

Post-Socialist Blues Within Real Existing Capitalism:
Anti-Communism, Neoliberalisation, Fascism

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This project draws on Alex William's (2020) contribution to Gramscian studies with the concept of complex hegemony as an *emergent, dynamic* and *fragile* process of acquiring power in socio-political economic systems. It examines anti-communism as an ideological element of neoliberal complex hegemony in Bulgaria. By employing a Gramscian politico-historical analysis I explore examples of material and discursive ideological practices of anti-communism. I show that in Bulgaria, anti-communism strives to operate as hegemonic, common-sensual ideology through legislative acts, production of historiography, cultural and educational texts, and newly invented traditions. The project examines the process of rehabilitation of fascist figures and rise of extreme nationalism, together with discrediting of the anti-fascist struggle and demonizing of the welfare state within the totalitarian framework of anti-communism. Historians Enzo Traverso (2016, 2019), Domenico Losurdo (2011) and Ishay Landa (2010, 2016) have traced the undemocratic roots of economic liberalism and its (now silenced) support of fascism against the "Bolshevik threat." They have shown that, whether enunciated by fascist regimes or by (neo)liberal intellectuals, anti-communism is deeply undemocratic and shares deep mass-phobic disdain for political organizing of the majority. In this dissertation I argue that, in Bulgaria, anti-communism has not only opened the ideological space for extreme right and fascist politics, it has demoralized left political organizing by attacking any attempts for a politics of socio-economic justice as tyrannical.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Bozhin Traykov. A version of Chapter Three has been published as "The Use of Batak or Questions not Meant to be Answered," *Critique and Humanism*, 50/II (2019) in Bulgarian language.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not be possible in its current form without the invaluable help of many people. Knowledge creation is a collective endeavour and this dissertation is not an exception.

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Rob Shields for his guidance, help and support throughout the process of my studies and research. Rob's supervision gave me the freedom to explore my ideas and encouraged my independence. My gratitude goes to my supervisory committee: Catherine Kellogg for her insightful suggestions and challenging questions that greatly helped shape the theoretical approach of this work; Marko Živkovič for appreciating the ambitions and scope of my project and for the many intellectual discussions and exchanges of ideas, as well as for his supportive feedback; Richard Westerman for his feedback and contributions to the form this dissertation took.

Special thanks to Srdja Pavlovič for his involvement with and support of my work.

Other scholars and colleagues from the University of Alberta have also helped in the various stages of this project. I would like to thank Sourayan Mookerjea and Anna Kirova for their earlier engagement with my work, as well as my friends and colleagues Mike Granzow and Matt Unger with whom I had countless discussions and debates, wrestling with ideas and theories.

As always, thank you to my friend and mentor Jerry Zaslove.

Many thanks to friends, colleagues and scholars in Bulgaria that in some capacity influenced this project to take the direction it took, they are too many to mention here. I would like to acknowledge: Alexander Vezenkov, Borislav Subev, Georgi Zelengora, Dimitur Subev, Julia Rone, Zhivka Valiavicharska, Lea Vajsova, Momchil Hristov, Polina Manolova, Philipp Lottholz, Stanimir Panayotov, Todor Hristov my friends and colleagues from dBEPСИЯ magazine - Ivaylo Dinev, Neda Genova, Raia Apostolova, Petur Dobrev and Stanislav Dodov.

Thank you to my mother Darina and my father Stiliyan for their unconditional love and support. Thank you to my uncle Yordan Donchev whose intellectual integrity and honesty have been example and inspiration of how to conduct my life. This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my grandmothers Mara Nikolova and Spaska Traykova, two strong and resilient women that lived through most of the turmoil of mid-20th and early 21st century Bulgarian history, they both passed away during my absence.

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Introduction

This project starts with the premise that post-socialist capitalist Bulgaria has joined a global trend, characterized by a right wing political extremism, authoritarianism and the emergence of right wing mass movement base (Bofo et al, 2019; Brown, 2018, 2019; Traverso, 2019). This shift occurs both in the Global North and the Global South. In the EU not only more evident cases like Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland have moved away from liberal democracy, but also Emanuel Macron's later actions signal similar trends within the traditional spaces of social democracy with strong left movements and organized labour power, like France.¹ Marco Bofo, Alfredo Saad-Filho and Ben Fine summarize this trend as transitioning from previous neoliberal stages of shallow and formal practices of liberal democracy towards various forms of authoritarianism (2019, p. 3).

I argue that the rise of right wing nationalism and extremism has to be analysed in the context of the draconian policies of austerity enforced on EU countries by the *troika* – the European Commission (EC), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and European Central Bank (ECB). The austerity of the troika is not only an economic measure but an ideological component of neoliberal worldview. Mark Blyth argues that austerity has not only hindered social mobility for the majority but is also a dangerous idea that he traces back to Adam Smith's moral judgment of debt. According to Blythe Smith's moral critique of (state) debt resonates with austerity policies today – saving is a virtue, spending is a vice (2013, p. 114) and countries that spend have become “black sheep”, or as they were referred PIGS (Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain) in the EU (114). “Austerity as we know it today”, Blythe stresses, “as an active policy of budget cutting and deflation, may not be readily apparent in the history of early economic thought”. Nevertheless, “the conditions of its appearance—parsimony, frugality, morality, and a pathological fear of the consequences of government debt—lie deep within economic liberalism's fossil record from its very inception” (2013, p. 114).² Bulgaria together with Romania, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania has been the poster boy of austerity, a source of pride for PM Boyko Borisov, who has said many times in interviews that Bulgaria is the most loyal and obedient EU member to the austerity requirements of the *troika*, as opposed to the PIGS.

The turn towards authoritarianism in Bulgaria is associated with Borisov. Borisov and his party of big business *GERB* (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) have been in power for more than a decade, forming various coalitions with other parties with neoliberal agendas. Borisov came to power in 2009 but had to resign in March 2013 amidst massive protests against his cabinet's draconian austerity policies.³ In November 2014 he managed to

¹ Consider recent attempts to dismantle the pension system in France by introducing a point system to determine workers' pensions that was faced with mass mobilization of unionized workers from various sectors. (Moreau, 2019)

² Blythe also argues that alternatives to austerity such as encouraging small amounts of inflation to reduce debts gradually, increasing corporate taxation and reducing tax havens and tax avoidance strategies, that have been historically effective were not considered (2013, pp. 241-244)

³ The protests were sparked by the high prices of electricity and against the monopoly of energy companies in the city of Varna, but soon erupted into massive national discontent with socioeconomic conditions in Bulgaria. On February, 19th 2013 Plamen Goranov set himself on fire as an act of protest against the municipal government in Varna that was relying on PM Borisov's support, he died on March 3rd. In the course of the protests eight people died as a result of self-immolation, although only Goranov's was a political act, while the rest were acts of desperation of their social conditions. On the 2013 protests and how the winter protests of the poor against Borisov

return to power and in April 2017 he gained control over parliament for the third time. Borisov's current cabinet is a coalition between *GERB* and right wing nationalists of *Obedineni Patrioti (United Patriots)*, consisting of *IMRO*, *NFSB* and *Ataka*⁴. As in the previous two times Borisov was in power his government has been marred by corruption scandals, embezzlement, nepotism and cronyism, leading to more inept decisions and various crises in administration and state institutions.

Being business friendly the current government has implemented harsh measures that attack worker's rights. In 2017 the ruling majority voted a law for concessions that opens up It has also engaged in the dismantling of the minimum social protection that was provided for the elderly and the people with disabilities. In the past decade violence against women has increased from organized crime human trafficking to cases of increased violence against women, with more than thirty domestic violence cases resulting in dead in 2018 alone.

Bulgaria is the poorest and most corrupt EU member with the highest levels of inequality not only within the EU, but also one of the highest within Europe, ranked the last in HDI out all of the countries of the former Eastern bloc inside the EU (Human Development Index, 2019; dnevnik, 2019). In comparison in 1990 the country was ranked 26th (Popivanov, 2015, p.227) Close to eighty percent of income in Bulgaria is less than 460 euro and more than half earn less than 256 euro (Draganov, 2019).

Bulgarian privatized healthcare, while the most expensive is the least affordable in the EU, with shortage of medical stuff that are severely underpaid⁵. The most common words to describe the state of healthcare are crisis, corruption, high mortality rate, drastic pay inequality (Tzankov, 2018; Atanasov, 2019; Tzelukova, 2020). Bulgarian education⁶ is in a dismal state, with one of the lowest percent of GDP spending in the EU, with the majority of the budget spent on so called vocational education and training (2019; OECD Education, 2019). According to PISA⁷ Bulgarian students are below OECD countries average on all three measures – mathematics, science and reading (PISA, 2018). The results show a steady decline, Bulgaria is now below any EU country and most European countries, ranked 50 out of 78 nations (PISA WorldWide Ranking, 2018).

Bulgaria faces a major water and pollution crisis, as well as a waste management crisis, having been turned into the garbage destination of the EU by the ruling regime (Gospodinova and Stoyanov, 2019). Borisov's former Minister of the Environment and Water, Neno Dimov from *United Patriot's IMRO* (he was pressured to resign when the scandal erupted) is directly responsible for the water crisis, while the waste importation business can be traced to big business players close to Borisov himself (Gospodinova and Stoyanov, 2019). Pollution is also

differ from the spring and summer liberal protests against the subsequent government see Veronica Stoyanova (2018).

⁴ *Ataka* was thrown out of the *United Patriot's* coalition in late 2019.

⁵ The salary of a medical nurse in a Bulgarian hospital on average is less that of a cashier in BILA (a German supermarket chain operating in Bulgaria).

⁶ In 2019 an assistant professor's monthly salary in Sofia University (the highest ranking in the country) is around \$500 per month. The rent for a one bedroom apartment in downtown Sofia is around \$400.

⁷ OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment that evaluates educational systems by measuring performance of fifteen year old students in science, math and reading.

an environmental threat for the major cities, with the capital Sofia having the worst air quality of all European capitals (European Air Quality Index, 2020) .

During Borisov's decade in power free speech has become severely threatened. Out of all EU countries, Bulgaria has the worst media freedom ranking from *Reports Without Borders*, plummeting from 35th in 2006 to 111th in 2018. Mass media ownership is under oligarchic control, while investigative journalism is often without options for reaching larger audience, being under attack by smear campaigns, demonized as "enemies of the state"; as a result only 10% of Bulgarians trust the media as being independent (Adès-Mével, 2019; Dzhambazova, 2019).

Despite all of these devastating socioeconomic, political and cultural trends, the current Bulgarian government has embarked on a steady course of militarization, combined with a growing accumulation of state debt. In 2017 a document produced by the Ministry of Defence declared the Republic of Bulgaria's willingness to comply with the 2014 NATO Wales Summit with the pledge to increase its military budget by 2% of GDP by 2024 (National Plan, 2017). In comparison in 2018 US's military spending is 3.2% of GDP, China, who is not in NATO, spends 1.9%, Germany's is 1.2% and Japan's is 0.9 (Tian, et al 2019). The push for more spending also came from Trump's administration. Since gaining office Donald Trump has declared cutting spending on NATO (Browne, 2019).

Yet, while Germany's promise of increase of military spending has remained that – a promise, the Bulgarian Ministry of Defence was eager and quick to start implementing NATO's requirements, to Trump's satisfaction. In reality, this increase in spending translates into buying military products from the US for billions of dollars. Bulgaria- the poorest country in the EU - was the first to comply with NATO and Trump's requirements. As opposed to his colleagues Orbán and Kaczynski who have been accused of close connections with Putin, Borisov remains loyal to the US and even proposes the NATO opens a centre in the sea resort and third biggest city in Bulgaria – Varna.⁸

Nevertheless, instead of massive political mobilization against neoliberal austerity, anti-democratic governance and militarization of the country, Borisov faces discontent that gives him no cause for concern. The threat of Borisov being challenged by a mass democratic political movement is non-existent. Paradoxically, while most Bulgarians harbour distrust and discontent with Borisov and his cabinet, they are equally opposed to elections (Draganov, 2020). Borisov whose organized crime ties are not a secret⁹ has been able to sustain power amidst high distrust of the political process. This brings the questions of what is keeping Borisov in power and what brought about this situation of no alternative to this current regime that with its reliance on the US, more and more resembles the characteristics of Latin American authoritarian regimes.

Borisov is accused by liberal intellectuals of populism. However, in accordance with Enzo Traverso, my view of populism is of a style of politics, rather than ideology (2019, p. 15). As Traverso points out populism has become an envelope term for any politics that criticizes

⁸ Varna, which already has been an arena as a NATO navy destination in the Black Sea, also has the highest number of Russian born citizens in Bulgaria. There are more than a hundred thousand Russians residing in Varna.

⁹ In 2006 a diplomatic cable to Washington, leaked by wikileaks, now former US ambassador, Byrle provides a detailed analysis of Borisov's criminal past and his ties with organized crime and dependencies, concluding that "Borisov...covets American approval...[is] seemingly pro-American [and] may emerge as the next leader. [Therefore] we should continue to push him in the right direction" (*Wikileaks*, 2011).

neoliberalism, whether it is simply in rhetoric or with real political platforms. As a rhetorical strategy that juxtaposes the need of the people to the elite, it undergoes specific transformation in Borisov unilateral style – oftentimes the PM positions himself against his own administration (that in his own words acts contrary to his own decision). Therefore, through rhetorical manoeuvring, Borisov negates his own administration’s decisions and presents himself as the one resolving the crisis (fomented by his own cabinet). Such a style of unilateral arbitrary decision-making, not only negates the democratic process, but is often accompanied with a contradictory rhetoric. When questioned for his adherence to neoliberal policies, Borisov reverses the rhetoric, labeling any calls for economic justice populism. That way calls for the government to put pressure on monopolist energy companies becomes “pure populism” (Jordanova, 2013).¹⁰

The control of mass media and harassment of investigative journalism, the search for support from the US by catering to its geopolitical and military agendas, the unilateral nepotistic style of Borisov, seem to be insufficient explanations for his staying in power. The project focuses on the relation between socio-economic process and ideology production. The approach is to map out the relation between political economic power and the power of ideas in a specific historical moment – the transformation of Eastern European societies after the fall of the Berlin wall. I am examining the context in which certain theoretical models appear and form as popular discourses, first in academia and then through institutional means in the public sphere.

1. Hegemony, Passive Revolution and Neoliberalisation

This project is informed by the theoretical framework of hegemony, as formulated by the work of Antonio Gramsci and developed in Gramscian studies¹¹. Alex Williams, in his recent contribution to Gramscian theory, understands hegemony as a concept to think how “power in socio-political-economic systems operates” (2020, p. 88). And continues that the venues of power in such systems are consisting of “interacting component parts (...from the state apparatus to political parties and social movements) with self-organizing dynamics, intricate hierarchical or stratified emergent structures, and multiple potential configurative possibilities (2020, p. 88). In relation to William’s concept of *complex hegemony* I understand hegemony as an open and dynamic process with an emphasis on *emergent* and *fragile* practices to maintain power. Gramsci conceptualization is grounded in historicity, Gramsci formulated his concept of hegemony and passive revolution within a historico-political analysis steeped in specific examples from Europe’s historical past since the French revolution. Hegemony as unstable, dynamic process is already formulated in *The Prison Notebooks*, where in relation to various crises of power in Europe Gramsci discusses the unstable equilibrium of forces (1971, pp. 107-108), the “relation of forces in continuous motion” (p.172) or “rupture of equilibrium of forces” (p. 184). Therefore,

¹⁰ Those are the same companies whose high prices of electricity led to self-immolation in the winter of 2013.

¹¹ Some of the main contributions on Gramscian theory of hegemony are Peter Thomas (2009); Jonathan Joseph (2002); Stuart Hall’s cultural studies perspective and analysis of Thatcherism in Britain (1988); Robert Cox (1983) from international relations perspective; the work of William Robinson on transnational class informed by Gramsci (1996, 2004) and subsequent works); Robert Keohane on economic hegemony in political economy (2005); David Adam Morton on hegemony and passive revolution (2007) and Alex Williams on hegemony and complexity theory (2020).

hegemony is not a static domination of power. On the contrary, as Stuart Hall writes, “different forces come together, conjuncturally, to create the new terrain, on which a different politics must form up” (1988, p.131). And Adam David Morton points out that “hegemony is a dynamic process... constantly constructed, as well as contested” (2007, p. 78).

Thus, my understanding is that the struggle for hegemony occurs within a moment of crisis of a socioeconomic system that enables mobilization of different political forces that come together at a particular historical time, what Gramsci terms *historic bloc*. The neoliberal historic bloc that formed in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc is what the context of this study is. As sociologists Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley (1998) argue in their influential book about the transformation of Eastern Europe, this bloc consists of the technocrats of the socialist state, dissident intellectuals and the reformist fractions of the political *nomenklatura* of the Communist parties. After the financial meltdown of 2008, global capitalism entered another structural crisis (Robinson, 2019). Attempts to regulate the crisis by imposing draconian austerity in the EU mobilized the radical right in many European countries (Woodley, 2012; Robinson, 2019; Traverso, 2019). The hegemony of fascism in Europe was established in time of structural crisis of capitalism, crisis of the ideology of liberalism and the defeat of organized labour during the industrial phase of nation-state (Gramsci, 1971; Eley, 2003; Maier, 2003, Robinson, 2019). Is the return of fascism in time of crisis of global capitalism, where global finance ¹² and Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC)¹³ are at the helm of capitalism, possible?

Hegemony pertains to the question of practices of how to win and how to sustain power (Williams, 2020, p. 91) What are the mechanisms to take power and the mechanisms to strive to sustain it, in other words how does hegemony operate? ¹⁴ Hegemonic practices of power pertain

¹² Giovanni Arrighi (1994) traces a historical pattern across 600 years of capitalist development. He uses the concept of *systemic cycles of accumulation* (SCA) to distinguish four cycles in the development of global capitalism within which regional powers have achieved hegemonic dominance due to the reorganization of accumulation and production. Each cycle is characterized by an increase in scope and intensity of accumulation consisting of phases. In the first phase a period of material expansion is followed by a period of market stagnation. This stagnation signals the second phase characterized by a transition from accumulation of material capital to accumulation of financial capital. Arrighi (2005) explains this recurrent pattern according to the circulation of money and commodities in the following way:

The central aspect of this pattern is the alteration of epochs of material expansion...with phases of financial expansion...In the phases of material expansion, money capital (M) sets in motion an increasing mass of commodities (C), including commoditized power and gifts of nature; and in phases of financial expansion, an expanded mass of money capital (M') sets itself free from its commodity form, and accumulation proceeds through financial deals...Taken together the two epochs constitute...*systemic cycle of accumulation* (2005b, 86).

For Arrighi the rise of the financial capitalist class signals the crisis of the hegemonic capitalist power, in this current historical conjuncture, the US, since the stagnation of material production and financial capital's production of debt brings about massive impoverishment of the subordinated classes. See (Arrighi, 1994, 2005a, 2005b)

¹³ William Robinson defines the Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC) as the global hegemonic fraction of capital, consisting of the giant financial and economic corporations that have ceased to be corporations of particular country (Robinson,

¹⁴ Peter Thomas (2009) argues that we can read the concept of hegemony as a key that enables us to understand Gramscian thinking about the question of power. Hegemony is in direct relation to the concepts of *intellectual and moral leadership, coercion and consent, war of position, passive revolution*.

to the question of *coercion* and *consent*. An open Gramscian reading of hegemony examines exercising power through coercion and consent as a dialectical process, the interrelation between coercion and consent is not clearly divided, as well as the interrelation between civil and political society. With the metaphor of *war of position* Gramsci analyses the process of gradual work to achieve hegemony in the political and cultural front. “The massive structures of the modern democracies”, Gramsci writes, “both as State organizations, and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the "trenches" and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position” (1971, p.243). Thus, material and discursive ideological production would constitute elements of war of position for hegemony.

Since hegemony is a concept immersed in historicity (Morton, 2007) , there is no blueprint for exercising hegemonic power, as there is no static equilibrium of hegemonic power. The concept of hegemony should be analysed in specific historical context. Coercion and consent take many forms and have to be analysed as two aspects of the exercising of hegemonic power. Intellectual production of ideas (think tanks, NGOs, etc.) within the realms of civil society, have influence over state institutions – the very same intellectuals exercise social power as possessing the knowledge of expertise and function as advisers of state officials. The politician-intellectual within state institutions and various positions of power is a typical hybrid for Eastern Europe in general and for Bulgaria in particular (Todorova, 1995, p. 70). Yet, the question of the operation of hegemony is linked to questions of agency and structure. Social power of persuasion is interrelated to structural processes, such as formation of anti-communism/anti-socialist and pro-neoliberal labour unions in the early 1990s, that later were either too weak, or unwilling to resist further neoliberalisation. Therefore, mechanisms of persuasion are related to certain structural processes within state and society.

Another important aspect of the conceptualization of hegemony is linked to Gramsci’s notion of *passive revolution*. Passive revolution is another key concept formulated and developed through historical analysis (Schwarzmantel, 2014, p. 96).¹⁵ Gramsci defines passive revolution as “revolution without a revolution” (1971, p. 59) or “revolution/restoration” (p. 108) to point out the lack of radical democratic social changes.¹⁶ Gramsci uses the term to imply a process of transformation of the state without mass participation in the political process. In other words, the process of the restructuring of the state is undertaken by elites. His key example is the Italian unification movement that did not include the peasantry and resulted in a political system in which elites co-opted leaders of political parties, a process known as *transformism* (1971, p. 106-118).

This brings me to the relevance of William’s concept of passive consent: apathetic passive consent differs from active approval of political and socioeconomic systems. It could be apathy of the political process and high levels of distrust of the political process, as in the case of Bulgaria.¹⁷ An examination of what brings about passive consent is required for further research. Passive consent should not be examined separately from coercion. For example, the violent primitive accumulation of state assets, characterized with rapid privatization and a process of

¹⁵ Chapter four engages with the origin of the concept of passive revolution in more detail.

¹⁶ Therefore, Gramsci (1971) analyses Italian fascism as another example of passive revolution. He points out that while the fascist state introduces legislation of “far reaching modifications” of the economic structure, the principle of capitalist social relations based on private property remains the same (120).

¹⁷ See chapter four.

massive unemployment; state suppression of the teachers and medical workers strikes and protests, lacking of strong union support have to be explored in relation to the numerous protests in 1990s and 2000s that have been exhaustive and unsuccessful attempts to change the political establishment.¹⁸

Therefore, cultural and political hegemony is related to socioeconomic hegemony: “though hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity” (Gramsci, 2000, p. 112). Although, acknowledging the contributions of post-structuralist understanding of hegemony, especially of Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 1990); Laclau, (1996), Mouffe (1993) this project is not following in this tradition, where the primacy of discourse is key. Post-structuralism’s engagement with hegemony shifts away from the importance of class and political-economy in the analysis of the socio-political process. Laclau and Mouffe’s conceptualization of hegemony is modified in accordance with the emerging social movements at the time of writing: new radical movements focused on race, gender, sex. Laclau and Mouffe’s focus on identity politics intends to counter Marxist economism and the primacy of the working class in the study of hegemony. Famously, Laclau and Mouffe reject that last instance of the economic in the analysis of structural Marxism, especially that of Louis Althusser. The primacy of discourse and discursive practices at the expense of materiality of political economy, do not give a full picture of the way hegemony operates.

As Williams reminds us class exists outside of discourse, in relation to the basic processes of capitalism (2020, p. 128). He draws on Etienne Balibar (1991) who at the apogee of post-modernism and post-structuralism stresses that the weakness of class identity and class based politics, should not be mistaken for the erasure of the positions of the wage labourer and the capitalist. I argue that this could be illustrated within newly capitalist states in Eastern Europe like Bulgaria. The process of primitive accumulation formed new social relations, changing the dynamics of class. This was a process of reformation of lower wage workers within a capitalist system, when the safety networks of socialism cease to exist. That process of socioeconomic transformation was underpinned by new social relations that differ from those established under socialism. The absence of class-based political organizing does not mean that exploitation ceases to exist.

Slavoj Žižek (2008) employs Laclau and Mouffe’s concept of *floating signifiers* to show that the ideological space exists always within a narrative that is in confrontation with other narratives to win over its representation of ‘reality.’ Ideological space is made of non-bound, non-tied elements, ‘floating signifiers’, whose very identity is open, but whose loose ideological elements are ‘fixed’ together into coherent structure of meaning by a ‘nodal point’. Thus, the ideological struggle occurs over the determination of the nodal point that functions as the prism through which the floating ideological signifiers will be understood and connected through a master-signifier. The nodal point is the point where a master-signifier is introduced that *interpellates* (calls to action for ideological cause) the individual into an ideological subject. For example, the master signifier of *free market* in the context of post-socialism *quilts* together floating signifiers like “democracy”, “freedom”, “individual rights” that call to ideological action the subject within a capitalist system. The master-signifier is an empty signifier initially, but at a

¹⁸ In the relation see the discussion of polyarchy as a political system designed to hijack the democratic process.

key nodal point it centralizes and unites all of the ideological elements (floating signifiers) to represent a specific understanding of reality (2008, pp. 85-113).

Thus, what constitutes the primacy of a master-signifier in the ideological field is not its uncontested truthful meaning, but the outcome in a struggle over meaning, which cannot exist outside of the material conditions of the socioeconomic system. As Žižek points out the floating signifiers acquire meaning consistent with the established ideology only retroactively, after the introduction of the master signifier. That way the *free market* as a master signifier retroactively determines the meanings of the floating signifiers, i.e. democracy can exist only in a free market economy, etc.

Discursive practices play a role in this transformation on ideological level – the forming of new values, which Laclau and Mouffe would define as *floating signifiers* (entrepreneurship, individualism, Euro-Atlantic civilizational model), rejecting old values, (solidarity, collectiveness, socialist brotherhood), but the materiality of the changing economic structure (violent appropriation of assets, de-industrialization leading to massive unemployment) is outside of the realm of discourse. Laclau and Mouffe’s model of articulation within discourse, although helpful to analyze the ideological field of the current Bulgarian state and society, is not capable of providing analysis of Bulgarian neoliberalisation and more importantly the specificity of hegemonic operation through coercion.

The case of post-socialist Bulgaria brings the need to refer back to Althusser’s notion of materialization of ideology within *Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)*, as well as the coercive aspect of *Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs)* as the socio-political venues of production and reproduction of ideology. The material aspect of ideology with its ritual practices relates to state practices of anti-communism through legislative policies, commemorations and other rituals. The ideological constellation of anti-communist is an element of the understanding of hegemony as a dynamic and unstable process that contains contradictions and mobility but also preserving a level of consistency (Williams, 2020). It is not disjointed from the process of neoliberalisation. Neoliberalisation pertains to the spatial aspect of hegemony, i.e. its transnational dimension and their implications in specific instances, like Bulgaria as a regional peripheral space.

By employing Gramscian politico-historical analysis this project maps discursive and material practices of anti-communism in Bulgaria. Anti-communism strives to become the hegemonic ideological constellation that operates on many levels and scales. I show that in Bulgaria anti-communism strives to operate as hegemonic common-sensual ideology through legislative acts, production of historiography, cultural and educational texts, and newly invented traditions. It has to be examined in relation to the political economic process of transformation of state and society. The project examines the process of rehabilitation of fascist figures and rise of extreme nationalism, together with discrediting of the anti-fascist struggle and demonizing of the welfare state within the totalitarian framework of anti-communism. Thus, I map the formation of anti-communism in Bulgaria in a larger historical and intellectual context and examine its operation in relation to specific instances of hegemony attempts. The project acknowledges the significance of anti-communism as Gramscian common sense: anti-communism as explanatory mechanism of the past and present and justification of Bulgarian neoliberalism continues to be alive and well three decades since the disappearance of *People’s Republic of Bulgaria* (1944-1989).

I examine the question of hegemony through passive revolution in relation to the core thesis of neoliberalisation as a path-dependent regulatory system aimed at accelerating marketization and commodification in all realms of social life. The concept of *neoliberalisation* was developed in Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, Nick Theodore's work (2010; 2013). Neoliberalisation is defined as market-regulatory disciplinary restructuring that is characterized by hybridity, according to specific historical context, that makes it also characteristic of uneven-development (2010, p. 330). Neoliberalisation processes have heterogeneous forms, depending on regional context, yet neoliberalisation has endemic features based on its operational logic. While after the 2008-2009 global financial crisis neoliberalism has been weakened as an ideological project, its specific regulatory policies are still quite strong. Brenner et al. emphasize that each crisis generates a new set of neoliberal regulatory policies. According to the logic of neoliberalisation crisis is an opportunity for states to prioritize market solutions to important public and social issues.¹⁹

Neoliberalisation should be read as a *syndrome*, i.e. it is a series of processes and activities rather than a unified phenomenon that does not always have the exact same outcome (Brenner et al, 2010, p.330). This is to point out that despite the utopian drive of neoliberalism for marketization of society, the impossibility of its actualization and the contradictory outcomes of such projects ushers a process of perpetual neoliberalisation as a process of trial and error, push forward and rollback of neoliberal policies. What Jamie Peck terms “self-contradictory form of regulation-in-denial” (2010, xiii) is a specific form of regulation (through legislation) presented as deregulation of the market, that has significant social repercussions that generate perpetual crisis. Yet, the crisis generated by the failure of neoliberal policies brings about reinvention of neoliberal policy repertoires (Brenner et al, 2010, p. 333). Neoliberalisation works by displacing and refracting the crisis. For example, the 2008 fiscal crisis generated by the banks is refracted into a state crisis projected on the marginalized populations, that in return ushers another wave of neoliberalisation through austerity (Peck in Brogan, 2013, p. 191). Brenner et al (2010) advocate the need to trace how this syndrome is reproduced in different contexts. Depending on the specific regional context neoliberalisation has to overcome and transform previous institutions and structures. Therefore, driven by the same operative logic of concrete policies, neoliberalisation takes many forms. In the Bulgarian context neoliberalisation has to restructure the state socialist model.

2. Ideology: Contradiction of Enunciation and Position of Enunciation

What underlines this project is the recent literature on the antagonistic relationship between social democracy and liberalism, as a starting point into the discussion. I will define this scholarly work as historical counter-narratives of the dominant narrative about liberalism. Ishay Landa defines such an antagonistic relationship as an anti-democratic struggle in the name of

¹⁹ From this point of view the history of neoliberalisation as process of pushing the neoliberal project of marketization of state and society is generated in the context of crisis: 1970s OPEC crisis that transformed into crisis of Keynesianism; the late 1980s crisis of socialism that led to the end of the Eastern bloc; 2007-2008 financial crisis and the second wave of neoliberalisation with the pushing of austerity programs within the EU.

sustaining the capitalist system (2010, p. 16). We can historically trace its trajectory back to John Locke²⁰ and the contradiction between equality and property (Balibar, 1994). In summary, the history of political democratic engagement and the form of social democracy is a history of struggle between two forces: elitist fear of the “masses” “crowds” or “rabble” with mechanisms to suppress them and popular movements of mass democratization. The history of ideas of classical liberalism and neoliberalism show that they often were in the former. While I have oversimplified by stating this as a dualism for the sake of introduction, this thesis considers aspects of this tension. I will explore the nuances of this dualism in the case of Bulgaria in the recent past. How is democracy being understood? Democracy as a system of representation of different powerful lobbies, especially those that have economic power is much different from the notion of democracy as rule of the people. In a capitalist socio-economic system the majority of those represented have the function of wage workers. Therefore political decisions to regulate the economy, which would entail delegating rights to workers and restricting the power of private owners, would be more democratic, than imposition of austerity by technocrats and supranational institutions like the *troika*.

Sheldon Wolin (2008) traces the antagonism between liberalism and social and political democracy in the context of the Cold War. According to him the Cold War, and especially McCartism as a severe phase of the Second Red Scare, halted the momentum of political and social democracy in the US that began in the 1930s. Many scholars have analysed the purging of unions from “communists” and the contract between business and labour, in which the state plays the role of arbiter (Harvey, 1990). For Wolin during World War II and then the Cold War the state reliance on corporate economic power shifted the balance away from organized labour. That process was combined with financial and business elites attacks of the New Deal as a leftist plot to transform the economy (2008, p. 23). As he writes: “The propaganda of business interests depicted the combination of social democracy and political regulation of the economy as simple socialism and therefore the blood relative of communism” (2008, p. 26).

In other words, Wolin looks back into the era of so-called embedded liberalism to discern the undemocratic forces that prevail in the last decade. Embedded liberalism is a term coined by John Gerard Ruggie to define the capitalist world order of 1945-1979 as nexus between Fordism-Social Democracy- Keynesianism (cited in Williams, 2020, p. 148). David Harvey (1990), discusses the three major components of post-war capitalism: corporate direction of factory production (with an emphasis on stability), the role of organized labour as the guarantor of the system, and the Keynesian state as a regulator and stimulator of demand. Harvey argues that eventually within this triad “the decisions of corporations became hegemonic in defining the paths of mass consumption growth, presuming, of course, that the other two partners in the grand coalition did whatever was necessary to keep effective demand at levels sufficient to absorb the steady growth of capitalist output” (1990, p. 134). In relation to such analysis of the post-war era, Jonathan Joseph defines the welfare state as the hegemonic order where full employment and consumerism were its ideological cement, higher wages and social benefits came at the expense of exclusion of the majority from the political decision making process (2002, p. 190).

²⁰ Domenico Losurdo, Michael Perelman and Ishay Landa have traced the contradiction between Locke the champion of liberty, the protector private property, and the defender of colonial slavery and child labour.

But the antagonism between liberalism and democracy has a longer history that should be traced back to classical liberal thought. Domenico Losurdo (2011, 2016); Michael Perelman, (2000) and Ishay Landa (2010; 2016) have provided a historical counter-narrative to the traditional understanding of liberalism. The works of Losurdo, Perelman and Landa have shown what Slavoj Žižek defines as the contradiction between the enunciation and the position of enunciation.

Drawing on the Lacanian opposition between the subject of enunciation and the subject of the enunciated content, Žižek reformulates this concept from its psychoanalytical origin to refer to the political. Jacques Lacan draws from linguistics to emphasize in his theoretical model of the unconscious. Lacan emphasizes the tension between the imaginary representation of the subject and the symbolic act of enunciation (through language). Žižek refers to the tension between the enunciated and the position of enunciation to relate it to the articulation of political rhetoric and action (2009, p. 437). An example pertaining to the topic at hand- fascism- illustrates this point. Žižek writes:

“While fascism, in its mode of activity, brings the antagonistic logic to its extreme (talking about the ‘struggle to death’ between itself and its enemies, and always maintaining—if not realizing—a minimal extra-institutional threat of violence, of ‘direct pressure of the people’ bypassing the complex legal-institutional channels), it posits as its political goal precisely the opposite, an extremely ordered hierarchical social body (no wonder that fascism always relies on organicist-corporatist metaphors). This contrast can be nicely rendered in terms of the Lacanian opposition between the ‘subject of enunciation’ and the ‘subject of the enunciated (content)’: while democracy admits antagonistic struggle as its goal (in Lacanese: as its enunciated, its content), its procedure is regulated-systemic; fascism, on the contrary, tries to impose the goal of hierarchically structured harmony through the means of an unbridled antagonism.” (2009, p. 285).

To further illustrate the contradiction between what is said and who is saying it, Žižek continues with a discussion of the often perceived apolitical stance of the middle class:

“on the one hand, the middle class is against politicization—it just wants to sustain its way of life, to be left to work and live its life in peace, which is why it tends to support the authoritarian coups which promise to put an end to the crazy political mobilization of society, so that everybody can return to his or her work. On the other hand, members of the middle class—in the guise of the threatened patriotic hard working moral majority—are the main instigators of grassroots mass mobilization in the guise of rightist populism—for example, in France today, the only force that truly disturbs the post-political technocratic-humanitarian administration is Le Pen’s Front National” (2009, p. 268).

Žižek’s examples with representative democracy and fascism and with the apolitical politics of the middle class show the propensity of contradiction between ideological enunciation and its materialization in practices. This also becomes clear when we look at the intellectual history of liberalism but engage seriously with the question of not only what is being said/written (production of ideas) but also who is saying/writing (from what social/class position). The founders of liberalism were champions for freedom from the aristocracy, while fearing the

democratization process. This contradiction within liberalism is illustrated in prominent liberals' advocacy of the system of colonialism and suppression of the working class in Europe, in the name of propertied classes. At its core the contradiction signifies the deep antagonism between the liberal establishment buttressing the property classes and their revolutionary role as champions of freedom against the old elites.

Ishay Landa (2010) introduces the concept of the liberal *split* to illustrate the kernel of the contradiction: the split between economic liberalism and political liberalism, or between champions of the free market that sustains the power of property classes and those calling for political and social democracy that demand change of the existing socioeconomic order and class hierarchy. He writes:

“in the course of the 19th century it became clear that the demand for popular representation is a political weapon that cuts both ways: wielded by the bourgeoisie in the name of the people against the aristocracy, it was effective in bringing about and consolidating bourgeois society. But once “the people” wished to dispense with their bourgeois proxies and speak and act for themselves, demanding, as a necessary first step, that the suffrage be universally extended, popular representation threatened to encroach upon bourgeois prerogatives and interests...Capitalism, fundamentally, was seen to be at odds with democracy; the *economic liberal* sphere was seen to be at variance with the expansionary dynamics of *political liberalism* (sic)” (2010, p. 20-21).

Michael Perelman has examined the interrelation between political power and ideas, the process of the establishment theoretical narratives into ideological common sense in the case of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Perlman shows how classical political economists like Smith, while writing about self-regulating markets were instrumental in calling for the design of policies that would coerce and force the process of transformation of the peasantry into a workforce. The question of concealing the violence of capitalism, while promoting violent measures of disciplining the population into a wage workforce is of particular importance to me in relation to the question of neoliberal hegemony. One has to recognize that the dominance of (ahistorical) neoclassical economic theory in universities is not unrelated to socioeconomic and political power.

As Alex Williams (2020) points out it was a process starting as early as the 1980s, when neoclassical perspectives overcame their Keynesian and Marxist adversaries in economic departments. However this process is not removed from the context of crisis of Keynesianism (Harvey, 1990; Robinson, 2004), the grass root work of neoliberal think tanks since 1970s (Harvey; 2005; Peck, 2010) and the charisma of Thatcher and Reagan (Hall, 1988; Harvey, 2005). It is what Harvey defines as the counter-revolution of the elite undertaken by Reagan and Thatcher that enables the process of changes within education which gradually brings about the dominance of neoclassical economics. I concur with Williams that the political, cultural and socioeconomic process all play a role in the restructuring of educational programs and textbook writing (2020, p. 140). As a result generations of educators have been thought to ignore exploitation and teach a particular worldview, without alternative viewpoints (2020, p. 140). Such educators function as what Gramsci referred to as organic intellectuals.

The dissemination of neoclassical and neoliberal ideology as common-sensual in governments, NGOs, global institutions of governance, universities has occurred over a period of

about forty years and in Bulgaria the process started a decade later. The ideas of Hayek, Friedman and Mises dominate economic departments in today's Bulgaria. The focus on this project is to show that neoliberal ideological views and rise of right wing political ideas should be analysed in relation to each other.

Jamie Peck (2010), Quinn Slobodian (2018) and Wendy Brown (2015, 2018, 2019) have explored the same relationship between power and ideas in their critiques of neoliberal reason. While economic liberals championed the free market urging states to implement coercive methods for its realization, starting with the enclosure of the commons (Marx, 1990; Perelman, 2000; Fedederici, 1998), neoliberals' quest was the design of supranational institutions that would frame the global economy in a desired direction (Slobodian, 2018). For neoliberalism the free market is not a sufficient economic system, it has to model states and societies (Foucault, 2008; Brown, 2018; Peck, 2010).

Logically such projects as the enclosure of the commons, the extremely violent primitive accumulation of capital (which is an ongoing mechanism of capital accumulation), colonization and slavery were projects of suffering of the many. Although the notion of the EU as neocolonial is highly unpopular in the mainstream, scholars have looked at the EU two-tier system and US interference in Europe, as a form of neocolonialism. The slow violence of capitalism – environmental devastation, extreme social inequality, marginalization of groups, also has to be taken into account. Capitalism projected its own crimes in the mythic monster of Communism/Bolshevism. Perhaps that is how we should analyse the stories of the Stalinist terror. However, this project considers not only the anti-communist horror stories cited by post-socialist Bulgarian elites as a projection of capitalism's own crimes, but it also inverts the dominant anti-communist discourse that puts an equal sign between fascism and communism.

This project searches for the crossing points between liberalism, neoliberalism and fascism and argues that contrary to official regimes of knowledge (Foucault) that present authoritarian forms of rule as aberrant to capitalism, authoritarian impulses are deeply embedded in the intellectual tradition of the advocates and apologists of capitalism. From its theoretical origin in classical political economic thought and liberal philosophy, to Austrian and later US neoliberal intellectual circles, the understanding that economic liberalism ("free market" capitalism) requires oppressive mechanisms of political control is not foreign to the architects of capitalism, in its various forms. In that sense, we should not view totalitarian regimes like Italian fascism and Nazism as aberrant to the values of economic liberalism or neoliberalism, but as their not so distant cousins.

The argument works as a counter-narrative to that of dominant anti-communist discourse in Bulgarian intellectual, political and media space that is shaping public opinion for the last three decades. Anti-communism, on the one hand, serves to demonize left political movements putting an equal sign between socialism and totalitarianism, lumping together "communism" with the regimes of Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, etc. On the other, downplays, negates or simply dismisses the capitalist roots of the various forms of fascism. As I will discuss further, liberals and neoliberals, like fascists, dreaded mass politics understood as the politics of working class organizing. In that sense the fear of the "tyranny of the majority" of classical liberalism (Mill, Tocqueville, Constant cited in Landa, 2010) of "totalitarian democracy" or "democracy of the plebiscites" (Hayek, 1944), of the dreaded "re-distributors" (Mises, 1981) or the "Asiatic hordes of Bolshevism" (Hayek, 1945, Mises, 1981, Nolte, 1993) all hide a deep mass-phobic fear of

political organizing of the “have nots”.²¹ Adam Smith is sincere in his explicit illustration of the role of government within capitalism: “wherever there is property there is great inequality,” such that “the acquisition of valuable and extensive property ... necessarily requires the establishment of civil government.” And continues with explanation of the role of such civil government that “in so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all” (cited in Blythe, 2013, p. 112).

Economic liberalism is driven by the understanding that democracy should exist only if it is dependent on the economic order of capitalism. Sociologist William Robinson (1996) traces the modern aspects of this anti-democratic agenda of liberalism to the rise of democratization theory. I find Robinson’s conceptualization of polyarchy relevant to the case of Bulgarian political system because it sheds light on the question of hegemonic power relations, not only within the state but also in relation to Bulgaria’s positioning within the system of global capitalism. Robinson argues that after the 1980s, in the context of neoliberal political economic shift, the US starts promoting a form of democracy, which drawing on Robert Dahl, Robinson analyzes as polyarchy. Polyarchy is characterized by a political system that could be defined as façade democracy in which parliamentary represented political parties do exist but they are carefully managed by economic elites. My reading of polyarchy is in accordance with Robinson’s Gramscian conceptualization that considers the political system of polyarchy as a mechanism for hegemony. Thus, my understanding of polyarchy is of a political system designed to hijack the democratic process of mass political participation. The parliamentary process is reduced to the existence of political parties that follow the same political-economic course.

The concept of polyarchy as a political system is closely related to Gramsci’s concept of passive revolution. As was pointed, passive revolution refers to efforts of dominant groups to manage the process of political participation by introducing moderate change from above, in order to prevent radical democratic transformation from below (Gramsci, 1971, p. 106-118; Robinson, 2014, p. 171). In that sense the system of polyarchy should be viewed as a mechanism to prevent political uprising that could threaten the socioeconomic order. Bulgarian polyarchy has led to exhaustion of political mobilizing through a series of numerous unsuccessful protests.

Drawing on Robert Cox’ analysis of hegemony from international relations perspective, Morton argues that a historicist approach to hegemony has to take into account three spheres of activity – *social relations of production, forms of state and world orders* (2007, pp. 114-115). Morton proposes a framework to examine the interrelation between social relations of production that may give rise to certain social forces that become bases of power and in effect changes the state form that in turn shapes the world order (2007, 117). Such a frame could be applied to the rise of neoliberal historical bloc and the formation of the neoliberal state within the core of capitalism, as the hegemony of Reaganism and Thatcherism in the 1980s reshaped the world order, starting with the process of neoliberalisation in Latin America and later on Eastern Europe. However, in my opinion, this process could be examined from the perspective of how peripheral states undergo a reverse process by which the world order reshapes the state. The formation and prevalence of anti-communism in Bulgaria is explored in relation to the

²¹ In the eve of 1848 revolutions Alexis de Tocqueville writes “Soon the political struggle will be between the Haves and the Have-nots; property will be the great battlefield” (cited in Landa, 2010, p. 39).

framework of neoliberalisation of the state, with the rise of historic bloc made of former nomenklatura, dissident intellectuals organizing the oppositional forces, and organized crime figures that drive this process of neoliberalisation, within the global context of neoliberal hegemony of the *Washington Consensus*.

This project grounds *neoliberalisation* and *passive revolution* in specific historical analysis of Bulgarian post-socialist capitalism. My reading of so called *transition* (to democracy and free market),²² is that of a process of Bulgarian neoliberalisation made possible by a passive revolution, as a result of the global process of ending of Soviet modelled socialism, that prompted the specific crisis of the Bulgarian socialist state. Therefore, the exploration of anti-communism within the framework of hegemony through passive revolution requires an examination of its historical formation and its production and reproduction in the context of Eastern European neoliberalization from the early 1990s onwards. Anti-communism is the ideological side of the Bulgarian passive revolution, characterized by neoliberalisation of political and civil society. In this project anti-communism is viewed in its materialization within ISAs with its legislations and rituals and invented traditions, such as commemoration practices, building monuments, while destroying others from the socialist past, reinstalling previous monuments from the monarchist past, etc.

