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## From duty to pleasure in the cookbooks of communist Bulgaria: attitudes to food in the culinary literature for domestic cooking released by the state-run publishers between 1949 and 1989

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines how ideology influenced the home cooking literature in communist Bulgaria. It traces the evolution of discourses related to taste and pleasure from food and cooking in state-published cookbooks between 1949 and 1989. Evaluating the fluctuation through the decades, it argues that “futurism,” to which food was a means to convey political and social agendas, prevailed until the end of the 1970s. Taking pleasure in eating and cooking was only legitimized in the 1980s. The analysis suggests that while Bulgarian cookery literature fully accepted the futurist ideology of the USSR, it made little use of the Soviet “Socialist Realism gastronomy,” which saw food as a source of pleasure and cooking as “excellent respite from work”.

### KEYWORDS

Cookbooks; ideology; cold war; Eastern Europe; communism; Bulgaria; history of food; everyday life; cultural history

When in 1984 violoncello player Peter Saraliev published his *Cookbook for Men*, Sofia had come a long way since the terror of the early communist years and was experiencing the resonance of Soviet Perestroika. The sorrows of the past quite forgotten, Bulgaria had undergone a rocky industrialization and the swelling urban population was living the uneventful, shabby life of state-socialist modernity. One of the pillars of this modernity was meant to be gender equality. Yet Saraliev’s cookbook was the first in the entire history of Bulgaria to target male readership.

In fact, his book broke ground in more ways than one. In the era of nutritionists, it was authored by a hobby-gastronomer (Figure 1). Untypically, it presented cooking as an art and as a source of pleasure. It even rebelliously denounced canteen food, which had been promoted in the country ever since 1944, and stated that cooking was “indeed an art” requiring “a lot of creativity, talent, and imagination” (Saraliev 1984, 5). Indeed, just a few years earlier cookbooks such as his would have been deemed ideologically heretical. Its attitude to food had little to do with the nearly militant nutritionism<sup>1</sup> of the previous decades, which filled cookbooks with chemical formulae, Engels’ views on proteins, and the presentation of home cooking as wasteful, unnecessary, and obsolete.

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**Figure 1.** Petur Saraliev, a professional musician and the author of *A Cookbook for Men* (1984). Press Photo BTA. Photo: Oleg Popov.

This article studies how pleasure from food and cooking was obliterated from the cookbooks of communist Bulgaria and how it later found its way back. More precisely, it investigates the fluctuation of several related elements of communist food ideology: the discouragement of home cooking; the efforts to transform cooking into a professional, scientific occupation; the dominance of nutritionism; and the legitimacy of indulgence in food and cooking. The evolution of these discourses is analyzed chronologically, offering the first extensive and systematic study of Bulgarian culinary literature from the period.

The article continues with a literature review and a description of the sources and methods, clarifying the choice of material and its division into periods. Further, it follows the development of the discourses in the communist cookbooks within four timeframes. The final section summarizes the entire development and analyzes it against existing research on Soviet culinary literature.

Cookbooks reflect “the structure of domestic ideologies,” argued Apadurai (1988, 3). During the twentieth century, when a series of social engineering projects took place across the world, cookbooks were utilized to carry out social and political agendas in the domestic sphere. Notaker (2008) studied their use in Germany under Hitler, and their utilization in communist Cuba was investigated by Fleites-Lear (2012) and Garth (2014). My work builds on recent research of the culinary literature of the USSR: on Gronow and Zhuravlev’s (2011) analysis of Soviet culinary literature, which identified in the seminal *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* efforts to create “Soviet Haute Cuisine”; on Piretti’s (2012, 80) discussion of the same book as an instrument of Stalin’s policy of “cultural deceit” used to reinforce the perception of Soviet life as joyous; on Geist (2012, 296), who in the same vein argued that, in aestheticizing reality, the book represented an “exceptional example of Socialist realism.” I made use of Rothstein and Rothstein’s (1997) classification of Soviet cookbooks into “futurist” and “traditionalist” and of Geist’s (2012) idea of “socialist realism gastronomy.”

The article also draws on the existing research on daily life under communism. It builds on Oldenziel and Zachman’s (2009, 3) conceptualization of the kitchen as a crossing-point of “the state, the market, and the family” and a heated arena of contestation during the cold war. My analysis supports the findings of researchers like Crowley and Reid (2010; Reid 2016) and Bren and Neuburger (2012) who studied the changes in consumer tastes under and after Khrushchev, noting that the increased attention to consumption did not, in fact, mean liberalization of consumption. It also confirms and broadens the studies of Mineva (2003) and Elenkov (2011, 2015) concerning the attempts at introducing “controlled” consumerism in Bulgaria.

The central sources for this study are the commercial cookbooks<sup>2</sup> for domestic use, published by the state-run publishing houses in Bulgaria between 1949 and 1989. Cookbooks from the 1920s and 1930s were also used to add historical perspective. The article is based on an overview of all the cookbooks throughout the period and an in-depth analysis of the cookbooks with the greatest number of printed copies. Also, trend-breaking titles with smaller print runs were studied.

The material has been divided into four periods. The first starts in 1949 when book publishing in Bulgaria was monopolized by state-owned publishers and ends in 1956 when Stalinist-style rule was abandoned and Todor Zhivkov took over leadership of the communist party and the state. The second period between 1956 and 1968 is marked by communist entrepreneurship and timid liberalization. The third timeframe, between 1968 and 1980, is one of stagnation following the Prague Spring. The years after 1980 are treated as a separate period marked by the state gradually abandoning attempts to control domestic life with the arrival of *perestroika*.

