# Protest and Recognition in the Bulgarian Summer 2013 Movement

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# PROTEST AND RECOGNITION IN THE BULGARIAN SUMMER 2013 MOVEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*2011 marked an extraordinary year in which in cities all over the world, political protest and crowds in the street took over public space, in broad opposition to repressive state associated with neoliberalism. Since 2011, a "new global cycle of protests" has developed, characterized by public expressions of outrage, fury, and resentment. In Sofia, in early 2013, Bulgarians gathered on the streets, for the first time since 1996–1997. After the first protests in early 2013 diminished, a new and even stronger protest movement developed during the summer of 2013. The aim of this paper is to detect the peculiarities and distinctive traits that are unique to the Bulgarian Summer 2013 protests. It is argued that, although the Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement is part of the "new global cycle of protests," the Bulgarian protests are characterized by a distinctive struggle for cultural recognition that is partly inspired by Bulgaria's National Awakening movement that had struggled against the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century.*

**Keywords:** Bulgarian protests 2013; national awakening; national identity; new new social movement; struggle for recognition

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## INTRODUCTION

2011 marked an extraordinary year in which in cities all over the world, political protest and crowds in the street took over public space, in broad opposition to repressive states associated with neoliberal rule (Breau, 2014; Fox Piven, 2014; Giroux, 2013; Marom, 2013; Ossewaarde, 2013; Sotirakopoulos & Sotiropoulos, 2013; Tejerina, Perugorria, Benski, & Langman, 2013). In many cities throughout the world, citizens spoke out about cutbacks in funding for education, power abuse, affordable houses, affordable food, employment, social justice, concentration of wealth, and real democracy. British and Canadian student protests, the Arab Spring, the Indignados or 15M movement in Spain, the Occupy movement in over 88 countries and more than 1,000 cities, they all expressed their grievances against the crushing currents of corrupt governments, excessive inequality, and social malaise. Estanque, Costa, and Soeiro (2013) observe that a "new global cycle of protests" has emerged since 2011. The new global cycle of protests – Langman (2013) calls them "new new social movements" (as contrasted with new social movements like the Global Justice Movement and the World Social Forum) – refers to a post-'11 wave of indignation which continues to inspire and encourage protest movements all around the world, also in cities that had rarely seen protests in their urban histories.

The new global cycle of protests means that the various post-'11 protest movements share certain features in common across the world. First of all, such "new new social movements" are characterized by a broad social base (the Occupy Movement introduced the "we are the 99%" slogan to express its inclusive character). And this broad social base is less characterized by activists (even though the protests may be organized by experienced and trained activists) than by "ordinary citizens" (Flesher Fominaya, 2015; Kuymulu, 2013; Saad-Filho, 2013; Sotirakopoulos & Sotiropoulos, 2013). Second, post-'11 protests are largely organized via new social media in what Saad-Filho (2013, p. 659) calls the "facebookization of protest." "New new social movements" emerge in a particular worldwide technological environment, shaped by the Digital Revolution, that enables intensive social networking (Ganesh & Stohl, 2013; Saad-Filho, 2013). Third, the post-'11 protests are organized for reclaiming public space, squares and parks in particular (Lorey, 2014; Örs, 2014; Ossewaarde, 2013). And, fourth, such squares and parks are sites for "real democracy," practiced as a new form of representation in public space by all who wish to participate (Flesher Fominaya, 2015; Lorey, 2014; Örs, 2014). Fifth, the new global

cycle of protests is characterized by a profound distrust of representative democracy. The post-'11 protest movements distrust all political parties and unions – representative institutions are identified as "fake democracy" – as the rule of, by and for the oligarchical, corrupt establishment (Dean, 2014; Diuk, 2014; Khmelko & Pereguda, 2014). In the new global cycle of protests, "corruption provides a symbol of everything that is wrong in the country" (Saad-Filho, 2013, p. 660). Sixth, the "new new social movements" do not seek to appropriate state power. They limit themselves to opposing oligarchical power (Flesher Fominaya, 2015). And seventh, post-'11 protests are united in a common grand narrative of oppression and resistance, linked to historical legacies of the French Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement, "1968" and "1989" (Flesher Fominaya, 2015; Kopper, 2014; Ossewaarde, 2013).

The new cycle of protests is global. Yet, the protests themselves are embedded within particular local or national contexts, histories, and long term trends (Baumgarten, 2013; Estanque et al., 2013). Evocations of collective memory and strategic uses of the past are very common in the symbolic system and interpretive processes of protest movements as such. Also the "new new movements" deploy constructed memories and identities to unify protesters. They strategically tap into participants' deeper emotions and aspirations, so as to propel and maintain mobilization (Farthing & Kohl, 2013). The particular trigger for protests as such to evolve is embedded within this "emotional reservoir" (Kopper, 2014, p. 451). In the new global cycle of protests, worldwide financial crises, neoliberal austerity and corruption may be the global context in which the "new new social movements" have emerged, yet, economic hardship, widespread suffering, or political oppression as such did not trigger the protests of the Arab Spring, Indignados or Occupy Wall Street Movement (Estanque et al., 2013; Khmelko & Pereguda, 2014). In the Arab Spring, Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation on December 17, 2010 was the catalyst that mobilized collective emotions and transformed fury into contagious outrage, enthusiasm and revolt. The inauguration of the Occupy Movement was preceded by a series of incidents, particularly fraud in the financial world. In Cluj-Napoca a large mining project in Western Carpathians by a Toronto listed company, Gabriel Resources, triggered student protests in 2011. The Gezi Park protests were driven by the ruling government's decision to construct a new shopping mall in Taksim Square Istanbul in May 2013. The Euromaidan protests spread when President Yanukovych refused to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union on November 21, 2013. All these movements belong to the new

global cycle of protests, but they all have their own, locally, or nationally embedded, emotional reservoir that can be used for mobilizing collective action.

