

LILIANA DEYANOVA

REMEMBERING REVOLUTIONS: THE PUBLIC MEMORY OF 1989 IN BULGARIA

What meanings has 1989, the *annus mirabilis*,¹ as characterized in Ralf Dahrendorf's *Reflections on the Revolutions in Europe*, acquired for Bulgarians? The aim of this chapter is not to explain what happened in this year and why, but to describe "the year 1989" in the coordinates of memory. Or rather the different "1989s" in different collective memories. Also of interest is how this symbolic year—whose commemoration, like any, homogenizes contradictory experiences—is already beginning to free itself from and elude the memories of eyewitnesses and becoming an object of history. This history is unclear and complex, however, since during over the past twenty years, opposing groups have tried to make their specific memories of 1989 universal and official by stigmatizing and marginalizing the memories of other groups. This is a process that in recent years has resulted in resolutions and laws regulating the memory of past events. One of the most discussed is Resolution 1481 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe dated 25 January 2006, "The Necessity of an International Condemnation of the Crimes of Totalitarian Regimes." The logic of this resolution will be considered in the last section of this chapter.

The analysis here is based on discourse analysis of various types of narratives concerning 1989, including media reports, high school textbooks, electoral platforms of political parties, diverse theoretical interpretations, etc. A diachronic view of two decades of narratives linked to 1989 enables us to see various tendencies, such as the exhaustion of the symbolic energy of "the 1989 revolution" or "the Change," as experienced in the form of increasing disappointment. It is also possible to see three distinct phases of memory: these can be tentatively categorized as *trauma* (generated by the memory of communism becoming a traumatic syndrome), *nostalgia*, and *laws on memory* (the regulation of the memory of communism by laws regarding memory, *lois mémorielles*).

¹ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolutions in Europe*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 7. See also Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Revolutions of 1989. Rewriting Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999); Claus Offe, *Varieties of Transition: The East Europe and East German Experience* (Cambridge: MTT, 1997); Andrew Arato, "Interpreting 1989," *Social research* 60, no. 3 (1993): 609–46; Nadège Ragaru, "Apprivoiser les transformations postcommunistes en Bulgarie: la fabrique du politique (1989–2004)" (PhD diss., IEP, Paris, 2005.); Katherine Verdery, *What was socialism and what comes next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

The year 1989 as representing events and as a symbol

The year 1989 was long and overloaded with events. On one of the first days of the year, 9 January, the Bulgarian State Council issued Decree 56, which introduced corporate organization as a basic form of entrepreneurship. This released the economy from state control and contributed to it becoming market based. It also eased the conversion after 1989 of political capital—the capital of the former *nomenklatura*—into economic capital.² Then from May to August 1989, several hundred thousand Bulgarian Turks moved to Turkey (four years after they had been forced to change their Muslim names, one of the greatest crimes of the Bulgarian communist government).

This chapter, however, focuses on 1989 as the beginning of the postcommunist era in Bulgaria, although as quickly becomes clear, the beginning of the new era did not fall on a particular day. While the Bulgarian symbolic counterpart of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Bulgarian beginning or “genesis,” has long been considered 10 November 1989, this date has become more and more contested as years go by. It was on 10 November, at a plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, that Todor Zhivkov, who had held the role of dictator in Bulgaria for many decades, was forced to resign. This resulted in a massive feeling of irreversible change, of the end of the epoch that had begun on 9 September 1944 (which had long been celebrated as the date of the “Communist Revolution”). This generated real euphoria. However, one can perhaps speak of euphoria only with regard to those first few hours and days, when there was a shared feeling of a revolutionary turning of the tides.³ The first large rally of the opposition, on 18 November, took place not on the Party Square, where the festive communist marches had taken place (which were no longer obligatory or had been cancelled), but in front of St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. Today, the opinion is increasingly heard that 18 November should be designated as “the day of the fall of communism”⁴ and be the date this is commemorated.⁵ But there was

² George Mink, Jean-Charles Szurek, *La Grande Conversion. Le destin des communistes dans l'Europe Centrale* (Paris: Seuil, 1999); Deyan Deyanov, “The Economy of Shortage and the Network Revolution (Rethinking 1989),” *Sociological Problems* 28 (2006): 372–87; see also the articles by Ivan Tchalakov and Andrey Bundjulov on networks before and after 1989 in the same issue.

³ See, for instance the memories uploaded in 2009 on various websites (bghep.co.uk; “20 years later” etc.): “On 10 November, I was a seventh form schoolboy... We, the students of Class 7b, touched history;” “For me, communism was over that morning, one could take a breath.” Cf. Dimitar Ludjev, *Revolutsiata v Balgaria 1989–1991*, vol. 1, “*Nejnata revolutsia*” i *neinoto vreme* (Sofia: Ivan Bogorov Publishers, 2008).

⁴ I refer to the letter of Lubima Yordanova to Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, 2 November 2009, <https://bg.fanopic.com>. See also <http://forums.ec.europa.eu>.

