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Aneta Vasileva, Emilia Kaleva: Recharging Socialism: Bulgarian Socialist Monuments in the 21st Century

RECHARGING SOCIALISM: BULGARIAN SOCIALIST MONUMENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Bulgarian socialist architecture, and particularly its controversial monuments, have recently become the object of various informal actions, debates and interventions which provoke continuous social reactions and inspire spectacular newspaper front pages. It appears that such monuments have infinite potential for dividing people, not only on political, but also on aesthetical or emotional bases. Nowadays in particular, the monuments have even greater social importance as the keepers of dissonant public memory, while their public appreciation reflects different posttotalitarian processes in Bulgarian postsocialist society.

Keywords: *Socialism, monuments, memory, heritage, conflict, preservation*

Bulgarian public space may be properly interpreted only in the context of its recent past which has shaped most of the contemporary architectural environment. The change of authorities at the end of communism deprived architecture and urban development of their ideological background and of formal public approval. As a result, two conflicting attitudes coexist today: the politically charged denial of socialist art and architecture and the nostalgic revival of socialist habits, industrial objects, popular culture images

and other formal representations. Socialist monuments occupy a peculiar position in between the two opposites. On one hand, they are considered cool art objects, indifferent to political turmoil, with transcendental aesthetic value of their own (cf. Mihov 2012). On the other hand, they inspire different practices of denial – such as destruction, oblivion, mutilation, repositioning and intentional demolition – which are politically charged to a great extent. Other representations of emotional denial derive from the aesthetical misunderstanding of modern art, the nationalistic revival of presocialist heroes and art forms or plain indifference. Consequently, the academic study of socialist monuments offers fertile ground for the examination of postsocialist theories and speculations in humanities and architecture (cf. Todorova 2004, 2010; Vukov and Kazalarska 2017).

This paper maintains that the socialist art and architecture represent cultural heritage even in the absence of formal validation. Namely, with a few exceptions, the buildings constructed after 1944 are generally not officially listed as cultural monuments in Bulgaria. The paper upholds the contemporary heritage trends which bring the boundaries of cultural heritage classification closer to our times.¹ The paper further argues that politically burdened, traumatic and dissonant material traces bear particular importance and should be preserved as the *keepers of public memory*.

One such controversial example is the “Monument of the Soviet Army” in the centre of Bulgarian capital Sofia.

A number of public events have addressed this fifty-meter-high, politically burdened monument, and thus offered the possibility for an ironic, politically discharged attitude, so much needed in the contemporary public perception of socialism. Namely, over twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, strong clashes of communists and anti-communists persist.²

¹ Upon his analysis of international documents on heritage protection, Todor Krastev noted: “We are witnessing a remarkable evolution in the notion of cultural heritage”. Among other changes, he outlined the extension of the temporal scope of heritage which now included the heritage of the 20th century and thus encompassed the symbols of the latest history. For example, the Karl Marx Allee in Berlin and the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw have already been listed as cultural monuments, which was absolutely unthinkable at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall (Krastev 2008).

² “Monument of the Soviet Army” in Sofia was completed in 1957 in the centre of Sofia as the symbolic demonstration of the totalitarian power and ideology. Today, this part of the



*Figure 1: The Monument of the Soviet Army. Celebration event some time before 1989.
Photo: ATRIUM Archive*

Public appreciation of socialist monuments represents the most revealing indicator of the posttotalitarian processes currently unfolding in Bulgarian society. Yet the physical demolition of art objects from the second half of the 20th century, undertaken for political reasons in the global 21st century, still causes surprise. In parallel, the same highly politicized society, in a different city and in different context, is so attached to a piece of socialist monumentality to have its local authorities propose it for the UNESCO heritage list.

city has completely lost its elite character and serves as the site of spontaneous informal activities, which reached their peak with the graffiti act “Moving with the Times”. In June 2011, the western sculptural group of the monument was painted over into popular superheroes and cartoon characters. Despite the lack of consensus on the future of the monument, it has gradually turned into creative field for alternative art expression and urban subcultures.

