



Postsocialism and the Afterlives of Revolution: Impossible Spaces of Dissent

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This article examines postsocialism as an emerging theoretical concept to assess the contestations of liberalism and fascism in public spaces. Focusing on recent political events in Romania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, we address how post-Cold War figurations and erasures of socialism circulate in both expected and unexpected ways in recent instances of protest. Rather than fall into stereotypical invocations of Eastern Europe as a historical and geopolitical site from which to theorize the prefiguration of illiberalism and totalitarianism in a post-Brexit and post-Trump era West, we instead ask, what can Eastern European postsocialist politics teach us about the perils of liberalism? We highlight how the reorganization of public space undergirds the conditions of forgetting that enable postsocialist disaster capitalism, which, as we contend, speaks not only about Eastern European specificity, but also more broadly about the contradictions of Euro-American liberalism made apparent in its recent crises.

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After exploring how and why the Cold War is being newly interpolated in the contemporary moment, we delve into studies of postsocialist liberalism, focusing upon Romania's "Light Revolution" and Macedonia's "Colorful Revolution" protests. During early 2017, nearly one million Romanians took to the streets, demanding an end to political corruption. Likening the ruling political party to the "dark" socialist past, an ongoing postsocialist trope, protestors appealed to the West for salvation. Utilizing smart phone displays and lasers, protestors gained recognition for their technological prowess, a form of Western becoming. While these aspirational politics can be traced back to the Enlightenment, referencing peripheral subjectivities of being never quite Western/technological enough, these protests expressed a specifically postsocialist spatiotemporality, framing state socialism as a void, something to be finally overcome by returning to the pre-socialist European "golden era." In doing so, protestors effectively straightjacketed ideas of Communism upon those of fascism, forgetting that state socialism emerged as an antifascist project in Romania long before authoritarian rule emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Meanwhile, Western liberal media picked up Romania's light signals with gusto, hinting that if only US protestors could organize the same, then they too could effectively oust the corrupt and fascistic Trump from his newly elected seat. As such, two parallel fantasies emerged, with the East and the West each vying to become the other, each reifying timelines in which liberal progress means overcoming fascism and corruption. But why does this also get written as overcoming Communism? What does this say about liberalism, postsocialist temporality, and the public space in which these demonstrations transpire?

We then turn to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's "Colorful Revolution," in which, like in Romania, protestors staged objections to government corruption and intolerance. These protests took place against the backdrop of Skopje's newly renovated capital, funded by the ruling government of Macedonia VMRO in the project "Skopje 2014," which appropriates the symbols of ancient Greece for the recently formed Macedonian nation-state. This project materializes Macedonia's imagined history of being central to Europeanness and democratic tradition within public space. Turning to the politics of spatial elimination of socialist collectivity in both the visual manifestations of the Colorful Revolution and in the project Skopje 2014 (whose total cost exceeded 600 million Euros), this section of the article tracks the ways

in which Macedonian contestations of statecraft and liberal democracy dramatized the erasure of the socialist past (including the architecture and conception of public space that informed the 1963 plans for rebuilding the city after the devastation of the earthquake that reduced Skopje to rubble that year). But first, we begin by exploring why there has been a resurgence of the Cold War as a descriptor of present-day geopolitics in the West. We are wary of the explanatory logics of the Cold War because it positions Eastern European socialist histories and their remains as augurs of growing fascistic possibilities, eliding the violence that liberal democracy and disaster capitalism have wreaked.

1 POSTSOCIALISM: RE-EVALUATING LIBERALISM AND AUTHORITARIANISM AND THE COLD WAR 2.0

In their now canonical article, “Thinking Between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War,” Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery argue that “ethnography must ... employ a critical lens on the global [and epistemological] effects of Cold War thought throughout the twentieth century. It is time to liberate the Cold War from the ghetto of Soviet area studies and postcolonial thought from the ghetto of Third World and colonial studies. The liberatory path we propose is to jettison our two posts in favor of a single overarching one: the post-Cold War” (29). Chari and Verdery understand the Cold War as an epistemological limit to how the world could be known in the second half of the twentieth century.

While Chari and Verdery’s interest is in the critique of area studies paradigms, we might also consider another epistemological impasse brought on by the Cold War paradigm—that is, the positing of liberalism and illiberalism (for instance, fascism, totalitarianism, and antidemocratic tendencies) as paradigmatic opposites in the political-ideological spectrum. This Cold War opposition mapped the free and unfree worlds—a cartography that remains intact today upon a palimpsestic atlas. However, as we argue, by continued reliance upon geohistorical Cold War maps, we fail to understand how their dialectical contours enable fascism to grow uncharted. As we assert, postsocialism marks not only a temporal but also a spatial orientation toward a possible politics in a post-Cold War world. Here, we think of spatiality not only in terms of the maintenance of East/West antipodes, but also as it defines the locations, limits, and temporalities of revolutionary imaginaries. As such, post-Cold War

framing is a useful conceptual lens with which one can track how public space works to avert (and erase) the crises in liberalism through the affirmation of concepts that bolster capitalist proliferation (including transparency and anticorruption). As we observe, contested spaces are about an affirmation of Westernness or Europeanness that is dehistoricized and, therefore, uncritical of the politics of privatization and dispossession.

