

Communism is wrong

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Repetition demands the new. [...] Whatever, in repetition, is varied, modulated, is merely alienation of its meaning. The adult, and even the more advanced child, demands something new in his activities, in his games. But this 'sliding-away' (glissement) conceals what is the true secret of the ludic, namely, the most radical diversity constituted by repetition in itself.

J. Lacan¹

The post-socialist predicament is a paranoid one: more than 20 years after 1989, we live in a political environment of extreme anti-communism with no tangible "communist threat" around that can be accused to have triggered it. Unless such a threat is imagined. As Derrida² has shown, Communism died in 1989 but it later returned as a specter haunting anti-communists. This article takes its cue from Derrida's observation and discusses some of the forms spectral communism has assumed in recent times.³ It does so in respect to the latest waves of anti-governmental protests in Bulgaria.

I engage with the question of how can we extricate ourselves from our post-socialist ideological deadlock of living in perennial capitalist crises without the hope for a communist revolution. Paradoxically, the way out of our ideological predicament of vitriolic anti-communism without communists passes through and in anti-communism itself, yet in no way does this endanger our fidelity to the communist idea. However, the analysis is neither ideologiekritik nor the deconstructionist operation of immanent critique; as I will show, our task is not the deconstruction of the new anti-communism, but attentive cultivation of its central tropes.

In that respect, our method here resembles simple extraction: what kind of understanding of communism can we extrapolate from the current anti-communist ideological dynamics, and what role can anti-communists possibly play in the constitution of emancipatory politics? I will answer these questions in reverse order according to the level of complexity. Naturally, in the absence of a strong Left after 1989, the situation of "anti-communism without communists" is populated by anti-communists who therefore happen to be the only discursive source

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1 Lacan, 2004, p. 61

2 Derrida, 2012

3 This essay is immensely indebted to my comrades Madlen Nikolova and Georgi Medarov. The essay's problematique is also tackled in Tsoneva, Nikolova and Medarov (forthcoming).

of any kind of understanding of communism whatsoever. Even though this is a negatively charged understanding, to put it mildly, it is crucial to remember the lesson of Freud that the unconscious knows no negation.⁴ That is to say, the very fact that someone speaks about communism regardless of the type of valuation produces communism; or rather, we can say with Derrida, it invokes the specter of communism even if it is to exorcise it after.⁵ The anti-communism of today, however, is not a static homogeneous whole but a complex body of ideas liable to subtle semantic shifts in its historical unfolding. Since the discursive production of communism is highly dependent on anti-communist intellectuals, I will show how some of these shifts attest to changes in the ideological environment which present the Left with vital opportunities to intervene and push the discourse in an ever more radical direction.

Our method is inspired to some extent by the Derridian notion of iterability.⁶ However, the Derridian notion presupposes radical openness and context-independence, in the sense that repetition of the (self)same sign, free of any determination stemming from context and conditions, leads to endless proliferation of meaning(s). While I certainly endorse the idea of change through repetition of the same, in our case, thinking in terms of redoubling is more apposite. The 1990s anti-communist protest rhetoric was repeated verbatim in 2013, yet this precise redoubling or coiling of the discourse within itself led to a “mutation”, or the apparition of a really radical utopian dimension within the anti-communist narrative. We rely here on a weak teleology: iterability does not just alter in the abstract; redoubling enables the intrusion of the Real. Therefore, iterability obeys what I call the “appearance-apparition” nexus. It operates by quilting the analysis on the surface or “epidermal” level of the discourses under scrutiny, and forfeits the urge to look for “deep meaning” that allegedly informs them. The apparition is preceded by the moment of repetition and the bouncing back of the image from the reflecting surface. This is the condition that enables the apparition (of communism) to intrude. As Lacan says, repetition constitutes “the most radical diversity.”⁷ My aim is to show how today’s revival and repetition of 1990s anti-communism changed its meaning and how we can profit from

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4 Freud, 2005

5 *ibid.*

6 Derrida, 2001

7 Lacan, 2004, p. 61

the new meaning.

Topographically speaking, our movement is neither as in ideologiekritik from the surface to the deeper cause, nor archaeological reconstruction, but upwardly moving eschatological reflection: from the surface up to the apparition itself. This means that our position vis-à-vis contemporary anti-communism is paradoxical: since the Left has occupied an apologetic position (“we are sorry for Stalinism...”) and busies itself with politics of recognition and consensus-building. We can suddenly rely on the Right which, in the very act of passionate negation of communism, articulates a much more radical idea thereof than the Left.

This essay is structured in the following way: I begin by familiarizing the reader with the wave of anti-governmental protests that erupted in Bulgaria in 2013. The discursive production of (anti)communism happens in times of extreme political turbulence and plays a crucial role in the ideological legitimation of the protests. Then I proceed with an historical outline of the terms of the debate after 1989 in order to compare the different ideas of communism which structure the narrativization of the post-socialist transition. To this end, I draw on examples from past, and on recent publications in the mass media. Finally, I will discuss the position of the left with regards these developments and assess its chances for seizing on the opportunities opened by the ideological shifts in contemporary anti-communism. (The implication is that we need to abandon the politics of recognition and fully assume the monstrosity of communism.)