My analysis of anti-communism is informed by Slavoj Žižek's ideological critique. Žižek is not concerned with the content of ideology, but with the power relations that are hidden in the process of its enunciation and can be revealed only when examining the position of enunciation: "An ideology... can be 'true' ... what really matters is not the content *but the way this content is related to the subjective position implied by its own process of enunciation* (sic)" (1994, p. 8). The content within ideological space functions to conceal some relation of social domination (power, exploitation), while at the same time legitimizing it. Thus, "the very logic of legitimizing the relation of domination must remain concealed if it is to be effective" (1994, p. 8). This is what Žižek terms the possibility of ideology to lie in the guise of truth. In fact, he emphasizes that the truthfulness of the content (factual accuracy) produces stronger ideological effect. Anti-communism as an ideological constellation of post-socialist Bulgaria might produce factual "truths" about the repression of the "Communist regime" (although as it will be shown, in many instances this is not the case), however, what remains concealed is the function of anti-communism that legitimizes the process of neoliberalisation, that also sustains Bulgaria's peripheral position within the system of global capitalism. As I will show, anti-communism is not simply a production of discourses about the past, it is a mechanism that attacks and demonizes any attempts for political organizing based on class politics for social and economic justice. Therefore, my concern is not with the sincerity of those that enunciate anti-communist narratives.²³ There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the dissident and liberal intellectuals who created the binary opposition totalitarianism vs freedom/democracy (meaning liberal capitalism) who truly believed that the end of the socialist state would bring democracy to the

²² Further in this project I address the importance of the ideological significance of the term "transition".

²³ Although nuances have to be taken into account – as I will show anti-communism has become the banner of political and public figures with fascist past (members or relatives of members of fascist organizations and movements from the interwar period). In that sense, the ideological rehabilitation of fascism has a biological aspect.

majority.²⁴ The main concern of this project is on questions of ideological production: how anti-communism becomes hegemonic ideological discourse, what is the process of transference of anti-communism from a set of ideas to discursive and material ideology. What concerns this project is an inquiry by which the contradiction of enunciation and the position of enunciation can be illuminated. In other words, how did anti-communism as enunciation of freedom,²⁵ became ideological enunciation from the position of power, to conceal power relations and injustices; and how it forms a new partnership between anti-communism and fascism in the context of neoliberalisation in Bulgaria.

This project traces the trajectory of fear of mass political organizing from classical liberal thought, to the neoliberal hegemonic project through the rise of fascism. While I am not excusing the atrocities and repressions of Stalinism and other regimes in the name of Communism, I analyse them in relation to Žižek's insight that ideology hides in the guise of truth. After 1989 Stalinism and Communism were convenient monsters to demonize left politics in Eastern Europe and the world and to rid, once and for all, of the dreaded prospect of leftist class politics.

3. Outline

In the first Chapter I map aspects of liberal and neoliberal intellectual thought with a focus on the contradiction of enunciation and the position of enunciation. The chapter goes into a discussion of the conceptualization of notions of *freedom* and *human rights* in liberal and neoliberal thought and their development within historical context. The focus of this chapter is to illuminate the process of forming ideological narratives and their political-economic implementation. A focus on Fredric Hayek's production of ideas and exposing the deep undemocratic implications of such ideas is not sufficient. It has to be accompanied by an understanding of the process by which such ideas become hegemonic common sense. Therefore, the relationship between ideas and political implementation has to be taken into account.²⁶ Under the framework of *neoliberalisation* I explore how *democratization theory* constitutes the ideological production that enables neoliberal restructuring of states and societies. William Robinson's analysis of hegemony through polyarchy illustrates the violence and coercion the political-economic implementation of real existing neoliberalism requires.

In the second Chapter I transition into a discussion of the historical formation of anti-communism, its significance during the Cold War and its rebirth in Eastern Europe after the end of the Eastern bloc. I also engage in a discussion of a new reading of fascism in Bulgarian context. The chapter examines anti-communism's success in discrediting anti-fascist struggles,

²⁴ For example, in an interview, Alexander Kiossev, a well-known liberal scholar admitted that he did not know the difference between liberalism and neoliberalism. See (Valiavicharska, 2014, p. 306)

²⁵ President Zheliu Zhelev in some sense could be viewed as the tragic figure that illustrates this process. As the founder of the UDF as a movement of anti-communist democratic forces, and the author of seminal anti-communist book that inspired Bulgarian dissidents, he helped create the neoliberal Frankenstein, which he later admitted became more and more fascist. See chapter two.

²⁶ Jamie Peck recounts Thatcher slamming Hayek's *Constitution of Liberty* and declaring: "This is what we believe" (Peck, 2010, p. xv)

as a larger project to demonize left politics. The question of fascism as a mass-phobic political project and its gradual rehabilitation is central to the production and reproduction of the anti-communist ideological constellation, as characteristic of the neoliberalisation process.

The third Chapter provides a case study of ideological mobilization based on uses and misuse of history. By focusing on a scandal related to a new depiction of historical events - the massacre in the village of Batak, I analyse the interrelation between mythologizing of historical narratives and mobilization of nationalist projects. I read the particular scandal within the Gramscian framework of war of position. The chapter engages with discussion of the power struggles of the political-intellectual within the realm of cultural production.

Chapter four, returns to Gramsci, enriching the concepts of hegemony and passive revolution by introducing a de-colonial perspective. I examine the specificity of material and discursive practices of anti-communism. The chapter focuses on recent developments of far right mobilization that are interrelated to the production and reproduction of anti-communist ideology.

This project came as a result of a shared feeling of defeat and desperation with fellow comrades struggling to gain some ground within real existing neoliberalism, alarmed by the growing fascination of Bulgarian society. During my stay in Bulgaria, having been away for almost two decades, I experience first-hand not only the marginalization of the left, but increasing harassment of leftist and anti-fascist groups. As a member of a collective that publishes one of the few magazines dedicated to critical analysis from the left, I realized the extent of silencing of critical voices and the difficulty of creating a platform for voices alternative to the neoliberal common sense. My interaction with the *Autonomous Workers Syndicate* and independent syndicate that fights for worker's rights and strives to create solidarity among workers, as well as member of the research collective *KOI* (Collective for Social Intervention) that often works with the largest labour union, showed me the extent to which neoliberalisation has eroded organized labour. I was also able to become engaged with the *Autonomous Factory*, an anarchist collective dedicated to creating a safe space of ideas and creative endeavours, a group constantly harassed by neo-fascists.

My experience made me realize how even such collectives and activist groups are not immune to enunciating the hegemonic anti-communist discourse. Oftentimes I will hear that there is nothing redeemable about Marx and Marxism or that Stalinism is related to the ideas of Marx, etc. Oftentimes during protests against growing fascist tendencies within government, I would see posters putting equal sign between the red star and the swastika, as if coming from the official propaganda. During discussions with independent scholars, like historian Alexander Vezenkov I learned about the extent of censorship and even the reality of losing one's job if one does not follow the anti-communism totalitarian framework. My discussions with independent researcher and filmmaker Georgi Zelengora also informed my understanding of the political situation, providing important context of inner power struggles within intellectual and political circles. As the author of a book and a film contrasting the nationalist line about Muslim minorities in Bulgaria, Zelengora has been blacklisted from the history department after completing his PhD and has worked a series of manual jobs to survive. All of these encounters, participations, observations and experiences prompted me to engage with a research that examines the question of why is the left in a post-socialist state so weak and what would be the consequences of such weakness. The research traces the process of ideological production in a particular historical context.

The third chapter grew out of participation in an interdisciplinary research project with colleagues from *Sofia University* focused on the political uses and misuses of history. The fourth chapter came as a result of intellectual collaboration with scholars/activists within the Balkans of how to make sense of the neoliberalisation process of the region and its implications. Versions of those two chapters were published as articles.

Chapter One: Freedom, Rights and Democracy: Contradiction of Enunciation and Position of Enunciation

1. Property and Freedom

The historical accounts of the struggle between *haves* and *have-nots* would give a better picture of where today's adherents of Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig Von Mises stand. I turn to the contradiction that is contained within liberalism itself that would illuminate the following critique of liberal capitalism and more specifically neoliberalism. As Samo Tomšič writes about the capitalist worldview: “[a]bstract freedom and equality presuppose equally abstract human essence, while private property and private interest ground the social consensus” (2015, p.61). Yet, this social consensus is based on “fundamental submission of the political universalism to the interests of capital” (2015, p. 61). Neoliberal rationality takes such worldview to the extreme of reductionist understanding of human essence as *homo oeconomicus* – a rational subject driven by the logic of supply and demand, cost and benefit and disseminates the market model in all domains of social existence (Brown, 2015, p. 31) The neoliberal model of governmentality constructs and construes the state as a market, rewarding entrepreneurial logic and punishing those who don't have it (Brown, 2006: 694). Slavoj Žižek (2017) adds that liberalism disguises political decisions as economic, therefore naturalizing antagonistic power struggles. For example, inside the ideological frame of neoliberalism, the pollution of a community from toxic waste, as a result of the activities of a private corporation, is not a political issue but an economic one. Having been reconstructed to deregulate corporate power, the state resolves to various forms of persuasion, together with the corporation: slogans about paying the price (polluting the community's resources) in the name of generating jobs; PR campaigns within the community to create division, etc. Neoliberal logic conceals the destructive act and shifts the ethical question of right and wrong into cost – benefit analysis.

When crisis disrupts this harmonious worldview of consensus the causes are always outside of the logic of capitalism. Because the apologists of this socioeconomic system believe in overlap between human nature and capitalism, they fail to search for disruptions at the very core of its logic. In other words, for the liberal advocate of democracy and free market, which is a code for capitalism, the fallacies and ills that one experiences under capitalism are never within its form, within its structural logic, but are coming from outside forces – Asiatic barbarians, Bolshevism, a few bad apples, predatory elites, more regulation, weak rule of law, organized crime, terrorism, morally corrupt individuals that do not perform their duties, etc. I find their partial accuracy to be the exact definition of Žižek's ideological formula – that ideology can lie in the guise of truth. We can see how the fantasy of capitalism as a system that answers to a belief of human essence attaches to moral explanations about the failures of capitalism in post-socialist Bulgaria: morally corrupt individuals like the former nomenklatura, organized crime, shady politicians working for Russian interests, social parasites, cultural explanations like the legacy from the Party state and the lack of readiness of Bulgarian for democracy (discourse of NGOs).²⁷ The reason for suffering within capitalism is internalized – it is the individual's

²⁷ See Dostena Lavergn's anthropological work on the expert discourses of Bulgarian think tanks and NGOs. (Лаверн, 2010)

personal failure that refuses to adapt, or is not fit for survival, having personal traits that are to blame – laziness, free loading, etc. What the liberal advocate fails to see is that all of these ills and fallacies are symptoms that point to a problem at the heart of the form of the system that their ideological worldview continues to hold to.

The history of liberalism gives different accounts that point us to search for antagonisms within the logic of liberal democracy and the free market system. At the core of liberalism there is a contradiction – a dialectical split between what Ishay Landa defines as *political liberalism* and *economic liberalism*. Ishay Landa (2010) shows how prominent liberal thinkers like John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Alexis de Tocqueville, while advocating individual liberty were concerned with the danger of popular democracy or what is commonly known as the “tyranny of the majority over the minority” (31). Of course, in this context minority is understood not as a vulnerable ethnic group, but as the minority of the propertied class, the elite. The fear of the have-nots prompted liberals to become strong advocates of exclusion of “the masses” from political participation. The French liberal Benjamin Constant distinguished between “legitimate economic freedom and illegitimate political freedom” (Landa, 2010, p. 30). Acknowledging the working class’s patriotism “to die for one’s country” did not prevent him from insisting that “property makes alone men capable of exercising political rights” (Constant cited in Landa, 2010, p. 31). Thus, not having the economic freedom (understood as property ownership) makes the struggle for political freedom illegitimate.

Etienne Balibar (1994) defines this split as the contradiction between the postulate of the French revolution – *freedom, equality, fraternity* and the Lockean freedom to own *private property*. According to Balibar, the most important document of the French Revolution, the *Declaration of the Rights of the Man and Citizen* of 1789, contains the main contradiction of modernity. The participants in the revolution have incompatible interests: on the one hand, the bourgeoisie, and on the other, the *sans culottes*²⁸ - the revolutionary poor Parisians fighting for social and economic equality.²⁹

Therefore the *Declaration* of the French Revolution is different from the bourgeois idea of freedom that the English philosopher John Locke tied to private property. At the core of Locke's philosophy there is opposition between common and private, with strong racist connotations. Because the "wild Indian" cannot take advantage of the common good, the “civilized” individual has the right to take it and cultivate it, by making it his own (cited in Losurdo, 2011, p. 24). The cultivation of land into private property justifies the act of seizing it from the “primitive and uncivilized savage”. Locke's logic is not only the foundation of liberal bourgeois ideology but serves as the ideological justification of colonialism. How can we explain the paradox of advocating liberty against the absolutist state, while justifying slavery? Here, we should look at the Žižek’s insistence that power relations reveal themselves once we differentiate the enunciation from its position of enunciation. Locke enunciates liberty but his position of enunciation belies the universalism in the notion of liberty. As a member of the elite and shareholder in the slave trade with the *Royal African Company* and Secretary of the *Council of*

²⁸ Literally meaning those without pants.

²⁹ The demonization of the *sans culottes* was immediate, for example British cartoonist James Gillroy depicted them as feasting on children of the aristocracy, later the October revolution of 1917 will be depicted in a similar fashion. The pejorative term Black Jacobins was used to discredit the Haitian revolution. (Gillroy, n.d.; Hörmann, 2017)

Trade and Plantations,³⁰ he can conveniently exclude certain people (non-whites), even to the point of dehumanization, from his universal concept of liberty.

In the context of European history, adding property to freedom and equality is at the root of class division. Such discussion entails conceptualizing what Karl Marx discovered is the contradiction between socio-economic reality and the notion of political governance, understood as political equality for everyone. Or, if we refer to the present - the contradiction between capitalism and democracy, understood as mass participation in the political decision-making process. We can read it as a conflict between economic liberalism and political liberalism that opened up the political space for the working class to politically organize. As Marx writes, the freedom of workers to sell their labour is in fact labour exploitation. The first historical processes of exclusion in the modern state are based on class division - those who have the freedom to sell their labour are excluded from those who own the means of production.

The labour of the producer is a form of exploitation for someone else's profit, which entails conditions of economic oppression, but a formal equality of economic actors under the liberal rule of law. We can associate this with the class problem because if the misery of many (the working class) leads to the prosperity of few (those who have seized the means of production and possess them, i.e. the bourgeoisie, the industrialists and the financial elite), this is the basis of class antagonism between producers and holders of the means of production. As Marx discovers, exploitation is the basis of capitalism as a socio-economic system, and its concealment is made possible by the idea of market exchange as a buyer and seller's equality on the market. This is what Žižek (1989) has conceptualized as discovering the symptom: the contradiction between the postulates of bourgeois law of equal rights and social inequality that generates exploitation of one class against another. The freedom to sell once labour is coercion for the sake of survival. The sale of the mass product to the market, where all are equal and involved in a fair exchange, does not reveal the violent history of its production. In *Capital* Vol. 1, Marx shows how the history of accumulation of capital and the process of mass production are history of violence and forms of exploitation.

From the nineteenth century onwards the liberal principle of protecting private property, despite changes of the political system became the norm in Europe. For example, if a French territory became German the owner of private property might have to become German nationality but his right to property was granted. The *Cobden Treaty* of 1860 guaranteed the separation of governmental sphere from the private realm of possession, trade and economy (Buck-Morris, 2000, p. 16). In other words, the liberal concept of separation of the economic and political guaranteed the wealth of the propertied classes. The right to property of Europeans, based on the liberal principles, despite the change of state territories and the type of government was exclusive to Europe.

1.1. Who has the Right to Property?

In the colonies indigenous peoples were deprived of lands and other forms of ownership. In his *Second Treatise* John Locke did argue that indigenous people (“wild Indian”) were

³⁰ The Royal African Company controlled the slave trade in the British empire and the Council of Trade and Plantations was in charge of the expansionist policies in America (Losurdo, 2011, pp.13-14 and 24).

ignorant of labour, which made them ignorant of property and money (Losurdo, 2010, p. 24). The argument went as follows: because the “wild Indian” or “savage” does not know how to cultivate and exploit the land and for this reason should not have the right to own it. John Stuart Mill argued that slavery is a proper means to “civilize” indigenous people (cited in Losurdo, 2010, p. 7). This liberal thinker compared non-white races to children that “require being taken care of others” that “must be protected against their own actions” (Mill, 2003, p. 95) Despotism is the means by which to “protect” and “improve” the “barbarians” (2003, p. 95) In *Principles of Political Economy*, he argues that “savage tribes” that are “so averse from regular industry” can only be introduced to “industrial life” through slavery (Mill, 1965, p.239). Such measures were not only reserved for “barbarians” and “savages” of the colonies. Michael Perlman (2000) discusses the violent forms of disciplining the European peasantry into wage workers that were advocated by the classicists of political economy.

In relation to the legacy of liberalism, Susan Buck-Morss argues that those European principles – protecting private property among European nations, while not honouring this right to colonized peoples, became the basis of US foreign policies. She writes: “the fostering of economic relations with nations that are not economic equals became the basis for political domination” (200, p. 16). But what is more important is that with Theodore Roosevelt’s corollary to the *Monroe Doctrine* in 1904 a new discourse was established – while keeping up the appearance of separation between political and economic, “freedom” takes up economic meaning. Therefore, policing and military interventions was justified in the name of economic freedom, which in reality meant protecting the economic interests of private American firms (2000, p.18). Roosevelt’s corollary contains two key elements of liberal discourse. One is the principle of economic freedom as the freedom to own property, and the other is that economic freedom is granted only to Europeans, or those of European descent.

As Susan Buck-Morss (2000) writes, Willsonian self-determination is an anti-communist response to Lenin’s formulation of national independence as a precondition to the class struggle. President Woodrow Wilson’s fourteen points were a direct response to Lenin’s right to self-determination. Every resistance to capitalism was read as a sign of Soviet involvement during the Cold War (200, p. 20) Buck-Morss continues that the notion that struggles against capitalism in the so called Third World can be national and truly representative of the people was unthinkable for US ideologues of the Cold War. Therefore suppression of political leaders that could threaten US foreign interests were framed as support for anti-communist patriotic fighters. While arguing that planning is impossible to achieve through democratic means, without giving an explanation as to why this is the case (1944, p. 69), at a later point of his life Hayek was embracing the right wing dictatorship of Pinochet, as necessary to kick start economic reforms. Therefore, it seems that Hayek is not against dictatorship, but against certain forms of dictatorships that might lead to equal distribution of resources, or economic regulation (which in Hayek’s writing is termed planned economy).

There is an undergoing trend that is characteristic both of the architects of liberal capitalism and the theoretical originators of neoliberalism, as an advanced form of capitalism. It is the realization that achieving their project requires forceful restructuring and reshaping of society. The works of Michael Perelman (2010) and Quinn Slobodian (2018) map the intellectual trajectories of the liberal and neoliberal school of thought. The history of what Marx refers to as “primitive accumulation” is well known. However, Perelman focuses his research on how

classical political economists were instrumental in advocating policies that further this violent process of accumulating capital.

The contradiction set forth in the *Declaration* of the French revolution is how freedom and equality will be interpreted - whether close to Locke, as the liberals interpret or close to the *sans culottes*, expressing radical democratic impulse for the political participation of all. Here are two different political interpretations. If in one case we have an abstract equality before the law, in the other the equality proceeds from the working people, and the state that is ruled in a true democratic sense, representing the interests of the majority, guarantees it by redistributing the goods and conducting social policies. On the other spectrum are the disciples of Locke who is often considered the philosophical father of liberalism. Yet, as I pointed out his advocacy of liberty was a very selective type of liberty: while vehemently defending the right of the individual to property, he was justifying slavery and colonialism in the name of this very same property (Losurdo, 2011). Locke was also supporting the struggle against absolute monarchy in Europe, while at the same time prescribing to the poor child labour at the age of three (Perlman, 2000; Landa, 2010).

1.2. Citizen vs Economic Rights

The historical significance of the *Declaration* as the first document that defines citizenship lies in the fact that it postulates open political space for struggle for the inclusion of the excluded - women, workers, colonized, minorities, refugees. As Balibar (1991) states, citizenship and national identity are interrelated to each other through the modern state (92). One of the key mechanisms that educate citizenship is state educational and cultural institutions, as well as civil society institutions. But these also could become the places of (for example, fascist) exclusion of those who do not belong to the nation and its common interests. Still, the notion of a nation stands for the idea of the common good, which is the right of the national community. But the common good is always at the expense of private economic interests. Underlying the universal notions of freedom and equality is the interconnectedness of the concrete forms: *community – state – market*. Whether the state would be an arbiter between the community and the market or enforcer of market interests on the community depends on political contingency.

When examining the problematic of EU citizenship and how it applies to new members from Eastern and South-eastern Europe, it is necessary to adopt a historical approach that can illustrate the controversy associated with the idea of universal citizenship. Balibar reminds us that the development of universal citizenship in its historical form is related to colonialism. The discourse of universalism developed first in imposing Christianity in colonized lands and then in secularism and Enlightenment (2004, pp. 57-58). In other words, the historical form of universalism is related to imperial policies of assimilation. The process of joining the European Union poses questions related to a colonizing impulse from earlier historical times. The *Schuman Declaration* of 1950, which led to the creation of the *European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)*, insists on the continued exploitation of Africa. In its essence, the *ECSC* is the basis for European economic integration, which later led to the formation of the EU. Despite its official narrative of rejection of its colonial past, the EU's colonial legacy continues to live in its economic policies.

When discussing the current state of the European Union and citizen rights, we should go

back to the question of *community – state – market*. Is the EU, in its current form capable of adhering to the rights of its citizens? Hence, I find it important to examine how neoliberal thinkers designed their notion of rights, in relation to the question of rights within the EU. Against human rights neoliberals posed rights of capital, reframing the question from economic matter into a matter of human rights. They dismissed the right to full employment, but argued that restricting capital flows should be considered an act of war (Slobodian, 2018, p.125). Hayek used the notion of the *xeno* in Ancient Greece – the guest friend that is granted protection in foreign territory to argue the same for private property and capital (2018, pp. 123-124). Such forms of rights required political institutions to ensure them with specific policies. The tactic of neoliberal intellectuals after 1945 was to undermine social-democratic interpretations of human rights and co-opting them to fit capitalist prerogatives. To the “demand for social security, employment or nourishment” neoliberals posed the “four freedoms of capital, goods, services and labour” (2018, p.136).

The negation of social and economic rights for individuals, while construing rights for economic agents brings about a logical outcome. The ultimate goal was making investment rights stronger than civic rights and the way to achieve this goal was by dismissing the *one-nation-one vote* principle that the Global South countries insisted upon to protect themselves from the power of big economic interests (2018, p. 144). Here the contradiction between economic and political liberalism is fully illustrated – in order to ensure economic liberalism as certain types of political action are required that restrict and perhaps prevent political liberalism. This brings me back to the EU and the rights of citizens against the neoliberal rights of corporations. One of the most worrisome aspects of CETA and TTIP agreements for the citizens of Europe, US and Canada is the clause that makes it possible for corporate entities to encroach upon state policies that have guaranteed rights to their citizens – the right to environmental protection being one.

In the context of the changing function of rights, Wendy Brown (2018) discusses the changing role of the First Amendment in the US Constitution. Based on the works of several law scholars Brown summarizes that FA has shifted from protecting individuals to protecting corporations from being regulated. The impact of such protection is not surprising – increased exploitative practices, violation of human rights, environmental abuse and devastation. Countries like Bulgaria where worker’s abuse is the norm have become glad recipients of FDI, which translates into corporations moving in to take advantage of cheap labour and lack of labour rights. “Rights [under neoliberalism]”, Brown writes, “are strategically redeployed from their intended attachment to individuals to something else— corporations, property, capital, families, churches, whiteness. Economic and familial privatization of the public, combined with the neoliberal denigration of the social, together build the right- wing attack on ‘social justice’ ...Hayekian formulation of freedom valorizes and expands the private to retrench the reach of the political and challenge the very existence of the social” (2018, p.20). Hayek’s legacy of freedom that exists in late neoliberalism is defined by Brown as follows: “freedom that has no value apart from that generated by speculative markets” (2018, p.29).

The case of CETA and TTIP on first reading seem to illustrate the contradiction between theory and practice of neoliberalism. However, this is not the case if we delve in the political project of neoliberalism. Quinn Slobodian has summarized the objective of neoliberalism as follows: “the neoliberal project focused on designing institutions— not to liberate markets but to

encase them, to inoculate capitalism against the threat of democracy, to create a framework to contain often-irrational human behavior, and to reorder the world...a space of competing states in which borders fulfil a necessary function” (2018, p. 2). The project of global capitalism, that we now refer to as globalization, required institutions that would enforce economic liberalism, at the expense of political liberalism. In the last chapter of the *The Road to Serfdom* – “The Prospect of International Order”, Hayek provides a blueprint for the type of global governing system that he envisions. Hayek proposes a global federation that encases the world economy through law. The main objective is to dismantle the welfare state.

2. Hayek’s Intervention: The Economy is Natural

In that sense, we can read Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* as manifestation of the author’s fear of political liberalism. The book explicates the author’s subliminal view of the (capitalist) economy. In his view any type of intervention, even the slightest brings disastrous consequences. Due to the “close interdependence of economic phenomena,” once started, economic planning could not be stopped, “the planner will be forced to extend his controls until they become all-comprehensive” (1944, p. 105). Hayek argued that planning leads to dictatorship because he equates freedom with private property (an argument that is ahistorical, since those possessing private property have been in the minority). In the tradition of classical liberalism that feared the tyranny of the majority, Hayek inverts the notion of democracy from the rule of the people, which in their majority are wage workers, to the minority of property owners. Hayek writes: “A true dictatorship of the proletariat”, even if democratic in form, if it undertook centrally to direct the economic system, would probably destroy personal freedom as completely as any autocracy has ever done (1944, p.69). Yet, for the majority of the citizens in a capitalist liberal democracy that freedom would be to sell their labour and in an unregulated capitalism that Hayek advocated for, the price of that labour is lower and lower.

Furthermore, Hayek draws a direct line between government directing economic life and totalitarianism (1944, p. 86). This line of thought is taken up by anti-communist adherents and is still enjoying popularity in Eastern Europe, such as Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, despite the failure of neoliberal market fundamentalism. In support of his argument Hayek uses an abstract example of how state regulations of the economy lead to discrimination of (racial) minorities, however he does not consider the reverse situation, where the state has enforced anti-discrimination laws on private business, as is the practice in the United States.

Presented as “tyranny” the welfare state is juxtaposed to the choice of “higher values” of health that comes at “considerable cost” (1994, p.97). This ideological manoeuvre that presents the welfare state as tyranny also negates the notion of healthcare as human right. Healthcare becomes something that one can have at “considerable cost”, i.e. in Hayek’s understanding of state and economy, healthcare is a commodity, which he equates with liberal government and with liberty. Through a rhetorical exercise Hayek reaches the conclusion that people would prefer making the hard choice for themselves, than the choice being made for them. In the case of healthcare this would mean people preferring to pay for private healthcare (making the hard choice), rather than being provided public healthcare. The United States, where affordable healthcare is out of reach for millions, has taken Hayek’s postulates at face value. Despite abysmal records of suffering due to lack of healthcare, the Hayekian notion of governmental

social programs as tyranny has taken strong roots. One prominent example of this would be the paranoia a few years back in relation to Obama's modest healthcare reform. This is also the same thinking behind World Bank's restructuring of Bulgaria's healthcare system with the formation of the health bank – literally a bank for healthcare.

Michel Foucault (2008) has analysed how the neoliberal school has used planning as a mechanism to argue a position against the welfare state. By taking up various state planning policies – as diverse as the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, FDR's New Deal, British Keynesianism, they argued that no matter what the political system and constitution the common root of economic interventionism equates them with tyranny. Therefore, the ideological exercise was to equate liberalism (understood as economic) with freedom and any form of state intervention of the economy as anti-liberal, therefore anti-freedom (111).

Hayek presents a level of abstraction by which the actions of the state or state planner as its representative are always deliberate and authoritarian, leading to human suffering, while economic actions are non-deliberate and simply occur. Suffering from the state is “deliberately imposed by authority”, a result of “central action” (1944, p. 106). On the other hand, being fired by a private employer does not constitute the same level of suffering (meaning inequality) because it is “nobody's conscious choice” or because “suffering may hit anyone” (p.106). Therefore, while state planning equals deliberate suffering, unregulated economy equals unconscious happenstance and is nobody's choice. This is what Quinn Slobodian (2018) has termed to be Hayek's view of the economy as a sublime process, a spontaneous order beyond human comprehension and beyond capture (2018, p.18 and p.87).

Hayek's efforts to present economic planning as synonymous with tyranny, sometimes take absurdist dimensions. In another passage, from *The Road to Serfdom* Hayek readily dismisses the whole historical trajectory and mechanisms of colonialism making the claim: “Who can seriously doubt that a member of a small racial or religious minority will be freer with no property, so long as members of his community have property and are therefore able to employ him, than he would be if private property were abolished and he became owner of nominal share in the communal property” (1944, p.104). Such claim not only ignores the operation and structure of settler colonialism but also shows lack of comprehension of other forms of organizing outside the Eurocentric/Western ontological paradigm. Hayek must have forgotten that in Locke's formula of freedom and private property, neither was reserved for racial minorities. He is quick to criticize Marx, yet seems to have missed the historical accounts of colonialism in *Capital* Vol. 1. Hayek's “negative theology” (Slobodian) contending that the world economy is sublime and ineffable, is the exact opposite to Marx's historical analysis of capitalism.

In *The Constitution of Liberty* (1978), Hayek makes a distinction between liberal democracy and what he calls totalitarian or social democracy. Hayek differentiates between English and French tradition (with the notable exception of Tocqueville and Constant, who he deems closer to the English tradition). Those are also the liberal thinkers for whom “tyranny of the majority” meant a code for the poor working class. Ostensibly, Hayek claims English liberal democracy comes from spontaneous freedom, trial and error and development, while the French notion of democracy is collectivist and therefore tyrannical.

From Hayek's writing it would seem that he was only focusing on the political tyranny of governments, that his main concern was the undemocratic nature of governments and that by

making the argument that totalitarianism had its roots in collectivist organizing, he was a champion for individual freedom. Yet, if he was unaware that economic policies can be equally despotic as state governments, he should have not been concerned in designing ways to restrict political freedom, to secure economic one.

Hayek goes into elaborate exercise of tracing the origins of Bolshevism, Nazism and fascism in collectivism, which he claims comes from the tradition of the French revolution, yet he completely ignores the context in which totalitarianisms occurred. The Russian revolution of 1917 occurs in the midst of the devastating World War I, in which European states fight over property in the colonies. The extreme class antagonisms between the two world wars come as a result of decimated socioeconomic conditions and the draconian sanctions of the winners over the losers of the Great War (World War I). Enzo Traverso (2016) defines this historical period as the time of revolutions and counter-revolutions. However, Hayek the champion of economic liberty does not seem to have any concern with the despotism hiding behind such liberty.

In her analysis of Hayek's notion of freedom, Wendy Brown shows how it is "equated wholly with the pursuit of private ends, is appropriately unregulated, and is largely exercised to enhance the value, competitive positioning, or market share of a person or firm" (2019, p. 13). For Hayek politics as such, and democracy in particular, limit freedom as they concentrate power, constrain individual action, disrupt spontaneous order, and distort the "natural incentives, distributions, and hence health of markets" (2019, p.15). Adam Smith's "invisible hand" of the market (the self-regulating principle) is expanded into ontological and normative principle: all society is like a market and best organized as a market, and all liberty (personal, political, social, civic) has a market form (2019, p.16). As Brown points out Hayek turns economic theory into a cosmological one: the same kind of freedom ought to prevail everywhere and is capable of producing the same positive effects everywhere. This is demonstrated in the formula: liberty generates responsibility, responsibility generates discipline, and discipline generates social innovations, efficiencies, and order (2019, pp.16-17).

Hayek makes a rhetorical manoeuvre anyone who does not believe in the "spontaneous ordering of the market" is cast as "primitive", "naïve", exhibiting "anthropomorphism" (as if the market is not a result of human relations) to dismiss any demands for economic justice (1982, pp. 62-63). The concept of social/economic justice is defined as "primitive" and has to be "outgrown" (1982, p. 63). Ironically, his own subliminal understanding of the market is never questioned by his neoliberal disciples. Hayek's assault on the concept of social justice includes the insinuation that because social justice does not apply to the individual but to society, it is unachievable. Hayek is economizing society by using words such as "product" and "shares" to refer to justice. According to such a mindset, justice becomes a product that some organized body has to give shares to various groups. When justice is understood as a product the task of everyone getting "equal shares" is impossible.

To this reified notion of justice, Hayek juxtaposes a notion of the market as an unpredictable and unintentional force. The unjust mechanism of the market is not a result of deliberate action or exercising of power, but of processes "neither intended, nor foreseen" (64). According to such logic social justice is immoral, because an authority has to decide what is just and unjust, while the market is a neutral force, no intentional suffering can be assigned to it. Therefore, Hayek concludes that to demand justice from the market process, i.e. to demand economic justice is "clearly absurd" (1982, p.64). The next step is the already known parallel

between social justice and totalitarianism, where Hayek's favourite example the Soviet Union is mentioned with quotes from Andrej Sakharov to strengthen the argument (1982, pp. 65-67).

Hayek brings this logic to its extreme conclusion by arguing that government regulation in the name of social justice has a tendency to accelerate until it reaches the characteristics of totalitarian system (1982, p.68). This is a reified notion of governance and of the political process that does not take into account contingency of various political parties with their social and class base. According to this understanding left politics is reduced to sinister acts of regulation that translate into control of individuals by the state. After forty years of neoliberal governmentality, this logic has progressed into a worldview that brings about paranoid campaigns against universal healthcare, against regulation to protect the environment, against reproductive rights, etc. Hayek's alternative to a world of social/economic redistributive justice that requires political action, which he deems a threat to freedom, is an abstraction – markets and morals (Brown, 2019, p. 33). Markets and morals are not intentionally coercive, but spontaneous and organic. The spontaneous order of markets is not subject to the directions of specific authority (Hayek, 82, p. 85). Hayek uses the term spontaneous order to refer both to his notion of the market and to the type of society that he advocates for.

For Brown, the attack on distributive justice extends from the economic to the social where in a form of dialectical negation white supremacists and other hate groups today signify expression of freedom, while political correctness is cast as tyrannical policing (2018, p.21). And she is very clear that poor white male anger resulting in Trump's election should be examined in relation to the forty years of neoliberal political economy. However, it is not clear whether if the highly popular democratic socialist Bernie Sanders was fairly treated by his own party and be allowed to become the contender for the Presidency instead of the unpopular status quo candidate, we will have the same outcome.³¹

2.1. The Pernicious Outcome of Neoliberal's Freedom

The intellectual history of neoliberalism tells quite a different story from what we are used to hear, that free market societies are characterized by democratic governments. Instead, neoliberals faced democracy as a problem. Democracy is understood as popular demands that threaten the market economy. For the neoliberal mindset those threats took various forms from European white working class to non-white decolonized peoples (Slobodian, 2018, p.17). Starting with the premise that the economy is sublime and without capture, therefore it cannot be quantified, measured and understood, meaning that it also cannot be planned (Slobodian, 2018). As Slobodian points out, the sublimation of the economy meant it was eluding comprehension (2018, p.87). Because Hayek and his colleagues had a theological perception of the economy, their comprehension of it was that it is incomprehensible. For Hayek the world economy was sublime and operated beyond reason, demands for economic equality and social justice was "to foreclose the creative capacity of competition" (2018, p.225).

Foucault also touches on this aspect of naturalization of the economy. The economic game is natural and everyone must accept it and abide by it (2008, p. 143). In a welfare state the

³¹ We are witnessing this very same process of preventing the popular democratic candidate by his own party again in 2020.

common sensual element is the social acceptance that for the betterment of society there needs to be social policies that ease the class antagonism. The notion that economic inequality destabilizes society has to be subverted. As Foucault has shown neoliberals attacked the core principles of the welfare state: restricting an unrestrained economy that produces inequality and destructive social effects; socialization of consumption; active and generous social policies (2008, p.142). Because the economy is sublime and ineffable the transfer of income is dangerous – it takes away from investment.

In Hayek's inversion of the notion of rights, economic interventionism that guarantees democratic freedoms is denounced as a threat to freedom (1982, p. 68). To the rights that the welfare state guarantees, such as the right to healthcare are opposed alternative rights that are presented as individual rights. Paradoxically, the mechanisms that have been implemented against socialism, communism, Nazism or fascism, the mechanisms that produce the freedoms of capitalism with a human face, were negated by the neoliberals. By inverting the talk of coercion and repression, they were able to paint a picture in which economic interventionism is undemocratic. Policies of redistribution are equated with lack of freedom. The freedoms that such policies provide, for example, Roosevelt's *New Deal* providing employment to ameliorate the conditions of the majority – the working class, establishing social security to ensure social safety for the elderly, the right to pensions, or the freedom to retire. Neoliberalism presents as freedom economic prosperity, which however is abstract. Once again we are faced with the problem of enunciation and position of enunciation.

Frederic Jameson, among others, has pointed out the ambiguity of the ideological term 'free market' (1994, 276). Its origins come from the conception of the inherently violent nature of humans. Hobbes feared that violence and competition will erupt into chaos and thus only a strong state can tame and control this chaotic outcome. In Adam Smith it is the market that substitutes for the centralized state – "the competitive system, the market does the taming and controlling all by itself, no longer needing an absolute state" (1994, p. 280). In other words, Jameson defines the market as the "Leviathan in sheep's clothing" because, just as the absolute state, it is a mechanism for control of the individual, since human beings are incapable of controlling their destinies. Therefore, there is a fundamental paradox in the neoliberal equation between free market and individual freedom. By putting an equal sign between free market and democracy (rule of the people) neoliberal ideologues conceal the fact that in traditional liberal thought the market has always been a mechanism for control.

That the market is a mechanism for control becomes obvious if we examine neoliberal regimes of governance in relation to the role of the state. The success of neoliberal policies depends on a process of normative measures designed by state apparatuses whose objective is to shape individuals as homo-economicus subjects (Brown, 2005). In other words, to be successful, neoliberal governance requires a process of social conditioning. Through concrete policies, the state both rewards behaviour and attitudes driven by economic self-interest and punishes those groups that are not economically savvy enough to adapt to the new rules of the game. An example of the first strategy can be seen in states' lifting of regulations on trade and finance, as well as deregulating culture industries in an effort to promote competition and consumerism (lifting restriction on advertising for children, etc.). An example of the second strategy is the states' gradual withdrawal from social policies that aim to ameliorate the conditions of the most vulnerable.

For Hayek (and the father of American neoliberalism and Hayek's student Milton Friedman) the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet is a favourable outcome as long as it secures the economic rights of foreign capital. As Hayek puts it "I personally prefer liberal dictators to democratic governments lacking liberalism" (cited in Landa, 2010, p.238). Driven by their fear of democratic empowerment that could bring about demands for socio-economic justice, such as policies of economic redistribution and ceasing immoral trade (slavery), liberals in the past have advocated ways to repress the democratic process. The same goes for the architects of neoliberalism that championed individual freedom understood in a very limited way as economic freedom, without concern how to achieve it. But when a democratically elected government (such as that of Salvador Allende in Chile) underwent highly popular policies of redistribution of wealth, they did not hesitate to cheerlead for dictatorships, as long as such dictatorships succeed "beating off the attack of the re-distributors" (Mises, 1981, p.40). For Mises, as most prominent neoliberals, the function of democracy was to "make peace and to avoid violent revolutions" (cited in Slobodian, 2018, p. 45). But ultimately the goal of democracy as a political system for him was to push the market interest. Dismissing policies of socio-economic equality and amelioration of class disparity, because "men are endowed different by nature" (Mises cited in Slobodian, p. 45)

In that sense this understanding did not hesitate to advise suspension of democracy if it interfered with the market. This is what Mises aimed at as the chair of the *Chamber of Commerce* in Austria during 1930: he promoted the passage of anti-terror law that effectively was designed to abolish the right to employment benefits and social housing that Austrian workers have tried to secure by going on strike (Slobodian, 2018, p. 46). Later, we see the same tactics being implemented by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan that are commonly known as the originators of neoliberalism in the Global North, respectively the United Kingdom and the USA (Peck, 2010).

The period of "capitalism with human face" or the so-called Keynesian welfare state took two world wars to arrive. It came because of the pressure of social forces, exhausted by the imperial drive of capitalism. During the welfare state, the state mediated between capital and labour, organized labour was granted collective bargaining rights but at the cost of unions being purged of their radicalism. David Harvey argues that eventually within this triad "the decisions of corporations became hegemonic in defining the paths of mass consumption growth, presuming, of course, that the other two partners in the grand coalition did whatever was necessary to keep effective demand at levels sufficient to absorb the steady growth of capitalist output" (Harvey, 1990, p. 134). The capitalist welfare state is short-lived, nevertheless highly hated and feared by neoliberals. For instance, another prominent neoliberal, Wilhelm Ropke, depicted the British welfare state as a step in the direction of Nazism (Peck, 2010, 16).

3. Democratization Theory and Practice

Here I turn to the question of how the intellectual production of Hayek, Mises, Friedman and other neoliberal thinkers became ideological common sense. Tackling this question requires turning to the Gramscian concept of struggle for hegemony. The ideas of neoliberal intellectuals could not become common sensual if not for specific historical context: crisis of the capitalist welfare state in 1970s that signaled the beginning of the end of embedded liberalism; rise of what

David Harvey (2005) terms counter-revolution of the upper class, explicated in the political leadership of Thatcher (Britain) and Reagan (US). The hegemonic ascendance of neoliberalism started with the *Washington Consensus* but the neoliberalisation of Bulgaria happened within the overarching ideological, political and economic crisis of the Soviet model throughout the Eastern bloc.

William Robinson's concept of polyarchy³², as a political system, is useful in relation to discussing the process of the transformation of socialist states and societies. A political system of polyarchy secures policies of neoliberalisation. Neil Brennar, Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore have developed the concept of neoliberalisation to point out to the uneven process of implantation of neoliberal policies with diverse outcomes. Uneven development is characteristic of the spatial dimension of neoliberalisation. Neoliberalism in Bulgaria challenged, overcame and adapted to some of the legacy of the socialist state. The process of neoliberalisation in Bulgaria is characteristic of the formation of a new historic bloc. It consists of the reformist fraction of the *nomenklatura* (key administrative functionaries of the Communist party), dissident intellectuals and organized crime that after the dismantlement of the repressive apparatus of secret services emerged as a powerful key player (Appel, 2004; Zhelev, 2005; Ganev, 2007).

An important aspect of this transformation is an approach to primitive accumulation that would require looking at it not only as a historical process but as a recurring mechanism of formation of capitalist economic and social relations. Primitive accumulation should be examined in relation to the changing role of the working force, on the one hand with the formation of anti-communist and anti-socialist unions, and on the other with the deindustrialization process and re-orientation toward service economies and outsourced sectors like call centres. In this section I focus on the importance of the formation of polyarchical political model that has managed to regulate crisis of the post-socialist capitalist Bulgarian state. The formation of this polyarchy should be traced back to the intellectual history of democratization theory.

Sociologist William I Robinson situates the production of *democratization theory*, as part of the role of US academia after World War II to provide legitimation for US foreign policy objectives (1996, p. 42). A Gramscian reading of US academia positions academic professors as the organic intellectuals who through their status as experts function to administer intellectual and moral leadership. Democratization theory emerged in the United States after World War II in the context of the defeat of fascism and the rise of anti-colonial struggles that posed a serious challenge to regulate and control capitalist relations in the Global South. Democratization theory is characterized by the rejection of the classical definition of democracy as the rule of the people. Instead, the focus is on "institutional arrangements for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter cited in Robinson, 1996, p. 51). Perhaps, the most important aspect of the theory is the separation of the social and economic from the political and the affinity it claims between democracy and free market as a code for capitalism (1996, p.54).

One of the most prominent scholars of democratization theory, Samuel Huntington is very close to Hayek's understanding of democracy when he writes:

"In all democracies, private ownership of property remains the basic norm in theory and

³² The concept of polyarchy is discussed below.

in fact. . . The existence of such private power is essential to the existence of democracy . . . Political democracy is clearly compatible with inequality in both wealth and income, and, in some measure, it may be dependent upon such inequality . . . Defining democracy in terms of goals such as economic well-being, social justice, and overall socioeconomic equity is not, we have argued, very useful” (cited in Robinson, 1996, p. 54).

