# MUSEUMIZING CONTESTED HERITAGES:

## POST-COMMUNIST IDENTITY POLITICS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF COMMUNIST HERITAGE IN BULGARIA

### A CASE STUDY OF THE MUSEUM OF SOCIALIST ART IN SOFIA

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the second half of the 20th century the Iron Curtain divided the European continent into two ideologically opposed blocs. The West was a symbol of democratic freedom, opportunity and thriving prosperity, while the East represented its communist repressive and backward 'Other'. The year 1989 will remain in history as the year of the implosion and overthrow of the communist regimes across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). In the wake of the dramatic events these countries emerged in a radically transformed environment that required their all-out re-organization and adaptation according to the neoliberal political and economic principles. Since then, the states from the former Eastern Bloc have undergone a long and complex process of democratization, pluralization and marketization, ultimately aimed to turn them into Western-type capitalist democratic economies and prepare them for accession in powerful supranational structures, such as NATO and the European Union (EU). This so called 'transition process' has in recent years been problematized and critiqued for being too reductive in that it has focused mainly on technical and procedural changes, thus ignoring and being insensitive to the profound political, social and cultural transformations that have been taking place in the countries of the region. It has also been claimed to have turned a blind eye on the long-standing impacts of the regimes that continue to have a bearing even in the post-socialist development of those countries (Verdery, 1999; Young & Light, 2001; Blokker, 2005).

What is more, some critics of the transition in Central and Eastern Europe have argued that insufficient attention has been paid to issues related to a process that has been going on in parallel with the state restructuration, which is no less significant. As the former socialist states faced up to their renewed contexts while getting inserted in the international division of labour and the global flows of capital, people and ideas, it became necessary that they work on the renovation of their political identities and national representations to project an image of stability and hospitality that encourages foreign investment (Light & Young, 2001; Hall, 2008). To this end, the development of international tourism in the former socialist states had much wider political significance than the dominant narratives emphasizing the industry's attractive economic rationale (Hall, 1999; 2003; 2008; Light, 2000a&b; 2001).

During the communist regime the revision and manipulation of history, culture and heritage had been employed as powerful instruments in building a uniform, socialist society that obeys to one party and one ideology. Any subaltern identities were silenced and suppressed (Castells, 2000), and the societies of the capitalist West were the 'Other' against which the socialist national identities were constructed and reinforced (Verdery, 1993). After the disintegration of the communist rule, though, renouncing of everything that was associated with the oppressive powers of the regimes was central to the processes of post-socialist identity transformation and the assertion of the countries' new Westward-looking political, economic and cultural aspirations. Museums played a key role in the processes of re-envisioning the communist past and its connection with the present by creating narratives which represented the country's history in a desired light. Despite the attempts of those nations to re-imagine themselves in a new way, put their communist history behind them and open up to their renewed realities, the enduring presence of the ubiquitous material legacies of the ideology and the totalitarian regimes keeps reminding of that part of their past (Verdery, 1999; Light, 2000a&b; 2001). Moreover, a rising interest in touring and gazing on the communist heritage of Central and Eastern Europe have brought back to surface concerns about the perpetuation of certain myths

and images that continue representing the region within Western imaginations as an 'Other' (Light, 2000a&b; 2001).

Each country has a unique way of coming to grips with the problem of how to interpret and represent its communist legacy, in a way that serves the state's contemporary political and economic purposes. In this research project I will explore how this problem is addressed in Bulgaria, which between the years 1944 and 1989 was a satellite state under the Soviet hegemony. For more than two decades after the fall of the communist regime, the question of what to do with the tangible and intangible legacies of that era of the nation's history was a source of political and social tension within the country and the main political approach to it was to regard it with silence (Vukov, 2012). As a result of such tensions, the tenth anniversary of the fall of totalitarianism (in 1999) was marked by the destruction of the greatest symbol of the country's communist past – the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov, one of the prominent leaders of the Bulgarian Communist Party (Verdery, 1999). Many other monuments and memorials praising the ideology and its heroes found similar destiny, while others subsided to the collective amnesia, which was being institutionalized within the Bulgarian society in the course of its post-socialist development (Vukov, 2012).

