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The ambiguities of intellectual dissent in late socialism: the case of Bulgaria

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ABSTRACT

The old totalitarian paradigm¹ – the model still commonly deployed across Central and Eastern Europe and beyond to describe and explain state socialism – painted an image of socialist regimes as autocratic and all-powerful systems of total control imposed on a paralyzed mass of people, where only heroic individuals resisted. The dominant interpretations of intellectual dissent correspondingly still often overlook internal inconsistencies, tensions, and pluralism which characterize resistance in late socialism. In this contribution, we focus on intellectual work at the University of Sofia, Bulgaria, in the late 1970s and 1980s to trace some of the ways in which the totalitarian narrative and its key binary dissidents-system fails to capture the complexities of political and intellectual life in late state socialism. We show that a peculiar type of anti-totalitarianism – characterized more by pluralism and internal tensions – could be ascribed correctly to critical social science during the period, but rather than as a critique of state socialism, it should be understood as a critique of the alienating aspects of industrial modernity and should be contextualized in the nascent consumer-oriented transformation of actually existing socialism after the shift from heavy to light industries and the processes of destalinization after the 1960s.

For decades, the model commonly deployed to describe and explain state socialism, particularly in its Stalinist articulation, was that of the totalitarian paradigm – as the Soviet historian and one of its most influential critics Sheila Fitzpatrick dubbed it.² Although largely discarded by area specialists and historians of the period, the concept continues to animate the popular and nonspecialist³ academic imagination of state socialism at large, including that of late socialism (1970s-1980s) – a period specialists concur should not be seen as totalitarian. The popular image of state socialist ‘totalitarianism’ painted an image of the regimes as autocratic and all-powerful – systems of total control where the State imposes its unlimited power on a paralyzed and helpless mass of people, where only heroic but tragic individuals resisted. And although critical revisionist historical and anthropological work has demonstrated the varieties of ways in which these systems were not all-powerful and were even ‘comparatively weak’,⁴ making

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‘dissidence’ also a lot messier, outside of area studies some interpretations continue to overlook the internal inconsistencies, tensions, and pluralism which characterize resistance.⁵

Despite having largely fallen off grace, the totalitarian paradigm has further given rise to patterns of thinking underpinned by a fairly rigid binary lens which appear to dominate analyses of state socialism today, for example via theories of hidden transcripts, dissimulation or mimicry – dichotomizing life in state socialism into ‘official’ and ‘hidden’ transcripts,⁶ representing masks versus truth,⁷ or dissimulation versus truth,⁸ Party language versus private language,⁹ or public self versus private self.¹⁰ Since the late 1980s, many intellectuals in the region have thus often tended to deny there was any ‘mixing [of] the language of power with their own language’ and to present the latter as ‘a free space to be extended through struggle’.¹¹ Yet, some revisionist anthropological work has demonstrated the ways in which these relationships were characterized much more by ‘nested interdependencies’,¹² and have argued that this dominant binary model fails to capture how language, knowledge, meaning and personhood operate.¹³ Underlying assumptions in this model take the speaking person to be an internally autonomous, self-formed consciousness whose authentic voice could be hidden or revealed.¹⁴ Our paper aims to overcome such problematic assumptions and contribute to attempts to offer a more refined understanding of late socialist power relations.

We focus on intellectual work taking place at the University of Sofia, Bulgaria in the late 1970s and 1980s to trace some of the ways in which the binary model dissidents-system indeed fails to capture the complexities of political and intellectual life in the country. In doing so we examine some of the forms of critique which such an effort to dispense fully with the totalitarian paradigm can unearth. At the same time, we show that a peculiar type of anti-totalitarianism could be ascribed correctly to certain tendencies exhibited by Sofia-based critical social scientists in late socialism, but rather than as a critique of state socialism, these can be understood as a critique of the alienating aspects of industrial modernity. The latter forms of critique, nevertheless, as we will show, cannot be seen as a complete negation of either the socialist system or modernity in general, but should be contextualized in the nascent consumer-oriented transformation of real socialism after the shift from heavy to light industries and the coinciding processes of destalinization after the 1960s in Bulgaria. Our main argument is that the boundaries between ‘the system and its discontents’ are much more ambivalent and porous than is often suggested in approaches relying heavily on the binary model described above. This ambivalence, as we also demonstrate, is visible both on the symbolic level of content of intellectual production and on the level of its formal practice or the entanglement between elites and (those who were later identified as) ‘dissidents’. In contemporary interviews, rather than ‘dissidence’, the concept some of the Sofia-based critical social scientists sometimes adopt to refer to their thinking and identities in late socialism was the Soviet concept of ‘*inakomislje*’ - or ‘different thinking’.

The first part of this article looks at some of the dominant arguments, articulated by the revisionist critics of the totalitarian paradigm. In particular, we are interested in the ways in which the question of liberal subjectivity has been imagined by the totalitarian paradigm, and also how those imaginaries presuppose notions of autonomy, critiques of alienation, depersonalization in industrial modernity and formal rationality that may include not only attacks on socialism but on modern capitalism as well. The second part

explores the intellectual climate of late socialism in Bulgaria by studying how the concept of totalitarianism itself had entered Bulgarian debates. Here, we find the work of the revisionist historian of ideas Zhivka Valiavicharska who studied the way the concept of totalitarianism was adopted by critical Bulgarian intellectuals since the 1960s in the context of the rise of Marxist humanism in the post-Stalinist period, where Marxist humanism occupies the ambivalent space between anti-systemic and pro-systemic discourses. Then, we illustrate the relationships of ‘nested interdependencies’¹⁵ of ‘dissent’, ‘autonomy’, and the systemic and the oppressive in contemporary narratives of the participants in the alternative humanities’ intellectual milieu in late socialist Bulgaria. These interdependencies are traced both at the symbolic level (what concepts and concerns mediated intellectual production) as well as at the practical level – the way ‘differently thinking’ intellectual elites and party elites overlapped. In the concluding section, we demonstrate that some of the ambivalences, overlaps and interdependencies we have depicted within the ‘academic underground’ of Sofia University could be traced more generally to wider cultural transformations of socialism after the 1960s. We end with a discussion of two cases in point: the mainstream success of science fiction publications, such as the hugely popular book series from the 1980s ‘Galaktika’, and the dynamics of resistance played out in a black market for Western rock music in Sofia. Science fiction both attracted mass audiences, as well as influenced deeply the formation of intellectuals. As we will show, if science fiction is considered a critique of totalitarianism in terms of its content, however, this critique has to be understood as against the totalitarianism of instrumental reason, alienation from industrial capitalism and consumerism, rather than as anti-communism. At the same time, in terms of the form of its distribution in Bulgaria, science fiction carried ‘anti-systemic’ and ‘non-conformist’ messages, despite being promoted by the official authorities, and in that way partook in the formation of political and cultural identities, some of which questioned real socialism and somewhat enhanced post-1989 anti-communism.