The main vector of difference within the anti-communist narrative is temporality. In other words, the semantic difference is activated with respect to the temporal location of the “target” of the anti-communist rhetoric. For instance, the anti-communism directed at the empirical Socialist regime was the type of anti-communism that dominated in the 1990s and early 2000s. In short, this is an anti-communism directed at the past. The prevailing anti-communism of today, however, seems to be directed at the present. As such, it harbors a doubly subversive potential: when its links to the empirical, socialism get much looser, and the space for free fantasy looms larger. Further, this anti-communism delegitimizes the capitalist status quo while simultaneously relying on a fantasmatic (and fantastic!) notion of communism, which finally begins to autonomize itself from the catastrophic failures of actually existing socialism. Before I discuss this issue, a brief familiarization with the protests is in order.

The ongoing Bulgarian Spring

The year of 2013 witnessed the longest anti-governmental mobilizations of recent history. Firstly, they happened in February over abnormally high electricity bills (sometimes exceeding people's disposable income!). The protesters blamed the privatized energy distribution companies for the price hikes and demanded their nationalization, among other things. Thousands of people marched in every Bulgarian city resulting (unsurprisingly) not in nationalization but in a surprising government resignation. The interim elections were won once again by the ex-ruling party, however, it could not form a government coalition so the president gave the mandate to the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP: socialist only in name, as they were responsible for the introduction of the flat tax, delegated budgets and other extreme anti-labour policies).

The BSP formed a government with the liberal Rights and Liberties Movement (DPS, informally known as the party representing Bulgaria's sizable Turkish minority) and their coalition was secured with the vote of the leader of the extreme-right ATAKA party. The new prime minister proposed an infamous media mogul called Delyan Peevski to be the chief of the national security agency (DANS), and this sparked an immense sense of moral indignation among the Bulgarians, expressed in daily protests that have recently entered their sixth month. The appointment was taken as the ultimate proof that in Bulgaria, mafia and politicians are indistinguishable and the latter serve only the interests of the former. People organized very quickly, and the government repealed the decision for the appointment within a few days. Nevertheless, the protests continued. This time around, however, it was emphatically reiterated that this protest, unlike the winter one, is not for bills and everyday trivialities but for morality in politics and Europeanization. Some of the language the protesters use to express their dissatisfaction with the government is anti-Turkish (because Peevski is a member of the Turkish-minority Rights and Liberties Movement - DPS) and virulently anti-communist, reviving the old anti-communist clichés from the 1990s.

Despite the fact the demand for the removal of Peevski as a security chief was met, the protesters say they will not stop until the government itself resigns because it has zero credibility after such an arrogant appointment. This central demand has been augmented with calls for "European normality," "authentic experts," "transparency and morality in politics" and similar slogans. EU and Bulgarian flags dot the "skyline" of the daily protests. The pro-EU sentiment is so strong that when the European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship

Viviane Reding visited Bulgaria apropos the political crisis, protesters flaunted a banner saying that they choose her as a Prime Minister, presenting themselves as voluntarily willing to submit to European colonization, as it were.

As if to amplify the urgency of the “moral crisis,” people organized various mock burials, church masses, enacted various impersonations of the government coalition and produced innumerable collages. Because of the surge of creativity surrounding the protest, some of the liberal media built an image of it as the protest of the moral, creative, pro-EU, tax- and bills-paying middle-class, which wants to finally get rid of the communist remainders and ensure “European normalcy”. Furthermore, liberal activists, explicitly supported by big business, asserted cynically that the poor protested in February, while now the “middle classes” march not for material trivialities, but for “values” against the shadow elite. In so doing, they revived the 1990s reactionary anti-communism in the compelling figure of the “unproductive parasitic communist oligarch”, pulling the strings of the Transition behind the backs of the hapless and hard-working Bulgarian middle class.

People shout “red scum”, but mix it with anti-Turkish images and slogans, while the extreme-right leader who supported the coalition is oftentimes portrayed as a traitor wearing a Turkish hat. “Communists” is a common word deployed to describe the government coalition. The image of the protests is one of productive bourgeoisie that has waged a struggle against the unholy alliance of parasitic politicians and the equally parasitic rabble, supplying the former with votes⁸.

The 19th and early 20th century liberal imagination was also haunted by nightmarish representations of the working class power. Consider Pareto’s warning:

On the one side the trumpets are sounding and the troops moving to the assault; on the other, heads are bowed in submission . . . [T]he upper classes have become gutless and demoralized. They patiently endure every insult, threat and oppression; they are only too anxious to avoid irritating their enemies, kissing the hand that strikes them . . . Even when a strike is beaten they are too weakened to follow up their victory . . . ‘I will do the commons no wrong.’ The upper classes have followed this advice throughout the nineteenth century

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8 Ganev, 2013

and up to the present day. . . . In the past, the mass of the people was opposed, not so much to the principle of paying taxes as to the manner in which the principle was exercised. Today we find that it is the 'haves' who accept the principle of being squeezed Never uniting to throw off the burden, each one of them strives to push it off on to the next man; by such internal discords they make themselves even weaker as a social group (Pareto 1966:320–22).⁹

Yes, no matter how exaggerated his fears and extravagant his rendition of “bourgeois meekness,” Pareto’s worries did have a base: in the run-up to the March on Rome, working class militancy had reached frightening proportions from the point of view of the “parties of Order.” No comparable threat to order is posed today by the toiling masses in Bulgaria. Yet the liberal imagination is contracting, wild with fear brought on by the communist specters that it sees.