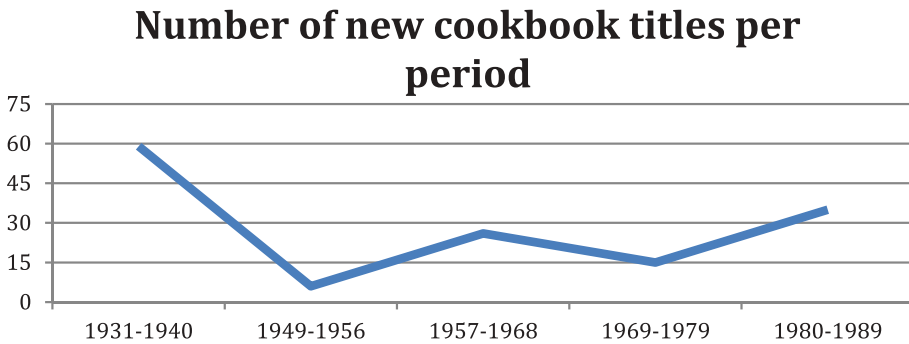
To analyze the sources, I applied close reading within Barbara Wheaton’s structured approach to studying cookbooks as historical sources.<sup>3</sup> It suggests a set of perspectives from which to extract historical information: analysis of the foodstuffs, equipment, and cooking techniques used; the concept of a meal; the self-perception of the author; the intended role of the cookbook. I broadened it by analyzing the projected readership.

## 1949–56

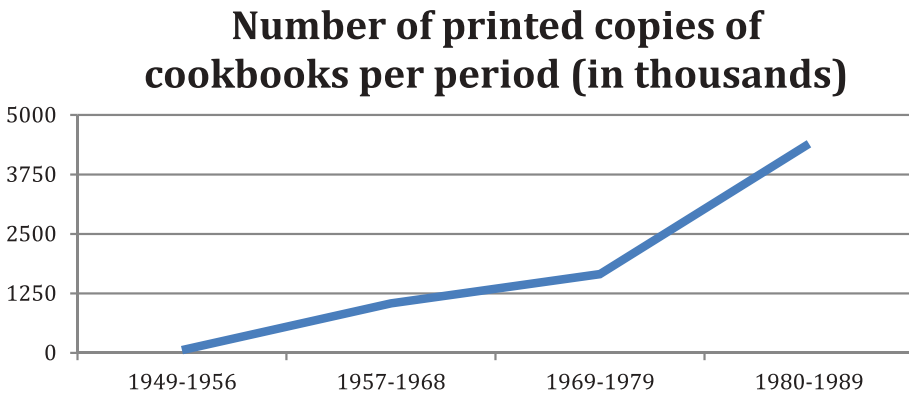
After a few transitional years since coming to power in 1944, in 1948 Bulgaria's communist government established a state monopoly over the publication of books (Deyanova 2005, 2) and the state assumed all publishing activities.

In the first seven years a total of six books dedicated to domestic cooking was released, which represented a tenfold drop from the sixty-two books published in the 1930s. A trend to publish a few titles in large numbers of copies was set, which was retained throughout the years of communist rule (Fig 2 and 3).

In the first period, three of the six published books were authored or co-authored by Penka Cholcheva, a prolific author from the pre-war period. Her husband owned a popular women's magazine before 1948 and later cooperated in the publication of the state women's magazine *Zhenata Dnes*, as did Cholcheva. Her recipes stood out as simple and generic even before the communist regime and were further simplified to adapt to the ascetic spirit of the post-war period.



**Figure 2.** The number of published titles (cookbooks for home cooking) per period available in the National Library in Sofia.



**Figure 3.** The total number of printed copies of cookbooks per period according to the National Library catalog (the table contains only the period of communism, when the print runs were indicated in the books).

In 1955 and 1956 the first cookery compendiums, which later became considered typical of the period, appeared. These were *Our Cuisine* (Naydenov and Chortanova, 1955) and *Housewife's Book* (Cholcheva and Ruseva 1956). Each of them was reprinted six times within the following decade.

These state-published cookbooks already embodied “domestic ideology” identical to that of the Soviet “futurist” cookbooks (as defined by Rothstein and Rothstein [1997] and Geist [2012]). This cookery literature’s discourses, which were directly or indirectly related to the legitimacy of indulgence in food and cooking, were (1) framing home cooking as an undesirable activity; (2) placing a strong emphasis on nutrition; (3) intending to professionalize home cooking, pushing it into near-industrial efficiency; (4) subordinating the value of taste to (and limiting its functions within) nutritionist goals.

The intention to reduce women’s work at home was an early goal of the new communist government in Bulgaria, which, subscribing to Lenin’s and Stalin’s teachings (Schuster 1971, 262), saw women as an army of workers. Replicating the practices in the USSR after 1917, the new Bulgarian leadership planned to replace home cooking with public, industrial alternatives. It pressed for the immediate creation of a widespread network of state canteens. Thus a new theme was introduced in the cookery literature of Bulgaria. Cookbooks began promoting canteen food and depicting home cooking as an inferior practice.

“From the point of view of hygiene, public nutrition of the working people is the best,” read the first sentence of Bulev’s *Hygiene of Home Food Preparation* (1951, 3). The author emphasized that, based on scientific grounds, “it provides for the most correct production, preservation, and processing of foodstuffs.”

While hygiene was an element of the general move for modernization of Bulgarian society in the early twentieth century, Bulev’s book showed how it was to be integrated to serve the goals of the new state: as an argument for abandoning or reducing the “tiresome and with low efficiency” home cooking in order to free human resources for the state economy. The liberation of women from this daily chore “allows them to participate actively in production, in scientific work, and in the execution of the state economy plan” (Bulev 1951, 3).

A few years later the first communist cookery manual *Our Cuisine* repeated the idea (Naydenov and Chortanova 1955, 11). Depicting public catering and employment in industry as freedom, the authors also suggested that home cooking was wasteful and that canteens would therefore prevent “a significant waste of money.” Professional and domestic cooking were seen in direct opposition: the one modern, the other old-fashioned; the first efficient, and the second risky, often detrimental.