Dominant paradigms

Sheila Fitzpatrick¹⁶ describes several paradigm shifts which have taken place in Soviet studies since the 1950s, marking out a totalitarian paradigm, a revisionist paradigm, and a post-revisionist paradigm. The totalitarian paradigm, dominant in the 1950s and 1960s, zooms in on the high echelons of institutional power and on ideology, and produces a simplified, caricatured, image of a unified and total system mercilessly devouring society and heroically resisted by only a few woke individuals – dissidents. The 1970s and 1980s, Fitzpatrick argues, saw a revisionist shift which was more empirically oriented, used historical methods, extensively drawing on archives, and took interest in investigating support for the system ‘from below’. The 1990s then witnessed a third shift onto a post-revisionist paradigm which revived an interest in ideology but this time through the lens of post-structuralism. Unlike the revisionists’ interest in society and behavior, post-revisionists such as historians Stephen Kotkin and Johan Hellbeck, and anthropologists Alexei Yurchak and Katherine Verdery, conceptualized power via discourse and subjectivity. Key to their work is particularly Michael Foucault’s conceptual apparatus and his critique of the ‘repressive hypothesis’, presupposing a certain form of

(liberal) human nature which preexists social practice and which could simply be emancipated from external and oppressive power.¹⁷

What the critical revisionist frameworks highlight is the fact that much of the academic and journalistic writing about state socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe rested on assumptions that the latter was ‘bad’ and ‘imposed’ and people either conformed unwillingly or resisted it heroically. Their studies challenged commonly applied binaries – the Party versus the people, oppression versus resistance, public self versus private self, regime versus dissidents, etc. Their work also challenged arguments and approaches which described socialist language as ‘political diglossia’ between official Party language and private people’s language.¹⁸ Yurchak¹⁹ notes that this binary model works as an ‘epistemological straitjacket’, in his summary:

Even though these models describe a subject that is ‘split’, they, ironically, reproduce the Western-centered understanding of a normal person as a bounded, sovereign individual (Strathern 1988:57) with a ‘unitary speaking ego’ (Hanks 2000: 182), whose authentic voice can be hidden or revealed.

Issues of subjectivity are also problematized by Krylova²⁰ who scrutinizes the impact of the Cold War view of human agency on the academic conceptualizations of the Stalinist subject. Krylova argues that American Cold War ‘neoindividualistic’ liberalism produced a particular – morally charged – perspective which counterposed an autonomous (and repressed) subject against total power (that is outside the subject). The totalitarian framework was predicated, Krylova demonstrates, on a liberal subject constituted via a specific regime of reading popular fiction such as *1984* by George Orwell or *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler. Krylova claims that popular fiction acts as a central resource via which academic work during the Cold War imagined communism. *1984*’s plot structure, for example, built an image of totalitarian man by pitting ‘totalitarian’ against ‘liberal’, generating a binary framework which allows characters only two possible positions in society – either a complete inner break with the system or a complete identification with it.²¹ *1984*’s protagonist Winston is alienated from others and atomized, but also coherent in his resistance to the ‘Party’, consistently striving to keep the private separate from the public so as to retain his personal autonomy. He does this by ‘acting a part’, learning to play by the rules, rationally manipulating his way out of a repressive surrounding and into his head – where he preserves his individuality and autonomy.²² Similarly, Soviet studies abounded in theories of split subjectivity and ‘social schizophrenia’ where the Soviet subject is thought in terms of a split between ‘official’ and ‘hidden intimate’ selves, sustained through the practice of ‘dissimulation’.²³

Ultimately, Krylova’s study shows that it is unclear to what extent academic accounts of Soviet reality were informed by popular fiction more than by actual empirical work. The interpretative narrative produced – one that pitted the system against the liberal self – permeated the dominant academic interpretations of totalitarianism as well as the early revisionist scholarship, Krylova argues, making the liberal notion of subjectivity a central paradigm for Soviet studies: ‘[t]he search for remnants of liberal subjectivity and signs of resistance against anti-liberal communist Russia’, Krylova writes, ‘constituted a central, long-term agenda for American scholars’.²⁴

The search for liberal subjectivity did not infuse only the totalitarian school, Krylova claims – the early revisionist studies also reproduced a similar conception of subjectivity –

one that takes the form of either a conforming/adapting or a resisting subject, but always as against a recognized ‘objective’ and ‘individual’ self-interest. An example of this is Sheila Fitzpatrick’s²⁵ research on social mobility during Stalinism – which demonstrates that support for the system is mediated through private self-interest. Similarly, as Yurchak²⁶ notes, revisionists’ critique of isolated binaries does not necessarily do away with underlying assumptions about a pre-constituted sovereign liberal subjectivity – when Kligman and Gal²⁷ demonstrate that there was a ‘ubiquitous self-embedding or interweaving’ rather than ‘a clear-cut ‘us’ versus ‘them’ or ‘private’ versus ‘public’”, the implication is still that “everyone was to some extent complicit in the system of patronage, lying, theft, hedging, and duplicity through which the system operated”²⁸ – the autonomous liberal subject can choose to now be in, now be out, but the clear-cut boundary between them and the system remains. Bulgarian post-revisionist scholar Momchil Hristov²⁹ argues that the totalitarian paradigm ignores power relations in their capillary operation. He argues that a Foucauldian solution to the problem of the creeping liberal subjectivity frame is to pay attention to the microphysics of power – to the dispersed tactics, techniques, and strategies, local power relations and discursive practices, taking place in disparate contexts, with particular aims and as part of particular power struggles.

Overall, the totalitarian approaches to socialism could be and are largely considered defunct and inadequate as explanations of how real state socialism functioned. Nevertheless, they still persist in many ways in both academic and political imaginaries. In this sense it is important to ask what conditions the symbolic efficiency of totalitarian imaginaries. Yet, this question could not be reduced to the scholarly usefulness of the category in terms of its comparative potential. It could not be reduced to its political efficacy in the context of the Cold War either. We argue that it needs to further be thought of in terms of its fitness as a key resource for the critique of modern rationality and alienation more broadly, and we return to this argument later. In the meantime, let us consider some of the ways in which a liberal individual subject was constituted in opposition to totalitarianism in the Bulgarian context.

The totalitarian paradigm in Bulgaria

The totalitarian paradigm has also frequently been used to assert a relationship of equivalence between Communism and Fascism – presenting them as totalitarian twins. It was precisely a book inviting allusions to the structural resemblance between Communism and Fascism which came to embody popularly the idea of ‘dissidence’ in the Bulgarian context. Written by a philosopher, Zhelyu Zhelev (later to become Bulgaria’s first President after the changes) in the 1960s, but only published in 1982³⁰ – having been rejected by publishing houses before – the book presented in ideal-typical and stereotypical fashion the ‘totalitarian state’ based on an analysis of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Because of its implicit allusions to actually existing socialisms, the book was seized from bookshops a few weeks after publishing, but thousands of copies had already been bought and it reached a substantial audience changing hands over the next few years. It should be noted that Zhelev already had a history of sanctions – he was expelled from the Party in the 1960s for attempting to defend a doctoral dissertation criticizing Lenin’s vulgar materialism, angering older generations of philosophers such as

Todor Pavlov – the author of the ‘theory of reflection’ - who was instrumental in institutionalizing the dominant dogmatic strands of ‘Dialectical Materialism’ and Historical Materialism’ in the 1950s not only in Bulgaria, and who was still influential despite destalinization.³¹ Yet, Zhelev’s book made it to the official printing press – published by *People’s Youth* – in 1982. Since then, both the content and the life of this book have been used in the Bulgarian public sphere to justify the validity of the totalitarian model as an interpretive lens on socialist intellectual life in Bulgaria.