Anti-communism and anti-capitalism

As stated, the 6-months long (and ongoing) anti-governmental protest is explicitly justifying itself as an activity “against the communists”. What is usually meant by “communists” is the mafia-government entanglement, with some vague references to the socialist-era secret police agents who allegedly transformed their political power into the economic. The currently ruling coalition is led by an expert-technocrat (one of the architects of the 1997 currency board), who was appointed by the Bulgarian Socialist Party—the “heir” of the communist party. Therefore, it makes sense to many a protester to bracket off the transformation to the party that occurred with its explicit shedding of communist symbols, name, rhetoric and politics in 1990 and presuppose an immutable continuity between the two parties. However, even though the prime target of this discourse is the current government, it does not stop there. In fact, the entire transition to what Badiou has called “capitalo-parliamentarism” is often cast as illegitimate because the “communists have hijacked it”. One might object that this discourse serves to externalize the inherent faults of capitalism while the protesters actually support capitalist developments in the abstract. However, this observation misses the point that even though capitalism in the abstract is acceptable, every single concrete capitalist is considered an “oligarch,”

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9 In Landa, 2012, p. 52.

a “mafioso,” a “communist,” and so on. This is how anti-communism directed at the present erodes the very legitimacy of the capitalist mode of production, while simultaneously reminding us about a chief feature of communism. Namely, when anti-communists blame the incomplete and inauthentic transition to market democracy on spectral communism, we are effectively reminded that communism subverts the self-valorization of Value. It matters little that throughout history communists succeeded in replacing feudalism in Central Europe with [state] capitalism “pure and simple”.¹⁰ By contrast, historically inaccurate anti-communism stays faithful to the idea of communism despite itself.

Slavoj Žižek¹² has argued that the post-1989 anti-communism provides a language with which to critique the problems capitalism generated. Thus, all the evils attributed to communism are actually the evils of capitalism: poverty, inequality, insecurity, corruption and so on. Žižek’s observation is certainly correct, though in dismissing anti-communism as simply a misguided indirect critique of capitalism, he fails to see how the latter points beyond itself: to the truth not of capitalism but of an eventual (and eventual) communism.

How can we account for this dimension? The emergence of this potential obeys the logic of the redoubling enabling the emergence of the Real. As Zupancic demonstrates, the redoubling of fiction, exemplified in the “play-within-the-play” structure in Hamlet, far from avoiding the Real, serves as its very “trap”.¹³ There is no opposition between fiction and the Real “truth is structured like fiction.” For example, in discussing the dream of the father, Zupancic¹⁴ outlines the following sequence: the reality of the dead child, the old man keeping vigil (and failing) and the father redoubling in the dream of the latter, and precisely this redoubling enables the intrusion of the horrifying Real: the child reprimanding his father and thus forcing the father to confront the terrifying truth of a father failing as father.¹⁵

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10 Tamas, 2008

11 Postone, 2009

12 Žižek, 2009

13 Zupancič, 2003, p. 13

14 Zupancič, 2011

15 Zupancič. 2003

Going back to our discussion of anti-communism, in addition to serving as a vehicle for expressing discontent at capitalism as Žižek argues, the repetition of the 1990s anti-communism (directed at the past) for the needs of the protests to critique the present, triggered a repetition-redoubling sequence which opened up a space for a radical dimension previously not present. I will illustrate this point with a few examples.

Communism and democracy

Almost the entire post-1989 transition passed under the rigid binary opposition between communism and democracy. For example, the main anti-communist opposition grouped under the coalition of the Union of Democratic Forces. Their newspaper (published from 1990 to 2002) was entitled “Demokratsia”, meaning “democracy”. It was one of the main vehicles for propagating the irreducible opposition between communism and (liberal) democracy. Despite the fact that this newspaper is associated with the liberal-democratic right, one can find in it articles according to which it is absurd to speak about fascism in Bulgaria during the interwar period¹⁶, articles which minimize the numbers of killed and tortured anti-communists in the same period¹⁸; articles espousing colonialist-nationalist aspirations towards the Republic of Macedonia¹⁹, articles which decry the negative demographic balance and propose to help some of the “three million Bulgarians abroad” (presumably Macedonians and others) to settle in the country, instead of “Turkish migrants”²⁰, and suchlike. The newspaper is an endless source of anti-communist arguments, and as demonstrated above, even (proto)fascists ideas are acceptable in the “noble cause” of demolishing communist thinking and exposing “communist crimes.”