Drawing on the work of Robert Dahl, Robinson (1996; 2013) defines the form that such democracy takes as polyarchy. Robinson writes: “Polyarchy refers to a system in which a small group actually rules and mass participation in decision-making is confined to leadership choice in elections carefully managed by competing elites” (1996, p. 49). Polyarchy is marked by a shift in US foreign policy in the 1980s from promoting authoritarianism in the post-World War II era to promoting democracy (Robinson, 2013, p.228). The limited understanding of democracy that liberal elites of the 19th were protecting – democracy reduced to the selection of leaders through competitive elections (Samuel Huntington cited in Robinson, 1996, p.50) seems to correlate to the concept of polyarchy. Robinson (1996, p. 40) traces the origin of polyarchy with Pareto and Mosca, key figures that play an important role in the formation of fascist ideology (Landa, 2010). Landa describes them as disillusioned liberals that have given up on political liberalism. Democratization theory is the progression of liberal concern with the question of how to exclude the majority (lower classes) from the political process. Polyarchy is “democracy” that prevents the rise of political democracy that could challenge the socio-economic order of capitalism.

Characteristic of polyarchy is the reduction of democracy simply as the right to vote. There is no concern for mechanisms that hold accountable elected officials once they win elections; participation in the political process is reduced to voting in elections and the key concern is the form of “fair elections” that follow proper procedural rules (1996, p.59).³³ For polyarchy to work it has to exclude any possibility of popular democracy. In *Crisis of Democracy*, a report by the *Trilateral Commission*, Huntington is concerned with the extension of political democracy movements in the 1960s, resulting in the opposition to the war in Vietnam and distrust with Johnson and Nixon’s administrations (1975, pp. 107-108). Huntington’s explanation of the problems of governance in the US is due to mass democratic movements. He perceives as a negative tendency the democratic reforms in universities that have been a space for democratic political organizing. He is also worried about democratic processes influencing the military, calling it “a disaster on the battlefield” (1975, p.114). His solution to the problem of democracy is “balanced democracy”, by which he means “a measure of apathy and non-involvement on the part of some individuals and groups” (1975, p.115). His model of successful democratic administration is that of Truman and Eisenhower who surrounded themselves by a small circle of Wall Street bankers, what he calls “the existing source of power in the country” (1975, p.97). Therefore, it is easy to imagine that the defined undesirable individuals and groups would be on the left, the politically organized working poor, etc.

The democratization theory shift in the 1980s is a continuation of the US' foreign policy objective, with different means, to prevent successful socialist movements to acquire state power. Anti-communism was the ideological frame to combat any popular leaders that would encroach upon the interests of US business within the so-called Third World. With the

³³ Yet, in the case of the Democratic party in the US working against its own popular leader, Bernie Sanders, we witness how even this rule can be bend if polyarchy is threatened by a candidate popular with the working classes.

establishment of the National Security Council and the CIA under it in 1947, every subsequent US President violates every democratic right in the name of protecting democracy against communism (Morss, 2000, p. 21). The President becomes the sole arbiter when deciding to engage in covert or direct action when a Western capitalist order and class system is being threatened by a nation. His decision-making power is not checked by the legislative assembly or the people of the United States (2000,p.24).

National Endowment for Democracy is an institution created in relation to the shift toward democratization. It was created in 1983 with the participation of the US National Security Council. *NED* was formed under the Reagan administration at a period of intensification of the Cold War. However, until the fall of the Berlin Wall, its primary area of operation was Latin America. Latin America still continues to be an area of primary interest, but *NED* has also been very active in Eastern Europe since 1989. *NED* came about due to the need to substitute CIA's violent methods. The CIA was seen more as a force of destabilization, it was efficient at overthrowing democratically elected governments and covert operations to install vassal regimes but not at stabilization. *NED* shifts the tactics of US foreign policy from covert financing to openly funding NGOs, political parties, business groups, media, trade unions and civic organizations. As the *New York Times* put it *NED* is a "combination of Government money, bureaucratic flexibility and anti-Communist commitment" (cited in Robinson, 1996, p. 88)

William Robinson emphasizes the overall uncritical look of US academia at institutions such as the *NED*. Despite being created "at the highest echelons of the national security state" and "organically integrated" into the US interventionist foreign policy, in US textbooks *NED* has the reputation of a benevolent institution dedicated to the enhancing of world democracy (88-89). *NED*'s board of directors have been such interventionist figures as Henry Kissinger (major figure during the Chile events that brought about Pinochet), Zbigniew Brezinski (the architect of Soviet's involvement in Afghanistan), Paul Wolfowitz (one of the architects of "regime change" agenda for the Middle East) and Madeleine Albright (Secretary of State (1997-2001) in Bill Clinton's administration).

In 1992 an article by legal scholar Thomas Franck argued that there emerges a "right to democratic governance" on a global scale. The article was written in the context of the failed attempt for a coup in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev and the case of Haiti, when the coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide led to UN response. In her critique of the notion of global democratic governance, Susan Marks (2011) provides detailed analysis of the events in Haiti. In 1991 Aristide was overthrown with a military coup, but in 1994 with the help of the US military he was brought back to power. Yet, the condition for such help was the implementation of neoliberal SAPs in Haiti. In a sense, such highly unpopular policies were at complete odds with Aristide's initial political program that went against the political and military elite in the country. The result of SAPs in Haiti was further foreign dependence of Haitian economy, bringing impoverishment of local producers and increase of social inequality.

International initiatives following the ideological framework of democratic governance excluded the right for democratic control of economic life (Marks, 2011, p. 521). In the case of the Soviet Union, the coup against Gorbachev was an attempt to stop his reforms and the breakup of the Soviet Union. As in the case of Haiti, the US's support against the coup was influential. The unsuccessful coup was followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the shock therapy reforms of Yegor Gaidar - President Boris Yeltsin's economic advisor. In

other words, both Haiti and the Soviet Union “democratized” at the expense of the participation of their own citizens in the decision-making process.

This explains why the championing of democracy by the “democratic West” takes a very specific form. Carl Gershman the president of the *National Endowment for Democracy (NED)* summarizes the objective of what was understood by the promotion of democracy in a neoliberal era: “In a world of advanced communication and exploding knowledge, it is no longer possible to rely solely on force to promote stability and defend the national security. *Persuasion is increasingly important*, and the United States must enhance its capacity to persuade by *developing techniques for reaching people at many different levels*.” (cited in Robinson, 1996, p.2, italics mine). Gershman went on to stress that “democracy” abroad should be a major consideration for” the United States, in its effort to “enhance its capacity to persuade” around the world (cited in Robinson, 1996, p.2).

What is being championed and promoted and when this fails violently installed, recently in the cases with the Middle East, is what Jodi Dean calls “real existing constitutional democracy” that privileges wealthy elites and excludes the poor from the political process (2009, p.76). A prominent champion of democratization, NYU political scientist, Adam Przeworski puts it quite bluntly in relation to the ‘democratization’ process in Latin America: “It seems as if an almost complete docility and patience on the part of organized workers are needed for a democratic transformation to succeed” (1986, p.10) And proceeds to give as examples of functioning democracies Belgium, Sweden, France and Great Britain only after the defeat of organized labour (1986, p.10). We can trace the fascist sentiments, that I will later discuss³⁴, in such an argument, although this time the fascist fantasy of “class harmony” is substituted with “democracy”. The only condition for success, however, is the defeat of those that can disturb such idyll, i.e. Jews/Communists, or in this example organized workers.

Democratization theory’s notion of democracy is understood the way the liberal elite of the nineteenth century understood it – as anti-demos. As Ishay Landa (2010) points out the democratic pressure was seen as a threat to the liberal elite, because the uneducated masses could impose severe restrictions on the entrepreneurial freedom of their employers, by way of regulating labour conditions, as well as redistribute wealth by way of progressive taxation (275). Democracy was conceived as a tyranny from below by this same elite and therefore has to be resisted (276). For Mill the ideal form of governance was the voluntary succumbing of the many to the “superior wisdom of the few” (cited in Landa, p. 276). Ishay Landa shows how historically the realization to lead the masses with their eyes wide shut, brought about techniques of mass suggestion. The revered icon of neo-conservatism, Leo Strauss is a key figure in this process. Landa continues: “what is threatening for liberalism is not necessarily the formal existence of a democracy, but rather the existence of a democracy that escapes the elites’ control” (288).

Hayek envisions individual freedom within the realm of liberal democracy that enforces complete economic freedom. And this liberal democracy exists as the opposite of mass political democratisation - polyarchy. Slavoj Žižek points to the ideological significance of the liberal notion of freedom based on personal choice. “At the very nerve centre of liberal ideology is the idea of freedom of choice grounded in the notion of the ‘psychological’ subject endowed with

³⁴ See section The Jew and the Communist: Tracing the Figures of Mass-Phobia in next chapter.

potentials she strives to realize” (2017, p.35). By disregarding the questions of forms of social relations, forms of state and forms of world order (Morton, 2006) and shifting freedom into the realm of choice, this is how the liberal ideology justifies a neoliberal social existence:

“...the ruling ideology endeavours to sell us the very insecurity caused by the dismantling of the welfare state as an opportunity for new freedoms: you have to change your job every year, relying on short-term contracts instead of a long-term stable appointment? Why not see this as a liberation from the constraints of a fixed job, as the chance to reinvent yourself again and again, to become aware of and then realise the hidden potentials of your personality? You can no longer rely on the standard healthcare and retirement plans, so you have to take out additional insurance? Why not see this as another opportunity to choose: either a better life now or long-term security? And if this predicament causes you anxiety, the postmodern ideologist will immediately accuse you of wanting to ‘escape from freedom’ by clinging mindlessly to the old stable forms” (Žižek, 2017, p. 35)

For Žižek such liberal notion of freedom as individual choice results in liberal subjects being the least free: “in changing their own opinion or perception of themselves, accepting what is imposed on them as originating in their ‘nature’, they are no longer even aware of their subordination.” (2017, p.39) Because the liberal freedom of choice is that of a choice already made for the subject, a choice within the coordinates of existing power relations (2017, p.41). If the existing power relations are that of predatory type capitalism, class disparity and lack of labour rights, the choice has to be made within the confines of such conditions. Stuart Hall emphasizes that the entertainment industry cannot be analysed independently of the economic, political and social conditions of its production (Williams, 2020, p. 167).

For example, if someone eats worms on USA’s *Fear Factor* or similar reality show of a corporate media network, the degrading act of eating worms for money is naturalized as a choice of testing endurance. Here is a more striking example from Bulgaria: on the only public television, *Bulgarian National Television* (BNT) the parents of an eight-year-old contortionist girl that is suffering from arthritis are congratulated for her bravery. It soon becomes clear that the parents are unable to pay for their daughter’s treatment. Nevertheless, this revelation does not start a discussion on the consequences of privatized healthcare. The girl’s participation in a show, in hopes that she is selected to continue to the next stage and eventually would materialize into fame and money to cover her treatment, is perceived by all as a natural choice. What is imposed on the little girl and her parents is the elimination of socialist healthcare as a right to all. Instead, they are faced with making a choice within the confines of existing power relations.

I will schematically and briefly demonstrate how such liberal (un)freedom operates in the larger context of post-socialist capitalist Bulgaria. The post-socialist Bulgarian governments dismantle social programs, do away with any remnants of the welfare state, implement economic policies that result in de-industrialization and over-reliance on FDI, therefore paving the way for social conditions that render many to turn into a surplus population or outsourced cheap labour. The somewhat expected reaction of the disappearance of the welfare state would be turning to the nationalism of populist right for protection (Bofo et al, 2019). But more unexpected is the proliferation of entrepreneurial self-perception. The imposed reality of low-paid, unskilled service work is naturalized and the reaction is to proclaim oneself an entrepreneur. During the enclosures the massive refusal of peasants to be turned into wage-labourers was so significant

that various methods of repression were designed to discipline the future workforce and destroy their forms of social empowerment³⁵ (Marx, 1990; Foucault, 2008; Federici, 2004; Perelman, 2000). In post-socialist capitalist Bulgaria, the violent process of primitive accumulation coerced the majority of the people to exploitative labour on a minimum wage. Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurism have become the ideological mantra of neoliberalism's individual freedom. The fantasy that everyone can be an entrepreneur also serves as a preventive mechanism of political organizing of workers. The Bulgarian neoliberal state is designing educational policies that shape children into economic agents from an early age. Today in elementary schools the subject of *Entrepreneurship and Technology* is mandatory from first grade onwards; some kindergartens include exercises in banking and finance.³⁶

³⁵ On primitive accumulation and the destruction of women's social power see (Federici, 2004)

³⁶ During a personal conversation with a parent of four year old, I found out that when the child was in a private kindergarten he participated in a game designed to "enhance financial abilities".

Chapter Two: Trajectories of Anti-Communism/Fascism /(Neo)Liberalism

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the ideological underpinnings of (neo)liberal *transitology* have been an explanatory narrative of the Eastern bloc countries' transition from totalitarianism to democracy and free market (always used interchangeably).³⁷ Such explanation entails that a capitalist socio-economic system brings about political democracy. However, throughout Europe, not only in its Eastern part, the opposite has occurred – a growing tendency towards authoritarian forms of government, paralleled with growth of far-right, xenophobic, extreme nationalist, fascist movements. This teaches us that in times of crisis free market capitalism has proven to be incompatible with political democracy. Since the global financial crisis that originated in the US as a result to neoliberal deregulation of the financial sector, draconian austerity policies were imposed in a top-down manner from the troika (IMF, ECB and EC) on various European states, such as Greece, Italy, and Portugal (Traverso, 2019, p. 10). At the same time, during two decades under the IMF currency board, Bulgaria has been in a state of permanent demographic, social, economic and political crisis. Is the post-socialist condition, exacerbated in the Bulgarian case moving from neoliberal peripheral capitalism toward a fascistic form of authoritarianism, a peculiar paradox?

1. The Ideological Significance of Anti-Communism

Slavoj Žižek, perhaps more than any other scholar, has brought back the importance of ideology critique after the fall of the Berlin Wall. For Žižek the importance of ideology and ideological production in various social and cultural texts (media, film, scholarly work, political narratives) is its permeation into everyday life, without any regard to it being believed or not. Žižek emphasizes the role of ideology in power relations, especially class relations. As he points out the significance of ideology is not its content – whether it is true or false. The significance is in the subjective position of enunciation that tells the truth or the lie. The position of enunciation of ideological content (no matter the question of accuracy) conceals relations of social domination (class exploitation, political power). This is what Žižek means when he points that, “ideology [can often] lie in the guise of truth (Žižek, 1994, p. 8). He provides an example with the way the media addresses the US government's and various human rights NGOs' attempts to provide justification to the American public for military intervention. The accounts of a “Third World” dictator's human rights violations, for example Syrian dictator Basahar al-Assad's alleged use of biological weapons, might be factually accurate. However, the actual reasons for the US's push for *regime change* that would reveal geopolitical and political-economic interests remain concealed from the public. In other words, the importance is not so much what is being said, but who says it and from what position in relation to power. That is how we should analyze the production of anti-communist texts (narratives, images, literary text, historiography, film, etc.). The question of the accuracy of content should be second to the question of who produces

³⁷ Transitology is the study of so-called “transitions” from “authoritarianism toward liberal democracy”. It has close theoretical ties with democratization theory. Some of the influential works from this vast literature include: (Carothers, 1999 ; Diamond et al., 1988; Linz, 1996; O'Donnell et al., 1986) and for Bulgarian context the works of political scientist and founder of the Center for Liberal Strategies (CLS), Ivan Krastev.

it and from what position. I will argue that the empirical content of anti-communist historiography is enveloped in the ideological framework of *totalitarianism*.

Theorists, scholars and thinkers from Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and Karl Popper's *Open Society* to historians Ernst Nolte and François Furet have put together an equation between fascism and communism. Prominent originators of neoliberal thought like Fredric Hayek, Ludwig Von Mises, Wilhelm Ropke and Milton Friedman have espoused the same view, in some cases arguing that fascism is the lesser evil. For example, in *Liberalism in the Classical Tradition* first published in 1927, Mises gives high praise to fascism as saviour of European civilization from Bolshevism, and in 1946 Ropke depicts it as the lesser of two evils.

My aim here is to situate anti-communism as part of larger ideological constellation that has its intellectual roots, in the works of classical liberalism, but is also linked ideologically to the writings of neoliberal thinkers, whose views after forty years of neoliberal hegemony have now become hegemonic common sense. Anti-communism is not just an ideological discourse but a political mechanism. What unites anti-communism and the works of liberals and neoliberals alike is disdain for the process of mass democratization that challenges the elites of the political-economic status quo. Anti-communism exposes and hyperbolizes the crimes of communism, while redirecting us from, concealing and denying those of capitalism. The question that comes to mind is whether the anti-communism of today is that much different from Hitler and Mussolini's anti-communism?

1.1. The Rise of Anti-Communism After World War II

The formation of anti-communist discourse in Bulgaria will be examined in relation to the development of the totalitarian model during the Cold War in US scholarship, as well as the role that Central and Eastern European dissident intellectuals play, especially after the failed attempts for socialism with a human face in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Why? In order to trace key influences of Bulgarian anti-communist discourse, one needs to take into account anti-communism during the Cold War, as well as the inner workings of intellectual thought inside the Eastern bloc.

The *Truman Doctrine* of 1947, based on George Kennan's policy of containment gives rise to the Cold War (Gaddis, 2005). This policy treats the Soviet Union as an aggressor intending to spread Communism globally. The totalitarian model begins its birth with the Cold War in political science departments and dominates Western scholarship of the Soviet Union (Fitzpatrick, 2007). The term first originates in fascist Italy from Giovanni Gentile and Alfredo Rocco (Gleason, 1984, p. 146). Gentile uses the term positively to refer to the fascists' concern with "the whole will and thought and feeling of the nation" (cited in Gleason, p. 146.). The totalitarian model portrays the Soviet Union as a top-down system, characterized by automatized passive society, the reign of terror and ideological propaganda. As Sheila Fitzpatrick points out the analogy between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia underlines the totalitarian model (2006, p. 80). The totalitarian model in scholarship is not divorced from the US's foreign policy agenda. As Fitzpatrick emphasizes, the study of the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 60s is heavily funded by the US government (2006, p. 81). Sovietology as the interdisciplinary study of the Soviet Union and socialist Eastern Europe is both "shaped and threatened by their close association with the American state, military and intelligence agencies" (Bockman, 2011, p. 51). Until the 1960s

the totalitarian framework dominated *Sovietology*, which emerged in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor to the CIA (2011, p. 53). Many prominent Marxist from the Frankfurt School, such as Marcuse and Neumann are employed at the OSS (Simpson, 1994, p. 43).

Yet the beginning of the totalitarian paradigm in Soviet studies also comes from the Left. It is not only Hannah Arendt's work on totalitarianism that makes the parallel between fascism and Soviet Communism. In the 1930s, disillusioned Marxist scholars from the Frankfurt School – Franz Neumann, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse use the totalitarian framework to make comparisons between Stalin's Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Hannah Arendt's (1951) essentialist notion of totalitarianism as “absolute Evil” and “total terror” makes the link between Communism and Nazism, which she defines as totalitarian, but leaves out Italian Fascism from the equation. It is also she that defines Eastern European socialist states as totalitarian. In a revised preface to the third part of her book, *Totalitarianism*, she writes that Nazi and Bolshevik systems look like variations of the same model (Arendt juxtaposes Stalin's Five-Year Plan to Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP)). Arguing that while the NEP, which mixed a socialist and small-scale capitalist economic model, presented possibilities for the Bolshevik state's reconciliation with the “people,” Stalin's forced collectivization and nationalization policies with the “transformation of classes into masses” and “elimination of all group solidarity” were the conditions for “total domination” (Arendt 1951, p. xxxi).

In *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956) Zbigniew Brzezinski and Carl Friedrich provide six basic features or traits of totalitarian dictatorship: “ideology, single party typically led by one man, a terroristic police, a communications monopoly, a military monopoly and a centrally directed economy” (21). Important affirmation of the totalitarian model came from Marxist East European dissident intellectuals. Georg Lukacs' students Agnes Heller, Ferenc Feher and Georgy Markus text, *Dictatorship Over Needs* (1983) was highly influential among dissidents. In their Marxist critique of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, they saw a “complete submission of workers in all aspects of everyday life” where “labour power is fully subjugated by the power elite,” workers are “completely deprived of any opportunity to articulate their needs for freedom” and everyday life has to “reflect the state's prevalent ideological outlook” (Feher, 1978, pp. 34-35).

If we trace chronologically the trajectory of the totalitarian model, we see how it coincides with the phases of the Cold War. It emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, first with disillusioned leftists, like Isaac Deutcher and the Frankfurt School and in popular culture with Orwell's *1984* (1949). Orwell's popular book that became synonymous with Stalinism was influenced by Russian exile and disillusioned Bolshevik Yevgeni Zamiatin's *We* (first published in English in 1924). In 1951, four years after the *Truman Doctrine* of confrontation with the Soviet Union, which started the Cold War and two years before Stalin's death the first edition of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* came out. Brzezinski and Friedrich's book with their six characteristics of totalitarianism comes out in 1956, the same year Khrushchev makes his famous speech denouncing Stalinism.

In the 1960s and 1970s, starting with Khrushchev's thaw and continuing with the policy of *detente*, the totalitarian model faded from fame. There is a paradigm shift in Western, especially US scholarship of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the change comes as a result of US-Soviet exchange programs that give scholars the opportunity to visit the Soviet Union, research archives

and experience everyday life, and the discredited role of the US during Vietnam war plus anti-systemic movements questioning capitalist mass society and automation, on the other (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 82).

The works of François Furet and Ernst Nolte are particularly important for the revival of the totalitarian framework. But most importantly, as I will discuss, they are key in the process of demonization of left politics since the 1980s and become a big source of inspiration for anti-communism in Bulgaria. Both historians are openly anti-communist. Furet is a former *French Communist Party (PCF)* member who leaves the party in 1956 and during the events of May 1968 is employed in the Ministry of Education of de Gaulle's government, while Nolte had always been conservative and has participated in actions against radical leftist student groups in Germany (Schönpflug, 2007, p. 272).

Enzo Traverso differentiates between the American revisionism of the seventies that challenged the totalitarian model and European revisionism of the eighties. Furet's revisionism of the French Revolution and Nolte's revisionism of Nazism is parallel to a revisionism in *Sovietology* that starts to question the totalitarian model. However, the legacies of those two revisionist schools are very different. If revisionism in Sovietology searches for a nuanced view of Soviet history, refusing to paint a vision of a monolithic, unchangeable system, focusing on social and cultural dynamics, the revisionism of Furet and Nolte that is later taken up in Eastern Europe is the opposite. It is a conservative response resembling the postulates of neoliberal theorists like Hayek, Mises and Ropke. As I will show, this revisionism also hides an apologetic view of fascism (Traverso, 2016, p. 322).

Furet's revisionist ideas come about post-1968 characterized by major political and socio-economic shifts in France. The events of May 1968 are a response to a crisis of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2018). However, it is characterized by a rift between the language of the French working class and that of the students. Workers organize against restructuring of production in industrial sectors and formulate their resistance in terms of struggle against exploitation and unequal distribution of costs of growth. The student's critique was of alienation, denunciation of the Fordist model, hierarchies and authoritarianism. The students and educated cadres demanded artistic expression and autonomy. In other words, it was a critique against welfare capitalism that was planned and supervised by the state. Boltanski and Chiapello show how those new movements that demanded autonomy and artistic expression, coming from the left but opposed to *PCF*, uproot the political power of the traditional left, dedicated to the class struggle, and as a result underpin the rising new stage of flexible capitalism, that will become known as neoliberalism.

It is in this political-economic context that new intellectual trends start to dominate. This is the context in which, after the events of May 1968, a new process of various anti-Marxist influential trends emerge, some composed of the former *PCF*. François Furet is a key representative of a trend in scholarship that views history by "uncoupling revolutionary moments from the circumstances and actions that constituted them" (Wolfreys, 2007, p. 51). Furet, a historian of the French Revolution argues that totalitarianism is rooted in the Jacobins. And more importantly, that "totalitarianism had revolutionary roots" (Schönpflug, 2007, p. 271). In his book *Hatred of Democracy*, Jacques Rancière positions Furet's work within what he terms a *new antidemocratic discourse* (Rancière 2014, p. 13).

Ultimately, Furet and Nolte's projects aim to put an end to the French and Russian revolutions as symbols that have mobilized politics against various forms of oppression. Nolte's rhetorical questions best show his position: "Did the National Socialists carry out, did Hitler perhaps carry out an "Asiatic" deed only because they regarded themselves and their kind as the potential or real victims of an "Asiatic" deed? Wasn't class murder on the part of the Bolsheviks logically and actually prior to race murder on the part of the Nazis?" (Nolte, 1993, p. 22). Despite being in agreement with Nolte's historic-genetic thesis about the similarities between Bolshevism and fascism, Furet distances himself from the thesis of "imitation", but agrees that "the universalist extremism of Bolshevism provokes the extremism of the particular in Nazism" (Shorten, 2004, p. 287). Nolte's thesis explains Nazism as imitation of Bolshevism – the claim that the Nazis were reacting to the Bolshevik atrocities and that the Holocaust was "copy" of the "original" Bolshevik atrocities on a mass scale. In other words, *classicide* predates genocide. As it will be shown, the trope is taken up by Eastern European anti-communist/neoliberal elites with recent attempts to criminalize communism in the EU.

1.2. The New Revisionism: End of the Cold War and Rise of Neoliberalism

The second revival of the totalitarian model may be analysed in relation to US President Ronald Reagan's strategy of intensification of the Cold War and the rise of the neoliberal model. The presentation of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc as totalitarian after the fall of the Berlin Wall has the ideological significance of demonizing any political-economic system that is alternative to the capitalist model. Therefore, the texts produced by conservative historians, like Robert Conquest and Zbigniew Brzezinski for whom a planned economy was as evil as mass terror, but also Marxists' immanent critiques of the subjugation of the working class became the basis of East European anti-communist production.

Enzo Traverso (2019) analyses the genealogy of the thesis of "equal-violence". That thesis equates fascism and antifascism arguing that both sides committed violence. It originates with the voices of such Nazi sympathizers as Heidegger who in a famous exchange with Marcuse compared the expulsion of East Germans to the Nazi policies of extermination of the Jews and Carl Schmidt who complained that focusing on the crimes of the Third Reich ignored the Allies' "genocide" of German civil servants (2019, p. 248).

In the 1980s the shift toward revisionism started with historian Ernst Nolte. In 1986 he published an article in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, entitled *The Past that Will Not Pass*. In it he argued that the Nazi camps came as a logical response to the gulags (Nolte, 1993: 22). The whole debate around Ernst Nolte's revisionist views, that is known as *Historikerstreit*, is documented in the book entitled *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler* (1993). It is important to situate the political and cultural climate of the time of the debate. Nolte started expressing such views in the 1980s, a time when, from a political-economic perspective, the pro-business, anti-union policies of Thatcherism and Reaganomics were making their advances (Peck, 2010; Harvey, 2005). Despite suppression of the coal miners in the UK, Thatcher's flirting with Polish Solidarity is well documented. Yet, this train of thought that for left liberal thinkers like Habermas was scandalous was not new. It was the context in which it was reemerging – Reagan's intensification of the Cold War and the beginning of neoliberal restructuring. That has to be taken into consideration.

In a Western-centric narrative very close to colonial rhetoric, Ernst Nolte tried to excuse Nazi atrocities as a response to the “Asiatic deed” introduced to Europe by the Bolsheviks (1993, p. 22). He put an emphasis on the participation of Jews in the Russian and Central European communist movements, implying that the racial genocide of the Nazis was a response to the class genocide of the Bolsheviks. However, as will be further discussed, Hitler’s project of extermination has its ideological roots in a fascination with American settler colonialism and European colonial genocidal projects (Buck-Morss, 2000; Traverso, 2007).³⁸

The link with neoliberalism if not direct is vividly present. As early as 1951, in his book *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis*, Mises makes claims similar to Nolte. Mises claims that the Nazi one-party system, the secret police, the concentration camps, the propaganda, the extermination of people, were all adapted from the Soviet Union and the Nazis in Mises’ view are the most “docile disciples of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin” (1951, p. 580). Another prominent neoliberal Wilhelm Röpke, in a similar fashion to Mises views in 1927, sees Nazism as the bulwark against Bolshevism. He makes the very same argument that Nazism was the lesser evil (1946, p. 28).

For Nolte it seems, the Nazis are almost victims of “Asiatic” Bolshevism: “Cannot Hitler’s most secret deeds be explained by the fact that he had *not* (sic) forgotten the rat cage?” (1993, p. 22) “Rat cage” refers to a quote from Hitler, which Nolte claims is correlated to Orwell’s rat cage presented in his *1984*. Therefore it is not coming from the writer’s imagination but is a real instrument of torture of the “Chinese Cheka” according to Nolte (1993, p. 21). However, Hitler himself has stated that by “rat cage” he meant the Lubyanka prison (Jackel, 1993, p. 77).

Nolte writes “the so-called annihilation of the Jews by the Third Reich was a reaction or a distorted copy and not a first act of an original... Third Reich traced from “liberation movements” to which it belonged, connected to the Communist movement” (14). While Nolte insists that the demonization of the Third Reich is unacceptable, he seems to be engaging in the very same process when it comes to the Russian Revolution. Ultimately, it looks like his claim that Nazism’s *Final Solution* is a reaction to Bolshevism is an attempt to present the October events as the source of all evil.

According to such a logic, the Holocaust was a preventive measure by “potential victims” and this is further implied by agreeing with some arguments in David Irving’s *Hitler’s War* (1975). Nolte agrees with Irving, a well-known Holocaust denier, who assigns significance to such outlandish instances as American Jewish Theodor Kaufman’s self-published book *Germany Must Perish!* (1941) -- a book that had no political and intellectual impact in the US and was met with mocking fascination and compared to Swift’s *A Modest Proposal* in *Times* magazine for its outlandish claims. Nevertheless Goebbels saw it as a useful tool and major justification for his anti-Semitic propaganda, alleging that Roosevelt himself was influenced by Kaufman’s book (Herf, 2008, p. 11-13). Nolte (1993) is not content with using Nazi propaganda to support his argument, he also goes as far as to give credence to the thesis that Hitler’s treatment of German Jews as prisoners of war was justified, based on such accounts as Kaufman’s book and Chairman of World Zionist Organization, Chaim Weizmann that the Jews of the world are on England’s side (Nolte 1993, p. 8).

³⁸ I come back to this question in my discussion of fascism in this text.

Enzo Traverso has explored Nolte's sources that consist of anti-Semitic White³⁹ propaganda, reproduced by the likes of Alfred Rosenberg. But what is more important to Traverso is Nolte's "complete lack of critical distance from his sources" (Traverso 2007, p. 141). In the same article for *FAZ* from 1980, Nolte repeats Hayek and Mises, expressing the view that Mussolini's Italian fascism had a positive side – it preserved private property and therefore "spared the Italian people the perfected totalitarianism of Stalin" (Nolte, 1993, pp. 6-7). Later in this text I will further discuss how this notion becomes the common ground for the popular lesser of two evils argument.

1.3. Attack on Antifascism

Another component in the ideological construction of anti-communism is the revisionist trend that devalues the significance of the anti-fascist struggle in Europe. Antifascism is the "shared *ethos* (sic)" of the European democratic forces emerging after the defeat of the Third Reich (Traverso, 2016, p. 329). Because the social policies of the welfare state were also made possible due to the anti-fascist resistance – once again the historical opening presented itself when the majority participated in the political process. The political importance of this opening is clearly explained by Roberto Battaglia, a historian of the Italian anti-fascist resistance who writes:

The historic importance of the part played by the Resistance in the liberation of Italy and the overthrow of National Socialism and fascism cannot be too strongly emphasized. Of the countless patriots who had flocked to the movement and fight in defence of national independence, many thousands acquired for the first time an understanding of the part they would be called on to play in the future of their country, and, when the war was over, these new protagonists, the workers and the peasants, entered the lists (cited in Pavone, 2013, p. 43).

Traverso (2019) summarizes the importance of the anti-fascist resistance as follows: "a national liberation movement against the Nazi occupation, a class struggle for social emancipation and a civil war against collaborationism" (256).

Anti-fascism is a strong component in the formation of a type of social democracy, characterized by strong left movements in the post-war years. The neoliberal hegemony, forty years after the end of the war, has to be analysed in relation to the revisionism of antifascism. After WWII with the participation of the anti-fascists, capitalism was democratized in the manner that economic liberals around Hayek and Mises feared it would be. But more importantly, with the Soviet Union defeating fascism, a strong alternative to capitalism became present. The legacy of antifascism with the mass participation of Europeans from Italy and France to Greece, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria brings about a reflection of the true meaning of democracy. Even Furet, who has taken it upon himself to discredit antifascism, admits that it encompassed "the partisans of pluralistic democracy side by side with the Communists, and included not only socialist, anarchist, Catholic, and unorganized workers but also bourgeois parties and freedom-loving peasants" (Furet 1999, p. 221). That prompts the first Italian PM

³⁹ Russian tsarist officers fighting the Bolsheviks after the October revolution.

Ferruccio Parri, an anti-fascist partisan (guerrilla fighter) during the war, to claim that liberal Italian governments before fascism were not democratic. The anti-fascist resistance was a true democratic movement with massive participations (Pavone, 2013, p. 23). The anti-fascist struggle and its legacy pries open the contradiction between economic liberalism and political liberalism, or the liberty of the *Declaration* of the French Revolution and Lockean liberty as private property ownership.

Furet's intervention depicts the anti-fascist movement as being controlled and directed by the totalitarian regime of Stalin, who used it for his own agenda. Such an understanding of the struggle deprives the millions that participated of agency. They simply become cogs in the Stalinist machine of manipulation and imperial ambitions.

Revisionism of antifascism comes about in the 1980s and 1990s, which is also concomitant with the ideological and political ascendance of neoliberalism. An ideology proclaiming the triumph of capitalism gains hegemony with the *Washington Consensus* for Latin America and then spreads throughout Eastern Europe.

It is symbolic that the whole revisionist turn coincides with a visit of Ronald Reagan in West Germany in May 1985, the very same month Mikhail Gorbachev, the politician associated with the end of the Soviet Union became General Secretary of the Communist Party. After weeks of protests in the US and Germany, President Reagan and Chancellor Helmut Kohl visited Bitburg Military cemetery, where Waffen SS soldiers were buried. Reagan commemorated Nazi soldiers and Holocaust victims in the same day (Ghodsee, 2014, p. 118).

As I showed, the apologetic line that presents fascism as the lesser of two evils can be traced back to the prominent figures of neoliberalism, like Hayek, Mises and Ropke. However, it is only with the rise of neoliberal ideological hegemony and political-economic reordering of the international system, that such revisionism becomes prominent. Nolte's revisionist interventions in the mid 1980s, shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall; as well as his later collaboration with Furet in *Fascism and Communism* (1996) and Furet's *Passing of an Illusion* (1999) have significant ideological implications for Eastern Europe and Bulgaria specifically. The interpretation that fascism and Nazism originate from the "totalitarian germ of Communism" (Traverso, 2016, p. 25) becomes one of the key elements of equating communism with fascism by presenting them as totalitarian. It draws a line between totalitarianism (lumping together communism and fascism) and liberal democracy. The anti-communist hard line also insists on communism as the more severe of both totalitarianisms. Nolte's intervention was an attempt to dismiss Nazism as an imitation of the real monster, Bolshevism. This was an intervention that would subsequently lead to discrediting of the anti-fascist movements.

Recent steps of the European Parliament (EP) to condemn communism as equivalent to Nazism show the significance of the revisionist turn first in Eastern Europe and now in the whole of the EU. In September 2019 EP passed joint resolution, backed by liberals, conservatives, greens and even centre left, that equates fascism with antifascism, under the frame of totalitarianism (Broder, 2019). In Bulgaria Nolte's intervention took the form of outright denial of the fascist past. This opened the door for the rehabilitation of fascist figures which I will discuss at a later point. It is no wonder that among the active participants in the September EP resolution are Alexander Yordanov and Andrej Kovatcev from the ruling *GERB*, both known to the Bulgarian public for denying the crimes of fascism in Bulgaria.

2. Dissidents: Formation of New Common Sense

Barbara Falk (2003) traces the beginning of anti-communist discourse in Central and Eastern Europe with the failed revolutions in Hungary (1956) and Prague (1968), that were led by members of the Communist parties. However, “much of the opposition to authoritarian communism grew from and remained committed to the Left (Falk 2003, p. 61). Therefore, resistance after the death of Stalin in Eastern Europe is not anti-communist resistance but a resistance against its particular form – Soviet Stalinism. That this is the case shows the overwhelming role of the workers councils during the Hungarian uprising (2003, p. 109-110). As in the case of Paris and Budapest, the revolt in Prague is working class revolt, due to the policies of industrialization. But as in the case of Paris, the subsequent role of intellectuals and their role in the forming of new common sense discourses was crucial.

Even though the majority of the dissidents of the Eastern bloc are politically on the left, they fail to acknowledge the dangers of *transition*. They focus on the question of civil society and human rights, contrary to the Western left whose critique of capitalism questions “property, ownership, and class conflict” (Falk, 2003, p. 327). By focusing on civil society, dissidents fail to understand the new form that capitalism takes under neoliberalism. As Falk points out the dissidents accept the postulate of democracy and free market, whereas the later “became the economic portion of an indivisible package” (330).

However, their understanding of market economy is that of the European market of the welfare state, “the golden postwar age” market (330-331). Thus, constructing the notion of return to Europe unquestionably normalized the market. The simple formula of this narrative juxtaposed “civilized” Europe to “Asian”, “barbaric” Russia/Soviet Union (Falk, 2003; Todorova, 2009) Europe has a market, as opposed to the USSR that has a planned economy. Dissidents’ normalization and naturalization of the market is not much different from the essence of neoliberal ideology of the economy as something outside human scope, an unpredictable and invisible order (Slobodian, 2018).

The normalization of the market, its naturalization leads dissident liberal intellectuals like Havel in Czechoslovakia, Michnick in Poland, Zhelev in Bulgaria to inadvertently support neoliberal reforms. The return to Europe, i.e. the *transition* to a free market and democracy becomes the new common sense. The realization that this return takes the path of the Chicago-style neoliberalism of the Washington Consensus comes later. Yet, Falk underlines the different connotations that liberalism has in Europe and in an Anglo-American context (Falk 2003, p. 334). Here, once again we come to the question of political versus economic liberalism. As I showed in the previous chapter, liberal democracy has become a code term for capitalism, especially since the rise of *Democratization theory* in the 1980s (Robinson, 1996).

As Falk points out, it is with the outcome of the transformation of Eastern Europe from socialist to capitalist states and societies that dissidents who previously define themselves as left hesitate to call themselves socialist (2003, p. 344). Therefore, the story of dissident resistance takes a particular form that is interrelated to the ideological common sense, post factum. In other words, how recent history is interpreted is shaped by the outcomes of historical events. This becomes clear with examples.

The Return to Europe contains the Orientalist discourses with which Eastern and Southeastern Europe is represented and self-represented (Mocnik, 2002; Todorova, 2009; Wolff,

1994). It relies on a crude dichotomy – civilized/European vs. barbarian/Asian, democratic vs. totalitarian, modern vs. primitive. Todorova (2009) shows how prominent Eastern European intellectuals, such as Milan Kundera and Václav Havel disassociate from Russia, claiming that Central European culture has nothing in common with the Russians (140-161). Such views are in stark contrast with the notion of the USSR as liberator and guarantor of national independence that Kundera himself documents (Falk, 2003, p. 59).

In 1990, regarding the leadership of Prague spring, Havel states that “instead of proud representatives of the people [they]...behaved like guilty servants” during the Soviet occupation of 1968 (Falk, 2003, p. 208). Coming from the leader of the *Velvet Revolution* such a statement signals the discrediting of the ideal of socialism with a human face and left politics. No wonder then that President Havel preferred to embrace PM Vaclav Klaus’s neoliberal reforms rather than the social democracy of the ousted leader of the Communist Party and the Prague revolution, Dubček. Ironically, Havel’s critique of the substitution of socialist ideals with consumerism, where freedom is reduced to buying brands of washing machines is reminiscent of critiques of façade democracy in a capitalist system (Havel, 2018). Yet, he was instrumental in Eastern Europe’s course toward becoming part of global capitalism, including its militaristic structure in the form of NATO.

2.1. Zheliu Zhelev and Anti-Communism

In the Bulgarian context, Zheliu Zhelev emerges as a political figure close to Havel. He becomes the leader of the anti-communist opposition, *Union of Democratic Forces (UDF)*. The *UDF* first emerged as a formation of activist organizations, *Club for Support of Glasnost and Preustroiska, Ekoglasnost* (the environmental activists), *Podkrepa* (labour union) and human rights organizations. It forms into a coalition made of more than a dozen different parties. Some of them are reformed parties that were forbidden in 1947, such as *Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (BSDP)*, and heirs of the bourgeois parties: *Radical Democratic Party (RDP)*, and *Democratic Party (DP)*, as well the *Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU)*.

In 1990 Zhelev became the first democratically elected president. For those on the right, Zhelev is not firm enough on communism and ready to make concessions with the socialist party. An assessment of Zhelev’s dissident years and political career depicts him as a dissident not by choice, but by circumstance (Gochev, 2014).⁴⁰ Zhelev and the Bulgarian dissidents are contrasted to the “real dissidents” of Central Europe, that the author claims “are linked to the old elite and the Catholic church.” However, Barbara Falk’s research of dissident history shows that the majority of dissidents are left critics of the authoritarian socialist state, not anti-socialist. This anti-communist reading of Bulgarian dissidents like Zhelev presents them as people secretly linked to the Communist Party and ready to do their bidding.

Such an assessment of Zhelev enforces the narrative of weakness of the leader and betrayal. It shows the mindset of anti-communist hardliners within *UDF*. Later, in the mythology of anti-communism, Zhelev became the figure that secretly worked against his own party. However, Zhelev was not the leader whose goal was to turn the *UDF* into a strong left-leaning

⁴⁰ Georgi Gochev is a philologist in the private New Bulgarian University, author in *Dnevnik* and editor of *Literaturen Vestnik* (Literary Newspaper).

coalition, as an alternative to the former *Communist Party*, *BSP*. Such a figure was Petur Dertliev, the leader of *BSDP*. Dertliev, a social-democrat imprisoned for ten years (1947-1957) during Vulko Chervenkov's Stalinist regime, was a charismatic politician, with a strong conviction that the road for Bulgaria is towards a social-democratic welfare state (Zhelev, 2005, p. 349). That made him feared both within the *UDF* for his leftism, and within the *BSP*, because of his anti-communist stance and desire to build alternative left that would take away from their vote (349-357). Despite his popularity and the strong support for *BSDP*, Dertliev not only did not gain the needed support that could turn *UDF* toward the left political spectrum, but the opposite occurred. From 1992 onwards the party moved more and more to the right.

Zhelev summarizes this process as "UDF's total shift to the right, ideologically and politically" that transforms it from anti-communist but also anti-fascist democratic coalition into an extreme anti-communist driven by revanchist aspirations; it is characterized by "open attempts to rehabilitate the fascist past...revocation of the verdicts of the People's Court, revocation of the referendum of 1946 [that abolishes the monarchy and pronounces Bulgaria a republic]...admitting the *Legions*, a typical fascist formation" into *UDF* (Zhelev 2015, p. 286-87).

In his political autobiography Zhelev gives an account of the confrontational attitude of the first *UDF* government of Philip Dimitrov (1991-1992): it managed to antagonize the two major trade unions, the other political parties, the press and the *Bulgarian Orthodox Church* (Zhelev 2015, p. 442). This political blow was so severe that *UDF* did not come back to power until 1997 when hyperinflation and mass discontent with *BSP*'s impotence to stop financial collapse and organized crime reign brought about opportunities to launch shock therapy reform in Bulgaria. Ivan Kostov brought to completion the neoliberal shock therapy reform started in 1991 by Dimitrov. Johanna Bockman lists Bulgaria as the third country to implement shock therapy after Poland and Czechoslovakia (2011, p. 191). However, the outcome of 1991 neoliberal policies was so devastating that *UDF* was unable to stay more than a year in power and remained in opposition for six years. In 1997, through deals with the *IMF* and *World Bank*, as well as major support from the US, Ivan Kostov managed to change the whole political-economic course of the state.

Right-wing politicians lament the lack of strong anti-communist leaders like Havel who would not make concessions to the Communist Party. However, like Havel who sides with neoliberal PM Vaclav Klaus, Zhelev is uncritical of the neoliberal reforms of the *UDF*. He praises the *UDF*'s liquidation policy, calling it a "return of peoples' land" (Zhelev, 1998). The liquidation policy was driven by *UDF*'s zeal for *decommunization* and had disastrous effects for Bulgarian agriculture. It resulted in the concentration of land into the hands of a few big players (*arendatori*). *UDF*'s agrarian reform in practice brought about the destruction of animal farming and abandoning of massive amounts of land; the privatization of Kostov's cabinet brought about the end of the process of deindustrialization, dismantled state enterprises were sold at devalued prices. Only 15% of the privatized enterprises remained in production, in comparison to 90% in the Czech Republic (Mitev, 2011, p. 47).

Before President Peter Stoyanov's civilizational choice, which as rhetoric is a variation of the Central European return to Europe, President Zhelev defined the foreign policy priorities as breaking with the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc's political, military and economic structures. The ultimate goal was membership in NATO and the EU. If Petur Dertliev was the

political leader unwilling to compromise welfare policies for reforms, Zhelev was a leader for whom NATO, IMF and the World Bank served as guarantors of Bulgaria's democratization. Therefore, whether out of political naiveté or firm belief in the benevolence of these institutions, Zhelev was closer to the extreme neoliberalism of post-1992 *UDF* leadership than he thought.