The Bulgarian Summer 2013 protests, an under-researched case, belong to the new global cycle of protests (Tejerina et al., 2013), sharing most of the distinctive features of the post'-11 protests. Like the Gezi Park and Euromaidan movement, the protests were triggered by a particular, national political scandal of the newly installed Oresharski administration that created a public outrage. We argue that the emotionally loaded protests in Bulgaria are not only the struggle of a "new new social movement" but also signifies a deeper conflict between the state and the nation – a situation in which the state fails to represent the national identity. We approach the Bulgarian Summer 2013 protests as an event in which, in line with the post-'11 protests, "ordinary citizens" (rather than social movement activists) enter into conflict with their government about what their national identity involves, in a context in which it is widely felt that that the state denies or challenges their national identity (Bertram & Celikates, 2015; Kleist, 2008; Presbey, 2003; Zurn, 2003). In this protesters' struggle for recognition of the Bulgarian identity, we argue, the Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement not only links up with the common grand narratives of the new global cycle of protests (mainly the French Revolution and the "1989" narratives). It also strategically evocates collective memory of its historical struggles with oppression associated with the Bulgarian National Awakening movement that originates in the nineteenth century struggles for national independence from the Ottoman Empire (Kelbecheva, 2013).

While the Bulgarian protests as such lived on for one year, from June 2013 to June 2014, with different phases, we have concentrated our research on the first wave of protests – the period between June 14 and August 3, 2013 – which is defined by the momentum of the initial trigger. Given that the post-'11 protests are characterized by widespread use of social media, we selected data from social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Most of the data we gathered from Facebook groups like *Национален Протест срещу безобразията в България* (National protest against the outrages in Bulgaria) (NPBB) and the event *#ДАНСwithme ден 7* (ДАНС/DANS is the Bulgarian State Agency for National Security, DANS with me being a word play adopted by protesters). Furthermore, we analyzed open-ended interviews with protesters, found on YouTube (such as protesters' initiatives like *The Voice Of*) and in national online newspapers. We selected political blogs from the anti-governmental information agency Noresharski.com and Bulgarian Protest Network, which are organized by independent protesters. And we selected Bulgarian newspaper

articles in which protests and related events are discussed during the first wave period. Bulgarian media is not free. In Freedom House's Global Press Freedom ranking 2013, Bulgaria ranks 77/196, along with countries like Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, and Greece – and with a significantly better score than Turkey (120/196) and Ukraine (131/196). We observe that media bias is reflected in the reported number of participants who protested during the first wave. Whereas national media widely reported on 3,500 participants, based on the information given by the national police, international media accounted for a broad social base of over 50,000 protesters (*Offnews*, June 20, 2013). In order to avoid a one-sided media viewpoints of the protests, various online media articles have been selected. In the Annex the data sources are listed.

We constructed six keywords to guide our data collection and analysis. After an initial scanning of media sources we expected keywords like "resignation Oresharski Cabinet," "populism," "corruption," "(n)oligarchy," "distrust," and "self-immolation" to be the widely used linguistic expressions of the Bulgarian summer 2013 movement. NPBB and *#ДАНСwithme ден 7* as well as diverse political blogs such as Noresharski were scanned for the keyword "Resignation Oresharski Cabinet." Based on initial results national and international online newspapers were scanned for what we expected to be common characteristics ascribed to the Oresharski cabinet such as "populism" and "corruption" and "(n)oligarchy." In the Transparency International corruption index 2013, Bulgaria ranks 69/175, along with countries like Romania, Greece, and Italy. A keyword like "self-immolation" we deemed highly relevant for signifying an extreme protest expression: "suicide protest" (Spehr & Dixon, 2013). Although no self-immolation actually took place during the first wave, protesters often made references to previous self-immolators, who were at times identified as heroes of the protest. Finally, we have been sensitive to the use of both global and Bulgarian symbolism. To illustrate our argument that the Bulgarian Summer 2013 protests is both distinctively global and a continuation of distinctively national protest legacies, we concentrated on both the strategic uses of world history and Bulgarian history, slogans, and repertoires of action.

## OVERVIEW OF EVENTS IN BULGARIA

The Bulgarian Summer 2013 protest movement in Sofia is part of the new global cycle of protests, sharing all the features of "new new social movements," yet, it is also grounded in a struggle for recognition of a Bulgarian

identity that is believed to be misrepresented by the Bulgarian state. Key slogans that the protest movement employed from the very start of the protests, which were listed on NPBB, included "Mother Bulgaria is the one that nourishes us and we cannot allow the government to kill her." In contrast with the Indignados and the Occupy Wall Street movement, and like the Arab Spring, the Gezi Park protests and Euromaidan, the target of the Bulgarian Summer 2013 was not primarily neoliberalism, financial powers, or the 1% superrich, but the national government that had come to diverge from the nation, betraying the nation. The protest movement sloganized its protests in terms of "The Quest for Saving Bulgaria." This quest originated in a particular "moral shock," namely in certain shocking political events that were perceived as state's attack on the nation. The previous government had resigned in February 2013 due to the protests in early 2013, hence the newly elected Plamen Oresharski cabinet was a carrier of hope and expectations. But on June 14, the then newly elected Bulgarian Prime Minister and his cabinet had decided to appoint the media mogul Delyan Peevski as head of the National Security Agency (*The Economist*, July 6, 2013). The appointment of Peevski, as well as the whimsical use of the appointment procedures by Oresharski – that is, shameless democratic breaches – created a collective moral shock. According to one protester, media mogul Delyan Peevski represents Bulgaria's major social problems, which, in his perception, include "corruption, nepotism, organized crime, and the abuse of state power" (*The New York Times*, June 28, 2013). In other words, the oligarchic nature of the elites is blamed for Bulgaria's malaise.

