"Millions for the Movies" in Late Socialist Bulgaria:

The Political and Moral Economy of the Cinema Industry

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Abstract

This article offers a reading of late socialism in Bulgaria (1970-80s), envisioned through the prism of the social history of cinema. Drawing on archival records and interviews with film professionals, some of whom held leading responsibilities during those years, it examines both the political economy of the film industry and its impact on the lived experiences of film professionals. Thereby, the paper sheds light on the workings of the command economy in a socialist country, as well as on the ways in which actors involved in this sector "made do" with the political, ideological and economic constraints they faced. Rejecting an approach centred on propaganda and censorship only, the article unveils the processes of subjectivation at work witin this social world, and the moral economy of the members of the guild. Ultimately, the article suggests that in late socialist Bulgaria control was exercised less from above, in a centralized and orchestrated way, than it was made up of the articulation of small constraints and the contingency of situations. Thereby, the analysis also contributes to understanding how the end of the socialist regime came about. This did not occur as a result of a clear and brutal rupture. Prior to the sudden downfall of dictator Zhivkov, a succession of small changes, often imperceptible, had fostered a novel political configuration, one conducive to revolutionary transformations.

« Des millions pour le cinéma » sous le socialisme tardif en
Bulgarie : économie politique et morale de l'industrie filmique
Résumé

Cet article propose une lecture du socialisme bulgare des années 1970-1980 à partir d'une analyse de l'histoire du cinéma réalisée à travers un travail dans les archives et des entretiens avec des acteurs du secteur ayant eu des responsabilités durant ces années. Il analyse son économie politique et son impact sur les expériences vécues des professionnels du cinéma pour mieux comprendre les formes de l'économie dirigée dans un pays socialiste et les façons dont les acteurs de ce secteur « faisaient avec » ces contraintes. Il analyse également son économie morale pour appréhender les processus de subjectivation à l'œuvre malgré la propagande et la censure. Au final, l'article suggère que le contrôle était moins exercé par le haut, de façon centralisée et orchestrée, qu'il n'était fait de l'articulation de petites contraintes et de la contingence des situations. L'analyse développée contribue également à comprendre comment est advenue la fin du régime socialiste, moins par une rupture claire et brutale que par de petits changements, souvent imperceptibles mais qui ont fait émerger une nouvelle configuration politique.

Keywords
Bulgaria; cinema; command economy; cultural studies; domination; socialism; subjectivation.

Mots-clés
Bulgarie ; cinéma ; communisme ; domination ; économie dirigée ; études culturelles ; subjectivation.

In his address to the Second Congress of the Union of Cinema Professionals (*Bulgarski suyuz na filmovi deytsi*) in Sofia in 1980, the renowned Bulgarian screenwriter Georgi Mishev described the challenges faced by scriptwriters at a time when culture officials were deploring a "dearth of scripts" (*stsenarni glad*):

> Once he has written a piece for the cinema, after several months of hard work, the scriptwriter must submit his screenplay. This requires him to go through several steps, and endure well-intentioned statements, promises, advice, suggestions […]. Any inadequacies, any unexpected changes on the financial side (and any other risk factors) are handled, not by those who are party to the agreement that is working with capital of 3 million a year [i.e. the Studio Boyana], but by the "person known, for the sake of brevity, as the author", a person for whom the word "capital" is nothing more than a term from "Political Economy, Part I". Even the most ordinary plumber knows that once he finishes a job he will receive payment for his work immediately, without having to wait until the walls of the building are fully painted and its residents have moved in. The scriptwriter also knows this, but he is compelled to wait. He has to go through a first committee, a second committee, and a third committee. He has to wait until the filmmaker has prepared the script, until shooting starts, until the premiere takes place, until the film is sold abroad. He has to wait for two more years before he can get his money back, although his remuneration often has little to do with the payment agreed upon… Throughout this long waiting period, the person known as the author, if he loves the cinema, has no choice but to wait. But if that person dares to write novels too, after his first script he's going to start thinking: "Why, for Christ's sake, shouldn't I write novels that can get printed as soon as one editor gives his approval, with no panels, no committees to face […], novels that sometimes get translated into twenty foreign languages, while the author receives rights for every single translation […]?" But let's not go into further into the matter of "material stimulus". Dwelling on the theme of "art and money" isn't pretty. Have you noticed that the word "money" hasn't been directly used even once? We preferred the more decent expression "material stimulation". Now let's see how things stand with the spiritual side of the story.[1]

For the scholar of socialism, Mishev's speech deserves attention for a number of reasons. Making sardonic references to issues of remuneration, copyright, and personal enrichment during a strictly-choreographed public ritual might come as a surprise in a political order allegedly aiming to "reverse the alchemy of capitalist exchange" and to abolish the "magic of money" denounced by Marx.[2] His speech also suggests that rivalries between professional corporations might have played a significant role in the daily exercise of power during socialism – in addition to centralized control. Finally, Mishev's speech provides a welcome reminder that the political management of (fragmented, discontinued) time was key to exerting control over the film industry in socialist Bulgaria – a time shaped by a significant number of decision-making bodies and the uncertainty of their judgments.

In recent decades, the historiography of socialism in Eastern Europe has moved beyond the long-structural opposition between the "revisionist" and "totalitarian" schools.[3] In particular, the sociology of culture and consumption has provided a heuristic entry into daily lives during socialism.[4] While much of this historiography has focused on the Stalinist era, several pieces of research have shed light on the specifics of late socialism.[5]

This article[6] aims to contribute to this growing literature on "culture as politics".[7] In other words, the purpose is not primarily to contribute to the writing of a history of Bulgarian cinema,[8] but to envision cinema as a window onto socialism. In this specific study, though, instead of considering the acts of viewing and the ways in which movie-going found its ways in people's leisure and cultural activities, the focus is on the political and moral economy of cinema in socialist Bulgaria and its impact on the lived experiences of movie

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[1] Mishev, 1980, 5-7.

[2] Zatlin, 2010, 147.

[3] Yurchak, 2005; Kotkin, 1995; Edele, 2011, 2020. For a broader perspective on the definition of self and the modes of existence within such societies, see Lüdtke, 1998 and Lüdtke, 1991; Oeser, 2015, 5-16.

[4] Crowley and Reid, 2002; Reid and Crowley, 2000; Pence and Betts, 2008.

[5] Yurchak, 2005; Zhuk, 2010; Kozovoï, 2009; Bren, 2010; Dragostinova, 2021; Donert et al., 2022.

[6] The author wishes to thank Béatrice Hibou and Françoise Mengin for their comments on an earlier version of this text. My gratitude also goes to Katharine Throssell for her marvelous editing work on this paper, as well as to Yann Lézénès for giving the text its final polish.

The title of this article paraphrases Boris Shumiatskii, the head of the Soviet film industry, and his famous appeal for a "cinema for the millions". On this period in Soviet film history, see Taylor, 1983.

[7] Bren, 2010, 10.

[8] For this perspective, see Iordanova, 2008; Garbolevsky, 2011.

professionals (*kinadzhii*),[9] a professional group that was simultaneously the addressee, the co-producer, and sometimes the victim of the socialist order that feature films were supposed to help bring about.

Considering socialism through this particular frame provides an opportunity to expand our knowledge of the concrete workings of command economies. Cinema offers an interesting vantage point in this respect, as it was simultaneously a technology intensive industry, a cultural product, and part of the entertainment business. One might argue that socialist film-making and film-distribution were in some respects unique, since this vast industry, whose leaders yearned for international recognition, could not remain secluded from the broader world and was therefore compelled to confront questions of international circulation and competition. Issues of participation in international festivals, of co-production (including with Western partners), and of access to the latest technologies (most of which were produced in the West) required a specific consideration of export-import policies, the resorting to (scarce) foreign currencies, as well as financial and symbolic retribution for the artists. Such a perspective would be misleading, however. Similar dynamics occurred in other sectors of culture (the graphic arts and the production of memorials and statues for the regime for instance). The money-consuming cinema industry simply gave these conundra greater visibility. Thereby, an analysis of the world of movies functions as a magnifying glass, improving our understanding of planned economies, as well as the ways in which societies "made do" under late-socialist regimes.

In recent years scholars have increased our awareness of the relationship between ideology, art, and leisure in Eastern European film industries, exposing the tensions between the quest for successful ideological socialization, economic efficiency, and audience satisfaction.[10] Sensitive to the diversity of film genres and the increasing role devoted to popular comedies in the USSR from the 1960s on, some scholars have even ventured to use notions such as "blockbusters" to depict marketable film genres and to suggest the need for a more thorough study of the "link between the filmmaker and the audience" reflected in box office sales.[11] Their work has allowed us to move beyond a reading of socialist cinema which supposed that state funding eschewed any consideration of financial sustainability and return on investments. In Bulgaria too, from the early 1970s onwards, the yearning for international prestige, the search for financial profitability, and a growing awareness of the social differentiation and diverging tastes of moviegoers led officials working for the state cinema monopoly to reconsider production and distribution strategies. Yet the role that co-productions, services for foreign film companies (including Western ones), and the tentative introduction of profit-sharing mechanisms played in this reorientation remains under-researched.

Secondly, and more importantly, building on recent scholarship in this field, the objective of the present study is to highlight the multifaceted interplay between subjection and subjectivity in socialist Bulgaria and beyond.[12] "Sovietized" cinema has often been seen through the prism of the relationship between art and propaganda; censorship and subversion.[13] As early as 2003, cinema historian Dina Iordanova suggested that it was imperative to move beyond a focus on censorship in order to understand the development of film industries in Eastern Europe.[14] It might be possible to take this further and argue that the mechanisms of censorship and power cannot be accounted for by focusing on censorship alone. In addition, conventional dichotomies between state control (over film production, release, and reception) and societal resistance leave aside a key player, the social milieu of cinema professionals, whose social history needs to be told, taking account of the variety of self-definitions and social trajectories within it.

This study is structured in two parts. The first part analyses the multi-layered rationale of socialist film policies in Bulgaria and its specific political economy, while the second part explores the moral economy of

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[9] The notion here covers all the professions involved in film production: directors, cameramen, actors, scriptwriters, composers and sound engineers, editors, set designers, make-up artists, animation artists, and other technical personnel.
[10] Sumpf, 2004; First, 2008; Rajagopalan, 2008; Feinstein, 2002; Pozner, 2005; Prokhorov, 2003; Tcherneva, 2013.
[11] Beumers, 2003, 453.
[12] Todorova et al., 2014.
[13] On the non-linear workings of film censorship in the USSR, see Godet (2010) and, from a different perspective, Vatulescu (2010). Peter Kenez has provided a classical reading of Soviet censorship in Kenez (2001).
[14] Iordanova, 2003, 17.

the "film world".[15] For that purpose, it traces the social dynamics of change, stratification, and prestige, at work within the movie guild, as they impacted the legitimacy of cinema and socialism itself. The key sources for this paper include archival records (especially decisions of the BKP regarding the arts, and the archives of the cinema monopoly body, *Kinematografiya*, preserved in the Bulgarian Central State Archive and the Sofia State Archive) as well as interviews with former executive and administrative officials from the *Kinematografiya*, directors, cameramen, actors, sound engineers, and critics, among others.