However, revisionist scholarship by Zhivka Valiavicharska³² on the conception and reception of the book and more broadly on the political life of the notion of totalitarianism in late socialist Bulgaria has made inroads destabilizing this picture. Valiavicharska demonstrates the instability of the boundaries between official party line and ‘dissident’ thinking. For example, Zhelev’s book relied on the concept of a ‘holistically developed personality’ to construct a figure of the liberal individual subject as the natural opposition to totalitarianism. Yet, the notion of the ‘holistically developed personality’ had been a key part of dominant party discourses since the 1970s, it embodies the socialist humanist aspirations of the post-Stalinist period, promising an alternative to modern industrial alienation³³ in an ambivalent project of ‘resistant modernity’.³⁴ Moreover, despite being sometimes critical of the traditional model of economic base and its ideological-political superstructure within mainstream IstMat and DiaMat scholarship, Zhelev revived it in his theory of totalitarianism. This, however, cannot be reduced to a kind of a tactical move, as Zhelev retained the topographic metaphor even in the 1990s, when he argued that Communism was the worst of the two evil twins since Fascism ‘at least’ did not touch society’s economic base, that is private property.

These internal contradictions and ambiguities become all the more interesting when we consider the fact that Zhelev came to be recognized as the emblem of anti-totalitarian struggle and an archetypal figure of the ‘dissident’ in Bulgaria. Neither at the level of ideas nor at the level of practice,³⁵ however, did he conform or resist in any coherent form which fits the model of the dissident subject carved out in the totalitarian framework.

Intellectual dissent in late socialist Bulgaria

Zhelev’s appropriation of the socialist concept of the ‘holistically developed personality’ and its repurposing as a move of liberal/anti-communist ‘dissidence’ is one of very few examples of a more explicit attempt at a ‘dissident’ stance. Apart from Zhelev, few intellectuals in late socialist Bulgaria appear to have had a conception of themselves that fits the category ‘dissident’, as theorized widely, particularly in Western academia, based on central European notions of resistance to socialism. When asked whether they thought of themselves as ‘dissidents’, in a recent interview, Liliyana Deyanova,³⁶ a key intellectual based at the University of Sofia, said they had not heard of this word at the time, but they thought of themselves as ‘inakomisleshti’ - ‘differently thinking’. The concept of inakomislie has a complex and unsettled history itself. In Soviet historiography, it is commonly described as a more ‘latent’ form of ‘nonconformism’³⁷ which is vaguer and broader³⁸ and often carried a less negative connotation³⁹ than the term ‘dissident’ - itself often associated with a more narrowly defined anti-Soviet and pro-Western sentiment.⁴⁰ In Bulgaria, the label inakomislesht was used by Todor Zhivkov in 1978 precisely to distinguish it from ‘dissident’ – in 1978, Zhivkov claimed there are no

dissidents or dissent in Bulgaria, but only ‘*inakomisleshti*’ (differently thinking) people.⁴¹ Although it is unclear whether Zhivkov coopted a concept already used by Bulgarian intellectuals (who would have borrowed it from Soviet philosophy), what the life of this label perhaps demonstrates is the ‘intradiscursive, rather than interdiscursive’ relation between authoritative and resisting discourses, where both ‘the dominant and the dominated draw on the same vocabulary of symbolic means and rhetorical devices’.⁴² But if Oushakine thinks this ‘mimetic resistance’ in terms of an *inability* of either to ‘situate themselves “outside” this vocabulary’,⁴³ we would like to think of it in terms of Michail Bakhtin’s concept of ‘*vnyenakhodimost*’⁴⁴ – a concept which describes an intense dialogic relationship between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ that refuses to see these as two bounded spaces or psyches, but instead highlights a ‘dialogic simultaneity of several voices in one’.⁴⁵ It is via an examination of this ‘neither inside nor outside’ form of different thinking – *inakomislie* – at the level of ideas (symbolic content) and at the level of practical relations (practical form) that our article attempts to offer a more fine-tuned understanding of ‘dissent’ in late socialist societies. To this purpose, we zoom in on the intellectual work of some of these Sofia-based critical intellectuals – work which already by the 1970s was taking place in a very vibrant intellectual climate.

The late socialist humanities cohort, primarily based at the University of Sofia, built a rich intellectual life in and around numerous seminars, conferences and summer schools, poetry readings, binge drinking sessions, music, pubs and hedonistic parties. Politically and intellectually ‘the seminars’ varied greatly – from the more liberal ‘circle Sintez’, through to the critical theory oriented Marxian seminar, to seminars featuring more conservative debates over theology. Sintez focused on literary criticism and theory and were highly influenced by postmodern literature and culture, and poststructuralist theory.⁴⁶ For the purposes of this brief account, we mostly focus on the work of the Marxian seminar [Марсков семинар]⁴⁷ – set up by a group of young (mostly) sociologists who met regularly between 1978 and 1986.

Partly inspired by the Soviet philosopher Merab Mamardashvili (as well as Evald Ilyenkov) they engaged in a form of what they called ‘different thinking’ (*inakomislie*) – it was not ‘dissidence’, they claim,⁴⁸ but a form of critical thinking which involved reinterpreting both Western and Soviet theoretical texts and developing new theoretical conceptualizations. The seminar had its formal institutional presence at the University, it was publicly funded, and some of its members occupied important positions in the high echelons of power – one of its key members for example was Andrei Bundzhulov, head of the Bulgarian communist youth organization, an extremely powerful position in the Party.

This cohort of social scientists who matured intellectually in the 1970s were reading widely both Eastern and Western literature, and were debating over Husserl, Gadamer, Mamardashvili, Althusser, Ilyenkov, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, Lukacs, Frankfurt critical theory, Propp, Jakobson, and others. The intellectual superiority of this cohort compared to previous generations, emboldened their self-confidence: ‘We lived with the slightly arrogant confidence of being a philosophical capital’ equal to both Moscow and Paris, recalls Deyan Deyanov,⁴⁹ the founder of the Marxian seminar. They were unwilling to be merely on the receptive end of theoretical production, but believed themselves capable of proposing their own theories which were equal, if not better, to the ones articulated in Moscow and Paris. This somewhat arrogant attitude also reflects

the relatively privileged position Sofia intellectuals enjoyed in a context where there was significant funding and support for social science, and sociology in particular – hundreds of sociologists were employed in factories to mediate labor-management tensions for example; and the 7th World Congress of Sociology held in 1970 took place in Varna where 3200 sociologists (the Bulgarian delegation had 500 members!) gathered from all around the globe. Along with significant funding for conferences and translations, the post-Stalinist cohort of scholars had access to pretty much any international literature via inter-library loans. At the same time, this access was decelerated due to technological reasons – the National library had limited copy machines which would operate rather slowly. Thus, intellectuals were forced to select the best books and articles, and were discussing them collectively. Collective waiting for copies is often recollected in interviews as a kind of a common ritual, which facilitated informal intellectual debates.

