

The System of Socialist Holidays and Rituals in Bulgaria

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Cultural management of the everyday life of the people by a clerical, intellectual or political elite has a long history. The attempts of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries at creating a "socialist way of life" which includes an all-embracing system of socialist holidays and rituals are presented as one of the most radical examples of cultural management by a political elite. In Bulgaria, the socialist holidays and rituals were developed in the early 1970s by commissions (which included ethnographers and folklorists). Detailed scenarios were tested on a regional basis, and in 1978 the ritual system was introduced nationwide. The example of socialist life cycle rituals demonstrates that in spite of persuasion and enforcement the rituals for the secular baptism (name-giving), wedding, and funeral were accepted only partly and in a selective and adaptive manner, while other rituals (like the Handing out of the first ID) were not accepted. As a result of "negotiation" between the ruling elite and the people and of growing public criticism, the government reduced the number of holidays and rituals and the degree of obligation. The development since the political changes in late 1989 points to a return to traditional forms.

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I

When Sigurd Erixon in 1955 introduced into European ethnology the concept of 'centraldirigering' to denote the controlling influence of the state, the administration or any other authority or ruling elite on the everyday culture of the 'folk', he gave a name to a phenomenon already familiar to many ethnologists. 'Central steering' of folk culture or 'cultural management' was by no means specific for modern times. In Europe, examples can be provided from every historical period since the middle ages giving evidence of attempts of some kind of elite to regulate the everyday life of the "simple people" or the "lowly classes".¹ The management of folk culture by means of laws and regulations, persuasion or force can be superficial and concern only the object world, e.g. what houses have to be built (Erixon 1955) or dresses to be worn, but it can also affect the actions and behavior of the people, e.g. their

manners, customs and rituals, or even their inner beliefs and attitudes, their values or their entire world views. The deeper changes are usually aspired by elites that employ cultural management as a means to maintain power relations or to educate and "improve" the people. Depending on the kind of elite, the attempts at managing folk culture can be divided into three groups which shall be outlined briefly:

(1) Cultural management by the *Church* and the *clerical elite*. Ever since the Middle Ages the Church has sought to influence and change the culture of the people. These attempts were particularly strong during the time of early Christianization, when heathen holidays and rituals were replaced by Christian ones, and during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Dietz-Rüdiger Moser (1981) presented ample evidence of the massive involvement of the Catholic church and its orders in the man-

agement of folk culture for ideological purposes; priests and monks rewrote countless folksongs and tales and fed them back into oral tradition. Over the centuries, the Church also developed and introduced a complex system of life cycle rituals, of feasts and holidays of the calendric cycle, and of elaborate Church rituals – and at the same time eliminated ‘pagan’ rituals and holidays.

(2) Cultural management by the *intellectual elite*. In the second half of the 18th century, the dominating influence of the Church on folk culture was largely reduced by the advent of the era of Enlightenment. The Church’s place was taken by members of the educated and enlightened elite (like teachers, ministers, doctors, scholars, writers etc.), who began to take an interest in folk culture. Their goal was to improve the conditions of the uneducated classes and to protect them from “irrational” behaviors, attitudes and beliefs – like superstitions, excessive feasting and celebrating, rude habits etc. Traditional religious rituals and feasting were among the first targets of the enlightened critics, and it is precisely in this important area where we encounter the first attempts at altering folk culture in a systematic way. In her book on “Ritual and Enlightenment”, Beate Heidrich (1984) pointed out that as early as in the late 18th century intellectuals made serious proposals to replace the traditional system of holidays and rituals by a new system of “improved” or altogether new rituals and holidays. This system was to satisfy the needs of the state, the needs of the people, and the requirements of mass education and popular enlightenment. In order to achieve these goals, the rituals should organize and regulate the emotions, the minds, and the bodies of the people, enhance rational thinking, sobriety and economic efficiency and at the same time popularize the ideals of national solidarity and patriotism. In some countries intellectuals (among them the first folklorists and ethnographers) had influence on the ruling political elite and were able to directly control folk culture.

(3) Cultural management by the *political elite*,

then, is obviously closely related to the management by an “enlightened elite”. In the age of mercantilism, enlightened monarchs or other leaders wanted to protect their national economies from losses resulting from frequent and excessive feasting, from irrational spending of money and other resources, and from superstitious attitudes and actions. In order to control folk culture, however, they depended largely on the expert knowledge of the educated elite. As a consequence, some folklorists and ethnographers gained considerable importance in the 19th century, because they provided valuable information about the ways and customs of the people which was needed to exert, in the words of Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, a wise “cultural administration”.² Since that time, many states have made pragmatic political use of the findings of ethnologists concerning the habits, the customs, the rituals, and the beliefs of the folk in order to effect changes in the social behavior and even mental structure of the people.