In so doing, the paper will bring out the deliberately ambiguous, diffuse character of a microphysics of power in which professional solidarities and rivalries, mutual acquaintances and dependencies, favours, and petty betrayals, all coexisted. In examining the strategies pursued by some film professionals within artistic networks, cultural institutions and/or party structures, the analysis reveals a domination made up of a plethora of scattered constraints, rather than large-scale, centralized, homogenous, and consistent patterns of coercion. Additionally, remuneration policies, the differential allocation of new technologies and the administration of public honours all played a role in the fabric *and* the domestication of socialism. Finally, the Bulgarian case study provides evidence of chronological shifts during "late socialism". In this case, it is the little breaks and micro-shifts that are of crucial importance. The 1980s, in particular, saw the erosion of previously-shared conventions and the crystallisation of a critique of movie policies and of the regime itself.

THE "GOLDEN AGE" OF THE BULGARIAN FILM INDUSTRY: THE COMPLEX RATIONALES OF SOCIALIST FILM POLICIES

Bringing the cinema to each town and Hamlet

The development of a film industry in Bulgaria dates back to the years 1910-1920. The first steps in cinema were taken in 1897, with the organization of a screening in the city of Ruse, on the Danube river.[16] In 1908, the capital of the young Bulgarian state, Sofia (independent since 1878) obtained its first cinema. Its name, *Moderen Teatur*, speaks volumes about the ambitions invested in this new medium in search of respectability. In the 1920s and 1930s, the pleasures of cinema became familiar to an urban, socially diversified clientele that watched mainly American and German offerings. But by the Second World War, cinema coverage across the country was still very uneven. In 1944 there were 213 cinemas (including 140 in towns and 73 in villages), often housed in *chitalishta*, Bulgarian multi-purpose houses of culture.[17] Film production, although it had developed more actively in the 1930s, was still embryonic, with a total filmography of 46 titles.[18]

Shortly after the establishment of the new communist regime, in October 1946, a law on film culture was adopted.[19] Private activity was not completely banned, but a state monopoly over the distribution, purchase, and sale of films was established.[20] Like their Soviet counterparts, the new leaders of Bulgaria saw cinema as "the most powerful means of education", in the words of Vulko Chervenkov, then chairman of the

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[15] The notion of the "film world" is used here by analogy with that of the "art world" coined by American sociologist Howard Becker. This choice mirrors the belief that an analysis of the social dynamics within the film milieus must take into account the diversity of social actors who participated in what were highly collaborative projects, rather than focus on the creative professions (director, screenwriter, cameraman, comedians…) (Becker, 1982).

[16] Kurdzhilov, 2008; Yanakiev, 2003.

[17] Durzhaven kinoarhiv, 1960, 109. Figures quoted in http://www.titra.net/news/statistics.htm [accessed June 9, 2011; no longer active]. This data needs to be treated with caution, as it varies from source to source. A 1980 report gives the figure of 155 cinemas in 1939 (123 in towns and 23 in villages), and 13 million filmgoers per year. See *Doklad po osnovnite problemi v razvitieto na bulgarskoto kino* [Report on the main problems in the development of Bulgarian cinema] co-signed by Hristo Hristov, director of the Bulgarian Union of Cinema Professionals, and Nikola Nenov, Vice-President of the Committee for Culture. See *Tsentralen Durzhaven Arhiv* (TsDA, Central State Archive), *Fund* (F, Archival Fond) 405, *opis* (op., Inventory) 9, *arhivna edinitsa* (ae., Archival Unit) 273, *list* (l., Page) 2.

[18] Yanakiev, 2003, 9-146; Iordanova, 2008, 7.

[19] "Zakon za kinokultura, 1946, belezhi i tekst", *Durzhaven Vestnik* (DV, State Gazette), Issue 253, 14.10.1946.

[20] Interestingly, state interference in the cinema industry predates the establishment of the socialist regime. In 1940, a department was set up within the Propaganda Bureau that was responsible for the production of newsreels [*sedmichni kinohroniki*]. In 1941, a newly created private foundation, *Bulgarsko delo*, was placed under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. This foundation was responsible for the production of films, documentaries and newsreels, the construction of new cinemas, and the training of technical and creative personnel. It also issued a specialized journal, *Kino i Foto* (Piskova, 2000).

Committee for Science, the Arts and Culture, and they gave it a prime role in "the political and cultural life of citizens and especially young people".[21] Organizationally, however, it was not until 1948 that the main change occurred, with the nationalization of the whole branch. The new public monopoly, *D. P. Bulgarska Kinematografiya*, was placed under the responsibility of the Committee for Science, the Arts and Culture. Order 91 of the Council of Ministers (31 January 1952) outlined the policy on repertoire:

> The Bulgarian film industry must be directed mainly towards the production of films dedicated to building socialism in our country, by creating on-screen images of new people – heroes of labour in factories and mines, machine-tractor stations and TKZS [collective farms], our border guards, our heroic Dimitrovan youth [from the name of the communist leader, Georgi Dimitrov], and workers in the field of our socialist culture.[22]

From that point on, Promethean investments in "cinefication" were made, in order to bring socialist popular culture into every single hamlet and to participate in shaping the new socialist man. As an article from *Kino i foto* emphasizes in 1946, "cinema has become one of the most powerful means of cultural elevation, of political, economic, and social education, of training and useful entertainment. These qualities derive from the fact that the live movie-image does not require any particular skill in order to be understood by all, peasant and city dwellers, educated and non-educated people".[23] In 1960, there were 1,515 movie auditoriums in Bulgaria. Twenty years later, the number had risen to 3,453, of which 2,542 were located in rural areas. The state also invested in infrastructure development (the feature-film studio, *SIF Boyana*, was opened in 1962), the training of creative and technical personnel, the establishment of film festivals (*Zlatna roza* for feature films in 1961) and the launching of specialized publications (*Kino i foto* in 1946, *Filmovini novini* in 1955, *Bulgarski filmi* in 1960). Disrupted by political repression in the 1940s, production reached a first quantitative milestone in 1956, and stabilized at around 10-15 films per year in the 1960s, before reaching an annual rate of 20-25 full-length movies over the next two decades.[24] An estimated 112 million tickets were sold in 1960 and 126.6 million in 1965.[25] Towards the end of the 1970s, 130 to 160 films premiered every year. On average, each citizen attended around 14 or 15 movie performances a year.[26]

However, in the second half of the 1970s, a period perceived as the "golden age" of Bulgarian cinema by filmmakers and critics was drawing to a close. Competition from television (which started in 1959[27]) contributed to this relative decline in audiences,[28] as did the discomfort of auditoriums (especially in villages and small towns where projectors, screens, heating, and ventilation left much to be desired) and the monotony of the programme of the films presented outside major urban centres. In 1980, the number of tickets was down to 95.8 million.[29] The 1970s were punctuated by efforts to boost box office successes and make the industry viable. Attempts to rise to these challenges led to serious debates within the state apparatus. Revisiting these debates will shed light on the complexity of the logic underlying the economics of film production and the remuneration of *kinadzhii* in socialist Bulgaria.

Seeking economic efficiency: the commodification of Bulgarian cinema

It may be tempting to assert, as some film professionals in the first years of the 21st century have done, that after 1989 "economic" censorship replaced the old "political" censorship. The implication here is that

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[21] *Motivi kum zakonoproekta za kinematografiya*, quoted in Deyanova, 2005, 36.

[22] *91-to postanovlenie na ministerskiya suvet ot 31 januari 1952 g. otnosno sustoyaneto i zadachite na Bulgarska kinematografiya* [Order 91 of the Council of Ministers of January 31, 1952 concerning the situation and missions of the Bulgarian Cinematography].

[23] Borov, 1946. The author wishes to thank Mariyana Piskova for having brought her attention to this text.

[24] Yanakiev, 2000, 297-311.

[25] Again, this data should be handled with caution. Certain tickets were "artificially" sold within the context of collective outings organized for workers, conscripts, or pupils. The success of individual films is even more difficult to ascertain, since movie theatre managers – under pressure to fulfil their monthly plan – used creative accountancy methods (some tickets sold for western films were reported under the column "Soviet" or "Bulgarian" movies). Interview with filmmaker and then director of the feature film studio, *SIF Boyana*, Evgeniy Mihailov, Sofia, 24 September, 2006.

[26] By comparison, in the Soviet Union, the average citizen visited movie theatres 18 times in 1966 and 19 times in 1970. See Zhuk, 2010, 125.

[27] The number of TV owners increased dramatically from a low 8% in 1965 up to 42% in 1970, 66% in 1975, 75% in 1980 and 93% in 1985. See Lampe, 1986, 194.

[28] Ivanova, 2005.

[29] Figures quoted in http://www.titra.net/news/statistics.htm [accessed 18 June 2009; no longer active].

funding issues were never priorities when the state film monopoly was following ideological injunctions. However, a closer examination suggests that the search for profitability – which became a recurrent concern from the 1960s onwards – led not only to a more systematic consideration of audience preferences, but also to often inventive policies for diversifying funding sources.

Until the late 1950s, the movie industry was directly financed from the state budget responsible for expenses not covered by revenue from screenings. In July 1952 the Council of Ministers published an order stating that 50% of receipts from showings of Bulgarian films should be allocated to funding the annual production of national cinema. However, article 1 of the order indicated that any losses would be borne by the state budget.[30] A credit system run by the Bulgarian People's Bank was also set up to finance both production and cinematography. However, a drive for greater "economic efficiency" emerged in the 1960s, a period dominated in Bulgaria – like in other socialist countries – by attempts to reform and liberalize command economies.[31] Noting that the model of extensive economic growth had broken down, in 1968 the authorities adopted a programme called "Main provisions for the further development of the system of government in our society", aimed at improving the planning system, boosting business competitiveness (in particular through greater consideration of turnover as an indicator of performance, an overhaul of investment policy, and the establishment of a profit-sharing scheme for workers), while accelerating technical progress. The film industry was not unaffected by this attempt at rationalization.

In 1970, following the adoption of the Plan-Programme on the Further Development of Cinema, *D. O. Bulgarska kinematografiya* acquired the status of a legal person and an accounting system of its own (*stopanska smetka*).[32] Henceforth, performance was evaluated through a focus on the production of films "that enrich the cultural treasure of our nation and break through onto international markets and screens" (art. 2, para. b). The goal was "to achieve maximum artistic results with minimum investment by using the achievements of world cinema, science and technology, specializing in production, improved organization of work and management, modernizing the technological base and adopting an appropriate mix of material and moral stimuli" (art. 3, para. g of the Plan-Programme). In other words, the goal was to contain costs while making technical advances to catch up with western countries. From now on, *D. O. Kinematografiya*, the state cinema monopoly**,** was supposed to finance its activities, largely through fees from the release of films, while continuing to benefit from bank loans guaranteed by the state. The reform, however, coincided with an increase in the costs associated with the modernization of equipment (the transition to colour, the replacement of 16 mm projectors by 35 mm projectors in village cinemas, etc.), and the construction of new movie theatres (40 cinemas were built between 1971 and 1976, for a total of 28,000 seats and a cost of 6.1 million leva).[33] As Bulgaria did not produce film stock, cameras, or projectors, it had to rely on massive imports. The purchase of equipment from socialist countries increased from 2.8 million leva (1965-1970) to 3.3 million (1971-1975), while those from "capitalist countries" grew exponentially (2,000% between 1971 and 1975, from 48,000 convertible leva to 997,000 leva).[34]

Meanwhile, there was an intensification in contradictory demands. First, film was given both an ideological and educational/cultural role and, at the same time, was seen as a source of entertainment. Second, culture officials and certain party bureaucrats wished to satisfy increasingly differentiated audiences without sacrificing the goal of transcending the socio-cultural divisions inherited from capitalism. They also sought a diversification of the repertoire – including by increasing the number of films imported from the West – which could maintain cinema attendance and revenues without coming into conflict with the normative requirements of the party or exceeding the limits set on trade in foreign currencies. Decisions on this issue often reflected fraught negotiations between the Ministry of Finance and the State Committee for the Plan

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[30] *598-to postanovlenie na Ministerski Suvet ot 28 juli 1952*.
[31] Ivanov, 2008; Feiwel, 1977.
[32] On the issues linked to the introduction of the *stopanska smetka*, see Ivanov, 2008, 70-71.
[33] TsDA, F 486, op. 4, ae. 1, l. 59-62.
[34] TsDA, F 486, op. 4, ae. 1, l. 61.