Another trend developed to discuss home cooking as an instrumental activity aiming above all at supplying needed calories in an efficient way to the nation of workers. The trend to educate home cooks on nutrition issues occurred across Europe and the USA (Scholliers 2013, 18, Dantec-Lowry 2008, 108) was echoed in Bulgaria at the turn of the twentieth century. *Food of the Future* by R.H. Hweldon was translated and, while promoting the principles of vegetarianism, it spoke of biochemistry and of the basics of nutrition (Hweldon 1914). In the 1930s cookbooks addressing a broader readership also included such information (Kassurova and Dimchevska 1933; Hristova 1937). But the nutritionist approach to food in the 1930s was rivaled by a more hedonistic one:

home cooking was also seen as entertainment. In 1934, the women's magazine *Ikonomia i domakinstvo* published the cookbook *Favorite Recipes of Movie Stars* (Peykova 1934). Many cookbooks featured colorful, international cuisine and implied that food ought to be seen also as a duty to pleasure.

This second trend was silenced with the establishment of the state monopoly over book printing. The communist cookbooks embraced nutrition as a single doctrine and it became another aspect of the argument to cook less at home.

In both *Our Cuisine* (1955) and *Housewife's Book* (1956), extensive chapters on the nutritive qualities of food preceded the recipes, outweighing in size the sections with general instructions on cooking techniques. *Our Cuisine*, where the ratio between the two was 105 pages to eight pages, opened with a chapter on "The Connection between Nutrition, Health, and Work Efficiency." It began with a graphic description of the human body shedding cells from the epidermis, hair, fat, from the slimy coating of the intestines and the urinary tract, and so on.

*Housewife's Book* (1956) similarly stressed the importance of nutrition to work performance. Taste was briefly touched upon as the authors noted its importance for the maintenance of good metabolism and they then proceeded further to discuss biochemistry.

The early communist cookbooks featured the first signs of what later became a prominent trend toward professionalization of home cooking. The cookbooks were taken from the hands of home cooks and practitioners and entrusted to scientists and theorists. Of all the authors of cookbooks before 1944, only two continued to publish: the above-mentioned Cholcheva, and Sonya Chortanova, who prior to 1944 published a textbook for professional schools (Chortanova and Nikolova, 1942). All the other authors until well into the 1980s were nutritionists and dietitians with scientific titles or professional food technologists.

Another way to introduce professionalism in domestic cooking was the publication of cookbooks addressing both groups of users. The earliest example is *Our Cuisine* (Naydenov and Chortanova 1955), which two years earlier was published as a *Manual for Public Catering* (1953). Even though also addressing home cooks, the later editions retained features of professional cooking literature: quantities were indicated per one portion, techniques and equipment were irrelevant to home cooking.

Also, the emphasis on "home cooking on sound scientific grounds" and the goal to make it fast and efficient resounded in most cookbooks (Cholcheva 1949; Naydenov and Chortanova 1955, 1967, 1971; Cholcheva and Ruseva 1956).

The nutritionist agenda served well the idea of reducing the investment of human resources in home cooking because their priorities overlapped. The strong blend of the two ideologies sidelined not only the notion of food as pleasure or entertainment but also any concern with its taste. In the hierarchies outlined by the cookbook's structure and content, taste was assigned a subordinate function. It was important only inasmuch as it improved digestion. While its biological function was briefly acknowledged, its emotional, cultural, or any other values were entirely ignored.

Cholcheva (1949) mentioned the prioritized goals of food as "healthy, nutritious and tasty," with "tasty" arriving only at the end. Bulev's writing laid out the idea of Pavlov, which would resound through the coming decades: that taste is in service of digestion.

He even concluded that “the good preparation of food could be rightfully called pre-digestion of food” (Bulev 1951, 7).

The role assigned to taste fits well the broader concept of utopian modernism as it was fantasized by the ideological leaders of the communist bloc. The entire society was seen as a (biological) machine employed to realize an ideological mission. In it, the family was a “cell” of the society, and the woman was a “lever” in that cell (*Housewife’s Book* 1956, 18, quoting communist leader Georgi Dimitrov).

Thus in this first period the main elements of the dominant ideology from the period took shape. On the level of the explicit ideological messages, home cooking was framed as potentially detrimental and a waste of time. Cooking began to be directed toward rationalization and the application of professional models. The recipes and the appearance of the food, in general, corresponded in spirit to theories of nutritionism. Taste was only discussed as playing a role in digestion.

## 1957–68

The death of Stalin is often considered a threshold between a more austere social order and the relatively more relaxed “late communist” times, which paid greater attention to the consumer. Although it is arguable that the transition was that sudden (see Gronow 2003; Stanoeva 2015, for earlier examples of concern for consumers in the USSR and Bulgaria), there is an agreement among scientists that at the end of the 1950s the European communist societies became “mass consumer societies” (Crowley and Reid 2010, 11).

In Bulgaria, 1956 was a threshold year in which Todor Zhivkov took over the leadership. His arrival was transformative for the communist state, which at some extent shifted its focus from ideology to economy (some post-socialist interpretations define this shift as a transition from violating to bribing the masses [Znepolski 2008, 221–250]).

The shift in this context visibly affected the cooking literature in Bulgaria. The ways in which it did so, though, showed the limits of the “thaw” and its controversial nature. On the one hand, more new titles appeared in which frugality gave way to claims of relative affluence. Indeed a “gradual redefinition of luxury,” of which Crowley and Reid (2010, 11) spoke, could be found in their orientation. The discourses from the previous period, however, were also reconfirmed.

What seems to be the first sign of the “thaw” was the publication of six new titles in 1958; this was one more than in all the preceding seven years together. The year 1968 saw the publication of four new cookbooks, two of which were translated and all of which were for non-essentials: cocktails, alcohol and soft drinks, fruits and longevity. Also, the first book since 1940 on home-made desserts in Bulgaria was published. Still, the diversity of the culinary literature remained incomparable with the pre-war decades.