However strong the conscious efforts of the elite to shape folk culture may be, their influence will always be balanced by the spontaneous and uncontrollable actions and often by conscious resistance of the ‘folk’. As Wiegelmann (1977: 44–46) noted, the actual development of folk culture can be described as resulting from the strength of two vectors in a parallelogram of forces, one of them determined by conscious cultural management, the other by the cultural processes among the people. The balance and relationship between the intentional directing efforts of the elite and the creative actions and reactions of the ‘folk’, however, varies largely throughout history and in different societies. With regard to the intensity of cultural management, Lane (1981: 1) distinguishes between two major types of societies: Societies with several (and often conflicting) elites and a pluralistic structure tend to place less emphasis on cultural management, whereas societies with a single ruling elite unified by common general goals, ideals, or ideologies place great emphasis on it, particularly in their formative years. One-party states, among them all socialist coun-

tries, naturally belong in this group and shall therefore concern us here in detail.

II

One of the main objectives of socialism is the creation of a new man in a socialist society with a new, socialist culture. In the decade after the October revolution, profound changes were made in the cultural policy of the state which aimed at social and cultural progress in that direction. Bourgeois culture, religion, peasant culture, and ethnic cultures with all their holidays, rituals and feasts had to give way to new cultural forms which reflected the goals and the spirit of the new order. However, as the studies by Binns (1979), Lane (1981) and Rytlewski/Kraa (1987) show, the attempts in the early 1920s at creating new rituals and holidays were shortlived and had little effect because of the predominance of the personality cult in the Stalin era.

In the late 1950s, after the terror of the Stalin period and the personality cult had ended (Binns 1979: 17), the government made another, far more comprehensive attempt to develop a socialist culture and way of life. This way of life was to consist both of such features that were common to all socialist countries and of others that were specific for the individual countries, the “differentiating factors” that shaped the “characteristic ways of life of the individual nations and ethnic groups” (Hadžinikolov 1979: 38–39). The “specific features” were to be taken from the traditional ethnic or national cultures, but it was to be made sure that only positive or “progressive” elements were adopted, while the negative or “reactionary” ones were eliminated.

The “socialist way of life” comprises – in theory – all aspects of the everyday life of millions of people in the socialist countries. With regard to everyday culture, however, most attention and work was devoted to the development of socialist rituals and holidays. Since the late 1950s, more and more traditional holidays and rituals were modified and new ones were created; they were first tested and introduced on a regional level (Binns 1979: 19–20). The result of these efforts was a highly elaborate and all-

embracing system of socialist rituals which was to structure the lives of the individual, the family, the collectives, society, and the entire nation (cf. Saburova 1970, Lane 1981).

The reasons for the development and introduction of this “system of socialist holidays and rituals” in the Soviet Union are many and complex. Studies have shown that the speed and relative success of its introduction was mainly due to a convergence of the interests of the State and the broad majority of the population (Rytlewski/Kraa 1987: 34, Lane 1981: 19–20).

(a) On the side of the *population*, a yearning for more rituals and holidays had emerged after the Stalin era, and there seems to be evidence that the first initiative indeed came from “below”. The neglect of rituals during the Stalin era had never been accepted by the population. The unceremonial “socialist weddings on the work place”, which were common well into the 1950s had to be abandoned because the desire for celebration and ritual, for color and diversion in the grey socialist everyday life proved to be too strong. In addition, the general need for emotion and expressive action, for aesthetic organization of life, particularly of leisure time, emerged as determining factors. Rapid urbanization and industrialization created new needs and habits of consumption, and furthermore the ties to ethnicity and ethnic culture (which had supposedly disappeared) demanded visible symbolic expression. In a rapidly changing world rituals and holidays could convey stability and continuity, and in a society that was fast discarding its traditional social ties they could offer security and integration. Finally, rituals and holidays could satisfy the desire for meaning and cohesion in life.

(b) In the late 1950s, the *State* first reacted to these needs by permitting some of the old bourgeois rituals. Very soon, however, the demands of the populace were taken up and attempts were made to satisfy them in a way that corresponded to the needs of the State and the Party. It was discovered that the popular desire for ritual coincided with the interest of the State in the preservation of the *status quo*, the social and political order. After the loss of

Marxist utopia as the legitimizing force, after the abolition of the personality cult and of Stalinist terror the Party was in need of new mechanisms to safeguard and legitimize its power, to sustain the motivation of the people, and to integrate them into socialist society. Rituals and holidays as habitual symbolic actions appealing to the emotions offered all these advantages, because "only in the ritual can utopia be transcended and emotionally presented as being realizable" (Rytlewski/Kraa 1987: 48). Furthermore, they satisfied the need of the Party for the creation of traditions, and they could also be used in a subtle way for the internalization of socialist norms and values and serve as a safety valve for emotions. Finally they could be used to intensify the battle against the church. As symbolic actions, the rituals and holidays functioned as a substitute for pluralism and real political participation, or as Lane quotes a Soviet intellectual, "a means to buy the people's souls" (1981: 34).

The establishment of the "system of socialist holidays and rituals" was carried out on various levels. Commissions were set up to devise ritual calendars for the whole year and to develop and test scenarios for private and public rituals and holidays and to work out norms and guidelines for their performance. On the local level, the material and personal preconditions were created in the whole country through the training of personnel and the building of "wedding palaces" and other facilities.

