

## Neda Genova | Material-semiotic Transformations of the Berlin Wall in Post-Communist Bulgaria

**Bionote:** Neda Genova has recently completed her PhD in Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths College. She has defended a thesis on the material-semiotic transformations of surfaces and their role in political negotiations of time and space in post-communist Bulgaria. She is a member of the editorial collective of the online magazine *dVERSIA* and a member of the feminist collective *LevFem*. Neda has been teaching at Goldsmiths since 2016 and has also taught at the Institute for Media and Culture at the Heinrich Heine University of Düsseldorf. She is interested in post-colonial and feminist theory and practice, and how they can act upon institutionalized spaces, like those of the university.

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**Abstract:** In this article I examine the repeated material-semiotic mobilization of the trope of the Berlin Wall in post-communist Bulgaria. I show that despite the official dismantlement of the Wall commenced some thirty years ago, the structure's afterlife continues to exert a unique influence on Bulgaria's public life today. I explore the function of the Wall as a narrative and political device in moments when the relation to public space is negotiated or when notions of "past" and "present" are short-circuited. By taking up the notion of a "recording surface," developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, I show how Bulgarian post-communism can be understood as the terrain of a continuous production of consensus. I argue that after 1989 the Berlin Wall has adopted a governing and consensus-building function that contributes to the "smoothing" of political and social differences on the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism. Yet, what makes the examination of the fictitious successors of the original Berlin Wall an interesting terrain for examination is that their operation is predicated upon a material heterogeneity and dynamism. In the article, I explore the way this trope has been mo-

bilized in four different cases from Bulgaria's most recent history and demonstrate in what sense its "reactivation" can be seen as contributing to the stabilization of the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism.

**Keywords:** Berlin Wall, Bulgaria, post-communism, recording surface, protest, transition, post-1989



Figure 1. Protesters collapsing a Berlin Wall made of cardboard during anti-government demonstrations. Courtesy: Darik Radio.

A preoccupation with the afterlife of the Berlin Wall has been a permanent fixture of Bulgaria's post-communist present.<sup>1</sup> This is an engagement that takes the form of anything, from the exhibition of individual fragments of the barrier to a playful re-enactment of its collapse. For example, a Berlin Wall made out of cardboard boxes was "built" and then "felled" in front of the German Embassy in Sofia during the anti-government protests that took place in Bulgaria in 2013 and 2014 (Figure 1). On another occasion, during the same protests, demonstrators dubbed a crowd-control fence, installed in front of the Parliament, to be "Sofia's Berlin Wall." Exclamations that "our" Berlin Wall "still stands" are regularly voiced out in various

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Zhivka Valiavicharska for her valuable comments and feedback, which aided me when writing this article.

contexts - as in the case of an anti-communist group lobbying for the dismantling of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia. In another episode that took place in 2015, park maintenance workers incidentally poured concrete on a piece of the actual protective barrier exhibited in Sofia. This event made for a minor diplomatic scandal with Germany and provoked the indignation of many watchful citizens lamenting the lack of cultural appreciation of the people who committed the mistake. And finally, a travelling exhibition of large chunks of the Berlin Wall was recently brought to Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second-largest town. The colourful fragments were displayed in the city centre on the occasion of the opening of the celebrations, which marked Plovdiv's assumption of the title "European Capital of Culture" for 2019.

How can we understand the continued material-semiotic<sup>2</sup> mobilisation of the Berlin Wall thirty years after its actual collapse in Bulgaria's post-communist context? What function does its evocation and its frequent "rebuilding" assume in cases of political unrest in the country, in moments when the relation to public space is negotiated or when notions of "past" and "present" are short-circuited, via the utilization of powerful tropes such as "Europe," "freedom" and "democracy"? In this article, I will argue that none of the abovementioned occurrences and the publicity they were granted are merely incidental - if considered from the point of view of the governing and consensus-building function performed by the Wall today. The insertion in various contexts of a remarkably flexible, adaptable, and heterogeneous - in both symbolic and material terms - trope of a "Berlin Wall" can be understood as a narrative and political device. It contributes to the establishment and stabilization of what, in thinking with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, we can understand as a "recording surface"<sup>3</sup> of post-communism. Although the official dismantlement of the Berlin Wall commenced some thirty years ago, the structure's afterlife continues to exert a unique influence on Bul-

garia's public life today in that its re-actualization, as I will demonstrate, helps to articulate a certain understanding of the present moment and its relation to a constantly disavowed past.

In his seminal work *Zone of Transition: On the End of Post-Communism*, Boris Buden writes of a particular kind of a disavowal inherent to the image of the Fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>4</sup> According to him, similarly to the missing perspective of the actors in the French Revolution in accounts of that historical event, the gaze of the people who actually "felled" the Berlin Wall is also missing from images that have sought to capture this event. Buden writes about the forced infantilisation of Eastern European populations, who were suddenly put in a position to be "educated to democracy" by their Western counterparts, despite the democratic nature of their very act of disobedience towards former governments across the Eastern bloc. He states: "The image of the Fall of the Berlin Wall, which stands for the fall of communism, already contains the whole truth of post-communism."<sup>5</sup> By "truth" Buden means the consensus of capitalism triumphing over communism and, consequently, a lack of an economic and political alternative to the neoliberal regime introduced in the ex-socialist countries. This, according to him, is predicated upon the disavowal of the agency of the populations for whose sake these changes were allegedly introduced.

My contention is that there is something of this disavowal that persists in present-day utilizations of the trope of the Berlin Wall in Bulgaria. Only through an erasure of the heterogeneous motivations and political ideas that drove the actors who toppled down oppressive regimes at the turn of the 1990s across Eastern Europe, is it possible to establish an unequivocal, consensual understanding of the regime imposed afterwards as one that lacks any viable alternative.<sup>6</sup> As many have pointed out,<sup>7</sup> the period that followed the "fall of communism" in the so-called East, and the collapse of the

<sup>2</sup> The term "material-semiotic" is borrowed from Donna Haraway, see: Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Treichler (London and New York: Routledge, 1992). My use of it here is also informed by Félix Guattari's work on machines and his insistence on the necessity to uncouple semiology from linguistics. See: Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. by Julian Pefanis (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2012), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Boris Buden, *Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus*, 1. Aufl. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Buden, *Zone*, 17. All translations from the German original are mine.