The recognition of the potential of communist heritage as a tourism attraction and a dollar-earner, as well as the long-standing need to come to terms with the communist past of the country led to the opening of the Museum of Socialist Art (MSA) in September 2011, under the initiative of the government functioning at that time. After long years of avoidance, Bulgaria joined a number of post-socialist countries in appropriating its communist heritage for the tourism industry. However, from its very inauguration the Museum turned into a subject of contestation regarding the choices made of how to represent and interpret the artefacts, and more importantly, about the implicit political messages that the Museum conveyed (Vukov, 2012). Therefore, this research focused on the representation of communist heritage and its implications in the post-communist renovation of the Bulgarian national identity through the case study of the Museum of Socialist Art, as it is indicative of the controversial and divergent attitudes towards the legacies from that past and, importantly, it constitutes the state-authorized discourse on the problem.

To achieve this, I will adopt a Foucauldian approach towards the museum as a power-invested institution that deals with visual objects. Through the discourses which get produced and reproduced by the embedding of objects within museum settings and practices, certain claims of truth about history and culture are made (Rose, 2007a). Thus, because it is productive, discourse is infused with power (Rose, 2007c: 143). An essential aspect of Foucault's conceptualization of power is that it is not simply imposed in a top-down manner onto the "bottom layers" of society (Rose, 2007c:143). Rather, it is inextricably connected with discourse and, as discourses are everywhere, so too power is everywhere (Rose, 2007c:143). Institutions play a crucial role in the reproduction and circulation of discourse (Nead, 1988:4, quoted in Rose, 2007c:142) and, therefore, power is invested in them. Therefore, I will explore how certain art objects claimed as national heritage are embedded in and produced by the museum institution, and the effects that this creates in terms of the production of particular human identities (Rose, 2007a). Studying the museum institution in this way involves a particular visual methodology, related to direct observations of the museum, its setting and its visitors (Rose, 2007a). Casual interviews at the museum setting will be employed to try and gain a comprehension of the discourses within which both domestic and foreign visitors of the museum interpret the museum narrative, as well

as of the meanings that they attach to the objects on display while observing the MSA exhibit. The research data will be analyzed using discourse analysis.

In what will follow the problem delineation and the relevance of this research will be concisely stated. Next, the theoretical framework will provide an overview of the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the study. I will depart with an account of the conceptualizations of the ambiguous notions of heritage and identity, which seeks to demonstrate that one should not take those categories for granted as they both hinge on specific historical contingencies and get continuously transformed and reconstructed to serve contemporary purposes. After this, I will try to relate the concepts of heritage and identity by showing how representations and discourses of national heritage are deployed in the processes of building national identity. Following that, the key role of international and domestic heritage tourism will be evoked in order to begin thinking about how the industry is implicated in effecting the political construction and legitimation of particular identities. The section devoted to the museum as a cultural institution and the politics of exhibiting will deepen that analysis and will show how objects are endowed with particular meanings and produced as heritage and what the effects of that in terms of the shaping of social identities are. The final section of the theoretical framework will try to embed the above-mentioned concepts and practices in the contexts of the post-socialist identity transformations taking place in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, that chapter will talk about a type of heritage which is rather specific to the countries of the former Eastern Bloc and will be central to this study, namely the notion of 'communist heritage' (Light, 2000a&b) and its representations. Examples will be provided to demonstrate how different countries in the region address their communist legacies in different ways. Chapter five will present the case study of the Museum of Socialist Art and will provide arguments for the selection of this particular case. Subsequently, having outlined the concepts and contexts of the study, the research objectives will be presented, as well as operationalized into the research questions which will guide this research. This will be followed by the methodological framework of this research which will provide an outline of the research design and the techniques employed to help generate and analyze the research data. Finally, the results and conclusions of this research will be presented in chapters eight and nine.