Brancati (2013) observes that pro-democracy and anti-oligarchy protests are especially likely to arise in election periods if people are unable to remove the incumbent government from power through elections. In the Bulgarian case, the protests were ignited after the elections, through a scandal that made people, from various social backgrounds, lose all their trust in political leaders, parliamentary representation, and in a free media. The moral shock that triggered the political protests, and mobilized a broad social base, is, to a high extent, produced by the particular biography and reputation of Delyan Peevski. Prior to his appointment, the media mogul, who owns around 85% of Bulgarian media, had been involved in trials for corruption and organized crime, without being persecuted. Peevski had achieved high positions in public institutions, for which a university degree is a minimum requirement. He had been an MP. He had close connections to high-ranking political and corporate elites. According to the public discourse, Peevski had a fake university degree in law (*Capital*, June 14, 2013).

The particular catalyst for the Bulgarian Summer 2013 protests was not only the brutal fact that Peevski's crimes were left unpunished by the Bulgarian judiciary system, but also, more powerfully, Oresharski's decision to appoint Peevski as head of DANS, in the leading position for combating organized crime. This is the particular scandal that triggered the emergence of the Bulgarian protests on June 14, 2013. On that day the protester Tsvetelin Pavlov twittered that the appointment of Peevski either means the end of the government or the end of democracy in Bulgaria (Twitter, June 14, 2013). Hence, like the 15M movement and the Gezi Park protests, and in contrast with the Arab Spring and Euromaidan protests, the Bulgarian Summer protests are not a struggle for the introduction of democracy, but a defense of democracy in a context of the crisis of parliamentary democracy and representation (cf. Lorey, 2014). The Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement displayed itself as the pro-democratic NOligarchy or anti-oligarch movement. An anonymous protester, interviewed in *The Voice Of* (July 24, 2013), ascribed oligarchic, corrupt, and undemocratic rule to the entire Bulgarian government. After the annulment of Peevski's appointment, a week after the protests had started, protests against oligarchical rule continued. In a widely used wordplay, even used in newspapers controlled by Bulgaria's media moguls, Prime Minister Oresharski's government was baptized as "Oligarski's cabinet." This slogan became a key identification of the killer of "Mother Bulgaria," within the protest movement's narrative (*Dnevnik*, July 14, 2013).

After the annulment of Peevski's appointment as head of the Bulgarian State Agency for National Security and a follow-up trial, the first wave of anti-oligarchy protests continued all summer of 2013, until August 3, the day the Bulgarian Parliament's one month long summer break started. With it protest participation number dropped significantly. During the first wave of protests, protesters demanded the resignation of the Oresharski government, but Oresharski refused to step down, arguing that his resignation and early elections would throw Bulgaria into turmoil (*BTV News*, June 16, 2013). (The Oresharski government was eventually dissolved on August 6, 2014, in the context of Bulgaria's banking crisis.) In a protest blog in *Noresharski* (July 29, 2013), it was stated that Oresharski's refusal to resign was an undemocratic act. Protesters emphasized the Oresharski government, by appointing a criminal as head of DANS, had failed to recognize the will of the people. But there were also other reasons protesters labeled the Oresharski government as illegitimate. As widely discussed on NPBB, protesters felt misrecognized and misrepresented by the ruling parties, the ultra-nationalist Attack, and the Turkish ethnic-based DPS.

Moreover they identified the Socialist Party, personified by the long-term party chairman Sergei Stanishev and, during the 2013 elections, elected with 20% of the votes, as a continuation of a socialist identity. Protesters labeled the Socialist Party as "red trash" or "red mafia" – another important wording in the movement's protest narrative (*Noresharski*, July 29, 2013; *Dnevnik*, July 29, 2013). In other words, in line with the other post'11 protest movements, also the Bulgarian Summer 2013 protests rejected all parties, including opposition parties. The established parties, especially the Socialist Party, were no longer considered as legitimate agencies of representation but as oligarchic strongholds. The anti-establishment mood was most explicitly expressed in the movement's powerful slogan "DPS = GERB = ATAKA = BSP." The protest movement in Sofia was not engaged in an ideological party struggle, but instead rejected the identity of the entire Bulgarian political establishment and demanded fundamental reforms of the representation system. A political blogger pinpointed that "the system is rotten" and that Bulgarians were forced into corrupt practices. In one interview of "The Voice Of" a middle-aged woman called for radical action, a revolution in order to clean the "political trash" that the Oresharski Cabinet personified (*The Voice Of*, July 24, 2013). In *The Voice Of* (July 24, 2013), professor in philosophy Vladimir Brezov, who supported the protest movement, demanded a change of the parliamentary election system that would enable new and small parties to enter the parliament, so as to break oligarchic rule (*News*, June 25, 2013).