The presentation of home cooking as an undesirable activity persisted in the later editions of *Our Cuisine* and *Housewife’s Cookbook* and was reinforced by new releases. Tashev’s *How to Feed Ourselves Correctly* (1961, 4) insisted that a gradual transition from individual, familial practices to collective, public nutrition was taking place in “many collectives in the socialist countries.” The preface of Sotirov’s *Contemporary Cuisine* glorified the “harmoniously developed Bulgarian society,” describing home



cooking as already redundant—perhaps not entirely lost, but transformed by industrialization. Home meals were still cooked “once a week,” stated the author, and the “rich assortment of semi-prepared foods” reduced the housewife’s obligations “to only perfecting convenience food into culinary dishes” (Sotirov 1959, 1).

However, this depiction was too far from reality and at the end of this same period the advice to women to reduce time spent on home-cooking was modified. The household encyclopedia *Book for Every Day and for Every Home* presented home cooking not as unnecessary or undesirable; rather, it discussed it as unavoidable: “The contemporary woman obtained the right to participate in the building of a new life on equal grounds, but this undoubted achievement did not relieve her from her domestic obligations” (Cholcheva, Angelova, and Kalenderova 1967, 34).

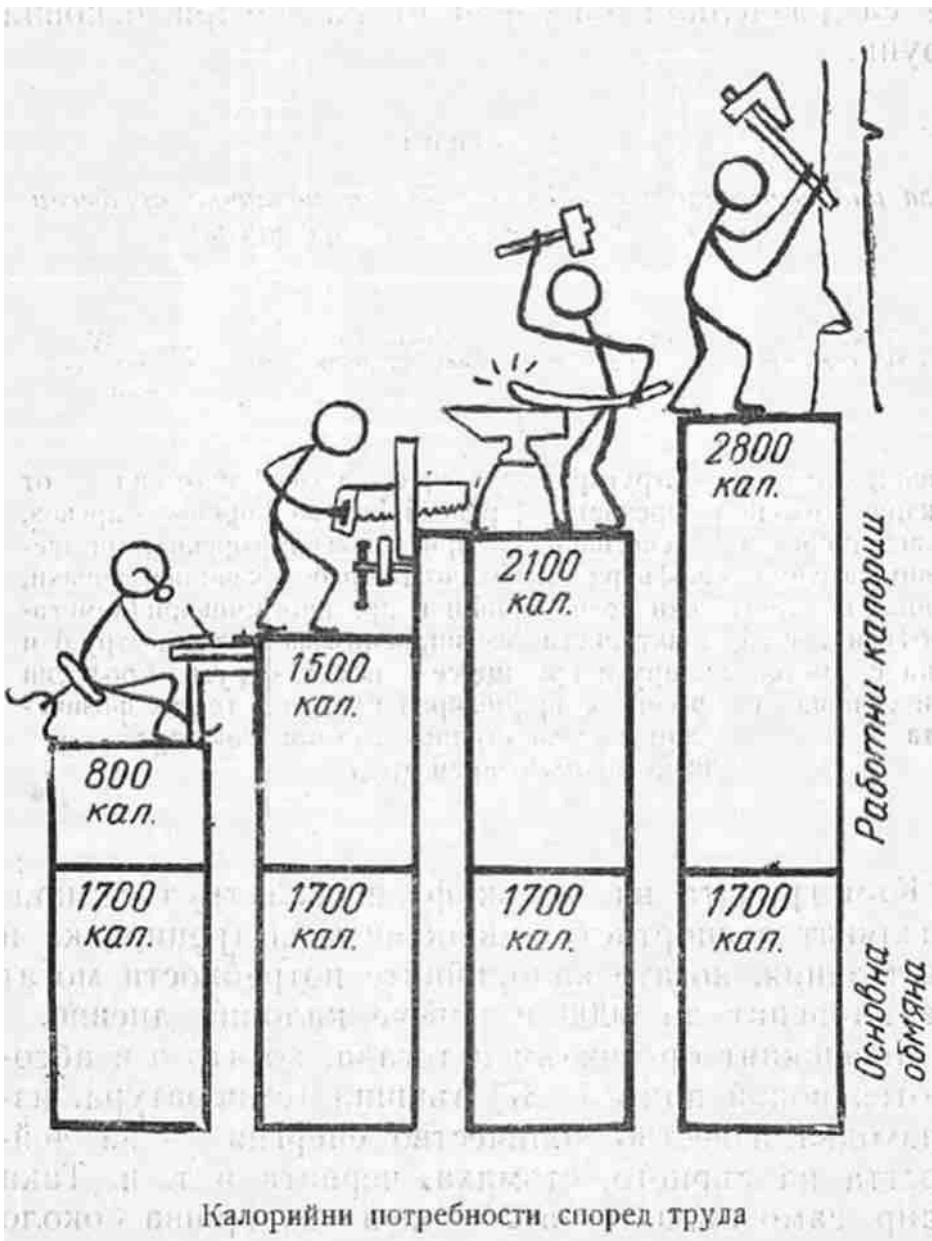
The monopoly of nutritionism throughout these years was well preserved. Communist nutrition science was seemingly engaged in developing a range of models for calorie intake adapted to different age groups and sexes and different types of work performed (Figure 4).

The most far-going was *Our Cuisine* (Naydenov and Chortanova 1967), which in its newer edition spoke not only of the labor efficiency of the population but also of its combat potential. “The good nutrition of the population increases its power, work efficiency and combat ability,” reads *Our Cuisine* (4). That the cold war had not lost its grip is further visible in the statement that good nutrition is “only possible in a socialist society.”