<sup>6</sup> Buden describes the attitude, as famously put by Winston Churchill: "Capitalism is the worst economic system, except for all the others," as a cynical one in that it presupposes an "ironic distance" towards one's own economic and social reality yet also includes a refusal to challenge its status quo. See *ibid.*, 24ff.

<sup>7</sup> See Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

bipolar worldview with the end of the Cold War, is characterised by a diminishing of antagonisms that would be articulated in political terms. These would have to engage with questions such as “what constitutes a society worth living in?” The symbolic transformation of the Berlin Wall itself can be seen as being in line with these developments. Previously the Wall was considered to be the sign *par excellence* of political division - reflected in the official name given to it by GDR authorities, “Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart.” By contrast, after 1989 it has increasingly become a consensus-building device that contributes to the “smoothing” of political and social differences on the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism. Yet, what makes the engagement with the fictitious successors of the original Berlin Wall an interesting terrain for examination is that their functioning is predicated upon material heterogeneity and dynamism.

In the following pages I will first briefly outline how I make use of Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “recording surface” and demonstrate in what ways it can be rendered useful for the study of post-communism. I will then engage with various instances in which the trope of the Berlin Wall has been mobilised in recent times and demonstrate in what sense its “reactivation” can be seen as contributing to the stabilization of the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism.

When deciding to engage with these questions through this particular theoretical lens, my methodological approach is informed by an engagement with the work of Donna Haraway. Her call for *situatedness* in knowledge production and her simultaneous assertion that claims to “objectivity” are never neutral but rather the products of an uneven distribution of power and knowledge,<sup>8</sup> have become a common point of reference for many feminist and critical writers. However, what bearings do these insights have for the present theoretical work - one that takes as a point of departure socio-political and cultural developments of a context largely considered to be “foreign” to the experiences and knowledges of the majority of the ones educated in “Western” institutions? We, who will have little difficulty deciphering not less specific or situated notions that have

emerged from cultural and political developments of the West (such as “Thatcherism” or, say, “Nouvelle Vague”), might suddenly find ourselves unequipped to come to terms with references that pertain to less familiar contexts. The lack of a more holistic and comprehensive account of these contexts can appear as dissatisfying and one might even demand to be properly introduced to them.

The decision here to take *some* context for granted is thus politically and intellectually motivated. More often than not, those of us situated differently are asked to carry out the work of introducing an unmarked, generic reader to complex situations, convoluted historical trajectories, and contradictory political demands for pages and hours on end. Instead of taking these complexities as terrains for further theoretical examinations and political thinking that would truly matter for these contexts, we are caught in the condition to always have to “contextualize” and “explain” them anew. This not only often runs counter to the very theoretical interests that have brought us to these complexities in the first place, but also inadvertently makes us complicit in perpetuating Orientalist and self-colonizing practices of thinking and producing knowledge. My intention here is to thus move away from such an approach (classically found in traditional area studies); I will instead take the abovementioned occurrences from Bulgaria’s contemporary public sphere as instigations to think about the political and narrative function of the various re-actualizations of the trope of the Berlin Wall for and at the recording surface of post-communism.

### Recording Surface

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari draw on Karl Marx to develop a notion of three syntheses as different, yet interrelated modes of production: these are the connective, the disjunctive and the conjunctive synthesis. Unlike the *connective* synthesis, which is a characteristic of desiring-machines and which constitutes the (“primary”) production of production,<sup>9</sup> or the *conjunctive* synthesis, productive of consumption, the *disjunctive* synthesis is governed by the law of distribution and is also termed “production of recording.”<sup>10</sup> It engenders what Deleuze and Guattari call a “recording surface.” The

<sup>8</sup> See Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1988), 575-99.

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

construction of the latter involves a peculiar kind of displacement, set in motion when the recording surface comes into being: it can be understood as an obfuscation and negation of the productive forces which have gone into its own creation.

Deleuze and Guattari describe a conflict between what they term the body without organs (BWO) "that functions as a socius"<sup>11</sup> and the machinic (social) production. They assert that "capital is the BWO of [...] the capitalist being."<sup>12</sup> The movement, which enables the formation of a recording surface from the BWO is made possible by a transfer of "the productive powers and the social interrelations of labour"<sup>13</sup> from labour to capital. Only through this appropriation and simultaneous negation of its own conditions can the BWO come to constitute and act as a recording surface:

The body without organs, the unproductive, the un-consumable, serves as a surface for the recording of the entire process of production of desire, so that desiring-machines *seem* to emanate from it in the *apparent* objective movement that establishes a relationship between the machine and the body without organs.<sup>14</sup>

In this crucial passage it is important to stress the care put by Deleuze and Guattari into presenting the movement through which desiring-machines *seem* to originate from the BWO as *only apparently objectively given*: even if the recording surface is not a naturally given precondition for production, it nevertheless presents itself precisely in this manner. Thus, it can be understood as a result of a peculiar kind of displacement. Through their reference to the functioning of fixed capital as exemplified in Marx's analysis, one is led to contemplate how capital comes to appear as the "natural or divine presupposition"<sup>15</sup> of desiring-machines precisely because it fails to lay bare the processes of production inscribed onto and originating it. Labour is erased from the miraculated surface so that this surface can present itself as the "quasi cause"<sup>16</sup> of (desiring-)machines.

The negation constitutive to the production of the recording surface can be furthermore conceived as a manifestation of what Alfred North Whitehead has termed a "Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness,"<sup>17</sup> as it involves the error of taking what is in fact a *product* of a constructive abstraction (the recording surface itself) as a cause or a pre-given. Hence, the *disjunctive* synthesis can be understood as a peculiar form of abstraction, which is productive of a social territory, but whose mode of production is at the same time contingent upon the purification of that very same territory from the traces of the discarded (yet constitutive to it) "social interrelations of labour."<sup>18</sup> This territory is formed through the attachment of machines, each acting as a point of disjunction, to the BWO. Between these points "an entire network of new syntheses is now woven, marking the surface off into co-ordinates, like a grid."<sup>19</sup>

My claim here is that the post-communist condition of Bulgaria can be understood as a recording surface, as it acts on the premise of negating the conditions of production and social interrelations of labour, which have been incorporated in it. One way of defining post-communism is as the *continuous production* of consensus in the aftermath of the collapse of communist regimes. This is done through the coordinated working of political mechanisms such as a linear, progressive understanding of historical development; the imposition of a logic of "belatedness" for "catching-up" societies of the so-called Eastern Bloc; the naturalisation of economic reasoning and marketization as the only viable ground for building a prosperous society; the negation of pre-1989 historical experience and the exclusion from the present of dissident (collective) subjectivities. However, what is important to bear in mind when describing the modality through which the social surface of recording comes into being, is that it is the result of *productive* processes, and, as such, it is neither a mere given nor does its continuous renovation - more often than not premised upon violent erasures - occur without a trace. The process of establishing such a consensus, albeit seemingly to-

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid..

