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# The Image of the Teacher in the Memories of Sofia English Language School's Alumni From the 1970s<sup>1</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

The article aims at gaining a better understanding of the everyday life in an elite socialist school in Bulgaria.

The text discusses why Bulgarian communist authorities not simply acquiesced to but actually supported the foundation of such a school in a society that aspired to equality and egalitarianism, and how they instrumentalised the concept 'childhood' and adolescence in their pursuit of creating the 'new socialist individual'.

As the primary goal of the text is to shed light on the mundane, unofficial life in this socialist school, it makes use of memories of former students of the school. By analyzing these recollections the article wants to demonstrate not only how the schooling institution inculcated norms of social conduct and constructed publicly acceptable individualities, but also how the students reacted to these interventions; to what extent they subverted and resisted the dominant order. Last but not least, bearing in mind that these memories are as much embedded in the past as they are connected to the actual moment of narration, the article studies how the childhood/adolescent past of the narrators is deployed as a legitimizing resource for their meaningful and socially acceptable identity presentation now.

## KEYWORDS

everyday life, state socialism, education, memory.

Since the 1960s and the publishing of *Centuries of Childhood* (Aries, 1962) the issue of childhood has become a prominent theme in the studies of social researchers and historians of modern Europe. Although there has been a lot of criticism to the methods Aries applies in his book, the significance of his studies has hardly ever been denied, since Aries is the first to initiate the discussion on childhood as a social construct. He also makes it possible for historians, educationalists and social researchers to start recognizing and analyzing the importance of children not only as influenced by but also as influencing historical processes.

Therefore, the aim of this article is not to charge a detailed critique of Aries's *Centuries of Childhood*. On the contrary, it takes as its starting point the central statement of the

French historian – that the way children were viewed in early modern Europe differed considerably from the way childhood was perceived in the Middle Ages. Whereas in pre-modern times children were, to a great extent, integrated in the world of adults, from the 17th century onwards infants began to be seen as vulnerable, ignorant, incompetent and innocent. They needed protection, education and cultivation. Thus, we see how within the framework of the emerging modern European states childhood commenced to be viewed as a specific stage in human life. With the rise of the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, modernization and most importantly – formal schooling, children were 'sacralized' (Hendrick, 1992: 2). They were envisioned as the essence of human nature, the potential and future of humanity. This potential, however, had

1) The author would like to thank all the participants in the Existential Socialism discussion series at the Centre for Advanced Studies, Sofia for their useful comments and contributions. This article was originally published in Bulgarian in the volume *Childhood under Socialism (Detstvoto prez socialisma)*, ed. Ivan Elenkov and Daniela Koleva, 184- 196. Sofia: CAS, Sofia/RIVA, 2010.

to be accordingly supervised, guided and disciplined in order not to get distorted. Childhood became an ‘invention of modernization’ (Shorter, 1976: 168) that proved to be instrumental to the building of the modern nation-state. The enlightened individual that the child had to be transformed into – the embodiment of the social policy, healthcare services and mass education provided by modern institutions – had to pose no threat to society, to possess the right conduct and contribute to the improvement of the social world. The transformation of the attitude to children, the focus on the children’s welfare – the future of humanity had to be protected against brutality and abuse – changed the place of children in society. Rather than the families, which sometimes demonstrated harsh treatment or indifference to their children, it was the state that had to introduce appropriate legislation and rearing practices that would guarantee the children’s adequate upbringing. Thus, the children fell under the gaze of various modern institutions, which limited the children’s freedom and restricted the perception of children as independent subjects of history, as free agents.

As this article aims to interpret and analyze the school-day memories of Sofia English Language School’s alumni from the 1970s, the questions that it will discuss here are: How did Bulgarian state socialism instrumentalize childhood (and if we bear in mind the context of the current article – adolescence) in its aspirations to create ‘the new socialist person’? How did socialist Bulgaria – a society so much in love with the concept of equality – legitimize and interpret the foundation of elite schools (such as Sofia English Language School)? What narrative strategies do the alumni resort to when they have to present now the problematic past public image of the school? How do they explain now their distinction in a society obsessed with egalitarianism?