As many cookbook prefaces suggested, the authors of the period faced a major dilemma: if the reader was told that home cooking was unnecessary, what was the reason for publishing the cookbook she held in her hands; and as the communist world moved toward public catering, why did the home cook need cookbooks? In the 1960s two discourses were used to bridge the gap. One of them consisted in depicting home cooking as a service to society. It was verbalized in Cholcheva’s *Contemporary Cookbook* (1964, 8), which stated that “in the socialist society . . . good cuisine is no longer a question of luxury or a whim,” but a matter of “public necessity.” This line was based on the long-cast image of female communists as “housekeepers of the revolution” who were to extend their housewifely practices of thrift and vigilance to the service of the state (Wood 1997; Reid 2016).

The other tactic was to profile home cooking as a professional, almost scientific occupation, as yet another embodiment of modern women’s education. “The contemporary woman has many obligations. Therefore, she needs great skill to overcome any possible difficulties in their fulfillment. Here women’s ability to combine diligence with a system in her work is of importance,” advised the influential women’s magazine *Zhenata Dnes* (Vasilev 1966). Many cookbooks reiterated the idea (Cholcheva, Angelova, and Kalenderova 1967; Kanturski 1968 among others).

Throughout the 1960 these two discourses developed and expanded, and seemed to have smoothed out the contradictions. They also opened the way to the rehabilitation of indulgence in food, and in particular in home cooking. The change not only helped out the cookbook authors. It also served to build a new, communist-style consumption—a purpose that the communist state identified in the 1960s as a way to strengthen its economic system.



**Figure 4.** A drawing from “How to Feed Ourselves Correctly” by Prof. Tasho Tashev, published in 1961, shows the different daily caloric needs according to different types of work. The calories are divided into two parts: those serving the “basic metabolism” and “working calories,” which are needed to perform activities (Tashev 1961).

The ideal woman image, which was earlier centered on the triangle “competent housewife, good mother, high-performing worker,” in the 1960s was broadened with the expectation of the ideal woman being a correct, responsible consumer, who craftily employed the benefits of her education and expertly navigated the bounty resulting from her country’s industrialization.

In essence, it was an urban modification of the traditional peasantry's life model where work on the farm or field was replaced by work in the state economy. As further confirmation of Buck-Morss's (2002, 7) argument that the capitalist and communist world were after all chasing the same utopia, the ideological frame very much resembled that observed in the USA at the turn of the twentieth century. There, many affluent households had to let go of servants and women had to find a way to cope on their own within their limited amount of time. This produced a similar ideal in which households borrowed principles of organization and efficiency from the food industry (Dantec-Lowry 2008).

While the new developments sanctioned enjoyment in home cooking, initially most authors kept their distance. Nevertheless, cookbooks featuring luxurious ingredients (Sotirov 1959) or dedicated to non-essentials appeared, and even if their approach was to accentuate nutrition and never to acknowledge the pleasures of eating or cooking, their very subject legitimized their readers' interest in home cooking of things other than basic necessities. Perhaps the best example in this direction was *Home Preparation of Desserts* by the German author Enderline (1968), which was the first cookbook specifically dedicated to desserts since 1940.

The preface to Enderlein's book, written on behalf of the Publishing House for the Woman, presented preparing desserts at home as essentially unnecessary, but enjoyable. It rendered the choice in the shop as "enormous," but stated that nevertheless "most women are always interested in recipes for home-desserts preparation as this gives them joy" (Enderline 1968, 5) (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** The covers of the last pastry cookbook from the pro-communist period (Marinov 1940) and the first from the state publishing houses under communism (Enderline 1968).

While Enderlein's book was published in only 20,000 copies and had little to do with the festive spirit of Marinov's pre-war *Pastry and Cookery Manual* (1940), the early idea of a communist consumer can be identified in it: trying to both allow a certain indulgence and keep it under control. The attempts to educate communist consumers, to allow modest, "correct" indulgence, which were noted by researchers like Mineva (2003), Elenkov (2011), and Stanoeva (2015), found their way also into other cookbooks. Briefly describing the historical Bulgarian cuisine, Cholcheva for example somewhat confusedly wrote that it was characterized by "healthy, reasonably selected quality food, sometimes excessive, but never too much, not fantastical, like some other people's" (Cholcheva 1964, 19).

Thus, the second period saw a reassertion of the discourses from the first period, but also some modifications. Nutritionist agendas remained dominant. The idea of home cooking was sometimes presented as dying out but increasingly was seen as unavoidable. Women were required to be efficient. The thaw was most of all visible in the early, isolated moves to legitimize pleasure in food and cooking, which were often mixed with contrasting messages appealing to restraint and presenting home cooking as a duty.

## 1969–79

The Prague Spring of 1968 brought an end to the relative opening towards the West of many Eastern European countries, Bulgaria included. Some high-profile ventures trading internationally and serving the budding consumer market were abruptly stopped by Zhivkov and the 1970s are remembered as a period of renewed isolationism. Those developments affected the cookery literature. They did not stop the cultural opening of Bulgarian cuisine, but seemingly prolonged the life of the earlier ideological messages and temporarily blocked the way of consumer (and indulgence-) -oriented perspectives.

In this period the number of new titles dropped sharply—from twenty-seven cookbooks between 1957 and 1968 to fifteen between 1969 and 1979. Despite the general reverse turn, some of the new cookbooks manifested explicit interest in the internationalization of home cooking.

In the 1970s, many cookbooks abandoned the idea of the replacement of home cooking by public catering. In some ways though, the notion returned and was even developed further. The authors of *Our and World Cuisine and Rational Nutrition* (Chortatnova and Dzhelepov 1977, 49) admitted that private cooking is "still dominant," but pointed that it "gradually gives way to organized public catering." Discussing home cooking as an outdated practice whose demise is merely a matter of time, and good riddance, they also blamed those practicing it for toying with the economic future and the biological survival of the nation: "In home cooking each family solves the issues related to it separately and the errors (over- or under-eating) affect the health, the labor abilities, and the longevity of the family members" (ibid).