Paraphrasing Gary Madison²¹, in this vision democracy is everything communism was not. The Rightist universe is structured around simple binary oppositions which pit the various aspects of “communism” and

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16 Spasov, 1990

17 Kozarov, 1990a

18 Kozarov 1990b

19 Minkov, 1990

20 Dimitrov, 1991

21 Madison, 2012

“democracy” against each other: the state socialist bureaucratic and controlled society is opposed to freedom; uniformity and homogeneity to pluralism; control and administration to spontaneity; lies and inauthentic life to authenticity and truth; foreign imposition (from “Moscow”) to self-determination, etc.²² More than anything, though, communist deprivation and the shortage economy are pitted against the (alleged) plenitude of capitalist democracy (as it is imagined existing in fantastic faraway lands). For example, one of the common tropes used to describe the “actually existing socialism” is that the nomenklatura enjoyed foreign imports and luxury goods whereas the Bulgarian people had to make do with low-quality foods and constant shortages of basic household goods. The situation becomes especially acute around the Chernobyl disaster: contemporary accounts of the period constantly stress that, whereas the ordinary people ate radioactive food, the nomenklatura enjoyed radiation-free foreign imports.²³ Thus, when opponents of communism speak about their experience of it, the image that emerges is of a two-tier regime which conforms to their binary universe: a well-fed and affluent elite, supported by their masters from Moscow, enjoying at the expense of the toiling people.

In a nutshell, in the 1990s “communism” overwhelmingly meant a top-down and an elitist project imposed over and against the will of the masses. This is especially so with regards to narrativization of the 1944 communist take over, where the role of the Bulgarian Communist Party and the guerillas is downplayed and the role of the Red Army magnified. This leads many to conclude that communism was a foreign imposition no different than any Western colonial project known in history (perhaps, even worse, as many historical accounts comparing the effects of the presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria and of the Wehrmacht seem to indicate, with Germans’ allegedly “civilized, clean and non-intrusive presence” always toppling the Russians).

In July 2013, an article appeared which caused a rupture in this line of thought. This article posited implicitly a long-lost connection between communism and democracy (lost even for communists)²⁴. This article is part of a new trend of “class analysis” coming from a surprising

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22 Ibid.

23 Bakalov, 2012. (Inequality here runs not only around the axis “clean-contaminated” but also of what is the composition of the food in question: whereas the people eat simple vegetables, their rulers enjoy nutritious meat.)

24 Dainov, 2013

corner: the liberal opinion-makers. Its author, Evgenii Dainov, is a prolific public intellectual. The article in question aimed at giving a “scientific” justification of a popular 1990s and 2013 anti-communist protest slogan: “red scum/red garbage”. Dainov opens up dramatically with a scene from “Monty Python & the Holy Grail” movie: a bunch of hard-working peasants are confronted with the shining image of a man atop of a horse but they do not know who he is. The person’s impeccably clean white garment provides the only clue as to his identity. An exchange between the peasants follows, and one concludes that the clean stranger must be a king, since “he hasn’t got shit all over him.” This clear affirmation of the class optics from which the history of underwear is approached structures the entire article. For example, in discussing the medieval and early modern roots of the word “lingerie”, Dainov states that the entire set of white items that belongs to the group of lingerie was reserved for those “who did not have to immerse themselves in shit in order to get food”. The upshot is that before the advent of modernity, the aristocracy, by virtue of its privileged status position, had access to good quality underwear, something unthinkable for the poor masses. Dainov puts it bluntly: “the people who rule are those who can afford to wear white”. In Western modernity, everyone has access to underwear, but even so, it is a vehicle for reproducing class divisions. This logic obtains even in his discussion on the October Revolution: the dirty masses, rallying behind the red flag, versus the Whites²⁵, or the upper echelon of pre-revolutionary Russia. However, unlike the gradual (according to Dainov) dethroning of the aristocracy from power, which proceeded by way of cooptation of the commoners who began ruling (i.e. their adoption of white underwear and all the rest of insignia belonging to the upper class, such as spats), those countries which underwent violent revolutions, such as Russia, had also declared war on upper class lingerie.

In the first 30-40 years of their rule, the Soviet Bolsheviks openly display their disdain for all forms of underwear. They wore green jackets, sailcloth boots and footcloth. Those types of white underwear that are still in use transform into “blackwear²⁶” (to this day in Russia). The entire opulence of lingerie is reduced to the notorious tank-top whose

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25 Dainov argues that the name “Whites” is also historically linked to white lingerie.

26 This is a word game as in Bulgarian the word “underwear” is a derivative of the word for “white”.

function is merely bodily: namely, to soak up the sweat from the unwashed Bolshevik body so that the top coat can be washed as rarely as possible. It is only in the 1960s with the restoration of some rudimentary forms of civilized life, white shirts return to Soviet Russia as dress uniforms for weddings, celebrations, official visits and funerals.

In Bulgaria, with the demise of “newsboy cap” socialism, the communist nomenklatura which replaced the urban bourgeoisie as a ruling class, develops a taste for pink, light violet, gray, yellow and brick red [underwear]²⁷.

Let us not be carried away by the depths of this spontaneous Bourdieuesque analysis of taste and (class) distinctions in fashion. In addition to learning about the rough typology of the kind of underwear appealing to communists, we should be alert to the implicit background message: communists are dirty. And they are dirty because they have carried over their previous dirty habits and distaste for lingerie from the-revolutionary class position. That happens to be the position of the toiling property-less and lingerie-less masses, or the vast majority of the population.