In order to address these questions I will, first, outline the methodological framework and theoretical findings this paper draws on in unfolding its arguments. Secondly, I will present the set of arguments with which the state

authorities supported the establishment of elite schools and enabled their (problematic) integration in the field of socialist mass schooling. Finally, I will analyze the school-day memories of the alumni, using them not so much as sources of ‘hard facts’, but as narratives through which the respondents present themselves, and want to think of themselves, as agents, as active protagonists in the everyday life of the school.

This study owes a great deal to Foucault’s and Bourdieu’s critical observations about the role of schooling in the individual and biographical development of modern citizens. Though it is true that their critiques of Modernity cannot unquestionably be superimposed on the Bulgarian context, it is also true that their ideas can help us comprehend the complex fabric of everyday life in socialist Bulgaria, the intersections between the state’s interventions and the individuals’ efforts to pursue their own interests, express their own selves. Combining the critical findings of Foucault and Bourdieu seems important to me as it allows us to observe not only how the state individualized and normalized the people, turning them into ‘docile bodies’ (Foucault, 1995 (1977): 135), but also the subtleties by which the distinctions and differences in Bulgarian socialist society were simultaneously instilled and concealed (Bourdieu, 1984).

The socialist state considered the child/adolescent biological material, which, after appropriate treatment, would become an efficient, loyal, responsibly behaving citizen whose public actions would not undermine the existing social order and whose disciplined work would contribute to the common good. What’s more, in his private life the individual would never totally escape public surveillance, thus making no allowance for potential disruption and disturbance of the homogenized and unified socialist collective.

The child was deemed a major modernizing resource for society. As Bulgarian socialist children were growing in the best of all possible social regimes, what they needed was to be fully incorporated and integrated in the social(ist) reality. A key role in this regard



played schooling and education. School was the public-disciplinary space that had to inculcate the legitimate modes of conduct, the acceptable principles of 'vision and division' (Bourdieu, 1989: 14-25) of the world. By the means of the overt and covert curriculum schooling entered the individual space of the students, thus naturalizing the existing social hierarchies and stratifications and presenting them as the only normal, meaningful order of the existing world.

Here I intentionally label the space of school 'publicly-disciplinary', drawing primarily on Bundzhulov's observations about the order of socialist living. In his book *Heterotopies* (1997: 70-75) he points out that in the socialist world the two aspects of power (the individualizing, i.e. the disciplinary and the normalizing, i.e. the public) merged into one due to the invalidation of the modern normative orders. Whereas in western democracies these two spheres (the public and the disciplinary) of living remained separated, in socialist Bulgaria the difference between the normative/normal and disciplinary was eradicated. The individuals became visible to the authorities not because they diverted from the norm; the state would recognize and notice the people only when/if they tried to adhere to the norm. The norm of socialist living, however, was always removed somewhere ahead in the utopian future. The individuals had to discipline their bodies and summon their strength in a constant attempt to reach their civil, public status of normal people: "A person is as much liberated as he or she has made the objective requirements of life his or her own viewpoint, attitude and need" – this might sound similar to Bourdieu's definition of habitus<sup>2</sup>, but is in fact a quote from Makarenko (Chakarov, 1979: 89)<sup>3</sup>.

Before I move on to a brief summary of the controversial history of the English Language Schools in the educational field of socialist Bulgaria, I must add one more detail to the theoretical framework that gives a vantage point to my research. In a subtle analysis of the examination situation Deyanov deepens our

understanding of the hidden interactions between the private and public in socialist school. Working on Foucault's model of the examination situation, Deyanov (1994: 85- 92) points out that what becomes evident in this situation is the consolidation between hierarchical surveillance and normalizing sanction. Along with this, however, we can also see a complex interaction between the overt and covert, between the public and private. The space of school (and more specifically – the space of the classroom) is the place where the still unregulated, personal and influenced by the family habitus of the student finds its public expression. The examination, the evaluation is a process which transmits the personal time of the student into the classroom. The as if unsupervised, unintegrated time of the young individual is actually incorporated in the regime of schooling. While examining, the teacher, in fact, becomes aware to what extent the student has devoted his 'domestic time' to aspiring to the state prescribed norms/the excellent grade. Thus, the examination is the surreptitious way through which the official time occupies the private temporality, making it susceptible to normalization, unification and surveillance.