⁵ On the difference between “commemoration” and “celebration” and a date as a “memory site,” “realm of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*), see Pierre Nora, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–93).

another key event in the history of the opposition even before 10 November: the march organized by the *Ekoglasnost* movement on 3 November 1989 to submit a petition to the Parliament against a governmental power plant project on the Maritsa and Mesta rivers. While collecting signatures for the petition at the end of October, a number of *Ekoglasnost* activists were beaten and others arrested by the People's Militia. This spurred a major international reaction. Thus, today some propose 3 November, the day of the largest demonstration against the socialist power that had been held until that time, as the first day of the postcommunist era. And according to yet others, it should be 7 December, the day when the various opposition movements united and created the political formation called the Union of Democratic Forces (*Sayuz na demokraticnite sili*, SDS), which subsequently long remained the main opponent of the Bulgarian Communist/Socialist Party in electoral struggles. And another key date for the consolidation of the anti-communist opposition was 14 December 1989.⁶ On that day, a "living chain" that gathered around the National Assembly to demand academic autonomy joined other protest movements, demanding the abrogation of Article One of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, upon which the governing role of the Communist Party was built. A fact often forgotten today, however, is that on the previous day one of the plenums of the Communist Party had requested the convocation of a Party Congress to do just that: abrogate the anachronistic article. Year one of the revolution then ended with the Parliament's decision of 29 December to restore the Muslim names of Bulgarian citizens with Turkish ethnicity, citizens who formed one-tenth of the population. This occurred after their mass mobilization in late December and round-the-clock demonstrations near the Parliament building.⁷

⁶ Historian Mihail Gruev has defended the thesis that precisely 14 December, the "day of the birth of our civil society," must be the date on which to celebrate the anniversary of "1989" in Bulgaria. See his contribution to the conference dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of the beginning of the changes, organized in St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia on 14 December 2009 by historians Iskra Baeva and Dimitar Ludjev. See more on the conference debates in Theodora Georgieva, "20 Years Later, Eyewitnesses and Commentators," *Kultura* 25 December 2009, p. 3. There are also other ideas about the when the actual "date" should be, e.g. 13 October 1991 when the anti-communist opposition finally won the parliamentary elections. It is well known that Bulgaria was the only country in which the first democratic elections after 1989 were won by the communist party, albeit under the new name Socialist Party.

⁷ For a systematic chronicle of the events, see Evgenia Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, *Balgarskite prehodi 1939–2002* (Sofia: Prozorets 2005); Nadège Ragaru, "Apprivoiser les transformations postcommunistes en Bulgarie: la fabrique du politique (1989–2004)," Vol. 2 (PhD diss., Paris: IEP, 2005); a detailed history of the events is found in Ludjev, *Revolutsiata*. It is not possible here to enumerate all of the initial larger dissident formations. To mention a few, the Public Committee for the Ecological Protection of the Town of Rousse was established on 8 March 1988, the earlier Independent Association for the Protection of Human Rights (IAPHR) was established on 16 January 1988, and the independent trade union Podkrepa was created. The Club in Support of Glasnost and Restructuring held an important role. It was "an informal association," a "discussion club," but the leadership of the Communist Party qualified it as "a

Conceptualization of the “change in 1989”

I will not deal here with the theories about the definition of socialism or the subsequent period, ideologically called the “transition from totalitarianism to democracy” (which is also the name of the mandatory lessons taught today in the history curricula of Bulgarian high schools). My task is another one: to describe the different waves of how 1989 as well as socialism/totalitarianism/communism has since been remembered.

The year 1989 initiated a radical transformation of institutions and elites. It was a year in which old institutions were no longer legitimate but the new ones had not yet become so. Collective memory is a means for legitimizing in times when there is a shortage of legitimacy (“the more conspicuous the defects of legitimacy, the more important the appeal to memory becomes”⁸). A comprehensive analysis would, of course, show how the stages of dissolution of the old regime, the institutions and symbols of the socialist state, have had an influence on how “the long farewell to communism” has been represented and, correspondingly, how the narratives that interest us have developed.

There are a number of conceptualizations of “the change” that are important to this analysis. One of the first in Bulgaria, and also one of the most interesting, is that of the sociologist Georgi Dimitrov. According to him (in explicit disagreement with Dahrendorf), the notion of “the revolutions in Eastern Europe (REE)” is a myth and must be deconstructed in order to “expand our public horizon in reference to which to organize our civil behaviours.”⁹ While the concept of “revolution” was politically effective when it emerged, it later became obsolete. If one continues to chant “democracy has no alternative,” we cannot understand a social transition in which there is “a blatant discrepancy between certain public expectations and the facts of the political process.”¹⁰ The cliché of the “revolutions in Eastern Europe (REE)” homogenizes “Eastern Europe” and ignores

parallel structure in opposition to the party.” Ludjev, *Revolutsiata*, 58. A differentiated analysis would demonstrate the contradictory memories of the glorious dissident years as well as the struggle of these groups to be recognized as “the most important dissident formation.” A very important conflict in the postcommunist public sphere is that between perestroika dissidents (who some call “infiltrated communists”) and the “real anti-communists,” as for example the IAPHR considers itself. I refer to an interview with Freddy Foscolo in the newspaper *Glasove*, 17 December 2009. These last groups were not invited to the meeting held on 19 January at the French embassy between President Mitterrand and Bulgarian dissidents, the so-called Mitterrand breakfast. Its anniversary in 2009 was celebrated by a large conference.

⁸ Alain Brossat, Sonia Combe et al., *Mémoires en bataille. Histoire et mémoires en URSS et en Europe de l'Est*. (Paris: Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, 1992). This thesis has been explicitly mentioned by Jean-Charles Sczurek.

⁹ Georgi Dimitrov, *Bulgaria v orbitite na modernizatsiata* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo Sv. Kliment Ohridski, 1995), 185.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 185

the other processes in the reality after 1989 that were the result of long-term national differences. The separate national cases are “incommensurable.” Thus, in Hungary or the Czech Republic, the events can be viewed as “processes of political normalization after a successful modernization,” while in Bulgaria or Russia, the processes have in fact been generated by “another crisis,” a series of failed attempts to modernize. “En bloc thinking legitimates the presumption of the revolutionarity of the ongoing processes.”¹¹ Timothy Garton Ash’s neologism “refolution” also highlights the forms rather than the character of the processes. For the majority of Western observers, the processes that took place did look like a “revolution,” “an optimistic label” that “provides emotional and conceptual comfort.” Its function is to normalize the international situation.¹²

The internal point of view is equally non-analytic. The strategists and the leaders of the restructuring “have an interest in heroizing their work.” Most political leaders have not been “representatives of well-structured citizen interests” and have had no way of legitimizing their rise to power other than by an “external heroization of their civil contribution” to the revolution.¹³ And ordinary citizens have been persuaded that the problem of leaving socialist society, which really could no longer exist, could have been resolved merely by an unprecedented mobilization and self-negation; thus ordinary citizens also continue to believe in this symbolic myth. Since the different groups seem to be talking about the same thing, the unstable foundations upon which this myth is built have remained unnoticed for a long time.