Postsocialism emerged as a term in academic writing in the 1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the USSR. As Chari and Verdery note, unlike postcolonialism, which entered academic discourses years after the decolonization movements began and was even at its inception a theoretical concept, postsocialism, initially at least, was a descriptor of what came after the end of formal state socialism. It portrayed, Verdery argues, “reorganization on a cosmic scale,” redefining and reordering “people’s entire meaningful worlds” through processes of privatization, lustration, “democratization,” and “transition” (to modes of liberal-democratic governance)—in other words, the remaking of persons from socialist to capitalist subjects (*The Political Lives* 35). Initially, however, it was limited as a descriptor and applied mostly to Central and Eastern European nations, and at times, when modified, to China and Vietnam (Atanasoski and Vora; Chari and Verdery; Buck-Morss; Zhang). Thus, following the 1990s, postsocialism increasingly appeared less relevant to theorizations of social and cultural life within global capitalism. After all, if simply a depiction of economic, social, or governmental transition, that transition had to reach an end at some point—a point from which one could ask, “What was postsocialism and what comes next?” Yet, as recent years have shown (particularly during Obama’s presidency and now during Trump’s), the Cold War seems to be alive and well as a revived framework for apprehending the world, at least in the US. From Russia’s ban at the 2016 and 2018 Olympics, to accusations of spying and hacking attributed to both Russian and Romanian illiberals, the contemporary moment invites us to revisit the theoretical place of postsocialism. The call of this edited volume to think about how concepts are brought to life anew in different moments, and how these theories circulate in novel ways, seems especially apropos in theorizing postsocialism and the so-called “cosmic ruptures” of today (Dunn).

When not ghettoized within area studies, postsocialism (as related to but separate from the post-Cold War) is, as we assert, relevant as a theoretical concept suited for assessing the time and space of political action. It is particularly useful in moments when revolution either seems impossible

or, when it happens, as inevitably ending in either in totalitarianism or liberal democracy (Buck-Morss; Scott). As Atanasoski and Vora have argued, when apprehended as theoretical ground, postsocialism marks not the end of all socialisms, but the end of state socialism as a dominant discourse overdetermined by Cold War knowledge production about the world. Conceptually, then, postsocialism enables an exploration of socialist legacies on multiple scales, expanding beyond state socialism and the Communist International, and how these have (or have not) remained constitutive of contemporary radical and decolonial imaginaries of collectivity and political action. Put otherwise, postsocialism facilitates an assessment of ongoing socialist legacies in new ethical collectivities and networks of dissent opposing state- and corporate-based military, economic, and cultural expansionism since the end of the Cold War.

Given the revival of the Cold War as a geopolitical frame, postsocialism also offers an important corrective to the dehistoricizing, decontextualizing, and limiting binary framing of democracy and authoritarianism as the only (and opposing) political forms. The so-called “Cold War 2.0” takes place in a moment when state socialism has receded into the past, but in which the model of antagonistic battle for imperial control of “satellite” states between the US and Russia (and indeed, even China) seems alive and well, written as a contest between liberalism and illiberalism, and between democracy and authoritarianism. Sorin Cucu has recently questioned why the Cold War is the ghost that the contemporary conception of world history (or world politics) needs. Taking on both the understanding that we are experiencing a resurgence of the Cold War, and the notion that the Cold War never ended, he argues instead that “Even if we accept that the continuity of the Cold War trumps the pattern of change experienced by the world in the last few decades, we still need to accept that the Cold War today has none of its former power and that, in spirit, it allows for contradictions in so far as these contradictions are enabling reconfigurations of its discursive make-up.” In other words, Cucu shows how Cold War discourse accommodates its own contradictions to create various geopolitical configurations and fantasies as historical inevitabilities.

The historical inevitability engendered by the framework of Cold War 2.0 resuscitates the oppositional tension between terms like democracy and authoritarianism with no existing critique of capitalism. According to Alexei Yurchak, “the opposition of ‘democracy’ and ‘authoritarianism,’ ... instead of providing analytical clarity, in fact, contributes to decoupling ‘democracy’ from ‘capitalism’ and thus concealing and

depoliticizing the real conditions” (1). Such depoliticization asserts that capitalism and liberal democracy are antithetical to each other, eliding that in numerous postsocialist contexts, they were violently injected as inextricably linked, with the purpose of destroying socialism and its legacies. For instance, in the case of Romania (as in many other formerly state socialist nations), the transition to liberal democracy meant privatizing, fragmenting, and restituting state-owned land, housing, and factories, leading to rampant dispossession (often racialized), and a return of pre-socialist wealth (Florea; Verdery, *Vanishing Hectare*). At the same time, transition installed a regime of elites who transformed late-socialist power relations into new forms of crony capitalism backed by Western firms and interests, razing many of what had been successful and independent sectors (Chelcea and Druță; Pusca). Today, Romania remains an extractive space for Western capitalism, from Silicon Valley IT firms to Austrian lumber companies, maintaining the highest material and social deprivation rate in the EU (Eurostat).

Yet on both sides of the former Iron Curtain, liberal democracy, rather than reflecting upon the destructive powers of its capitalist accompaniment, makes its object of critique authoritarianism, which, in the era of the Cold War 2.0, is increasingly conflated with Communism. Both the Light Revolution and Colorful Revolution protestors, rather than blaming global capital for post-1989 devastation, blame treasonous politicians who they render unpatriotic, un-European, and Communist. As Yurchak elaborates, the liberal reduction of the political field informs the resurgence of “‘patriotism’ versus ‘treason’ and of ‘patriots’ versus ‘foreign agents.’” In the US, this discursive strategy divorces Trump’s victory from US political contexts, which have everything to do with the endurance of neoliberal hegemony and white supremacy (Kelley), instead impugning illiberal outsider interference. As such, “Real politics becomes displaced onto the stereotyped figures of ‘foreign agents and patriots who oppose them’” (3).