Where are the sources of such polarity? In the following part, the stories of two monuments are discussed. They were both built in 1981 in commemoration of an important and widely celebrated anniversary in the socialist period – 1300 years of the foundation of Bulgarian State. The first monument, “1300 Years of Bulgaria”, is situated in the centre of the capital Sofia and is generally despised by the inhabitants of the city. The second one, “Founders of the Bulgarian State”, located on top of a hill above a medium-sized, provincial town of Shumen, has turned into a beloved local symbol which, it is claimed, the citizens of Shumen are ready to defend personally against any demolition.

THE DESPISED MONUMENT “1300 YEARS OF BULGARIA”, SOFIA³



*Figure 2: Monument “1300 Years Bulgaria” and the National Palace of Culture, 1980s.
Source: ATRIUM Archive*

³ Monument “1300 Years Bulgaria”, Sofia, Bulgaria. Completion: 1981. Sculptor: Valentin Starchev. Architects: Alexander Barov, project leader and the team of Glavproekt, Atanas Agura, Vladimir Romenski, Alexander Brainov. Structural engineer: Rumen Mladzhov.

History of the site

The monument was constructed as part of the larger complex of the National Palace of Culture (NPC). In the late 19th century, the site of the future complex lied outside the city of Sofia and hosted military barracks of the First and the Sixth Infantry Regiments. The two regiments participated in Serbo-Bulgarian War (1885), Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and in World War I (1914-1918) with over 3000 soldiers who lost their lives in the battles. In memory of the fallen soldiers, a memorial was designed by Bulgarian architect Alexander Obretenov and erected in the central part of the complex of barracks from 1934 to 1936. Three walls with enamelled plates holding the names of the fallen soldiers were mounted on the blind walls of three barracks, which formed a U-shaped frame.

In the bombing of Sofia in the winter of 1944, one of the memorial walls was destroyed. The other two were dismantled during the construction of the National Palace of Culture complex in the 1970s. By that time, the site had already lied within the city, rather close to the city centre. Initially, the site was designated for an opera house; later, the decision was changed and the location was considered more appropriate for a multi-purpose cultural centre, one of the so-called “palaces for the people”, spread throughout the former Eastern Bloc.

The construction of the National Palace of Culture formed part of the initiative to celebrate the 1300th anniversary of the Bulgarian State in 1981.⁴ The foundation stone of the Palace was laid on 25 May 1978. The entire complex with the ambient public space was planned as a major node to the south of the main axis of the Sofia city centre. The construction of the complex in the second half of the 21th century irreversibly transformed the structure of the city centre and created a completely new type of urban zone. Up until the present, it remains one of the biggest urban interventions

⁴ A strong nationalistic wave in Bulgarian socialist culture and architecture gained strength at the end of the 1970s and culminated in the widely celebrated 1300th anniversary of the foundation of the Bulgarian State in 1981 (681-1981). The nationalistic orientation toward the past directly reflected in the changes of cultural policies of the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party, which attempted to legitimize the regime by presenting it as the rightful successor and the culmination of a consistent national cultural development (Elenkov 2008:380).

in the capital city and the largest open public space in Sofia. In an integrated manner, it attempted to address the complex issues of transportation, communication, urban planning, architecture and horticulture, including a distinct synthesis of the arts at all levels – from the open public spaces to its interior. Integrity represents its most distinctive feature, with the monument “1300 Years of Bulgaria” as its notable part.

History of the monument

The monument was envisioned as a vertical accent in the multilevel open spaces of the vast new urban complex. In accordance with the procurement tender review, the team of sculptor Valentin Starchev, architects Alexander Barov, Atanas Agura, Vladimir Romenski, Alexander Brainov and structural engineer Rumen Mladzhov, was contracted to build the monument. The monument was designed at the same time as the surrounding park: conceived for its exact location, its appearance corresponds to the late 20th century architecture of the main building of the Palace of Culture. The thirty-two-meter-high, concrete-and-steel composition represents a spiral, interpreting the idea of the historical development of the country. The spiral comprises three segments with dynamic plastic volumes which represent the past, the present and the future. Each segment is highlighted with bronze sculptures and inscriptions.