However, it seems to me that what became clear in the first days was that the different participants were not “talking about the same thing,” and indeed they did not want to. This is why even today some remember 1989 as a year that revived the aborted 1968 events in Bulgaria and the desire for “socialism with a human face.”¹⁴ Others remember the year as having accelerated the end of the “communist yoke” and the violence this yoke had generated (for these, the beginning of the end was 14 December 1989). What a third group remembers about 1989 are the rallies and demonstrations demanding the restoration of Muslim names, which the communist power had forbidden and replaced with Bulgarian ones. A fourth group remembers the year as when they finally could legalize their private businesses, a fifth as the year *Batman* came to the cinemas, and for still others, it was nothing in particular.

¹¹ Ibid., 190.

¹² Ibid., 192–94.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ In 1968 dissidents in Bulgaria were a very small group without influence. Although there were quite a few intellectuals who advocated the reform of socialism (a “socialism with a human face”), and although there was mass dissatisfaction with the participation of Bulgarian troops in the crushing of the “Prague Spring,” dissent remained fragmented in Bulgaria, with no publicly visible civil actions.

Quite a few researchers have stressed “the dividing nature of the founding myth” of the revolution.¹⁵ The historian Nadège Ragaru has emphasized one extremely important idiosyncrasy of the post-1989 processes, namely, disappointment. This remains poorly understood in transitological and other theories, whereby postcommunist transformations move (albeit at different speeds and with different amounts of success) from the institutional and legal chaos caused by the change of regime to a gradual stabilization in political and other types of institutions and organizations. But in Bulgaria, such processes of “stabilization-banalization-consolidation” did not take place. As Ragaru, author of one of the most interesting “Western” studies of the Bulgarian postcommunist period, has written, the transformations were “not because there was democratic dysfunctionality,” a shortage of democracy. Rather the social actors “had to manage the challenges of the present.” And the context of that present was the great social transformation of the Western institutions of classical modernity, of the “globalization of the forms of economic organization, of an increased geographical mobility.”¹⁶

But as I mentioned above, my object in this text is not the memories of scholars doing research on 1989 and post-1989,¹⁷ but is the collective memory of Bulgaria.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ragaru, “Apprivoiser.” See also Peter-Emil Mitev, *Izbori '91* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 1993).

¹⁶ Ragaru, “Apprivoiser,” 751–62.

¹⁷ In this text, I will also not deal with methodological issues as, e.g., “the truth of memory” of eyewitnesses. Since the classic book by Jean N. Cru, who analysed falsity in the memories of witnesses of World War I, there is abundant literature on this question. More on the issue of historical evidence can be found in François Hartog, *Evidences de l'histoire. Ce que voient les historiens*. (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes, 1999).

¹⁸ For a systematization of certain debates on the study of collective memory and of Bulgarian studies, see Roumen Daskalov, *Ot Stambolov do Jivkov* (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2009); Liliana Deyanova, *Ochertaniata na multchanieto. Istoricheska sotsiologia na kolektivnata pamet* (Sofia: Critique and Humanism, 2009); Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., *(Re)Writing History. Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism*, Studies on South East Europe 4 (Münster: Lit, 2004). Many scholars in Bulgaria are working on the problem of the collective memory of communism, including Daniela Koleva, Kristina Popova, Peter Vodenicharov, Ivan Elenkov, Ilya Iliev, Snejana Dimitrova, Ivaylo Dichev, Krassimira Daskalova, Rayna Gavrilova, Rositsa Gencheva, Tchavdar Marinov and many others. Recently, the enormous project at Ivaylo Zneploski's Institute for Studies of the Recent Past (presented on the website <http://minaloto.org>) has seen a great deal of publication activity. Alexander Kiossev is the leader of several projects concerning the memory of communism, including one of the first in Bulgaria, “Construction and deconstruction of the symbolic world of Communism.” Within the international project of Maria Todorova and Stefan Troebst, “Remembering Communism” (see the site www.rememberingcommunism.org), Petya Kabakchieva has studied the memory of social inequalities, Mila Mineva the “nostalgia for the Soc,” Albena Hranova the “loan-memory” of the youngest generation, Vanya Petrova postcommunist films, Iskra Baeva and Evgenia Kalinova the memory of the “Revival Process” 1984–89 as well of the files of the political police, and Tanya Boneva the memory of ethnographic archives. Mihail Gruev and Aleksey Kalionski are also doing research on the memory of the “Revival Process” of 1984–89. See also some of project's research as presented in Maria Todorova, ed., *Remembering Communism: Gen-*