Scholars as well as administrators made several attempts to classify the host of socialist rituals and holidays. Lane (1981) divides the Soviet holidays and rituals into (1) familial life cycle rituals, (2) rituals of initiation into social or political collectives, (3) labor rituals, (4) holidays of the calendric cycle and their ritual, (5) rituals of the military-patriotic tradition, and (6) the mass political holidays of the revolutionary tradition. The classification is not consistent, but neither are those of Soviet and other scholars. The classification proposed by Rytlewski/Kraa (1987: 37) stresses the role of the State and the Party; it groups the holidays and rituals into (1) general events of the state, (2) events connected with labor, (3) military

events, (4) events devoted to the youth, and (5) rituals of the life cycle and the cycle of nature. In a similar proposal, the Bulgarian ethnographer Nikolov suggested that the socialist holidays and rituals should be classified by "the principle of their organization", i.e. by the institution which is the carrier of the ritual. Thus he divides them into five groups "reflecting the level of the socialist system of government", namely (1) party rituals, (2) state and public rituals, (3) labor and professional rituals, (4) family rituals, and (5) Komsomol rituals (Nikolov 1985: 37-46).

III

With a delay of some ten to fifteen years other socialist countries followed the Soviet example, among them Bulgaria. While the Soviet system of rituals has been treated in several analytical studies (Binns 1979, Lane 1981, Rytlewski/Kraa 1987), the Bulgarian ritual system has not yet been analysed critically;³ the studies presented by Bulgarian ethnographers and folklorists are descriptive, classificatory or prescriptive. Although the Soviet model was largely followed, the creation and development of the Bulgarian system shows several distinctive features which make its study worthwhile.

In accordance with the Soviet example, rituals and holidays were first developed, introduced and tested on the local or regional level. The manuals issued in the early 1970s by local authorities⁴ usually contained scenarios for a large number of life cycle rituals (including the "Handing out of the first identification card" and the "Induction into the armed forces") and labor rituals and holidays (like "Induction into the Work Brigade" or "Evening of the Cattle-Breeder"); for the important life cycle rituals the manuals even provided three versions which differed by the degree of elaboration. After the initial testing period, the system of socialist rituals and holidays was officially announced for the whole country in 1978. The Council of the State issued and published in the official gazette⁵ "Guidelines for the Development and Perfection of the System of Holidays and Rituals in the People's Republic of Bulgaria". The "guidelines" are very detailed

Classification of holidays and rituals (by Mizov 1980).

1. *Sphere of material production*
 - a. object-related holidays (Examples)
 - in agriculture Day of the vintner
 - the industry Day of the worker in light industry
 - construction Day of the construction worker
 - transport/communication Day of the communication worker
 - trade and services Day of the worker in commerce
 - b. subject-related rituals and holidays:
Entry into the work collective, jubilees, anniversaries, awarding of medals and prizes, retirement celebration etc.
 2. *Sphere of intellectual production*
 - a. object-related holidays (Examples)
 - in education May 24; Dec. 8 (Day of the Bulgarian student)
 - science May 24; (Day of Enlightenment and Culture)
 - culture, arts, media May 24; Day of radio and television
 - health care Day of midwifery; Day of the health worker
 - b. subject-related rituals and holidays (as above under 1b).
 3. *Social and political sphere*
 - a. international holidays (May 1, March 3, Nov. 7)
 - b. national holidays
 - 1) of society a. historical b. present achievements
 - 2) of the state a. administration b. army c. police
 - c. regional and local holidays
 4. *Sphere of consumption: the individual and the family*
 - a. Holidays and rituals of the individual:
Giving of the name, First Steps, Wedding, Birthday, Funeral, Graduation party, Welcome after long absence, Handing out of the first identification card, etc.
 - b. Relationship between the individual and the collective:
Day of the young family, Housewarming party, Remembrance of the dead, New Year etc.
 5. *Sphere of consumption: family and society*
 - a. related to intellectual production:
Koleduvane (Christmas custom), survakane (New Year custom), kukeri (mask rituals and feasts), 1. mart (March 1, with red and white pendants), cvetnica (a synthetic holiday at Easter).
 - b. related to material production:
Day of the Forest, Nature Day, Day of Sports, Day of Tourism etc.
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and explicit in outlining the general goals and functions of the holidays, but they also deal in great detail with the individual groups of rituals and holidays and with such aspects as the ritual places, the masters of ceremonies, or the symbols and objects to be used. Finally, they determine the tasks and responsibilities of three institutions to be concerned with the system of holidays and rituals:

(1) Several institutes of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences were to fulfill the important tasks (a) of creating a "Unified national classifier for the important events in the life of

society, the collectives, and the family"; (b) of establishing a "National calendar of holidays" and of one "Regional calendar" as a model for other regions; (c) of compiling a book of first names, and (d) of studying the "socio-psychological, ethnographic and folkloristic foundations of the holidays and customs".