Another modification of the idea was offered by *Bulgarian National Cuisine* (Petrov et al. 1978, 6). The authors presented the retirement of home cooking as "doubtless and inevitable," stating that this process is beyond human control.

The 1970s marked the peak of nutritionism in Bulgaria, which in this decade was literally raging on the cookbook pages. All the volumes opened with extensive chapters on nutrition filled with tables, charts, and chemical formulae. The movement of bowels,

the rhythm of activity of digestive glands, and similar biological information was added to the detailed biochemistry lessons. Bulgarian housewives were briefed on Friedrich Engels' views about proteins expressed in his *Dialectics of Nature* (Engels 1934): "Life is the mode of action of proteins" (Naydenov and Chortanova 1971, 6). Anything from canning to refreshing drinks was described in chemical terms and *Hunters and Fishermen's Cuisine* (Yordanov and Chortanova 1976) started with a discussion of the nutrition problems of the planet. In many cookbooks the targeted food was defined as "correct" (Hadzhiyski et al. 1976; Tsoleva and Stoilova 1978), implying again the danger of errors lurking in domestic cooking.

Also the efforts to "professionalize" home cooking were taken further. The idea of modernity remained linked to scientific progress that was understood as constant rationalization, including the use of domestic foodways. The housewife was taught to cook "rationally," to use tables of nutrients, calories, and temperature. The goals of the domestic cook, limited to obtaining "strong, nutritious bullion," or to preserving "the valuable nutrients in foodstuffs," were to be achieved via sets of "rules" (Cholcheva and Kalaydzhieva 1972). Housewives were addressed in technical language: the foodstuffs were to be "treated," subjected to "manipulations," cooking was an "operation." Simple instructions to take stones out of cherries were written in a dry scientific style: "The intention during food preservation is to remove the unusable ballast components prior to and not in the course of consumption" (Hadzhiyski et al. 1976).

To be up to date, the modern woman had to know how to rationally prioritize and approach her tasks—only then she could make the best out of the egalitarian communist society which she now could enjoy. "The diverse interests of our women, and their participation in all spheres of public life, demand correct distribution of time and labor in the household" argued Chortanova and Dzhelepov (1977, 51). They promoted the use of the (rare on the market) convenience food with the argument that its preparation did not require "special knowledge."

The 1970s marked a regression regarding the legitimacy of enjoying food and/or cooking. That some polemics have marred the field becomes clear from the foreword of *Bulgarian National Cuisine* (Petrov et al. 1978, 5): "Some people think that discussing food is like writing fiction," wrote the authors argumentatively, pointing their criticism at the possibility of "idolizing this physiological activity." On the one hand, taste seemed to remain of marginal concern to the authors of the cooking advice. Naydenov and Chortanova (1971, 5) republished their list of priorities, assigning taste last place. The interpretation of Cholcheva and Kalaydzhieva (1972, 10) was similar.

One could expect that a book like *Hunters and Fishermen's Cuisine* (Yordanov and Chortanova 1976) would offer some credit to hunting and fishing as indulgences of life, if not for the rare qualities of game-meat dishes. However, it focused on killing methods and on diseases carried by wild animals. *The Refreshing Drinks in Our Household* (Belorechki and Dzhelepov 1973), dedicated to stimulating and refreshing drinks, proceeded to discuss them for 148 pages almost without mentioning their taste.

Nevertheless some other cookbooks from the period implied a drive for greater sophistication and (ostentatious) affluence. The instructions on how to meet guests expanded. Menus, previously discussed in terms of possible dietary requirements of

the guests, now switched to the incorporation of unavailable-on-the-market ingredients for use in lavish meals meant to impress (Naydenov and Chortanova 1973).<sup>4</sup>

The internationalization of the cookbooks went in the same direction (Cholcheva and Kalaydzhieva 1972; Chortatnova and Dzhelepov 1977). It is difficult to judge whether the introduction of sections of foreign recipes was driven by the presupposed interest of the reader, or by the desire to demonstrate a cosmopolitan spirit (some later developments suggest that the second is more probable). The shift stands out clearly in the later editions of *Book for Every Day, for Every Home* (Cholcheva, Angelova, and Kalenderova 1977), where the section on leisure food<sup>5</sup> is expanded by fifty percent and titles engaging the reader in dialog are included: “Can we cook?,” “Do you like French specialties?,” etc.

Thus, the 1970s reinforced the early ideological messages in the cookbooks, with some modifications. The end of home cooking was now less discussed, but the idea evolved: it was depicted as not so much undesirable as unavoidable. Nutritionism and the efforts to professionalize home cooking increased. The importance attributed to taste was reduced compared with the 1960s. One development that quite contradicted the isolationism of the decade or perhaps heralded its end was the growing attention to foreign cuisines.

## 1980–84

The last decade of the communist regime started with the fear of potential internal political discontent over the contrast between the people’s expectations and financial possibilities and the availability of goods on the market (Ivanov 2011, 250). Fearing that the unrest in Poland might spread into Bulgaria, the political establishment finally adopted the internal market as a priority. It stopped exporting deficit goods, thus deepening the financial problems of the state. While in the USSR Gorbachov announced perestroika, researchers argue that in Bulgaria the attitude toward consumption remained “ambivalent” (Dichev 2003, 43; Ivanov 2011, 251). Some consumer practices were considered ideologically correct, but others were dismissed as remnants of the bourgeois past. “The ritual worship of the ideological gods, in which nobody anymore believed, continued until 1989,” stated Ivanov (2011, 253).

Still, the cookbooks demonstrate shifts in the ideological discourses, most pronounced after 1984. The first material evidence was the boom in both variation and volume of culinary literature which in the period 1980–89 reached thirty-three titles, and cookbooks were printed and reprinted to an impressive total of 4,395,000 copies.