Today it is accepted that in the history of Bulgarian intellectual thought, the structural comparison between communism and fascism started with the book *Fashizmut (Fascism)* of the philosopher and dissident Zheliu Zhelev, who, as mentioned above, later became the first democratically elected president. In *Fashizmut*, published in 1982 and subsequently withdrawn from distribution, Zhelev never makes any comparisons between communism and fascism, but his readers view such comparison as implied in the book (Valiavicharska, 2014). The book and its destiny, as well as Zhelev's falling out of favour with the Communist Party, gained him the status of dissident intellectual. Zhivka traces the history of Zhelev's book. Although the book was written in 1967, its first attempt for publication came in 1982, when only 10 000 copies were published and then withdrawn from bookstores after three days. However, 7000 copies were sold and started circulating among intellectuals. There are rumours that even Todor Zhivkov's daughter – Liudmila, had a personal copy. As a philosophy PhD student, Zhelev had been in trouble before. His theoretical arguments with Stalinist hardliner, Todor Pavlov, Chair of Philosophy Department in Sofia University, cost him his membership in the Communist Party. The dramatic history of the book and its author established *Fashizmut* as forbidden fruit not only in intellectual circles but especially among ordinary people from all backgrounds. The book was perceived as “a revelation, a dismantling truth” by “tens of thousands” (Valiavicharska, p. 321).

The chain of events that gives Zhelev the reputation of a dissident somehow put aside the question of validation of his thesis. In the 2012 Preface to the same book but with a title suitable for the current ideological conjuncture, *The Totalitarian Twins: Fascism Thirty Years Later*, Zhelev again makes the claim that compared to communism, fascism is the lesser of two evils, because at least it does not lay hands on private property. This is the same line of reasoning that Ernst Nolte exhibits when discussing the “positive” aspect of Italian fascism. For him Italian fascism was “positive because it did not eliminate economic freedom of the market” and “spared the Italian people the perfect totalitarianism of Stalin” (Nolte, 1993, p. 6). Knowingly or unknowingly, in the 1990 introduction to his book Zhelev repeats Nolte's thesis word for word, when he refers to fascism as “a copy plagiarized from the original [meaning communism]” (Zhelev, 1990, p. 11).⁴¹

⁴¹ The question inevitably comes to mind: if 1960s-1980s People's Republic of Bulgaria is a totalitarian state, or to use Zhelev's implicit analogy – the same as a fascist state - how would a fascist state retaliate against political opponents and how did the late socialist state retaliate against dissidents like Zhelev? Italian Communist politician and intellectual Antonio Gramsci died in a fascist prison in 1937. Bulgarian communist poet and anti-fascist Nikola Vapzarov is executed in Sofia in 1942. In comparison, Zheliu Zhelev is expelled from the Communist Party, for his philosophical attack on Marxism-Leninism and goes into exile in his wife's village, where he writes *Fashizmut*. Despite the author's initial intention, Zhelev's book opens a discussion that asks different sorts of questions. Aside from the economic mechanisms of repression of free speech in liberal democracy - marginalization and being pushed out of the mass media market, such as the case with award winning journalist Seymour Hersh, after his reports on Syria, a more alarming development is the imprisonment of *Wikileaks* founder Julian Assange. Such examples ask whether if after forty years of neoliberal restructuring, following Zhelev's narrative, we should not instead be comparing fascist repression to attempts to silence critical voices in late capitalism. The striking difference between the whistle blowers of tomorrow like Daniel Ellsberg to the faith of Chelsea Manning, Julian

The totalitarian past is the domineering explanatory narrative of forty-five years of Bulgarian history prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Totalitarianism is a key component of the anticommunist discourse that dominates Bulgarian public and political spheres. It might have had its origins in the dissident writings of Zheliu Zhelev but it was taken up both by (neo)liberal and conservative intellectuals and politicians in Bulgaria. Valiavicharska (2014) highlights how the discourse of totalitarianism “grips” Eastern European societies at a very particular juncture “during the radical historical turn that ended 20th century socialism – to buttress arguments about inevitability of capitalist relations” (2014, p. 308). As an ideological discourse anti-communism should not be viewed separately from neoliberalism. The harsher the neoliberal reforms, the more the anti-communist discourse based on the totalitarian model intensifies.

2.2. The Anti-Democratism of Bulgarian Anti-Communism

Anti-communism as a discourse is produced in political rhetoric; in cultural institutions, the production film, literature, art; in public and private collective memory sites, such as museums, monuments; in state commemorative practices, and in NGOs and think tanks. An example of the power that anti-communism holds on cultural politics is a recent campaign to change the content of a historical textbook that covers the socialist period. In June 2019 a scandal erupted in the media regarding the new 10th grade *History and Civilization* textbooks. It started with an online petition by journalist Hristo Hristov and historian Evelina Kelbecheva of the *Truth and Memory Foundation* against “silencing facts and events from the period of Bulgarian history from 1944-1989 and the period of transition to democracy after 1989” (Enev, 2019).⁴² It becomes clear that the attack is against one particular textbook – that of the *Bulvest* publishing house.⁴³ The textbook is written by historians Iskra Baeva and Evgenia Kalinova,⁴⁴ who were accused of manipulation of history. Here are some of the accusations that were then reproduced by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES): minimizing the significance of the number of victims of Communism;⁴⁵ not including that the *People’s Court* was the “most

Assange and Edward Snowden signify a much more severe anti-democratic shift within liberal capitalism.

⁴² *Truth and Memory Foundation* was founded by journalist Hristo Hristov, with close ties to the conservative *Konrad Adenauer Foundation* and EP member from the ruling *GERB*, Anton Kovatchev. Evelina Kelbecheva, is a historian from the *American University in Bulgaria*, who had made claims in the media that the forceful attempt to rename Muslims in the 1980s, known as the *Revival process*, was genocide. Alexander Yordanov, recent EU deputy from GERB, far right politician, known for his fierce anti-communism and denial of Bulgaria’s fascist past, joined in the accusations. The *Institute for the Research of the Recent Past (IRRP)* a think tank that has been very prolific in the production of narratives about the repression of the “totalitarian regime” also took dislike to the history textbooks and sided with Hristov, Kelbecheva and Yordanov. Then other conservative groups, evangelical Christians and the right-wing parties joined in the chorus.

⁴³ Textbook production in Bulgaria has been privatized since the 1990s.

⁴⁴ Baeva and Kalinva are often accused of manipulating history due to their nuanced and contextual historical narratives. As a member of *BSP* Baeva has been subject to attacks on the right.

⁴⁵ A special section in this text analyses in detail the problematic of anti-communist speculation with numbers in larger context.

repressive” in Eastern Europe and underling that it was declared unconstitutional;⁴⁶ insistence on including such “prominent Bulgarians like Hristo Yavashev and Ilia Minev.”⁴⁷

Baeva and Kalinova provided a detailed reply to MES with selection from their texts as proof. On the question of victims, the online text explains: “The number of those killed without trial and sentence is difficult to determine. The BRP [Communist Party, at that time still the Workers Party] promoted repression as revenge for the killings of Communist members in the previous period, but also used it to fight political opponents. Eight thousand one hundred and sixty people passed through the camps from 1945 to 1948, and hundreds of ‘unreliable’ people were displaced from the cities” (Baeva and Kalinova, 2019). Next, the authors explain that because of the lack of thorough research and methodology to investigate the people who were killed, declaring any number of victims would be a speculation.

Baeva and Kalinova’s reply to the question about the *People’s Court* is of particular importance. Here I will cite the parts of the textbook and their reply, which could shed light on the attack of the authors themselves. In the textbook, Baeva and Kalinova acknowledge that the repressive nature of the *People’s Court* that if based on the monarchist constitution of 1879 that was still active, was unconstitutional. But they point out that “all political parties supported the demand for judicial responsibility from the former governing bodies, because this is a requirement of the winners [of World War II]... There are many and justly sentences for mass executions and atrocities, as well as for the persecution of the Jews” (Baeva and Kalinova, 2019). From Baeva and Kalinova’s responses to MES, it becomes clear that it is not the manipulation, omission or inaccuracy of historical facts that is Hristov and Kelbecheva’s problem.⁴⁸ Baeva and Kalinova are simply being *soft on communism*.⁴⁹ Being soft on communism translates into providing contextual details such as Churchill and Stalin’s secret agreement for the division of Eastern Europe, positioning Bulgaria and the Communist Party in the context of the anti-fascist struggle, acknowledging the crimes of many of those sentenced by the *People’s Court*, putting repression against the Turkish population in proper context and refusing to make speculative claims about the unproven assassination of dissident Georgi Markov.

This is not simply an attempt by conservative circles to influence public opinion. The participants in the scandal have close ties to the ruling regime of Borisov and enjoy the support

⁴⁶ As Alexander Vezekov has pointed out, claims that the People’s Court is the most repressive are simply inaccurate. See Vezekov (2013). By declaring PP unconstitutional, the Supreme Court became involved in what I argue is a process of rehabilitation of fascism and discrediting of antifascism. I come back to this point in a special section.

⁴⁷ It does not become clear why the artist Christo, who is a US citizen, is mentioned next to one of the leaders of the fascist *Bulgarian Legions*. However, it should be mentioned that today Minev has a monument in his hometown. I come back to the *Legions* in the discussion of Bulgarian fascism.

⁴⁸ A close look at the textbook shows that Baeva and Kalinova’s theoretical frame does not divert from the totalitarian framework. However, they have also used terms such as state socialism

⁴⁹ Being fully aware of the different historical context, I use this Cold War term from the era of McCarthyism, because the mechanisms of accusation and labelling allow us to make parallels with the US’s Second Red Scare. *Free Europe*, an heir of US’s major propaganda vehicle during the Cold War *Radio Free Europe* that recently resumed work in Bulgaria gave start to the accusatory tone and the making of unsubstantiated claims. See the highly inaccurate and misleading article by (Simeonova, 2019)

of the Minister of Education and Science, Krasimir Velchev,⁵⁰ as well as the Deputy Minister Petur Nikolov,⁵¹ who happily agreed to meet their demands. Velchev's background in finance makes him a precedent for the position of Minister of Education and Science, usually reserved for members of academia, but also shows that Bulgaria is "catching up" with a global technocratic trend of neoliberalism, a course towards giving the managerial class executive powers. This trend is in accordance with the extension of the principle of financialisation to non-financial sectors under neoliberal modes of governing (Williams, 2020, p. 204). It should also be understood as what Williams defined as solidifying the neoliberal managerial class (2020, p. 205). Velchev's lack of knowledge on matters of historiography and education did not prevent him from disregarding the opinion of the majority of academics, who have opposed Hristov and company.

The demand to rewrite history textbooks could hardly be defined as pressure. It came from a small but vocal and quite politically influential circle, concentrated in NGOs, think tanks and private research institutes, ideologically close to the ruling regime. The final outcome of this outcry was a requirement from MES that all textbooks should declare communism as a criminal regime. Such intervention by MES in the educational process should be situated in a larger context. In Poland and Hungary, similar conservative forces have been participating in rewriting the past. Campaigns against textbooks are not limited only to Bulgaria or Eastern Europe. As early as 2002, the Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi proposed rewriting of Italian textbooks to purge them of left "bias" (Pavone, 2013, p. 44). Berlusconi was in coalition with the heirs of the Italian fascists and was not happy with the praising of anti-fascist resistance in the textbooks. The course of revisionism depicts the fascists defending Mussolini's Salò Republic as victims of World War II (2013, p. 45). As I discuss elsewhere, in a similar fashion in Bulgaria today, fascist figures of the past have been transformed into "victims of Communism."

3. A Reading of Fascism

On April 20th 2019, Burgas, the fourth-biggest Bulgarian city and a seaport, woke up to posters commemorating the birthday of the Führer of the Third Reich, Adolf Hitler (news.bg). At the same time, on April 21st in the Bulgarian capital Sofia, *Fortress Europe* was formed, an organization presenting itself as consisting of European patriots (in reality a concoction of far right, neo-Nazi and neo-fascist organizations, with telling names: the Bulgarian *BNS* or *Bulgarian National Union*, the Czech *Národní a Sociální Fronta* or *People's and Social Front*, the French *Des Nationalistes* or *The Nationalists*, the German *Die Rechte* or *The Right*, the Hungarian *Legio Hungarie* or *Legion Hungary* and the Polish *Szturmowcy* or *Storm-troopers*.

⁵⁰ In an interview Velchev stated that Baeva and Kalinova's textbook is not in accordance with Bulgaria's "civilizational choice" (cited in Enev, 2019).

⁵¹ Nikolov, who is elected by the nationalists *United Patriots*, is self-identified conservative and advocate of the "three pillars of conservative politics – Christianity, patriotism, and capitalism" (Rudnikova, 2009). Nikolov is a typical representative of a group of far right conservatives, adherents of Thatcherism that have been influential in all three regimes of Borisov. Nikolov's career before politics also includes writing in ultra-right newspaper *Pro-Anti*.

For the *Fortress*, the first order of business was “to eradicate Marxism, left parties and the Zionist lobby.”⁵²

The renewed severity of the anti-communist ideological narrative thirty years after the end of state socialism is not simply a negation of the past. I argue that anti-communism negates one aspect of the past - the period between 1944 and 1989 - while its revisionist narratives about the interwar years present a favourable picture of a repressive fascist past. Recall that Mises (2005) explains fascism’s atrocities as “emotional reflex actions evoked by indignation at the deeds of the Bolsheviks and Communists” (2005, p. 28). He also writes that after the initial violence of the fascists their policies became more moderate – the book was written in 1927, in the early stages of fascism. At that time Mises did not have yet to run for his life away from Europe. The moderation of fascism’s liberal views continues to have unconscious influence over it (2005, p. 28). Although it may sound paradoxical to make such a claim, by liberal influence Mises meant economic liberalism, i.e. preserving the capitalist system of property. Mises was aware that fascism is not an enemy of capitalism. That is why he went as far to call it “lesser of two evils” because it does not aim to abolish private property. This alone – the threat that the Communists present to capitalism leads him to conclude that fascism and other dictatorships “are full of the best intentions” and that fascism “for the moment saved European civilization” (2005, p. 30). In this context European civilization becomes synonymous with the capitalist system. We can see a very prevalent trope in current anti-communist discourse – the *othering* of the Soviet Union as something aberrant to European civilization, something barbarous and foreign. In the 1980s Ernst Nolte continued with this trope of Nazism as an imitation of “Asiatic” barbarism. Bulgarian anti-communism does not simply put an equal sign between communism and fascism it has started a process of rehabilitation of fascism,⁵³ in the name of Bulgaria’s *civilizational choice*.⁵⁴

Therefore, I find it important to go back to a discussion of fascism that illuminates why Bulgarian anti-communists have followed the “lesser of two evils” argument of neoliberals and revisionists. Historian Ishay Landa has analysed the ideological interrelations between fascism and liberalism. Drawing on Hitler’s own speeches and policies, Landa shows how Hitler’s project intended to resolve the contradiction between economic (capitalism) and political (democracy). For Hitler political liberalism was incompatible with capitalism. Therefore, the solution was to eradicate it. He was a firm believer that only an authoritarian form of government was capable of preserving the capitalist economic system. In short, for Hitler the prevalence of the political is in the name of the economic (capitalism). Hitler realized that the biggest threat to the preservation of capitalism in times of crisis was the political engagement of the “masses” because they would become the biggest obstacle to the type of industrial economic development that Hitler envisioned.

Because Hitler was the leader of the *National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP)*

⁵² Covered in (Ангелов, 2019; Антифа Бг, 2020; Барикада, 2019; Маргиналия, 2019; Чолаков, 2019)

⁵³ Detailed analysis of this process follows in the next section and in my third article.

⁵⁴ Such a choice entails that Bulgarian antifascism is discredited as the tyranny of a few national traitors, the *People’s Court* is removed from the larger context of anti-fascist struggles and delegitimized as criminal and in bringing this logic to its final conclusion – fascists are transformed into victims of Communism.

it is a common trend among current Bulgarian historians⁵⁵ to view him as anti-capitalist, yet Hitler's own words reveal a different story. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler writes: "Analogous to political democracy on the economic terrain is communism" (1942, p. 73). Along with the anti-Semitic definition of Marxism as a plot of the Jews to destroy individualism and replace it with the masses, we read that it corresponds politically with the parliamentary system (democracy) and economically with labour union movement. Hitler is not anti-individualist when he admires the deeds of great men in Randian fashion but he is anti-individual when it comes to citizen rights because they are an obstacle to discipline. His musings about the factory as a type of work environment that requires despotic cooperation, echoes Marx in *Capital*. However, contrary to Marx's concern with how to liberate the worker from this despotism, and contrary to Marx depiction of the exploitation of the worker, Hitler is concerned with how to achieve the opposite – how to sustain the control and exploitation. Thus, in a Social Darwinist fashion he writes: "without organization, without coercion, and so without individual sacrifices it [society] would not function. Life is a continuous renunciation of individual liberty" (Hitler, 2003, p. 233).

Tracing the historical rise of fascism, we see a common trend –the European countries that turn fascist, Italy, Germany, Spain, and Austria were characterized by highly organized mass politics, sharp political division and strong class identity (Landa, 2018). In Italy after World War I, the Italian Socialist Party (*PSI*) was the largest political party, followed by the Catholic left – *Italian Popular Party (PPI)*. Together they made more than fifty percent in the Italian parliament of 1919. Yet, as in other countries, there was division among the left, within the socialists (Reformists vs. Maximalists) and among socialist and clerical socialists. Socialism in Germany was growing stronger since Bismarck's reforms after the unification. During the whole period of the Weimar republic (1919-1932) the combined electoral share of the left – socialists and communists — was around 36 percent, compared to the Nazis whose only substantial increase of 18 percent happened in 1930. In 1932 the Communist Party gained more votes and all three left parties *KPD*, *SPD* and *USPD* had 37 percent. However, the division among the left in Germany was no less severe than Italy. While the left was divided, Hitler's Nazis were able to monopolize the centre and the right.

It was not the working class embracing fascism, it was the middle-class fear of the left that led to liberals, conservatives and nationalists gravitating towards the *NSDAP*. The workers that were enchanted by Hitler were not politically organized in unions or syndicates. Hitler was never able to sway the majority of the working class towards Nazism; before 1933 the left lost only four percent of the vote (Landa, 2018, p. 165). But he was able to shift the vote of those on the right and once appointed Chancellor he had enough power for an outright attack on the left that came with the Enabling Act of 1933. Mussolini was not able to defeat the left before taking power without resolving to violence. Hitler himself admits the inability of the Nazis to overcome the power of the left had it not been for the violent takeover of the Italian fascists: "If Mussolini had been outdistanced by Marxism, I don't know whether we could have succeeded in holding out. At that period National Socialism was a very fragile growth" (Hitler, 2000, p. 10).

A close look at Italian fascism shows its political manoeuvring before Mussolini's taking of power. At first the Italian fascists were pacifists, but around the 1920s Mussolini embraced

⁵⁵ The late Plamen Tzvetkov was a prominent advocate of this narrative. See for example Цветков, 2000) (Цветков, 2000)

imperialism and militarism, also from atheism he reconciled with the Vatican, getting the big landowners on his side. In its early stages fascism appeals to young intellectuals who are discontented with liberalism but cling to nationalism. At the same time, the possibility of communist revolution in Italy in 1922 and Germany in 1932 is very real (Paxton, 2004: 105). The *Enabling Act* of March 1933 that gave Hitler the power to rule by decree and Mussolini's *1925 Laws for the Defence of the State* are the first steps toward dictatorship. By 1927 Italy had become a one-party dictatorship. Conservatives' and liberals' (although very weak) fear of the left is a bigger priority than stopping Mussolini.

The model for successful formation of fascist dictatorship is polarization, deadlock, mass mobilization against internal and external enemies, and complicity by existing elites. Traverso (2019) defines fascism as "movement rooted among the (both emerging and declining) middle classes and directed by plebeian leaders"; despite its rhetoric fascism was about "compromise with the older economic, bureaucratic, military, and political elites" and "never changed the economic structure of society"; more importantly, "The birth of fascism always implies a certain osmosis between fascism, authoritarianism, and conservatism" (89). Contrary to Furet's (1996; 1999) notion that fascism and communism unite in their hatred of the bourgeoisie, I concur that fascism and conservatives unite in a marriage of convenience and find a common enemy in the left (Paxton, 2004; Landa, 2010). Even a revisionist like Furet has also acknowledged that "Fascism was in many ways a response to the threat of the proletarian revolution" (1999, p. 221).

Fascism should be analysed as a strategy that subverts the mass politics of the left. Gramsci used the concept of passive revolution to describe such regimes. In short, it is mass mobilization for the purposes of political and economic control over the masses and not vice versa – the masses control over political and economic matters. This is what explains the success of fascism in the two states where the left had considerable leverage above liberal elites. The difference between fascism and authoritarianism is their approach to the masses. Fascism's strategy of ruling is by politicizing the masses in a different direction, i.e. to "nationalize" the left (in Hitler's words), by de-democratizing mass politics through various methods (forms of disciplining and control, ideological propaganda, and material aspects of ideology – rituals, commemorations, marches, vigils).

In contrast, authoritarian regimes count on the apolitical state of the masses, attempting to keep them demoralized (Paxton, 2004, p. 217). As I already pointed out, fascism came into power in European countries that had strong political movements on the left. Although Hitler used parliamentary elections to gain control over the political process, fascism both in Germany and Italy was not able to overcome socialism's influence over the majority of the workers and sway their vote. Fascism's main political goal was to destroy the left once it took political power. In contrast to Germany and Italy, authoritarian regimes like the ones in Bulgaria, Romania or Hungary, could use fascist movements as tools for securing their own regimes. When the Bulgarian monarch Boris III felt threatened from the left, he could use the services of the extreme right to suppress such threats.

Contrary to the interpretation of fascism as anti-capitalist, both from liberal and conservative scholars like Fritz Stern, Peter Sloterdijk, Ernst Nolte, my view of fascism is informed by the works of scholars who have examined the process of development of fascism. They have shown that Mussolini and Hitler purged its radical left element prior to taking power. Behind the slogans of class harmony was hidden the goal to preserve social hierarchy, fascism's

adoration of the Duce, or of the Führer translated into contempt for the masses. Consider Mussolini's understanding of syndicalism (2002) usage of discipline – economic, discipline, political discipline that translates into unity of the Party (2002, p. 177) and low wages for the workers in times of crisis (2002, p. 172), or the notion of “all elements in production have their inevitable hierarchy” (223). Therefore, “The captain of industry is the creator of wealth” (2002, p. 171) and the workers should give up the class struggle and the goal to abolish private property (2002, p. 73). For this reason, fascism put the syndicates under the control of the state, where the masses (socialist organized workers) could be disciplined into the “fascist masses.”

Ishay Landa (2016) who has examined the rhetoric of fascist leaders shows how fascism introduces a dichotomy between masses and people. The first are undisciplined, rebellious, lazy and pacifist while the second is disciplined, respectful of authority, laborious, willing to sacrifice. The masses are associated with urban individualism, while the people are rural. Ultimately, the goal of fascism is to make people out of masses. Fascism usurps the politics of the left by creating a parallel structure of workers syndicates that have to be subordinated to the state. Ishay Landa borrows from Jameson the concept of the *political unconscious* that searches for contradiction and suppressed antagonisms within texts, to argue that under the notion of the masses fascism hides its hatred and contempt for the working class. The masses are viewed as code for rebellious workers that find their political awakening within socialism.

Ishay Landa (2010) has also shown why fascism, at least in its early stages, has been viewed favourably by liberals, with the case of Vilfredo Pareto. Pareto, a liberal turned conservative, who not unlike Hayek had a naturalistic understanding of socio-economic processes, was writing before the rise of Mussolini. In times when Italian Marxism was gaining political ground, he was concerned with what he viewed as the negative outcome of political liberalism. He blamed political liberalism for creating a system of equal rights that made possible workers' political organizing. He was particularly concerned with the right to strike and demands for progressive taxation. The process of Pareto's thinking presents a typical trajectory – the fear of liberals that representative democracy opened up potential for socialist politics, i.e. the political empowerment of workers whose interests are against the capitalist class.

This fear led to Pareto advocating the elite's rule through force. That as a result led him to side with Mussolini, whom he viewed as representative of the elite ruling through force. Pareto's endorsed fascism as the only political force to quell workers' demands, especially progressive taxation, that encroached on private property and restricted “free movement of capital.” For the very same reason – fear of Bolshevism as a threat to capitalism, Mises proclaims fascism (in its early stages) as possible saviour of European civilization. Hayek and Friedman's endorsement of dictatorship in Chile is also for the sake of the free market. The legacy of such thinking is exemplary in current Bulgarian historiography and history textbooks. History textbooks provide revisionist narratives that can be defined as inverted binary oppositions (Deyanova, 2010). The previous villains of history have now become heroes. Right-wing regimes are interpreted as the response to the violence of left despotism.

Even non-Marxist scholars of fascism acknowledge that fascism emerges in crisis. Capital if begrudgingly, accommodates to the fascist regime and in most cases prospers (Paxton, 2004; Griffin, 2008). Therefore, Mises' understanding that fascism is both “lesser of two evils” and “saviour of European civilization” (meaning capitalism) should be re-examined closely. In the context of a revolutionary threat from the Left – successful revolution in Russia, failed

revolutions in Germany (1919), Hungary (1918), Bulgaria (1923) and also the Left's strong positions in Germany and Italy the capitalist class felt threatened. Thus, in one case Capital had to make concessions with the fascists, but in the other case – a Bolshevik revolution – it was very likely to face its demise. The Third International's definition of fascism is formulated by its leader the Bulgarian Georgi Dimitrov (1934-1943), as the dictatorship of most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of financial capital (Dimitrov, 1972). According to this formula fascists like Mussolini and Hitler are agents of the capitalist elite. My understanding is that fascism emerged somewhat independent of the capitalist class, but was recognized by it as *the rabid dog* needed to keep the Bolsheviks away. We can observe the same panic but in a different context nowadays with the presence of political figures on the Left like Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn. Although, they are not perceived as a major threat yet, one can expect that the elite will opt for a rabid dog (if not outright fascist, at least with fascist coloration) to rid itself of the leftist threat.

George Mosse (1989) interprets fascism as mass movement stemming from the French Revolution, specifically its Jacobin phase that gives expression of the popular movement of the poor sans culottes. The revisionist trajectory searches for links between democracy and totalitarianism. Nolte and Furet imagine the Jacobins as the political ancestors of both Bolshevism and fascism. Furet makes a connection between Jacobinism and Bolshevism; Nolte argues that fascism's brutality is a reaction and even imitation of Bolshevism; Mosse searches for the roots of fascism in Jacobinism, as a mass democratic process. What is common in such positions is the notion of mass participation of politics as a road to terror. For Mosse "The French Revolution stood at the beginning of democratization of politics, which climaxed in twentieth century fascism" (1989, p. 20). Yet, as Ishay Landa (2010, 2018) argues fascism's war on left parties and labour organizations, banning of strikes, persecution of union leaders, proves exactly the opposite – fascism was an anti-democratic regime aiming to neutralize mass politics and negate the organizing forms of the masses. This becomes even clearer when comparing Jacobin and fascist relationships with the elites, "in the first case hostile and confrontational, in the second harmonious and good willed" (Landa, 2018, p. 183). Discrediting the perception of democracy by searching for such links is what Ranciere (2014) terms *hatred of democracy*.

3.1. The Jew and the Communist: Tracing the Figures of Mass-Phobia

Mussolini's fascist project is of class harmony, but in its Nazi variation the Jew represents the threat to class harmony. Mussolini's desire to reconcile class antagonisms in the name of the organic unity of the nation manifests itself in the totalitarian project. He writes: "As opposed to the socialist syndicalism, fascist syndicalism, through class collaboration leads to corporatism, this needs to be a systemic and harmonic collaboration that protects private property and private initiative" (Musollini, 2002, p. 173). Musollini's social reforms do not lead to an amelioration of class antagonisms, fascism simply suppresses any expression of class struggle. From Mussolini's own words it becomes clear that fascism is not an anti-capitalist ideology and political project. On the contrary, Mussolini is on a quest to save capitalism from liberalism, which has eroded politics and the economy. Liberal democracy he writes "deprived people's existence from style...Fascism returns the style of people's existence...violence, religion, art,

politics” (2002, p. 87). For Mussolini, the traditional values of European civilization are threatened – the family and private property. Mises would undoubtedly agree with the latter.

Critical theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer (2001), but also Žižek who follows the same argument, have argued that the Nazi fantasy of capitalism without antagonisms requires the elimination of the Jew for such harmony to occur. For example, in their discussion of anti-Semitism, Adorno and Horkheimer famously define the Jew as a scapegoat, who concentrates the injustices of the economic system. When Žižek defines fascism as the symptom of capitalism, he means that the contradictions in capitalism presuppose a type of instability (class antagonism) that erupts into violence. A common reading of Nazi anti-Semitism is that it assigns contradictory traits to the Jewish figure – the Jew as representatives of capital and as destructive anti-capitalist force (Marxism/Bolshevism). When discussing Nazi anti-Semitism, Ishay Landa (2016) points out that for Hitler there was good capital (national) and bad capital (Jewish absorbed in Bolshevism); destruction of Marxism/Bolshevism was meant to save capitalism (368-69).

Ishay Landa, while complementing the thesis of class antagonism, gives a new perspective on the significance of the Jew in the Nazi worldview. Hitler drew a difference between “healthy industrial capital” and “real evil Jewish finance capital” (Kershaw, 2008, p. 92). But by the mid-1920s Hitler was already making the connection between Jews and Soviet Communism (Kershaw 2008, p. 150). Landa argues the pressing need to exterminate the Jews even at the very end of the war was because of “[t]he Nazi perception of the Jew as a hugely powerful revolutionary, cunning, conspiratorial and mortally dangerous, not one of many plotters but the very leader and organizer, the living force propelling the popular revolt onwards” (Landa 2016, p. 367). That reading draws from a traditional trope of the Jew as a subversive figure Landa shows how dating back to Nietzsche this subversion is associated with the left and with revolutionary action. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche paints a conspiratorial picture of Christianity as coming out of *ressentiment* of the Jewish priests to destroy the strong Aryan race, culminating in the French Revolution, when “Judea” collapsed the “last political nobility in Europe” (Nietzsche 2007, p. 33). The Jew comes as a threatening force mobilizing the *rabble* (lower classes) against the elites (aristocracy/bourgeoisie).

Similarly, Liah Greefeld (1992) uses the concept of *ressentiment* as a psychological state of envy and anger in her discussion of nationalism. In another example, the liberal Dutch intellectual Menno ter Braak, who was strongly influenced by Nietzsche, uses the concept of *ressentiment* to critique Nazism. However, ter Braak harbours similar disdain for the masses as Hitler himself. His critique comes from an elitist position, where Nazism, democracy and socialism are lumped together, united by *ressentiment*. For him Nazism is “a movement of losers” (Braak, 2019, p. 106). In his critique Hitler’s hatred of the Jews is irrational; it is hatred for the sake of hatred.

Nazism’s view of Judaism derives from such elitism. Hitler’s view of the role of the French Revolution is somewhat reminiscent (although less sophisticated) to the one in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy*. Hitler writes: “With the French Revolution he [the Jew] achieved equal civil rights. That built the bridge he could now stride across to capture political power within the ethnic communities” (Hitler, 2006, p. 235). All the more, in *Mein Kampf* (1942) Hitler associates Western democracy with Marxism (often used interchangeably with Jewry), which reveals his disdain for mass politics of the working class. In Hitler’s own words “The Jewish doctrine of

Marxism repudiates the aristocratic principle of Nature” to substitute the masses for race and nation, replacing personality with the masses (Hitler 1942, p. 61 and 347). In *Mein Kampf* and his *Table Talk* (a series of monologues between 1941 and 1944), Hitler presents Marxism as the biggest threat to Germans. Facing hardships the worker is seduced by Marxism (2006, p. 270); the Jews are the masters of the German workers (2006, p. 413). The only solution is to exterminate them (1942, p. 131).

The Bolshevik revolution (that Nazism associated with a Jewish plot) was a class revolution. The elimination of class oppression, not class harmony was its ideological driving force; whereas, racial purity drove Nazi policies of extermination. As an answer to Ernst Nolte, Žižek (2002) employs the Freudian concept of displacement. In *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud (2010) explains *displacement* as a shift of emphasis in the dream from an important to unimportant element (2010, p. 202). A passage in Freud illuminates Žižek’s usage of displacement that he uses to illustrate Nazism. Displacement occurs under the pressure of censorship, it is a shift from a normal association to be taken seriously, to one that is superficial and seemingly absurd (2010, p. 345). In other words, the displacement of class onto race by the Nazis is the externalization of the political struggle inside capitalism onto a “foreign (Jewish) body” outside that disrupts the “harmony” of capitalism. But as discussed above, Landa’s (2016) emphasis is on the very class aspect of the Nazi final solution. In Hitler’s Social Darwinism, praise of “great individuals,” and praise for competition are rooted in 19th–20th Malthusian capitalist discourse, whereas the Nazi fantasy of the Jew represents the threat of class struggle, the very idea that the masses would be awakened to class consciousness.

Furthermore, Nazi anti-Semitism as coded in the fear of anti-capitalist revolution (Marxism/Bolshevism) materialized in the Soviet Union. Although, in Hitler’s fantasy the Jews condenses contradictory opposites – the Jews are agents of international finance capital and at the same time subversive Marxist agents that poison the German workers (1942, p. 180), I concur with scholars like Landa, Traverso and Losurdo that Nazism is not an anti-capitalist doctrine. On the contrary, for Hitler believed in good and bad capitalism and the bad one was tainted by the conspiracy of the Jews. The crossing points between Hitler’s anti-Bolshevism and anti-Semitism in the Nazi doctrine and anti-communism in post-Soviet times can be illustrated with Bulgarian anti-communism.

Such an understanding is strikingly close to Bulgarian liberals’ view of capitalism turned bad by the conspiracy of the omnipotent Communist secret service, or the evil nomenklatura. That paranoid imaginary explains the thirty-year drive for the expulsion of Communists, despite their total absence. The heirs of the Communists, the *Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)*, embraced neoliberal policies early on. The two largest organized labour unions declared their staunch anti-communism since their formation; Bulgaria is the country in Europe where neoliberal capitalism has hit hard. Paradoxically, the more unbearable Bulgarian capitalism becomes, the louder the voices to purge the Communists become. The fear is not of Communists (they do not exist) but of Communist thinking. For example, *Sofia Platform*, discussed in detail elsewhere, is alarmed that young people perceive healthcare and education as human rights. For the former Environmental Minister, Neno Dimov, those protesting the commodification of nature are “Green Communists,” and for the PM Borisov, the neoliberal *BSP* are the Communists.

Landa's analysis of Nazi anti-Semitism transcends the liberal explanation of Hitler as a delusional psychopath (enjoying new popularity in popular culture and political rhetoric).⁵⁶ It shows how Hitler's hatred comes out of deep fear of politically empowering the masses (that he, once again, fanatically believed were seduced by Jewish Marxism). Once the figure of the Jew takes the contours of "powerful revolutionary" we can see how this figure could metamorphose to any other threat to the order of things (of the holders of political and economic power) be it Communists, terrorists, or eco-terrorists.

Historically in the Balkans the common ground between anti-communism and anti-Semitism can be traced at least since the rise of Nazism, but in Eastern Europe after 1989 it has taken a new life. If liberal anti-communism shies away from employing the trope of the treacherous Jew turned Bolshevik, this is not the case with nationalist parties that are now part of governments in countries like Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria. But even when the liberal Zheliu Zhelev claims that fascism is the lesser of two evils, because it leaves private property intact, we can question what such enunciations reveal. I am far from implying that the first democratically elected president of the Republic of Bulgaria had sympathies for fascism. However, as was discussed, economic liberalism seems to be hiding the same anti-egalitarian sentiments that Hitler harboured and fear of the "masses" disruption of the order of things.

3.2. Imitating Bolshevism or Following Colonialism

Historians such as Landa, Losurdo and Traverso that have worked on exposing the ideological underpinnings of Nolte's revisionist school have pointed to the links between Nazi policies of extermination and expansionism and Western liberal colonial conquest. Susan Buck-Morss (2000) emphasizes the importance of the spatial aspect of US foreign policy. As she points out, the push westward resulting in the genocide of the indigenous peoples, is a prerequisite to Hitler's push to the East in Europe to "acquire *Lebensraum* (vital space). Therefore, instead of Nolte's attempt to trace the roots of Nazi anti-Semitism (race genocide) in Lenin and Stalin's "class genocide," those historians have explicitly shown us the deep connection between Hitler's policies and West European colonialism. *Lebensraum* was the German imperialist version of the "Western vision of the non-European world as a space open to conquest and colonization" while the idea of "extinction of the 'lower races' belongs to the entire European culture, and particularly British and French culture" (Traverso, 2018, p. 121).

Traverso (2007) writes: "The historical laboratory for Nazi crimes was not Bolshevik Russia but the colonial past of Western civilization, in the classical era of industrial capitalism, imperialist colonialism and political liberalism" (143). Hitler even compares the German conquest in Ukraine with the British conquest in India (Hitler, 2000, p. 92). Landa (2010) asserts that the Nazis "biological racism was prefigured...in the West, in France, in the USA and England" (2010, p. 97). Traverso refutes Nolte's thesis of the origins of Nazism in Bolshevism, indicating that the "central axis of the Nazi political project" of eugenics - racial purification -has its origin in 19th century Europe, during the epoch of classical liberalism (2010, p. 145). In 1900, British Eugenicist, Karl Pearson writes that civilization means "the struggle of race with race,

⁵⁶ See for example Žižek's insightful discussion of the falsity of seeking for the crimes of fascism in psychological profiles of Hitler, Mussolini, etc. (2011, p. 58).

and the survival of the physically and mentally fitter race,” the Arian race being the fitter one (cited in Landa, 2010, p. 98).

In addition to the link with European colonialism, what needs to be emphasized is that Hitler used the US’s settler colonialism as a blueprint for his genocidal plan, where in his version the inferior races were Jews and Slavs. The American West was equivalent in the Nazi political imagination to the German East. In Hitler’s words, the Eastern Slavic inhabitants were to be treated as the American ‘Redskins’ (Kakel, 2013, p. 45). The top Nazi leadership even emulated and exploited the language and practices of the ‘American frontier’ (45). In his *monologues* Hitler compares the Nazis “struggle” against the Partisans in the Soviet Union to that of the US against the “Red Indians” (2006, p. 284). In another instance, Hitler muses on North American’s sense of vast open space, which, according to him, Germans lack. Of course, the sense of open space is a result of negating the humanness of the indigenous people. For Hitler “There comes a time when this desire for expansion can no longer be contained and must burst into action” (2006, p. 707). This translates into the crusade of extermination of “Judeo-Bolshevism” in the East.

Dominico Losurdo defines Hitler’s *Lebensraum* as “the greatest colonial war in history...that aimed at the reduction of entire peoples to mass of slaves or semi-slaves in the service of alleged master race” (Losurdo 2016, p. 162). Hitler’s war on the Soviet Union contained plans to reduce the Slavic people to a source of slave labour. Slavs should be worked to death and be educated only to be “useful manual labourers,” because “we are the masters” (cited in Losurdo, 2016, p. 163) Hitler’s musings on education as dangerous and only required for the Slavs to be useful manual labourers, brings striking parallels to post-socialist Bulgaria, with its defunded higher education and restructuring of public education to meet the needs for outsourced labour in call centres.

Ultimately, Losurdo comes to similar conclusions as Landa by showing the interrelation between class struggle (the Nazi crusade of “de-proletarianizations” and extermination of Bolshevism) and national struggle against foreign invaders: “The struggle of an entire people to avoid the fate of enslavement to which it had been condemned cannot but be characterized as a class struggle. But it was a class struggle that took the form of a national, anti-colonial war of resistance” (163). Ishay Landa summarizes the interrelation between Nazism, racism derived from imperialism and colonialism and capitalist accumulation as follows:

Hitler’s anti-Semitism can hardly be made sense of when abstracted from the broader phenomenon of racism, which, in turn, cannot be properly comprehended unless within the yet broader context of imperialism, which itself develops on the basis of the capitalist mode of production...isolation of the question of anti-Semitism by necessity overlooks the fact that the extermination of European Jewry could not have taken place unless within a political project based on a general, not just antisemitic but also racist and social Darwinist theory, a systematic ideology ranking “superior” and “inferior” “races,” dividing them between would-be masters and slaves, while postulating competition for supremacy between men, states and races, as an inevitable and beneficial process of sieving the unfits and promoting human and cultural greatness (Landa 2016, p. 382-383).

But if we can trace Hitler's crusade to exterminate the *Untermenschen* (not limited to "Jews and Bolsheviks") to *white man's burden* and *manifest destiny*, can we see a thread that leads us to the US's quest for world democracy? Will this bring us a full circle back to the liberal origins of capitalism and the contradiction between economic and liberal freedom? If Nazism is violent exclusion/elimination in its pure form, not being mediated by various ideological and political manoeuvrings to prevent democratic participation, what is neoliberalism? How are we to read the neoliberal subversion of democracy?

4. The Question of Fascism in Bulgaria: Then and Now

This overview of the current literature on fascism aims to situate it at its proper place – as a mass-phobic project, driven by fear and hatred of left political organizing. Fascism cannot be a left project, because it has been driven by racial superiority with roots in colonialism, elitism and unwillingness to change the fundamentals of the capitalist socio economic system – private property and class hierarchy. Such understanding drives my analysis of current anti-communism in post-socialist capitalist Bulgaria, with its element of rehabilitating the fascist past. The process of revisionism that would lead to subsequent rehabilitation of fascism has its roots in the years of late socialism.

Historian Roumen Daskalov, who can hardly be accused of nationalist sentiments in comparison to other popular historians with regular media presence, presents an overview of Bulgarian historiography on fascism, in both periods – before and after 1989. However, such an overview reveals Daskalov's own problematically uncritical approach to the history of fascism in Bulgaria.

Defensively, Daskalov (2011) writes that Bulgaria "joined the Axis under German pressure in March 1941... but did not send soldiers to the Eastern Front and managed to rescue its Jews" (2011, p. 146). Yet, I would emphasize that, eager to comply with Hitler's demands, the Bulgarian government under Bogdan Filov put in effect the anti-Semitic *Law for Protection of the Nation*, two months before joining the Axis, in January 1941. The thesis that Boris III somehow reluctantly agreed to join an alliance with Nazi Germany is common among Bulgarian historians today (Tzvetkov, 1999; Markov, 2014, 2015). Academician Georgi Markov is a prominent representative of this post-1989 paradigm shift. This new paradigm diminishes the anti-Semitic repression of the regime, minimizes the partisan movement, defines the anti-fascist struggles as anti-state terroristic actions inspired by Moscow and presents the coming to power of the *United Front* (coalition of left forces) as a coup (Dimitrova and Poppetrov, 2018).

The beginning of a revisionist process in historiography starts with historian Nikolaj Genchev in the late sixties and continues with the publication of PM Bogdan Filov's diary by Ilcho Dimitrov. Such revisionism was provoked by a wave of nationalism that was characteristic of Zhivkov's regime from the 1960s onwards culminating in the *Revival process* (Elenkov, 2008; Todorova, 1995). For example, Ilcho Dimitrov who played a major role in the *Revival process* makes the argument about Bulgaria's involvement with the Pact in which the political elite "sincerely believed that they were acting in the national interest" (cited in Daskalov, 2011, p. 185). The argument shifts the focus away from responsibility of the Bulgarian Monarchy for their alignment with Hitler toward a question of sovereignty and independence. Daskalov fails to interrogate such a nationalist view of political decision-making and instead presents it as a proof

of how Bulgarian scholarship started to question the existence of fascism. The downplaying of Boris III's alliance with Hitler gradually becomes the official discourse in Bulgarian history – the authoritarian regime was concerned with “national unification.” National unification, a code term for Bulgaria's irredentist nationalist project, is now present as an official historical term in textbooks and historical literature.

Current trends in Bulgarian historiography exonerate Boris III's decision to join the Axis as necessary to protect the nation from Nazi occupation and as a chance to realize the ideal of national unification (meaning the occupation of parts of Yugoslavia and Greece that are claimed as Bulgarian lands).⁵⁷

Bulgaria's military expansionism and jingoistic foreign policy under Ferdinand I ended in devastating outcomes in three consecutive wars. Current Bulgarian historians are dismissive about the link between big business and fascism and point out that the fascist groups and movements in Bulgaria were not sponsored by big industrialists. One exception is Velizar Peev, owner of chocolate factories, who financed Shkojnov's *SBRZ*, Stalijski's *NZF* and Tsankov's *NSD* ⁵⁸(Poppetrov, 2008, pp. 50-51). However, taking into account the peripheral status of the Bulgarian state, whose primary big industrial production was tobacco, fascism should be viewed as a useful political and ideological model to sustain authoritarian power. Fascist movements were often used as a crutch by the monarch. Outright fascist sympathizers such as Gabrovski, Stalijiski, Lukov, Mitakov took ministerial chairs, and many others made political careers in the period between 1935 and 1944.

In that sense, the focus of the analysis should not be on the lack of a fascist Führer, but on how the monarchist regime was employing the services of fascists to sustain power. Stanley Payne (1980) defines Boris III's regime as royalist “a nineteenth-century-style oligarchic parliamentary regime” that repressed Communist and peasant left, but also proto-fascist right, while being close to Germany and Italy (326-327). Current historians have dismissed the term Monarcho-Fascism, used by Marxist-Leninist scholarship that defined the authoritarian reign of King Boris III. For many recent Bulgarian historians King Boris III is not considered a fascist dictator. Yet, he enters in alliance with Hitler, his regime passes the anti-Semitic *Law for the Protection of the Nation* (1941) and brutally tries to suppress the anti-fascist struggle. If not fascist, he certainly knows how to employ fascists to do the “dirty work” of keeping the regime safe from the threat of the agrarian left, the socialist and communist movements. For example, since the 1923 agrarian uprising onwards, Boris III skilfully uses the services of extreme nationalist and later fascist *IMRO* to brutally suppress leftist opposition (Payne, 1980, p. 135).