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

While there has been recognition among Bulgarian society of the need to begin reflecting on the profound intangible impacts and the material heritage which the communist past had left behind, the form in which the government decided to do so was in a museum that displays works of art produced during the communist period. No public deliberations were held prior to the inauguration of the Museum of Socialist Art with regard to the concept of the project, the selection of the objects to be displayed and their historic interpretation. As a result, some groups in Bulgarian society, such as members of the political, media and artistic circles, have noticed and commented on a lack of a comprehensive historical embedding of the art exhibition, construed as a partial interpretation of the issue attempting to 'rehabilitate' and 'eternalize' the totalitarian regime and its ideology (Vukov, 2012:4). Moreover, a top-down approach to such a politically-overburdened subject as the representation and interpretation of a controversial, and for some even painful, past invites questions and doubts as to the wider political goals which this project pursues; goals to which many may not subscribe that easily. It is, therefore, critical to investigate the objects and representations on display in the Museum of Socialist Art in terms of

the communist heritage discourses they create and how they come to constitute the post-communist national identity of Bulgarian citizens.

## 3. RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Post-communist identity transformation is an intricate process that takes place on multiple scales at the same time – individual, local, regional, national and international – and is shaped by the interactions between the processes happening on the different levels (Stenning, 2000; Young & Light, 2001; Young & Kaczmarek, 2008). This complexity means that there is a need for more research on post-communist identity transformations, especially given the continuous perception of the former socialist states as still being an 'Other' in Europe (Light 2000b, Young & Light, 2001; Young & Kaczmarek, 2008) and the role of tourism in this process of image perpetuation. Moreover, there is a need for research on how 'Other', perhaps even unwanted, pasts emerge again to contest dominant post-socialist identity discourses that try to obscure, frame partially or 'snip out' the legacies of this period. Each case of post-socialist identity formation is strictly unique as it is intrinsically historically-contingent and dependent on the state's and its population's unique experiences of socialism and post-socialism (Young & Kaczmarek, 2008). In this respect, this research adds to the existing body of knowledge on this process in the context of contemporary Bulgaria, a nation whose post-1989 identity is still rather elusive and unresolved.

Further, although the political uses of heritage tourism and its role in the manufacture of place-identities and 'Otherness' are widely discussed and applied in empirical studies (cf. Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009, for example), the current study could offer a look into how national heritage discourses are employed not only to educate and instill a certain national identity among Bulgarian citizens, but also to reify and reinforce certain power relations in a society, whose political, economic and cultural life is still dominated by former elites from or related to the communist *nomenclature,* that seek to legitimate their position in the process of capitalist democratic transition. This research is also an attempt at applying and deepening the theory and methodology related to the mutual constitution of objects on display and their various users in the enclosed and functional environment of the museum institution (Rose, 2007a). In addition, the social and perhaps even management-related relevance of this study lies in that it will seek to explore the visitors' own feelings and interpretations of the communist heritage exhibition at the Museum of Socialist Art, to find out what they think those artefacts are trying to teach, whether they identify with the narrative being created and whether it has any obvious or implicit lacks or manipulations. Such information could be of value to the museum management both as a cultural and educational institution and as a capitalist enterprise, as it could invite to more reflection and critical analysis of an ambivalent past that means different things for the multiplicity of voices in society.

## 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before I begin, it is important to outline the way the notion of *politics* is employed in the current study, as the researched problem is intricately interwoven with post-communist politics. In this respect, I will adopt Katherine Verdery's definition of politics, which sees it as:

*"a form of concerted activity among social actors, often involving stakes in particular goals. These goals may be contradictory, sometimes only quasi-intentional; they can include making policy, justifying actions taken, claiming authority and disputing the authority claims of others, and creating or manipulating the cultural categories within which all of those activities are pursued....politics as a realm of continuous struggles over meanings, or signification..."* (1999:23-24).