By the 1980s the predictions of home cooking’s extinction were silenced. An eloquent example of the turn was offered in *Advice for Women* (Simonides 1980, 49), translated from Czech. The author used the reframed concept of home cooking as a skilled activity to openly denounce the idea of its forthcoming end: he stated that the kitchen “not only hasn’t lost its importance but on the contrary, due to fast modernization it has become an important working place.”

Even more radical was the explicit denunciation of the public nutrition system visible in the already quoted example of *Cookbook for Men* (Saraliev 1984). No previous cookbook went as far as this in questioning the value of the ideological top priority in food by the communist regime ever since it came to power.

Another important change was that the 1980s marked the end of the monopoly of nutritionism. While it remained leading in some of the cookbooks, others dismissed it openly. Nutrition values and qualities of food are “a matter of concern to science, therefore we will only say that one needs to eat everything with which nature has blessed our land; of course, one should do that in a moderate and balanced way,” stated Saraliev (1984, 7).

Even frontrunners of nutritionism like Chortatnova and Dzhelepov (1983, 3) published a direct disclaimer: “It is not possible for every citizen to know in detail the chemical content of the various foodstuffs and to calculate what quantity to consume daily.”

The first title of the decade, *The Art of Cooking* (Smolnitska 1980), came as the last example of the old trend to treat domestic kitchens as scientific labs. Despite featuring the mostly ignored *art* in the title, the volume resembled a technical reference book. “Food preparation is a complex production process directed by firm rules,” stated the foreword. “It runs in three distinctive phases: preparation of cooking, actual cooking and finishing works” (1980, 5). The dishes were defragmented into elements that were subjected to complex classification and arranged in different chapters.

However, another manner of efficiency was also promoted during this period. Efficiency and skills were now seen more as instrumental in making the house “smell lovely of roasted meat” in no time and for the path of love through the stomach to stay open (Simonides 1980). The household was not only interpreted as a unit, subordinated to the communist society and state: it was treated as a participant of certain influence in the state economy (Miladinov 1982, 9)

Some authors even dismissed the idea of saving time altogether. Volf shamed those housewives who, “to save time, chose dishes that could be cooked hastily,” obstructing in this way the modernization of the national (Czech) cuisine. Such practice, he stated, is a remnant “from the war years,” when the circumstances were different (Vlahova 1982, 5, foreword by Prof. dr. Volf).

In the 1980s pleasure from cooking was finally legitimized and rivaled the nutritionist doctrine. “This book contains imposing dishes . . . where mostly for technological reasons it is sometimes impossible to satisfy entirely the requirements of healthy food,” articulated *The Gourmand’s Kitchen* (Fialova 1984, 5). Cookbooks called women to be more daring and to “experiment, combine and improvise” (Zareva 1988), to be adventurous (Vlahova 1982, 5).

The language too was transformed. Words like “art” and “gourmand” appeared in the titles and the formulae and technical terms gave way to casual speech. Home cooking was no longer “a set of complex rules” (Smolnitska 1980); it became “little secrets” (Zareva 1988). Also, the concept of authorship returned, and photos of authors appeared on the covers (Ilieva 1983).

A clear trend was the increased focus on festive cooking, even if the approach to it remained a “soup of signs” (Fleites-Lear 2012) just like that to gender equality and pleasure in food. The interpretation of repasts as a matter of duty that emerged in the previous decades was now mixed with encouragement for indulgence. This indulgence, though, kept bypassing the cook him/herself. The pleasure of the guests was of prime concern and the host’s emotional experience was ignored.

The first cookbook dedicated to festive cooking, *Culinary Spectrum* (Ilieva 1983), offered a sequence of elaborate menus, constructed for the celebration of particular occasions such as Labor Day, Communist Victory Day, and family anniversaries. It also contained a section with menus for foreign guests of different nationalities. This type of culinary advice was unique under communism when any contacts across the Iron Curtain were monitored by the secret services. The book implied that when meeting foreign guests, the housewife was responsible to please them, “so that they would remember with pleasure your home and Bulgarians’ hospitality” (1983, 190).

Thus, the 1980s fundamentally transformed all the main elements of communist food ideology even if leaving inconsistencies behind. The promotion of the public nutrition system died out and taste regained importance, competing with nutritionism. The change made way for more sensual and culturally (as opposed to physically) centered perspectives on food and home cooking.

The researched material presented in this article suggests that the discourses on food and cooking in Bulgaria were in constant evolution throughout the decades of communist rule. They were formed in the early 1950s, quite resembling the “futurist” cookbooks as described by researchers of cookbooks of the USSR: treating food as a means to pursue political and social goals of the new state (Rothstein and Rothstein 1997, 184; Geist 2012, 300). While in the late 1950s and in the 1960s certain amendments were made to bring food ideology closer to reality and certain cracks appeared in the line, treating home cooking as a public service, the political stagnation following the Prague revolution of 1968 to a great extent closed these openings. The 1970s saw further broadening of the main “futurist” discourses and these only retreated in the 1980s, making way for the legitimization of home cooking as a source of pleasure.

While Bulgaria was one of the most loyal followers of the USSR’s ideology within the communist bloc, comparing this material with the research on cookery literature in Soviet Russia brings to attention important differences. Researching the 1930s, scholars have established that the “futurist” cookery literature of Soviet Russia coexisted with what they called “traditionalist” cookbooks: adaptations of pre-Soviet Russian cooking advice (Rothstein and Rothstein 1997, 184; Geist 2012, 300). However, by the mid-1930s the state concentrated publication activities in its own hands and put an end to “traditionalism.” Bulgaria, which only joined the bloc at the end of the 1940s, missed this phase entirely.