The memory of 1989 as a memory of 9 September 1944

Many of the narratives about 1989, especially in the initial traumatic phase after the dissolution of the official memory of communism (the memory that was merged with the memory of the party state), were related to the memory of a fundamental event in modern Bulgarian history: 9 September 1944. The memory of “the Ninth of September” (a popular uprising or anti-fascist revolution for some, a coup d’état mounted with the Red Army’s help for others) is a *demarcation line* that divides the Bulgarian people into two large and almost ethnic-like groups: communists and anti-communists (“fascists”), executioners and victims, true Bulgarians and traitors, patriots and agents, us and them, red and blue (blue being the symbol of the anti-communist opposition). This memory—also associated with the memory of the so-called People’s Court, which condemned 2,700 “enemies of the people” to death in 1945—has created a deep national trauma and syndrome (similar to Henry Rousso’s “Vichy syndrome”¹⁹). Following the collapse of the official memory of communism, the public sphere was dominated by two opposing narratives about communism and the nation’s history. These were used by the political elites for political purposes. Each group favored its own account and strove to universalize its own memory. Historians found it difficult to neutralize and assess these accounts, to create a hierarchy within the huge mass of testimonies that was accumulating, and to secure them a place in the public sphere, not a new oblivion. It was difficult to integrate the memory of communism into contemporary experience, to use it as a mechanism that regulates—to quote Tzvetan Todorov—people’s ability to manage the present. And it was difficult for historians to identify the collective aspects of the Bulgarian situation; it was easier to limit themselves to the idea of its uniqueness.²⁰

res of Representation (New York: Social Sciences Research Council, 2010). One of the authors has taken part in a project that has created a special site for the memory of communism: www.spomen-iteni.org. Within the framework of two different projects, G. Gospodinov, together with Yana Genova, produced the *Inventory Book of Socialism* (Sofia: Prozorets, 2006). Blagovest Nyagulov and Antoaneta Zapryanova are examining the memory of Bulgarian historians. Since as early as 1990, the Institute for Critical Social Studies has been examining the memory of communism—in history textbooks, in the political public domain, etc.—and is currently working on a project to create a “Virtual Museum of Socialism.” Nikolai Vukov has done a systematic study of the destruction of monuments after the communist era. Daniela Koleva has systematized biographic and autobiographic publications on socialism in Ivaylo Znepolski, ed., *Istoria na Narodna Republika Bulgaria* (Sofia: IIBM Siela, 2009). One of these is the project of Vera Mutafchieva, Antonina Jeliaskova and others entitled *History Populated with People*. The Institute for Advanced Study is working on several projects concerning historical and collective memory (<https://www.cas.bg>; the site also contains an important bibliography of Bulgarian postcommunist studies).

¹⁹ Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy* (Paris: Seuil, 1990); Jeffrey K. Olick, “What Does It Mean to Normalize the Past?” *Social Science History* 22, no. 4 (1998).

²⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Arléa—Le Seuil, 1995); Olick, “Normalize”; Marie-Claire Lavabre, “L’histoire de la mémoire—sociologie de la mémoire,” in Bogumil Jew-

In one of the studies undertaken at the Institute for Critical Social Studies,²¹ it was examined how landmark events, places and persons in Bulgaria's history since the liberation from Ottoman rule (1878) had been presented in the postcommunist public sphere. Articles about historical events and relevant references were compared in two opposing newspapers: *Douma*, the daily of the former communist party, and *Demokratiya*, the daily of the united opposition (the two main political formations, which—in the post-1989 period—were supported by four-fifths of the total electorate). Examined was how these two factions, the “red” and the “blue,” referred to “Bulgaria” and what they considered “the common places of national memory.” The divide in national identity as civic identity (in contrast to ethnic identity) proved so deep that it was not only reflected in events which by definition had opposing significance (e.g., the People's Court), but also more in consensual events, events with a great unifying potential for the nation, such as the Jews on Bulgarian territory having been saved from deportation during World War II.

In the extensive disputes about the “communist genocide” or, more precisely, about which of the two genocides—the Gulag or Auschwitz—was larger in scale and “more horrible,” it was in fact easy to discern an eliminatory logic: In the narratives of communists and anti-communists, respectively, the testimonies of victims were disqualified as “lies,” and the testimonies of the executioners were considered invalid (insofar as they were extracted by violent means or fabricated by their accusers). “Executioners” and “victims” exchange places in the accounts of the two main parties to the dispute, but the logic they have followed is the same. It is strongly reminiscent of the logic of “classical negationists:”²² every eyewitness testimony of a Jewish survivor is proclaimed to be a lie; all confessions of Nazi witnesses on trial are eliminated on the assumption that they were made under threats. It is, however, not only testimonies about the Holocaust that carry this danger.

How does today's “ordinary negationism” work and why has it become possible? It is especially visible at the start of the anti-communist revolution, when communist monuments were destroyed and history was rewritten (a time, as was often stated, in which “the past was becoming more and more unpredictable”). It

siewicki, ed., *Travail de mémoire et d'oubli dans les sociétés postcommunistes* (Bucharest: Editura universitatii din Bucuresti, 2006), 30–45; François Hartog, Jaques Revel, *Les usages politiques du passé* (Paris: EHESS, 2001).

²¹ Maya Grekova, Liliana Deyanova, Milena Yakimova et al., *Natsionalnata identichnost v situatsia na kriza: istoricheski resursi* (Sofia: Minerva, 1977). Another important source for my analysis here is the research done at the same Institute as found in Deyan Deyanov, ed., *Prenapisvaneto na istoriata v utchebnitsite za gimnaziite* (Sofia: MONT, 1995).

²² Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Les assassins de la mémoire* (Paris: Seuil 1995); Emmy Barouh, *History and Memory: Bulgaria facing the Holocaust* (Sofia: LIK & Open Society, 2003). See also Bogumil Jewsiewicki, ed., *Travail de mémoire et d'oubli dans les sociétés postcommunistes* (Bucharest: Editura universitatii din Bucuresti, 2006).

has also been revived at every new social crisis. The memory of communism is a basic resource; even today it is used politically by the political elites. Nonetheless, this moving force in the postcommunist struggle has lost its centrality. Ideological politics have been replaced by pragmatics and, as the renowned political analyst Ivan Krastev puts it, the elites and parties of the transition have become invalid and out of place.²³

The debate concerning “the two dates,” i.e. 1944 and 1989, was revived on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of Bulgarian communism/socialism in 1944. The opposition MPs, during the parliamentary session, proposed a special “Declaration on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of 9 September 1944.” They contested “the right of this party and its electorate,” of “a party that wants to look nice to those people who feel nostalgia about communism” to “glorify this historical period while ignoring the fact that the democratic world has univocally condemned Nazism and communism.”²⁴ The declaration against nostalgia for “totalitarian symbols” was contested by the leftist MPs and, in the end, was not adopted. The right to memory also presumes the recognition of the right to nostalgia.

