a feminist. She also mentioned that during the 1970s Tsola Dragoicheva took the side of the younger generation of women-activists who insisted that there are still many “women’s issues” to be addressed while the older generation, led by Dragoicheva’s colleague from the period of the clandestine “Resistance,” Rada Todorova, insisted that women’s problems had already been resolved. Although Dinkova spoke about the conflicts that existed within the women’s movement, she also mentioned how exceptional it was to work for *Zhenata dnes*: “This was an incredible working environment where one could speak and write everything—thanks to the editor-in-chief Sonia Bakish.” Her emotional recollections about—as she called it—“the great women’s revolution” are published in Maria Dinkova, “Stranitsi iz velikata zhenka revolutsia” [Pages from the great women’s revolution], *Vezni* 13, no. 5 (2003): 23–37; no. 6–7 (2003): 23–46; and *Vezni* 18, no. 6 (2008): 33–62. See also Kristen Ghodsee, “Pressuring the Politburo: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women’s Movement and the State Socialist Feminism,” *Slavic Review* 73, no. 3 (2014): 538–562, esp. 543–545.

70. This issue is extensively discussed in Dragoichev, *Dragoichevi—maika i sin*, 104–105, 114, 135–142, 154–157.

71. I refer here to the title of the WIDF’s journal, *Women of the Whole World*.

72. Labon, “Bulgaria’s “Lady Stalin,”” 113–116; Marcheua, “Bulgarskata ‘Lady Stalin,’” 117–130.

73. Todor Zhivkov, *Memoari* [Memoirs] (Sofia: SIV, 1997).

74. Dragoichev, *Dragoichevi—maika i sin*, 104.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Marcheua, “Bulgarskata ‘Lady Stalin,’” 123.

77. This was an accusation that, according to Iliana Marcheua, gave the Politburo a new argument to disband the BNZhS and turn it into a Committee of the Movement of Bulgarian Women. See Marcheua, “Bulgarskata ‘Lady Stalin,’” 126. I do not agree with Marcheua’s explanation.

78. Pavlina Popova, “An Exceptional Life,” *Women in the Whole World*, no. 4 (1978), 54–55.

79. Fredda Brilliant, *Women in Power* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1987), 59–72, esp. 61.

80. Marcheua, “Bulgarskata ‘Lady Stalin,’” 118.

81. Popova, “An Exceptional Life,” 54.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Dragoichev, *Dragoichevi—maika i sin*, 114.

84. See, for example, Jill Massino, in Francisca de Haan, ed., “Gendering the Cold War in the Region,” 179. The work of Kristen Ghodsee on state-socialist Bulgaria also shows that there were spaces of feminist activism. Ghodsee, “Rethinking State Socialist Mass Women’s Organizations,” 49–73; Ghodsee, “Pressuring the Politburo.”

85. Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700–1950: A Political History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 200–212; Marilyn Boxer, “Rethinking the Socialist Construction and International Career of the Concept ‘Bourgeois Feminism,’” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (2007): 1–28.

86. For Yugoslav leader Vida Tomšić’s views, for example, see her *Women, Development and the Non-Aligned Movement*, 3. The film historian Dina Iordanova uses the notion “reluctant feminists” in analyzing East European cinema and the work of a number of women filmmakers from the region during the period of state socialism. Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 119–143.

87. The theories of totalitarianism are not based on comparative historical research and are completely gender blind, such as the well-known work of Hannah Arendt. But even Arendt admitted that the Soviet regime was never “monolithic,” that similarly to the German case where totalitarianism died with Hitler, totalitarianism in the Soviet Union died with Stalin, and after Stalin’s death the Soviet regime was not the same. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), 397, 399, 401–402.

88. De Haan, “The Women’s International Democratic Federation.”

89. See the already cited research by R. Connell, M. Blagojević, S. Fitzpatrick, M. Fidelis, K. Ghodsee, and C. Bonfiglioli, and the Forum in this issue.