## 4.1. THE POLITICS OF HERITAGE AND IDENTITY

In a world where societies grow, mingle and become more and more heterogeneous and societal, political and economic relations are getting ever more complex (Castells, 2000), as states find themselves inserted in the international division of labour, global capital and investment flows, and increasing international travel, some may have argued that these globalizing forces have resulted in the de-territorialization of space and the decline of the nation-states (Young & Light, 2001). However, what many scholars have encountered is the exact opposite process where the importance and characteristics of space and place have in fact increased, and so has the influence of the nation-states as the agents directing the re-territorialization process and holding the control of processes on their territories (Mitchell, 2000, Slater, 2000 and Graham, 2000, quoted in Young & Light, 2001; Hazbun, 2004). Importantly, this process has involved a growing need for re-adjusted place representations that can respond aptly to the dynamically changing conceptualizations and configurations of power (Graham, 2000, quoted in Young & Light, 2001). In this world, identity and the sense of place and belonging have not faded away, but have gained a fundamental relevance in international politics and global contestation (Castells, 2000; Young & Light, 2001; Hazbun, 2004; Graham & Howard, 2008). Identity has many articulations, such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, history, occupation, etc. (Verdery,1999; Castells, 2000). Heritage is but one of those manifestations, and one that is especially relevant and strongly implicated in the construction and articulation of national identity and nationalism (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994; Young & Light, 2001; Hazbun, 2004; Graham & Howard, 2008).

To date, the notions of identity and heritage have spurred many a debate in the scholarly circles, in an attempt to provide them with an all-encompassing definition, but what has been achieved is shrouding those two concepts in more and more questions. This is somewhat reflected in the work of Graham and Howard, who acknowledge the notions of heritage and identity with their immense flexibility and label them as *"two slippery and ambiguous yet dynamically important concepts"* (2008:1). Mindful of the complexity of the notions of heritage and identity and the intricate relationships between them, and unwilling to offer a single definition of them, I will look at the different understandings that exist within the scholarly works, in order to try to develop the way in which the concepts of heritage and identity and the relation between them will be understood and adopted in this research to help critically analyze the phenomenon of heritage tourism in this case and the issues of power and identity which are invariably associated with it.

### 4.1.1. HERITAGE

Many people associate heritage with tourism, places of historical interest and the institutions engaged with their preservation and management (Peckham, 2003:1). The theoretical

conceptualization of the notion of heritage, however, has accumulated a considerable body of literature and has charged numerous scholarly debates, but to-date the definitions of it are as many and as variegated as its commentators and practitioners (Harvey, 2001; Graham & Howard, 2008). Lowenthal even goes as far as to claim that *"heritage today all but defies definition"* (1998:94, quoted in Harvey, 2001). Some scholars have conceptualized heritage from a purely physical perspective. Hewison (1987, quoted in Harvey, 2001:327), for instance, has defined it as *"that which a past generation has preserved and handed on to the present and which a significant group of population wishes to hand on to the future"*. However, the way that the notion of heritage will be adopted in this study will go beyond the artefactual and will relate it to issues of selective representation, power, control, legitimation and, ultimately, identity.