Furthermore – and it is clearly underlined by Deyanov – the examination is the 'magical' (i.e. irrational) fashion that facilitates the quasi-legitimate 'publication' (making public) of the students' interests and intentions. The family habituses, competences and incompetence that the students inherit through their family background become publicly (in)acceptable. It is the decisive role of the teacher as a 'consecrator', an executive body of the schooling institution that determines the up/down-going social mobility and biographical trajectory of the student.

This is where the arguments of my article start. The current text is part of a bigger project aiming at researching the place of English language schools within the educational field of socialist Bulgaria – who initiated their establishment; how the necessity of such schools was articulated; which Bulgarian adolescents

2) [s]ystems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (Bourdieu, 1990:66).

3) Quoted in Chakarov.

were summoned to the schools and deemed loyal enough to be exposed to the dangers of the constant interaction with the 'capitalist language and culture' and yet keep their trustworthiness. Another important aspect of the study is to trace the channels of selection and access to these places, as well as the incorporation of these schools within the mass school network.

After Bulgarian Communist Party took power in 1948<sup>4</sup> and became the sole political subject that claimed to represent and defend the interests of the people of Bulgaria, it closed all schools funded or supported by private and foreign organizations. With Decree 1445 from 2nd August 1948 the activities of these schools were discontinued. Thus, all schools where western foreign languages were taught disappeared from the educational map of Bulgaria. This initiative was part of the state's efforts to homogenize and integrate the educational system of the country. Having proclaimed the establishment of a completely new society, where equality and emancipation regulated the social order, the state had to make sure that the right steps in that direction were taken. The purging of the schooling system from past residues, foreign influences and unsupervised channels of education was part of the efforts to provide equal opportunities for everybody. The state could guarantee this through unified, centralized rules for upbringing of reliable and efficient young citizens. Along with this, however, the political authorities were aware of the fact that the lack of cadres who could adequately use foreign languages and communicate with the West might lead to isolation of Bulgaria and damage its international image. Therefore, as soon as they closed the private schools, the authorities initiated the foundation of a similar type – this time state-controlled – of school. Not only did it have to provide excellent education in the subjects of the mass secondary school curriculum, but it also had to supply intensive foreign language teaching. The task assigned to it was to educate such model citizens who, in spite of being constantly exposed to western influences, would keep their loyalty to the communist creeds and promote Bulgaria's

communist achievements to the West. That was how the first state school for foreign language learning appeared in 1950 (Secondary School for Learning of Foreign Languages – SSLFL). It was housed in the buildings of the closed American college in Lovech and had to, literally, take its place. The SSLFL was supposed to transform the illegitimate cultural capital the college had used to produce, to invisibly incorporate it in the new social order and make it function for the sake of the socialist state. It comes as no surprise, however, that as soon as the school was founded, it acquired a dubious publicity. Although it was supposed to alter the goals of the foreign language learning and adapt them to the communist purposes, the school was still considered an heir of bourgeois traditions and treated with a lot of suspicion by the general public and the authorities themselves. Furthermore, the fact that the students of the school were incessantly exposed to cultural influences coming from the West turned them into a potential threat for the homogeneity and uniformity of Bulgaria's socialist society. As a result, the admission to this school had to be closely supervised. In order to make sure that the students accepted in this extraordinary space were really reliable, the authorities kept under a strict control the selection procedures. The ones admitted to the school had to demonstrate not only excellent academic results but also (this was even more important) an irreproachable family background: children and grandchildren of ex-partisans and of current members of the bureaucratic state apparatus were much favoured since the family relationships were seen as a kind of guarantee for ideological loyalty.