Party politicians like Stanishev suspected the protesters to have been paid and organized by particular interest groups (*24chasa*, August 29, 2013). And they accused the former leading party and current opposition, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), for attacking other parties (*Noresharski*, July 29, 2013). In response to such accusations, protesters started to explicitly state that they were voluntarily participating and were unpaid. This was reflected in widely used slogans like "I am not paid, I hate you for free" (NPBB). When, in response to Stanishev's articulated suspicions, the party secretary and former Prime Minister Boiko Borisov tried to turn the protests in favor of his party, that is, as an oppositional protest, the movement developed a fierce anti-GERB mood ("We don't want GERB back, we want a future!," NPBB). (Bill Clinton had tried to do something similar with the Occupy Wall Street Movement in New York, allying protesters with the Democrats and encouraging to support Obama's job plan (Ossewaarde, 2013).) Novaković (2010) states that Boiko Borisov, just like men such as Oresharski and Stanishev,

personified what the movement struggled against, namely oligarchic rule, mafia, and corruption. But Borisov seized the opportunity to present himself and GERB as representatives of the movement in July 2013. Among other things, he demanded, in the name of "the people," the cabinet's resignation and early elections. During the period of the summer protests, Borisov followed a populist course. He blocked, for instance, the implementation of a new credit for Bulgaria, discussed in the parliament, in the name of "the people" (*Noresharski*, July 5, 2013). In the narrative of the protest movement, however, Borisov's actions were always displayed as a populist game, abusing the image of the protests for his own benefit.

## COMMONALITIES AND DISPARITIES WITH GLOBAL PROTESTS

In the Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement, protests were manifested in a very physical, bodily manner, via a daily march during the summer of 2013 in Sofia. The protest march started on Independence Square and then occupied the city center of Sofia (NPBB). There are no reliable or representative statistics on the social base of the active protesters but a survey by the Open Society Institute Sofia (with 1,155 participants) indicates that even though there was a broad social base of supporters for the protesters, the active participants were rather male, below the age of 29, in higher education or employed with a center right political orientation (Open Society Institute Sofia, 2013, pp. 24–27). The protests were displayed in the media as protests of "the people," with youngsters, pensioners, families with their children, professors, doctors, people from diverse backgrounds marching on the streets (*The Economist*, September 10, 2013). A distinctive feature of the protesters' struggle for recognition was, in line with the new global cycle of protests, their non-violent, and socially inclusive character (#ДАНСwithme ден 7, NPBB). As a "new new social movement," the Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement's protests are typically the peaceful expressions of "ordinary citizens," from a broad social base.

Yet, the post-'11 movements, peaceful as their protests may be, typically encounter a violent government or police brutality. In New York, the Occupy Wall Street movement used the word against the sword – their poetry was crushed with water cannons and teargas (Gitlin, 2013; Ossewaarde, 2013). When Gezi Park protesters sought to reinstate Taksim Square as a site for democratic performance, the Erdogan government

responded with brutal violence, leaving seven dead, thousands injured and millions worried (Örs, 2014). And when the Yanukovych government responded violently to Euromaidan's peaceful protests, public outrage over such brutality made the movement grow rapidly (Khmelko & Pereguda, 2014). In contrast with the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street movement, the Gezi Park protests, and Euromaidan protests, Bulgarian police forces did, initially, not intervene in brutal ways. But when, on the 40th day of the first wave of protests, on July 23, 2013, protesters decided to block the building of the National Parliament – which they did not identify as a democratic institution but as a fortress of the oligarchs – making a human circle around the building, supported by bricks and waste containers (*Noresharski*, July 24, 2013), violent clashes occurred between the police and the protesters. After the night of the Parliament occupation the protester Anelia Mircheva tweeted that "there was police violence and […] a clear will to push away protesters" (Twitter #оставка, July 23, 2013). While protesters saw it is a fully legitimate act to block the (in their perception, illegitimate) political establishment – deputies and ministers – from entering the parliament, the corresponding police violence in response to this act was widely believed to be illegitimate.

In another attempt to oppose centralized oligarchic power, the protesters introduced the so-called "Morning Coffee" initiative. Protesters gathered every morning before the start of the parliamentary sessions in front of the National Parliament building, the moment the deputies came to work. The "Morning Coffee" provided free coffee for protesters and collected over 3,000 leva (ca. 1,500€) voluntary tips, which were later donated to a homeless shelter with the explanation that people have to do what the government does not, namely, providing care for each other (*Protestnamreja*, September 21, 2013). Thus, the protest movement gave an open space to express the protester's physical voices, presenting their collective identity as one of a thick solidarity, of "caring for each other" in a solidarity movement. The solidarity among protesters displayed in Sofia, like the solidarity displayed in the Arab Spring, 15M, Occupy Wall Street and Euromaidan, stands in sharp contrast with the profound mistrust of Bulgaria's political institutions and its ruling elites. Several protesters stated in interviews that after the fall of socialism Bulgaria had been sold for small money. Such resentment, or collective feeling of betrayal, was expressed in slogans like "Politics is a Business and Democracy is a Commodity" (NPBB). In their narrative, typical for protesters, the same socialist nomenclature of the pre-1989 days had stayed in power but had come disguise itself as benevolent "social democrats" while establishing a corrupt state of "wild capitalism"

(*The Voice Of*, July 24, 2013). Janka, a young protester (*The Voice Of*, July 24, 2013) stated that she had been angry and dissatisfied for a long time about the injustices of the political and economic situation in Bulgaria, but that she had hitherto felt powerless in expressing her dissatisfaction. An oligarchic system based on corruption and organized crime had made it difficult for civil initiatives to develop in Bulgaria. Another protester articulated a widely cherished belief among protesters that the Bulgarian state had managed to destroy what, in his opinion, were the three main columns that make out a good nation – health care, education and labor market (*The Voice Of*, July 27, 2013). In other words, in the protesters' narrative, the Bulgarian government was held responsible for destroying basic living conditions – a feature that the Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement shares with all the other post-'11 protests (Burean & Badescu, 2014; Ganesh & Stohl, 2013; Saad-Filho, 2013). This is a narrative that is globally used.

The Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement used, like other post-'11 movements, the "real democracy" slogan that had been invented by the Indignados in Spain, in 2011 (Burean & Badescu, 2014; Estanque et al., 2013; Flesher Fominaya, 2015; Ganesh & Stohl, 2013; Lorey, 2014). For the 15M movement, "real democracy" is a democracy without parties – yet parallel to representative democracy – horizontally practiced in assemblies, in the square (Lorey, 2014). In contrast with the propositions articulated by Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos (2013), Tejerina et al. (2013), and Baumgarten (2013), and differently from the 15M movement, the horizontalist mobilization structures in Sofia included no "real democracy" via general assemblies or open microphone sessions. Yet, In line with the post-'11 "real democracy" aspiration, the Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement had no clear leader. Instead, it was governed by a decentralized network of protesters. During the first wave of the protests, this network expanded rapidly. The network initiated online debates while coordinating protest marches via Facebook. The Facebook event *#ДАНСwithme ден 7* was a tool for coordinating protests on issues such as time, meeting point and protest route, that had officially been created by 34 persons with 82,996 Facebook participants (October 10, 2013). The Facebook page *Национален Протест срещу безобразията в България* (National Protest against the Outrageous Conditions in Bulgaria/NPBB) with 92,698 "likes" also gave protesters an open space to freely express their identity and exchange information, impressions.

The Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement did make use of the grand global narratives, including pro-democracy narratives. Like the Occupy Movement, the Bulgarian Summer 2013 protesters made strategic use of

the history of the French Revolution, as well as "1989" and the fall of communism in Europe, as a heroic struggle against oligarchic oppression, the quest for equality before the law, and the promise of legal rights. On July 13, 2013, the 31st day of the protests, a group of protesters re-enacted the French Revolution, Delacroix's *La Liberté guidant le peuple*. In a newspaper article (*24chasa*, July 13, 2013) the actors' decision to stage this scene in the streets was discussed as the struggle against the new "aristocrats," identified as the oligarchic and oppressive and patriarchal Bulgarian leaders without a spirit of nobility. In the staging of the French Revolution, as portrayed by Delacroix, Todora Ilieva, the bare-chested and feminist protagonist, frequently waves a European flag and shouts: "Europe, where are you? Democracy! Revolution!" (*Euronews*, July 18, 2013). On July 15, the 33rd day of the protests staged the fall of the Berlin Wall. The wall was built by boxes which were labeled with "mafia," "resignation," "zone free of communism," "independent media and society" and many more (*OffNews*, July 16, 2013; *BTV News*, July 16, 2013).

The protests in Greece, Spain, and Portugal included the EU as a target, interpreted as a corrupt neoliberal puppet that enforced austerity measures to satisfy global financial markets and favor large firms at the expense of the common people. Also in post-socialist states like Hungary and Poland, which entered the EU in 2004, discontent with the European project has become widespread. In Bulgaria, as in Romania, which had entered the EU in 2007, as well as among the Euromaidan and Gezi Park protesters, the EU continues to enjoy high levels of popularity (Iusmen, 2015). This is not to say that there were no critical voices among the Bulgarian protesters. Some protesters equaled the EU and the Bulgarian state, claiming that such political systems were "harmful" and "useless." The majority of protesters, however, were pro-European and identified the Oresharski administration as an obstacle for Bulgaria to "return to Europe." The protester Genchev tweeted on July 26, 2013 that "today for the first time he felt that he lived in a European country and that this depends on him" (Twitter, #оставка, #ДАНСwithme). Such protesters perceived Bulgaria as a part of a wider European narrative of freedom and democracy. This is in line with Vaclav Havel's (1990) "Return to Europe" discourse after the fall of socialism. Havel had argued, after "1989," that post-socialist states should turn away from their anti-European, socialist experience, in order to return to be re-included in Europe, for instance, via EU membership. The actors that had staged the French Revolution on the streets of Sofia frequently waved a European flag. Next to such European identity symbolism protesters struggled for the representation of a Bulgarian identity. They did not see any contradiction between these two identities, identifying the Bulgarian

nation as a part of, and culturally connected with, the whole of European history. Within the movement the "true Bulgarians" and "true Europeans" were celebrated as contrasts with the degenerated elites of the Bulgarian state that had failed to respect democratic procedure and violated the rule of law.

The creative and peaceful protests did not end at the frontiers of Bulgaria. The Agency for Social Surveys and Analysis estimates that in 2008 around 1.2−1.5 million Bulgarian citizens lived outside of Bulgaria, which makes up 16−20% of the total population (ASSA). In over 11 countries, from all over Europe, the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, from more than 20 cities Bulgarian migrants abroad organized global solidarity protests in order to support the anti-Oresharski movement in Bulgaria (#ДАНСwithme World, Facebook, Twitter). Migrated Bulgarians that were no longer directly affected by the policies of the Bulgarian government still felt misrepresented as Bulgarians and participated in the movement's narrative. A protester in Canada held a sign with "One Bulgaria across the globe. One protest" (Twitter, Ivan L Petrov, July 3, 2013). In Amsterdam, Bulgarian protesters held up a sign "We all want only one thing- resignation!" (*NPBB*, July 7, 2013). Within the protesters narrative in Sofia the political establishment was being blamed for the ongoing corruption and disastrous policies that were perceived as the fundamental reasons for why so many Bulgarians had left and are still leaving their country. A frequently seen sign during the protests in Sofia was: "GERB, BSP, DPS, ATAKA – Bulgaria deserves something better than you, so you immigrate!" (*NPBB*, July 7, 2013).