In other words, are we not facing a transition from the idea of communism as an elitist foreign colonization to communism as belonging to the mass democratic movement of workers and peasants, at the very heart of mainstream anti-communist discourse? Such a radical re-orientation is as of yet missing from the mainstream social-democratic left which still subscribes to the “elitist-colonial” theory of communism (not to mention the totalitarian paradigm) and is torn between the urge to denounce and apologize for “Russian colonization”, and the urge to affirm “our belonging to the European family.” Therefore, we should resist the temptation to denounce Dainov’s foul language and overly offensive depiction of the “tense” relations communists had with bodily hygiene and underwear, and embrace his brave move to dissociate communism from its 1990s colonial imagery and root it firmly with the “masses” (I will return to this point in the final section of this article)

Needless to say, the temporal division between anti-communism targeting the past vs. anti-communism targeting the present is a heuristic device and in reality, there are much more gradual transitions. Not to

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27 Ibid.

mention that even the anti-communism directed at the socialist regime need not be constrained by empirical evidence or based on personal experience. For example, one of the chief grievances among nationalists with regards to the Socialist regime was related to the latter's alleged "national nihilism". This criticism operates with a monolithic understanding of socialism, which misses the important thresholds and transitions with which the regime unfolded. For example, the 1970s Bulgarian liberal economic reforms, and the concomitant nationalist-conservative turn which culminated in the ethnic cleansing of the Bulgarian Turks. Nevertheless, this critique is still useful in our analysis, which aims to show how anti-communists saw the regime as much more radical and subversive than it ever was. One version of this type of criticism emerged recently in an interview with the famous Bulgarian literary critic and theoretician, Miglena Nikolchina.

Nikolchina has recently published a book about the informal seminars occurring mostly in Sofia University in the 1980s²⁸. She argues that the creation of those seminars was instrumental in the gradual erosion of the totalitarian state, which was historically bent on suppressing all forms of independent activity. In an interview dedicated to the publication, she argues that the seminar participants were driven by "an instinct, an unconscious impulse" to group together and attend even seminars few people could understand (i.e. in mathematical logic).²⁹ However, according to her, socialism was averse to large groups of people and sought to break them down whenever they appeared.³⁰ To speak of a regime so infamous for its mass mobilizations, unions, manifestations, mass gymnastics and collectivist ethos as a regime "which hates large groups. Its history can be narrated as the history of the breakdown of such groups – of artists, of people from any unified community"³¹ can be done only at the cost of history itself.

And precisely because of the break with history, does this historically inaccurate assessment not point to an idea of communism which reclaims for itself individualism, transcending another great binary opposition structuring the post-1989 ideological space: that between the communitarian ideologies (i.e. of communism and nationalism) and

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28 Nikolchina, 2013a

29 Nikolchina in Okov, 2013

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

liberal-democratic individualism? Annihilation of the stereotypical image of the irreversible homogenizing force of communism, turning all diversity and individual particularities into a gray, uniform mass seems to be taking place. Thus, we are left with an inversion: now the liberal dissidents are those led by a herd instinct and community feeling to congregate in seminars they don't understand, whereas communism is the anti-communitarian force suspicious to uniform communities and groups.

If we can think of communism as the opposite of mindless groups whose behavior is premised on automatic and blind following of party injunctions (as most versions of the totalitarian paradigm presuppose), can we push this line of reasoning towards reclaiming individualism for the communist idea as an antidote to capitalist mass society where Value eradicates all diversity by turning in into equivalents?³²

Communism and the Event

In this section, I turn to an example of recent anti-communism from the conservative Christian Right in Bulgaria. In my opinion, it articulates one of the most radical possibilities for re-inventing communism, along the lines of the Badiouian event.

Before discussing it, I would like to open an important caveat. As stated above, the 2013 summer protests created an ideology of "protests for European normality." To this end, they drew on a common understanding of socialism which taxes it for "having derailed" Bulgaria from its "normal" development. Following our method of staying at the level of appearances and resisting the deconstructionist impulse to tear apart the word "normal," let us accept the charge: indeed, communism obeys the logic of the Benjaminian "caesura": the rupture which derails history (and capital), making it impossible for it go on as before.

Thus, one of the most influential spokespersons for the protests, Kalin Yanakiev, a philosopher, theologian and active public intellectual, wrote an article entitled "Again communists". Yanakiev begins with moralistic denunciations of the dangers of the communism his generation remembers. Despite the references to history, gradually communism is radically severed from history a way that "deliver[s] it from history in order to hand it over to the event"³³

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32 See e.g. Berman, 2009 about the importance of radical individualism in early emancipatory politics.