Another important development in the USSR was the publication in 1939 of *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food*. Created by the controversial founding father of the Soviet food industry Mikoyan, it intended to build a utopian image of a wealthy USSR where people joyfully make use at home of an excellent modern food industry. Geist (2012, 301) defined it as an example of Socialist realism: a juxtaposition of futurism, which “celebrated food and cooking for their own sake.” The book was republished many times and in many copies, becoming the generic “communist,” “Soviet” cookbook. Researchers, though, have emphasized its incidental character (Glushchenko 2010). Pointing to the unique role of Mikoyan, based on a combination of curiosity, ambition, and influence, Geist (2012) argued that the appearance of *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* created a precedent for the Soviet era. Gronow and Zhuravlev (2011, 40) also pointed out the controversies that the book provoked amidst the growing influence of nutritionism in USSR, and which reached a peak in the 1970s. The power



of precedent kept the book in republication and made it the Soviet cookery bible within Russia and possibly the USSR.

If there was a Bulgarian cookbook that came anywhere close to *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food*, it was Sotirov's *Contemporary Cuisine* (1959). Just like the Soviet culinary bible, it tried to introduce haute cuisine. In just the same way it featured recipes with ingredients unheard of in the communist markets. It was even the second Bulgarian cookbook to borrow illustrations from *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* (without indicating the source).

However, these similarities underscore some contrasts between the Soviet and Bulgarian culinary literature of the period. If the unavailable products in Mikoyan's haute cuisine were those that his ideal communist food industry was meant to produce, Sotirov's were the ingredients which the rich class of Bulgarians had enjoyed in the past and that were lost under communism (such as game, truffles, foie gras, wine from Bordeaux or Madeira, asparagus, gnocchi, curry, and capers to name just a few). If Mikoyan's book constructed Soviet haute cuisine (Gronow and Zhuravlev 2011, 45), the haute cuisine of Sotirov was borrowed from France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and other inaccessible places. This fundamental difference provided for the opposite effect: instead of glorifying the fictional bountiful life in the communist state as Mikoyan's book did, *Contemporary Cuisine* highlighted the glory of pre-communist times and of non-communist lands.

Also, visually the two cookbooks seem to have left entirely contrasting impressions. The original Soviet illustrations were copied in *Contemporary Cuisine* (1959), often sized down to half a page, turned into black and white or half discolored by the poor print. They were also mixed with locally made photography, which lacked the stylized vision of the Soviet originals. Their connection to any recipe is not certain—they were placed like ambient illustrations among unrelated pieces of culinary advice, which in turn was crammed on the pages without visible concern for esthetic effect or readability. While the *Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* is described by Gronow and Zhuravlev (2011, 38) as offering “an unprecedented degree of luxury” in style, Sotirov's cookbook (1959) offered an illustration of the design and printing impotence of the Bulgarian communist state.

We can only guess today whether *Contemporary Cuisine* aimed at imitating/repeating the formula of *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food*, or whether it borrowed the illustrations to strengthen its position regarding possible censorship, as its content—with its featured impossible “bourgeois” luxury—clearly stood in contradiction to the popular postwar approach of denouncing anything related to the wealthy urban classes of the past as well as to the monarchy.

In any case, Sotirov's book remained an exception of limited importance. It lacked some aspects of the *Book of Tasty and Healthy Food*: its potential to amend the ideology while still keeping it up, its presentation, and, indeed, its power over people's imagination. Its author also lacked the influence of Mikoyan. The cookbook's life continued for one decade and never reached the seminal status of the *Book of Tasty and Healthy Food*. Most importantly, aside from the controversies, both the preface and the recipes in Sotirov's cookbook discouraged home cooking rather than turning it into an object of daydreaming or framing it as a source of pleasure and respite.

Building on the conclusions of researchers who studied the culinary literature of the USSR, this paper has illustrated how theories surrounding food and cooking in Bulgaria had less legitimacy even if the loyal satellite regime quite literally copied the Soviet ideology on many levels and in many fields. The analysis of the source material suggests that in comparison with the situation in the Soviet Union where the heritage of the 1930s views on food as a source of joy within a modern utopia resounded through time and coexisted (in a fundamental controversy) with nutritionism, the Bulgarian cookbooks were more uniform in their explicit “futurist” ideology. In this sense the research also offers an interesting insight into how incidents/precedents can significantly modify historical frameworks, introducing fundamental differences even between actively synchronized political systems.

## Notes

1. I use the term “nutritionism” to describe the food ideology characterized by obsession with nutrients and by general neglect of any social, emotional, or cultural meanings of food.
2. Apart from the commercial cookbooks, promotional, educative collections of recipes were released by institutions and organizations. They were distributed through alternative channels and did not have any significant impact. My broader research suggests that today they are rarely found in households. They were also impossible to track down systematically, as they were not treated as official books and were not deposited in the National Library.
3. The approach used is as taught by Barbara Wheaton during her seminar “Reading Historic Cookbooks: A Structured Approach” at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University in June 2016.
4. The question of which ingredients were absent from the Bulgarian market was never researched systematically. But the contemporary press, industries’ internal reports, and a growing number of published individual and collective memoirs offer insights. Key sources are the several expert surveys of the state of supermarkets in late socialism, found in the national archive. For example in 1972 an expert group at the Ministry of Domestic Trade (Ministry of Interior Trade, 1972) claimed that one of the best supplied shops in the capital was “regularly without meat, cured meats and sausages, soft cheese, fresh fish, fresh fruit, or 42.6% of the assortment.” “In different moments were absent chocolate-based produce, alcoholic drinks, certain types of sausages, vegetables, special sorts of bread and others, or another 29.3% of the [provisioned] assortment.” In conclusion, “only 28.1% of the assortment, such as bread (generic), milk and yogurt, sugar, some sugar produce and some fish cans have been regularly supplied” (Shkodrova, 2014).
5. I use the term “leisure food” to describe the food which Bulgarian housewives most often cooked during weekends or to entertain their family or guests and which usually included a broad variety of dough-based dishes, both salty and sweet.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

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