In the movement's narrative, the symbol of self-immolation played an important role. Spehr and Dixon (2013) explain that "protest suicide," a deliberate suicide action (like self-immolation and hunger strikes), in combination with the assurance of media coverage, is a powerful weapon in mobilizing public opinion to put pressure on an oppressive force. Protest suicide and hunger strikes are not uncommon strategies in resistance movements. The protest suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi had fired the Arab Spring. The Euromaidan protests included hunger strikes (Diuk, 2014). In Bulgaria, in 2013, prior to the first wave of protests, a wave of self-immolations had occurred for the first time in Bulgarian history, with six fatal victims, six survivors, and over four failed attempts or threats (*Vesti*, August 13, 2013). On February 20, 2013, the 32-year-old photographer Plamen Goranov (his name Plamen being translated from Bulgarian meaning "burning flame") had turned himself into a Bulgarian Jan Palach or Mohamed Bouazizi. Armed with a poster demanding the dismissal of the mayor of the city of Varna − an oligarch who had been directly connected

to TIM, a group of high-ranking organized crime. Plamen Goranov set himself on fire in front of the municipality building of Varna and died three days after, on March 3, 2013, as a result of his injuries. Plamen Goranov became the symbol of the fight against the Bulgarian state that had links with organized crime (Vice, 2013). During the first wave of protests, the Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement paid tribute to Plamen's self-sacrifice, displaying him as a national hero.

The many failed and successful attempts of self-immolation signified an unheard struggle for recognition, bringing Bulgarians to the edge of despair and insanity. A few months prior to the summer protests, on March 13, 2013, the 52-year-old smith Dimityr Dimitrov set himself on fire in front of the building of the Presidency in Sofia and survived. In the documentary "Burned Alive in Bulgaria" (Vice, 2013), Dimitrov announced that the oligarchic and corrupt Bulgarian regime had tired him. In a BTV News interview in March 2013 he referred to the catastrophic social situation of so many Bulgarians, who were plagued by mass poverty and unemployment. Dimitrov explained that "the problem of the Bulgarians is […] the inability to feel human" and he advices "not to despair. However, how is it possible not to despair when there is nothing joyful, nothing hopeful. Maybe the new government (*the Oresharski government*) will give them (*the Bulgarians*) a chance" (*BTV News*, March 13, 2013). Self-immolation is an extreme form of protest but Dimitrov reflected, like the 15M movement, on the pain of a "lost generation" that had no social hope. Bulgarians who had been pushed to the margins of social existence and driven to despair in the neoliberal era of global capitalism, expressed their anger and outrage via the channels the protest movement offers, in a quest for recognition of their sufferings. Tejerina et al. (2013) and Benski, Langman, Perugorria, and Tejerina (2013) observe that a protest movement typically transforms emotions of anger and frustration to joy and empowerment. In the Bulgarian protest movement, emotions of anger and outrage were often intensified, especially when protesters continued to be unheard, misrecognized, and humiliated by the state that has linkages with organized crime.

## IDENTITY AND MEMORY IN THE BULGARIAN PROTESTS

The Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement symbolically located its own protests within a narrative of centuries of oppression. Farthing and Kohl

(2013) explain that repetition of mythic stories of resistance to oppression, characterized by memory bridges between present needs, interpretations of history, evoke deeper emotions and aspirations that proves a powerful device for propelling and maintaining mobilization. In the long history of protests in Bolivia, Farthing and Kohl (2013, p. 368) observe, "stories invoking both martyred heroes and ancestors are usually combined with a utopian vision of the pre-Conquest past." In the Arab Spring, symbols of oppressive rule were taken from history. In Egypt, for instance, Hosni Mubarak was labeled as a pharaoh – the same label had been used for his predecessor, Anwar Sadad. The Gezi Park protesters identified Recep Erdogan as a new Sultan, who had neo-Ottoman visions and had his own majestic palace constructed, with a golden toilet. Erdogan's ottomanism violated the principles of the Turkish republic. The Bulgarian Summer 2013 protest movement pointed at a continuation of different legacies of oppression. The historical awareness of deeply rooted alienation of the nation from the state is reflected in a protest slogan: "the lack of evolution in you leads to a revolution in us" (NPBB).

Smilov and Jileva (2009) have noted that historic symbolism is of central importance in today's public and political discourse in Bulgaria, especially since "1989." The so-called "continuity of the Bulgarian nation and the alleged grandeur of the sacrifice made by its (Bulgaria's) ancestors" has been used as a central rhetorical, populist device in current political debates. The Bulgarian summer 2013 protesters actively used the narrative of the "Bulgarian National Awakening" (*Българското национално възраждане*) – mythical stories of Bulgaria' nineteenth century struggle for independence from Ottoman imperialism – in its collective identity and memory constructs (Daskalov, 2004; Kelbecheva, 2013; Verdery, 1993). In the National Awakening narrative, the so-called "true" Bulgarians have typically been displayed as Christians, mountaineers, hard-working peasants, who had suffered the extraordinary injustices and cruelties of the Ottoman invaders. The so-called "false" Bulgarians are the urban bourgeoisie who traded and intermingled with the Ottomans (Brunnbauer & Pichler, 2002). In the Bulgarian Summer 2013 protests, the National Awakening narrative was actively employed as a symbolic resource. Protesters invoked the stories of "true Bulgarians," the mythologized martyred heroes and the great ancestors, as models of resistance. "True Bulgarians" included National Awakening heroes like freedom fighter Vasil Levski (1837–1873), the poets and writers Hristo Botev (1876–1948) and Ivan Vazov (1850–1921) who, according to the Bulgarian Summer 2013 protesters' narrative, had rescued Bulgaria from the enslavement and oppression of the Ottoman Empire. Protesters widely quoted Vasil Levski's

phrases like "without a revolution we are lost forever and ever," or "we need deeds, not words" (NPBB).