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.; italics mine.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World. Lowell Lectures from 1925* (New York: Pelican Mentor Books, 1948), 52. Through an engagement with 17<sup>th</sup> century scientific thought, Whitehead demonstrates that its "enormous success" (ibid., 57) was due to the fact that in a process of abstraction it isolated, on the one hand, *matter* "with its simple location in space and time" and, on the other, the "perceiving, suffering, reasoning", *mind* (ibid.). The "Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness" consists of taking this isolation not as the *product* of abstraction but as "the most concrete rendering of fact" (idem).

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 12.

talising and all-encompassing in its capacity to permeate nearly all social spheres, is thus one that is always in the balance.

Some Bulgarian scholars, writing in the tradition of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, have come to describe the effects of these processes as a “post-political” state of affairs.<sup>20</sup> While there are indeed valid arguments to accept this description of post-communism - such as the frequent cloaking of profoundly political issues in a language of morality, or targeting individual, allegedly corrupt personalities, instead of scrutinizing the policies they put forward - I would be cautious to adopt a “post-political” framework as an explanatory matrix for the present. Even though I share the preoccupation with a necessity to scrutinize procedures seeking to stabilise a consensual vision of the *status quo*, my contention is that these consensus-building operations need to be read precisely as productive processes - predicated upon the negation of their own artificial character, they always include an element of openness and fragility. Furthermore, writings that stop short of looking into the modality and concerns of moments of political unrest, which challenge the generalized agreement of a lack of an alternative to the present beyond globalized capitalism, run the risk of becoming complicit with perpetuating that very same order they attempt to question. Indeed, only in the period between November 2018 and January 2019 protests occurred on an almost daily basis in Bulgaria, tackling issues ranging from environmental pollution to legislation in relation to gender-based violence, cuts in the social welfare system, implementation of punitive taxes on used vehicles, which disproportionately hit the less affluent. All of these instances, despite their frequently fragmented character, should be understood as challenging the consensual character of the post-communist regime with its tendency to flatten out differences and present itself as devoid of conflict and a natural state of things.

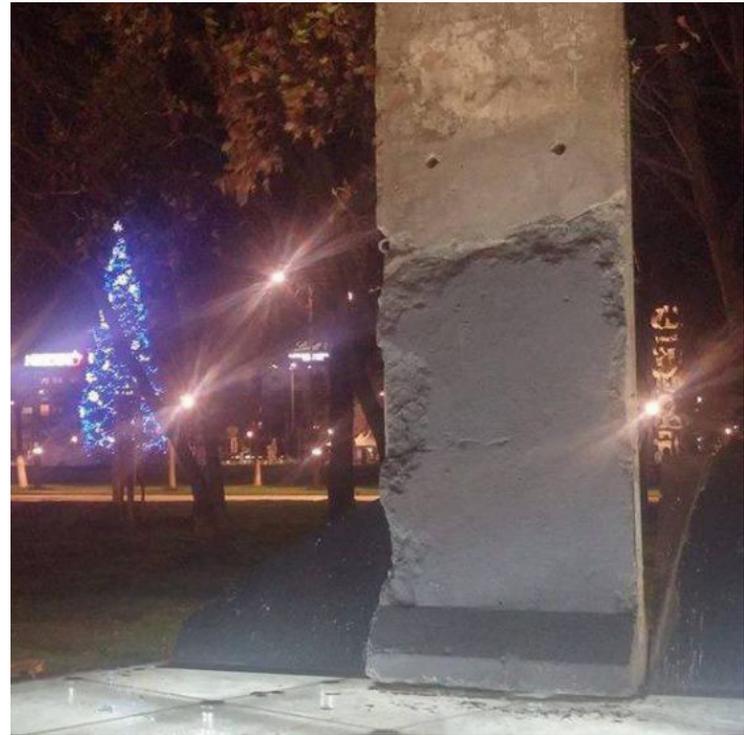


Figure 2. A chunk of the Berlin Wall that was temporarily plastered over during refurbishment works in Sofia. Courtesy: Stefan Ivanov/OffNews.

In the following passage, I will engage with one particular instance that temporarily exposed the fragility associated with one of post-communism’s chains of equivalences: “freedom = democracy = capitalism triumphing over communism.” A minor public nuisance occurred on December 2, 2015 when workers, contracted to refurbish the area in front of the National Palace of Culture (NDK) in Sofia, painted over a commemorative segment of the Berlin Wall placed in immediate vicinity to the building (Figure 2). The rationale behind the renovation works of the garden surrounding the edifice, which was to host meetings during the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council,<sup>21</sup> was to embellish the whole area in time for the country’s assumption of the role. The act of temporarily painting over the

<sup>20</sup> See for example: Georgi Medarov, Madlen Nikolova, and Jana Tsoneva, *Политика без политика. “Ние” и “те” в протестите и кризата на представителството* [Politics without Politics. “We” and “Them” in the Protests and the Crisis of Representation] (Sofia: Media Democracy Foundation, 2014). Alongside the provision of a comprehensive and detailed overview of the Bulgarian political landscape since 2005, Jana Tsoneva also put forward a similar argument in an article from 2017: Jana Tsoneva, “Politics after the Political,” *Jacobin* (March 30, 2017). <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/03/bulgaria-elections-corruption-privatization-judiciary-islamophobia>.