After the initial euphoria, the dreams and the construction in 1990 (after a defeat in the first free parliamentary elections) of the “Town of Truth,” a tent camp built by anti-communist demonstrators in the city center of Sofia after the elections in June 1990, after festivities such as the event “Say Goodbye to Communism,” whose participants solemnly burnt personal communist-era objects, it became evident that some sites of memory had also become sites of nostalgia. I believe, however, that many of the incidents being interpreted as “nostalgia for communism” do not, in fact, reveal a real desire for communism to return. In this sense, the conclusions of empirical studies like the New Eurobarometer 2001, establishing “increasing levels of nostalgia” in ten postcommunist countries and the respective threat of “non-democratic values,” seem quite problematic.²⁵ A detailed analysis must include a particular nostalgia’s contextualization. Such “meaning-seeking machines” demonstrate various expressions of longing for the past, such as the recently built monument to the last communist leader, Todor

²³ Ivan Krastev, “The Strange Death of the Liberal Consensus,” *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 4 (2007): 56–63. On this, see “the end of the ‘ideological politics’” on the website of the Media Democracy Foundation, Sofia. In my analysis, this reflects the modifications to the “the image of the enemy” during the “transition” period until the elections of 2009. And then again, the election-winning representative of the right-centrist formation GERB did not miss the chance to say that he dedicated his victory to his grandfather, who was “killed like a dog on 9 September 1944 by the communists.” <http://www.fmd.bg/?p=4597> (accessed 9 January 2014).

²⁴ See the stenogram of the plenary session of the 39th National Assembly of 9 September 2004, <http://www.parliament.bg/bg/plenary/ns/1/ID/1066> (accessed 9 January 2014).

²⁵ Joakim Ekman and Jonas Linde, “Communist Nostalgia and the Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21, no. 3 (2005): 354–75, 354.

Zhivkov, the club of the friends of the Moskvich car, and the mass showings of the twenty-six episodes of the first Bulgarian socialist “Eastern movie,” *On Every Kilometer*, which glorifies the communist anti-fascist resistance.

A rarely mentioned cause and form of nostalgia is related to the fact that the communist society was also a modernization project, a product based on the logic of modernity itself. According to Reinhart Koselleck, communist society is based on a “horizon of expectation,” hope that is a narrative of progress or a “future past,” a future that illuminates the past by giving it a new perspective.²⁶ This kind of nostalgia is also familiar in democratic countries—nostalgia for perspectiveness as perceiving mankind developing into a certain, better future in an era of global modernity, an era, as has been expressed by Jean-François Lyotard, that is seeing the “decline of meta-narratives” and “nostalgia for nostalgia.”²⁷ It is an era that is seeing the end of the welfare state, in which insecurity is structurally produced and an “imperative of urgency” dominates. A symptom of this type of nostalgia is “galloping patrimonialization.”²⁸

The anniversaries of 1989

Two decades after the revolutions in Eastern Europe, solemn commemorations have become less energetic or have almost disappeared and the events themselves have increasingly lost the designation of “revolution.” But in 1997, this term and hope for change were still alive. By then inflation had reached 300 percent and the governing party, the former Communist Party which had been renamed Bulgarian Socialist Party, experienced a radical legitimacy crisis. The “January protest movement” of 1997 were called a “new revolution,” a “second revolution,” a “second chance for civil society,” and the “beginning of a new chronology.” Ragaru, who wrote one of the most interesting analyses of this five-week “pres-

²⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, *Le futur passé* (Paris: EHESS, 1990).

²⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Minuit, 1979)

²⁸ For patrimonialization as a symptom of a new “régime of historicity,” see François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité* (Paris: Seuil, 2002). On the commercialization of the public sphere and the emergence of images (e.g. in advertisements) from “the good old times,” see Mila Mineva’s article “Communism reloaded,” which was published as part of the project “Remembering communism” directed by Maria Todorova and Stefan Troebst. <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/log-browse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Soz-u-Kult&month=0809&week=c&msg=Z1yboPD4dSLFWym-CZShdNA&user=&pw=> (accessed 15 July 2013). According to Mineva, new pop-cultural repertoires of remembering have started to emerge since 2000. They are a popular form of critiquing the present: by remembering socialism positively, people are expressing their hopes for the utopias of a better world. For a comparative perspective on nostalgia, see Dragos Petrescu, “History in transitional counter-memory, and nostalgia,” within the same project. See also the contributions to the colloquium that took place in September 2005 in Berlin at the Marc Bloch Institute entitled “La nostalgie de l’époque communiste: émergence d’une nouvelle mémoire collective en Europe de l’Est.”

sure of the street” and crisis of institutions and parties, has examined its stages and the causes for this revived will to change. The “January events” were expressing the desire for the anti-communist opposition to embody “the European future of Bulgaria,” the desire to denounce the false changes and artificial reforms, and the desire for a final condemnation of the “criminal Bulgarian Socialist Party.”²⁹