Given the resurgence of the “Cold War” as a paradigm to assess geopolitics in media venues, and, given Cucu’s and Yurchak’s incisive critiques about this revival as a reductionist move, it seems that postsocialism may be more useful (as we outline it above) that post-Cold War in allowing for a nuanced assessment of contested political terrains. These contested terrains often quite literally have to do with struggles over place (including neighborhoods that have been razed for the construction of a large US embassy in Macedonia, and movements against the privatization of

production that take place in factories across the former Yugoslavia). Yet often, even mass demonstrations enact a liberal futurity as inevitable. Like in Romania, in the former Yugoslav republics, including in Macedonia, the time and space of postsocialism are linked in the attempts to erase socialist sociality that is enacted in public space. While social problems are addressed through the language of corruption, lack of transparency, and ethnic conflict/minority rights, there is a continual deflection of the fact that all the republics of the former Yugoslavia must adjust to the demands of the market. In this context, the recirculation of “Cold War” as a frame of reference for geopolitics rehearses the terms of Cold War liberalism in its binaristic logics to conflate capitalism with democracy, transparency, and accountability. Kristen Ghodsee writes that “Just as the popular stereotype of communism is rarely uncoupled from the state repression of the twentieth-century experience of it, today ... the democratic ideal is becoming inseparable from the social chaos neoliberal capitalism has wreaked in its name” (xviii). However, we want to push this further to question how “the democratic ideal” in fact necessitates the grotesque coupling of socialism with state repression.

Since 1989, proponents of liberal democracy on both sides of the former Berlin Wall have read state socialism through an anticommunist lens, inhering what Konrad Petrovsky and Ovidiu Țichindeleanu describe as postsocialist colonial subjectivities amongst Eastern Europeans. These subjectivities rely upon, in McKenzie Wark’s words, an asymmetrical interplay between the East and the West, so that “The territory of the East was maintained as an image of the other within the map of the West,” while “the map of the West was the other put into covert circulation in the territory of the East” (65). Thus, while the West imagines the Eastern other as a necessary yet backward figure within its own dialectical cosmology, postsocialist coloniality incites the East to entwine Western cosmological imaginaries with its own.

This uneven interplay foments what Liviu Chelcea and Oana Druța name as “zombie socialism,” or the neoliberal postsocialist hegemonic form that interpolates Communism as a backward deadened void—one that threatens to return and consume the inevitability of liberal democracy, zombie like. Zombie socialism dehistoricizes the past, thereby paving the way for a neoliberal future. For instance, in 2008, conservative Eastern European politicians and intellectuals signed the Prague Declaration, equating the victims of Communism with the victims of Nazi Germany, demanding justice from EU governing bodies. Here, Communism and

fascism are interpreted as one and the same—the evil, fascistic monster that liberal democracy will save us from. Always lurking behind the curtain, zombie socialism threatens to turn people already presumed and subjectified as backward further back. Liberal democracy not only fears socialism’s existence but also hinges upon its realness to justify its own.

According to Nikhil Pal Singh, “totalitarianism” was both the “primary explanatory terrain concerning the post-World War II division of Europe,” and a reassertion of “racist and colonialist divisions of the world and its peoples that had allegedly been left behind in the U.S.-led break from the logics of fascism and empire” (68). As he elaborates, “the theory of totalitarianism became the hinge connecting the frame of U.S. global power to the teleological door of modernization that opened and closed on new nations according to a more deeply embedded set of norms and assumptions about obedience, deference, emotional ‘maturity,’ trustworthiness, rational capacity, and fitness for self-government” (68). The binaristic opposition between democracy and totalitarianism, and between liberalism and fascism, marks the entanglement of these post-Enlightenment ideological formations. Democratic liberalism imagines fascism as its “monstrous Other,” as its “doppelganger or double.” This is why, we argue, that liberalism needs to maintain a fascist threat especially when its legitimacy is called into question.

Because postsocialism takes the demise of state socialism as the occasion to highlight the entanglement of capitalism with liberal democracy, it is as theoretical ground aligned with Singh’s call to theorize liberalism as a violent, racial, colonial, and expansionist ideological form. Postsocialism calls attention to the violence of economic and political liberalization even as it asks to make legible other socialist legacies and new modes of envisioning politics (as we note above). It also calls to attention new modes of entangling geographies of theory and spatiotemporal subjectivities, in which it is not only “the East” interpreting Western cosmologies and cosmic ruptures, but also now Western scholars gazing eastward for illiberal refiguration.

In this sense, we take a slightly different approach to postsocialism from those who, since the election of Donald Trump, have begun to wonder whether “postsocialism,” as theoretical ground, finally has something to offer the so-called “West” because it can theorize illiberalism. In an earlier moment, some scholars argued that because the postsocialist condition reified a homogenized idea of Europe and liberal capitalism to which poststate socialist nations (at least in Central and Eastern Europe)

aspired, postsocialism had no critical insights to offer scholarship engaged with Marxist and decolonial thought (Lazarus). Yet in a post-Brexit and post-Trump world, postsocialism finally seems to have something to offer that is new and not belated—a knowledge of a totalitarianism and illiberalism that has now arrived in the so-called West. As Dace Dzenovska and Larisa Kurtovic argue, “A quick overview of interventions made by or on behalf of (post)socialist subjects in the Western media at the moment reveal that there are at least four dimensions to the new-found public audibility of the (post)socialist subject: (1) knowledge of totalitarianism/authoritarianism; (2) knowledge of fascism/nationalism; (3) knowledge of Russia; and (4) prefiguration of the future of the West” (3). Thus, as they elaborate, it is precisely that which made the postsocialist subject irrelevant in the past to Western knowledge production that makes the same subject relevant today as able to elucidate something about the present in places like the US and the UK. However, as we argue, it is not because the postsocialist subject understands the perils of fascism that makes postsocialism relevant in the current moment. Rather, we find postsocialist critique a rich place from which to theorize the perils of liberalism, and the fascism that it enables. If there is any future prefiguration to be done, liberalism rather than illiberalism might be the more politically salient object of critique. In what follows, we turn to liberal manifestations in Romania and Macedonia—not necessarily to prefigure the future of the West but to provincialize liberal geographies of theory and contemporary manifestations of the Cold War 2.0.