The selection at the entrance, however, did not facilitate the school's incorporation in the educational field of socialist Bulgaria. In fact, this caused further problems, because the school acquired an image of an elite place, a place producing distinctions in a society that revered equality and collectivism. Over the years the access to this type of schools was liberalized due to the fact that the number in-

4) See State Archive, fund 139, inventory 4, archival unit 37.



creased<sup>5</sup>. Still, the pressure at the entrance was great and they were decidedly more difficult to access than the mass secondary schools. They were considered to provide a better education (not only in terms of foreign languages). What is more important, they offered better career opportunities and prospects for an uprising social status in a society where most people had very limited opportunities to distinguish themselves.

In this current study the focus is mainly on the English Language School of Sofia. The reasons for this are, primarily, because it was the first socialist school where English language teaching was laid a special emphasis on. Another important feature of the school was that, along with the rest of the cultural and social capital it incorporated, Sofia English Language School brought the capital of being situated in the state's capital – a fact that cannot be discounted, bearing in mind that migration to big cities, especially to Sofia, was restricted by numerous bureaucratic and legal instruments. Thus, the location additionally augmented the symbolic capital of the school.

What stays in the center of my research is not only the reconstruction of the official institutional history of the school, but also the intricate everyday-life happenings within the place. Therefore, in my work I rely on archival documents as well as on oral narratives of former students of the school. References to personal memories prove to be significant, as they can give us a more detailed understanding of the everyday life in the institution. It is through personal memories and testimonies that the history of institutions, formal events and depersonalized publicity can obtain density and richness. The microhistory of daily life, individual stories and interactions can actually show us how 'institutions think' (Douglas 1986). The sections of mixture between the micro- and macro, the areas of contact enable us to see how people lived 'real socialism', how they followed but also adapted the rules of socialist life, attempting simultaneously to meet the public-disciplinary requirements and make time/space for their own personal aspi-

rations and ambitions.

Without underestimating the significance of archival documents, I base my research predominantly on personal narratives and life stories, believing that these particular utterances of real everyday life could demonstrate how institutional history structured and shaped personal experiences; the oral stories, however, could also show us how at the level of the individual and experiential, institutional history was sometimes sabotaged, reworked, even contested. Searching for an insight of the history of Sofia English Language School I decided to refer to the memories of former students. School-day experiences can be narrated because they are structured around the day-to-day interactions with teachers and classmates. What can be remembered and articulated are the stories that involve particular teachers (with their peculiarities and specificities).

The statement that memories are particularistic and individual, of course, comes as no news to students of oral history. In fact, this is one of the main epistemological arguments against the use of memories as historical resources – they have problematic truth-value. When we bear in mind, however, that school-day recollections do not reflect factual reality but individual perceptions, we can read in the memories the students' potential for subversion and resistance.

Although the reminiscences construct an image of the teacher as an embodiment / face / façade of the schooling institution that could distinguish the students and make them think their 'normal' biographical trajectory, they also demonstrate that the students were able to shift the position of the teacher in the field of the school, to change authorities and stakes.

In the course of the interviews<sup>6</sup> I conducted in order to record school-day memories, however, my initial assumption that the narratives would shed light on the informal, counter-culture of Sofia English Language School was considerably shaken. The narratives of the respondents are not stories of resistance, subcultures and informal groups that

5) The school in Lovech housed three departments – English, German and French. In 1954, however, the number of students willing to study these languages increased considerably. As a result, the departments formed three separate schools. The German section stayed in Lovech, the French moved to Varna and the English – to Sofia. Later on, such schools appeared in all major cities of the country, but this growth in number was still far away from transforming the institutions into mass schools.

6) See the profile of the interviewees at the end of the article.

contested the imposed modes of conduct. Rather, they are fairly monolithic and repetitive constructions that do not differ much from the official, self-congratulatory fashion of speaking about Sofia English Language School (and socialist education in general), entrenched in the public pedagogical discourse before 1989.

This, in fact, is the main challenge that the current analysis faces. The task that I set is to make sense of the way these memories actualize the past, how their embeddedness in the past is articulated in the present and to what extent this articulation can unproblematically be integrated in contemporary life. Another important task is to go beyond the solidity of the narratives that construct a stable and seemingly impenetrable image (of the school and the teachers) with the aim to work out what the memories silenced or 'forgot' so that the past appears acceptable today.