33 Bensaïd 2004, p. 99

The event, according to Badiou, is

a rupture in the normal order of bodies and languages as it exists for any particular situation [...]. What is important to note here is that an event is not the realization of a possibility that resides within the situation or that is dependent on the transcendental laws of the world. An event is the creation of new possibilities. It is located not merely at the level of objective possibilities but at the level of the possibility of possibilities. Another way of putting this is: with respect to a situation or a world, an event paves the way for the possibility of what from the limited perspective of the make-up of this situation or the legality of this world - is strictly impossible. If we keep in mind here that, for Lacan, the real = the impossible, the intrinsically real aspect of the event will be readily seen. We might also say that an event is the occurrence of the real as its own future possibility³⁴

A truth, argues Hallward, is “innovation in acte, singular in its location and occasion, but universal in its address and import.”³⁵ It takes place in a situation but it is not of that situation³⁶. This is precisely the contours of the anti-communist arguments of Yanakiev who marvels at the swift universalization of the hatred for communism that swept the protest. What for him was a lived historical order of experiences becomes a universal truth recognized as such even by people who have not lived communism, and for whom communism bears only abstract and not lived-empirical significance:

This means that even today, after exactly 24 years, the party of Stanishev [Bulgarian Socialist Party], was felt by people in possession of civil feeling [sic] to be “communist.” Here it matters absolutely nothing that in its proper political science meaning this party is not “communist” and its leaders are not “communists” in their basic practice since the entire political framework of the state would not allow them to become so.

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34 Badiou, 2010, p. 242-243

35 Badiou, 2001, p. ix

36 Ibid. x

People feel them this way and the entire “bouquet” of their age, value, mentality and even aesthetic diversity testifies to this.³⁷

In short, far from being in need of complex theoretical and rhetorical rationalizations, communism emerges as something completely self-evident and clear to all. This is indeed a big change from the hitherto prevailing mode of reasoning which casts communism as an “unnatural” order which was imposed at the cost of great suffering, deaths, destruction of communities, violation of “human nature”, and so on³⁸. In the anti-communist narratives, the “unnaturalness” of communism accounts for the regime’s need for “ideological propaganda” to paper over the unbridgeable gap between “human nature” and the Communist social order. This in turn makes it mandatory for anti-communist commentators to unmask, expose and denounce it incessantly.

That this is increasingly less the case can be gauged from Yanakiev's article where, far from a perplexing and unnatural force in need of vigilant unmasking, communism is “felt” by all yet it is beyond the objective knowledge of political science and divorced from any necessity for experts to explain what is it. Thus, we are dealing with a gut feeling for abnormality, immorality and emergency, which cannot be properly symbolized by the languages and knowledges of the situation. Its address is absolutely universal, even if (because?) it defies symbolization, since all generations feel and understand it, regardless of whether they have lived it or not. In that respect, together with philosophy, the truth of communism belongs to the order of what Badiou has designated as “a wager endowed with a universal bearing’, at each step coming up against either ‘a specialized and fragmentary world’ in the catastrophic form of religious, communitarian or national passion – claims according to which only a woman can understand a woman, only a homosexual can understand a homosexual, only a Jew can understand a Jew, and so on.”³⁹ The abnormality, immorality and emergency of communism thus transcends all particularity, specialisation and fragmentation of the world: it is a universal non-language that defies symbolization, yet is immediately understandable by all.

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37 Yanakiev 2013a, emphasis added

38 Velev Bojidar (n.d.)

39 Bensaid, *ibid.*

Drawing on Michel Foucault, Ina Dimitrova has developed a fascinating analysis of our curious post-socialist predicament of having constructed a monster out of communism.⁴⁰ As a monster, communism stands beyond the Law and thus prohibits standard/“normal” legal punishment. Since normal measures are rendered inapplicable apropos the radical monstrosity and exceptionality of communism, we end up “damned” to live with it for all eternity. In other words, the more communism is constructed as abnormal and monstrous, the more anti-communists rid themselves from what they desire most: a final cleansing (through so-called “lustration laws”) from the monster that keeps preventing us from achieving fullness. Dimitrova identifies two narrative strategies of handling the socialist legacy: the first emphasizes its radical abnormality which derailed us from the normal course of history, and the second (which she attributes to speakers for the regime) normalizes it by invoking historical necessities of late developing countries, etc.⁴¹ It is obvious that the second approach to the socialist regime is more reasonable and sober, and this is precisely the reason why it is less useful for us. While the historicist-normalizing ethos of this approach lays communism at rest, together with other past facts of human history, it is precisely the irreducible element of paranoia in the anti-communist narrative that keeps communism alive by constantly conjuring it up. Moreover, the negative valuation of the anti-communist narrative need not dishearten us: as it speaks from the avowed perspective of an allegedly lost pre-1944 normality, communism in this framework cannot but assume the significance of an event, or caesura which disrupts the normal course of history and resists normalization/integration into the symbolic order of capital. Or: “the real movement which abolishes⁴² the present state of things.”

In this respect, the left should resist the temptation to indulge in moral indignation at the rightists’ attempts at de-normalization, but work their way through them instead and radicalize their implications. The price is to supplement the self-referentiality of communist thinking about communism with a detour in the latest anti-communist conceptualizations of communism. Let us leave the sphere of circulation of selfsame ideas and enter the not-so-hidden, nightmarish-yet-

.....
40 Dimitrova, 2010

41 Ibid. 2010: 159

42 “abolishes” comes to replace “aufhebt” In the German version. I cannot imagine a more unfortunate translation.

promising abode of production of anti-communism. Nightmarish is not an accidental term: recall the terrifying dream of the father.