Over the years, there have been many attempts to trace back the emergence and development of the notion and practice of heritage preservation. It has been argued that the concept has initially stemmed from concerns for the *preservation* of material relics from the past that emerged in the 19th century and were primarily engaged with buildings and historic monuments with specific intrinsic values, such as their age and aesthetic architectural worth. The selection of the artefacts to be preserved was entirely entrusted in the hands of 'experts', who could decide for the 'public taste' and the worth of cultural assets (Ashworth, 1994). In the wake of the physical destructions of World War Two (WWII) the focus of heritage evolved into *conservation*, or what Burke (1976, quoted in Ashworth, 1994:15) defined as "*purposeful preservation*", of whole districts and ensembles which involved the interaction between a wider range of disciplines (planning and management, architecture and history) and, therefore, meant that the notion of heritage evolved to include concerns that were more implicit than the obvious aesthetic and architectural worth of it (Ashworth, 1994). The shift to market-oriented, post-industrial economy in the late 20th century has seen the third phase of the evolution of heritage ideas and practices, according to Ashworth (1994). The most salient change ushered in at this stage, he argues, is the embracement of the past and historical artefacts as a *heritage product*, the scope and characteristics of which are selected by the consumers and managed by the international market (see Figure 1). This phase was considered to be the dawn of the heritage industry (Ashworth, 1994).
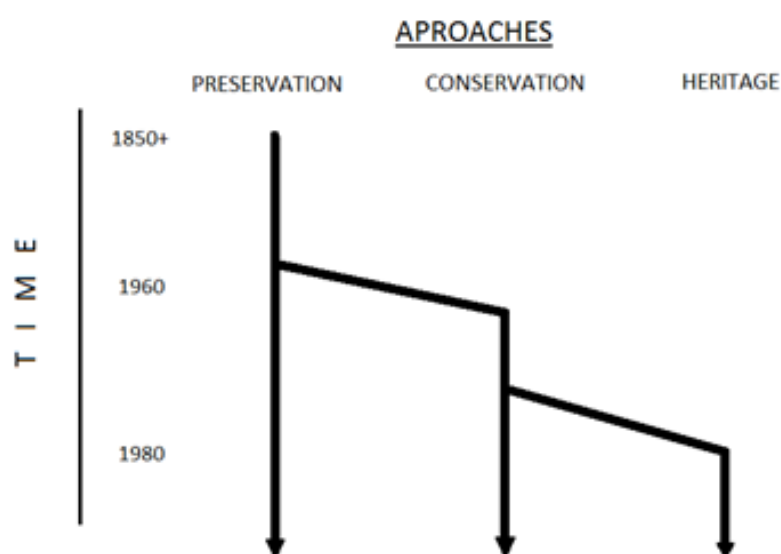


*Figure 1:* Phases in the evolutionary process of heritage (source: Ashworth, 1994:15)

Many scholars working in the field of heritage studies have tacitly assumed that the rise of the notion of heritage as more than a "*legal bequest*" (Graham et al, 2000:1, quoted in Harvey, 2001:322) and as "*a self-conscious creed*" (Lowenthal, 1998:1, quoted in Harvey, 2001:322) dates back to the late 20th century, coinciding with the post-WWII state reconstruction and the post-Fordist turn (Harvey, 2001). Hewison (1988) has related this to the increased processes of cultural commodification and consumption, coupled with the mass development of the tourism industry in the late 20th century, and has criticized the heritage industry for turning valuable places and artefacts into "*theme parks*" and "*products*" for consumption (p.239-240). However, the associations of the rise of the concept of heritage with the post-modern and post-Fordist conditions have not remained undisputed. Harvey (2001) for instance has challenged them as failing to grasp the complexity and entirety of the notion in three crucial aspects.

Firstly, he contests the position adopted by some authors that links heritage almost exclusively to processes of economic commodification that grasps it predominantly as a resource of a growing industry, such as the definition of Schouten (1995:21-31, quoted in Harvey, 2001:324) for whom heritage is "*the past processed through mythology, ideology, nationalism, local pride, romantic ideas, or just plain marketing into a commodity*". Secondly, Harvey sees conceptualizations of heritage which define it as another leisure form within the lines of the tourism industry as being overly limited in the scope of the concept (e.g. Terry-Chandler, 1999:192, quoted in Harvey, 2001:324). And thirdly, Harvey (2001:326-327) claims that the dating of the 'rise of heritage' to the 1970's and the economic shifts introduced by the post-Fordist turn displays a rather limited and simplified understanding of a complex and historically-embedded "*process*", which needs to be placed and traced in a temporal framework as long as the existence of the human civilization.