The legacy of Ottoman oppression was strategically included in the narrative of the Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement, for present purposes of delegitimizing the state. Protesters symbolically linked up with National Awakening movement, for instance, by wearing traditional costumes of the folkloric myth of the *haidutin*. A folkloric figure common to the Balkans, depicts a vagabond and outlaw who is semi-criminal as well as a freedom fighter against Ottoman rule. The protesters interpreted the Ottoman Empire, in line with the consciousness of the National Awakening movement, as "500 years of Turkish slavery." The Ottoman Empire signaled, for them, despotic rule by strangers that tried to extinguish Bulgarian nationhood and European culture. Within the protest movement many analogies were drawn between the Ottoman rule and the current Bulgarian state, which, as it was perceived by protesters, had, like the Ottoman Empire, destroyed the possibility to live a human life, in freedom. As Dimitrov, the self-immolator, stated: "the problem of the Bulgarians is […] the inability to feel human" (*BTV News*, March 13, 2013). According to an interviewed protester (*The Voice Of*, July 24, 2013), the state destroyed the nation, its educational, health care, and pension system and labor market conditions. On August 2, 2013, the 18-year-old Milena Doncheva posted a polemic article named "Good morning, slaves!" that quickly initiated heated debates in social media. She accused the Bulgarians for accepting and not rebelling against the injustices of the Bulgarian state, precarious labor conditions. She ended her post with "Go on sleeping nation, you have 500 years of slavery internship experience." Protesters felt as betrayed by the current government as they had felt oppressed by the Ottoman regime. A famous quote by Hristo Botev, poet, anarchist rebel against the Ottoman rule, and one of the founding fathers of Bulgarian nationhood within the National Awakening narrative was widely employed by the protesters: "the foundations of every government are theft, lies and violence" and "every government is a conspiracy against the freedom of humanity."

But it is not only the National Awakening myths but also the socialist legacies that play an important role in the protesters' identity and memory constructs. Young and Light (2001) argue that, after the Second World War, and until "1989," socialism had altered Bulgaria's typical sources of collective identity, replacing the nationalist discourse of the National Awakening with socialism. In socialist discourses, the Communist Party would represent the nation. The 15M and the Occupy Wall Street protesters used socialist legacies and symbolism (like references to the anti-fascist

battles in the Spanish Civil War, including the use of Picasso's *Guernica* (Kopper, 2014)), in their struggles with neoliberal capitalism. By contrast, the Bulgarian Summer 2013 protests included the negation of socialist legacies – legacies that in Bulgaria's post-socialist transitional period have been widely identified with a corrupt, non-accountable, nomenclature, and authoritarian regimes that had betrayed the nation (Kuzio, 2012; Rose-Ackerman, 2001). In Bulgaria, the protests were not anti-capitalist. Protesters did not interpret the economic malaise in Bulgaria as a product of Wall Street fraud or the 1% superrich; instead, the persistent economic malaise of the past decades was the result of continuing malpractices of the Bulgarian establishment. In their collective identity, protesters used powerful connotations of "evil," "abusive" and "bad" to emphasize the state's divorce from the nation, and, likewise, the alienation of the nation from the state.

The Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement did not establish any narrative linkage with the historical struggles of the labor movement. But like other post-'11 protests, it iconized perceived champions of humanity from all over the world, including Gandhi, Maria Theresa, or Bob Marley. The movement made strategic uses of both the national legacies and the icons of world history and pop culture, all presented as voices of the oppressed. Its multi-sourced protest narrative, its presentation of the voices of the oppressed, managed to mobilize a broad social base yet was not all-inclusive. The use of the National Awakening symbolism, as an inclusive "authentic" Bulgarian identity construct, was ambiguous if only because this narrative at times included xenophobic, derogatory opinions about the Turkish and Sinti and Roma population in Bulgaria. These are oppressed groups that risked exclusion from the protest movement that claimed to be inclusive and speak for the oppressed (*NPBB*, June 20, 2013). In other words, the Bulgarian Summer protesters, with its broad social base, struggled to include a wide variety of voices of the oppressed. The National Awakening narrative of centuries of oppression and struggles for liberation prevented them from providing respect, esteem and representation for the most oppressed groups of Bulgarian society.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Post-'11 protest movements share a common core, namely a broad social base of "ordinary citizens" (rather than activists), widespread use of new

social media, the quest for reclamation of public space, distrust of representative democracy interpreted as oligarchical power, protest practices of "real democracy" as a new, inclusive form of representation (which Lorey (2014) calls "presentist democracy"), and shared grand narratives of oppression and resistance, derived from events like the French Revolution, socialist struggles and "1989." The new global cycle of the so-called "new new social movements" are inspired by common concerns, namely the sort of violence people receive from the conditions they find themselves locked in, particularly in contexts of economic crisis and degradation of material life. Grievance about the decline of education, power abuse, affordable housing, social justice, and rising inequality are universally expressed in protest movements from Israel to Chile. As Brancati (2013) emphasizes, anti-oligarchy and pro-democracy protests in general are more likely to arise when the economy is not performing well and people blame the oligarchic nature of their government for the impoverishment. Langman (2013) and Ossewaarde (2013) stress that movements like 15M and Occupy in particular, have bloomed out of a legitimacy crisis of the global capitalist political economy. The alleged mindless rulers of that political economy are the 1% against a misrecognized and under-represented overwhelming majority of 99%. All of the post-'11 protests, however, have their own catalyst, their own memory work, and their own emotional reservoir that enables movements to mobilize a broad social base of participants. Each of the post-'11 protests emerges for different reasons, at different moments, typically in response to a particular scandal or incident that causes a certain moral shock.