A look at the history of the institutionalization of sociology in Bulgaria can illustrate the vibrancy and as we will show, plurality characteristic of this intellectual climate. The professionalization of sociology took place in a context of significant ideological and generational conflicts – between an older generation who had since the late 1950s been clutching to a dogmatic Historical Materialism, and a younger generation who became interested in theories of everyday life and constructivist approaches in the 1970s. One line of sociological work, institutionally and ideologically closer to the older generation, simply imported Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism to study social stratification, in this way substituting one dogmatic model for another; and some advocated 'convergence' models, claiming both really existing socialism and capitalism are undergoing similar modernization transformations and are destined toward a common future. Koev⁵⁰ calls it 'primitive transplantation of the Parsonian model', 'reinforced with quotations from Marx'. Koev was writing a PhD in the 1970s on phenomenological sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Science, where precisely stratification studies dominated, when he joined the Marxian seminar and brought new insights in that respect. Nevertheless, theories of the everyday and constructivist approaches, such as Berger and Luckmann's, whose translations were funded by the Party's central committee, were already part of the curriculum in the more 'open minded' Sofia University.

Some of these 'differently-thinking' younger sociologists were combining Marxian structuralist analysis with phenomenological insights, reading Soviet Marxists such as Evald Ilyenkov and Merab Mamardashvili. Mamardashvili for example, in his theories of the converted form and in his work on Marx's analysis of consciousness, talks about complex social systems, 'reproducing themselves with consciousness' and 'objects with cogito'. The Bulgarian sociologists read in him promises to 'surprise the phenomenon', going 'behind its back'. A famous quote from Marx, Mamardashvili uses, is regarding ideas as 'socially valid and thus objective thought forms'. The understanding of the ideal as a material practice is also a common trope in Ilyenkov's *Dialectical Logic*, widely read at the time.

Thus, working around an understanding of the ideal as a material practice, the 'differently-thinking' sociologists made a full circle – they used phenomenology to escape the stale doxa of the two previously dominant structuralisms – Todor Pavlov's 'reflection theory' on the one hand, and the structural functionalist western imports of stratification theories on the other hand, only to then reinvent the theoretical analysis of structures incorporating transnational cutting edge developments in social thought such as their

‘theory of mediating structures’. The ‘theory of mediating structures’ was the most important theoretical achievement of the Marxian seminar. It is similar to the Frankfurt style of critical theory, albeit with somewhat different and much wider inspirations. It is also influenced by a particular dialogue between Weber and Marx, in that in modernity not only the economy shifts toward the dominance of formal rationality, depicted in Marx’s Capital as M-C-M’, but all social fields – scientific, political, juridical, etc. M in M-C-M’ is not a simple mediator, but a mediator that pursues its own endless quantitative accumulation, a kind of a Hegelian bad infinity. And this is where they start to diverge, namely with the stronger focus on the function of the mediator (money in the case of the economy or the general equivalent in Marxian parlance). Some of the effects of the dominance of formal/instrumental rationality, or of the inversion between means and ends (‘mediators gone mad’ in their language), in each field, is the condition for the constitution of the autonomy of the field itself. This insight allowed these sociologists to avoid reducing modernity and its ‘totalitarian tendencies’ to the Enlightenment, in the way Adorno did, but instead to produce detailed empirical analysis of structures/fields, their mediators and the intermediations of structures/fields. Thus, a way was paved toward a critique of capitalism not simply as class domination (capitalists over workers), but also of the whole modern project, understood as a fateful encounter between modern technologies and industrial capitalism, of which the Leninist experiment was only a part, without reducing it to ‘state capitalism’. Paradoxically, however, the very modern form of autonomy in the intellectual field, in its particular late socialist variant, was what allowed the construction of those elaborate and expansive critical theories of modernity. This scope of intellectual ambition could hardly be imagined today, when we witness the radical deautonomization of the intellectual field under the pressures of the logic of the market, or what contemporary proponents of the theory of mediation structures call the businessification of fields.

Not a singular theory, in fact, but a set of overlapping theories that are constantly in flux, the theory of mediating structures is being developed to this day – most publications on it started to appear in the 1990s (and still do). An interesting point to bracket out here is that one had (and still has) to be invested in these intellectual networks in order to be able to follow the intricate webs of references and allusions within these theoretical developments. The reason was not some fear of repression of the totalitarian system, but on the contrary: by the 1980s intellectuals in Sofia had already achieved substantial level of autonomy, coupled with secure funding (especially by today’s standards) and no strong productivist pressure to constantly churn out publications and ‘finished products’. Dubbed ‘ideological timeout’ by Deyanov,⁵¹ sociology was in constant development, with no pressure to publish until ideas were ripe. Similarly, Ivan Krastev, a well known liberal intellectual in and beyond Bulgaria today – who was part of the Sintez circle – recalls that they were possessed by: ‘a sense that anything was possible. We were a generation which spontaneously embraced postmodernism. Our life was a game . . .’⁵²

Relations of dissent in late socialist Bulgaria

How can we talk of such radical autonomy of the intellectual field in a context others have described as totalitarian? There have been claims for example that these intellectual groups were some sort of enclaves, detached from power and hence politically

impotent. Koev⁵³ who was himself part of the Marxian seminar, for instance describes them as ‘politically protected zones, where a new generation could develop, and try to elaborate a sociology rather than an ideology’, and that ‘[t]he price to be paid for this “theoretical luxury”, however, was a lack of political activity and open public commitment’.⁵⁴ But thinking of the seminar as ‘politically protected’, ‘in’ or ‘out’ of the system/establishment, resisting or conforming, imposes a framework which erases the complexities of intellectual life in these circles. Here are a few examples to illustrate these complexities.

Andrei Raichev – a key member of the Marxian seminar was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and as such would get regular reports from informants/party secretaries from within the University. In a recent interview,⁵⁵ Raichev amusingly recalls a meeting during which he was reported to about his own suspicious behavior and ‘wrong’ ideological understandings in the Marxian seminar – the informant being unaware that the Raichev he was reporting of was the Raichev he was reporting to. And as the fact (mentioned earlier) that a key member of the Marxian seminar was also head of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Organization demonstrates, efforts to think of the field in terms of distinctions between a powerful state and powerless dissenting intellectuals hit a wall since these were sometimes the very same people. Another example which illustrates the complexities involved in the relationship between the political center and intellectuals in Bulgaria comes from an incident in the 1970s. On a morning in 1974 Sofia’s center woke up to a number of political graffiti such as ‘[It’s our] hair today, [it will be our] heads tomorrow’ in reference to the state’s so called ‘fashion police’ which would patrol the streets and routinely cut youngsters’ hair fashioned after 1970s Western styles and deemed subversive by the socialist state. Anticipating a heavy-handed response from the state, sociologists at the University of Sofia, who a couple of years later formed the Marxian seminar, rushed to carry out ‘urgent’ in their words fieldwork among young people. The results of the questionnaires and interviews they presented to the Komsomol were that young people voiced discontent ‘against concrete repressive measures’ rather than against the system – effectively succeeding in discouraging the state from launching a persecution campaign.⁵⁶ What is more, members of the seminars, and the ‘differently-thinking’ circles generally, did intervene politically on particular occasions – supporting political prisoners, defending Zhelyo Zhelev, protecting subcultural youth groups or backing environmentalist protests in the late 1980s.⁵⁷ Spaces of political power and spaces of intellectual critique were complex and entangled.