(2) The task of the Ministry of Culture was to "make a selection of appropriate speeches, music, art, architecture, symbols, objects of folk art, and of the classical heritage of Bulgarian and international literature and art". Furthermore, it was to "create the preconditions for the



A female registrar conducting a Socialist wedding ceremony in the “Blagoev” ritual hall in the center of Sofia (in 1983). The rich decoration of the hall with its wood carved altar-like table and its wrought iron grating have made it the most sought after hall for weddings in the Bulgarian capital. (Photograph taken by K. Roth).

most outstanding specialists in literature and art for the development and perfection of the ritual system...” and to “induce the mass media not only to reflect and popularize the achievements of the national system of holidays and rituals, but also to take an active part in its preparation, development and perfection” (chapter II, 5,B). The tasks of the ministry and the Academy were to be coordinated by a “National Commission for Socialist Holidays and Rituals” in the Ministry of Culture and by respective regional commissions.

(3) The Council of Ministers was to provide the financial means and the material basis for the performance of the holidays and rituals in the whole country.

Nikolaj Mizov’s book “Holidays, Customs, Rituals” (Mizov 1980) constituted another important step towards the establishment of the ritual system. One of its main goals was the development of a classification system for all holidays and rituals that was based exclusively on Marxist theory. Departing from the two dichotomies of ‘basis’ – ‘superstructure’ and ‘production’ – ‘consumption’, Mizov classified the holidays and rituals in five main groups; the first two groups, ‘material production’ and ‘intellectual production’, were subdivided into ‘object-related holidays’, i.e. holidays and rituals pertaining to a profession or trade as a whole,

and ‘subject-related holidays’ of the individual worker or employee (see table).⁶

Mizov claimed that the system was valid “for all historical periods and for all groups of people” (1980: 194), but it is obvious that because of the application of unsuitable basic categories it contains striking inconsistencies like multiple and arbitrary placements of rituals and holidays; group 3 is not based on the dichotomies, and the placement of rituals of the calendar cycle and such holidays as “Day of the Forest” in group 5 strikes as being very strange. It is revealing how Mizov explains and justifies the necessity of such a comprehensive system. Society and its various spheres are, as he maintains, organisms which are not completely self-governed but always need control from the outside (1980: 270); therefore society has an “objective need of direction, organization, and guidance” (1980: 274) by the Party or the socialist state. The management of folk culture is thus justified as an inherent necessity from which derives the duty of the socialist state to control it.

With regard to the degree of their traditionality or innovation, the rituals and holidays can be divided into three groups: The first group comprises traditional rituals which are only slightly modified and retain their basic meaning; secularized weddings and funerals

are examples of this group. The second group comprises old rituals turned into new ones with a change of form, content, and meaning; contemporary celebrations of former saints' days as holidays of a specific occupational group (e.g. Saint George's Day as Day of the Shepherd) or as life cycle celebrations (e.g. St. John's Day as Day of the young family) are examples of this second group (cf. Silverman 1983: 58). The third group finally consists of newly created rituals such as the Handing out of the first identification card at the age of sixteen.

The form and structure of the socialist rituals shows that they are composite or syncretic creations made up from elements of four different traditions or sources, namely, (a) the urban bourgeois tradition, (b) the Christian Orthodox tradition, (c) the national or regional folk traditions and (d) new elements or elements taken from other rituals or holidays.

IV

After the discussion of the basic features of the "system of socialist holidays and rituals" we shall now focus on the form and structure of the socialist *life cycle rituals*, i.e. the rituals that are of greatest relevance for the everyday life of the individual.

Until 1986 the local registrars had to perform the socialist life cycle rituals according to the manuals published by local or regional authorities. In 1986, the "National Commission for Socialist Holidays and Rituals" issued five official manuals to be used by all registrars in the country. The five booklets contain "improved" scenarios only for the basic life cycle rituals which were to be applied uniformly to all ethnic, religious, and regional groups in a country that was to be ethnically homogeneous and to have a "unified socialist culture". A booklet with "general recommendations" and the four scenarios prescribe the rituals for the secular namegiving, the wedding plus a folkloristic version, the 'Bulgarian wedding', and the funeral.⁷ Compared to the early manuals, the possibilities of variation are very limited.

The scenarios provide the local masters of

ceremonies with precise information and instruction on all relevant aspects like

- the meaning, the purpose, and the history of the ritual,
- the kind of ritual hall to be used, and its furnishing,
- the time of the day and the duration of the rituals,
- the objects necessary for the ritual,
- the required officials, and the way they have to dress,
- the demeanour of the officials and the participants,
- the exact sequence of actions, words, and speeches,
- what music, songs, and poems have to be performed,
- and even what emotional expressions and feelings the participants are to have or to show; the registrar has to speak "in a festive mood" and the song has to be sung "full of joy of life" (manual for the "Name-giving" 1986: 2) etc.

In order to demonstrate the significance and meaning of these life cycle rituals and their effect on the life of millions of people, the socialist "Giving of the name", a modified traditional ritual, shall be treated in more detail.