But the twentieth anniversary of 1989 was not celebrated with fireworks and fanfare in Bulgaria. According to the communist newspaper *Douma*, mentioned above, “twenty years after the fall of the Wall, most people are unhappy with capitalism.”³⁰ According to its opponents, the *Demokratiya* newspaper, “you cannot celebrate something that did not happen or was a failure,” and “communists are still here.”³¹ The liberal press published a study conducted by the Alfa Research sociological agency entitled “Twenty years after the changes, Bulgarians hesitate as to when they lived better.”³² Many publications were dedicated to the festivities in Berlin, where “freedom was being celebrated.” But as both Western and Bulgarian analysts of the post-1989 events stated, “Bulgaria is not celebrating.” And while there were actually quite a number of jubilee events and publications in Bulgaria, they were as fragmented as the memory of 1989 itself. Moreover they were not, and had little chance to be, visible publically—with a few exceptions, as for example the exhibition “Without a Trace” on the Belene labor camp 1949–59, organized by the private Institute for the Studies of the Recent Past and solemnly opened on 10 November, together with an international conference organized by the same Institute. The memory of communism had become split into pieces.³³

²⁹ Increasingly called “the BSP mafia.” This desire can also be seen in events such as the mock funeral march for the Party, enacted by the students of the Theater Academy, as well as in a renewed romanticism symbolic of 1989 but also of the Bulgarian national revival of the 19th century. See “1989 in 1997” in Nadège Ragaru, *Le temps feuilleté du changement. Essais sur la Bulgarie post-socialiste* (Sofia: Critique & Humanism Publishing House, 2010); see also the revolutionary slogans published by the Bulgarian Student Protest Union, of which some are included in Lubima Yordanova, *Ot lumpena do grajdanina* (Sofia: Bulteks, 1997).

³⁰ *Douma*, 10 November 1990.

³¹ *Demokratiya*, 10 November 1990.

³² Published in *Kapital*, 13 November 2009. According to this survey, 78.2% said that health care was better under socialism; only 12.2% responded that it was better in 2009. This is also the case with other indicators: according to 48.3% (vs. 26.2%) education was not better in 2009. The ratio was reversed in only three indicators: the diversity of commodities, freedom of speech, and leisure and travel. On Bulgarian National TV, it was possible to watch dialogs such as the following: *Reporter*: “What do you know about 10 November?” *Student girl*: “Almost nothing.” *Reporter*: “Haven’t you been told about it?” *Student girl*: “No.” *Student boy*: “As far as I know, they say this is the date of transition [...] when the Communist Party lost power.” *Another student boy*: “That was when reforms were undertaken in Bulgaria; it changed from totalitarianism, or something like that, into democracy.”

³³ Cf. Alexander Kiossev’s project “Beyond Hatred, Beyond Nostalgia,” a mini festival of the socialist past; see also the special issue: Alexander Kiossev, ed., “The Living Archive of a Fes-

My research comparing the events and their tenth and other round anniversaries is outlined in the following survey.

One year after 1989

On 10 November 1990 the communists joyfully celebrated “the pivotal date of the newest political history”³⁴ and “the day when the change began.” For these changes, “the Bulgarian Communist Party played a historical role [...] without its effort to destroy the totalitarian system, our development would have had another fate.” It is stated that “the Party has distanced itself from its mistakes,” which is why the leader of the communists says that “we must take the offensive—for democracy and civil peace, against violence and neo-fascism.” On the next day, 11 November, many photos and other material are published of a rally organized by the Supreme Council and the City Council of the Bulgarian Communist Party in Sofia. It is described as “a meeting of many thousands celebrating the birthday of democracy,” whereby “they are demonstrating their resolution to continue with change.”

But in the same issue of the communist newspaper *Douma*, we also find many stories and photos of counter-rallies and anti-communist protests, which were frequent at that time. Here one sees faces of people who suffered from “alternative [anti-communist] action,” as from a “violent blue fans gang.” The latter was a metaphor for anti-communism; actually no such gang ever existed. Some communists condemn the “incompetent voluntarism” of the former party leader—“the dictator”—Todor Zhivkov. (“10 November is the date on which our party found the strength to break once and forever with the dictatorship and the personal regime”³⁵). Slogans such as “we bring the future” and “democracy for everyone” are used.

On 10 November, *Demokratiya*, the daily of the anti-communist opposition, notes the date without enthusiasm: “One year from the start of the Big ‘Change’” (placing the word “change” between ironic quotation marks).³⁶ Memories of persons close to Zhivkov and the communist circles are published. The desire is strong to keep the memory of “the crimes of communism” alive (because “while

tival,” *Piron 2* (2009); cf. also the conference “1989. The Divided Year. Literature as a Political Construction of Transition,” organized by Plamen Dojnov and Mihail Nedeltchev at the New Bulgarian University. See also the important series of articles on the anniversary of 1989 in *Kultura*, and the festival of critical documentary films from the socialist period, “Despite: at the verge of changes” (Bulgarian publishers of human & social sciences, National Cinematheque and others). See also Maria Todorova, “Daring to remember Bulgaria pre-1989,” *Guardian*, 9 November 2009.

³⁴ *Douma*, 10 November 1990; *Douma*, 11 November 1990.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Demokratiya*, 10 November 1990.

communism is going, communists are staying"). The sites of "communist concentration camps" are sought and the memories of witnesses are published.

The communists were opposed to the opposition's alleged desire to take over power completely. "Yesterday the opposition demanded absolute power in a series of rallies" is the announcement about a national strike that then lasted thirty-seven days, revealing the high degree of political tension at that time.³⁷

Ten years after 1989

In 1999 the anti-communist opposition was in power and the changes that had begun on 10 November 1989 were described differently. The most glaring statement is the front-page title in *Douma* reading "No Reform or Transition in Bulgaria." Debates at the conference "Ten Years after the Tenth," organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, are quoted. The decline of the country and the misery of its citizens are described against the background of the hope for freedom that had momentarily sparked.³⁸ *Douma's* editorial board invites the ambassadors of Russia and the United States to discuss "the place of Bulgaria in the contemporary world."