90. Offen, *European Feminisms*.

91. I say this just to signal that I am well aware of the existing criticisms against Karen Offen’s typology, by Nancy Cott and Ellen Carol DuBois, for example. Most scholars link feminism to a view of women’s autonomy that is basically individualistic, liberal, and rights-conscious. Karen Offen, according to Cott, makes feminism a transhistorical term and concept; therefore she expands our understanding of the boundaries of feminism by including in it a relational point of view. At the same time, according to Cott, Offen does not make it explicit enough that the relational argumentation composed the standard, conservative status quo view of women’s position, rather than anything remotely feminist. According to Cott, “the constellation of relational beliefs was characteristic of existing gender hierarchy” (204). For more detail see, Nancy Cott, “Comment on Karen Offen’s ‘Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,’” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 15, no. 1 (1989): 203–205, esp. 204; see also Ellen Carol DuBois, “Comment on Karen Offen’s ‘Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,’” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 15, no. 1 (1989): 195–197.

92. Thus, for example, at the meeting on 15 December 1965, they suggested that unpaid motherhood leave be increased to six months and this leave be not only for women who raised their own children but also for women who adopted children; reduction of the kindergarten fees; a third suggestion concerned the school canteens: it was emphasized that existing agricultural cooperative farms should provide high quality food for them; the last suggestion was to bring more women into the construction/building industries and indeed that women should enter all spheres of the economy. TsDA, f. 417 (KDBZh), op. 3, a.e. 9, pp. 133–134. Later the Committee of the Movement of Bulgarian Women insisted that more money should be spent for the construction of kindergartens because only 80 percent of the children were in kindergartens, and they thought that 100 percent should be able to go to kindergartens. On this, see “Elena Lagadinova,” in Brilliant, *Women in Power*, 84–85. Actually the whole archival collection of the KDBZh contains a great number of suggestions such as those cited above, showing the committee’s initiatives and role in designing the state and Party policy toward women.

93. Brilliant, *Women in Power*, 73–88, esp. 77.

94. Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

95. Scott, “Against Eclecticism,” 114–137. In such a critical vein, some East European women’s/gender historians—Lydia Sklevicki in Croatia in the late 1980s–early 1990s and Peter Vodenicharov in Bulgaria more recently—demonstrated how antifascist women, after the joint victory with their revolutionary male comrades in 1944–1945, were pushed back into their private lives after the war was over. Peter Vodenicharov, “Marginalizatsia na zhenite v ‘Druzhestvata na boitsite protiv fashizma’ prez 40-te–50-te godini na XX: stariat patriarhalizum v novata antifashistka retorika” [Marginalization of women in the “Associations of antifascist fighters” during the 1940s–1950s: the old patriarhalism in the new antifascist rhetoric], in Daskalova and Kmetova, *Pol i Prehod, 1938–1958*, 235–242. Tsola Dragoicheva, however, was one of the major exceptions to this pattern.

96. Tsola Dragoicheva, *Smelo i gordo da zashtitim bulgarskata zheni i maika* [Courageously and proudly to defend the Bulgarian woman and mother] (Sofia: Otechestven front-Natsionalen komitet, 1945), 4–5.

97. Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, DY/31, Archivsignatur 1590, S. 4.

98. “Intervention de Mme Tzola Dragoitcheva, au nom de la délégation Bulgare: la participation des femmes a l’oeuvre de restauration de la démocratie et de la consolidation de la paix” [Intervention of Mrs Tsola Dragoicheva, on behalf of the Bulgarian delegation: The participation of women in the reestablishment of the democracy and in the consolidation of the peace], in *Fédération Démocratique Internationale des Femmes, Congrès Internationale de Femmes* [Women’s International Democratic Federation, International Congress of Women] (Paris: WIDF, 1945), 139–143, esp. 141.

99. The number of women voters outnumbered with 800,000 the one of men. She failed to mention, however, that these voting results were achieved not only thanks to the change of the system after the end of World War II and women’s participation in the antifascist struggles, but also thanks to the decades of activities of the old BWU, expropriated by the communists immediately after 9 September 1944. Dragoicheva spoke not only about women’s new professional and social roles; she outlined women’s participation in the Patriotic War that Bulgarians fought after September 1944 on the side of the antifascist countries (on the territories of Yugoslavia and Hungary). See “Rapport déposé par la délégation de Bulgarie: la participation des femmes a l’oeuvre de restauration de la démocratie et d’établissement de la paix” [Report of the Bulgarian delegation. The participation of women in the reestablishment of democracy and in the consolidation of peace], in *Fédération Démocratique Internationale des Femmes*, 183–186.