The monument epitomizes the creative forces of the late modernist tendencies in Bulgarian monumental art. It has exceptional artistic and architectural value with a high level of artistic synthesis, both as independent artistic composition with its architectural and sculptural forms, and also as part of the integral artistic synthesis of the surrounding urban and architectural complex. Svetlin Rusev, prominent Bulgarian artist from the socialist period, stated:

“...with its spiralling volumes, emphatic architectonic and plastic richness, (it) demonstrated that Bulgarian plastic culture had escaped the resemblance-based approach and was already speaking the language of architectural-plastic symbolism”.⁵

⁵ <http://presa.bg/article/Vlastta-ne-e-argument-zarushene/63000/11/33> (accessed February 12, 2015).

Public perception

Although the monument was quite progressive for its time, it was never appreciated by the public, both during and after the socialist regime. According to unofficial sources, the expression of personal dislike by Bulgarian communist leader Todor Zhivkov inspired the general public resentment. There was no further mention of the monument from this period. Furthermore, there were considerable problems with the quality of the materials used. Short term for completion and last-minute change of the finishing granite tiles resulted in the collapse of the cladding shortly after inauguration. In the 1990s, after the change of the political regime in 1989, no repairs were effected to the monument. The lack of maintenance induced further serious deterioration of its structural integrity and overall appearance.

In 2001, on the occasion of the visit of Pope John Paul II to Sofia, the monument was surrounded by a fence and hosted several consecutive graffiti festivals. Due to its progressive dilapidation, it was declared dangerous in 2009, followed by the scaffolding of the structure and the removal of the granite cladding. Some of the sculptures were drilled through during the installation of scaffolding.



Figure 3: Monument "1300 Years of Bulgaria", 2001-2008. Photo: Nikola Mihov



Figure 4: Monument “1300 Years of Bulgaria”, 2015. Photo: Lili Petkova. Source: memoreality.com

Next, all granite plates were removed, revealing parts of the steel-and-concrete construction. Despite the intervention, the expressiveness of the monument was not lost, but merely modified.

Various individuals and nongovernmental organizations attempted to raise public awareness of the importance of the monument. In 2008, “Memory Picture”, the intervention of Boryana Rossa, asked people to sign on the black or the white board so as to demonstrate their support for the demolition or the preservation of the monument. In 2012, the Association Transformatori,⁶ an urban intervention group, organised a competition entitled “Transform the National Palace of Culture Monument” which

received diverse feedback. Furthermore, in 2013, Transformatori staged a 3D-mapping performance entitled “Re:Vision” which used the bare concrete surfaces of the monument to project videos produced for the occasion.

Since 2012 the call for the deconstruction of the monument has been constantly on and off the table. In the past several years, the surrounding public space was partially renovated; however, the renovations did not follow a unified approach and, consequently, degraded the harmonious

⁶ The Association Transformatori is a non-governmental organization, founded in 2009, which addresses the issues related to urban space, architecture and design. The Association acts in the domain of public activism. Transformatori cooperate with public and municipal bodies, as well as private companies, on education and awareness-raising, as well as the development of public space in Sofia. More information is available at: <http://transformatori.net/en/>.

appearance of the complex. The underground shopping and communication centre was refurbished in complete disregard of the original materials and design. The aesthetic resonance with the main building, imbedded in the original design, was lost. In 2015-2016 the park around the Palace of Culture underwent major reconstruction works which reestablished the need to decide on the future of the monument.

As the architectural heritage of the 20th century attracts ever-increasing global attention,⁷ Bulgaria is lagging behind the trend, which leaves a detrimental effect on the socialist monuments such as “1300 Years of Bulgaria” in Sofia. Bulgarian architectural heritage of the 20th century, and in particular of its second half, is considered relatively young, lacking objective assessment, as well as caring disposition of the general public. Such architectural heritage is mainly linked to the socialist regime from which it originated. In consequence, it is mainly considered from the emotional or the political perspective, which equally deprives it of an impartial assessment of its characteristics and values. Comprehensive dynamic processes at the turn of the millennium placed such cultural heritage at great risk and the highly ideologically burdened monuments were the first ones to be affected.