The aim of this secularized baptism is to officially induce a newborn or small child into its family and into society, both into the local community and into the Bulgarian nation as a whole. Emphasis is therefore placed on the mother, on the local community, and on the "Bulgarian fatherland", as becomes apparent in the set-up and the performance of the whole ritual. The participants are divided into four groups: the master of ceremonies and his or her helper as professionals, the choir and some other children or youths as semiprofessionals, the party consisting of mother and child, father, godparents, and the other relatives, friends, and neighbors. The manual of 1986 specifies that the ritual must "take place in rooms determined by the People's Council specially prepared for the purpose". The room is to be decorated with flowers and the national emblem, the walls should have "paintings of na-

tional or historical significance", and the officials must wear "a sash in the three national colors". The ritual of name-giving is divided into the following eight parts which are all prescribed in detail:

- (1) preparation of the parents and god-parents for the ritual;
- (2) reception and welcoming of the participants and guests;
- (3) the confirmation of the child's name by the parents and godparents;
- (4) the song of the children's choir, which is woven into the ritual actions;
- (5) official announcement of the child's name by the registrar;
- (6) short address of the registrar to the parents about the raising of children and about family tradition;
- (7) congratulations and handing out of the "family book" and a savings book;
- (8) distribution of ritual bread in the vestibule.

The analysis of the manuals reveals, that the set-up and the performance of the rituals in the secular ritual halls are intended to be theatrical, ornate and emotional. Although full of national pathos and references to socialism, they show a clear resemblance with the elaborate and ceremonial church rituals which they are explicitly meant to replace. The manual from Sliven (1975) states that it is "the role of our People's Councils and of our public to diminish the influence of religion", while the introductory manual of 1986 (p. 2), commenting on the frequent use of candles in ritual halls, denies their religious meaning: "In this striving of the people for closer spiritual ties between them no religious influence must be suspected". The registrars are told that, instead, candles are "symbols of fire and light, and sometimes this is directly linked with the fire and light on mass graves and the grave of the Unknown Soldier".⁸

Socialist ideology mixed with patriotic ideas and vague allusions to the symbolism of traditional peasant culture form the ideological backbone of the "new socialist rituals". The manuals and scenarios demonstrate the extent to which the socialist state exerts cultural

management by establishing life cycle rituals and setting up rules for their performance.

V

How does the new system of socialist rituals relate to the more general historical observations outlined in the beginning? It is obvious that the development of rituals by the socialist states has precedents in European history from the late 18th to the 20th centuries. Secular life cycle rituals were developed and introduced in many countries in order to complement or replace Christian rituals: the secular civil wedding for the church wedding, the German "Jugendweihe" for the Christian confirmation (cf. Rytlewski/Kraa 1987: 44–45), or the civil funeral for the Christian funeral. We also have newly invented holidays such as Mother's Day, May Day or Valentine's Day. But these innovations of secularized or new rituals or holidays are relatively few, they were rarely forced on the population, and it usually took a long time until they had reached some final form and were widely accepted.

What makes the socialist rituals different from these innovations in pluralistic societies is

- their systemic quality, i.e. the totality of the system of rituals which is meant to embrace the entire private and social life of the individual, the family, the collectives, and society;
- the intended totality of organization and structuring of the individual rituals, and finally
- the rapidity and totality of their introduction and the extent of the elimination or repression of the traditional rituals.

We have so far discussed only the *intentions* of the ruling elite to establish a body of norms of social behavior and of attitudes at clearly defined occasions and described the channels through which they are enforced. We have not yet discussed the extent to which these new rituals have actually been accepted by those for whom they were designed, by the 'folk'. Historical experience teaches us to be wary,

Funeral hall in the new cemetery in the city of Sliven, East Bulgaria. The hall is plain, almost bleak; the coffin (usually made of plywood) is placed on the black pedestal in the center. In the standardized funeral speech the registrar usually changes only the names and personal data of the deceased. The funeral ceremonies have been criticized in the newspapers for their "tastelessness". (Photograph taken by K. Roth in 1989).



since over the centuries only a small number of propagated or innovated rituals and holidays were actually accepted. How does the Bulgarian population react to the socialist rituals? For an ethnologist or cultural historian this question is naturally of greatest interest, but unfortunately we find no satisfactory answer to it in the relevant works of Bulgarian scholars. Their writings, mostly in the journal *Bългарска етнografija*, are devoted to the description of individual rituals (Stamenova 1986, Rojdeva 1978) or the system of rituals and its ideological foundations (Mizov 1979, Popov 1981, Todorov 1980, Živkov 1984) or to the discussion of how to classify (Nikolov 1985), to improve or to popularize them (Todorov 1984). The sections in the ritual manuals dealing with traditional attitudes are written by scholars adhering to this prescriptive and normative view. Studies of traditional rituals are, as we have indicated, carried out for determining the "positive" customs and habits that may be integrated into the socialist rituals.