The act of narrating the life in Sofia English Language School faces the narrator with a few problems. As I mentioned earlier – this school could not be easily integrated in the educational field of socialist Bulgaria: on the one hand, it was supposed to educate the future ruling elite (it created differences in a society of equality); on the other, the authorities and the public regularly criticised the students for being 'spoilt', 'lazy' and demonstrating outright disdain to physical labour (the school did not fulfill the authentic goals of socialist education – love for hard physical work).

Along with this we should add another aspect the narrators have to deal with – they are supposed to talk about their socialist school-day memories now – a moment when the master narrative about the victorious march of communism has lost its hold and legitimate power. The way in which the former students handle the arbitrary past and present publicity of Sofia English Language School and show the school years as an integral (having a positive impact on their contemporary life) part of their biography is worth the attention. As I mentioned above, they do not tell stories about misrule and disobedience; neither do they try to

devalue the time spent there by presenting themselves as victims of a dehumanizing, degrading institution. Their stories are not memories of resistance and risk, but stories of gratefulness and praise. They present the years in the school with an uncritical and unquestionable admiration to the educational standards the institution set. They view the competences and skills obtained in the school as 'pure knowledge' – politically innocent and irrelevant to the ruling order. Therefore, the respondents refer to their school-day past as a period that does not need critical reflection or reconsideration. Since the time spent at the school provided them with absolute, irrefutable knowledge, it can easily be integrated in the present. The rationality of the competences and skills acquired there cannot be tainted by political contingences; hence, the acquired abilities serve as an explanation of the current social acceptability of the narrator. The school-day past has relevance to the present-day worthiness and meaningful existence of the respondent.

*"Of course, the others were jealous, but that's normal – we were the best! I hope everybody else (from the other schools – N.G) will forgive me, but it's without a doubt – this was the best school"*(interview recorded on 15.09.2005)

*"We studied a lot, we studied hard... I'm grateful to all my teachers for all the tough time they gave us!"*(interview recorded on 10.10.2005).

After asking one of the respondents, who was complaining of the boring textbooks they had to use, what motivated her to study so hard, slightly annoyed she answered:

*"What do you mean by 'what'? The pure desire to know, to learn! Nothing else! Nothing else!"*(interview recorded on 25.09.2005)

*In a similar vein another respondent, now a teacher, pointed out that the school was open to people with "a Renaissance attitude to knowledge"*(interview recorded on 14.09.2005).

All the respondents treated knowledge (the knowledge the school produced) as an absolute



referent that could compensate for all the contradictions and misdeeds of state socialism. They deemed knowledge ideologically innocent. Therefore, their memories refuse to see (and to make visible) the connection between the school curriculum and the prescriptions of the socialist state. They discount the fact that what this school with limited admittance taught was designed by the state. The curriculum produced loyal citizens of socialist Bulgaria and guaranteed the inculcation of those principles of vision and division which would reinforce the social order. The narrators, however, prefer to ignore the interrelation between power and knowledge. By leaving unheeded the political indebtedness of the acquired knowledge, they can claim recognition and authority in the present.

Inasmuch as all memories (retroactively) restore in the present a kind of lack, the recorded reminiscences about the socialist school commemorate the stable, unified and homogeneous picture of the world that social schooling provided. Praising today the absoluteness and completeness of the knowledge gained in the English School, these narratives manifest longing for universality. What is silenced or forgotten here is the successful 'private' manipulation of this 'universal' knowledge; the narratives leave unheeded the moments when they skillfully made use of the acquired competences to advance their own personal biography.

Similar interplay between the official and the private, between the public and personal can be traced in the image of the teacher the memories construct.

Whenever asked about recollections of impressive teachers, all respondents answered that all their teachers were exceptional.