2 THE LIGHT REVOLUTION

In February 2017, Romania’s streets and cities lit up as nearly one million protestors gathered for days at a time, demanding an end to political corruption. Affiliating the ruling Social Democrat Party (Partidul Social Democrat/PSD) to the “Red Scare” of socialist endurance, protestors organized what quickly became the largest collective protest since those that dismantled state socialism in December 1989. Referred to as #Rezist, vernacularly dialoguing with anti-Trump #Resist protests concurrently transpiring in the US, demonstrations also became known as part of the “Light Revolution,” referencing widespread utilization of digital, smart, and light-emitting technologies. For instance, hundreds of thousands of smartphones lit up Bucharest’s Victoriei Square on February 6th, nationalistically choreographed to display the country’s red, blue, and yellow flag. Lasers projected gimmicky

GIFs on the government building, depicting the ruling party as old, dark, and corrupt, and its leader, Liviu Dragnea, as poor and full of bad teeth. As one protestor's sign read, in English, "FEAR OF THE DARK(nea)." Above him, EU and US flags waved in the air, flying above professionally printed signs appealing to the West for salvation from the Red Scare continuing to haunt the country. Romania's technological prowess, protestors demonstrated, was light years ahead of the decrepit backwardness that still occupies the government. By expunging the last remaining Communist specters, Romania could *finally* catch up to the West.

Such aspirations of Western becoming can be traced back to the Enlightenment if not earlier in Romania, referencing peripheral subjectivities of never being quite modern, European, and technologically advanced enough. However, by framing Communism as a void, the Light Revolution expressed a specifically postsocialist temporality, one that understands historiography as written by Cold War victors. Telescoping zombie socialism, its mode of historiography flatly elides other readings of state socialism in Romania, a project that was far from monolithic, one that for many offered housing, health care, employment, and education for the first time in national history. For the country's racialized poor, these have provisions that have been blown to the wind with post-89 injections of shock capitalism, leading to new contexts of racial dispossession. This is not to glorify state socialism either, as of course, there were numerous horrors, especially in the 1980s as Nicolae Ceaușescu became more authoritarian, but it is to question how Communism gets repeatedly framed and internalized as backward. It is to ask why the socialist period gets written as fascistic and behind liberal progressivism, ignoring its explicitly antifascist and anticapitalist underpinnings. Why does the consolidation of post-socialist historical time hinge upon the integration of the East into Western order, yet at the same time, maintain what Petrovsky and Țichindeleanu describe as an Eastern "ontological time lapse behind the authentic present of the Free World"? The West needs the East to remain abnormal, and so thus begins, they write, "the *long durée* of 'transition,' the transition to 'normality'" (Petrovsky and Țichindeleanu 42).

Straightjacketing the horrors of Ceaușescu onto the Communist project, a Cold War narrative structure endures, imposing a continual need for Romanians to prove they have moved beyond their backward socialist past. In the case of the Light Revolution, by appealing to the West for salvation, and by utilizing new forms of technology, #Rezist protestors attempted to restage the death of Ceaușescu, imagining that *this time*,

they could effectively lustrate their backwardness and thereby enter the global time of postsocialist neoliberalism. Yet this was not the first restaging of Ceaușescu's death in an attempt to reach the vanishing point of normality. In 2003, the artist Dumitro Gorzo famously stenciled images of Ceaușescu across Bucharest with the text, "VIN ÎN 5 MINUTE (Back in 5 Minutes)," inferring fear that the former leader would return despite his '89 execution (Pusca 32). In 2010, this phobia manifested in the Ceaușescus' bodies being unearthed for DNA testing, just to make sure that they were truly dead. As such, the Light Revolution can be read as part of longer lineage of anticommunist restagings.

However, unlike past reenactments, the Light Revolution brought young people into the physical spaces that their parents stood in 1989. As one man's placard in Piața Victoriei spelled out, also in English, "WE WILL STAND OUR GROUND LIKE OUR PARENTS DID IN '89." This mimicry, strongest amongst the young aspirational middle class, presumes that contemporary government corruption is linked to failed post-1989 lustration. This framing erases the role that the West has played both in Romania's contemporary economic hardships vis-a-vis postsocialist disaster capitalism, and in the formation of Romanian middle-class aspirational subjectivities (Țichindeleanu). It also undermines a rich history of post-1989 protests, from those against crony capitalism of the 1990s, the 2008 anti-NATO organizing, the 2012 anti-austerity protests (sparked by outrage against a healthcare reform), and the antiglobalization Roșia Montana demonstrations of 2013 (positioned against extractive goldmining practices by a Canadian corporation).

Anticorruption framing in Romania is important to theorize alongside that within other postsocialist countries, from Slovenia to Bosnia. While in some postsocialist contexts, anticorruption protests align with anti-authoritarian and anticapitalist politics, in others, they have stymied movements by positing conservative regime change as solution. As Yurchak argues, narratives of corruption also have the power to divorce a county from its geopolitical contexts, "reducing it to a zone that is subjected to its own internal logic of authoritarianism" (3). The fascination with corruption is endemic to postsocialist Romania, where more politicians have been jailed for corruption over the past decade than in all of Eastern Europe combined, often rounded by the Direcția Națională Anticorupție (DNA), a body founded in 2005 by an EU directive. In fact, the Light Revolution erupted after Dragnea's government introduced a bill that would decriminalize bribes up to €38,865, a

political move that sparked outrage among a corruption-obsessed population. However, what is of interest to us here is less ongoing governmental corruption but rather the obsession with cleansing the nation of corrupt politicians (rather than of multinational corporations) to collectively advance into the European body (imagined as anticorrupt). As Alexander Clapp articulates,

One of the great successes of the DNA has been its ability to use middle-class protests to control Europe's vision of Romania today. Those who join the street movements admire it out of a mixture of naivety and fear of what Romania has been. It is a generation whose memory of communism is that of the austerity decade into which they were born, and who were raised in the wild-turf capitalism of the 1990s. Not only has their prosperity come from the influx of multinationals, whose CEOs now take to the streets with them in protest; so have many of their progressive values.