(concerned with reducing costs and state funding), the Committee for Culture (which also had to reach a balance between the various competing cultural corporations), the film industry (whose branches, "Cinefication" *Kinefikatsiya* and "Distribution" *Razprostranenie*, were particularly keen on issues of profitability) and the Union of Cinema Professionals (who sought to increase the authority of their corporation and to promote film as art).

Despite the new rules of 1970, the state continued to award fiercely negotiated annual subsidies to a priority cultural sector. Nevertheless**,** the cinema industry had to diversify its funding sources. *D. O. Kinematografiya* provided an increasing number of service fees (identifying locations, organizing shoots, making film sets and costumes, transport, lighting…) for Eastern European cinema industries. From 1971 to 1977, 60% of these fees went to the East German DEFA, the state-owned film studio.[35] For example, Bulgaria was one of the locations (alongside Yugoslavia, Romania, the USSR and even Cuba) where successful DEFA westerns were shot.[36]

Most importantly, the feature-film studio *SIF Boyana* sought to develop partnerships with Western countries. Between 1965 and 1972, ten co-productions were made in this way, mainly with Austria, the United States, Italy, the German Federal Republic, and Tunisia. For the year 1971-1972 alone, the service fees from shooting two films (Italian and West German) reached 250,000 dollars.[37] However, in 1979, in a report to the Vice-President of the Committee for Culture, Nikola Nenov, the director of *SIF Boyana*, Ivan Popyordanov, expressed his regret that the expansion of international partnerships was hampered by difficulties in obtaining bank guarantees and by the obsolescence of Bulgarian technology.[38] In addition, the growing needs of Bulgarian television, an avid consumer of dramas and series, stretched the production capacities of *SIF*. In the words of Ivan Popyordanov, "the production programme of the studio for feature films has increased significantly over the past five years and the human and technical resources are virtually exhausted. A comparison between the average number of employees of *SIF* and other studios in the socialist bloc shows that, programme for programme, *SIF* has an administrative and productive staff that is 15 to 30% less".[39]

A second option was acquiring licences for Western blockbusters. However, this policy – which met the expectations of cinema managers (required to fulfil their "plan" in terms of ticket sales) as well as of audiences (curious to diversify screening opportunities and to discover life on the other side of the Berlin Wall) – saw its relevance regularly called into question in the most conservative circles of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, as evidenced by the cautious terms in which Nikola Nenov, Vice-Chair of the Committee for Culture, defended the request for increased foreign currency provision for the "non-socialist" repertoire in 1980:

> The distribution of feature films is as follows: Bulgarian, 20, Soviet, 50, socialist, 65, capitalist and developing countries, 35-40. Therefore, *D. O. "Bulgarska Kinematografiya"* proposes 160 premieres as against 250 in the USSR, 240 in Poland, and 220 in Czechoslovakia. It is necessary to increase the potential number of films purchased, so as to lead to a diversification of the repertoire, to a differentiated approach towards the audience, and thus to an increase in the number of spectators. The film industry currently receives 280,000 convertible leva for the purchase of films from capitalist countries (1976, 200; 1977, 170; 1978, 170), and of all socialist countries it is the institution that distributes the fewest films of this type. We need to increase financial means to 1 million leva, the same amount as in the GDR (taking into account the higher prices on the international market). Let us be clear on the issue of films acquired from capitalist countries. The selection of these films is ensured by a special commission composed of specialists and highly qualified public figures. Films with a negative ideological effect are banned. Although we exclude some movies aimed purely at entertainment each year – musicals, adventure

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[35] This income rose to 845,000 leva in 1974; 1,238 million leva in 1975; 981,000 leva in 1976; and 871,000 leva in 1977. TsDA, F 404, op. 6, ae. 13, l. 6-10.
[36] Gemünden, 2001, 25.
[37] TsDA, F 404, op. 6, ae. 13, l. 8.
[38] TsDA, F 404, op. 6, ae. 13, l. 8.
[39] TsDA, F 404, op. 6, ae. 13, l. 9.

films, thrillers, etc., necessary as a genre, especially during the summer season – attention is directed mainly towards films created by world-famous progressive directors.[40]

It is important to emphasise the attention cinema officials to the need for a "differentiated approach towards the audience" here. Indeed, not unlike the USSR in the 1960s and1970s, one of the means for increasing film attendance and revenue was seen to be scientific research on the tastes and expectations of the audience. Audience surveys had existed in the Soviet Union as early as the late 1920s, before they were forbidden.[41] With the Thaw came a re-institutionalisation of the field of sociology, within the social sciences, that allowed for the development of a sociology of film[42]. Bulgaria followed a similar pattern. Sociology became part and parcel of the socialist project of scientific knowledge in the late 1960s, was given a major impetus with the holding of the Seventh World Congress of Sociology in Bulgaria (Varna) in 1970,[43] and benefitted from the country's participation in several international surveys (notably within the framework of UNESCO). Within the state monopoly over cinema *Kinematografiya*, a Centre for Sociological Studies (*Centur za sociologichni prouchvaniya*) was set up in 1970.[44] Until its closure in 1982, a team of film experts conducted over 40 surveys a year, primarily in the capital city, Sofia. Selective results were published in *Filmovi Novini*, *Kino i Vreme* and *Kino Rabotnik*, while others were circulated exclusively amongst Central Committee members, cultural officials, or managers of the state monopoly over cinema.[45]

It is beyond the scope of this article to describe the multiple ways these surveys were used by movie professionals (in order to save specific films from being shelved etc.), film critics (whose authority was threatened by the development of competing ways of assessing value and success), party ideologists, and film distribution authorities. However, it is interesting to note that during that decade, the leaders of the distribution branch of the cinema industry were convinced that film production needed to target specific segments of the audience in order to achieve the greatest ecnomic success.[46] More importantly, the development of public surveys coincided with a recognition that – although social homogenization was still envisioned as a distant socialist goal – for the time being, the social fabric of Bulgaria remained stratified. Hence "difficult films" (*trudni filmi*) could not be expected to reach mass audiences. Bulgarian culture officials pushed these conclusions further than their Soviet counterparts. In 1972, they launched a network of specialized "arthouse" cinemas, inspired by the French (and Polish) models.

The race for economic efficiency also led to a debate on the future of village cinemas – which highlighted the delicate relationship between the different missions assigned to the film industry. Bringing the worlds of film to each village served a principle of social justice and democratic access to culture, as well as one of ideological efficacy. However, from the mid-1960s the massive rural exodus left an aging population in rural areas – a clientele less loyal to cinema. While the movement of images on screens no longer produced the same sense of wonder as in the 1950s, television programmes in the evening now provided respite from the fatigue of village work. Increasingly, *Kinefikatsiya* officials, the managers of *D. O. Kinematografiya* and leaders of the Union of Movie Professionals (*Suyuz na bulgarski filmovi deytsi*, SBFD) voiced questions about the relevance of maintaining a rural network that operated at a loss. A report by the SBFD on "the real presence of cinematic art in the spiritual life of our contemporary world" echoed these concerns:

> It is […] well known that the cinema network in the villages loses money and that these losses are covered by urban cinemas. This requires that the latter put on up to 5 or 6 screenings per day. Even with the best intentions, it is not

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[40] TsDA, F 405, op. 9, ae. 273, l. 21.

[41] Sumpf, 2004.

[42] Mespoulet, 2007; First, 2008.

[43] Koleva, 2005, 101-170.

[44] See, for instance, the argument made in a report from the Committee on Art and Culture addressed to the Central Committee in 1969, in TsDA, F 1, op. 40 ae. 164, l. 9-16.

[45] On the development of audience research in socialist Bulgaria, see Ragaru, 2012.

[46] Interview with Emil Lozev, former member of the Center for Sociological Studies and with film and art sociologist, Professor Ivan Stefanov, Sofia, December 16, 2010. The insistence on targeting various sections of the public through a differentiated offer is also evident in Stefanov (1976). Professor Stefanov cites Soviet sociologists, Nikolay Lebedev and Yurij Lotman, as major references in the growing field of film studies. Igor Antonovich Rachuk was also invited to share his Soviet experience with Bulgarian professionals in "Kinoto i zritelite v SSSR", *Kino i Vreme*, 1975, pp. 164-173.

possible, with such a heavy workload, to ensure the culture of the cinema service of which we have spoken and which we desire so ardently. We need to discuss to what extent it is rational, not just from an economic but also from a cultural point of view, to maintain technology and qualified personnel who are expensive, when only 10 to 12 people attend a screening. We are not arguing for the closure of these cinemas, but for a discussion of this problem so as to find the most rational solution.[47]

In 1980, Nikola Nenov, Vice-Chair of the Committee for Culture, also expressed his regret that insufficient attention was being paid to the development of a more profitable urban network, although he did not tackle the issue head-on:

Changes in the demographic structure of the country have not been accompanied by the necessary changes in the number of seats in rural and urban cinemas. In other words, today we have fewer seats in cinemas in the biggest towns, where the most active population (from a socio-economic and political point of view) resides, the working class, the intelligentsia, and student youth.[48]

Yet, despite occasional closures in the second half of the 1970s and late 1980s, the (political) priority remained the preservation of a widespread rural service.[49]

Following the premature death of Lyudmila Zhivkova (the daughter of communist dictator, Todor Zhivkov) in July 1981, whose political rise had been associated with greater creative freedom and the bolstering of national pride,[50] more stringent ideological control over the arts put an end to attempts at rationalisation and maximizing profits by reaching new audiences. Studio managers were asked to become more self-reliant while abiding by increasingly ideological rules. Maintaining an annual rate of 18-20 feature films required "creative" accountancy (at the expense of investments in the construction of a new productive base or "cinefication", etc.). The 1979 introduction of the "New Economic Mechanism", the result of an umpteenth attempt to overcome the shortcomings of the planned economy, led to fears of state withdrawal. Between 1979 and 1980, public funding collapsed from 13 million leva to 5.4 million, of which 2.2 million were exclusively devoted to films celebrating the 1300th anniversary of the creation of a Bulgarian state in 681.[51] During the first half of the 1980s, the *Kinematografiya* primarily relied on films commissioned by the Central Committee to receive an additional budget and on support from the 1300 Foundation set up for the celebrations of the 1981 anniversary. The financial means available for bombastic historical epics were all the more welcome as they helped to finance the rest of Bulgaria's film production, thanks to enormous ticket sales and because a share of the budget was reallocated to other films.[52] However, film professionals increasingly complained about the shortage of quality material.[53] In this context of scarcity, the differential management of access and remuneration became more explicitly a mechanism of political control over the film creative and technical personnel.

