

**Galina Yakova**  
**Leeds Beckett University**

### **Repression and Privileges as Regulators of Agency in Socialist Bulgaria (1956-1989)**

Repression and privileges were the two sides of state control during the socialist regime in Bulgaria. As factors that shaped society and regulated agency, they evolved over time and became intertwined with the politico-ideological framework of the state. In the context of the Cold War, both of these system's tools were influenced either by external processes and events, internal specificities and circumstances or a combination of both. Repression and privileges were the stick and the carrot that Todor Zhivkov, the new leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) in 1956 and head of the regime in 1961, used as means for preventing dissent, dealing with political opponents and buying loyalty. However, aspects of these tools were replicated in all levels of governance and political organizations, thus directly or indirectly strengthening their application. The focus of this paper is the impact that repression and privileges had on the development of dissidence in Bulgaria in the period 1956-1989. Its findings are based on oral history interviews, archival data and memoirs. For analysing the complexity, dynamics and changes of the processes during this period, the paper will apply visual tools from Soft Systems Methodology.