Yet while the DNA, supported by NATO, rounds up politicians in the name of European liberalism, its jurisdiction does not extend to multinational corporations, which arguably are most responsible for contexts of postsocialist economic devastation. Thus, in Romania, as CrimethInk authors contextualize, “Anti-corruption discourse has served to rally people to coordinate their own colonization and exploitation by Western capitalists in the name of anti-communism” (Anonymous).

Romanian protests of the last five years have witnessed not only an increased neoliberal fervor among participants, but also an increased anticorruption politic pivoted against the Red Plague of the PSD. This sentiment grew in 2015, when protests broke out after an accidental and deadly fire in the nightclub Colectiv. Protestors blamed the government for dodging the regulating of permits, and incited the resignation of then PSD Prime Minister Victor Ponta. Anti-PSD sentiment was further flamed in early 2017 after the party won the national election. While the PSD is undoubtedly corrupt, mafiaistic, and neoliberal in its core, so is the rival party that many #Rezist protestors support—the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal/PNL). If anything, the main difference between these two dominant rival parties—the PSD the party of the current government, and the PNL that of the current president—is that the PSD enjoys most of its support from rural, poor, small-town, and senior populations, and the PNL from millennial urbanites. This is not to say that the PSD represents the poor—far from it—but at times, it has worked for a patriarchal system of redistribution that at least partially

benefits them (Poenaru). Meanwhile the PNL is understood as “more European,” parading a president, Klaus Iohannis that many speculate won the election based upon his ethnic German heritage, supposedly signifying his “inherent Western superiority.”

While PSD supporters did organize counter demonstrations outside of the main stage of police-protected protestors, many of whom were likely paid, they nevertheless were met with violence by #Rezistors, who launched anticommunist virulence against them. Yet #Rezistors were largely praised for their positivity in the media, also enjoying support from multinational corporations who gave their employees time off to attend. The Jandarmeria, Romania’s military police, was made famous for holding heart-shaped balloons at the protests, and even the head of Raiffeisen Bank attended a demonstration in Cluj with his family. Meanwhile, McDonalds offered protestors free tea so that they could stay warm and rehydrate, and Iohannis himself participated in the demonstrations early on. At one point, a US state department representative described the protests as a “sea of humanity” to a cohort of US students new to Romania, praising that there was nothing anarchistic or antiglobal about them. As he extolled, even though Piața Victoriei is surrounded by big banks, none of them had their windows smashed, and everyone respected the police.

Romania’s Light Revolution, while creating a safe space for police, banks, nationalism, and even the president, did not create any semblance of safety for antifascist organizers, who have been increasingly marginalized in anticorruption demonstrations over the last five years. Often when antifascist and anticapitalist groups attend contemporary these protests, they are scoffed at by more liberal protestors and told to take down their banners—a far leap from the anti-NATO and anti-austerity protests of years earlier. By barring these antifascist and anticapitalist protestors, the space of protest becomes safer not only for banks and police but also far right members of the Nouă Dreapta (New Right) and the homophobic *Coaliția pentru Familie* (Coalition for the Family). As such, arguably the liberalization and depoliticization of public space enable the growth of fascism.

This trend is deeply connected to Romanian urban property history, one that preceded the socialist era, yet that today is reinvoked through zombie socialism and shifting understandings of private and public space. It was during the interwar era that Bucharest saw the “golden age” of urban development, becoming known by many as the “Little Paris of the East.” This was also the age of intensified

fascism, marked by intense anti-Roma and anti-Semitic racism. The Communist regime arose to squash the fascist movement and the classism that backed it. Soon after, the party initiated an intensive urbanization project, including a housing nationalization policy. Mandating that owners of multiple properties to give up excess units, the state moved new residents in, including the racialized poor. Most of this occurred in older city centers, while new socialist modernist buildings were erected in the semiperipheries (Chelcea). Decades later, after transition, EU-supported urban housing restitution policies were implemented to return formerly nationalized buildings to descendants of prior owners. Interpreting socialism as aberration, retrocession laws have thereby facilitated the reclamation of former wealth. Significantly, this has incited a widespread trend of racial evictions in urban centers (Lancione; Vincze).

As postsocialist restitution signified a return to pre-socialist wealth and the valorization of private property, so did an emergent architectural heritage movement, one that initially rose against capitalist interests, but that soon became absorbed by them, as well as by veneration of fascist times. By glossing through the movement here, I specifically aim to highlight the modes in which it prefigures the liberalism of the Light Revolution. By the late 1990s, real estate speculators discovered Bucharest, wrecked by transition, as an easily exploitative space, and unofficial development became orchestrated outside of official city plans. As Ioana Florea finds, architects, planners, and proponents of urban beautification understood this orchestration as part of “derogatory urbanism,” fearing that new development would destroy golden era architecture. Relatively small protests emerged in 2005 and 2006 to protect old buildings, led by architects and students, some of whom soon formed NGOs. Expressing pre-socialist nostalgia, these groups framed themselves as a cultural movement backed by expert knowledge. Soon conservative and nationalist groups desirous of reinstalling pre-socialist urban identity joined in, and by 2008, the Association to Save Bucharest (Asociația Salvați Bucureștiul/ASB) Party emerged. 2008 and 2009 saw frequent small protests outside of the parliament, which included mock funerals mourning the loss of historic buildings while mocking corrupt officials. However, rather than mourn those being dispossessed from their homes through property restitution, this growing heritage movement was more concerned with pre-socialist buildings and symbolic capital. In 2015, the ASB grew into the Union

to Save Romania (Uniunea Salvați România/USR), led by mathematician Nicușor Dan, an increasingly public figure. The party has established itself as one of the strongest in the administration, and now is the second most popular in Bucharest, after the PNL. Anti-corruption is one of its central tenets, and numerous USR supporters made up Light Revolution constituents.