*"There were no bad teachers... They were all undeniable specialists" (interview recorded on 16.04.2005)*

*"On the whole, all our teachers were unbiased. They did not favour students only because their mother or father might have been an important person... you see, I like you more because your father is whoever*

*and I'll back you regardless of what you know or don't know. There were no such things. On the contrary, they harassed us. If you ask me, studying in this school was constant harassment" (interview recorded on 11.10.2005).*

Another respondent stated:

*"As far as studying was concerned, there were no privileges. They (the teachers – N.G) even bullied more those who came from abroad, whose parents were diplomats or had worked in embassies" (interview recorded on 15.09.2005).*

These comments represent a monolithic, unified image of the teacher as an unquestionable source of knowledge. When I say 'unquestionable', I mean a specific statement of a respondent. Commenting on the difference between the contemporary educational system and her memories from secondary school, she lamented:

*"Back then I would never dare question what the teacher said – be it what they taught or their appearance and clothes. This was inconceivable" (interview recorded on 14.09.2005)*

The quick overview of these comments displays an image of the teacher that totally coincides with the norm, prescribed by the educational institution, for this social role. The teacher is someone who educates and treats in a principled, rational fashion; s/he is supposed to produce equal, loyal, normal individuals. The authority of the teacher originates from the authority of the institution. The closer s/he is to the habitus of the institution, the more perfectly s/he presents the institution itself. S/He is the face of the ratio.

Nevertheless, as the narratives of the alumni unfold, this uncontested image of the teacher begins to disintegrate:

*"Bad teachers couldn't survive for long there... I remember we had a really lousy one. She couldn't survive and quit" (interview recorded on 6.04.2005).*

*"We had a teacher in Literature. She'd come from Varna because her husband was somebody... that kind of thing. Now, to tell*





*you the truth, the first few lessons were a complete disaster, even we could easily sense it. But this didn't stop her from becoming one of the best teachers in her field. Somehow, the whole staff supported and lifted them (the bad teachers – N.G) up and they strove to get better...”(interview recorded on 11.10.2005).*

Apart from the colleagues, other factors that had a stake in ‘lifting up’ and ‘tumbling down’ the teacher’s authority were the unofficial, but clearly visible and audible gestures of the students in the classrooms.

The above-mentioned commentaries on the ‘bad teachers’ present a turning point in the memories from the school – the monolithic image of the teacher starts to stratify and disintegrate. The memories begin to distinguish the teachers, outlining their specific places in the field of the school not only according to their adherence to the educational norm, but also according to their personal life that finds its entrance in the classroom. This is the moment to turn back to the initial part of the paper and to reiterate the argument that although the state viewed the children mainly as social material that had to be engineered and manipulated, in reality the students were an active side in school life. Despite not having legitimate and officially sanctioned resources to represent their claims, they found ways to express their interests, to subvert the dominant rhythm of school life.

Thus, the narratives begin to multiply the homogeneous image of the ideal teacher from Sofia English Language School; they start appraising the teacher and shifting his/her seemingly unquestionable position in the space of the classroom. Surreptitiously the school-day memories begin to construct an image of a teacher, who was not only a face of the institution but also as a person/identity; whose ‘private’, ‘family’ dispositions could obtain a positive or negative ‘public’ sanction. Whenever the respondents mention a particular teacher, they feel obliged to add a few facts about his or her private life. As if these few facts would make the listener ‘sense’ more inten-

sively the teacher’s professional presence in the classroom:

*“Our teacher in Chemistry – Stoeva –she was rumoured to have taken part in the partisan movement. I don't know to what extent it was true but it was part of the legends circulating around the school”(interview recorded on 11.10.2005).*

*“For some time we had a teacher in English who had lived in New York. Her husband was a representative or something in the UN. So she used American spelling. Back then, of course, we had no idea what American spelling, and as good students we began to notice mistakes in the things she wrote on the board. And somebody would say, ‘Oh, but this word is spelt with double L. And she'd say, ‘OK, double L it is’. And then somebody else would look it up in a dictionary and say, ‘Well, but it says here you can spell it with one L, too’. And she went on, ‘Ok, it could be spelt with one L. We didn't consider her a good teacher but at least there was what to remember her with” (interview recorded on 11.10.2005).*

What becomes evident from these classroom memories is that the teacher’s private life also found its outlet in the classroom and the students turned this into an unofficial power stake that allowed them to change the rules of behaviour in class. The ‘non-institutional’ surplus in the habitus of the teacher had the potential to change the distribution of power within the classroom. It could actually become a reason for confirming or contesting the authority of the teacher.