To support the existence of heritage practice in the pre-modern world, he evokes the example of how Rome became transformed in the medieval ages into a powerful Christian metropolis, based on stories that re-invented ancient Roman, non-Christian ruins as sites and landmarks of Christian heritage (Boholm, 1997, quoted in Harvey, 2001:330). Calling for a historically contextualized analysis of the notion of heritage for its better understanding is also the crux of Harvey's argument, who proclaims that *"heritage has always been with us and has always been produced by people according to their contemporary concerns and experiences"* (Harvey, 2001:320). Here we can already see several important implications which lay the basis of the way the concept will unfold further in this paper – namely, that heritage is not simply about artefacts, nor about history as chronological facts, but a token construct made and performed by social actors, and importantly, as a product built on the past, it is employed to respond to different interests in the present.

Despite the lack of consensus over the definition of heritage, the emphasis on its present-centeredness is a recurring and uniting theme in the recent theoretical works on it. What this means is that many scholars have viewed heritage as the endorsement of the past to serve various purposes in the present (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1999; Light, 2000; Harvey, 2001; Graham, 2002; Peckham, 2003; Hazbun, 2004; Graham & Howard, 2008; McDowell, 2008). In this sense, Lowenthal (1998:5, quoted in Graham & Howard, 2008:2) for example, has argued that heritage forges links with the past in ways that *"infuse them with present purposes"*, while warning that one of the consequences of that is the convergence of *"heritage vice"* and *"heritage virtue"*, where large interests lie beneath the surface of what is promoted as national patrimony. In a similar note, heritage has been defined as the various tangible and intangible carriers of

culture and history which get transformed into commercial, political and cultural resources to cater for particular ends in the present (Graham & Howard, 2008; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1999). Hence, the *making* of heritage has involved the marketing and consumption of history (both for internal and external audiences) to allegedly portray nations' pasts in ways that are *"at once reassuringly familiar and entertainingly exotic"* (Peckham, 2003:4). What is implicit in such accounts is that heritage is often conceived as an important *economic resource,* deployed in strategies for economic development, regional regeneration and reconstruction, and especially tourism (Graham, 2002). In the sense that heritage sites are made and promoted in ways that encourage consumption, the power of consumption should not be underestimated and unaccounted for, as it could potentially alter places and cultures, often leading to their homogenization (Sack 1992, quoted in Graham, 2002:) and reduction to a set of simple characteristics recognizable on the market (Ashworth, 1994:25-27). These emphases on the processes of commodification involved in the practices of heritage (Harvey, 2001) ultimately differentiate the notion of heritage from that of history per se (Ashworth, 1994:14-15).

Ashworth (1994) has outlined the uses of heritage as political and economic and has warned that potential tensions may arise from this double application. On the one hand, he explains that while on a more superficial level the consumption of heritage may be perceived merely as a certain experience, what happens on a deeper level is that the images and feelings which heritage evokes essentially contain powerful messages, whether that is intended or not (Ashworth, 1994). On the other hand, the preserved or recreated heritage objects are being embraced as products in a vastly expanding heritage industry. The process of conversion of the resources of the past, such as historical sites and events, folklore, myths and legends, into heritage products thus happens through their *meaningful* interpretation which can serve subjective purposes (Ashworth, 1994). In this sense, Harvey (2001: 327) proclaims heritage as invariably value-laden. Therefore, heritage is intrinsically intertwined with politics, as historical legacies are carefully selected and preserved to serve contemporary political aspirations (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Such aspirations include the legitimation (or undermining) of governments and their political ideologies and actions (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1999; McDowell, 2008), as well as the forging (or alternatively exterminating) of particular shared identities (Ashowrth & Tunbridge, 1999; Goulding & Domic, 2009) among others. Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) suggest that because of complex historical contingencies and the persistence of conflict and political instability, the interactions between heritage and politics are rather more complicated in the developing countries, including those in post-socialist transition, than in the developed world. This is especially salient to the region of Central and Eastern Europe, as national heritage in those states is still in flux due to their profound ideological transformations (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009).