The interests of this heritage movement grew visibility in 2010, when the City Hall obtained the right to construct a “North–South middle line” through Bucharest—a throughway project first conceived of in the 1930s intended to connect the Government at Victoriei to the Parliament further south, widening the streets along Buzești-Berzei. When implemented, this project led to the destruction of 98 buildings and the evacuation of 1000 people in the Matache neighborhood, most of whom were Roma. While anti-eviction protests did transpire, most of the resistance to the project was instead led by the heritage movement, upset about the destruction of the 100-year-old Matache market. In a film made Dragoș Lumpan to commemorate the loss, those displaced by the project were only mentioned peripherally. Instead, most prominently featured were architects and planners bemoaning the corruption of the former and corrupt major, Sorin Oprescu, who saw the project through. As several architectures argued, the problem is that Oprescu and the planners that implemented it are just “little Ceaușescus” who think that they can redevelop and cut through the city however they like, destroying historical value. In a screening of the film, Lumpan made similar remarks, bemoaning the loss of the market while referring to those displaced with overtly anti-Roma, anti-queer, and anti-sex-worker language.

This tension between pre-socialist aesthetic value and the livelihood of those dispossessed by postsocialist the installation of such value came to a head in 2012, when an old building in the city center, Carol 53, was bestowed historic value and granted both restitution and restoration. The heir, a famous architect and senior member of the heritage movement, evicted a large Roma family who had been squatting there for years. He then handed the building over to a collective of young artists and architects, who began a “cultural” co-living/working project, describing themselves as “squatters,” giving presentations and tours within and beyond Romania. Florea argues that Carol 53 perfectly represents the violence of the heritage movement: “With ‘Little Paris’ being negotiated as its identity symbol and its vision of what is valuable, the movement found itself in a process of excluding all those groups not

fitting into or not adhering to this cultural value system—such as the poor, the Roma, the uneducated, the less educated, the less urbanized dwellers” (Florea 74). This cultural value system is often shared by those protesting the Red Scare in Piața Victoriei, a plaza incidentally now more connected to the Parliament, thanks to the Buzești-Berzei development, and more well known to the West, thanks to the sea of smartphones lights beaming outward.

Indeed, the Western liberal media received Light Revolution light-wave transmissions instantaneously. Uncritically, outlets ranging from *Al Jazeera* and *Democracy Now* to the *New York Times* reported on the sea of humanity bearing its face across Romania. Focusing on the massive show of force against the corrupt government, the media was not shy in implying that if Romanians could take to the streets in such strong numbers, surely US Trump dissenters could as well. If Rezist was initially inspired by Resist, now Resistors should, it seemed, gain inspiration from Rezistors. This aspirational dialecticism marks an emerging paradox in liberal teleology, one endemic to its anticommunist condition. How, if postsocialist Romania has been conditioned by the West to be inherently behind, can its cultures of dissent be suddenly read as more progressive?

Of importance here is that both Rezist and Resist protests pin down a timeline that understands progress as a move from authoritarianism toward liberalism, per Singh’s analysis. In the case of Romania, allegations of authoritarianism are used to directly scapegoat the Communist past as source of blame for current conditions of austerity, corruption, and “backwardness,” rather than the violence and failures of disaster capitalism. To reverse this postsocialist retrograde, a return to Little Paris golden era is posited as one solution, while adaptation into the contemporary Western body is offered as another. Both of course ultimately link back to longstanding desires to become Europe. Meanwhile, in the US, liberal democrats blame Russian interference for Trump’s victory, often borrowing Cold War grammars and projecting neo-McCarthyist hysteria to pin down their case against illiberal hacking interference. Massive street protests backed by technological prowess in public space, proponents of liberal democracy allege, are one means of moving away from authoritarianism and toward liberal futurity. Light Revolutions, in other words, are part of a larger arsenal determined to militate against postliberal possibilities by enticing post-Enlightenment dreams.

3 COLORFUL REVOLUTION

From April-June 2016, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia saw thousands of people take to the streets in opposition to the corruption of the ruling VMRO government. The movement was dubbed the “Colorful Revolution” (Шарената револуција) because of the paint with which protestors covered the capital city of Skopje. As in the case of the press coverage of Romania’s Light Revolution, international media embraced Macedonia’s protests as inclusive and democratic, frequently noting the multiethnic aspect of the protests, in which for the first time ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians, who had been at odds since the country’s secession from ex-Yugoslavia in 1991, marched side by side. Because of the protestors’ calls for transparency and accountability, the Colorful Revolution was also framed as a movement toward liberal-democratic futurity in a small European nation (Macedonia’s population barely totals over 2 million people). The movement resonated with the demands of liberal governance against a regime that was framed as illiberal and as an obstacle toward Macedonia’s transition from its socialist past to its democratic liberal future.

The protests initially formed in response to opposition leader Zoran Zaev’s publication of excerpts from secret recordings made by the national security service. 20,000 people, including not only politicians but also journalists and other public figures were targeted. The wiretapping incident exposed numerous instances of corruption, most of which were linked by the European Union commission to the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and included instances of votes that were purchased, and even a murder cover-up (Moore). On 12 April 2016, immediately following then President Ivanov’s decision not to investigate Gruevski, protests erupted. After several months, both Ivanov and Gruevski stepped down but not until protests escalated, spreading from the capital Skopje to other parts of Macedonia.