In 2015, the debate was spurred by the proposal to rebuild the “Memorial of the Fallen Soldiers” at the location of the monument “1300 Years of Bulgaria”. A counter-group for preservation of the monument equally assembled. The debate led to deep confrontation, further animated by political arguments for and against communism.⁸ In December 2014, Sofia Municipal

⁷ For example, in 1991, the Council of Europe issued Special Guidelines for the Protection of the 20th Century Architectural Heritage, recommending that European governments “develop strategies for the identification, study, protection, conservation, restoration and public awareness of the twentieth-century architecture”. Over the past twenty-five years, this architectural heritage was listed among the priorities of the world-wide expert organizations, such as DOCOMOMO and ICOMOS.

⁸ Debates unfolded mainly online and on social media. The two opposing groups were: “For the Reconstruction of the Memorial of the Fallen Soldiers of the First and the Sixth Infantry Regiments”, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/303528473154855/?fref=nf> and “Monument 1300 Years of Bulgaria in Sofia. Let it be”, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/707499292671413/>.

Council decided in favour of the “reconstruction of the Memorial of the Fallen Soldiers of the First and the Sixth Infantry Regiments and dismantling and relocation of the artistic sculptural elements of the architectural and artistic complex ‘1300 Years of Bulgaria’, and its rearrangement”.⁹

Although the Municipality of Sofia insisted on the notion of displacement in place of demolition; in reality, the decision did, in fact, represent the destruction of the monument. Firstly, the displacement of such huge monumental structure is practically impossible. Secondly, the reinstallation of the monument in a different location would equally represent its destruction, as it was designed and built for its original location and forms an integral part of the urban complex of the National Palace of Culture in Sofia, along with its environment. Any relocation of the monument would involve the degradation of its value as part of the cultural memory of the urban environment of Sofia.

National professional associations of artists and architects, as well as the author of the monument, sculptor Valentin Starchev, quickly and firmly expressed their disapproval of the decision – however, none of the arguments were taken into account by the Municipality of Sofia. Moreover, local authorities clearly sided with one of the sides in the debate and, for political reasons, encouraged further confrontation of the two memorials.

As a result of the intensely politicized discourse, two dangerous tendencies surfaced in the debate over the monument “1300 Years of Bulgaria”: the politically motivated scepticism over the aesthetic value of the monument and the confrontation of two important symbols of national memory with the intention of eliminating one of them.

The latest development regarding the monument involved the support of ICOMOS Bulgaria which announced the international Heritage Alert on the issue and nominated it to the World Monument Watch Program of the World Monument Fund. Transformatori conducted another online project Memoreality¹⁰ which called for a fresh interpretation of the monument and its environment, beyond political tension, and sought dialogue of the opponents so as to arrive to an acceptable solution for all sides.

⁹ This decision is available at: http://www.sofiacouncil.bg/content/docs/c_f33813.pdf.

¹⁰ Consult the website of the initiative at: memoreality.com.

On Monday, 3 July 2017, the Municipality of Sofia initiated the deconstruction of the monument. Within three weeks, the bronze figures were removed and the concrete volumes demolished. Green space replaced the monument.¹¹ Organized by architects, artists, art-historians and other professionals in the visual arts, heated debates and protests accompanied the demolition of the monument in the atmosphere of high social tension.¹² The official explanation for the hurried demolition was the alleged necessity to rehabilitate the area around the National Palace of Culture in Sofia as the future seat of Bulgaria's first Presidency of the Council of the European Union, announced for January 2018.



Figure 5: A protest against the demolition of the monument “1300 Years of Bulgaria”. July 2017. Photo: Stanislav Belovski. Source: Facebook group “Monument 1300 Years of Bulgaria in Sofia. Let it be”

¹¹ This article is a follow-up to a conference paper presented at the international conference “Socialist Monuments and Modernism”, BLOK, which took place in Zagreb on 6-7 November 2015. The article was submitted for publication in December 2016. The demolition of the monument began in July 2017 which required this update.

¹² The story of the monument and the surrounding debates can be followed in a number of informal sources such as the aforementioned Facebook group “Monument 1300 Years of Bulgaria in Sofia. Let it be” which offers abundant information and photos (mainly in Bulgarian): <https://www.facebook.com/groups/707499292671413/>. During the demolition, several online articles in English also appeared (cf. Cheresheva 2017; Lazarova 2017).