Socialist stimuli and the issue of profit-sharing

The dilemmas that dogged the financing of the film industry can also be observed in the remuneration of the *kinadzhii*. While in the early years of socialism, political control and financial penalties were expected to encourage the production of ideologically correct films, from the 1960s onwards the state based its wage policy on a logic of incentives (known as *stimuli*) rather than on the application of penalties. Moreover, the definition of "work quality" increasingly included the economic success of films, a success measured primarily in terms of ticket sales and return on investment. But the most striking feature concerns the

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[47] TsDA, F 486, op. 4, ae. 1, l. 94–95. The report is not dated, but in view of its content, it was probably written in 1976.
[48] TsDA, F 405, op. 9, ae. 273, l. 15.
[49] Specifically 3,200 cinemas out of a total of 3,689 in 1975; 2,942 out of 3,453 in 1980, with the total number of cinemas staying above 3,000 – 3,069 in 1989 – until the fall of communism. These figures are quoted in: http://www.titra.net/news/statistics.htm and Antoaneta Borrisova, "Reorganization of the National Cinematography", *Moveast*, 2001, at:
http://www.filimintezet.hu/magyar/filmint/moveast/6/reorganization.htm [accessed 18 June 2009; no longer active].
[50] Brunnbauer, 2010, 286-289; Atanasova, 2004, 278-315; Nikolov, 2008; Levchev, 2011.
[51] TsDA, F 405, op. 9, ae. 273, l. 24,
[52] Interview with E. Mihailov, Sofia, September 27, 2006.
[53] See, for example, the speech by cameraman Venets Dimitrov to the Second Congress of the Bulgarian Union of Cinema Professionals in 1980, reproduced in *Kinoizkustvo*, Vol. 35, Issue 8, 1980, pp. 3-5.

introduction of mechanisms that were an approximation of profit-sharing. In the 1980s, however, remuneration was increasingly used as an instrument for fostering ideological loyalty.

Faced with a sluggish film production, at a time when intense political repression under Vulko Chervenkov, Party General Secretary between 1949 and 1954, largely paralysed the creativity of artists placed under surveillance, in 1954 the Bulgarian authorities decided to supplement monthly salaries (paid regardless of the actual production of film works) by a system of additional payments (linked to the number of productions made, *postanovuchnoto vuznagrazhdenie*). The stated aim of this decision was to "stimulate artistic workers in finding new socialist forms of artistic work, improved working methods, an increase in the ideal artistic quality of films, improved planning, punctuality in meeting deadlines, planned schedules, and lowering the cost price of production".[54] Financial sanctions could, however, still be applied, especially when the film produced was not released. These penalties sometimes even involved the cancellation of bonuses. The new system thus combined the quest for increased productivity with political control.

The tone changed markedly in December 1964 when the Committee for Culture adopted new rules regarding the funding of cinema production as well as the remuneration of the filmmakers and other professionals. The film industry was given the opportunity to recruit staff assigned to produce a specific film on the basis of short-term contracts. These "free professionals" had to be members of professional organizations such as the Union of Cinema Professionals, the Union of Writers, or the Union of Journalists. Moreover, films were now classified by category, and both the amounts allocated to their production and the additional payments depended on their category.[55] While the use of wage deductions as a penalty was reduced (20% maximum), the focus was shifted to socialist *stimuli* correlated with box office success. It was thus decided that if a category 1 feature film had sold over 1.8 million tickets eighteen months after its release, a bonus (*ednoratko dopulnitelno pooshtritelno vuznagrazhdenie*) of 2,000 leva could be allocated to the director (and 1,000 to the cameraman) if proposed by the director of *Kinematografiya* and the President of the Committee for Culture.[56] In addition, in cases where revenues from screening covered the costs of production and screening the film, the bonus could be increased by 50%. The studio where the film was made was responsible for making this additional funding available. In practice, however, this clause was never implemented, as no film ever sold the requisite number of tickets.

The main shift in retributive logics occurred in 1970-1971 with the introduction of a differentiated system of bonuses that involved not only "the popularity and economic success" of films, but also their "ideal-artistic quality" (20,000 leva maximum) and international recognition (as measured by distinctions obtained at festivals, each such prize bringing in up to 10,000 leva). The most innovative measure was the one which provided for sharing the profit "when, within two years after the film's release, the revenue from the network of cinemas and export covers part of the initial cost (of the film) varying with the percentage of return on the investment, and shows a net profit. The bonus represents 40% of net income for a film of the highest ideal-artistic category [...] and 20% for the others. Like other bonuses, this was divided between the film crew (director, cameraman, composers, actors, cinematographer, sound engineer etc.)".[57]

There were several reasons behind this move, one of them being the desire to obtain international recognition for Bulgarian cinema. With the extension of the Cold War into the fields of culture and the arts, Bulgarian officials hoped to achieve visibility and praise for their little-known country. Moreover, since the 1960s similar profit-sharing mechanisms had already been tested in other Eastern European countries, including in

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[54] Regulation on the direction of artistic workers employed in film production 11.01.1954 and *Tarifa za vuznagrazhdeniya na avtori, izpulnitelni i. dr. Izvetiya na Presidiuma na Narodnoto Subranie,* Br. 100, 14 December 1954.

[55] The first category included "films that have notable ideal-artistic qualities, and are recognized by critics and audiences"; the second category "films that have very good idea-artistic qualities, and are well received by critics and audiences"; the third category was "good"; and the fourth category, "poor". This classification was based on the proposal of the studio director after consultation with the artistic council. It was confirmed by the President of the Committee for Culture for films in categories 1 and 2 and by the director of the board of directors of *Bulgarska Kinematografiya* for groups 3 and 4. See *53 Decree of the Council of Ministers of 31 December 1964*.

[56] By comparison, in the second half of the 1960s, a Moskvich type car cost about 3,000 leva.

[57] See *Tarifa za avtorski, izpulnitelni i drugi vuznagrazhdeniya vuv filmoproizvodstvo, Postanovlenie 10/12.04.1970 na Ministerski suvet* [Tables of rates for the payments made authors, actors, and others in film production. Decision 10/12.04.1970 of the Council of Ministers].

the USSR.[58] Members of the Union of Cinema Professionals also supported this evolution. Film director Vulo Radev was one of them and was able to relay the guild's demands to the Central Committee after he joined it in 1970.[59] At the same time, the increasing international mobility of Bulgarian directors, cameramen, and actors fostered by the development of co-productions and the selection of Bulgarian films at foreign festivals, increased cinema professionals' awareness of the disparities between the amounts paid in the West and in the East. Famous actor Georgi Kaloyanchev experienced this discrepancy as he was invited to present *Inspektorut i noshtta* (*The Inspector and the Night*) by Ivan Andonov at a Greek festival in 1963:

> They asked him roughly how many millions he had earned for this great role (his performance was indeed a great success). He did not quite understand the question. And he said: "I told them a little lie, I claimed that I had earned 5,000 leva and not 3,000 leva." Idiot! They're asking how many millions you earned. [The journalists] responded: "5,000 leva a day, that's not much..." A day! That was the sum he had been paid for the entire film.[60]

Although, as we will see shortly, the implementation of profit-sharing measures proved difficult, it is clear that the discourse on socialist stimuli as a motor of performance fostered the emergence of economic practices that were closer to a market logic than previously thought. Over the last decade of socialism, in an increasingly hard-line ideological context, one of the main issues was the monetization of consent. Industry executives were forced to use more and more material incentives, because their projects, which still lauded socialist heroism, were out-of-step with filmmakers' aspirations.

According to director Petur Popzlatev:

> To make films like *Brigadata* [released under the title *Te naddelyaha* / *They conquered* in 1986, this adaptation of a novel by Veselin Andreev recounts the exploits of the partisan unit *Chavdar*, in which dictator Todor Zhivkov "distinguished himself"], they were given every advantage. The shooting lasted nearly a year. While on average people earned 4,000-6,000 leva per film, the payments soared to 80,000 leva. Obviously, I discovered the exact amount only later. But at the time, some things were obvious. We knew very well who was driving a car made in the West and who could afford to build a villa.[61]

Likewise, the scriptwriter and director, Veselin Branev, reports how Zako Heskiya, a renowned film-maker, tried to convince him to make a feature film celebrating the inter-war Bulgarian Communist Party, "you won't regret it if you accept, said old Zako, temptingly – not only will the salary be good, but there will be premieres in Moscow and Sofia, Bulgarian and Soviet prizes, opportunities for awards, etc.".[62]

Whatever the configuration (profitability or ideological loyalty), economic stimulation helped to bring real prosperity to some directors, scriptwriters, and actors. A fraction of the *kinadzhii* thus ended up being actively involved in the emergence of the very consumer society they continued to denounce in their films. The film critic, Neda Stanimirova, tells an anecdote that reveals the breadth of the social transformations associated with the "golden age" of Bulgarian film:

> One day, Pavel Pisarev, who was then director of the *Kinematografiya*, decided to take Todor Zhivkov to meet Georgi Mishev, a writer and screenwriter who had achieved fame thanks to his novels and films on the "migration cycle". At that time, Mishev had just finished renovating the lovely villa he had bought in Pancherevo. Pisarev is said to have commented: "Well, let's go and see what a lovely house Mishev got for himself thanks to his criticism of the petit bourgeois mentality displayed by those who wish to have villas."[63]

This caustic anecdote suggests the complex positions Bulgarian *kinadzhii* found themselves in under socialism. It also emphasizes the need for a more systematic examination of the ways in which socialism was both negotiated *and* domesticated in the film community.

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[58] First, 2008, 324-326.
[59] Radeva, 2004, 74-75.
[60] Mashev, 1990, 74.
[61] Interview with P. Popzlatev, Sofia, November 14, 2009.
[62] Branev, 2007, p. 395.
[63] Interview with N. Stanimirova, Sofia, September 22, 2006.

THE POWERS OF FILM: *KINADZHII*, RELATIONAL POWER, AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

When turning to power relations within the film industry and the interactions between *kinadzhii* and BKP ideologists, two narratives – both within academia and in the cinema guild – tend to prevail. One narrative envisions the milieu of cinema as an area of defiance towards the regime, a space of internal dissidence and rebellious ideas. The role that some prominent movie figures played (alongside other representatives of the artistic guilds) in setting up the 1988-1989 dissident movements is seen as testimony to their – unwavering – commitment to freedom and independence. Some observers go so far as to argue that, because of the particularly free-spirited atmosphere in which they lived, the *kinadzhii* did in fact enjoy a relative amount of autonomy under socialism, especially those who were working in the field of animated cartoons and documentaries.[64] The implicit but all-pervasive question in this account is to what extent did members of the artistic intelligentsia make compromises and/or become compromised in order to survive or even to thrive under socialism.[65] A second narrative emphasizes the pervasiveness of state and party control in socialist Bulgaria. This perspective emphasizes the various waves of repression (1957-1958, 1966-1968, and 1981-1983), when films were shelved, directors were sidelined, crushed, or left the country for a few years to seek an atmosphere of greater freedom in other socialist democracies.[66] Meanwhile, film professionals always have anecdotes about how they managed to fool the "censors". Some recount how the communist leader Todor Zhivkov allowed one film to be released because he had misunderstood its ending.[67] Others describe the techniques they used to get around the rules while pretending to abide by them.