<sup>21</sup> Each EU country hosts Council meetings on a rotational basis. Bulgaria held this role in the period between January and June 2018.

original graffiti provoked not only a swift reaction from the German Embassy, but also a series of widely publicized comments on the quality of the works and the alleged ignorance of the anonymous painters. They were reprimanded for not recognizing the historic and symbolic significance of the graffiti covering the original piece because the failure to properly decipher and respect the codes of "authenticity" and "freedom" was understood to have led to the illegitimate refashioning of the Wall's surface. It had to be sanctioned in political and class terms, and alloyed with a language of culture:<sup>22</sup>

The graffiti on the already collapsed Berlin Wall used to be a symbol of free spirit, which overpowered bigotry. The plasterers, who painted over the Berlin Wall in Sofia, probably deemed these graffiti to be ugly. This is not surprising: so much for their taste; so much for their culture [...]. It is remarkable that a quarter of a century after the end of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," public culture seems to be again in the hands of the working class!<sup>23</sup>

The surface of the Wall's segment in Sofia became a site of political and class struggle, where the proper, cultured reading of history served as a catalyst of subjectivation in the post-communist present. In Bulgaria and elsewhere, graffiti signs sprayed over the Berlin Wall have become an integral part of the structure's dynamic after-life since the citizens of Berlin felled it. The fragmented materiality of this surface, with the graffiti displayed on it, is the most visible manifestation of the political and semiotic transformation of the spatial partitioning device. We could claim that these graffiti have detached, even emancipated themselves from the Wall, yet remain tied to the "original" structure in so far as they continue interrogating and acting upon it. As one German online article sums up its shift:

Practically overnight, it [the Berlin Wall] turned from a monument of oppression and the Cold War into a sym-

bol of freedom - or rather into a sign on the American Way of Life [English in the original] having triumphed over communism.<sup>24</sup>

Returning to the context of Sofia: it is precisely this consensus of a definitive triumph over communism, which was put into question by the acts of the Bulgarian workers who accidentally plastered over the graffiti on the Berlin Wall's piece exhibited in the city. The fragility of this generalized agreement seems to be temporarily exposed by the ease with which the material evidence for that "victory" can be put out of sight and literally covered up. At stake, in such seemingly minor nuisances around cultural heritage in post-communism, is the "successful" transition to Western liberal democracy and neo-liberal capitalism, a passage which in the Bulgarian context often goes hand-in-hand with unequivocal anti-communism. In the case of the Wall's surface being plastered over, the centrality of this coupling is disregarded - an indifference, which sends ripples through the recording surface of post-communism. As the commentary quoted above made it starkly apparent, this disinterest provokes anxiety around a possible overturn of class power or even a reversal of the proper course of history precisely because it forces to the foreground the discarded and disavowed social interrelations of labour which have gone into the constitution of the recording surface.

The original graffiti, once considered "foreign" to the structure by the former GDR administration, which persecuted graffiti painting as an act of vandalism, still retain a degree of alterity towards the Wall's segments. However, this alterity is now appropriated, rendered operative and indispensable to their present material-semiotic arrangement as they are seen as carriers of meanings such as "freedom" and "revolt." These meanings can only be articulated as authentic when set as standing at odds with the pre-existing surface of the barrier: the struggle of "democracy" against "dictatorship," of "freedom" against "oppression," of "closed borders" against "open markets" is dramatized through the recording and, as in other cases discussed further in this article, the re-enactment of the interventions on the Wall. It can be asserted that, to some extent, the trac-

<sup>22</sup> According to Boris Buden, the language of culture and cultural heritage increasingly takes over public discourse in post-communism. Cf. Buden, *Zone*, 60f.

<sup>23</sup> Pavel Antonov, "Още една четка бетон по стената, която не съборихме" ["One More Brush of Concrete upon the Wall We Didn't Fell"], *Evromegdan* (April 12, 2015). <http://evromegdan.bg/1907/още-една-четка-бетон-по-стената-която-н;> translation from Bulgarian mine.

<sup>24</sup> Reinhold Manz, "Where is the Schutzwall?," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (August 11, 2009). <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/20-jahre-mauerfall/mauerstuecke-in-aller-weit-where-is-the-schutzwall-1883116.html>; translation from German mine.

es on the Wall's fragmented surface become the condition for the post-1989 circulation of its segments around the world. The fragile scribbles become guarantors of the definite shift in the signification of the whole monument (from a sign of oppression to one of victory of capitalism over communism) and as such need to be continuously stabilized and subjected to re-articulation in a manner striving to accentuate their "authenticity."

The segment in Sofia had been shipped to the city in 2006, and is one amongst hundreds of fragments scattered around the world - bestowed both as official state or municipal gifts, or sold for large sums to gallery owners, private collectors and corporations post-1989. Only a few weeks after the Wall was felled, the GDR transitional government itself recognised the commercial potential of selling the segments and started trading them through the companies Limex and Lelé.<sup>25</sup> While these transactions mostly involved more affluent actors, smaller pieces of the Wall are today sold to tourists visiting Berlin in huge quantities each year. Currently, the monopoly over this lucrative business is held by Volker Pawlowski, who is the principal seller of 90% of the small fragments in circulation in Berlin:<sup>26</sup> from tiny pieces sealed in little containers attached to postcards, to chunks of concrete glued to Plexiglas stands to, finally, large elements similar to the one in Sofia which can be sprayed over according to the client's specification.<sup>27</sup> A request for additional information on the conditions for purchasing whole segments of the Wall from "Pawlowski Souvenirs" revealed that the going price for an original piece of the barrier is €9,000 excluding shipping and potential painting costs.<sup>28</sup> An employee of the company assured me of the possibility to retroactively paint it over with graffiti or a company's logo (the examples of beverage companies Red Bull and Erdinger Weissbier, which bought elements and had them repainted, were provided) and that on this production aspect the firm collaborates with a Berlin-based graffiti artist who would charge me between €500 and €1,000 for his services.

<sup>25</sup> Limex, a foreign sale company in the former GDR, operating before 1989, took over transactions involving museums and public authorities, while Lelé Berlin Wall Verkaufs- und Wirtschaftswerbung GmbH was founded in West Berlin in order to facilitate the sale of Wall segments to museums and collectors, as in a widely publicised auction held in Monaco in June 1990. Cf. "Die Mauer-Dealer," *Cicero Online* (2017), <https://www.cicero.de/wirtschaft/die-mauer-dealer/39861>.

<sup>26</sup> Manz, "Where is the Schutzwall?"