The demolition further kindled the debate, which threatened to destabilize the general perception of the post-WWII modern architecture as part of Bulgarian cultural heritage. Bulgarians do not generally recognize that socialism has, in fact, significantly remodelled vast portions of the ambient space and that socialist architecture has ultimately changed most of their environment. For this reason, the debate over the destruction of the monument “1300 Years of Bulgaria” in Sofia also represented a discussion on the future of the modernist heritage of the country. Although such conclusion may appear rather grim, the following example will offer more encouragement and demonstrate that socialist heritage is still sometimes perceived as valuable and uncontentious historical material.

THE BELOVED MONUMENT “FOUNDERS OF THE BULGARIAN STATE”, SHUMEN¹³

The monument “Founders of the Bulgarian State”, located on top of the hill Ilchov Bair in the town of Shumen, was constructed in the period from 1979 to 1981. The monument was completed as part of the large-scale construction works in preparation for the 1300th anniversary of the foundation of Bulgarian State, which was enthusiastically celebrated by the socialist government. As the construction wave spread throughout the country, Shumen stood in the spotlight due to its geographical position between two former capitals, Pliska and Preslav, of the First Bulgarian State (7th - 10th century). The monument formed part of an overall renovation of the city centre which involved the reconstruction of the regional theatre with the ambient square, the main pedestrian street and the new pedestrian access to the monument. Built a year earlier, the public complex formed part of the same commemorative ensemble and included the historical museum and the new city library. The complex formed a unique visual and architectural ensemble with the pedestrian access to the monument and other minor architectural objects in its vicinity, including a cafe and an information centre.

¹³ Monument “1300 Years of Bulgaria” (also known as “Founders of the Bulgarian State”), Shumen, Bulgaria. Completion: 1981. Sculptor: Krum Damyanov. Architects: Georgi Gechev, Blagoy Atanasov, Ivan Slavov. Structural engineer: Preslav Hadzhov. Artists: Vladislav Paskalev, Simeon Venov.

The construction works started in August 1979 and continued without interruption, even during the following two extremely cold winters, until the summer of 1981. Apart from the best masons in the country and the most efficient construction teams, the work on the monument engaged student brigades of over 1,400 students, as well as numerous citizens of Shumen, who worked on the site voluntarily during the full twenty-two months of construction. The monument was officially opened in the autumn of 1981, just in time for celebration of the 1300th anniversary.



*Figure 6: The Demolition, July 14 2017.
Photo: Valery Gyurov. Source: Facebook*

Location and environment

The Monument extends on the axis perpendicular to the central part of Shumen and to the axis of the historical development of the city. Its location was carefully selected: today, the structure is visible from the vast majority of Shumen's neighbourhoods as it dominates the skyline from almost any location in the city. Besides its visual harmony, the monument is physically connected to the city with an access road which goes up the hill and around the medieval fortress of Shumen, and a pedestrian path which offers access to the main pedestrian street through a composition of alleys and monumental staircases meandering up the hill. It is said that the staircases comprise 1300 steps altogether, which is yet another reference to the commemorated anniversary.

Depending on the access route, the monument offers its diverse faces and elicits different first impressions. Car visitors may park the vehicle nearby and reach the structure by a wide, well-landscaped, horizontal alley. The structure reveals itself smoothly, as a succession of sloping volumes,

gradually increasing in height and leading the visitor into the core: an ideal scenography to engage visitors in the historical drama inside the monument.

Visitors who climb the legendary 1300 steps should be prepared for a serious physical effort before they finish their climb in frontal opposition to the monument. The last hundred steps leave the visitors breathless and thrown inside the structure abruptly, overwhelmed by the dramatically overlapping, menacing concrete volumes overhead. One enters this concrete cathedral feeling small, weak and full of awe (cf. Vasileva 2013).

Art and architecture

The monument “Founders of the Bulgarian State” represents a new type of socialist memorial: outside the city centre, beyond the usual intimacy of a small sculptural monument, it evolves into a comprehensive architectural and sculptural ensemble. In Shumen, the well-defined concrete structure elicits different impressions when observed from the interior and from the exterior. The story of the Bulgarian State is told through a succession of abstract granite figures of Bulgarian rulers and numerous large-scale mosaic murals in the interior, which reinforce the overwhelming impression of visiting a cathedral.