Of course, there is no denying the existence of repressive mechanisms, crushed careers, and broken lives. Even in the years 1960-1970s (where control was milder than in the Stalinist period), professional opportunities and lives were scarred, like those of the director Binka Zhelyazkova, [68] her husband, screenwriter, Hristo Ganev, and the journalist, screenwriter and director, Veselin Branev, whose attempt to escape to West Germany in 1957 resulted in his being placed under close surveillance by the secret police until 1974.[69] The Bulgarian film industry was also subjected to "campaigns" to regain control, such as after the film *A Woman Aged 33/Edna zhena na 33-ti* was banned in 1982, its director, Hristo Hristov, was forced to step down from his position of President of the Union of Cinema Professionals, and its screenwriter, Boyan Papazov, was fired.

Yet in order to understand how power was actually wielded, we need to broaden our approach and explore the daily experiences of a very diverse professional and social group. To focus solely on censorship and resistance assumes a binary division between "them" (party "ideologues" and "bureaucrats", the senior *nomenklatura*) and "us" ("artists", "real professionals") without questioning its changing and permeable boundaries. It also fails to illuminate the way power was woven into human relationships through friendship and rivalry, solidarity and ambition. Finally, it essentializes a regime that is seen as operating cyclically (routinely alternating between repression and openness), and fails to question its temporal shifts (which were not all politically predetermined), the role played by generational change, and the interactions between often independent micro-processes. To account for these processes, we will first explore the allocation of economic and symbolic advantages, before examining how socialist rule was negotiated through personalized networks

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[64] Interview with E. Mihailovska, Sofia, September 27, 2006.
[65] Muller and Wieder, 2008.
[66] Yanakiev, 1990.
[67] *Na malkiya ostrov* (On the small island, 1958) by Rangel Vulchanov is the film in question. Zhivkov is said to have failed to understand that the main character dies at the end of the film. In fact, upon its release, the film was heavily criticized by party ideologists. Shortly thereafter, the central committee of the Communist Party adopted a resolution criticising "a certain ambition to treat themes in an objective, abstract-humanistic way, devoid of active ideal content". See Chernev, 2003, 17-18.
[68] Binka Zhelyazkova wasone of the few women directors in Bulgaria, and a most talented artist with strong socialist credentials. Several of her works were banned and she spent long years without obtaining permission to shoot films. Her first movie, *Zhivotut si teche tiho* (Life flows quietly, 1957) was shelved, after the Bulgarian authorities determined it offered too somber a vision of the partisan movement and the postwar lives of its former members. Scriptwriter Hristo Ganev was expelled from the Communist Party in 1971 after abstaining from the vote on the resolution of the Congress of the Writers' Union denouncing the award of the Nobel Prize to the Soviet dissident, Solzhenitsyn. See the documentary by Elka Nikolova, *To Tell a Story about Silence*, Sofia/New York, 2006, 48 mn and Ragaru, 2020b.
[69] Branev, 2007.

and favours. This will enable us to tell the story of a film milieu whose members were both witnesses to and actors of late socialism.

Segmenting time and access to commodities and opportunities: the micro-powers of socialism

To understand on how power was exerted during late socialism, it would be misleading to search for large-scale repressive mechanisms subscribing to a single rationality, implemented by fully coordinated, conflict-free institutions meekly transmitting power from above. Two parameters stand out, however. Firstly, in its day-to-day functioning, the exercise of domination was associated with a proliferation of injunctions, demands, restrictions, and obstacles, as well as with a partitioning of time that fostered a blurring of expectations. Secondly, far from the usual assumption that there was a state-party, strategically able to enforce effective control, domination was forged through habits and micro-operations, sometimes with unexpected consequences.

From its conception to screening, the life cycle of a film went through a series of hurdles, petty-minded obstructions, and frustrations imposed by a profusion of bureaucratic and political authorities, whose decisions were interpreted as acts of censorship. These hurdles were not restricted to such instruments of ideological control as the rejection or rewriting of scripts, the use of editing cuts,[70] limited release cinemas,[71] removal from the screens,[72] complete banning,[73] etc. A director could also have an unwelcome subject, screenplay or actor being suggested, or imposed on them. Their film might fail to be classified in category 1 (making it eligible for a larger budget), or not obtain the shooting locations desired (abroad, in particular). Many filmmakers were not granted the editing time they deemed necessary, a satisfactory number of copies or a brilliant premiere in the presence of senior party and state officials. Selections for participation in Bulgarian or international festivals were also moments when party officials had an influential say, since filmmakers were not always allowed to travel with the official delegation publicising their movie. Simply put, control over the film industry operated through a multitude of levers and moments when expectations could be betrayed and hopes shattered. It was even exercised over the very materiality of film production (cameras, lenses, film stock, sound, and lighting). Ivan Andonov, a successful director, actor, and painter, recalls:

> They always found a way to censor us. Look at me, for example, for one of my films, they refused to give me the new cameras, the ones imported from the West. At other times, you had to settle for Russian film stock. But those who accepted commands from the Central Committee, oh yes, *they* had excellent working conditions and all the material they wanted.[74]

In addition to affecting the very definitions of "good work" by film professionals, the exercise of power relied on a social engineering of time. The ordinary life of a *kinadzhiya* was indeed caught between several time frames. The political calendar was that of the party congresses and plenums, of the decisions of the Politburo, the Central Committee or the Committee for Culture, decisions which defined the shifting contours of public priorities, of the missions cinema was supposed to fulfil, and of the words one could use to describe one's activity. At corporation level, the schedule of the Congress of the Union of Cinema Professionals ran in tandem with the five-year and annual plans of the *D. O. Bulgarska Kinemotografiya*, of *SIF Boyana*, the timetables of artistic collectives, and of arts councils, large and small. Individually, each professional internalized the more or less drawn-our rhythms of the creative process. While some aspects of governance by and of time were not specific for the field of cinema and betrayed bureaucratic inefficiency as much as

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[70] The critical reflections of B. Sharaliev in the 1979 film *All is Love/Vsichko e lyubov* were subjected to this. The work concerned the decay of the moral values of communism.

[71] As, for example, *The Swimming Pool/Baysenut* by B. Zhelyaskova in 1977.

[72] This was the case with *Ephemeral Sun/Kratko slunce* by L. Kirkov in 1979.

[73] The politically conservative theatre critic Vladimir Karakashev, vice-director of *D.O. Kinematografiya* at the end of the 1960s, has described these interactions between the officials of the Central Committee, the Committee for Culture and the management of the cinema industry in his memoirs (Karakashev, 2007, 152-164).

[74] Interview with I. Andonov, Sofia, September 23, 2006.

political injunctions, the uniqueness of the experiences of the *kinadzhii* lies in way these time lines overlapped. Because of its political administration, time was fundamentally unpredictable. A statement or a project that were valued one day could be the object of harsh criticism a few months later. Artists and administrators thus cultivated a science of speculation, keeping an eye on conditions, observing the slightest tonal inflection of dictator Zhivkov, or the revival of a previously used slogan, for marks of a change in political direction.[75]

Against this background, the differentiated management of access to scarce resources, remuneration, or public honours became one of the ways in which the power holders ruled over the film guild. The most striking example is probably what happened to the bonus and profit-sharing scheme for successful films mentioned above, introduced in 1970. In 1971, Metodi Andonov made a historical drama, *Koziyat rog*/*The Goat's Horn*, that was one of the biggest critical and commercial successes of the Bulgarian cinema of the 1970s. Thanks to the film's "popularity and economic success", the director would have expected to be paid 88,000 leva, and the screenwriter, Nikolay Haytov 84,000 leva. But at the last moment, the Ministry of Finance directive was revised. Pavel Pisarev, then director of the *D. O. Kinematografija*, gave this version of the amendment: when the amount of the royalties became known, "the Central Committee of the BKP [*Bulgarska komunisticheska Partiya*] and the Ministry of Finance were inundated with letters from the other artistic unions complaining about these '*kinadzhii* privileges'. So I was summoned by the then-Minister of Finance, Dimitur Popov, who asked me for a report. When he saw the sums involved, he said, 'Ah, that's a lot!' And then they decided to limit these bonuses so they did not exceed, for example, twice the amount of the initial payment".[76]

As shown in this episode, competition between professional actors occasionally allowed the state to extend its control over the film industry. The history of the Union of Cinema Professionals (SBFD) offers one more illustration of how internal rivalries led some artists to call upon state officials to arbitrate in their disputes. (Re)-established in 1954, the Union was intended to provide a corporative organization for artistic circles. In 1970, following the Prague Spring (in which the local film intelligentsia had taken an active part), the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party decided to strengthen its grip over the Bulgarian film industry.[77] To this end, a party cell was created within the SBFD. Meanwhile, several measures were adopted to meet longstanding demands by film professionals:[78] the journal *Filmovi novini* became a joint publication of the Union and the Committee for Culture. Plans were made for the construction of a 500-seat cinema, with seats reserved for the SBFD and with its own restaurant. Above all, an Art Fund (*tvorcheski fund*)[79] was set up, based on the Fund of the Writers' Union, with director Vulo Radev as its head. Radev began building a House for Creation and Rest (*Dom za tvorchestvo i pochivka*) in Lesidren and acquired two villas in Smolyan for the Union's foreign guests. Finally, the SBFD built around one hundred apartments in Sofia. In the context of a chronic shortage of housing in the capital, certain *kinadzhii* pulled all the strings they could with the leaders of the Union and with the party leadership to obtain a valuable rare apartment.

The rivalries over who would reap the regime's bounties when it came to honours were no less fierce.[80] From 1975, the SBFD was allowed to bestow its own awards, which led to often epic debates in the Union office when it came to selecting worthy candidates. The proliferation of public honours was a technique of government. Countless organizations were authorized to offer prizes, including the Central Committee of the

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[75] The understanding of time offered here differs slightly from that put forward by American anthropologist Katherine Verdery for the case of socialist Romania. The emphasis is not so much on the political extortion of time by public authorities, and the organization of the economy, as it is on segmentation and lack of visibility, the ever-constraining presentism imposed on social actors. See Verdery, 1996.

[76] Kovachev, 2006, 107-108; Radeva, 2004, 75.

[77] 'Report of the Board of Directors, presented by the President of the Union, [holder of the order] "Artistic Merit", Todor Dinov', *Kinoizkustvo*, Vol. 25, Issue 5, May 1970, pp. 3-18.

[78] The writer Georgi Markov, who migrated to London where he met his fate in the notorious "umbrella affair", described the opulence of the Bulgarian Writer's Union in Markov (1990).

[79] In early 1970, the President of the Union, Todor Dinov, deplored the way the lack of such a fund "deprives the Union of the possibility of influencing the artistic process in the film industry more tangibly through material *stimuli* […]. It places our Union and its members in a situation of inequality in comparison with other artistic unions". Todor Dinov, "Artistic Merit", *op. cit.*, 12.