At the same time, heritage is also knowledge which is set within different and mutable social, cultural and political circumstances and therefore can be re-negotiated as those circumstances shift in time and space (Livingstone, 1992, quoted in Graham, 2002). Inevitably, heritage as knowledge, a cultural product, an economic and political resource, carrying powerful messages, turns into an area of contestation (Graham, 2002; Ashworth, 1994; McDowell, 2008; Graham & Howard, 2008; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). In this respect, any construction and promotion of a certain heritage and not others leads to the potential disinheritance or marginalization of groups who do not subscribe to the promoted heritage. The processes of discordance over the meanings of heritage have been conceptualized as "*dissonant heritage*" (Ashworth, 1994; Tunbridge &

Ashworth, 1996:20, quoted in Ashworth & Graham, 1997:381). In a similar vein, Timothy and Nyaupane (2009:42-44) explain the notion of "*contested heritage*" as having to do with struggles between different social groups over the same relics, sites and events, where each group (or even sub-groups) interprets them differently and, respectively, poses claims over it as their own heritage.

Several things become clear in all these accounts of heritage. To start with, it does not constitute the past in terms of historically and chronologically accurate events (Ashworth, 1994; Johnson, 1999; Graham, 2002; Cosgrove, 2003), but it is instead all about representation, (re-) interpretation (Lowenthal, 1997, quoted in Munasinghe, 2005:253), *"sanitization"* (Johnson, 1999) or even *"fictionalization"* of history and the past (Baudrillard, 1994, quoted in Peckham, 2003). Further, the way people observe, interpret and make sense of things, including heritage, is by attaching particular meanings to them (Graham & Howard, 2008). This is what ultimately makes heritage an intrinsically value-laden and malleable concept, as the way people view and interpret things changes with time and in different contexts (Hall, 1997; Harvey, 2001; Graham & Howard, 2008). Therefore, the understanding of heritage should be less concerned with the tangible and intangible aspects from the past and instead be more sensitive to the subjective and inter-subjective meanings it is infused with and the representations that derive from it (Graham & Howard, 2008). This is a very salient moment in the analysis of heritage, because in the multicultural societies of today what is selected and represented as national heritage then makes up the *"authorized heritage discourse"* (Smith, 2006, quoted in Graham & Howard, 2008:2), meanings, values and norms in society. What the latter entails is that the making and representation of any national heritage in the contexts of the contemporary European multicultural societies inevitably becomes an ethical issue (Harvey, 2001). Last, and somehow implicit in the latter, heritage can be an effective political construct, tied to human agency, and an instrument in the exercise of power and ideology, which can serve to politicize culture (Peckham, 2003) by projecting certain desired images of the nation abroad, and by conveying ideas and constructs of inclusion and exclusion (Ashworth & Graham, 1997).

Although somehow apparent in the above accounts, it is essential here to underscore the strong (and mutually-constitutive) relationship and often seamless interfusion of heritage and place (as well as landscape) (Ashworth, 1994; Cosgrove, 2003) in order to begin to forge a link between heritage and notions of identity. On the one hand, places (and landscapes) are often *"sacralized"* (MacCannell, 1976, quoted in Ashworth, 1994:19), thus being turned into objects of heritage and pilgrimage. On the other hand, heritage is one of the main constituents of place that infuse it with history, culture and unique character. Thus heritage can also be seen as a locally-rooted phenomenon, which is composed by the unique historical developments of that locality and, respectively, it shapes places and landscapes, and gives them specific meanings (Ashworth & de Haan, 1988, quoted in Ashworth, 1994). At the same time, landscapes are built and shaped in ways that are meant to legitimate, reify and consolidate particular ideologies (Verdery, 1999; Graham, 2002; Peckham, 2003:10), which has strong implications for the capacity of the notions of heritage to be manipulated in ways that legitimate the ruling ideologies and their practices. In this regard, heritage is inherently pliable in the hands of local and national planning and intervention, which has become even a more salient issue in the global developments associated with globalization, re-territorialization and the rise of the heritage industry (Ashworth, 1994). More importantly, heritage is one of the most influential ways of articulating identity (Graham &

Howard, 2008) and "*has been closely linked to the development of the nation state*" (Peckham, 2003:2), which I will address in the following sections.