The monument forms one huge concrete cube – “cut” or “deconstructed” in two groups of dynamic blocks to the north and to the south, inclined under different angles – enclosing a fluid internal space with sculptures and murals. There is a stark, deliberate contrast between the massive, rough monolithic volumes on the outside and the decomposed, diverse and colourful space inside.

The winning project of sculptor Krum Damyanov proposed a structure which symbolized the power of Bulgarian state and its dynamic development. The structure is uneven: volumes rise from the ground to reach vertical heights and thus create a distinct impression of vibrant development. Four main sculptural groups tell the history of Bulgaria: “Khan Asparuh” (the Founder of the State), “Khans” (rulers of the country prior to its conversion to Christianity), “Kniaz Boris” (the Baptist) and “King Simeon with Warriors and Scholars” (symbol of the Golden Age of

the medieval Bulgarian culture). There are also three mosaic murals entitled “Winners”, “Baptism” and “St Cyril and St Methodius” (as reference to the origin of the Cyrillic alphabet).



Figure 7: The Monument “Founders of the Bulgarian State”, from the inside. Photo: Nikola Mihov

The monument “Founders of the Bulgarian State” belongs to the few socialist monuments which introduced the non-Slavic origin of Bulgarians, in opposition to the contemporaneous state ideology which favoured the Slavic origin of Bulgarian nationality and stressed the blood relation of Bulgaria and Russia.¹⁴

Today the monument “Founders of the Bulgarian State” forms an inseparable part of Shumen’s skyline.

In 2013, the sculptor Krum Damyanov duly noted: “I really want to ask the residents of Shumen today, especially the younger ones, if they can imagine the hill without the monument” (Vasileva 2013). Although it forms

¹⁴ This is a recent and notable comment by one of the living members of the architectural team involved in designing the monument: Aneta Kamenova-Bulant (cf. Bulant-Kamenova 2009:44–51).

a part of the commemorative monumental complex from the communist regime, it is not afflicted by negative public perception. As if there were no other monuments in the city, the residents of Shumen simply refer to it as the *Monument*. It has become the virtual symbol of Shumen which enjoys nearly total approval. The monument is well-maintained by a special municipal institution. It hosts educational excursions and weddings and represents a compulsory stop for all visitors of the city. The legendary pedestrian path with its 1300 steps is a busy, quotidian fitness route for the citizens of Shumen who climb the *Steps* all year round to maintain their health.

Comparable to the National Palace of Culture in Sofia, “Founders of the Bulgarian State” have often been criticized for their forceful and non-contextual character, as well as for the obscure and far-fetched abstract imagery, similar to the monument “1300 Years of Bulgaria” in Sofia. Despite the criticism, the monument in Shumen has proved to be successful as an architectural and a sculptural project, as well as a social experiment. It has managed to overwhelm the political polarization and the usual negative attitude towards socialist monuments in Bulgaria. Tense and more passionate than ever, the debate over demolition of the monument “1300 Years of Bulgaria” was still going on in Sofia in 2016, when the Municipality of Shumen announced its intention to nominate the complex “Founders of the Bulgarian State” for the UNESCO’s Natural and Cultural Heritage List¹⁵ in the beginning of September 2015.

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT

As both monuments convey manifest socialist and modernist conceptions through a marked nationalist and traditionalist narrative, it is interesting to consider the profoundly contrasting dispositions in the contemporary Bulgarian society. Although the monuments share similar structural and sculptural language, one is considered a symbol of the oppressive socialist past, whereas the other – an emblem of the eternal eminence of Bulgarian state.

¹⁵ “Predlagat Pametnika da stane pametnik na UNESCO”. 2015. *Shum.bg*, September 10. <http://www.shum.bg/index.php?item=130173&PHPSESSID=a81qru9k15nchh8tjmil2urd85> (accessed September 12, 2015).