Concurrently, *Demokratiya* writes about freedom: "Germany, ten years without the Wall." It recalls the will of the ordinary citizens: "If they had not demanded the change [...] then those who invent stories of their own heroism would have continued to speak happily." On the same day, the front page of the newspaper carries the article "The archives about 10 November have been hidden." The head of the General Department of Archives confesses to the absence of twenty-six archival items that would have been important for understanding the history of "10 November 1989." The decisions of the Politburo of the Communist Party are missing, as well as records of other key decisions, as for example of the intervention of Bulgarian troops into Czechoslovakia in 1968. Against the opinion that the actors of 1989 were "heroes," it is argued that 10 November was an internal Party coup: "a perfunctory change of the First One," "a palace coup endorsed by Moscow."³⁹

The "coup" thesis is also taken up by some textbook authors. After a period of confusion immediately following 1989 and the impossibility to "teach" the previous period (which is why it was automatically deleted from the history curricula⁴⁰), 1989 was gradually thematicized. It became mandatory to call these

³⁷ *Douma*, 11 November 1990.

³⁸ *Douma*, 10 November 1999.

³⁹ *Demokratiya* 10 November 1999.

⁴⁰ See the Instruction of the Ministry of Public Education of 1990 entitled "Some changes in the content and organization of the educational work from the first to the eleventh forms." Copy in the author's possession.

lessons “From totalitarianism to democracy.” Textbooks explain that “the crisis of socialism became especially conspicuous in the mid-1980s,” but removing Zhivkov from power “was done by political figures from the highest circles of the party and the state in the form of palace coup.”⁴¹ It can be read that “the Berlin Wall finally fell down, Zhivkov was deposed, and Bulgaria took the road of democracy.” According to the same authors, the Bulgarian opposition was different from that in the Central European countries: it “was born in early 1988 and stopped unexpectedly after ‘the change on the Tenth.’”

Another textbook explains that the problems of communism were mainly due to Todor Zhivkov (who was “an impostor and opportunist”) and the fact that establishing diplomatic relations with the EC was so late (in 1988) because of “the ideological burden of the ruling communists.”⁴² Other textbooks analyze the struggle between the two main views of “the destruction of the old system”: either as a rebuilding (perestroika) under the guidance of the Communist Party or as a “radical transformation of the society” after the fall of communists’ monopoly.⁴³ As mentioned above, the subject “The Bulgarian transition to democracy” becomes a mandatory part of the curriculum and a separate topic in new textbooks.

The laws on “the memory of communism”

There have been many attempts to pass laws on “the memory of communism.” These include the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Resolution 1481 (2006) on “the need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes.” Also in Bulgaria, for the past two decades different groups have been trying to assert their memory as being “the true memory of communism” and to control textbooks, monuments, museums and the media. In other words, they are attempting to acquire a monopoly over the legitimate symbolism of the era and the interpretations of the common sites of the memory of “communism.” In the following I will describe several attempts at creating memory laws.⁴⁴

On 30 March 2000, the Bulgarian Parliament discussed the Act Declaring the Criminal Nature of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria, and a month later it was passed. The Act was the final result of a series of attempts to pass decommunization and lustration laws in Bulgaria. The positive decision on the Act was

⁴¹ Iskra Baeva, Ivan Ilchev et al., *Istoria i tsivilizatsia za 11 klas* (Sofia: Planeta, 2001), 148.

⁴² Ivan Lazarov, *Istoria i tsivilizatsia za 11 klas* (Veliko Turnovo: Slovo, 2001), 163.

⁴³ Alexander Nikolov, Mitko Delev, et al., *Istoria i tsivilizatsia za 11 klas* (Sofia: Prosveta, 2002), 422, 425.

⁴⁴ For the logic of the so-called *lois mémorielles*, see Pierre Nora, Françoise Chandernagor, *Liberté pour l’histoire* (Paris: CNRS Edition, 2008), as well the debates between the French historian Gerard Noiriel and the Comité de vigilance face aux usages politiques de l’histoire.

predestined by the parliamentary majority of the anti-communist Union of Democratic Forces (*Sayuz na demokratichnite sili*, SDS).

The socialists called the Act “insane.” Georgi Parvanov, a historian and socialist MP at the time (and later president of Bulgaria) wrote an article in which he repeated (unrevised) the post-1989 arguments of the Left. He pointed out that the USSR was part of an anti-Nazi coalition; that before 1944 there had also been crimes, killings and foreign troops in Bulgaria; that the current Bulgarian GDP is lower than before 1989 and that many families “have forgotten the taste of meat products,” while under socialism seventy-eight kilograms of meat products were consumed per capita each year; that Bulgaria had been the world’s largest producer of cigarettes and second largest producer of nitrogen fertilizers; in short, that “we” (the socialists) would not allow “the distortion of the truth about the past” and “the rewriting of history post factum.”⁴⁵ Conversely, the SDS daily, *Demokratiya*, congratulated itself on the fact that communism had been outlawed, emphasizing once again that Bulgaria had done the least of all ex-communist countries concerning decommunization. They pointed out that Bulgaria was the only country where “the debate with the communists has not been recorded in any document” because the communists in Bulgaria are “even worse than those in Romania.”⁴⁶

As always, “Europe” was also invoked in the arguments. According to the BSP elites, a law like this was “a death sentence for a parliament that is heading for the EU.” And according to the SDS elites, “EU membership itself is the contemporary dimension of anti-communism.”⁴⁷

At the same time, other parliamentary panels and committees discussed various proposals for creating an Institute of National Memory. In some drafts, the Institute of National Memory is even called the Institute for Studies on the Crimes of Communism. This is why the SDS proposed that 50 percent of the members of the Institute be appointed by the Union of the Repressed People in Bulgaria after 9 September 1944, and the rest by the Supreme Judicial Council and the National Assembly. Item 6 of Article 28 of this draft defines a main task of the future Institute as “the formation of proposals on history curricula that will be made available to the Ministry of Education.”