Dean (2014, p. 385) observes that post-'11 protest movements, the Occupy Wall Street movement in particular, do "not unify collectivity under a substantial identity – race, ethnicity, religion, nationality." In contrast, the protesters in Sofia did unify collectivity under a substantial identity, namely, the Bulgarian nationality. As diverse protesters declared in interviews published in *The Voice Of*, theirs was a truly national protest, reflected in the strategic use of the Bulgarian flag as the major symbol, in defense of a nation betrayed by the state. In the summer of 2013 Sofia turned into a stage of free identity expressions, creative, and diverse forms of protest and every evening after 18:30 to a sea of Bulgarian flags, accompanied by the three syllable slogan "Ostavka" (Resignation). To protest was a matter of "saving Bulgaria" (or "Bulgaria is Ours – You are Fired" and "If we do not protest the one to pay is Bulgaria"), and, accordingly, to protest had become a matter of Bulgarian pride. Farthing and Kohl (2013) note that national symbolism typically invokes a collective obligation to

contribute to communal activities, including protest, being part of a legacy and heroic past.

Flesher Fominaya (2010) stresses that in protest movements in general, a movement's identity, misrecognized by the establishment, is not a given, but constructed in a dynamic process. The Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement constructed its alleged "true" Bulgarian identity through shared daily interaction and affective ties among the participants, ordinary citizens. Given that the protests included a broad social base, the "true" Bulgarian identity was constructed from participants' common values, experiences, solidarity, discourses, myths, and symbolic expressions which secured emotional involvement. In the Bulgarian Summer 2013 movement, collective memory was frequently enacted, as protesters inserted narrative commemorations, including the staging of the French Revolution and "1989." Protesters typically brought forward images of the past in their daily protests, in such ways that the formulations of the movement's identity, and hence its reason for struggling for recognition (Kleist, 2008; Zurn, 2003), mirrors a linkage with Bulgaria's history of oppression and struggle for freedom, law, rights, and democracy. It is precisely from this emotional attachment to the movement's enactment of an emotionally loaded memory, that a collective sense of outrage, the collective experience of being unjustly victimized by an abusive nomenclature, develops. Flesher Fominaya (2010) emphasizes that such emotional involvement, more than shared interests, provides the broad social basis for mobilization and consolidation (Benski et al., 2013; Brucato, 2012).

Farthing and Kohl (2013, p. 367) state that "the ways narratives of specific memories are mobilized in protest vary widely and are shaped by differences in culture, space and history." This phenomenon is certainly observable in the Bulgarian case. Already during the first protest wave in summer 2013, but also thereafter, the resignation of the Oresharski cabinet became the core political demand of the "anti-oligarch" movement, which parallels the Occupy Movement's anti-1% perspective, the Gezi Park protests (anti-Erdogan), and the Euromaidan movement (anti-Yanukovych). Anti-socialism was an important part of the Bulgarian narrative, not only in protests against socialist politicians but also in the symbolic display of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In other words, the Bulgarian protesters symbolically linked up the summer of 2013 with "1989," as an ongoing resistance struggle against the nomenclature. As in the Arab Spring and in the Euromaidan movement, protesters attributed characteristics of immorality and cultural barbarism, including "evil," "abusive," and "shameless," in response to the continuation of a powerful contradiction between the evil

state and the good nation – the nourishing "Mother Bulgaria" – throughout the centuries. The National Awakening narrative was employed to express this national alienation from the parasitical establishment and to mobilize protesters to being part of a legacy and heroic Bulgarian legacy, to take a categorical moral stance against the abusive oligarchy that men like Oresharski, Peevski, and Stanishev had come to represent.

The Bulgarian Summer 2013 protests also manifested a powerful European consciousness, manifested in the staging of the French Revolution and the role of the "Return to Europe" slogan in the protesters' media discourses. Saad-Filho (2013) notes that the mass protests in Brazil in June–July 2013 were marked by the problem that, among various social groups, expectations of a better life had risen faster than incomes. This created deep frustrations. In Bulgaria, expectations of a democratic state that would comply with the EU's Copenhagen criteria – including, democracy, rule of law, and human rights – had risen since its EU entry in 2007, only to be confronted with democratic backslidings. The "Return to Europe," a longstanding promise of democracy and rule of law in Bulgaria after "1989," always implied the removal of the Oresharski administration and a radical transformation of the Bulgarian state, including the election code. In sum, the Bulgarian Summer 2013 protests were part of the new global cycle of protests. The movement shares the conceptual features of the post'-11 movements. But in its identity and memory work, it expressed a highly ambiguous, paradoxical combination of a pre-modern, folkloric, and patriotic identity, with a modern, national, and European identity – a complex identity construct that managed to include a broad social base but could not include all ethnic minorities.

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