For lack of reliable empirical data and statistical information on the degree of acceptance of the new rituals⁹ we have therefore to rely on articles in newspapers,¹⁰ on information obtained from Bulgarian ethnographers and folklorists, and on our own observations over a period of nine years (1980 to 1989). These ob-

servations in several Bulgarian cities, towns, and villages (cf. Roth 1981) were, however, not systematic and extended mainly to the rituals of the life cycle. The conclusions drawn from them are therefore tentative and need further testing.

The introduction and acceptance of new rituals depend on a number of conditions which must be outlined briefly. An important prerequisite for all rituals is the existence of adequate facilities and trained personnel. In Bulgaria, the first ritual halls were built in the capital of Sofia around the year 1970, and over the last two decades more and more cities, towns, and villages have built their own "proper" festive ritual halls, usually in the city hall or – for funerals – in the cemetery. The ritual halls are often located in restored 19th century vernacular houses and are usually decorated with objects of newly made folk art, e.g. carpets and wall carpets, chairs and an altar-like table with rich wood-carving, decorative candle-sticks etc. In addition to that, more and more registrars have received a formal training as masters of ceremonies in special training schools. As a rule, towns and cities are better equipped than villages.

Secondly, the degree of obligation and enforcement by the local authorities is of great importance: The *wedding* has legal binding

force only when carried out by a registrar and is therefore necessary; in addition, the local authorities offer "real big weddings" on a Saturday or Sunday, i.e. the traditional days for a wedding, only in the approved form. The *name-giving* or the *funeral*, on the other hand, include no necessary legal acts and are voluntary. In principle, people have the choice of abstaining or of choosing the church rituals. It must be kept in mind, however, that many churches are deserted and that many local authorities discourage people from choosing the religious forms. Other rituals are strongly recommended by youth, party, or occupational organizations and the individual may wish to conform in order to avoid setbacks in his career. As a consequence, the acceptance of the rituals depends largely on the kind of ritual.

Thirdly, the acceptance of the rituals is to some extent determined by social class and status as well as place of residence. Urban intellectuals tend to be far more reluctant to accept them than new urbanites or villagers. Such differences are mainly due to the fact that since 1950 rapid industrialization, urbanization, and collectivization of the agriculture led to fundamental demographic, social and cultural changes and thus to a high degree of social and cultural insecurity and instability. The desire for unquestioned norms of behavior expressed itself in a desire for ritual as a stabilizing factor, and for conspicuous status representation, particularly among the millions of new urbanites. As a result, all kinds of official and private rituals, feasts, celebrations, and holidays have grown in size and elaboration over the last decades.

Having these general tendencies and factors in mind, we can now try to assess the range of possible (and actual) reactions of the Bulgarian population towards the socialist rituals. Obviously, the two extreme reactions to them are complete *refusal* and abstention or full-scale *acceptance*. Both reactions are to be observed in Bulgaria, depending on the factors mentioned above. The wedding rituals are widely accepted by the majority of the population, because they satisfy the need of ceremony, decorum, and status representation, while the "name-giving" as a voluntary ritual is chosen

only by a relatively small number of young parents. In spite of pressure from the local authorities, funerals are still relatively often performed in the church. The "Handing out of the ID card" is hardly accepted at all.

Full acceptance or complete refusal, however, are only two possible reactions. It is of great interest and importance to anyone concerned with *real* folk culture, that in a large number of cases the people prefer solutions that may be unexpected for the initiators. What we observe in historical and present reality is a variety of complex processes of limited acceptance, of adaptation, and of attempts to influence the course of events through "spontaneous creations" (cf. Binns 1979: 119; Lane 1981). The diversity of reactions of the populace can be summarized in the following four main attitudes:

1. Partial refusal of the ritual, i.e. the selective reduction of ritual elements. This reduction may occur either on request by the participants or it may result from the officials' desire to omit elements they consider inadequate or not suitable for their clients. To some extent, the state has provided for this possibility by admitting reduced versions of some rituals, e.g. modest wedding rituals for second marriages. The 1986 manual for the "Name-giving" states in a note that the ritual "can also be performed at home ... as a simple celebration in the circle of relatives and acquaintances". In villages and smaller towns the participants have more leeway to negotiate the performance of the ritual than in the cities; a name-giving which we observed in 1981 in a village in the Balkan mountains is a case in point.

2. Another reaction is the selective and adaptive acceptance of the ritual. Depending again on the size of the village or city and the degree of intimacy, the participants try to select and substitute elements of the ritual, thereby slightly altering its performance. Thus, the prescribed songs or poems may be replaced by others, other musical pieces or instruments may be chosen, new ritual objects may be introduced, or the ritual party may choose a particular day or ritual hall and with it a master of

ceremonies, who will perform the ritual in a way they like. As we were told by Bulgarian ethnographers, people make all kinds of suggestions and requests in order to make the rituals fit their needs. Some of them are tacitly accepted, others are brought to the attention of state commissions who decide on whether these suggestions are acceptable or not (cf. Binn 1979: 119). If the commissions approve of them, then "we will allow them to have their way", as a leading Soviet ethnographer put it. The 1986 manual blames mistakes and exaggerations in the earlier scenarios and presents revisions of all rituals, most probably as a reaction to popular criticism.