[80] The role of awards in the "self-aggrandizement of an elite minority" and the domestication of socialism has been aptly described for the Soviet case in Johnson, 2011.

Komsomol (*DKMS*), the Central Committee of Trade Unions, the Committee for Culture, and so on. As well as the awards given to a particular work of art or culture, there were medals given to reward the artist (*zasluzhil deyatel na kulturata, zasluzhil artist, naroden artist*; the orders of "Kiril and Metodij" 1st and 2nd class; the order of the *Narodna Republika Bulgariya*; and the *Dimitrovska nagrada*, the most prestigious). The distribution of these honours, which included cash prizes, mobilized everyone's energy. Proposals for medals were put forward by studios, film industry managers, and television. The press published the names and faces of the winning artists, and they were interviewed on television. In the 1970s, artistic circles interpreted these marks of public recognition as combining the concepts of "value" and "political loyalty" to varying degrees.[81] Nevertheless, the role they played in the symbolic incorporation of socialism cannot be underestimated, as can be seen in the social usage of these distinctions. Medals and awards were framed, displayed, and recounted in memoirs by the recipients, including renowned cameraman, Bate Dimo.[82]

What the above examples suggest is that socialist domination (as well as tactics used to ward off potential repression) drew extensively on human relations. As we shall now see, this also reveals a landscape in which the boundaries between "them" and "us" were often porous and where a greater co-optation by the party and state apparatus could be seen as the very condition for increased freedom of thought or action.

Social networks: the manufacture of power and domination

The distinctions between "censors"/"censored", "ideologues"/"professionals", "party hacks"/"independents" are even more difficult to trace if one takes into consideration the connections forged over the course of a career. These connections emerged between individuals bound by a sense of belonging to the same professional world, common centres of interest, and even a shared definition of their social status. In the cafes of the Boyana Studio, and the Unions of Writers or Filmmakers, mugs of beer and glasses of *rakiya* and vodka strengthened the links of corporate solidarity as much as they fostered the development of plots and even jokes that were sometimes politically risky. Holidays were informal occasions, spent in resorts reserved for professional associations or, for those with the best connections, reserved for members of the Central Committee. In other words, some of the people who were, at a given moment, in a position to enforce "ideological" control, moved in the same social circles as those film professionals they were supposed to be monitoring. They were, in turn or simultaneously, colleagues, friends, and lovers who took part in shooting films, giving semi-illicit screenings, and training or travelling abroad.

Likewise, the fact that a number of creative and administrative personnel straddled multiple positions within the party, the state, and professional circles further blurred the definition of one's role in the power structure. This point was most visible at the highest echelons of power. It is well known for instance that Lyudmila Zhivkov, Todor Zhivkov's daughter, was a researcher at the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Vice-President, and then President of the Committee for Arts and Culture, a member of the Central Committee and then of the Politburo. It was in academia that she met some of the intellectuals by whom she was to be surrounded. But managing a career within many different fields was not just common among the most senior figures of the regime. In the 1970s, some film professionals were also members of the governing bodies of the party, held honorary state positions, and/or were members of the Board of Directors of the SBFD. The film director Borislav Sharaliev, and the very popular actress Nevena Kokanova, were members of parliament. Filmmakers Vulo Radev and Lyudmil Staykov (also secretary of the SBFD between 1980 and 1990 and Director of *T. C. O. Kinematografiya* from 1986), and the cameraman Venets Dimitrov (director of the Artistic Fund of the SBFD between 1984 and 1990) all sat on the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

The issue here is not to think in terms of "moral duplicity", nor to assume that all *kinadzhii* had been co-opted by the Party, the state and, at times, the secret services. It is a matter of nuancing an interpretation of

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[81] Dimitrova, 2002.
[82] Subev and Gabrovska, 2005, 27-30.

socialism that contrasts those who made films with those who controlled them, those who benefited from the regime with those who were repressed by it. For evidence of this, one need only mention the case of filmmaker Hristo Hristov, a faithful party supporter who was president of the SBFD, a position of trust, but was ousted in 1983 after the condemnation of *A Woman Aged 33*. More telling still is the path of film director and novelist Ilya Velchev – son of Boris Velchev, number two in the party in the 1970s. Soon after he graduated from the prestigious Soviet All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK), I. Velchev was invited to take part in a Bulgarian-Italian television co-production. Working with western partners was a privilege not all Bulgarian directors could hope for at the time. A five-episode television series *Return from Rome*/*Zavrushtane ot Rim* (1976) was shot. Yet soon after the series was approved by the leadership of the Bulgarian national television, it was harshly criticized in a review commissioned by the party. At a meeting of the Politburo, on April 25, 1977, Todor Zhivkov built upon the critique of the film in *Literaturen Front* (*Literary Front*) to denounce "the transgression of the cultural policy of the party" by the young filmmaker. A few weeks later, in May 1977, his father, Boris Velchev – a potential successor to the Bulgarian dictator – was dismissed from his positions as secretary of the Central Committee and Politburo member. His son was forbidden to shoot a film for six years.

These changing positional dynamics explain why some professionals thought of themselves as "morally correct" (because they had supported a colleague unfairly attacked during a meeting, or had interceded in favour of a disgraced acquaintance, etc.), even as their colleagues considered them co-opted by power (accepting to make feature films to order, to reject a somewhat critical screenplay they had consulted on, to enter the Artistic Council, etc.). The complexity of these social realities is particularly evident in discussions of the modus operandi of artistic collectives (*tvorcheski kolektivi*, T. K.). Established under the reform of 1970-1971 to address the "screenplay problem", the T. K. were responsible for "implementing the policy of the party and the state in the field of artistic production and to bring together the artistic endeavours, experience, and talent of filmmakers to create fiction films of a high ideal and artistic quality". [83] Institutionally linked to the feature-film studio, *SIF Boyana*, these collectives were placed under the direct supervision of the cinema state monopoly. They comprised filmmakers, cameramen, screenwriters, etc. Each planned feature film was monitored by one or two redactors. However, the administrative and artistic functions of the T.K.s were not only "professional", they were also "normative" since the collectives were responsible for ensuring compliance with both aesthetic and ideological norms. The director Hristiyan Nochev remembers this arrangement:

> The artistic collectives were groups of people with similar ideas. At least one member was appointed by the party, but overall, they were people from the profession. In fact, censorship followed a bureaucratic logic implemented by the profession itself. Everyone knew that you could criticize a Party Secretary at factory or a small-town level, but not the Party Secretary in Sofia or a member of the Central Committee. Censorship operated by inertia.[84]

When they discussed their experience within the T.K.s in interviews, the *kinadzhii* who took part in them emphasize the professionalism of the institution. In their view, the contrast between "ideological function" and "professionalism" is of structural significance. However, when stories and recollections are juxtaposed, we find that censorship becomes an elusive object. Anyone who has worked in the collectives stressed that control was not carried out at their (technical and artistic) level, but at the level of the artistic mini-councils in the studios. Filmmakers working within them saw censorship within the film industry's Artistic Council. The Council, however, was presented as a professional organ by another protagonist, who put ideological control in the management of *D. O. Kinematografiya* or in the Central Committee, etc. Ultimately, the centre of the censorship structure – if there was indeed such a centre – was nowhere to be found. To some extent, statements made after the event by cinema professionals in the codified framework of an interview with a foreign scholar may betray their yearning for legitimacy or attempts to externalize responsibilities for particular episode. However, this possibility does not rule out the fact that it was precisely because each

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[83] Article 1 of the Statute on the Activity and Missions of Artistic Collectives of Feature Films, brought into effect on 20 October 1971.
[84] Interview with H. Nochev, Sofia, June 6, 2007.

protagonist in the industry believed that there existed a "centre", where decisions were made in the last result, that political control could operate through a decentralized network of routines. Moreover, their commitment to professionalism helped movie professionals to draw boundaries between what they deemed acceptable and unacceptable.

Moreover, there is little doubt that the players best integrated into the networks of power were sometimes also those most able to defend "non-conformist" works. The filmmaker, Petur Popzlatev, made this point clear:

> Twice in my career, a shooting session was stopped. Once it was by the Ministry of the Interior. I had chosen for one location a place that had previously been a camp [where opponents to the regime were detained]. For two and a half weeks, we were unable to film. Finally, the go-ahead was given thanks to Georgi Dyulgerov and Eduard Zahariev [two directors]. It's always important to have strong redactors. It was Eduard who had put me in touch with Tsvetana Kolarova. At the time, the redactors was a very important figure. It was he who went before the Artistic Council, and who had to defend the scripts and films. Tsvetana Kolarova was the wife of a former director of *Kinematografiya*, Pavel Pisarev. She had a wide circle of acquaintances and used them to get high-quality feature films made. In the 1970s, it was thanks to her that *Prebroyavaneto na divite zaytsi/The census of wild rabbits* [1973, E. Zahariev], *Vilna zona /Villa Zone* [1975, E. Zahariev] and *Trampa/Trading* [1978, G. Dyulgerov] could get made.[85]

In retrospect, this paradox of integration fostering greater openness has also been used to explain the "golden age" of Bulgarian cinema in the 1970s. At the time, Pavel Pisarev combined the roles of director of *D. O. Bulgarska Kinematografiya*, Vice-President of the Committee for Culture and member of the Central Committee. He could rely on the social networks of his wife, the daughter of former Prime Minister Vasil Kolarov: "Pavel Pisarev was a cultured man, he had travelled, he had seen how cinema was developing in other countries and wanted Bulgarian cinema to be recognized", relates the cameraman Radoslav Spasov. "As he was well placed, he could easily gain acceptance for ideas that otherwise would have been blocked by censorship. All he had to do was go and see Zhivkov."[86] In the Bulgaria of the 1970s, a certain autonomy could, at least occasionally and in certain places, be the product of a more complete integration in the functioning of power. Likewise, in accepting certain positions of power, some of the personalities who were seen as more "liberal" became co-producers of the socialist political order.