One more example. One of the interviewees had very good memories, and often mentioned the name, of her English B teacher<sup>7</sup> – Mary Antonova. (‘Mary’ is the official name of the teacher and this in itself is a symptom of the extraordinary presence of the teacher in the socialist classroom. ‘Mary’ is not a typical Bulgarian name and sounds unconventional, to say the least, to the Bulgarian ear). As I learned from the respondent, Mary Antonova had lived in the States for quite some time. This ‘otherness’, this, as I said before, ‘non-institutional’

7) ‘English B’ classes were the additional classes in English, which were part of the school curriculum and were supposed to be taught by a native speaker.

surplus of her life (away from the teaching profession) could be felt in the classroom.

*"She was the Anglo-Saxon type. Lean, tall. A pretty woman. And she could create a special atmosphere in class... She was eager to give her best to everybody. When she gave us something to translate in class, she played quiet music from a portable radio. And the music played, and everybody worked. No fidgeting, complete silence... Then, when we understood that she was about to leave the school, we signed a petition and she stayed for one more year. But then she left, or she went to the States. I can't remember"(interview recorded on 22.09.2005).*

The memories can give us plenty of other examples of similar unregulated invasions of the teacher's 'unsupervised', 'uninstitutionalised' private life in the space of the classroom. But only when these undertow streams encompassed all students, only when they turned the cold and sterile atmosphere of the classroom into a warm, intimate community, did the teacher receive the unanimous evaluation 'favourite'. Only after the homogeneous collective of classmates was ludicrously underplayed and the formal role interactions displaced by ones giving vent to personal expression, aspirations and stakes, did the teachers obtain their real authority.

*"We had pretty liberal teachers, well, they were liberal in their teaching approach, not in their personal interactions with us... we had an extremely cool class teacher in preparatory class.<sup>8</sup> I'll never forget how on the very first day at school she came into the classroom wearing a really short skirt. We were lucky, because she won us over with the way she approached us. We became a team because of her...(interview recorded on 19.07.2005)*

What can be stated here as a kind of conclusion, is that if we dare to go beyond the stable and uncritical image that the memories initially present, we will be able to see that the everyday institutional life in the socialist school was organized around the interaction

between various personal interests, stakes and illusions of the students and the teachers. What gave tangibility to that reality was not only the official institutional order. Rather, I'd say that everyday life in Sofia English Language School was constructed around the interaction of various types of relations – the rigid order of disciplinary regime, the 'domesticated' public life (Creed 1998) and the momentary lapses of authentic publicity.

When we try to analyse these interactions deploying the tools of microhistory – the minute, mundane happenings in which the students and teachers communicated – we can see how both sides of these interactions underplayed the rules of the socialist school while simultaneously staying within these rules. The narratives themselves never get over the lasting influence of socialist education. They are a symptom of a desire for stable, unproblematised rational knowledge; respectively, they construct the image of a teacher who would be the face and mediator of this knowledge.

Therefore, the moment when the memories disintegrate the image of the teacher, they are quick to piece it together again. The narratives try to 'forget', to neglect the multiplicity and diversity of the image, as it would contest the stability and rationality of the competences they obtained at school. The past has to remain untainted and protected against any critical reflexivity.

What the narrators would always leave into oblivion is the fact that the skills and competences they acquired at that particular school were skills and competences taught by socialist school.

8) In their first year at the school the students were exposed to intensive studying of English, that's why the first year was called 'preparatory'.

## Profile of the respondents:

gender	Years at the school	Date of recording the interview	Additional information
man	1972-77	16.04.2005	No consent for recording; university lecturer
woman	1950-1955	12.07.2005	retired
woman	1972-1977	19.07.2005	NGO activist
woman	1976-1981	14.09.2005	Teacher of English
man	1975-1980	15.09.2005	businessman
woman	1964-1969	22.09.2005	Family business
woman	1976-1981	11.10.2005	University lecturer
woman	1960-1965	15.10.2005	No consent for recording; university lecturer
woman	1973-1978	21.11.2005	University lecturer
woman	1978-1983	25.11.2005	Teacher of English

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