That the intellectual field in late socialism we describe here was characterized by autonomy is not to say it was isolated from governmental policies or society in general. Yet the relationships of interdependence were much more peculiar than the relationships assumed in the totalitarian model. In the following account – recounted by sociologist Lilyana Deyanova – too, we see neither censorship/constant supervision by a political center nor self-censoring suppressed voices (as in the ‘political diglossia’ suggested in many mainstream accounts⁵⁸). What is more, here we see that apart from the overlaps between mainstream and alternative, and between dominant party ideological line and alternative intellectuals which took place at the level of social networks, these overlaps

were very much present at the level of ideas too – significant overlaps could be observed within the content of intellectual production. In the words of Deyanova⁵⁹:

[P]ower wasn't somewhere faraway. We were both dominant and dominated, like Foucault says. Today it appears that there are far too many victims amid Bulgarian intellectuals, and those who present themselves as victims, or at least as rebels, are often not the real victims and rebels. Things were very tangled[...]

The following account of the institutionalization of the theme of the everyday in Bulgarian sociology illustrates this. The emergence and institutionalization of the theme of the everyday, Deyanova recounts in a recent interview,⁶⁰ took place as a result of the Party's 1974 February plenum on ideology which introduced the ideological category of 'way of life'/'quality of life'. One might say this meant it was imposed, but it was Petur-Emil Mitev – a key name in the revisionist Marxist circles who – by presenting a report – was key to ensuring the theme got inserted; and generally, from the late 1960s until the end of the regime, sociologists occupied key positions in the Party and state apparatus. The category of 'quality of life' emerged in parallel with the new sociological concerns in the West around consumerism and the so-called 'civilization of free time'.⁶¹ In the West, these developments were a result of the exhaustion of the former model of modernization – that of industrial capitalism, and triggered increased funding for research into so called 'indicators of quality of life', for example research into leisure time, the budgeting of time, etc. And in Bulgaria, Deyanova argues, this new line of enquiry was both in response to the new social realities of 'late' socialism (again, increased consumption, shift to light industries, etc.) and simultaneously as part of ideological efforts by younger cohorts to 'humanize' the system, that is, move away from the Stalinist focus on class and class conflict, and onto youth (which acquired a very significant focus as a social agent),⁶² and onto social phenomena of ordinary life 'on the ground'.

And it is as part of this that the late 1970s and 1980s saw significant increase in funding for the social sciences, and particularly for sociology. However, unlike scholarship taking place in academic structures closer to the Party (the Central Committee of BKP's Academy for Social Sciences), the phenomenological work taking place at Sofia University, and particularly the Marxian seminar was different. In the words of Deyanova,⁶³ it had nothing to do with the former: 'They, up there thought we were working to humanize the system and so on, and we didn't mind them thinking that's what we were doing'. Their work instead was first, highly theoretical and not directly politically activist, in the widespread sense of the word today; and, secondly, even in the cases when it could be considered as pro-western, liberal and even critical of totalitarianism, in the anti-communist sense of the word, as somewhat it is the case with Sintez, this does not fully answer the question of the conditions of possibility of this anti-totalitarianism. Even when the socialist system came under critical fire, this was frequently conditioned by implicit (or explicit) critiques of industrial modernity. The leftist dissent we have here then is not necessarily directed against the state socialist system, and, as we have shown, not necessarily done by people who considered themselves 'dissidents'.

The Western literature read and discussed in the seminars at Sofia University – even by those who perceived themselves as particularly pro-Western or liberal – was still

confined to Western critical theory. This has meant that, for example, leftist intellectuals – who would not have at any point called themselves dissidents – could identify with the ideas and thinking that took place in what today appear to be liberal/dissident seminars, such as *Sintez*. The following account taken from an interview with one such scholar is illustrative. Desislava Lilova, who was a member of *Sintez*, remembers in an interview⁶⁴ the way Jean Baudrillard's (1981) philosophical treatise *Simulacra and Simulation* was received: 'The first word [for *Sintez*] was simulacrum, it verbalized . . . the feeling of deceit, of a decor, randomly pasted quotes from Marx and Engels. [But] had I known "authenticity" was [claimed] in capitalism, I would have never set foot in [this seminar]'. For many, critique and thus dissent acquired parameters which transcended cold war binaries – critical thinking vis-a-vis socialist modernity had a much wider scope than the pendulum-like interpretations a lot of the early literature on 'dissidence' presupposed.

Nevertheless, as Lilova recollects, some of the members of these seminars read poststructuralism precisely as a critique of the socialist system, and continued to do so in the 1990s. That is to say, entanglements resulted in the opposite phenomenon – liberal scholars who would today consider themselves anti-communist, read and identified with leftist critique of capitalist modernity. A curious case in point here is the shock Jacques Derrida experienced when in a seminar in Sofia in 2002 he learnt that his 'Spectres of Marx' was read as an anticommunist pamphlet, and not as a philosophical critique of post-1989 neoconservative triumphalism. 'Back then it [postmodernism/poststructuralism] was anti status quo, but when it became clear it is leftist, suddenly it became retro and was thrown away', Desislava Lilova remembers.⁶⁵

And a final example of how such entanglement of different forms of critique would often result in misunderstanding: one of the significant conferences which took place in the 1980s was called 'Face and Mask' and was organized to discuss structuralist and semiotic theories, and notions of signifier and signified. Yet, as was later revealed, it was interpreted by State Security as 'the face and mask of authority', despite the fact that it was not at all what the organizers meant. But again, some younger intellectuals did read (post)structuralist French theory as a critique of the supposed 'inauthenticity' of 'the system', somewhat akin to Havel's power of the powerless and the living in truth.