3. The contrary reaction to partial refusal or acceptance is eager over-acceptance, i.e. the amplification of the rituals offered by the state and the addition or elaboration of elements (like the candles mentioned above). It is here that we have to bear in mind that the very creation of rituals in the late 1950s was a concession by the state to the popular desire for expressive action, celebration, and status representation. In continuation of this tendency, many people choose the most elaborate variants of the life cycle rituals, try to get the most beautiful ritual hall in town, pay extra money for live music, for professional photographers and (increasingly) for costly video recordings of the entire ceremony, for fancy dresses and for other extravaganzas. By doing so they undoubtedly overstrain the socialist state's idea of a "decent contemporary socialist ritual" as it is postulated in the manuals. In a way reminiscent of the enlightened criticism of the excesses of the 'folk' in the late 18th century, the newspapers sometimes warn against such excessive feasting and the waste of money and resources.

4. The change or reduction of *meaning* of the official ritual thus appears to be a fourth important reaction. The manuals show that each ritual has a clearly defined rationale and intention which correspond with the Party's ideology and cultural policy which is governed by the idea of moderation and 'decency'. Aware of the danger, the 1986 manual emphasizes that the rituals "have been stripped of some embel-

ishments which lower or sometimes change the meaning of the ritual". Nevertheless, most life cycle rituals have over the last decades developed into quite excessive celebrations, usually with hundreds of guests (even in the large cities) and exorbitant expenses. Particularly the private parts of the celebrations have taken on ever larger dimensions. They render the official ritual a short and insignificant episode, whose intended meaning is minimized, obscured, or even turned into its opposite. The official ritual is thus often reduced to a necessary prerequisite or pretext for status representation – and for the continuation of traditional customs like giving and taking presents, dancing, and joyful and uninhibited feasting in the streets, in restaurants, and at home.

VI

The indicated processes of selective and adaptive acceptance of socialist rituals make clear that even in totalitarian states the 'folk' manages to evade the open or subtle encroachments of the political (and parts of the intellectual) elite in a surprisingly varied and creative manner. In the long run and in spite of massive indoctrination, persuasion, and enforcement the efforts of the socialist state have turned out to be as futile as those of the enlightened elite in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (cf. Heidrich 1984: 243–44); Heidrich stresses the "refractoriness" and "obstinacy" of the people who decide for themselves what they want to accept and what not (p. 244). In the same manner, the Bulgarian population largely maintain their ways of celebrating and feasting while they outwardly accept some of the new rituals – and devoid them of their intended meaning.

As a consequence, the Party was forced to rescind its comprehensive program in the mid-1980s. Compared to the test period, the number of official scenarios was reduced to the three basic life cycle rituals, and in the rituals some new elements were replaced by elements taken from folk tradition; and although the pressure on the population continued in many local communities, the enforcement of the rituals was generally somewhat reduced. As a re-

sult of growing criticism the official statements showed a less optimistic or even resigned attitude; this becomes apparent even in the language of the 1986 manuals which are careful to point out that they give only "recommendations". Already in September 1987 the government abolished or reduced several public and official holidays and rituals (like the May Day Parade) and stopped awarding prizes to "Deserving Artists of the People", "Musicians of the People", "Craftsmen of the People", and the like.

The development of a national and of regional calendars of holidays came to a halt, and according to some of its members the "National Commission for Socialist Holidays and Rituals" convened only sporadically and virtually ceased to function because of dissent on crucial aspects of the entire system. The public discussion shows that – apart from criticism of the banality of the scenarios and of blatant inadequacies in the performance of funerals¹¹ – there is a growing awareness that such forceful attempts at manipulating the everyday culture of the people are inappropriate and that the creation of life cycle rituals is a long-term process: The holidays and rituals of folk culture as well as the religious rituals which were developed in the course of centuries and withstood "the test of time and tradition" are quoted as evidence.¹² After the political changes in late 1989 the criticism became more open; it was directed against the suppression of individualism and spontaneity by the bureaucracy or against the entire system of rituals.¹³ The prevailing tendency is a nostalgic return to folk tradition and religion with their valued holidays, rituals, festivals, and customs.¹⁴ The official cultural policy, however, has not yet been redefined and the socialist life cycle rituals still continue to be part of everyday reality in Bulgaria.