<sup>27</sup> Pawlowski Souvenirs, "Mauerelemente," *Pawlowski Souvenirs* (January 22, 2015). <http://www.pawlowski-souvenirs.de/index.php/item/3-mauerelemente>.

<sup>28</sup> Email communication from August 15, 2018.

When interviewed by journalists, company owner Pawlowski himself readily admits that the Wall pieces in mass circulation have been *retroactively* coloured, challenging claims that he is "faking history" by drawing a parallel to the East Side Gallery in Berlin, also sprayed over only after 1989.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, he states that no one would buy these pieces in their original state today as the old paint is flaking off.<sup>30</sup> The post-communist commodification and circulation of the Berlin Wall is thus premised upon the fabricated authenticity of the graffiti that have been retroactively painted over the fragmented and disintegrating surface of the Berlin Wall. The constitutive alterity of these graffiti, (occasionally transmuting into logos) covering piece after piece as an emblem of freedom, is what allows for their privatisation and distribution around the globe.

The fragments, big and small, draw a particular cartography:<sup>31</sup> from the Vatican Gardens to the gardens of the Taiwan Foundation of Democracy in Taipei; from the Microsoft Conference Centre in Redmond, Washington to the Hilton Anatole Hotel in Dallas, Texas; from the Imperial War Museum in London to the National Palace of Culture in Sofia. Similarly to the construction of the Great Wall of China from Kafka's short story of the same name,<sup>32</sup> their fragmented materiality also marks off a particular territory. If the Great Wall's never complete instalment is meant to ward off the uncivilized hordes of foreign tribes, the Berlin Wall segments' distribution around the globe is premised upon the fabricated consensus that there are no longer bipolar divisions to be held intact. From a vertically operating structure, formerly known as the "Anti-Fascist Protection Wall" meant to physically obstruct movement, its fragments have now become conjunction points on the miraculated surface of globalized post-communism. The conditions of the pieces' formation are erased from this surface: from the "felling" of the Wall and

<sup>29</sup> Manz, "Where is the Schutzwall?" The East Side Gallery is an open-air gallery on the east side of the Berlin Wall, which came into being when in 1990 different artists created altogether 105 murals on various chunks from the original structure.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Müller, "Wie ein Mann die Mauer zu Geld macht," *Spiegel Online* (December 29, 2010). <http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/geschaeftsidee-in-berlin-wie-ein-mann-die-mauer-zu-geld-macht-a-736888.html>.

<sup>31</sup> See *The Wall Net*, where an interactive map of many Berlin Wall segments scattered around the world can be consulted. It is evident that the largest concentration of pieces around the globe can be found in Europe and the United States, followed by South East Asia. The Wall Net, "The Berlin Wall across the World," *The Wall Net* (2014). <http://enmap.the-wall-net.org>.

<sup>32</sup> Franz Kafka, "The Great Wall of China," trans. by Willa and Edwin Muir, in *The Complete Stories*, ed. by Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

the missing gaze of the people who actually collapsed it, commencing the beginning to its disintegration, to the labour necessary for the crumbling of the singular concrete chunks, their subsequent covering with fresh paint and sale in souvenir shops online and on site in Berlin. The traces of acts of disobedience - the graffiti painted over the original protective barrier - have been retroactively appropriated and commodified by the industry, which emerged post-1989 and which now profits from the endless reproduction of these acts.

What comes to the fore instead, is the disjunct surface of the concrete wall, whose material-semiotic transformation (its physical disintegration, its cladding with graffiti guaranteeing “authenticity,” “democracy” and “freedom”) becomes the condition for the formation of a second, horizontal surface, unfolding over the globe. The description of the coming into being of this surface - the tipping over of the Wall, it's becoming-horizontal; the almost miraculous world-wide dissemination of little wall-fragments stripped of their polarizing function, becoming instead consensual or synthesising elements - is one way of describing the operative mode of the recording surface of post-communism.

If this section was devoted to the examination of the post-1989 lives of the segments of the “actual” Berlin Wall, in the next section I will consider a different kind of modality of this potent historical and political actor: that is, its capacity to attach itself to other, temporally and physically remote, structures and to vest them with its associated meanings. I will thus examine two cases when a “Berlin Wall” was built during the Bulgarian anti-government protests of 2013 and 2014,<sup>33</sup> and briefly point towards a separate instance when the trope of the Wall was attached to a particularly contested spatial product in the context of Sofia - namely, the Monument to the Soviet Army. I will also offer a reading of the operative mode of these fictitious, yet, nevertheless, politically effective, offshoots of the Berlin Wall.

### Walls at Protest

As discussed at the beginning of this piece, the trope of the Berlin Wall is particularly persistent in the Bulgarian post-communist

<sup>33</sup> While the protests lasted for over a year, from February 2013 to August 2014, the largest concentration of flash mobs, happenings, interventions in public space and other creative forms of protest was in the first half of this period - that is, until the turn of 2013. The examples I focus on here are all derived from this particularly prolific period as they explicitly utilized the trope of the Berlin Wall.

context: it has increasingly solidified as a signifier of totalitarian oppression and become a useful rhetorical tool for articulating a sense of indignation towards features of the present deemed to be unacceptable. More often than not, the evocation of the Wall becomes a means to “short-circuit” past and present; its figure works as a peculiar “bridging” device that permits its users to almost miraculously traverse thirty years of post-communism and attribute various faults of the present to the workings of communism’s undying ghost.

The anti-government protests which shook Bulgaria in 2013 and 2014 happened in two “waves”, putting forward various demands, including such against the monopoly of private electricity distribution companies, high-level governmental corruption, as well as the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few with known ties to officials in power. Two governments handed in their resignation in this tumultuous period, which was marked by daily marches and a series of student occupations of university buildings. A lot has already been written on this subject,<sup>34</sup> which is why I will here refrain from going in much detail on the socio-political conditions during the protests, the difference between their two waves or their discursive links to the overarching ideological framework of the transition period. I will instead look at two instances when the vocabulary of the protest made use of the trope of the Berlin Wall, and seek to offer a reading of its strategic utilization *vis-à-vis* the operative mode of post-communist consensus-building.