Popular culture and 'dissent'

Western popular culture (cinema, music, literature) often gets evoked in contemporary personal recollections and professional analyses of resistance in late socialist Bulgaria,⁶⁶ and it is another terrain in which forms of critique got tangled up. For instance, listening to Pink Floyd and British rock generally at the time is still recalled as a sort of proof for one's 'dissident' pedigree, despite some of the band's music having been published by state record companies before 1989. Its songs were covered by *Shturtsite* (translating as 'the Beatles') – a mainstream Bulgarian progressive rock band, established in 1967, which took its name from the famous band. Moreover, Pink Floyd itself famously uses leftist lyrics, images and style. In other words, the conditions of possibility for the critique of socialism may end up within an explicit or implicit critique of modernity as a whole, including of Western modernity. Nadège Ragaru,⁶⁷ based on her analysis of the reception and debates around the screening of *Star Wars* in Bulgaria in 1982, demonstrates that the country was not closed off to Western commercial culture. As she shows, cultural

imports were not unilateral, but were enmeshed into complex processes of reinterpretations, reappropriations, and debated over. For example, in *Srednoshkolsko zname*, a high-school oriented newspaper, teenagers wrote a collective and open letter in defense of the film, asserting the film could be read within a socialist framework and attacked denunciations of it as bourgeois. Atanas Slavov, the artistic director of the most influential science fiction fan club, replied to the open letter, claiming the film should be considered ‘mindless splendor of stupidity’ and that socialist cinema never had the intention to produce technically elaborate commercial products, but focuses on originality of imagination.⁶⁸ Ragaru shows that Slavov retains his analysis of the film after the end of socialism, and claims in 2012 that it should be considered as ‘space feudalism’ and counterposed to serious science fiction, dealing with ‘serious problems of reality’. The latter shows that Slavov’s position in the 1980s was not an effect of some totalitarian repression or uncritical hatred of the West, but simply a product of his analysis. Slavov himself exerted influence over key figures of Sofia University’s intellectual culture. Miglena Nikolchina,⁶⁹ for example, quotes Slavov and her participation in the science fiction fan club he presided over, as a key element in her intellectual formation. Nikolchina participated in numerous of the aforementioned seminars in Sofia University in late socialism, and has written the most elaborate study of the culture around the seminars.⁷⁰ In her analysis, titled *The Seminar: Mode d’employ. Impure Spaces in the Light of Late Totalitarianism*, ‘the seminar’ should be considered in the singular, despite its deep internal pluralism of languages of various groups and tendencies, to highlight their common opposition to the monolingualism of the ‘totalitarian system’.

Overall then, the critique of state socialist alienation and western capitalist alienation overlapped or got entangled to the point that it precluded any easy drawing of boundaries and blurred the coordinates of what were meant to be radically different political positions. This should also make it easy to see why such ideational and relational entanglements and ambiguities fly in the face of any totalitarian, and even some revisionist paradigms which impose a variety of strictly defined binaries on the life of language, ideas, identities, and practices in late state socialism.

Another illustration of this comes from popular science fiction in Bulgaria. Contemporary interviews with critical Sofia intellectuals suggest that science fiction influenced them deeply. Recognizing this influence is also key in recognizing that not only were there overlaps and entanglements between intellectual elites and party elites but also between intellectual elites and late socialist mass culture.

One of the most popular book series of the 1980s was ‘Galaktika’ – it printed ten books a year, a selection of the most popular science fiction coming from both the West and the East. Today, Galaktika is often seen as quasi ‘dissident’ and frequently comes up in contemporary analyses of the critical intellectual milieu in the country. The books did indeed depart sharply from mainstream publishing forms and formats – they were of pocket size which imitated popular publishing trends in the West at the time, they carried serial numbers which was meant to increase demand as it invited collecting. The series was so popular that books would sell as soon as they’d come out, and often get illegally printed in larger quantities by workers at the printers – in this way essentially turning the printing house into a capitalist venture. Another interesting aspect is that the books’ prices started to be rounded up – socialist books would normally have exact figure prices (e.g. 1.94 lev) aiming to reflect more precisely the book’s labor value, so rounding up the

prices (e.g. 2 lev) was also seen as an anti-socialist gesture since it presupposes a certain arbitrariness of pricing. In addition, the books' covers were also radically novel – they were bright colored, designed to attract attention and increase demand, they combined postmodern mixing of surrealist, hyperrealist and popular culture images. At the same time, the books' plots often contained radical critique of industrial modernity and uncritical progressivism. In this sense, there was a certain mismatch between the books' covers and their content.

Miglana Nikolchina places a special emphasis on the role of science fiction in the formation of 'dissident' thinking in Bulgaria, citing authors such as Agop Melkonian – who was an editor and translator for the series – though Melkonian would refer to the book series' authors as 'painting the degeneration of consumer society' and would offer stringent critique of the domination of technology over the human, of depersonalization and of alienation. There is then an obvious contradiction, a clear mismatch between a form that is commercial (most popular fiction of all times in Bulgaria) and content which is often explicitly critical of both capitalism and modernity.

The contradictions we highlight here are not restricted to the Bulgarian context. An early inspiration for anti-totalitarian (in the anti-communist and anti-utopian sense) critique in the Soviet Union in the 1920s was the anti-utopian novel 'We' by Yevgeny Zamyatin. The plot imagines a bleak future in which people have numbers rather than names in a world that is hyper-rational and, importantly, ordered after not a Marxist but a Taylorist blueprint. Rather than Marx and Engels, this anti-utopian world followed the rules of scientific management proposed by Frederick Taylor:

Yes, this Taylor was unquestionably the greatest genius of the ancients. True, his thought did not reach far enough to extend his method to all of life, to every step, to the twenty-four hours of every day. He was unable to integrate his system from one hour to twenty-four. Still, how could they write whole libraries of books about some Kant, yet scarcely notice Taylor, that prophet who was able to see ten centuries ahead?

As a final illustration of how ambiguous the problem of just what the target of resistance or 'dissent' in late socialism was, we would like to take a look at Venelin Ganev's⁷¹ analysis of the black market for Western rock music in late socialist Bulgaria.⁷² The black market was located in central Sofia and went by the name 'borsa'.⁷³ Ganev interprets the borsa as a site of dissent because of 'two groups of interrelated facts': first, an 'us versus them' binary emerging in his interviews with former regular customers, and secondly, observations framing it as an 'alternative publicness that rendered unorthodox forms of consuming leisure time'.⁷⁴ He reads the 'us versus them' binary in such statements from interviewees as '[l]eaving the drudgery of school and everything else behind and jumping into the rock universe – that was really great', and from such renditions by prominent central European dissidents as '[t]he working day is theirs, the free time is ours'. The former quote Ganev reads as a 'symbolic exit from the domain of hollow officiality and an entry into a space defined by its difference',⁷⁵ the latter he interprets as 'embark[ing] on defiantly chosen pursuits' after 'long hours of comporting themselves in accordance with the regime's rules', which Ganev insists is a matter not of escaping but of 'confronting "them"'.⁷⁶

It is far from clear what the anti-totalitarian impulse celebrated in this and similar analyses targets – state socialism or broader modern (industrial)

alienation, aspects of which are shared by both the socialist and the capitalist regimes. Ganev explains away the rock 'dissidents' fascination with music – much of whose lyrics contained obvious anti-capitalist, leftist nonconformism – with the claim that most listeners either did not pay attention to or did not speak good enough English to understand what was being sung. This is somewhat implausible considering his own observation that most of the attendees at the bursa studied at Sofia's elite language schools. When confronted with evidence that the bursa may not have been a site of overly political dissent – for example, Ganev quotes interviewees as saying 'Just because I went there does not mean that I considered myself a dissident. I knew that what I was doing violated the law, but, frankly, I never thought about that as a big deal',⁷⁷ he draws on James C Scott's work to argue that bursa attendees in fact followed 'transcripts of resistance' in the repressive environment of state socialism. The bursa, Ganev concludes, 'should therefore be interpreted as a site of dissent'.⁷⁸ This argument is grounded, once again, in the assumption of an autonomous liberal subject always on the look out for ways to articulate their individual difference in defiance to an oppressive and all-encompassing political regime. At the same time, Ganev's interviewees tell him the police never shut the bursa down, most likely because a cut from the profits was pocketed by police officers themselves and because the children of high-ranking communist nomenklatura were among the regular attendees. Another hypothesis Ganev proposes is that from the perspective of the authorities, the bursa was best left to exist visibly rather than be pushed underground so it can be easily monitored.