Notes

1. cf. Erixon 1955, Svensson 1973: 116–127, Wiegmann 1977: 44–46, Burke 1978 or Muchembled 1978.
2. In his book "Die Familie" (1855), Wilhelm H. Riehl advises the "Culturpolizei" to follow the "ethnographic laws governing the needs of the people. Therefore I consider it indeed to be a highly important task of folklore ... to bring logic into the administrative practice. The greatest triumph of administrative art would be to adapt each administrative act so neatly to the nature of the people that even with the most burdensome things they would believe that the administration regulated and acted only out of the people's hearts" (cf. Hermann Bausinger: *Volkskunde*. Darmstadt 1971, 57).
3. Sanders (1983) and Silverman (1983: 58) treat only details or aspects of the ritual system, while Höpken 1986: 450–456 gives a short but precise outline of it.
4. The following manuals were available for analysis: *Za novi socialističeski graždanski rituali* [For new socialist civic rituals]. Tărgoviște: Gradski občinski naroden savet 1972, 39 p.; *Socialističeskite graždanski rituali (scenarii, planove)* [The socialist civic rituals (scenarios, plans)]. Sliven 1975, 244 p.
5. Ukaz [Regulation] no. 965 in the *Dăržaven vestnik* [Official gazette] no. 42 of May 30, 1978, p. 505–509: *Osnovni nasoki za razvitie i usăvăršenstvuvane na praznično-obrednata sistema v Narodna Republika Bălgarija* [Basic directions for the development and perfection of the system of holidays and rituals in the People's Republic of Bulgaria].
6. The data for the table was extracted by the authors from four relevant chapters in Mizov's book which is often confusing or even contradictory.
7. *Obști preporăki za graždanskite obredi imenuvane, venčavane, pogrebenie* [General recommendations for the civic rituals Name-giving, Wedding, Funeral]. Sofia: National Commission for Socialist Holidays and Rituals 1986; *Imenuvane* [Name-giving]. Sofia 1986; *Venčavane* [Wedding]. Sofia 1986; *Bălgarska svatba* [Bulgarian wedding]. Sofia 1986; *Pogrebenie* [Funeral]. Sofia 1986.
8. The intention of replacing religious rituals was made particularly clear by the introduction of a secular form of an exclusively Christian ritual, the "memorial service for the dead", in the 1970s. The memorials were to take place at the same intervals which are common in Orthodox ritual. The ritual care for the soul and the spiritual well-being of the deceased was turned into a secular remembrance of the dead and the exhortation to "take their heroic example".
9. Binns (1978: 118–119) and Lane (1981: 239–251) present some information on the impact and acceptance of the rituals in the Soviet Union. Höpken (1986: 452–454) deals briefly with the negative attitude of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria.
10. The articles in Bulgarian newspapers are mostly descriptive and – in accordance with the 'task' of the media – supportive of the official cultural

policy; since 1985, however, several critical articles with information on the actual performance and variation of rituals have appeared (see notes 11–13).

11. See the article "Obred ili säbranie" by Petär Konstantinov in the leading weekly Narodna kultura of May 5, 1989.
12. See P. Konstantinov (note 11) and by the same author the article "Tradicii" in Pogled of May 22, 1989.
13. E.g. the article "Prazničnost" by the folklorist Georg Kraev in the daily "Anteni" of Feb. 7, 1990, p. 16; Kraev is very critical of the "hydra of rituals in the name of the people" and particularly mentions the ritual of "Namegiving".
14. This tendency becomes apparent in a large number of articles in leading newspapers (see note 10); cf. Večerni novini No. 14, 1990, p. 12; *ibid.* No. 44, 1990; Rabotničesko delo, Jan. 22, 1990.

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Zusammenfassung

“Kulturmanagement”, d.h. die zentrale Steuerung der Alltagskultur der Bevölkerung durch eine geistliche, intellektuelle oder politische Elite hat in Europa eine lange Geschichte. Der Versuch der Sowjetunion und anderer sozialistischer Länder, eine “sozialistische Lebensweise” mit einem umfassenden “System sozialistischer Feiertage und Rituale” zu schaffen, wird als einer der radikalsten Versuche des Managements der Volkskultur durch eine politische Elite dargestellt. In Bulgarien wurden

die sozialistischen Feiertage und Rituale in den frühen 1970er Jahren durch Kommissionen entwickelt, in denen Volkskundler wesentlich mitwirkten. Detaillierte Szenarien (in Handbüchern für den Dienstgebrauch) für eine große Zahl von Ritualen und Feiern des Lebenslaufs und des Arbeitslebens wurden auf regionaler Ebene getestet; 1978 wurde das Ritualsystem im ganzen Land eingeführt. Das Beispiel der Lebenslaufrituale zeigt, daß trotz intensiver Bemühungen des Staates die Rituale für die weltliche Taufe (“Namengebung”), die Hochzeit und das Begräbnis von der Bevölkerung nur teilweise und zumeist selektiv, modifiziert und adaptiert angenommen wurden; andere Rituale (wie die Aushändigung des ersten Personalausweises) wurden nicht akzeptiert. Die Regierung reduzierte seit der Mitte der 1980er Jahre die Zahl der Rituale und den Grad der Durchsetzung. Die Entwicklung der Rituale ist damit Ergebnis des Zusammenwirkens bewußter Steuerung durch die politische Elite und spontanen Handelns durch das Volk. Seit den Umwälzungen Ende 1989 deutet sich eine Rückbesinnung auf die traditionellen Feiertage und Rituale an.