A typical lustration law is the Act of Provisionally Introducing Certain Additional Qualifications for Senior Members of Scientific Institutions and the High-

⁴⁵ *Douma*, 31 March 2000.

⁴⁶ *Demokratiya*, 31 March 2000.

⁴⁷ For more on this topic, see Liliana Deyanova, “Des condamnations locales du communisme à la Condamnation internationale de janvier 2006 (les guerres des élites bulgares pour le monopole de la mémoire du communisme),” in Bogumil Jewsiewicki and Erika Nimis, eds., *Expérience et mémoire* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008), 193–213. I am also using interviews with historians and other researchers on communism within my project “How do Bulgarian Historians Remember Communism?” This project is part of the international comparative study “Remembering Communism” often mentioned here.

er Certifying Commission of 9 December 1992 (known as the Panev Act after the SDS MP who proposed it). On 21 October 1998 the Bulgarian Parliament passed a Public Administration Act that contained lustration provisions. The then president, Petar Stoyanov, used his right of veto and returned the Act to further debate. On 30 July 1997 the National Assembly passed, again with an SDS majority, a law on declassifying state security files. While at the time the law was revoked, by December 2006 Bulgaria had received a law regarding secret police files and a commission had been formed for granting access to them. The fixation on secret police files, conspiracy paradigms and “a clean past” have proven to be central issues in the debates about the memory of communism.

The above-mentioned PACE Resolution 1481 of 25 January 2006 on “the need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes” is rightly considered the culmination of the attempts to condemn communism. And calls for a “Nuremberg Trial” of communism are becoming louder. In the first variant of the resolution, it is said—and this opinion seems to be voiced ever more frequently in Bulgaria as well—that “the communist regime was even more perverse than the Nazi regime.”⁴⁸ But the attempts of the European People’s Party/Christian Democrats to promote this idea (together with Resolution 1481, which was the result of a long and skillful lobbying campaign of the Party) in a document called “Recommendation to the Council of Ministers” failed to win the necessary two-thirds majority. This means that this sentence will not yet be included in the history textbooks of the member countries concerned. But the problem of the official memory of “communism,” of the effort of particular groups to make their memory of “this regime” official, to turn it into a juridical law, a moral norm and even into a scholarly truth with the help of “their historians,” remains unresolved. While in 2006 the PACE resolution was not approved by the Bulgarian Parliament, it did pass in 2009. Soon thereafter, on 19 November 2009, the Bulgarian Parliament also approved the European Parliament Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism of 2 April 2009 (proclaiming 23 August a “Day of Remembrance of the Crimes and Victims of the National Socialist, Communist and All Other Totalitarian Regimes”).

The Bulgarian participation in both the initiative and adoption of PACE Resolution 1481 was not insignificant. According to the account of Bulgarian politician Lachezar Toshev, after a 2003 rally in Bulgaria to remember the people who had been repressed in the labor camp on Belene (Persin) Island, the initial text of the resolution was planned and written in Bulgaria, whereupon it was taken to Strasbourg, debated, revised and registered as a document to be put to the vote. In the name of this cause, a special website, *Decommunization*, was created in

⁴⁸ PACE Draft Resolution, 16 December 2005, <http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/XrefViewHTML.asp?FileID=11097&Language=fr>. The final version is PACE Resolution 1481, 25 January 2006, <http://assembly.coe.int/mainf.asp?link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta06/fres1481.htm> (accessed 26 September 2013).

Bulgaria, and a conference was organized in Koprivshtitsa on “The International Condemnation of Communism—the Initiative of the European People’s Party—The Bulgarian Perspective.” Also presented there on 24 September 2004 was a newly founded institute.⁴⁹

While the new institute for the study of the crimes of communism and the proposals for establishing an Institute for National Memory became the object of debate, this did not enter the public discourse. Some researchers see these kinds of institutes not as scholarly institutions, but rather associate them with the former “institutes for propaganda.” Others, however, are convinced that these institutes provide the long-desired chance of “guaranteeing the freedom of scholarly research” and an objective reading of history, which used to be obstructed by the “communist *nomenklatura*.”

Conclusion

The main question that has guided this account of the memory of 1989 (which, as in every narrative, is a question of construction, this construction being made from a position both scholarly and popular) has been how in Bulgaria the contradictory experience of communism and the various conflicting interpretations that clash in the public sphere are represented in the memories of ordinary citizens as well as of researchers on communism. The modern public space of history presupposes equal access to different interpretations. Indeed, to use the term of Pierre Nora, the modern public space of history consists of *lieux de mémoire*, “common places of memory.” But these places belong to no one; the “common places of memory” are not necessarily “places of common memory.” In the battle of conflicting interpretations this is, by definition, what is at stake: the possibility for a state, “Europe,” or various groups to assert a symbolic monopoly on a particular interpretation.

This is why it is essential to critically analyze the above-mentioned resolutions and memory laws that want to present “the truth about communism” as well as the research institutes whose goal is “to unify the memory of the times of communism,” and thus, also the memory of the year 1989.

⁴⁹ See the collection of official speeches and political messages as well as many documental studies [Vassil Stanilov, ed.], *Memory for Tomorrow* (Sofia: Rabotilnitsa za Knijnina Publishers, 2005), which was presented to the PACE. Cf. [Luchezar Toshev et al.], *Istoriata na edin document: 1481/2006* (Sofia: Rabotilnitsa za Knijnina Publishers, 2006).