Is there any subject of the communist idea? The subject who proclaims the truth (of communism) is not the subject of the enunciated communism (here we must part ways with Badiou). The communist desire does not have a proper, communist subject as a source of its enunciation; rather, it lies precisely with those who invoke it by way of negating it and exists as an attribution on the part of the anti-communists onto an Other. In the final section I outline the (skewed) subject of communism as it emerges from the anti-communist interventions under scrutiny. Far from the secret services agent or old party apparatchik who enjoys at the expense of the masses, the new subject of communism resembles closely what Vighi has called “the excremental subject”.⁴³

The ejects of communism

Important events that rupture the monotony of the daily protests are the so-called “pro-governmental counter protests”. Several such protests have occurred since June 14: July 16, September 4th, and November 16th saw the largest mobilizations. These protests were organized by parties from the ruling coalition, with BSP and DPS bringing thousands of their supporters by bus and train from towns and villages outside Sofia. The anti-governmental protests’ usual response oscillates from a logic of extreme victimization of the people “bussed into” Sofia with no understanding of why they are there, to an outright conspiracy theory with racist overtones (i.e. “these are gypsies who have been paid some money to come here”). In both cases, the image of the counter-protester that emerges is one of a hapless and agency-less victim: a poor person without a clue. Anecdotal evidence as well as interviews with participants feeds the victimization discourse, especially whenever the journalists do happen to get honest responses from some of the people that their intention to come was not the protest but to visit Sofia.

The subject of communism is thus an eject: the non-integratable excess of the system whose appearance in public space wreaks havoc, strikes fear and even disgust. I deliberately opt for the word “eject” because it connotes systemic-automatic rather than interpersonal rejection: the ejected are those who have no place, the part of no part⁴⁴

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43 Vighi 2003, p. 102.

44 Ranciere 2001

by virtue of the normal workings of the capitalist system wherein “[a]n accumulation of wealth at one pole of society indicates an accumulation of misery and overwork at the other.”⁴⁵.

What is the effect of communism? As stated, some (but not all) of the participants in the counter protests did answer the journalists’ questioning as to what the purpose of their visit is with “I don’t care about the protests, I came to see Sofia and to have a coffee.” These responses were a minority, but were enough to spark an immense wave of moral indignation on part of the anti-governmental protesters, many of whom immediately declared that those people bear the entire truth of the pro-governmental protests: simple people, either violently bussed in to Sofia, or bribed to join the protest. In either way, they did not know what they were doing unlike the anti-governmental protesters which were “authentic civil society” protests in that they were “spontaneous,” “self-organized” (despite the fact that opposition parties were involved in mobilizing their supporters), “creative” (the protest individual and hand-made banners bore witness to the creativity of the participants unlike the banners of the counter-protests which were often print outs disseminating the same messages), “middle-class” and even “beautiful.”⁴⁶ The numerous photo galleries with pretty faces from the protest were contrasted with the photo reportages of the counter-protests, where racist portraits of poor, ugly, downtrodden, wrecked people predominated, illustrating the incessant reiteration that these Gypsy and Turkish people do not belong to Sofia and its civil society⁴⁷. In another famous article, Yanakiev declared that the protests and counter-protests can be best understood as the “quality” against the “quantity”.⁴⁸

The blatantly racist representation of the counter-protest was indeed sickening to leftist activists, and many of us hurried to expose the racist logic guiding the liberal civil society in its violent contraction and exclusion of the counter-protest from itself. However, we should admit that once again anti-communists displayed a good intuition, namely, whereas the left detested the racist and exclusionary rhetoric which stripped the counter-protest of citizenship and membership in civil society, anti-communists were paradoxically closer to Marx in articulating

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45 Marx, Karl, *Das Kapital*, I, 671.

46 Gospodinov, 2013

47 Offnews, 2013

48 Yanakiev, 2013b

totally spontaneously what Marx had claimed about the position of the proletariat as part of no part of civil society.⁴⁹

In the case of the protests, the marginalized ejects carried a doubly subversive potential. Firstly, as the imagined bearer of communism because of their associations with the ruling coalition, and secondly, as the other part of the double revolution that historically fascists have feared: namely, the revolution from below (proletariat) and the revolution from without (the racialized/colonized Others at the margins of the empire⁵⁰). Finally, a fantastic communism that does not respect racial hierarchy is invoked due to the autonomization of the idea of communism from its historical precedent, over and against the evidence of some of the darkest aspects of the empirical Bulgarian socialist regime—such as the ethnic cleansing of Turks after the economic liberalization reforms were followed by a conservative cultural turn in the 1970s.

The anti-communist protesters⁵¹ who built an unbridgeable gap between themselves and the counter-protest were more true to the core of the antagonistic deadlock structuring all capitalist societies than the left liberals who decried the “production of artificial antagonisms”, and who tried to be likeable and acceptable to all. In addition to falling back on unreflected-upon ideas about national unity, this impulse to secure acceptability and “social cohesion” forgets that communism must be necessarily wrong from point of view of bourgeois morality.