100. Richard Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 327.

101. Tsola Dragoicheva, *Doklad pred Plenuma na Bulgarskia naroden zhenski suiuz* [A report for the meeting of the Bulgarian People’s Women’s Union] (Sofia: Bulgarskia naroden zhenski suiuz, 1947), 26, 27–28. More than that—Dragoicheva reacted against the creation of special women’s sections affiliated with the different political parties, because, according to her, this would dissociate women from the Union, which was the organization most concerned about women’s rights. She also pointed to links with the Women’s International Democratic Federation and the common goals of Bulgarian women with those of the women members of the WIDF. *Ibid.*, 29.

102. Tsola Dragoicheva, *Demokratichnite zheni v sveta v borbata za traen mir i domokratsia* (*Doklad, iznesen na Natsionalnia kongress na privourzhenitsite na mira, Sofia—3 april*) [Democratic women in the world in the struggles for lasting peace and democracy (Report at the National Congress of Peace Supporters, Sofia, 3 April)] (Sofia: Biblioteka BNZhS, 1949).

103. Minister Tsola Dragoicheva, chair of the KDBZh, *Svetovniat kongres na zhenite v Copenhagen* [The International Congress of Women in Copenhagen] (Sofia: Komitet na demokratichnite bulgarski zheni, 1953), 6.

104. Just a few examples: TsDA, f. 417 (KDBZh), op. 1, a. e. 28; Tsola Dragoicheva, *Mezh-dunarodnata demokratichna federatsia na zhenite: velika sila v borbara za mir* [Women’s International Democratic Federation: A great force in the struggle for peace] (Sofia: Komitet na demokratichnite bulgarski zheni, 1954); Ts[ola] Dragoicheva, “Svetovniat kongres na zhenite v Copenhagen” [The international women’s congress in Copenhagen], *Zhenata dnes* 8, no. 7 (July 1953): 4–5; “Deklaratsia za pravata na zhenite” [Declaration of women’s rights], *Zhenata dnes* 8, no. 7 (July 1953): 8; and “Neumorim borets za deloto na naroda” [Inexhaustible fighter for the people’s cause], *Zhenata dnes* 7, no. 1 (January 1952): 15.

105. See also Tsola Dragoicheva, *Doklad za rabotata i resheniata na sesiata na Izpulnitelnia komitet na MDFZh, Geneva, 16–19 Januari 1954, iznessen na plenuma na KDBZh ot nashata pred-*

*stavitelka na sesiata dr. Tsola Dragoicheva* [Report on the work and decisions of the meeting of the Executive Board of Women's International Democratic Federation, Geneva, 16–19 January 1954, presented at the plenary session of the Committee of the Movement of the Bulgarian Women by our representative at the meeting comrade Tsola Dragoicheva] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Natsionalnia suvet na Otechestvenia Front, 1954).

106. Dragoicheva, *Svetovniat kongres na zhenite v Copenhagen*, 6.

107. The restructuring was done according to her suggestion at the first national conference of women, held in September 1968. See Iliana Marcheva, "Zhenski organizatsii i vlast: bulgarskiat sluchai (1944–1990)" [Women's organizations and political power: The Bulgarian case (1944–1990)], in *Suvremennata zhena: roli i obrazi* [Contemporary woman: Roles and images] (Blagoevgrad: Universitetsko izdatelstvo Neofit Rilski, 2010), 36–44, esp. 41.

108. De Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation."

109. *Ibid.*, 2.

110. *Ibid.*, 1.

111. Dragoichev, *Dragoichevi—maika i sin*, 114; my interviews with Petrinka Nincheva and Maria Dinkova.

112. Linda Gordon, "Feminism Unfinished," a keynote address at the Boston Feminist Conference, 26 March 2014, 1. I am grateful that Linda gave me the opportunity to read and use her wonderful text after hearing her presentation at the conference. It was translated (by Anna Roshkeva) and published in Bulgarian: Linda Gordon, "Nezavursheniat feminism" [Feminism unfinished], *Kultura* (Culture), no. 26 (11 July 2014), 9.

113. A recent East European (Czech) example is Havelkova and Oates-Indruchova, *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism*, 9. But this negative evaluation of state-socialist women's organizations was once again questioned recently by Kristen Ghodsee. She showed how in the West the efforts of women's organizations in Eastern Europe were downplayed and discredited because their leaders were committed to different forms of Marxism-Leninism. Ghodsee, "Pressuring the Politburo," 538–542.

114. Inspired by the title of Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak's well-known book, *Feminists Despite Themselves: Women in Ukrainian Community Life, 1884–1939* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1988).