Both of these “Berlin Walls” were built during the second wave of the anti-government protests, which contested the legitimacy of the Plamen Oresharski coalition government. Formed in June 2013, after pre-term elections, this government was made up of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (typically seen to represent the interests of the Bulgarian Turkish

<sup>34</sup> See Medarov, Nikolova and Tsoneva, *Политика без политика [Politics without Politics]*; Valentina Gueorguieva, *Множества на несъгласните: Антропология на протестните движения в България (2009-2013)* [*Multitudes of Discontent: Anthropology of Protest Movements in Bulgaria (2009-2013)*] (Sofia: Sofia University Press, 2014); Ivaylo Dinev, “Махалото на масовия протест. Зимата на 2013” [“The Pendulum of the Mass Protest. The Winter of 2013,”] *Bulgarian Ethnology*, No. 1 (2016), 51-70; Julia Rone, “Left in Translation. The Curious Absence of Austerity Frames in the 2013 Bulgarian Protests,” in *Global Diffusion of Protest: Riding the Protest Wave in the Neoliberal Crisis*, ed. by Donatella della Porta (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017); Veronika Stoyanova, *Ideology and Social Protests in Eastern Europe: Beyond the Transition's Liberal Consensus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

and Roma minorities), and supported by the far-right party ATAKA. The summer of 2013 saw daily marches, ignited after a governmental appointment considered to be particularly brazen: that of media mogul Delyan Peevski as Head of the State Agency for National Security. The Bulgarian abbreviation of this institution, ДАHC, is homonymous with the English word “dance,” which led protesters to adopt the slogan “#ДАHCwithMe.” Photographic documentation of the daily protests, especially those taking place in the capital Sofia, circulated on social media and sympathetic media outlets, and was frequently accompanied by a hashtag stating the consecutive day of the protest.

The protesters designated the dates not only in relation to the usual Gregorian calendar, but also in relation to the first day of the protests, June 14, 2013. This collective “counting” quickly established a calendar of sorts through which the movement kept its own time and which furthermore came to incorporate the anniversaries of significant historical events. The latter acted as catalysers for the mobilization of collective action around particular dates; they provided narrative and visual resources for the protesters chosen not at random but arguably for their rhetorical potential for the present. For example, on July 14, 2013, or Day 31 of the protest, a small group performed a flash mob, re-enacting the painting by Eugene Delacroix “Liberty Leading the People” on the occasion of France’s National Day. In the early hours of August 21, or Day 69 of #ДАHCwithMe, the sculpted figures from a high relief at the base of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia were painted over in pink, accompanied with the caption “Bulgaria apologizes” written in Czech. This was a clear reference to the Warsaw Pact invasion of Prague, which happened on the same date in 1968. These individual, yet highly publicized actions, can be understood as devices aiding the protest movement to form a collective subject, not only by drawing from the political potential of charged historical events, but also by appropriating this potential for a present political context. Thus, while the belated “apology” for the Prague invasion betrayed an attempt to adopt a moral high ground in relation to the elites in power (seen as direct successors to the old Bulgarian Communist Party), the flash mob on July 14, 2013 was a clear curtsy to the French Ambassador who at the time spoke out in support of the protest.

In a similarly motivated gesture drawing from a liberal Eurocentric imaginary, protesters<sup>35</sup> built a “Berlin Wall” made out of cardboard in front of the German Embassy in Sofia only two days later - on July 16, 2013 (Figure 1). The carefully stapled cardboard boxes, inscribed with slogans such as “Resignation” and “Mafia,” were then toppled down with cries of “Danke schön!” (“thank you” in German). Putting aside an assessment of creative acts that more often than not seek inspiration from conveniently removed historical events, it is still worthwhile to examine this flash mob, as well as the Delacroix re-enactment, as suitable for providing us with a notion of the ways in which the protest movement sought to gain symbolic legitimacy in these instances. In both cases, the addressees were official representatives of foreign, Western European countries, and, on both occasions, the protesters were at pains to find suitable forms for a “cultured” expression of their dissent.

In *Zone of Transition* Buden writes eloquently of the position of historical belatedness Eastern European populations were assigned with during the so-called “transition period” and the instrumentality of an infantilizing language for stabilizing the *status quo*.<sup>36</sup> He scrutinizes Habermas’ notion of a “catching-up revolution,”<sup>37</sup> whose premise can be summarised as follows: “communism has cut off Eastern societies from normal historical development (which was possible in the West) and now, after the fall of this totalitarian obstacle, these societies are in the condition of historical belatedness.”<sup>38</sup> Buden hence argues that the figure of the child has become a central metaphor for Eastern European societies caught in perpetual attempts to “catch up” with their Western counterparts. An “ideal subject of a democratic restart,”<sup>39</sup> the child is immature - meaning it needs constant guidance, education and tutelage - and innocent - so that it bears no responsibility either for crimes of the past, or those

<sup>35</sup> At the time of this flash mob one of the most visible anti-government actors in the face of the Protest Network (comprising of a number of journalists, bloggers, university professors, workers in the NGO sector and others, many of whom took up political careers in the years that followed) was not yet formally founded. The act in front of the Embassy was publicised on social media and reported on in mainstream media as a collective one and attributed to the protest movement as a whole.

<sup>36</sup> Buden, *Zone*, 34ff.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 52ff.

<sup>38</sup> Neda Genova, “A Better Past Is Still Possible:’ Interview with Boris Buden,” *LeftEast* (July 4, 2018). <http://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/a-better-past-is-still-possible-interview-with-boris-buden>.

<sup>39</sup> Buden, *Zone*, 35.

of the present. This discourse naturalizes the hegemonic logic inherent to the child-parent relation, but also the idea that transition in post-communism can take only one conceivable direction: that of liberal democracy under capitalism.

As anti-colonial scholars, such as Frantz Fanon, have pointed out,<sup>40</sup> the internalization of a position of inferiority by subjugated populations has always been instrumental to maintaining the hierarchical relation between colonizers and colonized peoples. Although he ends *The Wretched of the Earth* with a call to “decide to not imitate Europe,”<sup>41</sup> the rhetorical mode of some of the particularly visible expressions of dissent during the Bulgarian anti-government protests (which took place exactly fifty years after the publication of Fanon’s book) works in precisely the opposite way: by accepting and dramatizing a child-like position of inferiority towards official representatives of Western Europe. The approval of these delegates vested in authority is what is imagined by some of the protest’s more vocal spokespersons as being capable of lending legitimacy to the popular revolt in Bulgaria. The point of critique I am offering here is not meant to cast doubt on the “success” of these rhetoric strategies, much less to reprimand protesters for a lack of proper historical or political consciousness: to do so would arguably mean echoing a patronizing attitude that Buden has called into question in his work. What I am, however, doing is taking seriously their enunciations and, rather than treating them as benign expressions of civil society at work, scrutinize their political efficacy and implication within regimes that can be described as hegemonic.