Ganev further deploys Walter Benjamin's critique of the consumerism-driven cultural homogenization of industrial capitalism – which churns out mechanically reproduced copies of original art (music) devoid of authenticity – but repurposes it as lens through which to see the bursa as itself a form of market-driven critique of cultural homogenization imposed by state socialist media. The paradox here is that, somewhat similarly to the Marx seminar at Sofia University, it is precisely the bursa's autonomy – achieved not despite, but because of a state consenting to its very visible existence – that the bursa could act as a locus for the articulation of difference, shielded from the alienating and ruthless logic of the market proper – the subject of Benjamin's protest. It appears then that rather than yield to daring dissenters political space carved out of its totalitarian grip, late state socialism provided the very conditions of possibility for the exchange of 'enchanted cultural fragments'⁷⁹ as Ganev calls the copied cassettes and records, making it difficult to sustain a frame grounded in a preexisting liberal subject struggling to forge their 'projects of self-creation' and a 'quest for an authentic personhood' in the face of a repressive monolith. The evidence points to a rich variety of political (dis)engagement at the bursa and elsewhere – undoubtedly some held strong anti-communist views whilst others refused to engage with politics at all, but the form of 'dissent' we would like to highlight here is one that is neither anti-communist nor a-political. Of an anti-totalitarian impulse probably, but one which can be equally articulated against the instrumental reason of both state and capitalist bureaucracies and the forms of alienation they produce.

When it comes to the consumption of music, in contemporary interviews intellectuals involved in the seminars at Sofia University highlight generational change as a key vector

of difference – listening to Western music was primarily a marker of distinction from their parents.⁸⁰ Similarly, the seminars and conferences of the intellectual *inakomisleshti* we describe here are frequently remembered as ‘as a product of the younger generation, young people to swing their wings [. . .] Nothing dissident can be identified here. A lot of people came. Including Party luminaries. But you could talk freely here, as you can see, sometimes in a loud voice, with passion’.⁸¹

Much of this then foregrounds a certain ambiguity in what has variously been analyzed as anti-communist/totalitarian dissent among intellectual elites in late socialist Bulgaria. Conceptions of bounded psyches split along a private and public self are difficult to sustain in sites such as the ones described here. These are instead characterized by a certain heteroglossia⁸² of ‘*inakomislie*’, itself conditioned by ideational, relational and generational distinctions made possible by a system’s material and ideological possibilities in the form of financial subsidies, forms of prestige, cultural values and collectivist ethics. And as we show, the heteroglossia of *inakomislie* we describe here can include not only attacks on socialism but on modern capitalism as well. As such, these are forms of thinking and relating to politics best thought of in terms of a critique of modern rationality and alienation more broadly.

Notes

1. S. Fitzpatrick, ‘Revisionism in Retrospect: A Personal View’, *Slavic Review*, 67 (2008) pp. 682.
2. S. Fitzpatrick, *ibid.*
3. Although the last significant publications of the ‘totalitarian’ school in the field of Soviet studies appeared in the 1990s (E. Traverso, ‘Totalitarianism between history and theory’, *History and Theory*, 56 [2017]), outside of (especially anglophone) area studies, the paradigm persists in various forms. See for example, M. Killingsworth, *Civil Society in Communist Eastern Europe: Opposition and Dissent in Totalitarian Regimes* (ECPR Press, 2012), M. Mälksoo, ‘Criminalising communism: transnational mnemopolitics in Europe’, *International Political Sociology*, 8(1) (2014), pp.82–99, M. Nikolchina, ‘The seminar: model d’emploi impure spaces in the light of late totalitarianism’, *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 13(1) (2002), pp.96–127. For a discussion of the persistence of the totalitarian paradigm in Bulgarian historiography, see G. Medarov, ‘The contradictory images of totalitarianism in contemporary Bulgarian historiographies’, *Psihologia socială*, 46(2) (2020), pp.35–51.
4. K. Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1996).
5. For analyses which do offer such nuance, see for example A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), J. Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, the Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2012), and N. Hristova, *Specification of the Bulgarian ‘Dissidence’: Power and Intelligentsia 1956–1989* (Sofia: Letera, 2005)
6. J. Scott, *Domination and Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Have: Yale University Press, 1990).
7. V. Havel, ‘Politics and conscience’ in J. Vladislav (Ed.), *Vaclav Havel: Living in Truth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), pp.136–54.
8. O. Kharkhordin, ‘Reveal and dissimulate: a genealogy of private life’. In J Weintraub and K Kumar (Eds.) *Public and private in thought and practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

9. K Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
10. For a discussion of these binaries, see A. Yurchak, 'Entrepreneurial governmentality in Post-Socialist Russia. A cultural investigation of business practices', in V. E. Bonnell and T. B. Gold (Eds.), *The New Entrepreneurs of Europe and Asia* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2002).
11. P. Seriot 'Officialese and straight talk in socialist Europe', in M. Urban (Ed.) *Ideology and System Change in the USSR and East Europe*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).
12. G. Kligman and S. Gal *The Politics of Gender After Socialism. A Comparative-Historical Essay*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
13. A. Yurchak *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
14. Yurchak, *ibid*.
15. Kligman and Gal, *The Politics*, *op cit*. Ref. 12
16. S Fitzpatrick S, 'Revisionism in Soviet history'. *History and Theory*, 46(4) (2007), pp.77–91.
17. See also M Hristov, 'Michael Foucault and the historical sociology of Socialism', *Kritika i Humanizum*, 29 (2009), pp.(63–86).
18. A. Wierzbicka, 'Antitotalitarian language in Poland: Some mechanisms of linguistic self-defense. *Language in Society* (1990), pp.1–59; M. Epstein, 'Relativistic Patterns in Totalitarian Thinking: an Inquiry into the Language of Soviet Ideology', *Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars* (1991); Jowitt, *New World*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 9.
19. A. Yurchak, 'Soviet hegemony of form: everything was forever, until it was no more. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45(3) (2003), p. 483.
20. A. Krylova, 'The tenacious liberal subject in Soviet studies. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian history*, 1(1) (2000), pp.119–146.
21. Krylova, *ibid*.
22. Krylova, *ibid*.
23. Yurchak, 'Soviet hegemony', *op. cit.*, Ref. 19
24. Krylova, 'The tenacious', *op. cit.*, Ref. 20, p. 120.
25. S. Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
26. Yurchak, 'Soviet hegemony', *op. cit.*, Ref. 19.
27. Kilgman and Gal, *The Politics*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 12, p. 51.
28. Kligman and Gal, *ibid*.
29. M. Hristov.
30. Z. Zhelev, *Fashizmut [Fascism]* (Sofia: Narodna Maldezh, 1982).
31. Z. Valiavicharska, 'How the concept of totalitarianism appeared in late socialist Bulgaria: the birth and life of Zheliu Zhelev's book Fascism', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 15(2) (2014), p. 312.
32. Valiavicharska, *ibid*.
33. Z. Valiavicharska, *Restless History: political imaginaries and their discontents in post-Stalinist Bulgaria* (McGill-Queen's Press, 2021).
34. In their work, N. Karkov and Z. Valyavicharska, 'Rethinking East-European Socialism: Notes Toward an Anti-Capitalist Decolonial Methodology', in *Interventions*, 20 (2018) pp.785, they argue that 'a close reading of state socialism's historical legacy offers the contradictory image of a social formation partially complicitous with and partially resistant to capitalist colonial modernity' (p.37).
35. For example, Zhelev sought support from highest level of Politburo for the publication of his book.
36. V Elenkova, 'Interview with Lilyana Deyanova'. The academic (under)ground 1981–1989. *Piron*, 8 (2014). Online. Available at: <https://piron.culturecenter-su.org/интервью-с-лиляна-деянова/>