The Colorful Revolution got its name because protesters threw paint bombs at the buildings and monuments in the city that were constructed for the project “Skopje 2014.” For instance, just four days into the demonstration, protestors threw eggs and rocks onto one of the most notable constructions of the Skopje 2014 project, the city’s “Triumphal Arch.” The Arch is surrounded by 22-meter-tall statues of Alexander the Great, Orthodox Christian saints, and national heroes like Philip of Macedonia. The urban renovation project, which produced dozens of

monuments and buildings in the style of classical antiquity, replete with towering columns, cost upward of one billion US dollars. Announced in 2010, the project has since then been associated with the corruption and wastefulness of the VMRO government, which spent money on rebranding Macedonia and not toward public resources. The Skopje 2014 cityscape has been compared with Disneyland or Las Vegas. Skopje has, thus, become the urban embodiment of kitsch, according to international publications ranging from the *New York Times* to the *Guardian* and *Balkan Insight* (Crevar; Gillet; Jordanvoska). In the international imaginary, then, Skopje is at best a cheap replica, or simulacrum, of a European city.

Certainly, Skopje 2014 attempts its rebranding through a dual movement of erasure (of a non-European socialist and Ottoman past) and assertion (of a European future). The project explicitly aimed to give the city a sense of historical gravitas and importance as a European metropole. According to Andrew Graan,

To achieve the desired recognition for Macedonia, Skopje 2014 drew on architectural styles deemed to index a chronotope of Europe that would anchor the country's national and brand image. Importantly, the chronotope of Europe that Skopje 2014 sought to materialize was tinted with nostalgia for the presocialist period. For example, Skopje 2014's use of baroque and neoclassical architecture referred to historically haute styles of European modernity ... These choices resound with a broader postsocialist concept of the "normal" that positions state socialism and its legacies as something to be overcome or erased. (169)

The presocialist fantasy materialized in the new urban landscape erases the socialist sociality of urban space in Skopje prior to the renovation. This was the result of the post-63 redesign of the city by renowned Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, who won a UN-sponsored competition to plan how Skopje would be rebuilt following the devastating earthquake that leveled the city that year. As Mirjana Lozanovska has explained, "The [1963] Skopje project coincided with the beginning of the period of self-management and democratisation of Yugoslav society, its policy of non-alignment, and the investment in art and architecture throughout Yugoslavia" (143).¹ Lozanovska especially dwells on Tange's City Wall plan—a wall of apartment buildings taking the place of the Ottoman Kale (old wall) that once marked Skopje's boundaries. The new

City Wall was no longer meant to serve as a fortress (to keep out) but rather, through its conception of dwelling and public space, to reimagine (socialist) humanity in the face of disaster (Lozanovska 152).

The new façade of Skopje 2014 symbolically and materially reorients sociality through space—not only in relation to other (citizen) bodies but also to how those bodies confront the past in relation to a futurity of an impoverished peripheral European nation. No longer at the center of the non-aligned movement, as the former Yugoslavia had been, Macedonia aggrandizes its invented past to assert its right to exist as a modern European nation. As Graan elaborates, “The ‘European’ Macedonia presented by Skopje 2014 thus not only draws on a model of Europe that has been particularly valorized in a post-socialist, Europeanizing context, but this vision is also organized against the backdrop of Greek and ethnic Albanian challenges to Macedonian state legitimacy” (169). Indeed, no statues of Albanian or Muslim figures were included among the many statues erected.

The problem with Skopje 2014 is not just a lack of representation of the country’s ethnically diverse past and present, however. Rather, Macedonian historical claims to be a cradle of European civilization is a post-Cold War development through which we can observe the erasures and inventions necessary to project the idea of a Europe now unified. This is what Wlad Godzich has termed “second hand Europe” as a way of describing the post-Cold War condition for inclusion of the former second world into the first. As he writes,

The politics revolve around a simple narrative: we may be latecomers to the present-day European Union, but ... we were Europeans before we were Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Poles, Romanians, or Albanians. In fact, we were the first Europeans, the original ones, and so it is only proper that we be European once again. You, Western Europeans, ask us to prove that we are worthy of becoming Europeans. You make us meet accession criteria, but we were Europeans not only before you, but before we became what we are. ... What is undeniable, however, is that this obsession with history, with the need to revise it and to reinterpret it, displaces a discussion of the values that post-1989 societies should embrace. (10-11)

Invented prehistories of Europeanness, and the question of value(s), as Godzich explains, are intricately connected to the problem of what is possible—and impossible—in present-day politics within formerly state socialist nations. As he argues, while civil protests have been a measure of

how much of the Communist/totalitarian vestige “democratizing” societies have shed, political protests have been largely absent in the post-socialist world.

At first glance, the 2016 protests in Macedonia do appear to have been political—they aimed at regime change. The protestors sought to make visible the lack of accountability in how government funds were spent for the Skopje 2014 project by desecrating the new national symbols. Anna Karkulj, one of the activists, explained that “These are modern times, and we use color, not weapons ... If we take down the regime with color, that is art” (Moore). But what are the goals of the stated regime change, as portrayed by the protestors? “‘We want politicians who will respect the law, and not work for personal gain,’ said Mihaela Ivanova, 23, a law student who has been taking part in the protests from the start. ‘There is a lot of criminality and corruption in public institutions’” (Moore). The call to law and order, as well as the disavowal of armed political action, uphold the principles of liberalism (Williams). What is wrong with Macedonia’s regime, in this sense, is not that it is invested in profiteering from privatization accrued through the nation’s transition to a capitalist economy, but rather, that the regime continues to be illiberal (or not liberal enough). Non-violence as a mode of protest is, thus, part and parcel of the law and order discourse that diagnoses what is wrong (not European enough) with “democratizing” nations. However, the so-called Colorful Revolution is a revolution-lite—a revolution in an age where the politics of “transparency” replace discussions about the equitable distribution of goods and resources. Moreover, critiques of corruption replace the critique of capital. Indeed, if there is one thing the protests across the former republics of Yugoslavia have had in common it is that, while the international media has framed them in terms of anticorruption, there is a decided lack of attention to how capital, privatization, and dispossession have led to a perpetual crisis tied to poverty, disease, ethnic ghettoization, and death across the Balkan nations.