It can be argued that the adoption of an unequivocally pro-European rhetoric in moments of political and social rupture in post-1989 Bulgaria comes to work as a “smoothing” force on the recording surface of post-communism. It serves to remove the possibility of engaging with the conditions for issues such as economic or social inequality, replacing this engagement with a lamentation of the insufficiently “European” character of the present - even when it is the effects of an endless catching up with this same “European” liberal democracy that often make themselves felt on this terrain.

<sup>40</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 313.

Finally, the perpetuation of a consensus that it is the latter that has to be “transitioned” to in order to at last cope with the injustices of the present day, is predicated upon an epistemological, political and historical negation. It produces a homogenous understanding of “Europe”, based on a double erasure: it presents Bulgaria’s own socialist past as incompatible with a notion of Europe, but also negates the importance of left-wing and communist ideas, projects and movements for the historical development of that very same Western Europe that Bulgaria is attempting to “catch up” with.

To come back to one intriguing detail of the flash mob enacted in front of the German Embassy in Sofia, July 2013: the “Berlin Wall” made out of cardboard was first “built” to then be felled in an almost ritualistic manner. The necessity to visually and materially build that spatial object - which more than any other has come to function as shorthand for the undying ghost of communism - resonates with Buden’s pronouncement of a certain “miracle” of post-communism:

... the miracle that communism has actually survived in the guise of anti-communism, as a target of anti-communism. [...] Today, the communist past is blamed for everything. This is why the system needs communism as its enemy, because what is at stake is the crisis of legitimation of the whole post-communist historical project.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, in order to “purge” communism’s ghost, it first needs to be “summoned”; in order for the “Wall” to be collapsed, it first needs to be constructed. Yet, its destruction cannot be executed once and for all: this event needs to be continuously revisited. The Wall comes to be “attached” to other sites, which are then speculatively associated with it - for instance, to the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, which had been previously dubbed by the anti-monument group Demontirane (which means “Dismantling”) as “Our Berlin Wall.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Genova, “A Better Past Is Still Possible.”

<sup>43</sup> For more on Demontirane, see: Various, “Гражданска инициатива за демонтиране на Паметника на Съветската армия” [“Citizen’s Initiative for the Dismantling of the Monument to the Soviet Army”], a Facebook group in Facebook (December 1, 2012), <https://www.facebook.com/groups/demontirane>. The constituent assembly of the group was held on November 9, 2011 on the steps of the Monument of the Soviet Army in Sofia.



Figure 3. The fence three days after its metal bars were exchanged for panels.

Courtesy: Vassil Garnizov.

In a similar process of simultaneous material heterogenization and discursive solidification, the crowd-control fence installed in front of Sofia's Parliament building during the abovementioned anti-government protests also underwent a peculiar material-semiotic transformation. After the fences made up of vertical metal bars were replaced by a smooth, continuous surface on November 12, 2013, passers-by and protesters quickly started attaching to it various materials in an attempt to articulate it as a "wall." Brick-patterned A4 sheets of paper, a poster reading "Berlin 1961 - 1989 / Sofia 2013 - ?" (Figure 3) and pieces of cardboard set on fire all contributed to the stabilization - and simultaneous "destruction" - of yet another reincarnation of the Berlin Wall in Bulgaria.

What I find particularly interesting in this case is the interplay between the utilisation of fragile materials - paper, cardboard, easily erasable paint - in order to establish a stable discursive link between the temporally and spatially delimited object that is the crowd-control fence in Sofia, and a whole set of politically charged references, most significantly pointing to the period of "totalitarian" communism. This link needs to be continuously revisited and dramatized through a rhythmic, daily return to the fence/wall's surface, which is

constantly modified through heterogeneous additions. Only in this way can the claim for "sameness" be stabilized and the utterance "our fence is a (Berlin) Wall" literally made to *make* sense. Hence, processes of semiotic homogenization and stabilization should not be seen as standing at odds with an alterity or heterogeneity in material, visual or even temporal sense; indeed, the latter should rather, in this case, be understood as the former's precondition. To achieve fixity of meaning, to articulate rigidity, to evoke a wall's prohibiting function, it first needs to be constructed using material and visual means that can hardly be described as solid or stable. In order for the Wall to fall again, it first needs to be re-built.

### Walls for Europe

In light of the insistent presence of the trope of the Berlin Wall in post-communist Bulgaria, it should come as no surprise that it became among the centrepieces of the opening ceremony to perhaps one of the most significant public events in the country in the year 2019: namely, the assumption by the city of Plovdiv of the title "European Capital of Culture." The kick-off of the official program on January 12<sup>th</sup> included both the opening of a private travelling exhibition as well as a 3D video-mapping spectacle on the façade of the Municipality building. The exhibition featured 25 original fragments from the Berlin Wall and the video-mapping also took up this theme. It animated visual elements that were extracted from the graffiti painted on the Berlin Wall pieces on display. As the town's mayor pointed out in his opening address, the choice of the trope of the Berlin Wall for the European Capital of Culture celebrations was not arbitrary but was rather dictated by the wish to assert Plovdiv as "the first city to commemorate thirty years since the Fall of the Berlin Wall."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Plovdiv Municipality, "Откриване на изложба *Изкуство на свободата от Берлинската стена*" [Exhibition Opening *Art of Freedom at the Berlin Wall*], Facebook (December 1, 2019), [https://www.facebook.com/pg/%D0%9E%D0%B1%D1%89%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%9F%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%B2-Plovdiv-Municipality-298150390280406/photos/?tab=album&album\\_id=2002981083130653&\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=-UC-R](https://www.facebook.com/pg/%D0%9E%D0%B1%D1%89%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%9F%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%B2-Plovdiv-Municipality-298150390280406/photos/?tab=album&album_id=2002981083130653&__tn__=-UC-R).