⁵⁷ Such trends are in stark contrast to US historian of Bulgarian descent Marin Pundeff. In an article about Bulgaria's alliance with Nazi Germany and declaration of war to the USA and Britain, he traces the King's orientation towards Germany as part of a pattern of Bulgarian foreign policy under the monarchist regime of Ferdinand I (Boris's father) who involved Bulgaria in World War I on the side of Germany and Austro-Hungarian Empire. Pundeff also points to the role of dynastic ties (Пундев, 1996, pp. 316–319). Hitler's own predisposition toward the Bulgarian monarchy should also be taken into account. Despite Hitler's non-aristocratic background, he expressed admiration for Ferdinand, describing him as “the most intelligent monarch I've known” (Hitler, 2000, p. 389).

⁵⁸ See note 53.

Bulgarian history during the reign of Boris III (1919-1943) is characterized with a series of other repressive measures against the Left. In 1923 a military coup ousted Alexander Stamboliiski and his government of the agrarian left. A two-year period of ruthless suppression and atrocities against the Left followed, committed by the military and mercenaries from *IMRO*. A protofascist figure, Alexander Tzankov, backed by the *Military League* (a conspiratorial group made of former military officers) and *IMRO*, took power. In that sense, if not Monarcho-Fascist, by employing the services of fascists, Boris III sustains the peripheral position of the Bulgarian Kingdom, characterized by underdevelopment and high levels of class disparity. In the years of late socialism, the historian Vladimir Migev introduces the term “fascization” that is useful way to depict the intellectual and cultural climate of the 1930s and 1940s in Bulgaria (cited in Daskalov, 2011, p. 157).

For the last decade the nationalist party *IMRO* has played a prominent role in Bulgarian politics. The *Inner Macedonian-Edrine Revolutionary Organization (IMERO)* was founded in 1893 to fight for political autonomy of Macedonian and Edirne regions that were under Ottoman rule. Ever since its formation the organization has been a factor for Bulgarian governments, but after 1918 the renamed *IMRO*’s meddling in political affairs became even more prominent. By the 1920s *IMRO* started to function as mercenaries and hired guns for right-wing regimes. For example, *IMRO* were the assassins of PM Alexander Stamboljiski and active participants in the subsequent terror against the agrarian left and the Communists unleashed by Tsankov’s regime. From 1924 during the leadership of Ivan Mikhailov, *IMRO* in fact functions as a state within a state, a terrorist organization that exercises its power over the population of the Pirin Macedonia region. Serbian historian Milan Ristic has traced Mikhailov’s collaboration with the Croatian fascists, the *Ustashi*. Today Mikhailov is held as a hero and patriot by the re-established *IMRO*, which is part of the current government.

Nikolaj Poppetrov, historian from the *Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS)* is currently the main researcher of fascism in Bulgaria, who is not downplaying its significance. I should also mention Alexander Vezenkov’s (2019) work in progress on the *Third Generation*. (Vezenkov was dismissed from the *Institute for Research of the Recent Past (IRRP)* for his critical view of the anti-communist paradigm in relation to the organization’s theoretical line – *totalitarian model*). Poppetrov has published a selection of the political programs, brochures, propaganda materials and other documents of the many pro-fascist, pro-Nazi, extreme nationalist movements and organizations between the two world wars. Prominent members of those organizations and movements found political careers in Bulgarian governments before 1944.

Here I will introduce in chronological order some of the more prominent more than fifteen such movements, parties and organizations and will point to the political positions of their members. Union Kubrat was founded between 1922-24, influenced by postulates of Italian Fascism ; its goals were to fight against Bolshevism and for “national unity”, order, discipline, hierarchy, resolving the contradiction between labour and capital (Poppetrov, 2014, p. 48).

In 1926 Krum Mitakov founded the Union of Bulgarian Fascists, his brother, Vassil Mitakov, became Minister of Justice in the first cabinet of Bogdan Filov (1939-1942) (Bozhinov, 2014, pp. 64-65). Mitkaov was an open anti-Semite and supporter of the *Ustashi*, Croatian fascists that committed atrocities against the Serbs. UBF declares its support for Ivan Mihaylov’s extreme

right nationalists, IMRO.

In 1923 General Ivan Shkojnov founded Suiuz Bulgraska Rodna Zashita. SBRZ had 45-50 000 members. SBRZ was adhering to Fascism and was espousing anti-communism, anti-Semitism and was anti-masonic. It followed the project of irredentist nationalism to revive San Stefano Bulgaria and was sympathizing of Mikhailov's IMRO (Poppetrov, 2008, p. 24). In 1930 Национална Задруга Фашисти National Clan Fascists was formed by d-r Alexander Stalijski who later in 1944 became Minister of Justice in Ivan Bagryanov's cabinet. NZF were sympathizers of Ivan Mikhailov.

In 1932 Suiuz na Maldezhkite Natzionalini Legioni (Union of National Legions) had between 20 and 50 000 members. UNL is Anti-communist and anti-Semitic, influenced by Italian Fascism and Nazism (Poppetrov, 2014, p. 122) the strongest fascist youth formation, with primarily high school and college students, embraced fascist with nationalist revanchist ideas of "national unity" of Bulgaria. The Legions supported Ivan Mikhailov's IMRO and were against any close relations with Yugoslavia. Hristo Lukov who became the leader of UNL in 1942, he was a Minister of War (1935-38), in the cabinet of Georgi Kioseivanov.

In 1932 former prime minister (1923-1926) Prof Alexander Tsankov founded the political party National Social Movement (NSD). Although, not directly anti-Semitic, by the 1930s Tsankov was admirer of Italian Fascism and after 1933 reoriented towards Hitler's Nazism (Poppetrov, 2009: 523). Inspired by Mussolini, in 1934 Tsankov planned a march towards Sofia to capture political power, but was prevented by a coup and subsequent establishment of Boris III's authoritarian rule (Nedev, 2007).

Union of the Warriors for the Advancement of Bulgarian-ness, (SRNB) together with the Legions was one of the most extreme fascist organizations. It was founded in 1936 by Asen Kartandzhiev and Petur Garbovski. SRNB did not hide its sympathies for the Third Reich and combined extreme nationalism and anti-Communism with virulent anti-Semitism. During the alliance with Nazi Germany (1941-1944) SRNB was influential in the process of political decision-making of the Bulgarian governments and some of its members took high political posts (Poppetrov, 2008, p. 90-94). Gabrovski became the Minister of Inner Affairs (1940-43) in Bogdan Filov's second cabinet, while another anti-Semite Alexander Belev was Commissar of the Jewish Question (1942-1944). Further to anti-Semitic policies inside the Bulgaria Kingdom, Gabrovski and Belev are key figures responsible for the deportation of Jewish population from the occupied territories to Nazi concentration camps.

In 1940 the government of Bogdan Filov formed the youth organization Brannik or Defender (1940-1944). Modeled under Hitler Youth, the organization was under the direct control of PM Filov. Promoting team sports, mountaineering and other collective activities, Defender was engaged in anti-communist, anti-democratic, anti-Semitic propaganda and establishing the authoritarian image of King Boris III, as the leader figure. The authoritarian state emphasized on what Althusser terms material practices of ideological production – manifestations, marches, commemorations of medieval rulers, irredentist symbolic rituals inside the occupied territories.

Defender was also responsible for anti-Jewish pogroms.

Fascism, Nazism and authoritarianism had their influence among intellectual circles around the magazines *Young Bulgaria* and *Nation and Politics*. Those circles are currently known in Bulgarian historiography as the Third Generation, which was the title of an article by Stefan Popov. Popov, who was a chief editor of SRNB's propaganda magazine *Prelom* was a follower of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, the originator of the concept of the Third Reich, and proponent of fascist politics. According to Popov the Third Generation who in their youth witnessed the devastating years of the national catastrophes had to bring back Bulgaria's greatness. Those nationalist intellectuals depicted themselves as reviving the national tradition, carrying the ideals of the generation that brought Bulgarian independence mythologizing the Revival period of the 19th century. Many were in search of a strong Father figure that would combine the testament of the Bulgarian Revival with the path of New Europe (fascism). Recall Donald Rumsfeld's use of New Europe, to define those supporting the US's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. What was most pressing was a decisive break with the fascination with Left ideals from the 1920s. Many of the members of the circle became political figures and took political positions in Bogadan Filov's two cabinets. Former chief editor of *Nation and Politics* Stefan Klechkov and director of Brannik (1940-1943) was also a Governor of the occupied Greek territories of Aegean Thrace. During this time the Jewish population was deported to Nazi concentration camps.

4.1. Silencing the Fascist Past

In recent years the so-called *Third Generation (TG)* used to describe radical Right intellectual circles of the 1930s, mainly among the magazines *Young Bulgaria* and *Nation and Politics* regained popularity. Alexander Vezekov (2019) points out that despite having rivalries among the various circles, *TG* were clearly nationalist with strong irredentist sentiments, anti-Marxist, anti-leftist, influenced by anti-liberalism and authoritarianism, including Italian fascism and Nazism (2019, p. 2-3 and 26). Many of those intellectuals were closely tied with the *Legions*. After 1935 when Boris III established his authoritarian regime, many of the members in these circles ascended to various political or state bureaucracy positions. For many the authoritarian royalist regimes represent the ideal form of governance (2019, p. 6).

Vezekov shows how the reintroduction of figures of the *TG*, such as Stefan Popov is taking an aspect of idealization. This start is given as early as 1990 by Boris III's son, Simeon Saksokoburggotski. In an interview the future PM of Bulgaria (2001-2005) described them as "the new modern generation that walks towards integration, towards Europe" (Kevorkian, 1990, p. 98). The signifier *Europe* is contrasted to the "Communists that wiped out many of this generation" (98). Thus, although indirectly, the king in exile relies on the binary opposition "civilized Europe" vs. "barbaric Russia" to connote the tragic loss of the intellectual generation of his father King Boris III. Recently Boris Stanimirov⁵⁹ praised *TG* as "closest to the standard for global elite...destroyed by the communist dictatorship" (2009, p. 104).

⁵⁹ Stanimirov is a typical representative of the current political conjuncture – self-defined conservative and admirer of Margaret Thatcher, Chair of an organization with the name *Descendants of the Officer Corpus of Kingdom of Bulgaria*, former deputy with the conservative coalition *Reformers Bloc*.

I argue that this process of rehabilitation, by silencing the past of their fascist biographies, of nationalist, right-wing intellectual circles of the 1930s should be analysed as an element of the anti-communist ideological constellation. The process of de-legitimization of the socialist state and the rule of the Communist Party required a new historical narrative. That narrative denied any mass support for the Communist Party throughout the forty-five-year-long period. Or what Todor Hristov (2013) terms the narrative of the rule of a tyrannical minority against the will of the nation. Yet, Bulgaria had one of the highest numbers of rank and file Communist party members, about a million from a population of 8.9 million. From 1948 until the 1980s, the rank and file membership increased by hundred percent (Popivanov, 2015, p. 87). The results of Bulgaria's modernization under *BCP* led to its ranking 26th in UN Development Index in 1990, lagging only behind GDR, Czechoslovakia and USSR from the East bloc countries. In contrast, in 2014 Bulgaria was ranked 58th behind all of the former Eastern bloc countries, except the former Soviet republics (2015, p. 227). In 1990 the heirs of the Communist Party, *BSP*, gained a decisive victory in the first democratic elections, taking more votes than other parties is evidence that contradicts such a narrative.

Using the framework of the totalitarian model, anti-communist historians from *IRRP* have tried to resolve those contradictions. The decision to join the Party for career advancement, conformity, sense of lack of alternatives, or as the only option for social mobility, had become the standard explanation for mass membership (Znepolski, 2011, p. 24; Hristova, 2005, p. 169). However, such a view does not explain mass support for *BSP* in most cities, towns and villages in 1990. In contrast, after *UDF*'s victory by one percent it suffered a devastating defeat less than a year later due to highly unpopular policies, such as the land reform, and first attempts for neoliberal restructuring of the state.

Having delegitimized the socialist state, post-1989 political and intellectual elite turned to the interwar period to search for proof of the "Communist's barbaric elimination of the brightest of the nation." In this narrative of idealization, the right-wing circles of *TG* possess the qualities of cultured Europeans that the Communists lack (Vezenkov, 2019). The appraisal of problematic intellectual/political figures of the interwar period illuminates how anti-communism and rehabilitation of fascism interact. The case of Stefan Popov is a good example of rehabilitation of a strong supporter of fascism and his reintroduction as "a prominent European intellectual." The reconstruction of Popov's intellectual image is selective – his membership in one of the most virulent fascist and anti-Semitic organizations, *SRNB* is omitted. As Vezenkov points out, as exiled from Bulgaria by the "totalitarian regime," Popov had the chance to reinvent himself after 1944. However, behind those clumsy attempts still hide such views like that of Hitler as a "bad manager of great ideas" (Vezenkov 2019, p. 26).

In 1994, the accredited publishing house *Prosveta* presented an anthology entitled *Why Are We What We Are? In Search of Bulgarian Cultural Identity* edited by Roumen Daskalov and Ivan Elenkov. Daskalov and Elenkov have compiled texts from Bulgarian scholars, poets, writers and artists concerned with questions of "Bulgarian identity" and "Bulgarian peoples' psychology." Most of the texts were written between the interwar period. In some way, the book serves as reintroduction of scholarly works that were forgotten or silenced during the socialist period. However, despite a lengthy introduction, nowhere does the reader learn about the context in which the texts are produced. The Bulgarian intellectual class had strong links with German academics and culture. During the 1930s, Bulgarians were the biggest recipients of stipends from

German universities in the Balkans (Kiuliumova-Boyadzhieva, 1991). Many nationalist intellectuals, disappointed with the disastrous results of the wars, turned towards the ideas of fascism.

The influences of fascism or proto-fascism among Bulgarian intellectuals of the interwar period address the common theme of civilizational choice. We can examine the trope of the civilizational choice in the production of intellectual narratives between the two wars. Many of the texts presented were published in the journal *Otetz Paisii* that existed from 1928 to 1943, but no information is provided about the journal itself. The fact that this was the journal of a nationalist and pro-fascist organization, under the same name is omitted.

German-educated intellectual and poet Kiril Hristov, in an article entitled *From Nation to Race* (1929), presents a theory of race: lamenting the race mixture among Bulgarians, Hristov coins the term *bastardization* to explain Bulgarian lack of national enthusiasm, compared to the neighbouring countries (429-454). Hristov's lamenting of racial purity and nationalism, combined with paranoid views of "mixing of the races," sound reminiscent of the anti-Gypsy and anti-refugee hysteria of the nationalist narratives today. Political and socioeconomic conditions: social division, lack of political organizing, economic decline, and crisis of the state are all explained with his theory of *bastardization*.

The reintroduction of figures like Stefan Popov and Kiril Hristov and the idealistic but inaccurate representation of the *TG* as a cosmopolitan, European elite, is a symptom of an ideological shift. Alexander Vezekov (2019) addresses how admiration for the regimes of Mussolini and Hitler, which they praise as *ideology of New Europe* and calls for return to *national traditions* shows the opposite of cosmopolitanism (2019, p. 23-24). In her book on Bulgarian think tanks, Dostena Lavergne (2010) illustrates the positioning of a newly formed intellectual elite concentrated in several prominent think tanks as experts of the *transition*. Communism is demonized and supporters of the socialist party are depicted, either as naïve or as backward, stained with the unsophisticated traits of the "patriarchal peasant culture" (Krustev cited in Lavergne, 2010, p. 151). The elites are key players in the constructing of binary oppositions between peasants and citizens, modern and backward, and, of course, elites and people/masses. Such attitudes demonstrate disdain for the masses or people that "lack democratic culture" (Bogdanov cited in Lavergne, 150). According to another prominent expert, political scientist Evgeni Dainov, Bulgarians are passive, lacking motivation and direction, while the intellectual elite makes their own decisions (153).

It is no wonder that the mass-phobic views of the *Third Generation* would appeal to the new elites. And as Vezekov (2019) brilliantly demonstrates their authoritarian, anti-Semitic or outright fascist attitudes could be conveniently silenced or forgotten (24). However, the interwar and post-socialist intellectual elite of think tank experts manifest striking continuity in their anti-communism and mass phobia expressed in desire for top-down rule. The interwar *Third Generation* saw themselves as the competent elite that should constitute the authoritarian regime, the think tank experts engaged in projects of *democratization* see their mission not as empowering the people in the democratic process, but as that of "reconstruction of social reality by the importation of institutions from outside" (quote from Georgi Stoev from the prominent neoliberal think tank *Institute of Market Economy*, Lavergne, 2010, p. 153). In that sense, paradoxically or not, the new self-identified democratic elites come closer to authoritarian if not

outright fascist, anti-liberal, anti-democratic and, of course, anti-communist intellectual ancestors.

Current tendencies of capitalist Bulgaria as a peripheral EU member, but in fact an obedient satellite of the US's geopolitical and political-economic interests in Europe, require analysis as to how the reintroduction of authoritarian/fascist narratives of the interwar period figures in sustaining power. A reading of the current socioeconomic conditions shows similar characteristics to the Bulgaria of Boris III – a thirty-year period of deindustrialization that relegated Bulgarian economy to an underdeveloped status, combined with the highest class disparity in Europe. Boris III gradually oriented the country towards Nazi Germany, in the last decade Borisov's regime has taken decisive steps towards turning Bulgaria into part of a US militarized zone. In his neocolonial analysis of neoliberalism Dušan Bjelič discusses NATO's "nesting military industrial complex in the Balkans as part of an ongoing Hot-Cold War with Russia" (2018, p.753). Bjelič explains the process by which impoverished, peripheral countries in the Balkans have to relocate significant resources for militarization under US-controlled NATO. In that sense, Bulgaria with its dysfunctional healthcare and educational system, lowest minimum wage in Europe and recent purchase of US F-16 planes for billions of dollars is a perfect example. After a recent visit to the US, Borisov proudly announced that he personally has proposed the construction of NATO "information centre" in the seaport of Varna. Varna that has already been turned into a militarized zone with regular training of NATO soldiers on the Bulgarian shore is not only known as a tourist destination but is also the city with more than hundred thousand Russian citizens. Announcing a stronger presence of NATO in Varna is clearly a hostile message for the Russians in the city.

It is no surprise that once again *IMRO* (that since its rebirth has followed in the steps of its predecessor although it has not yet evolved to political killings) plays a key role in the repressive structures of the state and in Bulgaria's geopolitical positioning. In Borisov's current regime, known as Borisov 3 (this is the third time Borisov is in power since 2009), *IMRO* plays a role bigger than ever in political decision-making, from thugs of the monarchist regime that were employed to eliminate the left, now *IMRO* have key ministerial positions, such as the Ministry of Defence and deputies in the Interior Ministry. The revival of nationalist narratives and rebirth of figures of the *Third Generation* have to be analysed in the context of such a militarization.

4.2. Victims of Communism: The Road Towards Rehabilitation of Bulgarian Fascists

There are three key steps of the Bulgarian state legislature that opened the path toward rehabilitation of fascist figures. In 1996 Bulgarian Supreme Court passed decrees №172 and 243 that repealed the death sentences of the *People's Court* of 1945 of the majority of the defendants, due to lack of evidence (Kolev, 2014). Those were the members of the cabinets of Bogdan Filov and Ivan Bagraynov from 1941 until 1944, kings' regents and advisers, the deputies and military officials. In 1998 the Constitutional Court further undermined the significance of the *People's Court* by declaring it unconstitutional. In 2000 the Bulgarian parliament passed a *Law Declaring Criminal the Communist Regime*. However, it should be taken into account that some of the sinister figures, responsible for atrocities, were not acquitted. Nevertheless, as it will be shown their names appear as martyrs and victims of Communism.

Who is rehabilitated? With the invalidation of the *People's Court* decision, several key

figures of Bulgaria's past between the wars were acquitted of any responsibility for the crimes committed by the state during the pact with Hitler. Here I will mention just a few as a glaring examples of the course of institutionalized anti-communism: Professor Bogdan Filov was the prime minister that signed the pact for Alliance with Nazi Germany in March 1941 and passed the anti-Semitic *Law for the Defense of the Nation* in January 1941. Petur Gabrovski was the Interior Minister in Filov's cabinet and together with Alexander Belev founder of the fascist organization *Brannik*, enforcer of the *Law for the Protection of the Nation*, together with the Commissar of Jewish Affairs, Alexander Belev (not acquitted by the SC) and also a key member of *Ratniks*, responsible for the deportation of 12 000 Jews from occupied territories of Yugoslavia and Greece to the death camps in Poland. Alexander Stalijski was briefly a Minister of Justice for a few months in 1944. He is the author of books *Fascist Teaching of the State* (1929) and *Fascism: Bulgarian Explanation of the Fascist Nationalist Teaching* (1929) where he expresses his endorsement of fascism. Stalijski was a member of the fascist *Bulgarian Peoples Defence* (*Bulgarska rodna zashtita*).

The number 30 000 serves as a peculiar signifier and has its own symbolic existence in Bulgarian historiography. It seems to reappear in narratives that describe the traumatic events in Bulgarian history. For example, the number of people killed during the April uprising (1876) is 30 000, same as the September uprising (1923), and it is the number killed during the anti-fascist struggle (1941-44).

The speculation with the number of dead has been a characteristic feature of Bulgarian anti-communism. For example, President Zhelev, without citing any sources, claims 40 000 dead for two months since 9.09.1944. He also claims that "the so-called" *People's Court* – this is a rhetorical tactic to delegitimize the role of the *People's Court* as an anti-fascist institution - pronounced 2740 death sentences "executed on the same day" (Zhelev, 2012, p. 287). In reality out of approximately 2700 death sentences, 1064 were executed (Vezenkov, 2013, p. 364). Next, he makes an unsubstantiated claim that "tens of thousands were disappeared" during the years 1945-47 (288). Zhelev also uncritically cites the highly discredited *Black Book of Communism*, edited by Stefane Courtois, that claims 100 million victims of Communism. He goes as far as to make the claim, without providing any sources, that "in six days 35 000 were killed" by Soviet soldiers during the suppression of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 (Zhelev, 2012, p. 298).

Zhelev comes very close to the magical number 30 000, both in his claims for Bulgarian and Hungarian slain by the Communists. The only source that he cites, that of the military museum of Sofia, is not in relation to victims of Communism, but to the soldiers that were mobilized to fight the Nazis, after September 1944. Political scientist Venelin Ganev (2010), without providing any sources claims 26 850 killed for the period September-October 1944, in addition to those sentenced to death. Another historian claims that 24 890 were declared disappeared in the official organ of the Bulgarian government in the autumn of 1944 (Sharlanov, 2009) but after a careful examination of the newspaper the number has shrunk to 2062 (Zelengora, 2010). However, the actual number of those killed by the new regime has not been documented, estimates vary from 18 000 to 30 000 (Daskalov, 2011, pp. 267-275). Yet, none of these are a result of systematic research.

So far, Alexander Vezenkov (2013) with the help of Georgi Zelengora's archival research presents the most reliable list of the number of people killed. The biggest number of killings happened in the autumn of 1944 and was no less than 4000 and no more than 7000, which

includes those sentenced to death by the People's Court (Vezenkov 2013, p. 366). Vezenkov, who can hardly be accused of left political leanings, concludes that the various attempts of civic organizations to discover all the names of the people killed found that for the whole forty-five-year period the number oscillates around 8 000 (Vezenkov 2013, p. 365). Vezenkov concludes that so far there has not been a thorough research that conclusively has determined the total number of victims. Nevertheless, in the recent textbook scandal, complying with Truth and Memory foundations demands, the Ministry of Education insisted: "According to various sources, between 18,000 and 30,000 people were killed without trial and sentence in the first days after 9 September 1944" (cited in Enev, 2019).

What brings about the need to speculate with the number of people that suffered under communism? It seems that there is certain doubt in these authors about the strength of their thesis and have to cover up this indecision by adding more numbers that are supposed to paint the horror of the Communist crimes. In his critique of the speculation with numbers, historian Vezenkov (2013) asks his colleagues: "If we are hesitant about the strength of traumatic memory, do we need to produce it" (253)? Evelina Kelbecheva from the American University in Bulgaria and journalist Hristo Hristov are prominent producers of such traumatic memories. They are also popular media personalities, often invited both by public and private media as experts of the Communist past. I argue that the production of traumatic memory is an important element of the production of anti-communism as an ideological endeavour. The production of traumatic memory about the past seems to be a mechanism employed to combat the trauma of the present, or what anthropologist Gerald Creed (2010) has termed the PTSD of neoliberalism.

The "virtual monument" to the Victims of Communism on Bulgaria's Territory" (quote from the website) has existed since 2009 with the goal of enlisting the names of all victims of Communism. Among the names of the Advisory Board is former Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov (1991-1992). As I pointed out, Dimitrov's cabinet is the first one to attempt neoliberal shock therapy reforms and as a result was voted out after one year in power. Other members of the board include historian Mark Kramer from the *Wilson Centre of Cold War Studies*, Evelina Kelbecheva one of the key figures in the history textbooks scandal and a member of *Truth and Memory Foundation*, another foundation dedicated to the victims of Communism; a journalist from the Bulgarian National Radio, Irina Nedeva; a professor of economy; a professor of law, as well as EP deputy Luchezar Toshev. Some of the project's sponsors are the *American Research Center in Sofia (ARCS)*. *ARCS* describes itself as a non-profit institution, incorporated in New York State, dedicated to facilitating academic research in the humanities and social sciences in Bulgaria and collaboration between scholars from North America and Southeast Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia)." Another sponsor of the project is the conservative *Konrad Adenauer Foundation*, the sponsor of GERB in Bulgaria and European People's Party (EPP) in the EP. *KDF* is sponsoring other anti-communist projects, such as the aforementioned *Truth and Memory Foundation*.

The project prides itself with having found 23 000 victims of Communist repression (not all Bulgarian nationality). The inclusion of names of those already listed as victims is not the only problematic aspect of the "virtual monument." What is more worrisome is the choice of those commemorated as victims. Among the names of member of cabinets such as PM Bogdan Filov, Interior Minister Petur Gabrovski and Minister of Law Alexander Staliiskii, are listed such figures as Alexander Belev, General Hristo Lukov, General Boris Dimitrov and officer

Konstantin Yordanov. A close look at the manner in which those state and military officials are presented reveals the omissions and selectivity of the narrative. For example, the reader does not learn that Belev was an avid follower of Nazism in Bulgaria, one of the founders of the fascist organization *Ratnik* and Commissar of Jewish Affairs, responsible for the death of 12 000 people. Gabrovski's role in the deportation process – as fellow *Ratnik* he was the one that sent Belev to study anti-Semitic law in Germany – is not mentioned, either. Yet, the site has not omitted Gabrovski's acquittal by the Bulgarian Supreme Court in 1996. General Lukov, the leader of the fascist *Legions*, is simply presented as “general, murdered in 1943.” A similar approach is used for Konstantin Yordanov – he is simply an officer and teacher, killed in September 1944. But under Yordanov's command one of the worst crimes of the “non-fascist” regime was committed. In December 1943, he ordered the execution of six children and their relatives, a total of eighteen people. Those were the relatives of partisans, part of the international anti-fascist struggle.

One has to wonder why so many historians and other scholars of social sciences and humanities have let this omission in the biographies of the victims slide? What we exhibit with the case of this “virtual monument” is part of a larger process that seems to intensify: representing the political, intellectual, economic and military elite of the monarchist regime as victims of Communism without the proper context of their role and deeds during Bulgaria's alliance with Nazi Germany. As Alexander Vezekov (2013) points out in his important analysis of the events before and after the Communist Party taking power, the focus of publications and representation of public discourse is selective. While it is undoubtedly true that there were innocent people that were killed, the majority of so-called *victims* were from the police and gendarmerie, i.e. the repressive apparatus of the state charged with the persecution of partisans and anti-fascists (388). Vezekov also points out that while in some towns and villages there were killings of a large number of people, in many others there was not a single victim (21). Such a nuanced approach moves away from the official narrative of unleashed, unprovoked terror.⁶⁰ Yet, the focus is always on “the brightest of the nation,” “the intellectual, political, economic elite.” In reality, Bulgarian history was equally cruel to its “intellectual elite” before and after the war. Between 1923 and 1925 and between 1941 and 1944 prominent left intellectuals were murdered by the repressive apparatuses of the state. And, after 9.09.1944 those sentenced to death by the *People's Court*, as Vezekov reminds us, were the pro-Nazi “elite”.⁶¹

Denouncers of communist totalitarian crimes with their game of numbers and “Which is the biggest evil fascism or communism?” arguments, have opened up ideological space for fascist figures and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that denounce the October revolution itself as a Jewish plot. This is how the anti-communist intellectual elite of the post-socialist Eastern Europe meets fascism. On October 4th 2018, Djanko Markov, a member of the fascist *Legions* received a medal of honour from the Minister of Defence and leader of *IMRO*, Krasimir Karakachanov. Markov is awarded this medal despite protest from three Jewish organizations (Draganov, 2018). Markov is second-generation legionary, his father Georgi Markov had a high position in the pro-fascist organization (Purvanov, 2018).

⁶⁰ Later in the book Vezekov gives many examples of mass killing as a retribution for mass killings of partisan and communist sympathizers (2013, pp. 367-369).

⁶¹ Alexander Vezekov's nuanced book cost him being ousted from the *Institute for the Research of the Recent Past*.

As an officer aviator in Nazi-allied Bulgaria, Dyanko Markov is sent on missions against anti-fascist fighters. He expresses regret for not being able to bomb the anti-fascists (Purvanov, 2018). As a member of the anti-fascist coalition after September 9th Bulgaria 1944 declares war to Nazi Germany, known as the *Fatherland War*. In a radio interview in 2014, Markov denies the anti-fascist significance of the war and calls it “a travesty” (Purvanov, 2018). In 2000, as a parliamentary deputy from the *UDF* Markov dismissed the deportation and sending to concentration camps of 11 343 Jews from territories under Bulgarian occupation – Vardar Macedonia and Aegean Thrace. Markov states from the Bulgarian parliament: “The deportation of hostile population [meaning the Jewish people] is not a war crime” and makes comparisons with the US deportation of people of Japanese descent after Pearl Harbor. Such a claim is strikingly reminiscent of Ernst Nolte’s attempts to find an explanation for Hitler’s goal to exterminate peoples.

The accounts here come from the book, *Union of Bulgarian National Legions in and its Struggle* (2016), titled akin to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* or *My Struggle* by another *Legion* member, Ivan Grigorov. After November 10th 1989, the *Legions* formed their own party, *Bulgarian Democratic Forum (BDF)*. In the 1990s, *BDF* becomes part of the anti-communist coalition, *Union of Democratic Forces (UDF)*. In the 1990s, Djanko Markov became Chairman of *BDF*. In 1995 the party commemorated the founding of the *Union of Bulgarian Legions*. During Ivan Kostov’s government (1997-2001), *BDF* had two ministers – Muravej Radev as Finance Minister and Theodosii Simeonov as Minister of Justice. Radev, who is also the son of a member of *UBNL*, becomes the Chairman of *BDF* after Markov.

In 2019, Muravej Radev, together with his daughter Yoana Radeva – Vlajkova, published a book about his father entitled *Broken Life: Memories, Thoughts and Dossiers*. The book is published by the renowned publishing house *Izotk-Zapad. Prelom* newspaper that views itself as a continuation of *Legions* press during the war years, praises the book. Radev is depicted as a patriot that suffered the terror of totalitarian repression at the sinister labour camp *Belene*, where prisoners were treated worse than Egyptian slaves (Gorcheva, 2019). On May 12th the book was presented by Kalin Yanakiev, professor of philosophy and another member of *BDF*. Radev and Markov, both *Legion* members, together with many other participants in pro-fascist, anti-Semitic organizations are today “patriotic anti-communists, suffering their Golgotha in Communist camps and prisons” (Gorcheva, 2019).

This rehabilitation has not only ideological but also significant political-economic implications. In a recent interview, Georgi Radev’s son and former Finance Minister in Kostov’s (1997-2001) shock therapy cabinet, Muravej Radev shows himself as a staunch supporter of neoliberal status quo. He is asked about ongoing demands to change Bulgaria’s tax system. As the only EU country with the lowest corporate tax, a flat tax and highest value-added tax of 20%, Bulgaria is also the poorest in Europe with the highest level of social inequality (Atanasov, 2018). In 2017 various grass roots organizations started a campaign demanding a non-taxable minimum wage of 460 lv (258 USD) per month and 9% VAT for basic necessity goods, medicine, textbooks and books (Draganov, 2017). As a result *DPS* and *BSP* took advantage of the campaign proposing lower percentage on basic necessity goods.

Asked about their proposal Radev dismissed it as populism. Then he went on to say that progressive taxation in Western Europe is because of those governments’ weakness that “succumbed to the pressure.” Such a statement by Radev echoes Pareto in his disdain for

democratic politics, who was particularly alarmed by proposals for a workers' right of progressive taxation. It is not surprising that those countries in the EU with "weak governments" also have strong leftist parties and movements. By explaining social policies as "succumbing to the pressure" Radev shows his understanding of a strong government – a government that dismisses the democratic process and implements policies against its own citizens. As I will show such disdain for democracy is not only characteristic of fascism, but liberal and neoliberal ideologues. Radev's interview illustrates how fascism lives in neoliberalism. The fascism inherited from his father is enunciated in his disdain for the democratic process (defined as weakness), while the support for the neoliberal flat tax is explicated in his position as a former Finance Minister. Radev's enunciation from a position of political power, betrays the *universal truth* (Žižek, 2002): that one has to resolve fascistic methods to implement neoliberal policies.

This episode is also symptomatic of a very telling trend among anti-communists and self-proclaimed democrats: sympathy and compassion for those who suffered in the past (the likes of Radev-father) and dismals of those that suffer in the present (resulting from the actions of the likes of Radev-son). According to Žižek, in late capitalism giving money and other forms of charity are exercised to keep suffering at a distance, the middle-class citizen of developed capitalist countries engage in sending money to African children, while ignoring the starving homeless child in her way to the restaurant in her own neighbourhood. In Bulgaria, which almost lacks a middle class, this refusal to dismantle the barrier between us and the suffering *others* seems to take a different dimension. Suffering is reserved for the past – the suffering of martyrs of "totalitarian Communism". Numerous symposiums, conferences in universities and other public and private institutions, academic books, memoirs, monuments and other forms of memory production remind us of the sufferers under the "monstrosity of Communism." At the same time, the suffering of those who suffer from the consequences of capitalism are naturalized by the very same producers of memories of the traumatic past. The irony that such intellectual producers refuse to acknowledge is that the disappearance of this very same intolerable regime of the past for the few has made possible the intolerable present for the many.

5. Fascistic Tendencies of Neoliberal Anti-Communism in Bulgarian Context

The newly formed neoliberal elite in Bulgaria used the rhetoric of the socialist state as a despotic mechanism of coercion and control. The notion of repression is a key ideological mechanism of anti-communism but it also serves to enhance the neoliberal narrative against the welfare/social state. In the last decade the narrative of the three bankruptcies⁶² of the People's Republic during Todor Zhivkov became popularized by the same journalist Hristo Hristov who I pointed out was a key figure in rewriting history textbooks.

The three bankruptcies narrative presents a counterpoint to the narrative of Bulgaria's *national catastrophes* during the monarchist past. The term national catastrophe has recently disappeared from history textbooks, but in Bulgarian historiography the national catastrophes occur during the reign of Kings Ferdinand I and Boris III. The Balkan wars and World War I were defined as two national catastrophes, while Bulgaria's alliance with Nazi Germany was the

⁶² See Христов, 2007)

third.⁶³ To this narrative Hristov juxtaposes the three bankruptcies – arguing that dysfunctional economic policies bankrupted the Bulgarian state in the 1950s, 1960s and 1980s. Hristov focuses on the secrecy and his book reads like a conspiracy on part of the state against its people. The overall conclusion is that the welfare state of public education, affordable healthcare and all the other social provisions came at the cost of secret bankruptcies. The bankruptcies narrative serves as an explanation of the post-socialist years as well. However, the current debt of capitalist Bulgaria that the ruling party *GERB* is responsible for is not mentioned by Hristov.

Anti-communism not only dismisses the welfare policies of the socialist state but presents them as indivertibly related to the tyranny of the state. As Kristen Ghodsee (2014) points out, it is not a coincidence that the European Parliament passed the resolution establishing *Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Stalinism and Nazism* in 2008, the same year of the global financial crisis. Invented traditions in Eastern Europe, like commemoration of victims (as was shown in the Bulgarian case, many of them actual fascist and Nazis, or collaborators), building of monuments and museum, production of books and documentaries and attempts for the criminalization of symbols, but also silencing the past (permitting only one official narrative) all come about in the midst of a crisis of capitalism. However, the answer to the ideologically defunct and economically bankrupt neoliberal model of capitalism is more of the same. The prescribed remedy for West and East Europe is more austerity measures, as if the shock therapy reforms did not lead to socioeconomic disaster, characterized by a deindustrialized economy and extreme social inequality that brought demographic crisis in places like Bulgaria.

Capitalism's authoritarian phase becomes tangible under the dictate of the *troika* (Traverso, 2019). Governments like that of the *Law and Justice Party* in Poland, figures like Viktor Orbán in Hungary that have been in power since 2010, and Boyko Borisov in Bulgaria, in power since 2009 under three different cabinets, mark the shift toward authoritarianism in Eastern Europe. At the same time Trump, Erdogan, Netanyahu and Putin are examples of the global process of the authoritarian shift. Anti-communism has an important ideological task. Once again the contradiction between democracy and capitalism intensifies. And it seems that once again the liberal elite of Europe is making the historical choice to disregard the popular democratic demands in fear of the “re-distributors.” The politics of memory plays an important role in this choice. With their legislative policies of construction of particular collective memories and rhetoric about the past, European leaders are complacent in the discourse of anti-communism. Ultimately, anti-communism establishes the intellectual paradigm in which “1) any move toward redistribution and away from a completely free market is seen as communist; 2) anything communist inevitably leads to class murder; and 3) class murder is the moral equivalent of the Holocaust” (Ghodsee, 2014, p. 135).

This original synthesis of historical, archival and media research draws together both English and other language sources for the first time. It establishes my claim that post-1989 anti-communist discourses lamenting the (well documented) terror and mass murder produced by “Communist totalitarianism” should be examined in relation to forty years of neoliberal restructuring of state and society. Behind the tales of terror and murder hides the same logic that draws the Hayekian line between social justice and totalitarianism. That logic brought to its

⁶³ For discussion of historiography of the national catastrophes see (Daskalov, 2011).

conclusion is what Jacques Ranciere (2014) has defined as *hatred of democracy* and Wendy Brown (2018) associates with the dismantling of the social and the disappearance of the notion of democratic citizenship under neoliberalism, when “opposition to restriction and regulation becomes a foundational and universal principle” (Brown 2018, p. 21).

Anti-communism is not just an attack on the historical experience of the socialist states and societies. It also entails discrediting the notion of revolution as an emancipatory project in the name of a democratic and socially just future. Therefore, it has to attack not only the October revolution, which anti-communism depicts as logically leading to Stalin, but also the French Revolution, as the very origin of the perception of revolution in the name of social justice and equality. It is the revolution of the poor that is being attacked, the sans culottes bring about the Jacobins and the Soviets bring about Stalin. By focusing on the atrocities of a counter-revolutionary process like Stalinism, the whole purpose of the revolution is discredited. Anti-communism is not concerned with historical context, its objective is the justification of the terror today, by bombarding us with the crimes of the terror tomorrow. Global corporate mass media control helps in the process of concealing capitalist structural violence, the disappearance of habitats, animal species, the impoverishment of regions, the surplus populations, often hidden from the public eye, or presented without any context, as just random events. Capitalism’s slow violence⁶⁴ hidden from the public is hard to mobilize immediate reaction to, as opposed to anti-communism’s stories of the gulag and the labour camp, propaganda films like *Soviet Story* (2008) or its Bulgarian version *The Beast Is Still Alive* (2016) that in neoliberal fashion put an equal sign between social justice and totalitarianism.

After all, the original anti-communists were the fascists. By capturing the state, Hitler and Mussolini negated the communist class revolution to protect private property, doing so however, in a state form. It is not surprising that, as Domenico Losurdo (2010) has shown, “numerous figures who professed themselves liberals and claimed to be restoring general liberalism,” supported the rise of Italian fascism in the 1920s. Fascism was promising because of “drastically reducing the concessions won from liberal society by the popular masses” (327). It is the preservation of economic liberalism removed from its political promise of mass democratic empowerment that the “genuine” liberals recognized in fascism. We saw that in his political unconscious the later Zhelju Zhelev, the Hegelian philosopher turned dissident, author of *Fashizmut* (published and withdrawn from publication 1982) the self-identified liberal and the first democratically elected Bulgarian president, the leader who was alarmed by the fascist tendencies within his own party, later in his life claimed fascism to be the lesser of two evils because it did not abolish private property. Zhelev therefore sided with the liberals that Losurdo describes. Zhelev was the first intellectual to equate fascism with Communism in Bulgaria in a similar fashion to the revisionists Nolte and Furet. Although, Zhelev’s anti-communism was not the anti-communism of rehabilitation of fascism that would later take over Bulgarian political culture, he is an important part of the intellectual production of this discourse that in its further development takes the form of a mass-phobic disdain of political organizing. Anti-communism

⁶⁴ Slow violence is a concept introduced by Rob Nixon in relation to the delayed destruction that capitalism brings, as a slow process that is not visible right away and does not lead to visceral reaction. . It has a spatial and temporal dimension. Its results come later: war effects; industrial pollution; displacement and uprooting. See (Nixon, 2011)

today is united with the anti-communism of Hitler and Mussolini in their mass phobia and agenda to protect economic liberalism.

Chapter Three: Batak Massacre Scandal: On the Mythologizing of History and its Political Use

1. On the Use of History and Wars of Position

This article was written as part of an interdisciplinary project of *Sofia University* that was broadly focused on the political appropriation of history and, in particular, the historical period known in Bulgarian historiography as the *Revival* period.⁶⁵ The Revival period is associated with the late 18th to late 19th century that is characteristic of the formation of a national identity, the struggle for national independence, and ends with the formation of the nation-state in 1879. Due to its significance as the period of formation of Bulgarian national identity, it constitutes an indelible part of invented traditions of the national-state and has been used by various nationalist projects since the formation of the Bulgarian modern nation-state.⁶⁶ In the interwar period, the *Revival* was held as a model for many nationalist and pro-fascist organizations, as the narrative of the new revival of the nation was a strong component of irredentism and a support of Nazi Germany as guarantor of “national unification”.⁶⁷ In the 1980s, the *Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP)* undertook a series of ethno-nationalist repressive measures known as the *Revival process*⁶⁸ against the Muslim minorities, starting with changing their names with the intention to assimilate them which led to massive exodus of about 300 000 Bulgarian Muslim citizens to Turkey.⁶⁹

In this article I focus on a scandal related to a historical event known as the *Batak massacre*. The Batak massacre occurred during the April uprising of 1876⁷⁰, which itself was the culmination of the struggle for national liberation. Although an unsuccessful attempt for a revolution against the Ottoman Empire, it was followed by the Russo-Turkish war (1877-78), leading to the liberation from Ottoman rule and the formation of the Bulgarian nation-state.⁷¹ The massacre in the village of Batak, with a population of about five thousands at that time, happened in early May as part of the Ottoman government’s punitive actions to suppress the

⁶⁵ See (Rumen Daskalov, 2004, p. 5) for detailed discussion on changes and continuities and major theoretical schools in Bulgarian historiography of the Revival period.

⁶⁶ A discussion of this process follows below.

⁶⁷ See previous chapter on this question. See also (Поппетров, 2008, 2009; Поппетров & Божинов, 2014)

⁶⁸ That was the official name of the assimilation campaign, in which the most influential historians as members of the Party took part. The cynicism of the repressive campaign is illustrated in the term itself that attempts to justify the actions of the BKP. Official Party propaganda depicts the campaign as the Turks and other Muslim minorities rediscovering their Bulgarian roots, awakening to their Bulgarian identity; therefore the actions of BKP are continuation of the revival of national consciousness. (Аврамов, 2016, pp. 73-115).

⁶⁹ On the political economy of the Revival process see (Аврамов, 2016).

⁷⁰ The uprising started on April 19th 1876 and is known in historiography as the April uprising.