For example, in an article, Bakalov calls indignantly the anti-government riot of 23rd July an “anarchist-bolshevik” outburst of violence which has nothing to do with the moralistic image of the protest. Abstaining for a moment from the urge to demolish the claim that a pro-EU protest such as the Bulgarian one can be called either anarchist or bolshevik (let alone both simultaneously), we should admit that Bakalov’s argument does indeed lend itself to extrapolating the obvious conclusions: communism is immoral (from the point of view of bourgeois morality) and certain fault-lines cannot be overcome with mere reconciliation, no matter what amount of national ideology or liberal appeasement is produced to paper over the capitalist field’s constitutive

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49 Marx, 1977

50 See Landa, 201

51 It should be clear that because the protest was anti-communist this does not warrant hasty conclusions that the counter-protesters are communists. They were simply imagined to be so by anti-communists and since we operate on the level of their fantasy, let us accept their premises for the sake of the argument.

deadlock⁵².

Where the anti-governmental protesters saw no agency, but objectified victims of the exercise of arbitrary party power, I see a peculiar type of resistance embodied in people whose very presence sent shockwaves throughout civil society. Putting this in Althusserian terms, the counter-protesters did respond to the interpellating hail of the party, but did so on their own terms. Namely, when the party officials said “protest!”, the would-be subjects responded “OK, I don’t care what it is about if I get a free ride to Sofia,” in short: “Fuck you! Coffee.” If the Althusserian subject is the one who turns to the hail and assumes the symbolic identity conferred on him, the ejected one fails to do that. As Žižek argues, “The leftover which resists “subjectivation” embodies the impossibility which “is” the subject: in other words, the subject is strictly correlative to its own impossibility; its limit is its positive condition”.⁵³ So the eject is the opposite of the subject as theorized by Louis Althusser.

In short, the subject who refuses the symbolic mandates “far from emerging as the outcome of interpellation, the subject emerges only when and in so far as interpellation liminally fails. Not only does the subject never fully recognize itself in the interpellative call: its resistance to interpellation (to the symbolic identity provided by interpellation) is the subject.”⁵⁴ Taking our cue from that, the non-Althusserian eject should be the one who does not struggle for normality, but who prefers to explode the socio-symbolic order even at the cost of his own demise, rather than to assume its symbolic mandates and ideological fantasies that mediate between it and the Real.

We can think this problematic further with Ranciere: “Wrong is simply the mode of subjectification in which the assertion of equality takes its political shape... Wrong institutes a singular universal, a polemical universal, by tying the presentation of equality, as the part of those who have no part, to the conflict between parts of society.”⁵⁵

Thus, when anti-communists want to prove that everything about communism is wrong, “wrong” should be taken in the double meaning which Ranciere’s perspective opens up: indeed, communism must be wrong, a terrible mistake even, from the point of view of bourgeois

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52 Bakalov in Volgin, 2013

53 Žižek, 2008, p. 236

54 Žižek, 2000: 115.

55 May, 2010, p. 75

normality, and “wrong” qua the radical assertion of equality on the part of those who have no part. Even if this assertion did not take place in the sense of people actually saying “we want equality”, the fact is that the shocking appearance of so many hitherto invisible and repelling people in the Bulgarian capital did present a formidable challenge to the “distribution of the sensible”.

Conclusion

This paper dealt with the new and rejuvenated notion of communism anti-communists from the 2013 protests have minted. The protests revived the anti-communism from the 1990s, however, in the process of doing so, they radically altered its semantic coordinates, obeying the repetition-alterity nexus of Derrida. Anti-communism directed at the past of the “actually existing socialism” produces the narrative of the deprived victim caught up in the vagaries of, and complaining about the economy of shortage providing only partial enjoyments while the nomenklatura enjoys unrestrained.⁵⁶ Key to this narrative are the ways that the discrepancy between the elite and the populace unfolds: here, inequalities in the access to food, housing, jobs, culture, education and knowledge are paramount (and indeed absolutely worthy of critique from the Left). These were indeed recurring problems in state socialism that should be taken seriously. However, what is important to our discussion is opening up possibilities for thinking communism (and socialism) differently. Those come from a surprising corner: the anti-communist right, which has revived the anti-communism from the 1990s in an attempt to give political expression to the 2013 anti-governmental and anti-mafia protests. That is to say, it has re-directed its grievances against the socialist regime to the present political and economic conjuncture. Paradoxically, the same anti-communism directed at the present breaks radically with the 1990s cliché and frees communism for a radical renewal while simultaneously eroding the legitimacy of the capitalist mode of production.

Historical communism was not true to its concept: it generated and perpetuated a mass of inequalities and suffering. However, critique of historical communism does not lead too far. The spectral communism which resides within the anti-communist discourse is much more subversive. So, let the delusions and specters guide us. The critique of anti-communism which claims that the latter merely furnishes the

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⁵⁶ Koleva, 2012

disenchanted masses with a language with which to complain about capitalism's excesses (even in the case when the masses honestly believe they are critiquing communism), fails to see the pragmatic efficiency of this discourse in articulating oppositional discourses to the present, as well as their radical potential. By claiming that anti-communism misses the point because it does not assess reality adequately (= it is mistaking capitalism for communism), we miss its pointing to a reality beyond itself, much more real than reality itself; pointing, as it were, to its concept.

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