Exploring the uses of "relationships" (*vruzki*) leads to a similar observation. Moving in a world, which extended beyond the *kinadzhii* to literary circles and artistic milieus (theatre, dance, painting, music, etc.), fostered a number of mutual acquaintances, friendships, and solidarities. These, in turn, allowed for a system of favours (*uslugi*) to develop. The screenwriter Georgi Mishev has given a detailed account of these exchanges of favours that crossed the boundaries between "'good' and 'bad' biographies", party officials, and non-aligned individuals. He recounts how he obtained a residency permit (*zhitelstvo*) in Sofia:

> Ivanka Grubcheva wanted to become a filmmaker. Her father was a general in the UBO [*Upravlenie za Bezopasnost i Ohrana*]. Her mother, Mitka, had been a partisan during the war. She had to make a film for her diploma and stumbled across a script I had written. It had caught her fancy. This was a time when, for me things were going rather badly, as far as the *zhitelstvo* was concerned. We were staying with two children in an apartment left vacant by a doctor who had gone off to work in Algeria. One day, a writer called me and said, "do you want me to put you in touch with a girl who will be able to fix your residency permit?" […] I helped her. On her return from the GDR, she called me, "I'm ready to take you to see my father". I entered the office. The general was sitting straight-backed behind his desk. He asked for my name. At no time did he look up at me. After a while, he said: "Go now, I've got work to do." One day, the militia called me. The guy in charge there told me: "Hey, are you crazy going to see the General over a matter of *zhitelstvo*?" It was obvious he was impressed. That's how I got permission [to reside in Sofia].[87]

The fact that *uslugi* and *vruzki* could cut across political and/or institutional lines did not mean that all film professionals had an equal opportunity to exchange favours. As early as the 1980s, some Eastern European anthropologists started drawing attention to the role played by what they called informal networks of ties and

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[85] Interview with P. Popzlatev, *op. cit*.
[86] Interview with R. Spasov, Sofia, September 27, 2006.
[87] Interview with G. Mishev, Sofia, September 26, 2006.

solidarities in making-do under socialism.[88] Their emphasis was on the so-called "secondary economy" and the extent to which it compensated for the deficits observed in the "official economy". Although extremely fruitful thanks to their wealth of empirical observations of daily life, these analyses of the day-to-day strategies of ordinary citizens left aside two important points. Firstly, they envisioned private solidarities as embedded in the social, disconnected from the political sphere, in an appropriation of the "them" vs. "us", "state" vs. "society" opposition that structured analyses of Eastern European socialisms at the time. Secondly, they tended to view these practices as designed to get around the state, or even to oppose "official" policies. In the late 1990s, in her analysis of favours and relations (*blat*), Alena Ledeneva greatly contributed to our understanding of the human fabric of everyday life in the Soviet Union.[89] Along with others, her work emphasised how tactics aimed to counter bureaucratic obstacles or economic hardships were rooted in shared social conventions, as well as in culturally embedded ways of understanding ties and reputation. Within the Bulgarian context, *uslugi* (exchanges of favours) and *vruzki* (connections) provided a functional equivalent to *blat*. Yet they were not limited to the realm of the social. They were part and parcel of the ways in which political transactions occurred. In other words, power was exerted as well as avoided, through these complex networks of personal connections.

To fully comprehend this point, politics – during socialism as well as afterward – need to be re-embedded in the social, and the dichotomy between "state" and "society" to be nuanced. Firstly, as suggested earlier, during socialism most people occupied multiple positions: a given person could at the same time be an "ordinary citizen", a member of the Party, befriend a well-connected Party official, and accept a job some of his relatives deemed "political". Secondly, connections and favours structured both the social *and* the political pyramid; they pertained to ways of doing politics and of producing social reality. Finally, similar conventions structured the behaviour of the powerless and of the powerholders. The (major) differences lay in the breadth of the social networks and the solidarities available to the various social strata.

In other words, the quest for personalized interventions – used strategically, so as to reduce uncertainty and to influence the allocation of scarce goods – must be considered an integral part of socialist governmentality. Thus, before ending our journey through the "worlds of cinema", it is to these modes of appropriation that we must return by examining the paths of social mobility for the *kinadzhii*, and the social differentiation within their milieu which resulted from stratified access to prosperity. Taking into account generational changes, our study also helps to identify the conditions under which, during the 1980s, conventions, habits and expectations that had contributed to the perpetuation of socialism crumbled, fostering the emergence of a challenge to authority within the film community.

Consuming socialism: generational change and the end of socialism

In the aftermath of September 9, 1944 (regime change, which brought to power the People's Front, a coalition dominated by the Communists with the support of the Red Army) the new ruling elite, who desperately lacked cadres, hesitated between repressing and co-opting those who worked in film. Some professionals who had forged their skills in World War II cinema put themselves at the service of the new order. This was the case for Zahari Zhandov, the son of a journalist and an actress. Zhandov had made his debut in the interwar era. After starting as a cameraman, he directed the department of film propaganda of the Bulgarian Army in 1944.[90] This wartime role did not prevent him from becoming one of the most stringent promoters of socialist realism and ideological rectitude in post-war Bulgarian cinema.

Indeed, family histories were straightforward in those troubled times. This want of linearity runs counter to many narratives of socialism, which insist exclusively on the promotion of a new elite – be it to stigmatize the repression of the former bourgeois elite and the want of knowledge and manners of those who replaced

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[88] Kenedi, 1981.
[89] Ledeneva, 1998.
[90] Yanakiev, 2000, 104.

them, or to herald the true revolutionary impetus of socialism and its ability to foster upward social mobility amongst people of worker or peasant extraction. An examination of the social group of *kinadzhii* tells a different story, a story of this and that combined, of the intertwining between individuals whose biographies were "stainless" (according to the norms of the socialist rulers), and descendants of educated urbanites.

Petur Popyordanov, the father of the future director of the feature film studio, *SIF Boyana* (1972-1979), Ivan Popyordanov, is one case in point. Born into an urban family of merchants, Petur Popyordanov founded a film production company, *Pobeda Film* in 1941. The latter was nationalized in 1948. Thanks to his skills, however, the former industrialist was recruited as director of the Finance Department of the new cinema industry. But in 1950, Popyordanov was arrested and sent to a concentration camp, where he spent nearly two years, a victim of Vulko Chervenkov's purges. Despite this tainted trajectory, his son, Ivan, was allowed to enter the Prague Film Academy in 1956, where he was welcomed by a student cameraman who was the son of a friend of his father. He joined the Party in 1962, and went on to have a brilliant career.[91] In his memoirs, Ivan Popyordanov recalls an important feature of this socialist revolution: the diverging fates met by members of one and the same family. While the husband of one of his aunts by marriage **(**Ivan Koprinkov, a Social Democrat member of parliament) saw his family decimated, another aunt married a member of the Politburo, Georgi Chankov.[92]

Examples of such complex family backgrounds include that of actor, Itshak Fintsi, who was born in Sofia in 1933. The future popular comedian grew up between a father who had converted to socialist ideas and worked as a sales representative for a German firm, and an uncle who was a wealthy entrepreneur whose chauffeur-driven Packard car took him to visit the family's companies. At the time when the State of Israel was created, in 1948, most of the members of the Bulgarian Jewish community departed for Israel. During wartime, the Bulgarian Jews, albeit subjected to a wide array of anti-Jewish policies, had not been deported thanks to the changing tide of the war in 1943 and to a diversity of social mobilizations against the arrest of Jews holding Bulgarian citizenship.[93] A few years later, a plurality of feelings, including fears that anti-Jewish policies might return, and widespread opposition to the *etatization* of Jewish properties, as part and parcel of the larger nationalization of crafts, trade and industries, convinced most Bulgarian Jews to opt for a new life abroad.[94] Politically and socially divided prior to the war, Itshak Fintsi's family hesitated between emigration to Israel and the building of socialism in Bulgaria. "My sister Ida was adamantly opposed to the idea of leaving, she was in love, Papa believed in the arrival of socialism, Mama was torn between her family, her husband, and her daughter. (I would have said, 'You decide'). So, we stayed".[95]

However, although not all of them came from a peasant or worker background, a number of the *kinadzhii* born in the 1920s belonged to the first urbanised generation. Their access to higher education and artistic accomplishments was bound up with socialism. The state sent contingents of them to train in Prague (Czechoslovakia), Łódź (Poland), Berlin (GDR), and Moscow (USSR).[96] Those who had been members of the anti-fascist movement and/or the communist youth organization had a prime there. The future director, Vulo Radev (born in 1923 to a peasant family in Lesidren) found that the time he spent in the Lovech communist youh movement helped him to win a scholarship to the prestigious Institute of Film Studies in Moscow (VGIK) in 1947. Among actors too, there were artists who, like Georgi Partsalev (1925-1989), were born in the rural world where newly-acquired wealth was no guarantee of access to education or an artistic destiny. It is no coincidence that some members of this generation gave detailed descriptions of the dramatic changes related to urbanisation and industrialisation in their films. Yugla, the village mentioned so often in

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[91] Popyordanov, 2008, 28-40.
[92] *Ibid*., 16.
[93] Chary, 1972; Ragaru, 2020a; Matkovski, 1962.
[94] Shealtiel, 2008.
[95] Fintsi, 2009, 27.
[96] In 1972, a university department for cinema studies was created within the Academy of Theatre Arts (VITIZ).

the literary work of scriptwriter Georgi Mishev, has – give or take a few letters – the same name as the town, Yogluv, where the writer was born in 1935, the son of a lumberjack.

In the 1970s, this same generation (of which many of the key figures were at least partly faithful, to the socialist project) played an active part in the advent of consumer society. The international context of Détente, Lyudmila Zhivkova's effort to internationalize Bulgaria's cultural policy and the use of cinema to showcase the achievements of socialism created numerous opportunities for movie professionals to travel abroad. From Karlovy Vary to Venice, Cannes to Babelsberg, and Toronto to Moscow, the peregrinations of the *kinadzhii* followed the film festival calendar. Cinematic co-productions also opened the doors of the East, the non-aligned countries, and even at times the west. Whilst they could never be sure of being included in a delegation or obtaining a visa, the *kinadzhii* increasingly saw their horizons extend beyond national borders. Visits to the West became more frequent from the mid-1960s onwards, and often served to confirm their recently-acquired high social status. Buying foreign brands (jeans, perfumes, etc.), and bringing gifts back for relatives and friends were concrete evidence of success. Film professionals also discovered forbidden entertainment (films, music and books that were "frowned on" at home), and engaged in cultural sightseeing.

Each trip to the other eastern European countries allowed them to situate Bulgaria on a scale of socialist prosperity and openness. In the 1960s, Bulgaria seemed very conservative in comparison with Poland or Hungary; fifteen years later, following the crushing of the Prague Spring (1968), Czechoslovakia experienced a stern period of "normalization." By contrast, the political atmosphere is Bulgaria seemed at the time quite relaxed. In the 1970s, a visit to Moscow provoked more ambivalence, aside from the excitement caused by the opportunity to mix in prestigious cultural circles. For the director, Georgi Dyulgerov (b. 1943), who completed his studies in Moscow in 1970, the discovery of the Brezhnev era came as a shock, but it did not call into question his loyalty to Bulgarian socialism, which he considered more humane.[97] Ten years later, Evgeniy Mihailov, eleven years his junior, came to the conclusion that the Soviet order had failed:

> In the 1960s, there had been growth, room for hope. But already in the 1970s, you could see the queues, the meat they had to bring in from the State Reserve, the economic crisis, the people walking the streets drunk. Intellectuals lived in another world; they formed a separate micro-society that survived by ignoring reality.[98]

Visits to foreign countries, however, were not the only sign of upward social mobility. Marriages between artists with a "good biography" and those with "bourgeois origins" also contributed to confirming the social status acquired by the former, and the sense of security enjoyed by the latter. Additionally, for the most sought-after actors, the development of television (and, correspondingly, of the system of TV stars) also resulted in a significant increase in monetary recognition. Engaged in severe competition with the "big screen", the young television industry made up for its lesser prestige by giving each performer a chance to negotiate his or her remuneration directly with the production manager. Pavel Pavlov, one of the founders of the television drama, relates:

> There were very few actors paid by the cinema industry. The best known, the stars, wanted to enjoy special status. At *SIF*, they received fairly modest pay and a few bonuses. On television, everything depended on negotiations with the production manager. He would turn up, offering a certain amount, and when the actor protested, "that's not enough!", he always found a way to work things out.[99]

Fame also brought benefits, whether in the shape of favours or offers of well-paid tours throughout the country.[100] Among the comedians, there was thus a growing differentiation between the artists whose popularity on TV went hand in hand with increasing material comfort, and those provincial theatre actors whose daily lives continued to be an exhausting mix of too many roles, too short rehearsals, and stressful tours. The material habits of some *kinadzhii* were brightened by bottles of Western whisky and brand-name