Figure 4. *Art Liberte: From the Berlin Wall to Street Art in Plovdiv, 2019*, video recording accessible from: *Vimeo*, <https://vimeo.com/315676059>, screenshot (00:55). Video courtesy of Plovdiv 2019 Foundation.

The staging of an “overlap” of the visual elements from the Berlin Wall fragments abstracted from their physical surfaces and then projected onto the façade of the Plovdiv Municipality, could be read as evidence that “Europe” and “Bulgaria” have come to coincide and occupy the same space at last. It furthermore appears to suggest that the temporal gap of a “victory of capitalism over communism,” which allegedly happened “overnight” in Western Europe but took some thirty years to be completed in the periphery, has finally been abridged.

However, if we take the political implications of this visual strategy, as well as its timing, seriously, we can use it as an occasion to examine more closely to what extent a celebration of the disintegration of borders can be upheld in contemporary Bulgaria and Europe as a whole. We could furthermore polemically ask to what extent does a celebration of the integrity (ideological, as well as geographical) of Europe, premised upon the trope of the Berlin Wall, obfuscate the political effects of walls and barriers that continue to operate across the continent some thirty years after the collapse of the Wall?

Material and immaterial barriers have been continuously built in the past thirty years; these are the internal and external divisions, put in place to govern the populations of Bulgaria and the European Union

as a whole but also of migrants seeking to find access to these territories. As a recent report by the Transnational Institute has shown, the EU has built more than 1,000 kilometres of “protective barriers” along its borders since 1989, in addition to a series of maritime and virtual walls.<sup>45</sup> We could claim that the solidification of these differently constituted walls, together with Europe’s increasingly restrictive policies towards migrants in general, are the main reason for the colossal loss of life on the borders, shores and in detention centres on the continent since the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>46</sup> While Bulgarian governmental officials easily succumbed to pressure from the EU and built a 166 kilometre long wall along the border with Turkey back in 2013 - that same year when the country was shaken by anti-government protests - many Bulgarian municipalities such as Vidin, Kyustendil and Kazanlak have been installing barriers for years to literally segregate the Roma population from the rest of the towns. As Tatiana Vaksberg and Rositsa Kratunkova have both shown,<sup>47</sup> walls keep being built under the pretext of protection or sheltering whole neighbourhoods, with the actual effect of impeding access to social and educational services for residents of these areas.

These acts of wall-building are incommensurable with the playful transformation of a crowd-control fence into a wall or the collapsing of a “Berlin Wall” made out of cardboard. My intention when bringing up the continuous construction of internal barriers and border walls across Europe and Bulgaria is not to create a simplistic opposition between “fictitious” and “actual” walls and to somehow discard the former as less politically potent.<sup>48</sup> As shown above, many of the contexts in which such fictitious walls are built are oppositional

<sup>45</sup> Ainhoa Ruiz Benedicto and Pere Brunet, *Building Walls: Fear and Securitization in the European Union* (Barcelona: Centre Delàs d’Estudis per la Pau, September 2018). [https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/building\\_walls\\_-\\_full\\_report\\_-\\_english.pdf](https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/building_walls_-_full_report_-_english.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> See UNITED, “List of 34,361 Documented Deaths of Refugees and Migrants Due to the Restrictive Policies of ‘Fortress Europe,’” *United Against Racism* (June 19, 2018). <https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2018/06/19/TheList.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Rositsa Kratunkova, “My City Is Not Yours, Let Me Be (Build) On My Own. Or, How Politics Created the Ghetto,” *dVERSIA* (July 4, 2018), <http://dversia.net/3448/my-city-is-not-yours-let-me-be-build-on-my-own-or-how-politics-molded-the-ghetto>; Tatiana Vaksberg, “От държата страна на стената” [“On the Other Side of the Wall”], *Deutsche Welle* (August 4, 2015). <https://www.dw.com/bg/от-държата-страна-на-стената/a-18366477>.

<sup>48</sup> I have instead engaged with the rhetorical modes and narrative strategies that are utilized to link, mix and separate “real” and “fabricated” walls at the recording surface of post-communism. The paths of enunciation of the distinct successors of the Berlin Wall thus appear to be interwoven and engaged in complex processes of mutual conditioning and disavowal.

to a *status quo* seen as oppressive; the building of “Berlin Walls” is, in these situations, meant to highlight the unjust character of the present and constitute the agents engaged in these practices of erecting and demolishing it in explicit opposition to this present. Nevertheless, I believe it is necessary to attempt to bring to the fore the spatial and social effects of those other walls which do not lend themselves as smoothly to a rhetorical appropriation and mobilization because they build the unwanted, disavowed ground of the post-communist regime. These two processes follow distinctly opposing, yet interrelated and co-constitutive, political logics. While the “tearing down” of the Berlin Wall builds the ideological foundation of a united Europe with its central tenet of freedom of movement, the “unification” of this space is premised upon the intensification of border operations that secure its outer limits and are driven by a racialized, exclusionary logic. Perhaps a sustained attention to the political productivity of these latter walls can discontinue what Buden has called an “education to immaturity.”<sup>49</sup> Finally, it is not only immaturity but also innocence that has to be rejected if the post-communist transition is to be brought to an end. As Donna Haraway has pointed out, by rejecting innocence, one can also shed “the corollary insistence on victimhood,”<sup>50</sup> which is a precondition for an engagement with and opposition to both past and present injustices.

In this article, I examined different cases in which the trope of the Berlin Wall was actualized and politically utilized in present day Bulgaria. Some of these events involved fragments of the historical object itself, as was the case with the inadvertent modification of one of its chunks during renovation works executed in Sofia in 2015, but also with the centring of celebrations for the European Capital of Culture in 2019 around a travelling exhibition comprising of a number of large-scale elements of the Berlin Wall. I also engaged with acts of disobedience from protesters who actively drew on this trope to construe fictive, contemporary versions of it. Lastly, I pointed towards the continuous erection of internal and external divisions in both Europe and Bulgaria, in an attempt to direct the attention to forms of wall-building that not only still persist after

1989, but have in fact intensified after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. If the recording surface of post-communism operates through the continuous smoothing and obfuscation of the socio-material, productive forces that have gone into its constitution, then the task I tried to undertake here is to show the political productivity of the material-semiotic transformations of one of the central figures of the so-called transition period.

<sup>49</sup> Buden, *Zone*, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *The Haraway Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 16.