In order to understand and explain this contradiction, it is necessary to define several general concepts – such as nationalism, memory and identity – as they reflected in Bulgarian culture of the second half of the 20th century.

In his extensive historical research of Bulgarian Communist Party, Yannis Sygkelos, Greek analyst of the history and the politics of the Balkans, focused on the development of a specific *Marxist nationalism*, its infiltration into classical Marxism – defined as international in the original theory – and its expansion in Bulgaria during socialism (Sygkelos 2011).

In the 1940s, Georgi Dimitrov, the future first communist leader of Bulgaria (1946-1949) and the Secretary General of the Communist International at the time (1934-1943), played the key role in the international promotion of the new nationalistic line. In his diary, in the entry from 12 May 1941, Dimitrov wrote about Stalin's adept assimilation of the contradiction between nationalism and traditional internationalism of Marxism: "We must develop a concept for integrating healthy, appropriately interpreted nationalism with proletarian internationalism. Proletarian nationalism must rely on the nationalism of each country". Stalin also confirmed there was no contradiction between the two. Dimitrov recalled his words: "Rootless cosmopolitanism that denies national feelings and the notion of a homeland has nothing in common with proletarian internationalism" (Dimitrov 2003).¹⁶

Such national self-identification of the left was particularly advantageous for the resistance movement against Fascism and Nazism during World War II. Later, at the end of war, Eastern European communist parties embraced the concept so as to portray themselves as independent progressive fighters for national ideals. In such manner, they attempted to create an image of the national front that the local population would no

¹⁶ Georgi Dimitrov kept his diary almost without interruption for sixteen years, between 9 March 1933 (while he was still in Berlin prison for the arson of Reichstag) and 6 February 1949 (six months before his death). The diary was kept in the archives of the Bulgarian Communist Party until 1989 and its release was delayed as Dimitrov wrote in Russian, Bulgarian and German simultaneously and used many abbreviations and pseudonyms from the period. The diary was finally published as a book in 1997. The second edition of the book was consulted for this article (Dimitrov 2003).

longer consider subordinate to Moscow. The Bulgarian socialist party used the same strategy to earn public trust. The exploitation of the most pervasive nationalist myths and their translation into culture and public memory ensued as the auspicious instruments of propaganda.

In this paper, the concepts of *collective*, *communicative* and *cultural memory* from the 20th century were used to define a working concept of memory which could be applied in the analysis of Bulgarian socialist architecture and its monuments. According to the definition by German egyptologist Jan Assmann from the 1990s, the collective memory is divided into communicative and cultural memory (Assmann 2008). The communicative memory is defined as noninstitutional or informal, whereas the cultural memory is institutional. Accordingly, the memory relating to Bulgarian socialist culture is defined as institutional memory sustained by state cultural institutes and programmes. It constructs “its own past” through anniversaries, anniversary texts and different events and further materializes it into monuments, memorials, buildings and architectural complexes.

How do we relate identity to memory in the (post)socialist society? Based on her extensive research on collective memory, social memory frames, Maurice Halbwachs, *memory struggles*, memory control and the need for identity, Bulgarian sociologist Lilyana Deyanova developed the following thesis: “In contemporary society the sites of collective memory are different. The common sites of memory are not necessarily the sites of collective memory” (Deyanova 2009). However, memory serves as a powerful instrument for constructing group identity. Therefore, the right to “your own memory” may serve as foundation for the construction of identity. The ethical problem consists in constructing an identity which does not encroach on the identity of others (Todorov 2015).

CONCLUSION

The communist authorities constructed their identity in relation to memory in an effort of self-legitimization. Common sites of memory were transformed into public spaces of history designed to control the past. The ensuing identity not only consolidated the regime, but also the entire nation, and was used by Bulgarian socialist culture as an appropriate

response to global universalism. For this reason, the sites of collective memory constructed during socialism inevitably engender tensions and contradictions in postsocialist societies.

Abandoning the reconciliation with history to the simple progression of time has proved to be fatal in the case of major controversial monuments. The principal dilemma thus consists in the possibility and the necessity of overcoming such tensions and contradictions.