⁷¹ On an overview of the national liberation movement see (Stavrianos, 2000, pp. 364–381; Crampton, 2007, pp. 41–95). Zakhari Stoyanov’s *Notes from the Bulgarian Uprisings* remain the key text about the events of the April uprising, written from the perspective of one of the revolutionary leaders. In his book Stoyanov also gives accounts of the Batak massacre, despite not being a direct witness of the events. On historical research in Bulgaria of Batak massacre see Dimitur Strashimirov’s classic study; As I show in this article, Ilya Todev’s recent book, written after the scandal that I am analysing, is a typical example of mythologizing of historical events (Stoyanov, 1976; Страшимиров, 1907; Тодев, 2013)

uprising. Historians are not in consensus as to who were the perpetrators, but the majority agree that they were hired mercenaries known as *bashibozuk* (Crampton, 2007, p.92). The mercenaries were Muslims from the local villages that might have been in long lasting conflict with the people from Batak.⁷² After being surrounded the Bulgarian insurgents gave away their weapons, but the majority of the people in the village were massacred, including women and children.⁷³ Other villages suffered similar fates, but none to the extent of Batak. After the suppression of the April uprising, the accounts of American scholar Eugene Schuyler and American journalist Januarius MacGahan that visited the village of Batak played a key role in the outcry about the “Bulgarian Horrors” in Europe and helped to mobilize public support for war in Russia. The public outcry about the “atrocities against the Christians” put pressure on the British Empire, the Ottoman’s strongest ally, and PM Benjamin Disraeli withdrew his support for Sultan Abdul Hamid II, paving Russia’s path to war (Crampton, 2007, p. 93; Stavrianos, p.401). Russian Tsar Alexander II took advantage of the geopolitical situation and declared war on the Ottomans in June 1877.

The village of Batak has become a sacred place of commemoration shortly after the formation of the nation-state. The local church, *St. Nedelya*, where hundreds sought refuge but were killed, was turned into a state museum in 1955 and national historical monument of culture in 1977. Near the altar of the church are displayed the skeletal remains of massacred people from the village. The History Museum of Batak that was founded in 1956 nowadays is dedicated mostly to the events of May 1876.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, a crypt reminds the visitor of another historical period of struggle, the Bulgarian anti-fascist struggle (1941-44), in which Batak played an important role. As I will show in my analysis, in its ideological significance Batak functions as a code word of Bulgarian victimhood in similar fashion to Kosovo for the Serbs.⁷⁵

I propose that one way to read the Batak scandal is through the Gramscian framework of war of position. A Gramscian reading of the Batak scandal should explore the attempts for nationalist mobilization as important elements of a war of position on the cultural and political front. Peter Thomas (2009) proposes a reading of political society and civil society that opposes rigid distinctions, where the former is supposedly in the “private realm” and the later in the “public”. Civil society and political society are understood as functions, rather than locations, of power. Williams (2020) explains that in such readings, institutions and practices in certain roles belong to civil society while in others to the state (101). Therefore, civil society and political society are not two separate locations; instead, civil society and the state are “geographically coextensive with each other” (Thomas, 2009, p. 176). In that way, “civil society is an ensemble of practices and relations dialectically interpellated by and integrated within the state” (280).

⁷² See the discussion that follows in this article.

⁷³ The leader of the insurgents, Petur Goranov, fled before the massacre started. I go back to this aspect later in the text.

⁷⁴ The Stalinist architecture of the building leaves no doubt of the period of its creation; ironically the museum was built the same year of Khrushchev’s speech denouncing Stalin’s crimes.

⁷⁵ I draw on Marko Živkovic’s (2011) analogy of Kosovo as “a magic incantation, a code word that would transport those who utter it or hear it to the realm of metaphysical Serbian victimhood” (178). He shows how such designation of Kosovo as a code word relates to the production of nationalist mythological narratives, especially the works of poets. As code word Kosovo could function as a master-signifier that calls to ideological action under the banner of nationalism. This is also my reading of Batak as a code word.

Since “political society and civil society are not conceived in a spatial but a functional sense, so hegemony is conceived as a practice ‘traversing’ the boundaries between them” (294). This reading permits me to disassociate from the liberal understanding of civil society as a “private realm” that somehow is immune from state intervention. In that way, the presence of academia, NGOs, think tanks, and media, etc. should be analysed in relation to the state. Most importantly, in such a reading civil society is not external to the economic activities of the state, and vice versa.

In Louis Althusser’s concept of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)⁷⁶, there is no clear distinction between civil society and state structure. Therefore, in his empirical list of ISAs he has listed the political system (including the parties); the media; the educational system (both public and private); the religious system; and the cultural system (literature, arts, sports, etc.) (Althusser, 2014: 243). As Althusser points out, the distinction between private and public within the capitalist state is not important; what is of importance is the function of ISAs (244).

Such a reading of the integral aspect of civil and political society within the state helps to explain the metamorphosis of the intellectual turned politician turned businessman, typical for Eastern Europe and Bulgaria in particular.⁷⁷ Political parties and influential intellectual figures are not operating from different locations – civil society vs state, but are taking different functions within the dialectical dynamic of civil society and political society. That kind of reading also looks at the Batak scandal as a war of position within ISAs in civil and political society. I argue that the war of position should be situated within the context of neoliberalization, with its specific Bulgarian characteristics.

2. The Batak Massacre Scandal

The scandal erupted in April 2007, when scholars Martina Baleva and Ulf Brunbauer were accused of questioning official historical accounts, which led to a public outcry, attempts to change legislation concerning freedom of speech, and even threats of physical harm. The camps that formed as a result of the conflict can be loosely defined as “nationalist” and “liberal”. On the nationalist camp side were majority of Bulgarian historians with few exceptions, majority of the Bulgaria political establishment from both ruling and oppositional parties, including the President and Prime Minister. Especially active in the escalation of the conflict were the nationalist parties *Ataka* with its network *SKAT* and *IMRO* that resolved to protests, demonstrations and threats of violence. On the side of Baleva and Brunbauer and in “defence of academic freedom” were scholars and intellectuals around the magazine *Kultura (Culture)*, the *Red House* (Centre for Culture and Debate), human rights organizations, such as *Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHK)*. Scholars from Sofia University wrote an open letter in defense of

⁷⁶ Althusser’s concept of ISAs was influenced by Gramsci’s analysis of hegemony operating through coercion and consent. Althusser formulated the concept of the ISAs (whether public or private) as the function of consent within capitalism. Yet, Althusser is clear that ISAs do not simply have the function of consent (ideology) as opposed to Repressive State Apparatus (military, police, courts, prisons). Ideology and repression are in dialectical relation, with the ISAs primarily functioning by ideology and the RSA primarily functioning by repression (Althusser, 2014, pp. 239-243).

⁷⁷ See: (Daskalov, 1995; Konrád & Szelényi, 1979; Todorova, 1995)

Baleva and Brunbauer, among them Alexander Kiossev, Ivalylo Dichev and Ivaylo Znepolski.⁷⁸ Also, the scholars that were supposed to take part in an exhibition and discussion that did not happen.⁷⁹

This article looks at the scandal around the so-called *Myth of Batak* as a case of political mobilization of “scientific” and popular discourses in relation to a historical event. The scandal involved a variety of actors – the media, nationalist political parties, public intellectuals and scholars, as well as key figures in the Bulgarian government. Since 1989 a number of projects in the humanities and social sciences explored the formation and construction of Bulgarian national myths and stereotypes, but none of them had led to such a violent public confrontation as in the case of Batak. Baleva and Brunbauer exposed the uncertainty concerning one of the most stable historical narratives surrounding the story of the nation building in Bulgaria – *the Batak massacre* of 1876. I analyse the controversy as part of a war of position in the context of Bulgaria’s accession to the European Union. This article is a contribution to the understanding of larger political and cultural implications in the mobilizing of national myths and their relation to contiguous power in intellectual and political circles.

In April 2007, researchers Martina Baleva and Professor Ulf Brunbauer⁸⁰ proposed to organize an exhibition and conference in Sofia entitled, *Batak as a Place of Memory*. As one of the participants in the project explains, the focus of the scholarly work was on the impact of a painting on the national memory about the events known as the Batak massacre (Vezenkov, 2009). However, the exhibition and discussion did not happen. Baleva and Brunbauer were accused of attempting to falsify Bulgarian history. The accusers consisted of politicians and public intellectuals from all spheres of political life. Both President Georgi Parvanov and former President Petar Stoyanov attacked the work of the two scholars, while Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev was more moderate, pleading that the massacre in Batak should not be used to divide society (Mediapool, 2007).

In the Preface to the texts making up the catalogue of the unfinished exhibition, Baleva and Brunbauer emphasize that the main object of their study is the painting of the Polish painter Antonin Piotrkowski: “The Batak Massacre” (1892). They focus on this painting in order to analyze whether there is a link between this work of art and the collective memory of Bulgarians (Baleva and Brunbauer, 2009, p. 5). The painting fits into European traditions in the 19th century

⁷⁸ Both Kiossev and Znepolski are prominent producers of anti-communist narratives. Znepolski who is a former Minister of Culture (1993-95) is the co-founder of the *Institute for the Research of the Recent Past (IRRP)* that adheres to the totalitarian framework of the socialist period. Znepolski’s career during the socialist period is impressive – from 1981 to 1990 he was director at the *Institute of Contemporary Social Theories* that is under the direct control of the Central Committee of BKP. The main funding source, before his death in 2011, came from a staunch anti-communist Dimi Panitza, an American émigré and former European editor of *Readers Digest*. In 1982 *RD* was instrumental in propagating the Bulgarian Connection theory that Bulgaria (with the KGB) was behind Pope John II’s assassination attempt (Lavergne, 2010; Hill, 2006).

⁷⁹ Nevertheless, a catalog with articles was published. In addition to Martina Baleva, the Bulgarian scholars that participated with texts are Evgenia Ivanova, Evgenia Troeva, Alexander Vezenkov and Roumen Daskalov.

⁸⁰ Professor Ulf Brunbauer is a historian from Austria, a researcher of social history of Southeast Europe, who defended a dissertation at the University of Graz on the subject of social history of the Rhodopes (the region where the village of Batak is located). He is currently the Chair of History of Southeast and Eastern Europe at the University of Regensburg. In 2007, Martina Baleva was pursuing a PhD in art history at Berlin Free University. She is currently teaching at the University of Innsbruck.

when a number of artists were interested in historical narratives from the Balkans. The authors point out that the painting was made after careful staging of the events, arranged by Piotrkowski himself. The staging is based on photos representing the massacre in the village of Batak, taken by a photographer from the city of Plovdiv, known as Kavros, a few years after the formation of the Bulgarian state in 1878. In the photos, surviving inhabitants of the village pose as victims and the Pomaks⁸¹ from the local villages pose as the victimizers. Nevertheless, “national historiography ... still continues to present them [the photos by Kavros] as visual documents about the events in Batak” (p. 6) made immediately after the massacre. Piotrkowski is also strongly influenced by the so-called “Turkish brochures” – popular propaganda illustrations in Western Europe, unilaterally depicting the Ottoman Empire as a “country of oppression and horror” (p. 6). Historian Maria Todorova acknowledges the change in the representation of the Ottoman Empire and its inhabitants, according to the geopolitical interests of the West European powers between the 16th and 19th centuries (Todorova, 2009a). During this period of three centuries, the representation of the Ottomans changes from that of brave warriors to ferocious barbarians.

The main thesis of Baleva and Brunbauer is that Piotrkowski's painting is part of a multitude of works, images and texts that instill the stereotyped, negative perceptions of Muslims and play a key role in shaping national collective memory. Books from classic Bulgarian literature and their film adaptations from the socialist period, such as *Under the Yoke*, *The Goat Horn*, and *Time of Violence*, were scheduled to be featured as examples in the exhibition that never took place. Propaganda mobilization of these stereotypes reached a climax during the socialist regime with the so-called *Revival Process* in the 1980s – an attempt by the *Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP)* at cultural assimilation of the Muslim population that culminated into mass migration to the Republic of Turkey. With the exhibition, the authors hope to “sharpen the senses for a critical approach to historical images” (p. 8). Baleva and Brunbauer explicitly stated that the Batak massacre as a historical event itself had not been questioned: “In this sense deconstruction does not mean denial of events, but analytical reproduction of the mechanisms of their representation and use” (ibid.). In an interview for Bulgarian daily newspaper *Dnevnik*, Brunbauer underlines that the project does not deny the massacre as a real historical event. The emphasis is not on the event itself, but on its mythologization. I would add that this definition of mythologization defines it as a process of clearing a historical event of its contradictions through selective images, text and other techniques, and through its location in the binary oppositions characteristic of national mythologies: *us-them*, *heroes-traitors*, *oppressors-martyrs*, *enslaved-liberators*.

3. Producers of Stories About the Past

The importance of the Batak scandal in the public domain and its political consequences cannot be considered separately from the issue of the intelligentsia as a social category. Here I clarify that I am confined to the so-called “humanitarian intelligentsia”. Because of the peculiarities of political, economic and social processes, the intelligentsia in Eastern Europe and Russia formed with the notion of a teleological function and the sense of a moral mission to lead

⁸¹ A discussion of the Pomak people will follow.

and enlighten the masses (Konrád and Szelényi, 1979). A number of authors have also put the formation of the Bulgarian intelligentsia in this context, with its specificities related to its origins in the Ottoman Empire (Daskalov, 1995, Dimou, 2009, Todorova, 1995). As Maria Todorova (1995) points out Bulgarian intellectuals' interest in "national psychology" in the interwar draws on a "martyrological image of an isolated, victimized nation" (p. 85). For Todorova, the question here is how this image of the nation is a result of projection. At the same time, despite being a very small part of society until the end of World War II, Bulgarian intellectuals enjoyed great influence over the state. Todorova argues that the constructed *national psychology* continues to enjoy public attention even to this day. As can be seen from the case of Baleva and Brunbauer's project, martyrdom and victimization are heavily present in the discourse of the accusers, accusing the two scholars of falsification of history.

3.1. Bulgarian Historiography Then and Now

Who is entitled, and under what circumstances, to tell the "historical truth?" Scholars who have analysed Bulgarian historiography emphasize continuity between the pre-socialist and socialist, as well as between socialist and post-socialist periods (Deyanova, 2010; Todorova, 2009b). Despite the demand to clear the historical narrative of fascist or communist *layers*, in practice, as many researchers have pointed out, there is a continuity in motifs within history textbooks. According to Daniela Koleva and Ivan Elenkov, in the 1960s Bulgarian historiography was characterized by expert talk about history (Koleva and Elenkov, 2006, p. 41). The problem of "truthfulness" becomes key as a claim for keeping politics and ideology out of the discipline of history (47). Nevertheless, Koleva and Elenkov consider it necessary to emphasize the words of influential historian and politician Nikolay Todorov.⁸² "The Bulgarian historian is a political worker," which they believe synthesizes the function of Bulgarian historiography to this day. According to the authors, the concept of science and principles of professional work developed since the mid-1960s continues to work after 1989 (48).

Liliana Deyanova discusses the problems with the rewriting of Bulgarian textbooks in different periods – prewar, Stalinist, late socialist and post-socialist. She observes a continuity characteristic of all the periods, namely the presence of the binary oppositions: "us-them," "patriot-traitor," "enemy-friend," "good-evil," "liberator-enslaver." According to Deyanova, whether "they" are national or class enemies, bad neighbours or enslavers—this, I would call it, "black and white" model—easily enters into political usage. At the foreground is the trope of true history – the one cleared of a "reactionary," "false science," ideas, theory or ideology. However, the quest for clearing a history of "lies" is a quest for imposing one ideological story over another. As Deyanova points out, this line continues to be followed in historiography. History continues to be thought of in a positivistic frame, where the role of the historian is that of a professional dedicated to historical truth.

Who are the main participants in the scandal? Together with the politicians a sizable number of historians took part in the accusation against the two researchers. It needs to be mentioned that moderate voices were also present, but they seemed to be a minority. In 2006,

⁸² Nikolay Todorov was the founder of *Balkan Studies* in 1964 at the *Bulgarian Academy of Science (BAS)* and served as its first director. He was also a higher political official in BKP.

Maritna Baleva outlined the main thesis of the future project about Batak in the journal *Kultura* (Baleva, 2006). Historian Naum Kaychev responded with moderate criticism in the same journal. He disagrees with Baleva's main argument about the importance of Piotrowski's painting and the importance of the photographs for the collective memory of Bulgarians (Kaichev, 2006).

Here I focus on the historical guild, which Iliya Todev – someone who is representative of this guild – describes as “professional,” while the attacked revisionists who dare demythologize the historical narrative he calls “dilettantes.” A statement by the *Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*, signed by Academician Ivan Yuhnovski, warns that “the falsification of history is not a European idea.” The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences refuses to give space to the “Myth of Batak” project, naming it a “pseudo-scientific expression,” “pseudoscientific writings” to “falsify historical truth” (pp.6-7). *Buditel* circle, gravitating around *TV SKAT*⁸³ and the political party *Ataka* takes a similar position. On the first page of magazine *Buditel* in May / June 2007, we read the title “The Batak massacre is not a myth but a reality.” The project is again defined as “spectacular falsification,” while the massacre in Batak is undisputed truth, which “the whole civilized world bows down to.” Further in the text we read that “some scholars [referring to Baleva] in the name of their own prosperity tend to sell their own history.” The declaration ends with a plea for the need of a national doctrine.

In an interview with newspaper *Monitor*, Acad. Georgi Markov argues that with Baleva's project “Turkey wants to clear its image” and goes into a narrative about how corporations “do not need Bulgarians, Englishmen, but only consumers without national consciousness.” So, “There are strategies to erase our national memory.” Markov implies that Baleva and Brunbauer's project is such a strategy. Conspiracy theory here serves as a defense/justification for preserving the public and professional positions. Markov presents himself as a defender of historical truth and national memory: “The Batak massacre [is] only a small, nasty case behind a global process of deleting history and replacing it with anti-histories.” That is why, Markov says, “We must be very vigilant.” The connotation here is that without Markov we will lose our vigilance, and this is devastating because “they [corporations, that could be replaced with any other imaginary enemy/outside force] do not need Bulgarians.”

It is worth mentioning Todorova's discussion about the presence of conspiracy theories in the public sphere in the mid-1980s. This is explained by the lack of state transparency in decision-making (Todorova, 2009b, p.110, 121). Anthropologist Marko Živkovic (2011) also takes into account the prevalence of conspiracy theories in Serbia during Slobodan Milosevic's regime in the 1980s and 1990s. He relates them to “the lived experience of social opacity in Milosevic's Serbia” (p. 215). Živkovic gives accounts of the conspiratorial narratives that are prevalent in a political and economic context, characterized by Milosevic's undemocratic and authoritarian rule, hyperinflation, UN sanctions and overall economic crisis. The impulse to fall into conspiracy theories is also very evident in the Batak scandal. Perhaps this is because many of the accusers of Baleva and Brunbauer are formed in the institutional and cultural environment of late socialism. Some of them, like archeologist Stanislav Stanilov, now a member of the nationalist party *Ataka*, were also participants in the scandal related to Vassil Levski's grave, which is the subject of Todorova's book. Stanilov is a well-known proponent and propagator of

⁸³ Founded in 1992 *TV SKAT* supported the nationalist party *Ataka* from 2005 when the party was founded, until 2009.

the representation of Turkey as a threat to Bulgarians. He has published a book entitled *Neo-Ottomanism and the Bulgarians*, in which he claims a strategic policy for the Islamization of Bulgaria through the use of the “Islamic diaspora – Turks and Gypsies” (Najdenova, 2016).

Todev defines the Baleva and Brunbauer project as “postmodernist,” and calls the two scholars “dangerous dilettantes.” (Todev, 2013, p. 93) They are “a part of the intellectual production of ‘National revivalphobia’” (p. 81),⁸⁴ placing himself in the circle of professionals (p. 18). In her book about the mythologization of revolutionary leader Vassil Levski, Todorova uses the title of one of her chapters “‘Professionals’ and ‘Dilettantes’” and traces the origin of this division. It originates in the positivist German tradition, which has a major influence on the formation of Bulgarian historical science. But, according to her, this sense of professionalism was reinforced after 1944, especially among historians dealing with periods they considered far from the ideological interest of the authoritarian state (Todorova, 2009b, pp. 112-113). According to Todorova, Bulgarian historians are still adhering to the positivist methodology, claiming to be objective.

In a footnote, Todev (2013) argues that the Baleva and Brunbauer project is in connection with the “growing idealization of the Ottoman Empire (p. 280).” Thus, he continues the “Turks embellish their historical past to be admitted to the EU” (2013, p. 283). This thesis repeats that of Acad. Georgi Markov. Markov argues that the project of the two researchers is the most striking example of succumbing to Turkish propaganda myths that compromise our “unaltered and fundamental historical values.” Thus, Acad. Markov's perception is that of an opposition between *myths*, understood as illusion, and *historical truth*, transforming a subjective point of view and affect into undeniably objective evidence.

3.2. Separate Categories or a Single Entity

I use Stefan Dechev's analysis of the *phenomenon Bozhidar Dimitrov* because he shows well the interdependencies between civil society and political society that interrelate within the integral state. The figure of Bozhidar Dimitrov should rather be analysed as a collective image, combining the nationalist, the politician and the businessman. Though he is a major accuser in the Batak scandal, he is also an expression of a whole tendency in the Bulgarian political and scientific circles. A tendency characterized by a quest for political power and participation in the corrupt schemes of the *nouveau riche* from the period of the primitive accumulation of capital. His easily digestible and mythological narratives, loaded with fantastic stories about Bulgarian history, has made him a prominent propagandist of ethno-nationalism. During the Batak scandal, the late Bozhidar Dimitrov was the *Director of the National Museum of History*. Yet, Dimitrov's political career includes being a member of the *Bulgarian Socialist Party* and minister in the first government of *GERB* (2009-13), responsible for Bulgarians abroad. Dimitrov's boisterous personality was often sought by the media, and he was a well-known media person. It is important to mention the broadcasting of his *Lesson about Bulgaria* on *SKAT TV* (1999-2002) and *Bulgarian Memory* in *Bulgarian National Television* (2002-2012). It is not surprising that Dimitrov became the main actor in April 2007. He was the first to denounce Baleva and Brunbauer's project from the TV screen, during one of *Bulgarian Memory's* episodes. As a

⁸⁴ Further in the text I discuss the significance of the so-called Revival period for Bulgarian historiography.

guardian of the *historical truth*, he subsequently won many political friends, including the current Prime Minister Boyko Borisov.

4. Nationalism and National Mythology

According to Katherine Verdery, the nation is an aspect of the political and symbolic/ideological order, but also of the world of social interactions and feelings, while nationalism is the political use of the nation as a symbol and political activity, nationalism uses the moods of people responding to this symbol (Verdery, 1993, pp. 37-38). It is clear from this that nationalism mobilizes not only at the level of discourse, that is to knowledge and meaning formed by power relations and institutions, but also at the emotional level, to the level of affect. Drawing on Verdery, my position is not that of an exposé of the myths of nationalism. Therefore, a Foucauldian approach would rather look for cracks in the monolithic narrative about the sacrifice of the people of Batak, within the framework of national mythology of martyrs/heroes (Aretov, 2006). For example, it would ask questions about the internal conflict between the different voices and question the knowledge about the event, framed by the texts of educational institutions, historians, museums, celebrations and other rituals of the nation state. Discourse as knowledge is the way in which specific, social, historical and political contexts are rendered true or false (Hook, 2001, p. 542). Foucault's understanding of discourse in no way separates text (written and speech/language) from discursive practices, that is, the material effect of discourse. It is necessary to distinguish between discourse as a power effect (at the level of textual analysis) and discourse as an instrument of power (practices of power). What Foucault describes as the order of discourse is knowledge and meaning formed by power relations and institutions. It is necessary to analyze the relation between language, meaning, knowledge and materialization of power (Hook, 2001, pp. 529-530). Power of language/speech is related to, and derives from, material and tactical forms of government (including state institutional power, political parties).

My analysis of the Batak scandal as a practice of nationalism is not limited to the production of textual and visual discourse (media appearances; positions of political parties; political rhetoric; the opinion of the director of *Batak Museum of History*; the declaration of forty-three intellectuals in response to the project, who asked the Republic of Turkey to apologize for “the genocide over Bulgarians”; etc.). It also includes material practices that illuminate power relations. In such a way, discursive and material practices of nationalism are tied to the Gramscian war of position, within political and cultural terrains. A few examples of material aspects are the refusal of Academician Yuhnovsky, then director of the institution *BAS*, to provide a room for Baleva and Brunbauer's project; the refusal of the Rektor (President) of Sofia University, Boyan Biolchev, to do the same. Of particular importance to the question of war of position are the actions of the youth section of the nationalist party *IMRO*. In December 2007, they tried to sabotage a discussion about the Batak scandal at the *Red House*. Finally, there is the canonization of five thousand Batachians by the *Bulgarian Orthodox Church* in 2011, which I come back to later in the text.

4.1. Nationalism in Context

Katherine Verdery (1993) insists that, despite its homogeneous goal of uniting “us” against “them,” nationalism is not unambiguous, and should be seen in terms of the forms it takes in a specific context – global, public and institutional. The nation as a symbol can have many meanings. Traditionally, ethno-nationalism excludes others on the basis of common language, history, culture, territory. However, how nationalism will manifest itself and which form of nationalism will be able to mobilize the majority is related to specific social conditions. Therefore, the global, social and institutional context when the Batak scandal erupted in April 2007 is of importance to the question of mobilization of nationalism. In January 2007 Bulgaria became a member of the European Union. The process of accession to the EU of Eastern European countries is related to the process known as globalization. Sociologists William I Robinson and Jerry Harris (2000) argue that the process of globalization is driven by the formation of Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC) as a global ruling class. In their analysis the EU is a supranational project for economic integration and a part of worldwide market liberalization (p. 23-24).

As Katherine Verdery writes, the mobility of global capital makes the traditional forms of power of the nation state ever weaker. Now each country is impacted from the effects of capital movements. Deindustrialization and capital shifts where there are lower fees, which exacerbates social inequality. At the same time, the movement of capital, coupled with the movement of people, for economic and geopolitical reasons (wars), creates the feeling of endangering the national body.⁸⁵ On the other hand, Jack Snyder relates the return of nationalism today to what he calls *disembedding liberalism*. That is, the extraction of liberalism from its roots – the compromise between the interests of capital and national autonomy through the welfare state (Snyder, 2019). Such economic processes are related to the process of neoliberalization, an important consequence of which is the weakening of trade unions that brings about ever-increasing class inequality (Brenner et al., 2010). Globalization processes amplify the fear of immigrants, combined with the panic of the refugees coming from Africa and the Middle East. Processes that gave nationalist parties in the EU momentum to gain political power.

In the global context of 2007, Bulgaria has just received membership in the European Union four months ago, but under conditions that placed a heavy burden on a large proportion of the population. After the shock therapy of Ivan Kostov (1997-2001) and the transition of Bulgaria into a currency board under the IMF, social inequality has increased. For comparison, in 1992, Gini's inequality index was 30.7 while in 2007 it had already risen to 36.1 (Tsanov et al., 2014). This shows a sudden transformation from a relatively egalitarian socio-economic system to a society of high class inequality. In the last decades, the Bulgarian economy has been shifting to attract foreign capital with low taxes and low-paid labour, thus transforming the country into a destination for cheap labor and disregard for workers' rights.

4.2. National Mythology

Roumen Daskalov (2010) distinguishes between the concept of myth as a falsehood or a lie and of myth as a selective, out of context and “absolutized” presentation of facts and events

⁸⁵ The anthropomorphic characteristics of the nation have its origins since Herder – the nation has a birth, spirit or soul, it has periods of blossoming and decay, as well as fears of death (Verdery, 1993, p. 40).

(p. 37). Daskalov stresses the importance of myth as a unifying and mobilizing factor: “The sacralization of the narrative, its acceptance of something sacred and inviolable is perhaps the basic characteristic of the myth [that is why] it can be used politically and mobilize masses” (p. 40).⁸⁶ Daskalov also emphasizes the importance of historical myths that perform functions to create a national identity. Bruce Lincoln defines myths not according to the truthfulness of the content, but how they are perceived as having authority over their audience. According to this classification, myth has credibility and authority (cited in Daskalov, 2010, p. 41). Myth is a request not only for the status of truth but for the status of paradigmatic truth (p. 41). This is particularly important in view of the impetus of the Bulgarian historian, particularly strengthened during late socialism, to show the *historical truth*. As a paradigmatic truth, national myths have the efficiency of social mobilization. And I argue that they can mobilize nationalist projects on the basis of national identity.

The paradigm of the Bulgarian national myth is based on the “truth” about the martyrdom and heroism of the Bulgarian people, about the treacherous betrayal of neighbours and other non-Bulgarians, but this does not prevent coexistence with the myth of tolerance and the willingness to sacrifice for others (saving the Jews during World War II). An indelible part of Bulgarian nationalism is the myth of San Stefano Bulgaria⁸⁷ as a whole and united nation. Cultural historian Alexander Kiossev argues that because there is no national territory during the Ottoman period, there is a constant need for a symbol of this non-existent territory. A need for an imaginary mechanism that must hold together the eternal national “body”, such mechanism is present in the production of Bulgarian poems and songs of the 19th century before the formation of the nation-state (Kiossev, 1995, p. 75). The myth of San Stefano Bulgaria is interrelated to that of the martyrs of Batak, encoded as a place of suffering and sacrifice in order to give birth to modern unified Bulgaria.

I relate the function of the myths of national history to Louis Althusser's (1994; 2014) understanding of ideological practices. Althusser emphasizes the material side of ideology – its function in everyday life in what he calls material rituals. In a famous example of a dialogue between Pascal and a nonbeliever, Althusser analyses ideology as an action instead of ideas – ideology has a material, not a spiritual, existence. Slavoj Žižek (1994) explains this following of rituals as externalization of the ideological performance. Crucial for the understanding of ideological practices is that they have an external function. Žižek gives as an example the Nazi book burnings, torch processions and other rituals. In the Bulgarian context “protesting citizens” burning the catalogue of Baleva and Brunbauer, *Places of Memory*, *IMRO* and *Ataka* supporters waving Bulgarian flags, some supporters waving posters *Baleva-traitor*, and the threats of physical harm are all examples of ideological practices. The ideological calling to action already

⁸⁶ I discuss questions of political mobilization in the last part of the article. Notice that the use of the term “masses” in Daskalov is pejorative, in the tradition of the liberal view.

⁸⁷ The Treaty of San Stefano between the Russian and Ottoman empires after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877, signed on March 3rd 1878, has remained in Bulgarian collective memory as the treaty that guaranteed the national unification of the Bulgarian people. Such perception was strengthened by the invented traditions of the nation-state, especially commemoration of the day that has become the national holiday. The treaty was short-lived and was revised in the Congress of Berlin. The subsequent Treaty of Berlin, that in addition to Russia and the Ottoman empire, included Austro-Hungarian empire, Great Britain, France and Italy, created a much smaller Bulgaria than the one agreed upon by the Treaty of San Stefano, despite the outcry of the small Bulgarian national elite.

presupposes a state structure, with its ISAs (where in accordance with Althusser I situate also the institutions and practices of civil society): schools, universities, research institutions that produce certain regimes of knowledge about the past. ISAs are not only producers of discursive material; they are engaging subjects in the ideological practices and rituals. The ritualistic significance of Batak is as part of the invented traditions of the state, as a place of commemoration of sacrifice that brought about the “rebirth of the nation.” Just as in the example of Pascal, we take part in the rituals – kneel in front of the skeletal remains to pay our respect for the martyrs of Bulgaria’s liberation.

Bulgarian Sociologist Todor Hristov has captured the ideological significance of state commemoration: A politician requires that we should show our gratitude to the revolutionaries. Requirement of showing gratitude means to show national unity, therefore not to show discontent with the government that the politician is part of. When a gratitude for the *April Uprising* is requested by the State, it turns into gratitude that we owe to the State. It turns into gratitude that we cannot refuse to the State, without showing ourselves ungrateful to the revolutionaries. Commemoration practices that administer gratitude become mechanisms to administer State power and from there on to enhance the power of those who exercise it (2013, p. 425).

National ideology materializes in practices related to the state and the nation (for example, commemorations, holidays, state rituals, sports practices, educational practices and cultural institutions – museums, monuments, etc.). Etienne Balibar points out that “every state ideology produces its own symbols and myths, has a unique regime of investing in sites of memory... develops its own model for regulating social conflicts” (Balibar, 2004, p.23). And, according to Nikolay Aretov, the nation as a conscious effort of an intellectual and political elite to consolidate a community needs its own mythology (2006, p. 33). The myths of historical events are an important part of symbolic forms of state power.

The tropes of sacrifice and martyrdom are a key feature in the building of the mythical structure of Bulgarian history. In her analysis of Levski's heroisation process, Maria Todorova (2009b) shows that the first step toward mythologizing this historical person is martyrdom (the stories of the brutal torture he was subjected to, despite the lack of evidence that this was the case). Martyrdom is also the basis of the story of the events in Batak, where the fate of the victims is described in ominous detail (for example, the story of Angel Goranov (Boicho) and the poem of Ivan Vazov, *Remembrance From Batak*). Interestingly, Iliya Todev, former director of the Institute for Historical Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and Alexander Dolev, a failed candidate for mayor in the city of Plovdiv from *IMRO*, repeated the motif of martyrdom. Todev even makes the strange claim that the inhabitants of the village literally accepted the call to *freedom or death* (Todev, 2013). In the preface to his book, the author makes a direct parallel between historical narrative and religion, insisting that *we* interpret the Batak massacre in the same way as Christians interpret the Good Friday (2013, p. 8). In other words, Todev compares the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in Christian theology to the Batak massacre – the people of Batak sacrifice for the Bulgarian people and the nation-state is born.

The historical period known as *Revival* functions as a basic myth for the birth of the nation or its rebirth from the Dark Ages of Ottoman domination (Daskalov, 2004, p. 78). Alexander Vezenkov's work that problematizes Bulgarian historiography's depiction of the *Revival* highlights the political significance of its use in the present. Bulgarian historiography

frames this period as a separate epoch, almost totally detached from the previous “Dark Ages.” It creates a picture of “constant improvement and progress” in which the whole “people” are involved (2006, p. 87). The context of modernization of the Ottoman empire, known as *Tanzimat* reforms, in this same period is either ignored or denied (2006, pp. 87-88). However, Vezenkov’s archival research shows how the idea of a new epoch of progress comes precisely from the state propaganda of the Ottoman empire and is interrelated to the beginning of a process of centralization of state power, analogous to that of European nation states (2006, pp.108-120). Yet, the importance of the *Tanzimat* reforms for the modernization of the empire and subsequently the formation of Bulgarian national identity is rarely acknowledged in Bulgarian historiography. For comparison, in neighbouring Greece, New-Greek Enlightenment is thought to be “a peripheral and late part of a process within Europe” (2006, p. 99). In contrast to modern Bulgarian historiography, the Bulgarian contemporaries of the *Tanzimat* – revolutionary leader Georgi Rakovski and educator Vassil Aprilov – recognize it is making possible Bulgarian national awakening (Vezenkov, 2006, p. 105).

Bulgarian intellectual and revolutionary circles during the *Revival* period formed the perception of the centuries of Ottoman domination as enslavement by a lower race. The trope of *Ottoman slavery* has remained a major component of Bulgarian nationalism. Bulgarian historiography before and during the socialist period has followed the narrative that everything related to the Ottomans and Islam is backward, barbarous, brutal, etc. Such narratives were formed by the revolutionary leaders as a strategy for mobilization against the Ottoman rulers (for example the writings of Georgi Rakovski, Liuben Karavelov and Hristo Botev). The analysis of Botev’s language, which Inna Peleva (2015) makes in her book *Botev. The Body of Nationalism* illuminates the binary opposition, presenting everything Turkish or Ottoman as barbarian in the texts of the revolutionary poet. In essence, this is a Eurocentric discourse based on binary oppositions: civilized-barbarian, modern-primitive, rational-irrational, and so on (Bakic-Hayden, 1995; Wolf, 1997; Todorova, 2009; Lambrev, Traykov and Kirova, 2018). This discourse, rooted in the Enlightenment, becomes a justifiable ideological framework of Western European colonial projects (Quijano, 2007). It adds binary opposition specific to the Bulgarian historical context: enslaver (Ottoman) versus liberator (Russian, later Soviet), that still functions to mobilize nationalist rhetoric. The motive of the lower race is still alive in the modern public sphere. The aforementioned Acad. Georgi Markov gives an expression of these stereotypes and clichés. Markov, then Director of the Institute of History at *BAS* says: “The Turks... come here to demolish the Christian civilization and detach Bulgaria for centuries from the Renaissance.”

Eric Hobsbawm (Ranger and Hobsbawm, 1983) argued that any affirmation of a national identity presupposes identification with something against which it is. In the case of Germany's reunification and the rise of Bismarck, the new state finds its antipode in its historical enemy – France. The celebrations and rituals surrounding the Franco-Prussian War turn it into an inventive tradition that seeks to conceal the social antagonism between different groups in newly-established Germany. After 1878, the Ottoman Empire that Bulgarians were part of, along with many other ethnic groups and peoples, became a traditional enemy. With the April Uprising of 1876 and the Russian-Turkish War of 1877, the goal of Bulgarian revolutionaries to form a nation-state was achieved. The newly established Bulgarian national state identified itself against the Ottoman Empire. As was shown above, Alexander Vezenkov's analysis shows that the neglect of the Ottoman influence on the *Revival* period is a basic ideological construct in

Bulgarian historiography. All parallels are sought with Europe in order to prove some continuity, but ignore reforms in the Ottoman Empire.

5. Preventing Discussion: Unanswered Questions

Why did an art history project occupy so much space in the political and public sphere? Why did this project cause such an outburst of nationalist anger? Martina Baleva and Ulf Brunbauer questioned the official historiography of the Batak massacre. A historiography that presents photographs made years after the event as evidence of the massacre. Bulgarian intellectuals, scholars, politicians and other participants in the campaign against the project took the position of defenders of the “historical truth.” But this implies an artificial binary opposition between myth and truth. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Bulgarian scholars who have participated in the scandal have emerged as guardians of myths under the pretense of guarding historical truths. The narrative of the event in the village of Batak, cleared of any controversies and antagonisms, puts it in the frame of myth. Baleva and the other scholars in the project dare to doubt the heroic and tragic events found in memoirs, poetry, and historical books. They tear the hard surface of a nationalist discourse made up of texts and material rites in a period of affirmation of the nation state. They show how the artistic intervention of the painter and the photographer is necessary in order for the event to live in the collective memory and become part of the invented traditions of the institutions of the state through museum exhibitions, rituals, commemorations and celebrations.

5.1. Silencing the Past: The Case of the Pomaks

Putting Batak outside of the discourse of national mythology opens up other readings and questions around the event. For example, how to deal with it in the context of the relationship between the Batachans and the Pomaks from the neighbouring villages? Haitian Anthropologist Michel Rolph-Trouillot describes the process of silencing the past by the process of producing historical stories. The process of production of historical narratives is selective – some stories are never mentioned by the official producers of the past, i.e. historians and institutions of collective memory. In his book *Silencing the Past*, Rolph-Trouillot writes that “every historical narrative renews the claim to the truth” (1996, p. 6). It is a claim of the knowledge producer(s) of what is claimed to have happened, as well as a claim for acceptance – that the audience accepts the story to be true. Stories that exist in textbooks, museums, and national holidays are sources from which we learn history. Still, the process of telling the “story” is selective:

“Silences enter the processes of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)” (1996, p. 25).

What is said and what remains silent involves a process that requires the exercise of power – “the materiality of the socio-historical process (historicity 1) sets the stage for future narratives about history (historicity 2)” (1996, p. 29).

From the analysis of Rolph-Truillot, it becomes clear that the historical narrative is produced in accordance with the existing political situation and the existing political order. That is why the Pomaks' story in the dominant historiography is either silenced or remains untold. In his interview for *Dnevik* newspaper, Brunbauer points out that Batak is a particularly explosive topic due to the existence of *otherness*. In the Rhodopes, the village represents a neuralgic point of the relations of the Bulgarians with others. The majority of the inhabitants of the region are Pomaks. Pomaks are peoples who speak Bulgarian, but practice Islam. Their identity has been challenged many times since the formation of the independent Bulgarian state. There have been a series of campaigns aimed at assimilating the Pomaks, converting them into Christianity and during socialism, attempts for cultural assimilation. The best known are those during the Balkan Wars (1912-13), the 1930s, the early 1940s and the 1960s and 1970s (Todorova, 2018). Todor Hristov (2013) points out that the position of the Bulgarian speaking Pomaks as supporters of Ottoman rule became problematic during the period of socialism when religion ceased to be a measure of ethnicity. Rumen Daskalov (2009) also draws attention to the silence during the socialist period about the participation of Pomaks in the suppression of the April uprising. Brunbauer (2009) describes the mechanism by which the perpetrators of the massacre turn into “Turks.” The thesis was very heavily enforced during the *Revival process* (95-96).

Public opinion during the Batak scandal did not pay attention to another inconvenient fact that Evgenia Ivanova (2009) discusses in her text: the story that the Pomaks tell about a murdered (in another version he was able to escape) son of the Pomak leader of the subsequent slaughter, Ahmed Aga (Barutanliata). There is also silence about the Bulgarian insurgents' killings of peaceful Muslims (Brunbauer, 2009, p.95). The Pomaks have their own stories about the events; stories that are silenced and do not come to the public's attention. State institutions and producers of the historical past that have social power⁸⁸ and large media presence – historians in their role as experts of the past – have produced a common sensual narrative of martyrdom and sacrifice, with clearly defined heroes/martyrs and villains. During the scandal, no one paid attention to the escape of the leader of the uprising, Petar Goranov, who left the village defenseless and later became a governor of the province in the newly established state. It was his book that became the main source for the events that followed his escape. The social conflict between groups in the village itself has been ignored to give expression to the traditional conflict between oppressors and rebels. The existence of conflict between the rich Bulgarian village of Batak and the surrounding poor Muslim villages, points to a different type of conflict than simply based on the opposition Christianity vs. Islam, or Bulgarian vs. Turk.

Inappropriate, for example, are also the questions: What happened to the Pomak villages during the Balkan War of 1912-13?⁸⁹ And why not, what happened in Morava, Serbia in 1915?⁹⁰ These questions would challenge the one-dimensional national myths about the nobility of the

⁸⁸ John French and Bertram Raven distinguish six forms of social power: coercive, rewarding, legitimate, reference, expert, and informational. The expert power is based on the belief of the recipient that the expert has superior authority and capabilities, while the informational depends on the quality of the message, its persuasiveness and the logic of the argumentation (Todorova, 2009a, p. 188).

⁸⁹ Brunbauer, Eminov and Todorova discuss the forced conversion to Christianity of the Pomaks in 1912/13 and systemic terror perpetrated against them.

⁹⁰ Martin Valkov deals with the politics of systemic terror and murders committed against the Serb population, especially the intelligentsia, from the occupied Serbian lands by the Bulgarian Army during the First World War.

Bulgarian soldier and the deceitfulness of the neighbours. Here, perhaps, it is necessary to mention also the silence of the real actors and victims in the April uprising. Once Batak turns into an emanation of Bulgarian suffering, we should ask ourselves, why speculate with the numbers? Dimitar Strashimirov provides a list of 1,748 people killed and slaughtered in neighborhoods, but the Museum of History in Batak insists on 5,000, a figure taken up in the media.⁹¹

All of these questions were so provocative that, instead of prompting reflection and discussion, they had the opposite effect. On April 3rd 2011, in the most significant Orthodox temple in the country, the *St Alexander Nevski Cathedral*, Patriarch Maxim, the leader of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC), performed the ritual of canonization. 5000 of *Martyrs of Batak* were canonized for Christian saints. Maria Todorova points out the significance of the ritual of canonization citing Catherine Bell “through ritual...those claiming power demonstrate that their interests are in the natural, real or fruitful order of things” (cited in Todorova, 2009b, p. 375). The ritual performs the important function of keeping and maintaining the unity of the group (p. 464). But how will the ritual of canonization of the Bulgarian martyrs of Batak be perceived by 12% of Bulgarian citizens who profess Islam as their religion? What is the symbolic meaning of this act and what social functions does it perform? Canonization of the slaughtered saints by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church falls into a myth-making plot about the violent change of faith.⁹² Its development, from the narrations of the early Christian martyrs to the lives of the New Martyrs killed in the name of the Orthodox faith, fits into national mythology (Aretov, 2006, p. 234). Maria Todorova sets the canonization of Levski, cancelled by the BOC,⁹³ in the context of the *longue durée* of nationalism. Here we have to put the canonization of Batachans within the *longue durée* of nationalism that Todorova identifies. The canonization does not have unifying, but rather divisive functions between ethnic Bulgarians and *others*, inflaming impulses of ethno-nationalism.

Martyrdom and victimhood have played a mobilizing role in the context of Balkan nationalism. For example, Marko Živkovic discusses the discourse of victimhood during Milosevic’s regime produced inside intellectual circles (especially by poets) in Serbia. The “archetypal, metaphysical, eternal power” of victimhood was used by poets with the help of the media to send the message of how “the others” slaughtered us (2011, p. 183). But as the author points out, the trope of victimhood is at best ambiguous because it easily descends into the call for revenge (2011, pp. 183-184). He focuses on the work of writer and poet Vuk Draskovic.⁹⁴ In his novel *Nos (The Knife)*, Serbs are presented as innocent victims suffering at the hands of their brothers (Muslims and Croats); reconciliation can only happen if Muslims recognize that they are Serbs (2011, p.184). There is a direct parallel between this message and Bulgarian writer

⁹¹ Alexander Vezekov analysed the political use of the number of perished in different periods of Bulgarian history, especially the periodic appearance of the number of 30,000 in the April and September revolutions and the period after September 9th 1944 (Vezekov, 2010).

⁹² Already in 1877, in the calendar of Dragan Manchoy, "5000 Martyrs from Batak" were included (Todorova, 2009b, p. 335).

⁹³ Vassil Levski's canonization attempts continued until today, last February 2019 by Valeri Simeonov's nationalist party, *National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB)* discussed in the final section of this article.

⁹⁴ Draskovic who opposed Slobodan Milosevic acknowledges how as an ideologue of a resurrected nationalist course him and other intellectuals unwillfully helped Milosevic's nationalist regime. See (Živkovič, 2011, p. 171).