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[97] Interview with G. Dyulgerov, Sofia, September 28, 2006.
[98] Interview with E. Mihailov, Sofia, September 27, 2006.
[99] Interview with P. Pavlov, Sofia, August 28, 2009.
[100] The comic actor G. Partsalev went on many such provincial tours: Ivanova, 2008.

shoes, eroding their former egalitarian convictions.[101] Others seem to have felt more uneasy in the face of the widening gap between the "have" and the "have nots" in socialist Bulgaria. Zheni Radeva thus describes a holiday in a resort reserved for the Central Committee, during the time when her husband, film director, Vulo Radev, was a member of the Committee (1970-1975):

> It was the afternoon. Before the sun set, we decided to go down to the edge of the beach. The way it was divided up was a real shock! There was a wire fence bristling with barbs, higher than a man by half, like in a concentration camp, enclosing the sand as it stretched down to the sea. On one side – clean, quiet, you could hardly see anyone at all; but on the other – people crammed together, on top of each other. Scary! Stunned by such a vision, we remained motionless like statues. We made our way back in silence […]. And decided with one voice, "Never again are we coming here." We felt like people placed in another category. We started to feel guilty, even though we weren't. I kept seeing the security fence in front of my eyes!
> In the evening – dinner, white tablecloths, the service polite and attentive just as it should be, everything *comme il faut* […]. Once the dinner had started, at each pause, one of the women would say:
> "They've built such a nice resort here! Our husbands bear heavy responsibilities at work, they deserve such a vacation."
> For us this was a real bombshell. Vulo retorted straight away:
> "Yes, you're right, it's all been built to perfection. But did you go down to the edge of our beach? […] Do you think that the people on the other side – teachers, professors, doctors, workers, miners […] – that their work is less important than ours, that they don't deserve a resort like this? […]"
> There was a long silence. […] The subject was dropped.[102]

Under these circumstances, Bulgaria might have experienced a happy post-revolutionary "Thermidor" where the *arts de vivre* of the old bourgeois society were revived at the cost of a certain restraint in the public space. These ways of living might have coexisted with the purring repetition of socialist slogans that few still listened to. Undoubtedly, at the collective level, the utopian project of socialism had lost its credibility. At the individual level, however, feelings of uncertainty and fear of repression had significantly decreased. Within the professional guild, time had become easier to foresee, to manage, to grapple with despite changing official priorities and sometimes unexpected developments. Most people knew how to find their way around. Perhaps the future would no longer be collective, but it looked as if it might be individual[103].

In the 1980s, however, several dynamics altered this configuration, and shattered this equilibrium. Bulgaria faced an economic crisis, ration coupons were issued and heating was cut off in the winter of 1984-1985.[104] This crisis was a blow to a society that had seen the emergence of a generation that, in the words of the director Ivan Andonov, "refused to wait any longer". He said, "What? You have a degree and you're getting a salary of 100 leva? People from our generation had finished paying off their apartments. They were rushing to have villas built for them. Their goal was to get hold of a rich woman, a villa, and a car."[105] The dissonance between expectations and actual experience was felt with particular force by those *kinadzhii* who were born in the 1940s and 1950s**.** The film industry, long faced with a shortage of cadres, now had to cope with a surplus of skills. Television, which had opened up new avenues for professional fulfilment, was no longer able to absorb the surplus graduates. Year after year, the question of film debuts became more pressing. Evgeniy Mihailov, born in 1954, summarizes the situation bluntly:

> In Bulgaria, in the 1980s, everyone knew they had to accept (political commissions) in order to succeed. There were too many of us. It was impossible to find ways of making a debut. It was every man for himself and, upstairs (among the film executives), they knew it too. They no longer even tried to give you the usual ideological speech. They told you: "Look at the queue. You have a choice, either you go through the door, or you go through the window. If you make films for us, you can go far. Otherwise, you'll have to wait."[106]

The issue was not just political. In this sector of Bulgarian society, like in others, the intergenerational mobility that had been one of the vectors for the legitimation of socialism had started to slow down. The

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[101] Migev, 2008, 169.
[102] Radeva, 2004, 56-57.
[103] On the appropriation of socialism in late socialist bulgaria, see Creed, 1998.
[104] Lampe, 1986, 199-223.
[105] Interview with I. Andonov, *op. cit.*
[106] Interview with E. Mihailov, *op. cit.*

perception of these obstacles was compounded by the death of Lyudmila Zhivkov whose policy had been met with great support among the cultural intelligentsia.[107] Her death in July 1981 marked a progressive degradation of the atmosphere in cultural professions.[108] The departure of Pavel Pisarev from the leadership of the film industry, and the exclusion of Hristo Hristov from the Union of Cinema Professionals (SBFD) suggested that the country was entering a new era of unpredictability. The energy that the aging Todor Zhivkov devoted to disgracing his potential successors confirmed this feeling. In these circumstances, the launch of Soviet perestroika in 1986-1987 fostered an upsurge of hope in Bulgaria, which the adoption by the Bulgarian rulers of a timid "July Conception" in 1987 merely dashed. In April 1989, playwright and screenwriter Valeri Petrov presented the poem "When I watch Moscow television" at the Congress of the SBFD:

> So, this order that is ours, weighed down by countless
> Privileges, castes, medals
> Could still fly off, it would be possible
> To light, in people's minds, a little flame.[109]

The contrast between the immobilism of Zhivkov's Bulgaria, its endlessly streched-out present, and the future set in motion in Moscow was no longer tenable. The *kinadzhii* did not agree on the solution to the crisis of Bulgarian socialism. Some wished for generational renewal, while others aspired to a more ambitious process of democratization. Gradually, however, a convergence was established between a new generation of filmmakers who felt their creativity was being hamstrung at this end-of-a-reign juncture, and their elders, tired of the vagaries of Zhivkovism. Dissent crystallized in 1988-1989, within the worlds of film and in other sectors of the intelligentsia. It was voiced by such established figures as screenwriter Georgi Mishev (b. 1935) or the actor Petur Slabakov (b. 1923), with the support of the young guard. On 8 March, 1988, it was at a screening of a documentary by Zhuriy Zhirov, attended by over a hundred academics, intellectuals, and artists that one of the first Bulgarian dissident organizations was founded.[110] The title of the film "Breathe!" (*Dishay!*) referred to the pollution in the Ruse region. There is no doubt that this title also spoke to a feeling remarkably prevalent in artistic circles – one of suffocation.

CONCLUSION

As our journey into Bulgarian cinema has shown, the movie industry and the people behind it, offer a window into the workings and lived experiences of late socialism in Bulgaria. The story they tell us is one of power and everyday life, constraints and their domestication. Rejecting a binary reading of socialism where social realities are presented in opposition to the ideological "façade", this story lifts a veil on the existence of social conventions and norms that were known to all protagonists, and internalized by them to differing degrees. To some extent, social experiences within the world of cinema differed, based on individual biographies, generational belonging, and gender. Some members of the guild were also perceived as more inclined to follow the "party line" than others. In all cases, however, there prevailed a moral economy, drawing the borders of the legitimate and the illegitimate.

Similarly, an account centred on the contrast between state repression and a search for professional autonomy would fail to elucidate the importance of juggling multiple positions (both inside and outside the party, for example), of social networks, and the evolving trajectories of cinema professionals. At a given moment in their careers, many a film artist was perceived as embodying the state and/or opposition to the state. Here, we are not facing contradictions that need to be overcome, nor instances of duplicity on the part of some

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[107] Savov, 1987; Aleksandrov, 1991.
[108] Elenkov, 2008, 434-440.
[109] Quoted in Georgi Danailov, *Do kolkoto si spomnyam* [As Far as I Remember] (Sofia: Fondatsija Svobodna i demokratichna Bulgariya), 2008. URL: http://www.slovo.bg/showwork.php3?AuID=23&WorkID=5723&Level=1 (accessed April 9, 2023).
[110] The future president, Zhelyu Zhelev, the journalist, Sonya Bakish, wife of the member of the Politburo and President of the National Assembly, Stanko Todorov, the painter, Svetlin Rusev, and the gymnast, Neshka Robeva, were among those public figures who attended the screening (Hristova, 2005, 351-355).

members of the guild. Rather, a diversity of positions and stances were adopted in different places and times. This flexibility allowed most filmmakers, cameramen, actresses and actors, as well as movie technicians, to negotiate their ability to exert their craft and, in a number of cases, to achieve fame and move up the social ladder.

While these corporate arrangements gave the regime the elasticity needed for its perpetuation, they also accelerated its demise once a multidimensional crisis was set off. Co-opting, circumventing, negotiating, and looking for intermediaries, were ways of dealing with the limits of a command economy and an increasingly personalized authoritarian regime. However, these ways of operating became increasingly tiresome over time. They also entailed high levels of uncertainty. With the increasing competition of television, the reassertion of political control over culture in the 1980s, and the economic crisis, the capacity of Bulgaria's regime to open perspectives for professional achievements dwindled. Ultimately the very same links among and across the cinema, cultural, and party spheres that had "softened" socialism, precipitated the coalescence and activation of anti-regime sentiments.

This case study delivers one more insight, which would sound extremely trivial, were it not often omitted from analyses of Eastern European socialisms: politics is embedded in society. The very same individual who attends a high-ranking party meeting during the day, acts as a citizen, a consumer, possibly a husband and a father after 6pm. He is thus both part of the "party-state" and of "society," to use a conventional dichotomy. However, "splitting" people between multiple selves has never made for a very convincing analysis of how politics and policies work. This is all the more true if one considers political regimes that aimed – although with varying degrees of success – to control and mould private identities as well as social and political practices. To agree with this statement, means reconsidering the ways in which both domination and subjectivation are examined.

Finally, in this paper, individual and collective experiences of time have appeared as key operators of change. Attention was not only drawn to the extraction, or the marking of time but also to its multilayered character. Additionally, the black box of the state was opened to reveal a diversity of social actors, institutions, and sites, where the definition and the appropriation of time were negotiated. In order to understand these layers and how they interacted, a generational perspective is needed. A predominantly peasant society prior to the September 9, 1944 regime change, Bulgaria underwent a radical social transformation during socialism (one not unlike the configuration depicted by American historian Moshe Lewin for the case of the USSR, shortly before its demise).[111] In this respect, the social history of the cinema guild is especially enlightening. It is the story of a new art industry and of large-scale upward mobility (in the 1950s-60s) that created patterns of social reproduction. In turn, the "embourgeoisement" of the new elites blocked possible avenues for those members of the new generation who were hoping for professional and personal success (in the 1980s). The Bulgarian art and cinema schools continued to train future professionals in this field at a time when the economic crisis restricted the labour market, including in culture and the arts. The very success of the regime (culturally elevating the socialist man) created a world where most individuals dreamed. The children of the communist "bourgeoisie" joined forces to call for the removal of dictator Todor Zhivkov, and for greater freedom of expression, in the arts and beyond.

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[111] See Lewin, 1988.

(Paris : Ed. Eur' Orbem, forthcoming 2023) and *Bulgaria*, *the Jews and the Holocaust: On the Origins of a Heroic Narrative* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, forthcoming 2023).

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