Socialist monuments represent *dissonant heritage* par excellence which generates social tensions and clashes instead of promoting common understanding as the ideal universal layer of culture.¹⁷ The present analysis acknowledges socialist monuments as part of Bulgarian cultural heritage on account of controversy and contention they inspire. They deserve to be preserved: not as established, indisputable heritage, rather as pretext for continuous interpretation of the past through authentic material traces.¹⁸ The choice of heritage we preserve today denotes a highly responsible decision from the perspective of future generations. The present objects of dissonance will bear a particularly high cognitive value in the future after contemporary disputes will have been resolved. The value of heritage does not comprise solely the universally esteemed historical intervals, but equally the lessons from contentious experiences. It is the controversy of

¹⁷ The topic of Bulgarian socialist monuments as forms of dissonant cultural heritage is discussed in detail in the PhD dissertation of Daniela Korudjieva *Upotrebi I upravljenje na disonantno kulturno nasledstvo. Pametnici na monumentalno izkustvo, 1944-1989* defended at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Sofia. On one hand, the author argues that heritage can both unite communities or individuals, and also divide and antagonize them (cf. TUNBRIDGE, J. I. and G. J. ASHWORTH. 1996. *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*. Chichester: J. Wiley). On the other hand, the right to cultural heritage is acknowledged as a basic human right, along with the right to life, freedom of belief, etc. (cf. SILVERMAN, H. and D. F. RUGGLES. 2007. *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*. New York: Springer).

¹⁸ The history of architecture offers a number of world-known examples of art objects which were initially met with pronounced public disapproval, but were later universally accepted as masterpieces and symbols of the city. For Paris only, such examples include the Eiffel Tower, the Pompidou Center, and the Louvre Pyramid. Recently, the Eastern European Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, formerly known as the “Gift from Moscow”, has become one of such examples.

the objects of dissonance that justifies the need for their protection. It offers an opportunity to discuss, rethink and formulate a shared public position which is still missing in Bulgarian postsocialist society. The attitude towards such dissonant heritage may thus be regarded as an indicator of the level of social progress.

On the other hand, the socialist monumental art, and the socialist architecture in general, should not be perceived as dividers of the East and the West, but rather as unifiers of the East and the East and, in the broader modernist context, also of the East and the West. The socialist heritage is pivotal for understanding the cultural identity of the Central and the Eastern Europe. The material traces of socialism represent authentic documents of the entire period of the “common” Eastern European memory of the second half of the 20th century. They also represent the uncomfortable legacy that may be transformed into precious cultural heritage. Such supranational heritage system comprises multiple benefits. On one hand, it compares the currently separate national heritage against a larger context, and thus outlines specific features and values of its components. On the other hand, the composition of different components reveals the broader picture of the common cultural identity of the post-war Eastern Europe. In such manner, the “common” assists in rethinking and recharging the “singular”. In conclusion, the socialist urban fabric, including its monuments, belongs to the ensemble of heterogeneous elements of the postmodern urban space, leaving its historical trace in the urban memory.

According to the popular Bulgarian political metaphor from the early 1990s, one cannot “read the book of the past and close it”. Reading the book of the past is a continuous process, closely connected to writing it (Znepolski 2017). Any settled definition appears almost totalitarian in comparison with the ambivalent inclusiveness and the shifting boundaries of heterogeneous interpretation.

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OŽIVLJAVANJE SOCIJALIZMA: BUGARSKI SOCIJALISTIČKI SPOMENICI U 21. STOLJEĆU

Posljednjih nekoliko godina bugarska socijalistička arhitektura, te naročito njezini kontroverzni spomenici, postaju poprištem raznih neformalnih akcija, rasprava i intervencija koje redovito izazivaju društvene reakcije i nadahnjuju senzacionalne novinske naslovnice. Ovi spomenici kao da posjeduju neiscrpan potencijal za izazivanje podjela među ljudima na političkoj, estetskoj ili emocionalnoj osnovi. U današnjem društvu spomenici imaju još veću važnost kao čuvari disonantnog društvenog pamćenja, dok stav javnosti prema spomenicima odražava razne posttotalitarne procese koji se odvijaju u bugarskom postsocijalističkom društvu.

Ključne riječi: socijalizam, spomenici, pamćenje, baština, sukob, konzervacija



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