Anton Donchev's novel *Time of Parting* (later adopted for the movie screen) that also deals with the theme of fratricide.⁹⁵ Alleged massive conversion to Islam in the 17th century in the Rhodope region sets the stage for the dramatic story of Manol's family and Karaibrahim, the Janissary commander sent to convert Manol's village. It becomes clear that Karaibrahim is Manol's son, forcefully taken from him at an early age, to become the Sultan's devoted warrior. Once the narrative establishes the common trope of the forceful conversion of Bulgarians to Islam, to explain the existence of Pomaks in the Rhodopes, we can examine how this trope functions to convey the notion of fratricide. In the case of Batak massacre, Bulgarians in 1876 suffer at the hands of our brothers (the Pomaks), who two centuries ago were forcefully converted to Islam. Despite the lack of historical evidence of the events depicted in Donchev's novel, the film *Time of Violence* remains immensely popular and influential. The ritual gesture of canonization by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church can also be considered as an example of what Katherine Verdery defines as the politics of dead bodies. The dead bodies continue to live in the ideological space as an application of Bulgarian nationalism.

6. The Batak Scandal as War of Position on the Cultural and Political Front

I read the mobilization against Baleva and Brunbauer's project as part of a war of position on the cultural and political front. In his analysis of the rise of Margaret Thatcher and Thatcherism, Stuart Hall (1988) draws on Gramsci to explain how from an unpopular economic thesis under the liberal consensus of the welfare state neoliberalism has become a dominant ideology. From the position of a political opponent of the status quo, Margaret Thatcher has been able to mobilize different groups and different social classes. The rise of Thatcherism comes at a time of economic stagnation, a crisis of the Keynesian model, and is characterized by what Hall calls *regressive modernization* – looking back on past grandeur, returning to the conservative values of the Victorian morale, coupled with an economic policy of deregulation and the withdrawal of the state from the economy (p.163).

Stuart Hall sees in Gramsci's analysis a concept of political power that is open: Politics is a terrain that meets economic, social and cultural forces and relationships (1988, pp. 162-169). In this concept, the ultimate outcome of the struggle for power is not predictable but depends on configurations and processes between forces; diverse social forces and movements can articulate strategic alliances with one another. As I argued, the role of securing consent is not only within *civil society*. Althusser's concept of the ISAs does not create a dichotomy between civil society and state, ISAs are institutions and organizations such as churches, schools, the press, trade unions, but also political parties, politicians, public intellectuals, etc. Those are venues "who have created in people certain ways of behaviour and expectations that correspond to the hegemonic public order" (Cox, 1983, p. 164). In the current context, some key aspects of Bulgarian ISAs, officially situated within civil society, will be media, non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and academic and cultural institutions.

The process of fostering power takes place on the cultural front. Cultural hegemony is a form of power that requires intellectual and moral leadership. That is why it is directly related to

⁹⁵ Donchev's novel was published in 1964, but the movie adaptation came out in 1988 at the midst of the Revival process.

Gramsci's notion of *war of position*. The political parties *Ataka* and *IMRO*, defining the language of nationalism and posing as guardians of historical memory, have been positioned in this war on the side of the “people” against the (liberal) elites. My argument is that the role of these parties in the Batak scandal must be seen as a strategy toward acquiring power. Thus, the populist rhetoric of *Ataka*, coupled with extreme right-wing/crypto-fascist rhetoric, exploits the traditional narrative of Batak to bring it into the conspiracy discourse of the external threat to the Bulgarian people.

Gramsci's concept of war of position on the cultural and political front can be viewed in relation to Katherine Verdery's understanding of politics. According to Verdery, politics is a constant struggle for meaning and transfer of meaning (Verdery, 1999). But politics is also a struggle to affirm symbols. This understanding of politics also illuminates the Batak case. Therefore, Batak as a place of memory occupies a particularly symbolic meaning associated with the mythological figures of the hero/martyr for the Christian faith (Aretov, 2006, p. 79). Alexander Kiossev (2013) introduces the notion of crisis reactive nationalism. The manifestations of such nationalism arise in a specific context and because of a specific occasion – an event or a happening characterized by a massive emotional and violent reaction accompanied by a media scandal. Causes for such reactive nationalism could be diverse but they always relate to the perception of an attack against “traditional Bulgarian symbols.” I would add that *Ataka* and *IMRO*'s mobilization of reactive nationalism is an instance in an ongoing war of position. The media hysteria at the end of April 2007, especially Bozhidar Dimotrov's role, created conditions for reactive nationalism to play out.

The Batak scandal shows a historic event as a heroic and mythical storyline. As I have indicated, Batak is located in the Western Rhodopes and its inhabitants, mainly ethnic Bulgarians, are neighbours of villages populated mainly by Pomaks, whose collective memory is very different from that of the Bulgarians. According to Brunbauer, who draws on Piere Norra's concept, “sites of memory gain extra significance where the claims of a nation of a particular territory or event seem uncertain...” (Brunbauer, 2009, p. 91).⁹⁶ Furthermore, the political significance of the scandal that has arisen must also be seen in the context of the domination of the *MRF* (the so-called Turkish Party) in the region at the time. Therefore, in the face of *MRF* and its ties with Turkey, the Muslim population saw a political party capable of solving their social and economic problems (Eminov, 2007, p. 16).

On the one hand, considering the cultural and geopolitical context – Bulgaria's entry into Europe and the narrative of *return to Europe* – we can look at the mobilization of nationalist discourse as counter-history (Hristov, 2013). According to Todor Hristov, within the national state a tactic for showing injustice and oppression is the counter-history of the narrative of freedom and liberation from the Turks, because under the façade of freedom, oppression

⁹⁶ Ali Eminov has drawn attention to the narratives that the Pomaks themselves tell about their identity. One of them states that the Pomaks are not Slavs (the thesis of Bulgarian historians) and that the Thracians (the peoples that inhabited this part of the Balkans before the coming of the Slavs) adopted Islam even before the Bulgarians came to the Balkans and before Byzantium. Another says that the Pomaks are Muslims, who until 1912 despite the violence to which they were subjected by the Bulgarians, managed to preserve their faith. For Eminov, the question of identity is related to social, economic and cultural processes. That is why both the nation state and the political parties play a role, as well as the financial support and attractiveness of religious missionaries from the Middle East (Eminov, 2007).

continues. Revolutionary and writer, Zahari Stoyanov's *Notes on the Bulgarian Uprisings* is for Hristov a seminal work of counter-history. Stoyanov opposes “haves” to “have-nots.” Those that have are the oppressors because they are interested in their own prosperity to the detriment of the common good (Hristov, 2013, pp. 446-448). On the other hand, as was mentioned above, those who attacked the project positioned themselves as defenders of historical truth. Not only historians like Georgi Markov, Georgi Bakalov and Ilia Todev, but also politicians and political figures like Bozhidar Dimitrov, Georgi Parvanov and Volen Siderov, took to exposing the “lie” that there is no “slavery” and that this “lie” is imposed by some ((Big) Other: the EU / US). This counter-history uses motifs of national mythology of betrayal and treachery – Baleva is a traitor, and Brunbauer (being referred to as “the German”), the treacherous *other*. Together the two of them have falsified Bulgarian. Thus, the opposition “haves” vs. “have-nots” instead of its socio-economic and class origin becomes loaded with a symbolic/discursive connotation, the “haves” are foreign powers and imperial interests while the “have-nots” are Bulgarians because they are being deprived of their own history. The signifier common good as *social justice* has been replaced by the signifier of common good as *history*.

The intellectual circles around the parties *Ataka* and *IMRO* occupy the position of defenders of Bulgarian history from the encroachment of the new/neo-liberal intellectual elites. Yet, in Bulgarian society there exist nationalist, traditionalist and xenophobic attitudes, which are a good ground for their political uses.⁹⁷ The mobilization of the electorate of the two parties can also be understood in the context of the political advantage of the *MRF* as part of the country's governance during this period in a coalition with the *BSP* and *National Movement Simeon the Second (NDSV)*. Moreover, 2007 marks a political success for the government with the accession of Bulgaria to the EU. Nadege Ragaru (2010) explains *Ataka's* successful tactics to speak to certain electorates of discontents with the status quo. *Ataka* speaks to those to whom nobody listens and denounces the liberal elites (2010, p. 288). Thus, in the cultural war of position *Ataka* positions itself on the side of Gramsci's “subaltern.” Yet, the actions of the party show the contradiction between enunciation and position of enunciation. While often employing anti-colonial rhetoric, once in power *Ataka* did nothing to keep its promises of nationalization of energy companies and banning foreign companies from exploiting national resources. It is important to mention that such a tactic was also used by Donald Trump during the presidential campaign in 2016. Trump took advantage of the pejorative *deplorables* that Hillary Clinton used to describe his supporters. This word has become synonymous with those who do not agree with the liberal status quo.

Much of *Ataka's* sympathizers are recruited through the structures of *Zora* (dawn) and *Zashtita* (protection). Since *Zora* and *Zashtita* are nationalist organizations made of former high-ranking military and police officials of the previous socialist state, talking the nationalist language is considered a winning strategy. These are the participants in anti-Turkish rallies in 1989-1990, around the *National Committee for the Protection of National Interests (OKZNI)*, whose co-founder and then spokesman was Georgi Parvanov (who at the time of the scandal was the Bulgarian President). Parvanov's direct participation in the scandal, as head of state, is not surprising. Eventually, it became known that many of the historians, who were also political figures were engaged in some capacity with the former repressive apparatus known as *State*

⁹⁷ I owe this clarification to Alexander Vezhenkov.

Security (DS), such as Bozhidar Dimitrov, Georgi Parvanov, Georgi Markov, Krassimir Karakachanov and others. In April 2007, this information was not available to the public, which allowed them to exercise social power, speaking from the position of authoritative experts, without being discredited. This link between a certain circle of historians and intellectuals with nationalist political projects will continue over the next decade.

Ataka's conduct during and after the scandal attest to Batak's significance beyond the sphere of ideological discourse and its entrance into the realm of actual political decisions and policy making, the material practices of ideological mobilization. On April 25th, 2007, the party proposed amendments to the *Penal Code*, according to which "preaching of an antidemocratic ideology that denies genocide over Bulgarians" should be punished by one to five years imprisonment and a fine (Ivanova, 2007). The uncritical use of the word *genocide* is not only an example of harnessing the ethno-nationalistic explanatory narrative of history but also directly targets the main political "enemy," *MRF*. It is also noteworthy the authoritarian impulse to remove all the different narratives that contradict the canonized nationalist stories of history. *Ataka's* leader, Volen Siderov, who is not alien to conspiracy rhetoric, accused the *Bosch Foundation*, which financed Baleva and Brunbauer's project, of a deliberate attempt to distort Bulgarian history (Ivanova, 2007). With his populist calls for boycotting the products of the German corporation *Bosch*, Siderov took up the position of activist in the name of the national cause. While public intellectuals and activists like Naomi Klein call for a boycott of transnational corporations because of their exploitation practices or dismal environmental pollution records, Siderov's appeal directs the disgruntled energy to a mythological past.

The unrealized Batak project is a signifier of the nature of the public sphere in post-socialist Bulgaria. The questions about history, national myths and historiography that the participants in the catalogue of the failed exhibition, *Batak as a Place of Memory*, posed in their texts were never dealt with in an open public discussion. Rather than listening to the questions, the public reacted hysterically, mobilized by the accusations, media appearances and threats of emblematic figures and of the Bulgarian *transition* like Dimitrov and Siderov and political parties. At the same time, such reactions cannot be seen outside the context of the accession of Bulgaria to the EU and the fears of a certain intellectual circle of the loss of their power positions. The Batak scandal is a key moment in the war of position for cultural hegemony, characterized by a return to the discourse of nationalism. The scandal of April 2007 has larger political consequences; it should be analysed as the early stages of more than a decade-long mobilizing of ethno-nationalist political projects. It is sufficient to mention that eleven years after Bulgaria's accession to the EU, the language of nationalism dominates the public sphere. Nationalism is embedded in the education program of both *Ataka* and *IMRO*, which are already part of the ruling coalition since the elections of 2016. In the section entitled *Education, Science, Technology, Culture* of *Ataka's* political program we read that one of the goals of the party is to attract "ours and foreign specialists" to promote "true Bulgarian history" (Ivanov, 2017). *IMRO's* program reads that "the educational system, except modern and effective, must be true to the *revivalist* interests (italics mine)." From the reaction of the project by Martina Baleva and Ulf Brunbauer, it is clear that the traditional right-wing nationalist reading of the interwar period, without the class struggle, and especially the anti-fascist aspect of socialist nationalism, is *Ataka* and *IMRO's* idea of "real" history teaching.

I argue that the nationalist hysteria with the massacre of Batak serves as a mechanism for displacement or misrecognition of an increasingly tangible and growing problem of social and economic inequalities. This process continued to develop in the next decade after 2007, consolidating *Ataka* and *IMRO* into power in the form of a nationalist coalition of three parties together with the *National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB)* under the name *United Patriots (OP)*.⁹⁸ To the ever-growing lack of basic social rights and rights of workers hired by Bulgarian and foreign employers; right to decent pay; medical care; pension; affordable healthcare, the increasing economic migration and so on, these parties offer as a solution ethno-nationalism. The nationalist discourses of *Ataka* and *IMRO* are cleared of the class struggle arc of the socialist state. The place of the bloodthirsty bourgeois is occupied by other internal and external enemies: “the lazy and parasitic gypsies living on the back of a fair taxpayer,” “the refugees as a secret US weapon,” “the gay values imposed by the EU,” “the treacherous Sorosoids like Baleva, receiving grants in exchange for national betrayal”⁹⁹ and any other fantastic images that tore the “nation’s body.” Here I will leave aside the question of the difference in the ideologies of the two nationalist parties: *IMRO* has been right-wing since its formation, and *Ataka* sometimes uses left-wing rhetoric. The participation of these parties in the scandal, and its continued regeneration, cannot remain outside the political-economic and the question of neoliberalization. From Ivan Kostov's (1997-2001) shock therapy to the three cabinets of Boyko Borisov, Bulgaria maintains an unmistakable neoliberal course, with varying degrees of policies of austerity.

⁹⁸ In October 2019, *Ataka* which is often accused of Putinism was excluded from the nationalist coalition.

⁹⁹ I mean the mass mobilization against the *Istanbul Convention* where key actors are again figures such as Bozhidar Dimitrov, Volen Siderov and others involved in the Batak scandal.

Chapter Four: From Anti-Communism to Fascism: Ideological Crusaders of the Bulgarian Passive Revolution versus Socio-Economic Reality

The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born, in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 276)

Almost three decades after Francis Fukuyama announced the “end of history” with the Soviet demise, in a recent interview he reneged on his own optimism stating that “socialism ought to come back” (Eaton, 2018).¹⁰⁰ Why is one of the biggest advocates of neoliberalism having second thoughts about this form of late capitalism? The shock therapy¹⁰¹ of price liberalization, privatization and deregulation of the economy that was prescribed as a remedy to East European countries in their transformation from socialism¹⁰² to neoliberal capitalism has in some cases led to a repetition of history rather than its end. Sociologist Vassil Prodanov claims that in Bulgaria’s case the country’s socio-economic conditions came to resemble the 19th rather than 21st century (1999). Deregulation, privatization, liberalization of prices and governments’ cutting of social welfare programmes brought drastic inflation and poverty to the majority of citizens (Tsanov et al., 2013). Bulgaria’s years of neoliberal transformation have been more devastating than the two Balkan Wars and World War I put together (Prodanov, 2007).

Bulgaria, a former loyal satellite of the Soviet Union, is a member of NATO since 2004 and of the EU since 2007. At the same time, it is the poorest member of the EU with a poverty level far exceeding that of other member states (Atanasov, 2018; Kurtev, 2018). This paper is concerned with the questions as to why and how was the dominance of neoliberalism, characterized by extreme social inequality, achieved and sustained in a society that only until recently was fairly egalitarian (Tsanov et al., 2013)? Furthermore, what are the larger political consequences of this dominance? How was the position of Bulgaria as a peripheral state in the Global North sustained and how did this position contribute to the dominance of the neoliberal regime? By employing the concepts of hegemony, “passive revolution” and “coloniality of power” I am tracing the role of the Bulgarian intellectual elites in the process of transformation of state and society. My focus on elites becomes clear when I discuss Antonio Gramsci’s understanding of the function of intellectuals in society. In addition to policies of neoliberal regimes, the paper traces mechanisms of establishing and sustaining peripherality through the production of particular ideological discourses, such as the “return to Europe” and anti-Communism. As I will show, the decolonial analytical framework proposed by Anibal Quijano (2000) and captured in the term “coloniality of power” presents a useful extension of Antonio

¹⁰⁰ I would like to thank Petar Bankov, Philipp Lottholz and Polina Manolova for their valuable help with this paper.

¹⁰¹ Shock therapy reforms refer to economic reform programs advocated by the International Financial Institutions (IFI), such as the IMF and the World Bank, that include immediate freeing of prices, liberalization of trade, introduction of convertible currencies, lifting of capital controls, elimination of state subsidies. Those reforms were modelled on reform programs adopted in Latin America in the early 1980s. (Appel and Orenstein, 2018, 21-22).

¹⁰² In accordance with scholars in the field such as Katherine Verdery and Caroline Humphry I use the term “socialism” instead of “Communism”. As emphasized by Verdery, the Soviet bloc countries “were governed by Communist parties but identified themselves as socialist republics on the path to true Communism” (1996, p. 235) When Communism is used in the context of the ideological narrative of the self-identified Bulgarian anti-communist intellectuals, I use that word.

Gramsci's hegemony theory and Marxist critique of capitalism. This is because Quijano develops a clear perspective on the colonial origin and the sustained colonial logic of the global capitalist system. He emphasizes how the latter uses instruments of domination that work through violence and exclusion and are based on class, race, ethnicity and gender. He is also concerned with the justification that the global capitalist system provides for its imperial and colonial aspiration through the usage of an Eurocentric epistemological and ontological knowledge. I discuss the three concepts and their interrelatedness before turning to the analysis of the Bulgarian context.

1. Hegemony and Passive Revolution

Gramsci's concept of hegemony was an attempt to understand why after World War I the working class in the West failed to overcome the capitalist system through revolution, and instead fascists captured the state. In Gramsci's analysis society is made of many groups – social classes. The process of hegemony occurs when a dominant class emerges and contests the old order. Gramsci emphasizes that hegemony requires intellectual and moral leadership, therefore the importance of the intellectuals as a social group with particular function that by its positioning gives it the leverage to influence ideas. Gramsci's analysis of the hegemony of the dominant class always requires the building of alliances with subordinate groups to create a “homogenous politico-economic historical bloc” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 168). Hegemony depends on “[t]he ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (12). Hegemony requires consensual acceptance of a shared system of ideas and beliefs by all classes, which serve to justify the rule of the dominant class, so that it could sustain power. This ideology becomes the “natural order of things” and is perceived as common sense by all. His classic example of hegemony is that of the Jacobins in France as a revolutionary party that mobilized all classes against the old elite and to a great extent included them in the political process, which he defines as the revolution of mass participation in the political process that unites all classes, as the French Jacobins' successful political project of modernization with mass political participation (Gramsci, 1971, 66-79).

However, hegemony is never stable, on the contrary, Gramsci refers to unstable “equilibrium of forces” within political and civil society. As I discussed in the previous chapter, I find Althusser's conceptualization of ISAs permit us to move from the rigid distinction between political and civil society and think of the ISAs as venues of functioning to exercise and sustain hegemonic power. In that sense, educational institutions, research centres, NGOs, think tanks, private foundations are interlinked with state structures. As Stephen Gill points out the separation between civil and political society is characteristic of liberal ontology. Such separation often conceals the links between public and private dimensions of international (and national) power and authority (Gill, 2008, p. 29).

The concept of hegemony is in a dialectical relationship to that of passive revolution. Passive revolution pertains to concrete historical instances in which aspects of the social relations of capitalist development are either instituted or expanded (Morton, 2010: 315). Gramsci borrows the term passive revolution from Vincenzo Cuoco who uses it to describe the Italian revolution. It is important to point out that Gramsci used Cuoco's concept to understand the historical foundations of Italian fascism (Thomas, 2009, p. 146). As previously mentioned

Ishay Landa (2016) disputes the notion of mass politicization in fascism, and defines it as an elitist mass-phobic movement that attempts to transform the organized political spaces of the working class into a disciplined force serving the state. He expands this concept by applying it to other countries where state modernization occurs without radical Jacobin-type revolution.

Gramsci writes: “The concept of passive revolution seems to me to be exact not only for Italy, but also for other countries that modernise the State by means of a series of reforms or national wars, without passing through the political revolution of the radical Jacobin type” (cited in Thomas, 2009, p. 147). Therefore, in Gramsci’s work passive revolution is an elitist top-down process of modernization, which does not bring about revolutionary change in class relations. The mobilization of popular support, or what Gramsci terms “the great popular masses” is used but then the majority of people is not included in the political process and their demands are ignored (Gramsci, 1971). As he points out, passive revolutions are incapable of sustaining hegemony for a longer duration, because of the lack of mass social support; the ruling elite rules through the state in a top-down manner, excluding democratic participation of all social classes. That renders the hegemony of the ruling elite fragile, because it cannot rely on a strong socio-economic base. Gramsci writes that the “State replaces the local social groups in leading a struggle of renewal” (1971: 105-106). In this case, the use of other mechanisms of control, such as political clientelism is necessitated. Gramsci’s concept of *transformism* analyzes a particular form of political clientelism – a process of co-option of the opposition. In his work, transformism is the convergence of the programmes of the Italian political parties after the Risorgimento¹⁰³ to the point of lack of any difference between left and right. Hence, according to Gramsci, the two main parties disintegrate into cliques and factions and this process continues until the rise of fascism (Gramsci, 1971, p. 58).

Another aspect of passive revolutions is what Gramsci terms Caesarism¹⁰⁴ – the rule of a dictator-like figure that unites the political process to advance certain policies. Crucial for the understanding of the difference between radical Jacobin-style revolution and passive revolution, is the process of party formation. Whereas the Jacobins represent a mass party that incorporates all social classes in the political process, the Caesarist figures rule on behalf of the upper class (Gramsci, 1971). Passive revolutions rely on mass participation for transformation of state and society but then exclude the majority from the decision-making process.

Gramsci’s conceptualization of hegemony requires intellectual and moral leadership that establishes social consent. The struggle for hegemony of a ruling class happens in the realm of culture and politics in civil society and is exercised by those who have the status and social function of intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971). Adam David Morton points out that particular importance should be given to the material aspects of ideology: publishing houses, media, libraries, museums, theatres, galleries and even street names (2007, p. 92). In the next sections, I will go into a detailed analysis of the role that Bulgarian intellectuals and the material aspects of ideology played in the hegemonic project of the neoliberal politico-economic model imposed in the country. Gramsci’s notion of hegemony should be understood as dynamic, rather than a static process: social alliances that attempt to construct, maintain and defend their hegemony can face

¹⁰³ An ideological and literary movement that resulted in the national unification of Italy.

¹⁰⁴ According to Gramsci there can be progressive and regressive Caesarism. The progressive Caesarism advances the progressive forces, examples are Caesar and Napoleon I, while the regressive one advances the regressive forces, example is Napoleon III and Bismarck (1971, pp. 219-221).

resistance and contestation by other social forces. In the struggle for hegemony intellectuals are at the centre both as participants in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggles.

However, the concept of hegemony should not be reduced just to the realm of ideology. Morton emphasizes the international aspect in Gramsci's understanding of hegemony; the politico-economic aspect related to the system of global capitalism with the expansion on a world scale of a particular mode of production. In the historic conjunction of neoliberalism this is the mode of flexible accumulation (Harvey, 2005). In that sense, the process of deindustrialization of the Bulgarian planned economy that manifested itself in the so-called transition towards free market economy should be examined as the relationship between core and periphery, characterized by uneven development (Morton, 2007). Thus, passive revolution can be understood as a project of local elites attempting to secure the hegemony of the global politico-economic model (the discourse of experts) and an attempt for imposing the ideological hegemony of this model within the civil society of the peripheral Bulgarian state.

2. The Coloniality of Power

According to Anibal Quijano, "coloniality of power" is a global model of power through which Western Europe and later the United States have sustained their hegemony on a global scale (Quijano, 2000). Coloniality of power is driven by the rationality of Eurocentrism. Western European knowledge production bases its ontological and epistemological fundament on the belief in the superiority of the European race. In a very selective manner, this race is understood as constituted only by the Northern colonial powers and their ideological vanguard – the United States. This model is characterized by capitalist social relations and mechanisms of control over labour, gender, race and subjectivity (Quijano, 2000; 2007).

The control of labour entails categorizing on the basis of race or ethnicity. As Quijano writes, Europeans associated unpaid or non-waged labor with the dominated races because they were considered "inferior" (2000, p. 538). The hierarchy of peoples with Western European roots on top helps us understand the lower wages that non-whites, or in the Bulgarian case, non-Western European whites, continue to receive for one and the same labour. The control of subjectivity also impinges on the educational process – it requires an education that imposes Western Europe as the creator of modernity and rationality, while the rest of the world is relegated to a pre-modern stage (2000, p. 542). Quijano emphasizes that the Eurocentric rationality is not exclusive just to Europeans, but can be acquired or at least lived up to by all "those educated under its hegemony" (2000, p. 540). Quijano uses the term hegemony in the Gramscian sense discussed earlier, arguing that intellectual elites educated in the Global North (Western Europe and the US) adapt the "cognitive perspective" of Europeans, p. "European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power" (Quijano, 2007, pp. 169-170). The rationality of Eurocentrism codifies intersubjective and cultural relations between Western Europe and the rest of the world in categories that function as binary oppositions: East-West, primitive-civilized, mythic/magic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern. In his analysis of the Southern question, Gramsci explains how the Italian intellectual strata justified the position of South Italy as inherently poor and underdeveloped (2000). The reasons used were not the socio-economic conditions of capitalism and the North's domination/power over the South, but nature – Southerners were deemed "biologically inferior" and "lazy, criminal and

barbaric” (Gramsci, 2000, p. 173). Such explanations fall under the Eurocentric discourse of coloniality of power put forward by Quijano. Further below in the text, I show how such mechanisms of domination operate in the Bulgarian context by focusing on the discourse of “catching up” on the road to modernity that has been amongst the most successful strategies of the Bulgarian intellectual and political elite.¹⁰⁵

I find Quijano’s work on coloniality of power complementary to the critical analysis of hegemony, passive revolution and quasi-fascism in Bulgaria. The seductive aspect of the power of Eurocentrism that Quijano discusses takes its particular form among Bulgarian political and intellectual elites who present themselves as leaders and educators of irrational/uncivilized/undemocratic people. My analysis presents an extension of Quijano’s coloniality of power via Gramsci. This becomes apparent when discussing Bulgaria's current entanglement with the US' military alliances and war agendas and similarly in regards to Bulgaria's alliance with Nazi Germany in the past and the denial thereof.

3. Bulgarian Passive Revolution

I propose to read the transformation of Bulgaria, known to Bulgarian society with the ideological term *transition*, as a form of passive revolution. David Morton writes that passive revolutions can be viewed as mechanisms that transform the state, so as to impose capitalist social relations (Morton, 2010). Rick Simon examines the Russian case of neoliberal transformation, employing Gramsci’s concept of passive revolution. He argues that the concept of passive revolution gives insight to the expansion of capitalism from the core to the periphery (Simon, 2010, p. 446). Despite the political establishment’s reliance on mass mobilization, the transformation of the state is instituted in a top-down manner. Reforms are implemented by a small political elite; in contrast to reforms from above in the case of the French Revolution discussed by Gramsci, social transformation happened with the decisive engagement of the radical left (*sans-culottes*) (Thomas, 2009, p. 147). Passive revolution is an “elite engineered social and political reform” that “usually relies on foreign capital and associated ideas, while lacking national support” (Morton, 2010, p. 317). The Bulgarian passive revolution is a capitalist restructuring of state and society that integrates the country into the Global North as a peripheral state. In the context of the former Eastern bloc, the *nomenklatura* (party elite), did not constitute a class, because in a planned economy, its members could not individually acquire private property or accumulate money as capital (434). This process was analogous in Bulgaria. The passive revolution came in the form of *perestroika*-style reforms that enabled the formation of a ruling capitalist class, formed by parts of the *nomenklatura* and the leaders of organized crime. This class took ownership over the means of production while simultaneously enabling the penetration of foreign capital.

In the context of (post)socialist Bulgaria, we can identify two periods in this process of passive revolution. The first one comprises the ousting of the dictator Todor Zhivkov and the coming of Gorbachev-style political figures to the front, such as Andrey Lukanov and Petar Mladenov, from within the *Politburo* (Executive Committee) of the Bulgarian Communist Party

¹⁰⁵ The notion of the need to “catch up” is not only characteristic of the ideological climate after 1989, but was prominent ideological postulate during the Sovietization process. An example is Georgi Dimitrov’s famous proclamation to do in ten years what capitalism has achieved in one hundred.

(BKP) (renamed into Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) in 1990). This period prepares the conditions for the massive privatization that takes place in the second stage. In its predatory execution, this privatization takes the form of violent primitive accumulation of public and state assets (see Traykov, 2018). The first period lasts approximately from the end of 1989 until the winter of 1997. In the winter of 1997 massive unrest erupts, prompted by hyperinflation and the unwillingness or inability of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) to quell the rise of organized crime.¹⁰⁶ The second stage of the Bulgarian passive revolution brings about the Caesarist figure of Ivan Kostov and is characterized by neoliberal reforms of a shock therapy type. While in the first years, the transformation had the euphoric support of the majority,¹⁰⁷ its consequences, mostly felt in the second period – violent primitive accumulation and class polarization, rendered the sustainment of the hegemony of the neoliberal model quite arduous. Since the early 2000s, subsequent governments implemented even more severe neoliberal policies that were hard to push through in the core of the Global North. Shock therapy was followed by a shift from progressive taxation to flat tax (2008), pension privatization (2002) and ongoing dismantling of universal healthcare, all of which did not occur as a result of public debate, but on the contrary, were imposed in a top-down fashion with the help of a complacent media.¹⁰⁸ The Bulgarian state became characterized by high levels of distrust towards the political elite and parliamentary politics. A public opinion poll by the European Commission¹⁰⁹ shows that in 2007 when Bulgaria entered the EU, only 7% trusted political parties, while 78% of the population tended to doubt their integrity. In 2017 the situation was not much different, 13% tended to trust the parties (this rise of 6% could be explained with the increased tendencies of clientelism within the ruling political party, GERB and its allies in parliament), while 77% continue to mistrust them. We can

¹⁰⁶ BSP was instrumental during the first period in ensuring that the reforms would be introduced and will be of benefit for its elite. During the 1990s, a split within the party took place between the nostalgic preservers of the party left-wing ideals (“red grannies”) and its rising business-oriented leadership (“red cell phones”), (Asenov & Rudnikova, 1995) that indicated the emergence of a capitalist class from the old nomenklatura.

¹⁰⁷ When 1989 saw an end to Zhivkov’s authoritarian rule, a massive democratization movement emerged in Bulgaria that was similar to the ones in Latin America and Central Europe. The rise of social movements that confronted the authoritarian regimes in East Europe were presented in US media (e.g. New York Times) as a triumph of Western, particularly American values over communist orthodoxy (Carreege, 2003, p. 300). The media completely ignored the various elements that characterized the movements of Eastern Europe. Both Sparks (2005) and Carreege (2003) document strong commitment to participatory democracy and social democratic sentiments that characterized Poland’s Solidarity movement, as well as its equivalents in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. As Sparks and Carreege point out the participants in the social movements strived for a political and economic transformation and a path to democracy that differed largely from the neoliberal shock therapy programs. In 1991 polls revealed that 62% of Bulgarians were in favour of social-democratic system based on the Swedish model, while only 12.3% favoured US-style free market capitalism (cited in Vassilev, 2003, p. 102).

¹⁰⁸ Bulgaria is last in media freedom in Europe and in the Balkans, placed at 111th in Reporters Without Borders. One person, MP from DPS, Delyan Peevski who has connections both to the ruling party and the opposition controls 80% of print media distribution. See: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/bulgaria-is-last-on-media-freedom-in-eu-and-in-the-balkans/>

¹⁰⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/themeKy/18/groupKy/85?fbclid=IwAR2V3AKWPoNCpUHEI6GGdCTtL_dGWrRqbzIaUWYynouhTekln8X6MC_5KIA

argue that after the initial confrontation between BSP and ODS (United Democratic Forces)¹¹⁰ during the first stage, with the formation of NDSV (National Movement Simeon the Second) a process of what Gramsci defines as *transformism* began during the second stage. In this sense, the initial ideological confrontation between BSP and ODS in the 1990s was followed by transformism. BSP, the supposedly socialist Bulgarian party, moved away from its internal conflict and carried out during the mid-2000s neoliberal reforms that continued to increase social inequality, such as the imposition of the flat tax and pension privatization, mentioned above.

To summarize, one of the major consequences of the restructuring from planned to market economy in Bulgaria was the brutal process of deindustrialization that came about as a result of the dismantling of horizontally and vertically integrated state enterprises (Chalakov et al., 2010). That process should be analysed as a mechanism of the coloniality of power, due to the instrumental role of foreign expertise that the political and intellectual elite took for granted. The devastating process of deindustrialization coupled with hyperinflation brought about an economic and political crisis by the mid-1990s. In 1997 Bulgaria accepted an IMF currency board, making Bulgaria's financial system dependent on foreign institutions. Under the guidance of the IMF and the World Bank, the country implemented structural adjustment programmes that brought about drastic class disparity, one that continues to characterize Bulgarian society to the present day.

Bulgaria joined NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007, but as the poorest member in the EU, lacking a strong economic base, its membership in those supranational structures further embedded its peripherality within the Global North. Bulgaria's subordinate position required convincing the majority of a new common sense, i.e. accepting the new postsocialist realities: class polarization, poverty, and deindustrialization, foreign exploitation of human and natural resources. Yet, an ideological framework that permitted the implementation of such policies already existed. The next section offers a distinctive perspective for reading the formation of this new common sense while searching for its Eurocentric roots. Bulgarian liberal intellectuals were pivotal in this respect, as in the tradition of Eastern Europe they took up the teleological position of protectors of democracy and the free market.

3.1. Demonizing the Past to Justify the Present

The *transition* in Bulgaria required ideological persuasion and was more of a political than an economic process. In other words, society had to be persuaded to accept certain models and ideas that were developed in the core of the Global North. Since November 1989, the newly formed Bulgarian liberal elite became the main producer of intellectual knowledge; self-proclaimed leaders of civil society in academia, NGOs, think tanks and media, stood next to former ideologues of the Bulgarian Communist Party, or those linked to it, in one way or another (Lavergne, 2010)¹¹¹. An important corollary here is Gramsci's understanding of intellectuals as

¹¹⁰ These were the two major political opponents, known as the ex-communists and the democrats, or the "red" and the "blue". They dominated the parliament in the first years after 1989, along with the Movement of Rights and Freedoms (DPS), also known as the Turkish Party.

¹¹¹ In the current context key aspects of Bulgarian civil society, as understood by Gramsci, would be media, NGOs, think tanks, academic and cultural institutions, where intellectual work is produced. Some prominent liberal intellectuals include: in academia the circle around Todor Zhivkov's daughter Lyudmila, the historian Alexander

“the entire social stratum which exercises an organizational function in the wide sense – whether in the field of production, culture, or in that of political administration” (1971, p. 97). Anthropologist Kate Crehan writes that Gramsci was not morally assessing intellectuals as a social stratum with a specific function, because he saw them in their specific historical context, in a specific time and place. Therefore, we should see them not as ‘the *entire* social stratum...’ but as “specific intellectuals...located within specific knowledge-producing institutions and practices” and we should explore “the links those institutions and practices have to particular classes” (Crehan 2016, p. 35). The postsocialist Bulgarian intellectual elite has formed and functioned as a gatekeeper of the common sense carved out by the neoliberal reformers of state and society (Lavergne, 2010). In that aspect, its explanatory narratives of the recent past should be read in relation to their function as gatekeepers of that common sense. Or, in their own ideological language, as democracy and free market agents (used interchangeably, as if one does not contradict the other).

The so-called transition to free market and democracy was the core project of the newly established intellectual elite in both Bulgaria and other Central and East European Countries (CEECs). The narrative of *transition* as a system of knowledge (Verdery, 1996) has to be interrelated to the Thatcherite *common sense* that “There Is No Alternative” (TINA) to neoliberalism. TINA became a hegemonic discourse in the West and, after the Soviet demise, rapidly spread throughout Eastern Europe. The euphoria after the fall of state socialism, and the popular enthusiasm for markets and democracy in CEECs, combined with the apparent victory of neoliberal capitalism in the West during the belle époque of US dominance in the 1990s (Arrighi, 1994), turned the neoliberal discourse of transition into the new common sense in the former Eastern bloc. How this occurred in the case of Bulgaria will be discussed in the following sections.

A very significant aspect of this rewriting of history concerns the years of King Boris III and his collaboration with Adolf Hitler. Contemporary Bulgarian historiography is at best ambiguous in its assessment of his regime and its alliance with Nazi Germany. Roumen Daskalov, who has mapped the various tendencies in modern Bulgarian historiography, sides with those denying the existence of fascism in Bulgaria and summarizes their position with the question: “If there was no German occupation (and relatively independent regime) and fascism was not in power, who were the partisans fighting against?” (2011, p. 276). This question is quite revealing of the inability or the unwillingness of producers of current Bulgarian history to grasp the social antagonisms within the capitalist system. Their premises rest on the existence of some kind of external threat that disrupts the harmony of a system of class oppression. Daskalov further claims that the delegitimation of the communist regime as totalitarian partially legitimized the old regime of the monarch that he, along with current Bulgarian historiography, insists is not fascist. Yet, the more important issue here is not whether the regime itself was fascist or not, but the fact that by diminishing the significance of fascism and the monarch’s collaboration with Nazi Germany and by instead presenting it as a strategic move to fulfil the

Kiossev, cultural studies professor Ivaylo Ditchev, the political scientist Evgeniy Dainov, the professor of literature Miglena Nikolchina; the founders of prominent think tanks – Ivaylo Znepolski from the influential anti-communist Institute for Research of the Recent Past (IRRP), Ivan Krastev from the Center for Liberal Strategies (CLS), Krassen Stanchev from the Institute for Market Economy (IME), and Ognyan Minchev from Institute for Regional and International Research (IRIR).

“national unification”, Bulgarian revisionists are (perhaps indirectly) responsible for the fascination with fascism in the present.¹¹²

To further justify the present so-called transition to free market and democracy, the socialist past had to be demonized. To do this, and to delegitimize the victory of the Communist Party that came in power in 1944, historians of postsocialism needed to expose the socialist period as tyrannical. Therefore, one of the key aspects of the attack on the recent past was that of denial of the history of class struggle in the country. Todor Hristov points out how the postsocialist historiography had to narrate a story of the secret war of a tyrannical minority (communists) against its own nation, a war that aimed to capture with violence and lies power over its existence (2013, p. 458). The revisionist interpretation of socialism in Bulgarian historiography presents a quite romantic image of the past before the so-called Communist coup of 1944. This romantic image downplays the authoritarian way in which the country was ruled almost throughout the whole period between the two World Wars. For example, in a recent interview historian Georgi Markov describes Boris III, the Bulgarian king of the interwar period, as “an extraordinary diplomat” and the statesman that achieved “national unification” and “saved Bulgaria’s Jews” (Markov, 2018)¹¹³. Stefan Groueff’s book *Crown of Thorns: The Reign of King Boris III* popularized the image of the monarch, shortly before his son, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, arrived in the Bulgarian political scene in 2000. Groueff, a political refugee, whose father was Chief of the Cabinet of King Boris III, paints a rather sympathetic, somewhat tragic image of the king. On the other hand, the repressions and violence of the Bulgarian right-wing dictatorships, brought about by military coups, the harsh socio-economic conditions, the antagonistic cultural and political climate during the authoritarian monarchist regime of the interwar period are not taken into account.

This romanticization of the Bulgarian monarchy plays with nostalgic feelings, but also functions as part of the discourse of a *return to Europe*, typical of the countries of Central Europe and imported from there by the Bulgarian liberal elite (Lavergne, 2010). In the years of late socialism dissident intellectuals from East Central Europe mobilized the discourse as a strategy to cut ties with the Soviet Union, by playing on the binary opposition of West versus East (Falk, 2003, p. 412). The demonization of the Bulgarian socialist regime required its interpretation as a standstill period that had deviated the country from its historical path to modernity. The “return to Europe” discourse was particularly pronounced during the presidency of Petar Stoyanov and Ivan Kostov’s government from 1997-2001, when Bulgaria was making strenuous efforts to become a member of the NATO military alliance and the EU. The ODS government of Ivan Kostov is known for launching shock therapy reforms, characterized by rapid and equally corrupt privatization (Traykov, 2018). Mitchell Orenstein and Hilary Apple write that “the enticement of full membership” was the carrot with which the EU forced

¹¹² The rise of nationalism among young people becomes very clear in Adela Peeva’s documentary, *Long Live Bulgaria*. Peeva documents a rise of fascination with ethnic nationalism, xenophobia and irredentism among young people in major cities in Bulgaria.

¹¹³ Presenting the occupation of parts of Yugoslavia and Greece, claimed by nationalists as Bulgarian, as national unification, is a trope in Bulgarian historiography since 1989. The narrative of the saving of the Bulgarian Jews is only partially true. About 50,000 Jewish people inside the Third Bulgarian Kingdom were not sent to concentration camps, due to the pressure of Bulgarian civil society and political opposition to the pro-German government of PM Bogdan Filov. However, the Jews from the occupied territories were all transported to the Nazi camps.

neoliberal reforms on reluctant governments in countries like Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia (2018, p. 24).

By directly drawing on the *return to Europe* discourse, President Stoyanov introduced the narrative of the *civilizational choice* that Bulgaria had to make. This trope continued to emerge in media and public discourse long after Stoyanov's presidency. In an interview for *TV Evropa* in 2011, sociologist Mira Radeva, stated that during Stoyanov's presidency "Bulgaria made an enormous, historical, revolutionary civilizational choice."¹¹⁴ At the core of the civilizational choice narrative is the dichotomy between West/Europe, that signifies civilization, modernity, progress and the future, and East/Russia that signifies the backwardness of the communist past. This dichotomy further leads to the opposition between other ideological terms – individualism/open society/modern versus communism/closed society/non-modern. Stoyanov's rhetorical strategy used interchangeably the need for membership in NATO and the EU as guarantee that the proper civilizational choice will be made. Those who questioned the need for membership in a supranational military organization under the control of the US were dismissed as belonging to the totalitarian past. As was mentioned above many who were discontented with the neoliberal policies and the geopolitical orientation of the state were mocked and ridiculed as "red grannies", to signify their belonging to the past. We can look at Stoyanov's *civilizational choice*, i.e. the choice to adhere to the so-called Euro-Atlantic *values*, as a variant of Thatcher's TINA. The consequences of the choice materialized in the following events: the bombing of Yugoslavia during the late 1990s and the subsequent participation of Bulgarian soldiers in the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the establishment of US military bases on Bulgarian soil since the early 2000s. The bombing of Yugoslavia continued for 78 days in 1999. According to *Human Rights Watch*, there were between 428 and 529 civilian casualties, while the Serbian government claims that at least 2500 were killed.¹¹⁵ From 2003 to 2008 Bulgaria sent 500 Bulgarian soldiers to Iraq, 13 of whom died. Currently, Bulgaria has around 600 soldiers in Afghanistan. As a member of NATO Bulgaria is also expected to participate in a potential conflict between the US and Russia by virtue of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Two key aspects and the interrelation between them need to be taken into account when discussing the way in which anti-communism operates as public discourse and as an interpretative scheme: the presentation of the whole period of socialism (1944-1989) as totalitarian and, secondly, the reluctance to recognize the regime between the two World Wars as fascist. The demonization of the socialist state and the Communist Party, before and after its coming to power in 1944, as well as the downplaying or denying of fascism serve as mechanisms for establishing the common sense of peripheral capitalism in Bulgaria. Left-wing positions, such as concerns for social and economic inequality, social justice are commonly associated with the repression of *totalitarianism*, while the refusal to treat Bulgaria's fascist past in the same manner, makes extreme right ideas permissible in society.

3.2. Criminalizing Communism

¹¹⁴ <http://www.petarstoyanov.com/bg/petar-stoyanov-v-mediite/petyr-stoqnov-naj-populqrnata-lichnost-na-prehoda>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/nato/Natbm200-01.htm>, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-remembers-nato-bombing-victims-03-24-2016>

There have been several attempts to criminalize assessments of the past that do not follow the strict anti-communist canon. On 26th of April 2000 the parliament passed a law that declared the communist regime criminal. This law was supported by the ruling United Democratic Forces (ODS) (Kostov's centre-right coalition), as well as by the liberal Movement of Rights and Freedoms (DPS). The law has had only symbolic significance and has functioned as a declaration. According to it, the communist regime has "destroyed the traditional values of European civilization" and has led to "a national catastrophe" (cited in Baeva and Kalinova, 2011, p. 222). On the 9th of September 2004 the parliament passed a declaration marking "the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Communist regime in the country" (222). The text claimed that with the establishment of communism "the European path chosen by *the builders of modern Bulgaria* [italics mine] was interrupted, which lagged our progress for decades" (224)

These declarations work as ideological exercises on three levels. On a first level, the narrative insists that there was destruction of something defined as the values of universal European civilization. However, the historical reality of Europe from the 1920s to the 1940s is that of the rise of various authoritarian and totalitarian regimes and the suppression of those fighting them, such as anti-fascists and partisans. In 1938, 16 out of 27 European states had authoritarian or totalitarian dictatorships and Bulgaria is not an exception (Poppetrov, 2008, p. 5). Despite the debates over the existence of fascism, the country was an ally of Nazi Germany and current historians have acknowledged the existence of political movements and organizations with ideologies sympathetic to Nazism and fascism in that period (Daskalov, 2011; Vezenkov, 2013; Poppetrov, 2009). Claims to the opposite mask the enormous socio-economic and political turmoil interrelated with class antagonisms in Europe between the two World Wars. They also diminish the role of anti-fascist forces. *Builders of Modern Bulgaria* comes as a direct usage from Simeon Radev's book with the same title. Radev was a diplomat in the Third Bulgarian Kingdom (1878-1944) and a publicist whose book documents the political process in the first decade of the nation-state. The use of this particular title exemplifies the Eurocentric notion that the political elite of the 19th century had to be European builders who followed some universal European civilizational model. Such a claim in an official political document shows how the discourse of coloniality of power operates in a region peripheral to European powers such as the Balkans.