37. V. N. Kazmin and M. V. Kazmina, 'Borba s inakomisliem v Rosii v 60–80-e gg. XX veka' [The fight against inakomislie in Russia in the 60s–80s of the 20th century], *Vestnik Kemerovskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, 2(62) (2015), pp.166–169.
38. A. V. Vasilieva, 'Dissenterui, dissidentui, pravozashitniki, inakomisliyashtie . . . : k voprosu o 'Dialoge' sosedstvuiushtih ponyatii v obshtestvennih naukah [Dissenters, dissidents, rights defenders, inakomisleshti: on the question of the 'Dialogue' between neighboring concepts in the social sciences], *Mir Russkogo Slova*, 1, (2014), pp.26–30.
39. S. I. Nikonova, 'Inakomislie i vlast', *News of the Samara Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, 10(4) (2008), pp.1176–1180.
40. Some human rights activists in the 70s and 80s observed that the term 'dissident' carried negative associations partly due to the fact power structures used the term. Nikonova, *ibid*, p. 1176 further stresses that this meant that for many in the Soviet Union, the term, foreign in nature, was associated with hostility and links to Western security services and to NATO.
41. T. Dragostinova, *The Cold War from the Margins: a Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene* (Cornell University Press, 2021), p. 57.
42. S.A. Oushakine, 'The terrifying mimicry of samizdat'. *Public Culture*, 13(2) 2001, p. 207.
43. Oushakine, *ibid*.
44. *Vnyenakhodimost* - where *vnye* translates into English as 'outside' and *nakhodimost* as 'locatedness', but the compound in Bakhtin's account emphasizes an intense relationship between inside and outside (*vnye*). For a detailed discussion of this concept, see Yurchak, *Everything*, op. cit., Ref. 13, p. 133.
45. Yurchak, *Everything*, op. cit., Ref. 13, p. 133
46. Some of these distinctions were reproduced, albeit in varying forms and degrees, and with shifting participants, in the intellectual life of post-socialist Bulgaria. For instance, the internationally renowned Bulgarian liberal political scientist Ivan Krastev was a member of *Sintez*, along with the cultural historian Alexander Kyossef, whose intellectual influence in Bulgarian scholarly debates today spans contemporary art theory and practice to literary criticism and postcolonial theory.
47. Its key members included Andrei Raichev, Deyan Kiuranov, Andrei Bundzhulov, Deyan Deyanov, Lilyana Deyanova, Kolio Koev.
48. V. Mihailova, 'Interview with Deyan Deyanov. The academic (under)ground 1981–1989'. *Piron*, 8 (2014), Online. Available at: <https://piron.culturecenter-su.org/интервью-с-деян-деянов/>
49. Mihailova, *ibid*.
50. K. Koev, 'Masks and faces: Bulgarian sociology in search of itself. *International Sociology*, 7(1) (1992), p.104.
51. Mihailova, 'Interview', op. cit., Ref. 48.
52. D. Anguelova-Lavergne, Think tanks: actors in the transition to global politics: a Bulgarian case study, in B. Petric (Ed.), *Democracy at Large: NGOs, Political Foundations, Think Tanks and International Organisations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.75–95.
53. Koev, 'Masks', op. cit., Ref. 50.
54. Koev, 'Masks', op. cit., Ref. 50, p. 105
55. G. Goncharova, 'Interview with Andrei Raichev. The academic (under)ground 1981–1989', *Piron*, 8 (2014), Online. Available at: <https://piron.culturecenter-su.org/интервью-с-андрей-райчев/>
56. Z. Valiavicharska, *Spectral Socialisms: Marxism-Leninism and the Future of Marxist Thought in Post-Socialist Bulgaria*, PhD dissertation, UC Berkeley (2011) Online. Available at: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6j85900c>
57. See for example, interview with Petur-Emil Mitev published in dVersia, 'Za nas mladezhta beshe kauza. Interview na Deyan Deyanov s Petur-Emil Mitev' [For us the youth was a cause. Interview by Deyan Deyanov with Petur-Emil Mitev], 3 June 2022. Online. Available at: <https://dversia.net/7016/mladezhta-beshe-kauz/>.
58. Wierzbicka, 'Antitotalitarian', op. cit., Ref. 18; Epstein, 'Relativistic', op. cit., Ref. 18
59. Elenkova, 'Interview', op. cit., Ref. 36, p. 11.

60. Elenkova, *ibid.*
61. Elenkova, *ibid.* p. 11.
62. Valiavicharska, *Restless, op. cit.* Ref. 33.
63. Elenkova, 'Interview', *op. cit.*, Ref. 36, p. 11.
64. G. Goncharova, 'Interview with Desislava Lila and Orlin Spasov. The academic (under ground 1981–1989)', *Piron*, 8. Online. Available at: <https://piron.culturecenter-su.org/интервю-с-десислава-лилова-и-орлин-спа/>, p. 22.
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71. Ganev, 'The Borsa', *op. cit.*, Ref. 66.
72. We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer of this article for pointing our attention to Venelin Ganev's analysis.
73. 'Borsa' translates as 'stock exchange'.
74. Ganev, 'The Borsa', *op. cit.*, Ref. 66, p. 529.
75. Ganev, *ibid.* p. 534.
76. Ganev, *ibid.*, p. 530.
77. Ganev, *ibid.* p. 529.
78. Ganev, *ibid.* p. 529.
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80. Goncharova, *op. cit.* Ref. 64.
81. Oleg Georgiev, cited in T. Hristov, What does it mean to talk freely. The academic (under ground 1981–1989). *Piron*, 8, (2014) Online. Available at: <https://piron.culturecenter-su.org/какво-означава-да-говорим-свободно/>.
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