This is a limited notion of political stakes. To be more precise, it is delimited by a liberal imaginary of justice. It is a justice in which there is only one temporality—a future of transparent liberal governance where law and order prevail. It does not question how law and order are in and of themselves founded on violence that legitimates liberalism’s narrative of progress. As a theory (revived from its descriptor of transition), post-socialism has the power to disrupt the liberalizing approaches to time

and space exemplified in the seemingly contradictory projects of Skopje 2014 and the Colorful Revolution that sought to desecrate the monuments of the project. Both erase socialist sociality because both limit a politics of the now—limit them to Europeaness, and liberalism (with its attendant market reform that undergirds notions of transparency and law and order). Instead, what if, as Susan Buck-Morss asks, we stop identifying success of political movements with

founding political parties, holding elections, and declaring loyalty to a secular, nation state that plays by the predetermined rules of the given world order. In other words, that which is suddenly possible in an event is to follow the lead of the self-proclaimed democracies that are already established. ... But what if the truly eventful social action ... is a previously unimagined structure of politics - not the universal one-size-fits-all relevance of nation-state democracy that, even allowing for the difference of culturally pluralistic contexts, presumes an eternal verity for two-century-old, Euro-American forms (which at present are responding badly to the global economic crises that their economic institutions caused), but a glimpse of global solidarity wherein national and cultural identities are suspended, and unity is the consequence, not of who you are but, rather, what you do? Let us call this a commonist practice.

Buck-Morss's call for a commonist practice as entertaining something previously unimagined articulates with our proposal of postsocialism as opening a temporality that allows for multiple kinds of socialisms and a politics not yet conceived of as such. For instance, can we reclaim the City Wall of Tange as a mode of inhabiting urban space to critique privatization and the destruction of non-market-driven lifeworlds? Would this not shift the political emphasis from the inevitability of market demands for transparency, law, and order toward other futures determined by past-conditional temporality of what might have been (Lowe)? Alternately, what if the orientation against the regime were aimed not at the statues (already thoroughly understood as simulacra, kitsch, and therefore, not something that could be desecrated), but at, for instance, the US embassy in Macedonia? This is a large and imposing structure, recently built due to Macedonia's strategic position, and it was a construction that led to the destruction of an Ottoman archaeological site as well as to the displacement of Roma and Albanian communities (Mattioli "Convicting Conviviality"). Such an orientation might lead to a decolonial critique of the spatial rearrangements of Macedonia.

4 IMPOSSIBLE SPACES

Almost a year after the Light Revolution in Romania, in December 2017, a small group of anti-eviction organizers gathered in Cluj to mark the seven-year anniversary of a mass eviction that displaced over 300 Roma residents from the city center and forcibly relocated them to the local garbage dump outside of town. Gathering outside of Piața Unirii, the 75 or so protesters, many of whom had made their way back to the city from the waste site to advocate for antiracist social housing policies, were swallowed up in a mass of 3000 Rezistors, still chanting against thievery, corruption, and Communism. While the housing justice protesters endured, eventually crawling out from the “sea of humanity” encompassing them, questions emerge as to what futures public space may hold when absorbed postsocialist neoliberalism.

If, as we have found in Romania and Macedonia, liberal-oriented public square demonstrations have now become absorbed by light, colorful versions of zombie socialism, Western aspirational politics, and dissent against politicians rather than global capital, what liberatory future does public space still hold, if any? Unlike the public square that captured radical hopes a decade earlier across the globe, from the Indignados movement to Tahrir Square, the contemporary postsocialist square has become one not of emancipatory politics but of neoliberal futurity. While Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” never arrived after the collapse of the Berlin Wall—due to the proliferation of anticapitalist alterities that have refused the time and space of post-Cold War neoliberal globality—it seems that, just as capitalism endeavors to absorb all that it can, public space protests now are fighting to finally materialize Fukuyama’s post-Cold War vision.

In the Western left, public space, or the commons, is still largely understood as an anticapitalist geography worth fighting for. Theorized as a symbolic and material remnant of precapitalism, occupying and maintaining the commons is understood as a radical and necessary gesture in resisting the gentrification of urban space and the forces of privatization. But what happens when these very forces occupy the public square, protesting socialism’s endurance rather than heeding to calls made by those dispossessed by the ravages of postsocialist neoliberalism? As we have seen in Eastern Europe, both the public square and the mass protest have increasingly become coopted by Western aspirational fantasies of privatization and pre-socialist “golden eras” rather than those

of anticapitalist and antifascist futures. It is this that paves the way for fascism to take hold. If the West is to look toward the East for illiberal prefiguration, it is imperative to look at the conditions that enable fascism rather than fall into the ahistorical trap that understands fascism as endemic to socialist/postsocialist Eastern Europe. And in Eastern Europe, if the liberal fantasy of public space and mass protest liberates nothing except global capital and fascism, perhaps it is time to imagine dissent outside of the impossible space of the commons, refraining from dreams of transparency and enlightenment and instead embracing more covert, obscure, and commonist tactics.

NOTE

1. While Lozanovska praises Tange's reference to the Ottoman past and its re-figuration for a hopeful socialist future, Fabio Mattioli ("Unchanging Boundaries") contends that in its infrastructural implementation, the Tange plan, as Skopje 2014, erases the Muslim presence in the nation by constructing the Islam as bounded and past (restricted to just one so-called old quarter in the city center).

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