On a second level, in order to affirm the "return to Europe" narrative, the political establishment had to negate the notion of socialism as a project of modernity by employing the binary opposition East versus West. Therefore, the statement that communism led to "decades of lagging behind" denies the Soviet model as a project of modernity. While the violence on a massive scale and the repressions of the Stalinist era (1945-56) should not be neglected, the results of the socialist modernization are evident. The industrialization that Bulgaria underwent from the 1950s onwards was followed by a process of rapid decrease of inequality, illiteracy and provision of universal healthcare. By 1988, a year before the end of Zhivkov's regime Bulgaria's Gini index was 22 (Tsanov et al., 2013), closer to the one of EU countries. In comparison, by 2017 the Gini coefficient rose to 40.2 (Atanasov, 2018), which made Bulgaria the only country in the EU with a Gini index above 40, thus bringing it closer to the Third rather than the First World.

On a third level, the criminalization of the past is directly related to the "return to Europe" discourse associated with the "civilizational choice" of membership in NATO and the

EU. A recent manifestation of this effort was a declaration of five non-parliamentary represented parties demanding the persecution of “those who deny the criminal character of the communist regime” and which at the same time insists that Bulgaria should be “a proud member of NATO”.¹¹⁶ Here, it becomes apparent how the attempts to demonize the past of the socialist state go along with the justification of Bulgaria’s participation in a military alliance, as part of which Bulgaria was involved in the bombing of a neighbouring country (Yugoslavia) twenty years ago. It is important to keep in mind that this declaration has been produced amid the ongoing hostilities between the US and Russia. As mentioned above, as a member of NATO, Bulgaria is important geopolitically to the US and recently has been pressured to participate in the militarization of the Black Sea as an ongoing attempt to position the country as part of the East European bloc against Russia. The ideological aspect of this geopolitical turn is demonstrated in the attempt to criminalize communism, putting an equal sign between communism, Nazism and fascism by defining them as totalitarian. In December 2010 the foreign ministers of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary and Romania made an attempt to pass a law throughout the EU member states that criminalizes communism in the same way as Nazism.¹¹⁷ Perhaps, sensing the danger that the criminalization of communism can bring about a denial of the role of the USSR in defeating fascism and Nazism, as well as diminishing of the history of anti-fascist struggles in Europe, the attempt faced the opposition of West European countries but in September 2019 such a resolution finally passed.

We see that so far efforts to criminalize the past have been unsuccessful. Their symbolic significance as part of ideological war of position (Gramsci, 1971), however, should not be underestimated. As I demonstrate later in the text with the example of the monument of the victims of communism, the revisionist approach to the history of the socialist past has opened the gates to the rehabilitation of figures that have committed criminal acts against civilians during Bulgaria’s alignment with Nazi Germany. The demand to prosecute people holding “wrong” conceptions of Bulgarian socialist history in fact presents a totalitarian impulse on behalf of the *transitions*’ politicians and intellectuals. The criminalization of communism can be interpreted as an attempt to impose a one-sided view on history that negates the context in which anti-fascist struggles led by Communist parties all over Europe emerged. In sum, it is an attempt to criminalize an important aspect of European historical accounts that reveal the deep social, economic and political antagonisms between the two world wars and the rise of fascism as an attempt to resolve the deep contradictions within capitalism. It is also an attempt to erase a hundred-year-old tradition of left-wing intellectualism in Bulgaria.

I situate the criminalization of history in relation to the attempts to change collective memory. The campaign for the renaming of cities, villages, streets, administrative and institutional buildings (Baeva and Kalinova, 2011, pp. 64-86) constitutes a part of ideological war of position over the past. The process started with the change of the name of the country, on 15th November 1990, when the Republic of Bulgaria replaced the People’s Republic of Bulgaria. One prominent exception is the retaining of the name of Bulgarian People’s Bank, which appears cynical in light of the imposed currency board from 1997. Names of partisans or anti-fascist

¹¹⁶ https://www.actualno.com/politics/pet-partii-poiskaha-kriminalizirane-na-otrichaneto-na-prestypnija-harakter-na-komunizma-news_657472.html

¹¹⁷ <https://dariknews.bg/novini/sviat/ek-otkaza-da-se-kriminalizira-otrichaneto-na-prestypleniqta-na-komunizma-641767>

fighters were replaced with those of clerical and monarchic figures. Baeva and Kalinova (2011) point out that not only the names of partisans and communist political figures are removed but also the ones of any left-wing political figures, including agrarian leaders. The names of international left-wing leaders and intellectuals, such as Salvador Allende, Patrice Lumumba, Henry Barbusse, also gradually disappeared. Streets carrying the word “revolution” are also renamed. All of these changes have significant political implications that combine with the ongoing process of history rewriting and the demonization of left ideals.

3.2.1. Sofia Platform Foundation

An example of the search outside of the Bulgarian peripheral capitalist system for explanation of its disastrous consequences is a recent report of *Sofia Platform* Foundation (SP). The foundation itself is a typical representative of the numerous think tanks operating in Bulgaria, producing explanatory narratives for the *failed transition to democracy* that exhibits the paternalistic Eurocentric attitude of liberal intellectuals. In a recent article entitled *The Generation of the Transition is a Ticking Time Bomb*, SP director, Luiza Slavkova accuses Bulgarians of having “twisted and irrational idea of democracy”.¹¹⁸ Concerned with the rise of undemocratic attitudes among young people, Slavkova fails to search for an explanation within the very structure of postsocialist peripheral capitalism and instead puts the blame on corruption, as something removed from the logic of the system. Another key culprit is the culture of the past – here the explanatory mechanism functions as follows: young people have irrational ideas about democracy because of the legacy of Communism. In a neoliberal cultural environment that promotes consumerism as the highest value of democracy (recall George Bush’s plea to keep shopping after 9/11), the authors of the report are reprimanding young people (*the generation of the transition*) for their understanding of democracy as “the ability to buy everything” (Slavkova, 2019). Yet, the explanation is once again cast in the past – the perception of democracy as the ability to consume is a compensatory mechanism, due to the economy of scarcity of the socialist past.

Such explanatory narratives come close to what Gramsci examines in the Southern question – it is the culture of the people that makes them lazy, irrational and barbaric, or in the Bulgarian case, prone to corruption, which in turn explains Bulgaria’s peripheral status, not the politico-economic and geopolitical realities of late capitalism. Therefore, the narrative follows the binary oppositions mentioned above – where the West is rational and Bulgarians are irrational. As the above example suggests, the Bulgarian experts have clearly distanced themselves from the rest of the “people”; they have adopted the elitist position of top-down knowledge producers and the role of educators. Educators that provide a very narrow understanding of the past and the present, that fail to see the irresolvable contradictions between democracy and the free market.

The socialist past is also to blame for young people’s claim that “education and healthcare should be free” (Slavkova, 2019). Luiza Slavkova’s explanation for this is symptomatic of the anti-communists’ disdain for everything socialist: “Attitudes and beliefs are

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https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/11/10/3343329_pokolenieto_na_prehoda_e_bomba_s_chasovnikov_mehanizum

transferred to the younger generations from their parents” and have to do with unrealistic expectations of the state (Slavkova, 2019). The expectation of a welfare state that administers a minimum level of socioeconomic rights, such as the right to education and healthcare is deemed unrealistic. The conclusion once again emphasises the need for proper education about the socialist past.

Sofia Platform has worked on several projects in this direction. The organization has created a manual for students and teachers with a series of lessons, entitled *What Happened Before 1989: Historical Collection About Communism in Bulgaria*. The authors of this manual, such as Evelina Kelbecheva, Ivan Elenkov, Ivaylo Znepolski, Alexander Kiossev, Momchil Metodiev, are well-known representatives of the Bulgarian anti-communist intellectual circle. In Ivan Elenkov’s lesson entitled *Everyday Life as a Mirror of the Regime*, we read that the period of communism destroyed “the historically established hierarchy of society or the *naturally formed* ... positions and relations between social groups” (2017, p. 11, italics mine). He continues by claiming that this has required “the eradication of the elites – politicians, industrialists, bankers, big landowners...” (11). Thus, the class antagonisms, especially intensified after the disastrous consequences of World War I that brought about poverty, debt and demographic crisis, are normalized as something natural. That way the events of 1944 and the formation of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria are presented as an unjustified act of a few, imposed on the Bulgarian people by a foreign power (the Soviet Union). Later in the text, labour unions are described as being a mechanism for control and exploitation of the worker, while the social benefits that the unions provided are said to have been used for “social discrimination” (16). Comparing this narrative to the current conditions of non-unionized labour, where blatant disregard not only for workers, but also basic human rights is the norm (Medarov et al., 2018), comes to show the outcome of such one-sided ideological renderings.

All of the manual’s lessons end with questions and exercises. For example, the question at the end of Elenkov’s lesson asks students to list all the activities in their everyday life that would be considered illegal during the “communist regime” (Elenkov, 2017, p. 23). The lack of nuances, implying that everyday existence in the regime was nothing but repressive, in such an ideologically-loaded question, situates the functions of the manual more in the realm of propaganda than education. Based on this logic, and using the language of the liberal elite, today we should ask the question: How many Bulgarian citizens enjoying the freedom of democracy and free market economy are capable of paying their water, electricity or gas bills, and what percentage can do so without undergoing serious strain on their personal budget? Ivan Elenkov paints a picture of everyday life in the period of state socialism without colours other than grey and black. In this picture socialist citizens are deprived of agency.

3.2.2. The Memorial of the Victims of Communism

The case of the memorial of the victims of communism is particularly interesting due to the choice of place. The memorial was erected in 1999 during the presidency of Petar Stoyanov and the ODS government of Ivan Kostov. It consists of a chapel and a black wall resembling the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. It is close to the National Palace of Culture, which is symbolically one of the great achievements of socialism associated with the name of Lyudmila Zhivkova. In fact, the People’s Palace of Culture "Lyudmila Zhivkova", as it was known before

1990, was built in 1980 at Zhivkova's insistence. There is a clear contrast between the *National Palace of Culture* and the presence of this memorial. Zhivkova's efforts in the late 1970s to promote peaceful cultural interaction still have a material presence. For example, *Kambanite Monument (The Bells)* was inaugurated in 1979 when the first Children's Peace Assembly was held under the patronage of UNESCO with the motto "Unity, Creativity, Beauty". By 1989, four such assemblies were held in Sofia with a total of 3,900 children from 138 countries and 14,000 children from Bulgaria participating in them.

The sinister memorial of the victims of Communism, which has about 7,000 names, is in striking contrast to the symbolic representation of the Children's Assembly and the National Palace of Culture. The monument compels us to "Bow down!" because "The suffering of our people is built in this wall." Inside the chapel we can see the words "To all Bulgarian martyrs." But who are the actual victims of communist terror, whose suffering we should worship? Central to the monument are the names of those sentenced to death by the People's Court (delegitimized by the words "so-called"). These are the politicians of the governments responsible for the alliance with Nazi Germany and for Bulgaria's involvement in World War II. Among the names of the victims, we also see that of General Hristo Lukov, leader of the fascist *Union of Bulgarian National Legionnaires*. But particularly stark is the case of Konstantin Yordanov, an officer who in 1943 ordered the murder of eighteen people in the village of Yastrebino, six of them children. Yordanov, one of the most sinister teachers (that was his profession) in Bulgarian history, now has the status of a victim of communist terror, which makes him a martyr of democracy. Thus, in the immediate vicinity of a building associated with the founder of the Children's Assembly for Peace is a monument that has proclaimed a child murderer for a martyr.

To summarize, attempts to criminalize the past both on national and supranational level, renaming of places and streets, *Sofia Platform's* accusation of Bulgarians for failing to understand democracy because of their past, texts such as Elenkov's bleak depiction of everyday life in socialism, the building of monuments presenting as victims to communism and therefore rehabilitating figures responsible for crimes during the war years or for propagating fascist ideology, have to be analysed as being a part of the dominant ideological constellation of anti-communism. Anti-communism presents a one-sided perspective about the recent past, while failing to reflect on present tendencies that are equally problematic, but at the same time turning a blind eye on the criminal regimes before 09.09.1944.

4. Patriots and Other Morbid Symptoms

In contrast to Elenkov's argument, when analyzing socialist-era mass gatherings, parades, manifestations, and rituals at work and home environments, Alexei Yurchak argues that it is not the crude propagandistic elements of ideology at work but the subtle moments of friendship and camaraderie that form in such ideological spaces (Yurchak, 2006). This might explain what he calls the "paradox of late socialism" (Yurchak, 2006; Boyer and Yurchak, 2010), the Soviet citizen did not wholeheartedly participate in the crude ideological rituals that the Communist Party enforced and was at times indifferent, at times cynical about the state's crude ideology. But oftentimes, real humane values, ethics, friendships, and creative possibilities were opened up in such practices and spaces, even if they may have contradicted the state's official goals and policies. It is these "unintended" experiences that underwrite the phenomenon of post-Soviet

nostalgia: the values and ideals of socialism – altruism, selflessness, equality, community, ethical relations and that exist outside the party state’s structures. I argue that it is precisely those openings that the process of decommunization has closed down. It has also made the nuanced processing of, and debate on, the past impossible through the classification of all things socialist as totalitarian, inhumane and violent.

The vacuum left by this amnesia was then filled with the rise of nationalism with fascistic tendencies. The ideals of socialism were discarded and substituted by the values of neoliberal capitalism. What are the new values? The entrepreneurial *homo oeconomicus* subject of neoliberalism blurs the ethical lines between virtuous and evil, right and wrong, true and false. The mind view of *homo oeconomicus* operates “in a two-dimensional existence between profit and loss” (Feldner and Vighi, 2014: 22). In a neoliberal ideological climate such values as friendship, cooperation, and responsibility for the vulnerable are often deemed irrelevant. Neoliberalism’s notion of human rights, excludes socioeconomic rights – the right to public education, the right to public healthcare, the right to adequate salary and pension. The state retreats from social provision and redirects welfare toward big business, as well as giving out public assets to private corporations through concessions. When growing social inequality and social polarization is not a concern for the neoliberal notion of human rights, a cultural environment characterized by indifference for those that are in need is more likely to occur. Excluding social groups from what Etienne Balibar (2004) terms the common good is a breeding ground for fascism. Fascism’s notion of the common good is directed only to those belonging to the national body, a body that becomes narrower and narrower through a process of exclusion of various groups, the weak, the vulnerable, the minorities, the elderly, the refugees, etc.

As Wendy Brown (2018) points out when Thatcher’s slogan that “society does not exist” becomes common sense it masks injustices and inequalities generated by socio-political processes and transfers all responsibility to the individual. A neoliberal assault on social and economic justice in the name of freedom and traditional moral norms (Brown, 2019, p. 44). The suffering generated by what Brown terms the *dismantling of the social* erodes any forms of solidarity and produces new forms of politicizing based on attacking the powerless, instead of the powerful. Then what type of nationalism interrelates to this neoliberal shift from democratic citizenship engagement towards individualistic moralizing? As Brown points out a shift in the perception of the nation from space of democratic citizenship to space of ownership based on market logic. That shift in perception has two aspects: one of the State as a business whose function is to make savvy deals; and another of a home that has to be secured from a dangerous world (34). The first aspect pertains more to the continuation of the US’s imperial policies of militarization of the Balkans (Bjelic, 2018), exhibited in the actions of Trump’s administration, which has a direct impact on peripheral EU members like Bulgaria (treating the militarization process as a business deal). The second aspect, however, is visible both in the core and periphery of the Global North. It permits a process of aggressive exclusion of “enemies” based on a paranoid imaginary. Therefore, nationalism under neoliberalism is a marketized nationalism that understands the nation not as democratic citizenship, but as exclusive homeownership that has to be protected. The impoverished, especially if they are minorities, or other “foreign invaders of the national body” are viewed as lazy, free loaders, parasites, etc. (Grygorova, 2016).

For example, the perception of the nation as an exclusive home invaded by inside and outside “enemies” can be seen in 2010 poster campaign of Hungary’s xenophobic and anti-

Semitic nationalists, Jobbik (Erös, 2014, pp. 23-39). Ferenc Erös has focused on two of Jobbik's campaign posters in his analysis. One declares that "Budapest is the capital of the Hungarians" and the other asks, "Do you really want to stop parasitism?" and then explains – "If yes, then you are Jobbik voter." In the first instance we have an exclusionary depiction of the capital to those who belong to it – "Hungarians." Brown(2018) has shown the very same mechanism with Le Pen's "France for the French" campaign, where the nationalist leader declares "We are the owners of our country" (24). Jobbik's second poster directly draws on Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda, while only the image has changed to that of a mosquito and the anti-Semitism is not directly declared, the connotation is clear – inside parasites are eroding the nation. It is no wonder that the American Jewish speculator (he was actively involved during financial crashes, including the Bulgarian hyperinflation) and philanthropist, born in Hungary, has become the favorite straw man not only for Jobbik but for nationalists in Eastern Europe. I situate the rise of fascistic nationalism in Bulgaria in relation to neoliberalism dismantling of the social goods and the shift in perception of the nation discussed in Brown (2018, pp. 24-34).

In recent years we are witnessing numerous examples of forms of populist mobilizations in Bulgaria that can be characterized as fascist. The waves of right-wing extremism that are flooding Europe have become stronger after the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent onslaught of austerity programs in the EU. Bulgarians' anger provoked by the outcomes of the country's transformation to a capitalist socio-economic, political and cultural system, often finds misplaced targets in minorities and other "threats" of the nationalist fantasy. In 2011 violence erupted in the village of Katunitsa that spread into nationwide protests in the major cities. The events were labelled in Bulgarian and Western media as "anti-Roma riots" and were condemned by the UN.¹¹⁹ The case of Katunitsa needs to be analysed in the context of the increased intolerance towards Roma people and the growing popularity of nationalist projects, such as *Ataka* (Ataka). Being at the centre of the Katunitsa riots, *Ataka* capitalized on the fear of the powerful and influential *Movement of Rights and Freedoms* (DPS), known as the Turkish and Roma Party, and gained major electoral success in 2013. The most recent case of violent anti-Roma outbursts happened at the end of 2018 at the village of Voyvodinovo, where attacks on the Roma community were encouraged by military officials and the minister of defense himself (Draganov, 2019). This was followed by a process of systematic destruction of Roma houses, under the pretext of their "illegal building".

During social unrests in the winter of 2013, provoked by high electricity and gas bills, *Ataka* and other nationalist projects relied on populist (nationalization of monopolistic foreign energy companies) and anti-Roma/anti-Turkish/anti-refugee rhetoric to mobilize support.¹²⁰ The trend towards growing nationalist sentiments resulted in the formation of the current government – a coalition between the conservative *Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria* (GERB) and *United Patriots* (Obedineni Patrioti, OP) – a nationalist alliance consisting of *Ataka*, *Inner Macedonian Revolutionary Organization* (IMRO) and *National Front for the Salvation of*

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https://www.dnevnik.bg/evropa/prava_v_es/2011/10/04/1168522_oon_osudi_antiromskite_demonstracii_v_bulgarii/

¹²⁰ Roma are depicted in media and political discourse as those living on the back of tax-paying Bulgarians. See for example Vania Grigorova's research on the mechanisms of instigating confrontation between the lower classes based on ethnic stereotypes (2016).

Bulgaria (NFSB). The current coalition of nationalist parties in the Bulgarian parliament constitutes an interesting concoction of interests.

Ataka has articulated a rhetoric very close to that of Bulgarian fascist movements from the interwar period. Even the name of the party itself is equivalent to the newspaper of the short-lived *National Socialist Bulgarian Workers Party* that was modelled after Hitler's *NSDAP*. *Ataka*'s political and media discourse combines various aspects of the narratives of xenophobic nationalist organizations of the 1920s and 30s, more or less influenced by and sympathetic to Italian fascism and German Nazism. Characteristic are the strong anti-communist and anti-Roma sentiments, combined with calls for the nationalization of resource extraction and utility sectors. The leader, Volen Siderov uses an anti-colonial rhetoric mixed with conspiratorial narratives, with pronounced anti-Semitic tones, as evident in *Ataka*'s 2013 election manifesto, the "Siderov plan." In the early 2000s when *Ataka* emerged on the political scene, it was the only major political party to demand the nationalization of privatized public and state resources and enterprises and the annulment of concessions to foreign resource extraction companies. Nevertheless, once in power as part of the coalition, all of these demands were quickly forgotten.

The recently resigned, after more than half a year of protests, Vice Prime Minister, Valeri Simeonov, formerly from *Ataka*, is the founder of the *National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria* (NFSB). Prior to this, Simeonov (with two other businessmen) founded SKAT cable network, which functioned as *Ataka*'s official media channel until 2009. SKAT's programs have been a combination of racist, xenophobic, anti-Roma, anti-Muslim, and anti-communist narratives, popularizing the theory of neo-Ottomanism, as well as various other conspiracy theories. In 2017 Simeonov, who is openly racist and xenophobic (Draganov, 2017), took the position of head of the *Bulgarian Council of Ethnic Minority Integration*.

Since its formation in 1990 *IMRO*, as the ancestor of a terrorist organization with the same name, has remained a right-wing nationalist party. During the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, it led a virulent anti-Serbian campaign in support of the then Prime Minister Ivan Kostov's decision to give NATO permission to use Bulgaria's airspace. In addition to being personally responsible for inciting anti-Roma hatred and encouraging violence in Voyvodinovo, the current Minister of Defence, *IMRO*'s leader Krassimir Karakachanov, was recently accused of being part of a scheme trading with Bulgarian passports. As a member of the European Parliament, *IMRO*'s Angel Dzhambazki voted against the criminalization of fascist and neo-Nazi parties. Similarly to *Ataka*, *IMRO* employs strong anti-communist and anti-Roma rhetoric.

While *United Patriots* have continued to position themselves as catering to the national interest, they have become one of the key players in the ongoing implementation of neoliberal policies, such as the privatization of public and natural resources. The nationalists' disdain for social programs that ameliorate the conditions of those vulnerable and in need was recently demonstrated by Valeri Simeonov. Simeonov showed his contempt for the mothers of children with disabilities, calling them "A few shrivelled women, whose children are probably not sick."¹²¹

In fact, the surge to positions of power of nationalist parties, not only in Bulgaria but throughout Europe shows that while presenting themselves as an alternative to neoliberalism,

¹²¹ <https://www.dnes.bg/stranata/2018/10/22/kreslivi-jeni-a-decata-im-uj-bolni-kolko-mogat-da-ponesat-maikite.391196>

they are ready to implement neoliberal policies even more fiercely than centrist governments. Alfredo Saad Filho and Ben Fine (2018) argue that the rise to power of various nationalist formations marks the shift towards authoritarian neoliberalism, characterized by disregard for keeping its democratic façade and the increased implementation of coercive mechanisms of control. Authoritarian neoliberalism is characterized by ascend to power of extreme right formations, that become conductors of harsh neoliberal policies, coupled with a "selective" form of nationalism expressed in racist and xenophobic policies that exclude different groups. The authors conclude that, in spite of the fascist forms, unlike the 30th-century fascism that arises in the context of the Keynesian economic model of the welfare state as an attack on strong left politics, "The new form of authoritarianism is typically neoliberal: the rage of the "losers" of neoliberalism, in the conditions of abdicated democracy, and a state apparatus that has lost legitimacy as a potential carrier of economic prosperity and social cohesion "(19). A recent example is the so-called "slave law" in Hungary under the nationalist regime of Viktor Orbán. The law increased the overtime labour employers can demand from their workers from 250 to 400 hours a year.¹²²

The case of the Bulgarian *United Patriot*'s neoliberal agenda (while posturing as patriots defending the nation-state) also serves as an example of this shift. Here, I have shown the emergence and consolidation of fascist tendencies in recent dynamics in Bulgarian political movements and key politicians and their establishment and promotion into governmental or otherwise powerful positions.

5. Filling the Vacuum

The rise of right-wing populism in Bulgaria is a form of unrecognized class anger interrelated to the dissonance between the official hegemonic liberal anti-communist framework and people's discontent with their existence in a peripheral capitalist state. Anti-communism dominates civil society institutions and organizations, demonizes left politics and ideals, but cannot quell the anger and discontent of many over their everyday existence. Bulgaria seems to be caught in the trap where the "old" that declares itself "new" refuses to die producing various morbid symptoms. Not surprisingly for Gramsci fascism is the passive revolution of the 20th century and in its objective was not too different from that of liberalism – he interpreted both as political strategies for modernization of ruling elites, implemented to avoid revolution and mass participation of the people in a struggle that changes social relations. Besides exposing how this passive revolution has played out in the context of postsocialist Bulgaria, this contribution has also pointed towards a more global perspective, following Quijano, on the 'colonial' nature of neoliberal capitalism and Western-dominated geopolitics, as they made their way into the country. In a state that has become peripheral to the global capitalist order the anger generated by the conditions of extreme social inequality is misdirected toward various treacherous "others" and the intellectual elite should be held responsible for this misdirection. The mantra of the free market and democracy was directly imported to the former Eastern bloc as part of the hegemonic political economic project with its expansion of the mode of flexible accumulation. Yet, after the disastrous transformation from state socialism to capitalism, Bulgaria, as other countries in

¹²² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46651428>

Eastern Europe, was practically relegated from the Second (the socialist bloc) to the Third World. This becomes clear if one looks at the structure of deindustrialized Bulgarian economy with its dire consequences for the majority of workers (see Vassilev, 2003; Tsoneva, Medarov, Nikolova, 2018; Traykov, 2018). It is not surprising that the more severe the current socio-economic crisis, the more intense the search for culprits in the past becomes, as was shown with the case of *Sofia Platform* Foundation. The Bulgarian liberal elite, strictly modelled on its Western counterparts, fails to see the crisis within the structure of capitalism itself and continues its perpetual search for evildoers from the past – bad communists that taught Bulgarians to rely on the state, instead of on themselves. The ongoing production of anti-communist narratives is part of a larger ideological constellation with the objective to sustain Bulgaria's peripheral position inside the global neoliberal order. The ongoing hegemony by default of the neoliberal politico-economic project has dire political consequences within Bulgaria with the rise of fascist and xenophobic movements and sentiments. Quijano's analysis of the geopolitical significance of the coloniality of power provides a larger context to Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and passive revolution that help us understand why in times of severe crisis of capitalism, once the left is marginalized or defeated the vacuum is filled by the rise of fascism.

Conclusion

In the last decade a series of studies¹²³ have examined Europe's right wing shift. However, with a few exceptions,¹²⁴ Bulgaria is rarely the focus of analysis. My goal is to point to the very conjecture of a shift from liberal democracy toward right wing authoritarian tendencies that brings about the intensification of attacks on the socialist past, attacking any attempts for left political organizing in the present. I have countered the comparisons between communism and fascism and lately antifascism to fascism; arguing instead for a counter-approach. This dissertation is a contribution to the study of capitalism's tendencies to resolve its own self-generated crises by suppressing political democracy. To this end I have focused on the case of Bulgaria. The study unveils the mechanisms of power that such a suppression of political democracy requires for an understanding of the transformation of state and society, within a peripheral region of the Global North.

The study's objective was to make visible the interconnectedness between production of ideas and power relations. This dissertation maps the process of neoliberalisation in Bulgaria in relation to the production and function of anti-communism. The anti-communist ideological constellation operates as a mechanism to sustain neoliberal regimes and power relations. The dissertation focused on the context in which anti-communism occurred in post-socialist Bulgaria and its role in the formation of a neoliberal capitalist state. I pointed out how the anti-communism of (neo)liberal intellectuals and scholars drove them to reintroduce figures of the fascist past. I also looked at the role of the state, implementing legislation that criminalizes the past of socialism; the role of foundations and think tanks as Althusserian *ISAs* that function as venues of ideological production, externalizing material practices of ideology: ritualizing and commemorating anti-communism and a new forms of nationalism, devoid of the class struggle narrative. My interest is in tracing how the production of anti-communism, and stemming from it a particular form of nationalism, masks relations of social inequality, especially new forms of class division. The production of anti-communism demonizes left politics and therefore the notion that workers' political organizing is an efficient strategy to fight exploitation and growing inequalities of neoliberalism

Since my goal was to map the process of passive revolution and the mechanisms to establish and preserve the fragile hegemony in the context of neoliberalisation, this dissertation touched on several key questions that opened up areas for discussion and future research.

Examination of the content of anti-communism. Anti-communism as a discourse in Bulgaria was not examined in detail in this dissertation. Close research of the anti-communist narratives, looking at other cultural texts in film, fiction, memoirs and other cultural products can be undertaken in a future project. In the past decade ISAs like the *Institute for Research of the Recent Past (IRRP)* have produced a large number of works following the totalitarian framework. Anti-communist narratives are produced on regular basis in *Istoria.bg*, a program on

¹²³ For example: (Auestad, 2014; Camus & Lebourg, 2017; Deland et al., 2014; Wodak, 2015; Wodak & Richardson, 2012); for an approach

¹²⁴ For example Martin Marinos' important article on the anti-neoliberal neoliberalism of *Ataka* (Marinos, 2015) and Georgi Medarov's dissertation *From Liberalism to Authoritarianism* (2017) in Bulgarian language. Medarov takes Laclau and Mouffe's discursive approach in his analysis of political rhetoric.

Bulgarian National Television (BNT). *Istoria.bg* intends to popularise Bulgarian history; the program invites discussion with Bulgarian historians from key academic institutions. Those are examples of venues of research with detailed content analysis of anti-communism as a discourse. This project opens up the question of comparative analysis of the anti-communism discourse within states and regions. Another research question pertains to comparative content analysis of the production of Bulgarian anti-communist discourses.

Ideological constellations of anti-communism, nationalism and reappearance of proto-fascism. Anti-communism promotes a form of nationalism that romanticizes the monarchist past. The trope of national unification is re-established, promoting old jingoistic narratives of irredentist nationalism going back to the period between the two world wars. This project, then, has mapped the re-emergence of nationalism and anti-communism in the context of neoliberal political economy. Further research on anti-communist nationalism as a mechanism to stifle the formation of class politics, would require identifying political parties, political movements and grass roots organising on the far right, as well as research of marginalised anti-fascist activists.

For examples, the contingents surrounding the commemoration of rehabilitated fascist General Lukov,¹²⁵ with the so called *Lukov March*, opens up continuing research needs on proto-fascist, neo-Nazi groups in Bulgaria today and their relationship to the political establishment. Exploring the contradictions and antagonisms within the left among questions of organising, strategies and tactics, the prevalence of identity politics over class politics, the anti-communism of anarchist groups, etc. could shed light on the problems that the really existing left faces by declaring a political project alternative to the *Bulgarian Socialists (BSP)*.¹²⁶

Institutionalisation of nationalist anti-communism within the EU. Reaffirming anti-communism through invention of traditions: building of monuments of victims of communism; reinstalling old nationalist symbols, such as monuments built during authoritarian military regimes is an ongoing process in Eastern Europe. Anti-communism negates the fascist past and starts a process of rehabilitation and romanticizing of fascism. Anti-communism, I have pointed out, opens up spaces for re-evaluating and negating the fascist past of various figures in current political life, presenting themselves as patriots against Communism in memoirs and the media. The role of European Parliament and EU institutions should be researched in detail. What is the process of demonizing socialism through EU institutions, equating the socialist experience with Nazism and fascism under the totalitarian framework? How was a new bloc formed in the EU by Eastern European political figures that pushed anti-communist narratives?

Neocolonialism and uneven development. Bulgarian social and economic conditions, the functioning of state bureaucracy and institutions and policy making lends itself to a decolonial approach to post-socialist capitalism. The index of inequality is higher than any other country within the EU. The past thirty years of Bulgarian capitalism led to the rise of social inequality of

¹²⁵ Discussed in chapter two of this dissertation. For more detailed analysis of Lukov March see (Поппетров, 2017)

¹²⁶ As heirs of the *Bulgarian Communist Party*, *BSP* has been marred with its "totalitarian" past, they have also been a major component in the formation of the polyarchic political system in Bulgaria. *BSP* has taken the left side of the political spectrum, but has undergone similar tendencies to the DP in the US and Labour in the UK (lacking leaders like Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn). Today it is a pro-business political establishment, dependent on the financial and economic oligarchy.

more than 100 percent. In Bulgaria today access to affordable healthcare, energy, water and consumption of nutritious and healthy food is a privilege for many. How is this social inequality of uneven development sustained? I have shown that it is sustained by mechanisms to prevent political organizing around working class demands. Research is needed on the division within the working class and a small layer of middle and upper middle classes. The so-called *IT* and call centre middle class denies its precarious position as an outsourced workforce and feels superior to those with lower wages within the service sectors.

Neoliberalism shifts the explanation of poverty from structural socio-economic issues to that of culture, putting the blame on the individual. As already discussed, in the Southern Question, Gramsci analyses the ideological mechanisms employed in relation to the justification of socio-economic uneven development. He shows how the intellectuals of North Italy “explain” the poverty of the South with “personal trends” and “cultural characteristics.” It is not the political economy of the North’s extraction of resources from the South that accounts for the impoverishment of the people, but their laziness. Gramsci understood the ideological struggle precisely as fighting such a narrative and organizing class politics. In the Bulgarian context, the self-identified *clever and beautiful* serves a similar ideological role. The so-called *clever and beautiful* consist of the entrepreneurial class, the intellectual strata of the NGOs and think tanks, and foundations, young professionals and the restitution class that disassociated itself from the “vulgar protest of those who can’t pay their bills.”

Disappearance of class from the discourse of Bulgarian nationalism. Bulgarian scholars of nationalism have argued that the rise of current nationalism should be traced back to the turn towards nationalism in the 1960s (Todorova, 1995, Elenkov, 2008; Daskalov, 2011). In his detailed work on cultural production during late socialism in Bulgaria (following the totalitarian model approach), Ivan Elenkov traces Bulgarian nationalism in the 1960s back to the period between the two world wars, characterized by the influence of fascism and National Socialism. He rightly points out that from the 1960s on, there was a process of rehabilitation of intellectual figures associated with the irredentist nationalist ideology of the pre-socialist period. Such is the case with Fanny Popova-Mutafova, an author known for her praise of fascism and aggrandizing depictions of Bulgarian medieval rulers.

From 1960s on, the two key vectors of Bulgarian irredentist nationalism are the Macedonian question and anti-Turkish/anti-Islam propaganda and its implications for the Muslim minorities (Marinov, 2012). The rehabilitation of *IMRO* started in the 1980s and is related to the nationalist course of the Bulgarian state towards Macedonia. This rehabilitation is a strategic manoeuvre in the confrontation between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia about the ethnic roots of the Macedonian people. I have shown how this opens up the road toward rehabilitation of fascist collaborators like the leader of *IMRO* Ivan Mikhailov, who had close ties with Hitler.

As Chavdar Marinov points out in the name of the “national interest,” the Bulgarian communist secret service tried to build an alliance with clearly anti-communist émigré organizations of right wing exiles, such as Ivan Mikhailov’s *Macedonian Patriotic Organization* in the US and Canada. In a sense, the legacy of Zhivkov’s revisionism toward the role of *IMRO*, dismissing its role in the repression and killing of the left between the wars, is what made the current *IMRO* possible. Krasimir Karakachanov, *IMRO*’s current leader in the Ministry of Defence was a State Security informer, whose role was to inform “anti-Bulgarian attitudes” within Macedonian organizations inside Bulgaria. Today it could be shown that the xenophobic

nationalism of *IMRO*, serves US geopolitical interests. It is not surprising that Karakachanov is a key figure that enables the transformation of this Balkan state into what Dušan Bijelić (2018) defines as a zone of US militarization.

Yet, what has been usually left out of discussions of current Bulgarian nationalism is the disappearance of the theme of class struggle that formed and underscores the content of the nationalist discourse. Todor Zhivkov's speech in commemoration of the 1300th *Anniversary of Bulgarian state* in 1981 is an interesting example. Even if simply formulaic, the presence of key words such as "perpetual struggle of our people against foreign and domestic plunderers and oppressors, for rights, freedom...social progress"; "struggle of the working class against capitalism"; "protest movements"; "continuous struggle for freedom and independence" (Todorova, 1995, pp.62-65) at the apogee of Bulgarian nationalism during the socialist state, demands inquiry into those who claim continuity of Bulgarian nationalism, without acknowledging changes. Zhivkov's speech is significant because of the intersectional aspect of the struggle both against class oppression and the oppression of foreign plunderers. This understanding of national identity is in contrast to the current propagation of jingoistic nationalism in the media, political talking points and the history textbooks. Further research on the anti-fascist struggle as the key characteristic of the nationalist discourse is needed. What is the significance of the disappearance of class from the narrative of nationalism?

Negating class politics Socialist nationalism and neoliberal nationalism. My approach to nationalism stems from Marx's understanding that the objective of class struggle and liberation of oppressed nations are expressly interconnected. Therefore, contrary to liberal views of nationalism as virulent expression of exclusiveness, I am concerned with particular forms that nationalism takes. Is it the nationalism of the ruling classes or is it national struggles against foreign oppression and domination? In his 1848 *Speech on the Question of Free Trade*, Karl Marx discusses international dependence in relation to class exploitation: "Free Traders cannot understand how one nation can grow rich at the expense of another...[and] refuse to understand how at the same country one class can enrich itself at the expense of another (Marx and Engels Vol.6, 1976, pp. 464-465). Therefore, in order to understand oppression within the nation, one has to look at oppression on a global level. In this stage of late capitalism, when TNCs have more power than nations, the notion of the interrelation between class struggle and national struggle is very relevant.

Marx understood class struggle in relation to the division of labour on a global scale. Colonial exploitation or foreign domination is linked to the social aspect of national struggles for liberation. When discussing Ireland, Marx (Marx and Engels Vol. 43, 1988) defines the land question as the exclusive form of the social question, a question of existence of the Irish people, a "question of life and death" (1988, p. 474). In other words, the struggle over land is a struggle of social existence; this is the form that class struggle takes. This is so because the English upper classes (both aristocracy and bourgeoisie) had relegated Ireland into a cheap resource for animal products, where the Irish people became an unneeded surplus population. Losurdo (2016) argues that, for Marx, class struggle took many shapes and forms, and in cases like Ireland or India where peoples are under direct foreign oppression, class and anti-colonial national liberation struggles could interrelate.

On such grounds Lenin became an advocate of the right to secession of Poland and Ukraine from the Russian empire. The right to self-determination of all nations is fundamental

in Lenin's understanding of successful international proletarian movement: "the recognition of the right to self-determination implies the maximum of democracy and the minimum of nationalism" (Lenin, 1970, pp. 25). The rights of national minorities within the boundaries of a nation-state is another key element in Lenin's understanding of Marxism.

Insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, in favour, for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression. But insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation stands for its own bourgeoisie nationalism, we stand against. We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressor nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation (Lenin, 1970, p. 20).

According to Yannis Sygkelos, Lenin introduced three theoretical innovations: the right of nations to self-determination, the anti-imperialist idea and the distinction between oppressive and oppressed nations (2011, p. 14). Thus, Lenin writes about Russia's dependence on "imperialist finance capital" (1970, p. 15) and "the right to free political separation from the oppressed nation" (1970, p. 33). Such an understanding of national liberation and class struggle is very different from the usual accusations of economic determinism. Lenin is aware of the need for the political independence of nations, but is critical of nationalist courses of movements of independence that oppress their own minorities. We can read this within Ishay Landa's (2010) differentiation of political liberalism (democracy) and economic liberalism (capitalist economy). Therefore, Lenin advocates supporting the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation, but only its democratic tendencies. He is uncompromising on the question of economic liberalism, warning of the tendency of the "bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation" to get into "reactionary agreements with the bourgeoisie of the dominant nation" (1970, p. 34). Therefore, Lenin understood as "the most difficult and most important task" the unity within the class struggle of the workers of the oppressor with the workers of the oppressed nations (1970, p. 36). The analysis extends itself towards questions of class politics inside a state that is within a supranational political-economic structure like the EU. It also opens up questions for research of global solidarity movements and class organising beyond the confines of the state.

Marx's notion of the interrelation between class struggle and national liberation is taken up and further developed by revolutionary thinkers and political leaders like Lenin, Gramsci and Dimitrov. Lenin supported Irish, Polish and Finish movements for national liberation, pointing to the importance of international support for national struggles against oppression, Gramsci's concept of the subaltern does not exclude the importance of the national culture of the oppressed classes within the state and from outside forces. Drawing on Lenin, Dimitrov's notion of the anti-fascist *United Front* includes not only the Left in alliance with the Communist Party, but also bourgeois parties as well, in the name of overcoming the imperialism of the Nazis.

The key to my approach has been my examination of the question of the relationship of current nationalist discourses in Bulgaria to forms of nationalism; in other words, what type of nationalism is being mobilized?

There are opportunities beyond this dissertation to consider whether *settler colonialism and primitive accumulation*, for example Canadian settler colonialism, can serve as a parallel and current example of how social struggle takes the form of struggle for land. Indigenous scholar Glen Coulthard explains Canadian Indigenous peoples struggle over land as key to the anti-colonial movements. He examines settler colonialism as a form of dispossession with land and

resources being central to the Canadian capitalist economy. For Coulthard, the framework of primitive accumulation gives us a better understanding of the process of uprooting of Indigenous people and depriving them from their means of subsistence. The struggle over land is also a class struggle, where indigenous people become proletarianized and disciplined as wage labourers. How this occurs in the Bulgarian context would require research on the process of primitive accumulation in Bulgaria, that is specific to post-socialist states and societies, in the context of neoliberalisation.

Coulthard for example, echoes Marx's words on Ireland, when he situates class struggle within the anti-colonial efforts of Indigenous people to protect their land and way of life. In an interview for *Jacobin* magazine, Coulthard does not hesitate to call himself an anti-capitalist nationalist. Coulthard points to the anti-capitalist legacy of anti-colonial movements in the 1970s. Therefore, it is crucial that the fight to prevent building of pipelines is not framed only as an environmental issue, but as one of decolonization and sovereignty of Indigenous people. Coulthard's work on land and nationalism opens up contemporary questions about the politicized anger of the subaltern and dispossessed as a dimension of class struggle.

Such questions clearly can pertain to the plight of Romani peoples in Bulgaria, where repressive measures are used as a way to regulate the crisis of class disparity and shift misrecognised anger towards *othered* peoples. The misrecognition of class onto race pertains to interrogating an ongoing process of the social exclusion and oppression of economically dispossessed peoples like the Roma, who despite being Bulgarian citizens are suffering under the segregation of the state. Mobilizing xenophobic fear and nationalism as a mechanism to shift discontent is a mechanism of all three neoliberal regimes of Borisov. The right wing nationalist parties *IMRO* and *NFSB* and *Ataka* mobilise anger on the basis of race hatred. The discontent with Bulgarian capitalism manifests into a shifting of class anger into race hatred.

I write this conclusion at the midst of the Covid 19 pandemic, Capitalism as a social and economic system has once again proven that in times of crisis its biggest enemy is political democracy. While billions are self-imprisoned at home, unable to organise, gather and protest, the US senate votes out a corporate bailout that surpasses the 2008 bailouts and puts a tremendous burden on working people as well as mustering attacks on traditional social security (Johnson, 2020). Turning to Bulgaria in the meantime, *IMRO*, the key partner of *GERB* in the current Borisov regime, proposes harsher measures for segregating the Romani people (Nikolov, 2020). At the same time, Borisov refuses to implement even modest social policies to ameliorate poor workers, who are the majority in Bulgaria. The Covid 19 pandemic healthcare crisis is another proof of the disastrous results that privatised healthcare has brought and will continue to bring, when millions have lost their jobs and therefore healthcare insurance in the manner of days (Conley, 2020). Yet, we see demands for universal healthcare that are now louder and louder can be disregarded by neoliberal elites and that profits can be prioritized over the lives of the disposable people (the working poor and the dispossessed) in the country that understands itself as the "leader of the free world", the US – but especially in peripheral states like Bulgaria.

This dissertation contributes to debates and discussions about the operations and mechanisms of political and economic powers that subvert real democratic processes — democracy understood as the massive participation of citizens in the process of decision making about the socio-economic conditions they live in. The study of Bulgaria as an exemplary problem is intended for audiences in other neoliberal nations as a warning about how a one-

dimensional understanding of the complex and contradictory past of socialism and its legacy lends itself to abuse of power and the reappearance of what we can see, in the light of the theoretical conclusions I have posed, as Gramscian morbid symptoms of fascism in a new political-economic context of post-socialist demoralisation and the demonization of left class politics.

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