## 4.1.2. IDENTITY

The definition of identity has provoked wide disagreement in the scholarly circles due to its heterogeneous character (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994 and Kedourie, 1994, quoted in Park, 2010). For a long time, identity has been viewed predominantly in a national framework (Graham & Howard, 2008). With the growing transnational exchanges and interdependencies some have argued that we have entered a post-nationalist age (Iyer, 1995, quoted in Hazbun, 2004), as in the process of globalization people, goods and currencies flow across the world unimpeded by territorial boundaries and rendering into question the territorially-based power of the nation-state as a dominant political unit (e.g., Cable, 1995, Strange, 1997 and Rodrik, 1997, quoted in Hazbun, 2004). Contrary to similar globalization discourses emphasizing the de-territorialization of space and the decreasing importance of the nation-states, what has been taking place, many scholars argue, is in fact an opposite process of re-territorialization, where the nation-state is still an important framework for social, political and economic life (Hazbun, 2004; Mitchel, 2000 and Graham, 2000, quoted in Young & Light, 2001). Moreover, the re-territorialization of space and the salience of the nation-state as a participant in the global market distribution call for the construction of new or adjusted national identities and place representations (Young & Light, 2001).

Reflecting on the concept of national identity Park (2010) draws on an analysis based on two opposing approaches to grasping it: the modernistic and the primordial. The primordial perspective views the nation and national identity as antique, sacred and immutable categories (Geertz, 1973 and Smith, 1994, quoted in Park, 2010). In this sense, national identity is formed by a set of unique cultural givens (Geertz, 1973, quoted in Park, 2010) which are innate to individuals and which exist notwithstanding time and shifting contexts (Smith, 1994, quoted in Park, 2010). From a modernist, constructionist standpoint, however, the nation-state and national identity are understood as categories which get continuously constructed in the various processes of spatial and temporal development (Anderson, 1983, Gellner, 1983 and Nairn, 1997, quoted in Park, 2010).

In this research I will adopt a constructionist perspective in studying identity as a construct and how it is related to notions of power and politics. Therefore, I would like to go on with Castells (2000), who from a constructionist standpoint, understands the concept of identity essentially as *meaning*, a meaning which is socially constructed in and through the actions of social actors and shaped and determined by cultural, social and political contexts. Importantly, the question of meaning is pivotal in all cultural practices, and it is by practicing and using things, by talking about them, by what we think and how we feel about them that we inscribe meaning to them (Hall, 1997). Meanings are also born and assigned in the ways we interpret events, objects, words and actions of people, the images and symbols we build and associate with them, the way we try to define them and place values on them, and crucially, by representing them in certain ways and not others. Therefore, it is the meanings we make that establish cultural norms, values and social conventions and give us *"a sense of our own identity, of who we are, and with whom we 'belong'…"*(Hall, 1997:2-3). And as meanings are constantly being produced, reproduced and exchanged through social relations and interactions, through processes of production and

consumption (Hall, 1997), so are identities malleable and negotiable and related to different subjective interpretations and representations.

Coming out of the 'cultural turn' in social sciences, when meaning is no longer thought of as intrinsic or a given, but as a product (Hall, 1997:5) constructed within and through social interactions and related to notions of power, Anderson's concept of the nation sees it as an *'imagined community'* whose members are connected with each other and with the nation's territory through strong imagined bonds which distinguish them from other nations (Anderson, 1991, quoted in Young & Light, 2001). He argues that national identity is created and recreated by specific *discursive* strategies, which include *"a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols, which stand for or represent, the shared experiences, sorrows, triumphs and disasters, which give meaning to the nation."* (Anderson, 1983, quoted in Goulding & Domic, 2009:88).

Salient to the understanding of national identity and nationalism is Edward Said's debate which also rejects the notion of national identity as an inborn attribute, and renders it as a social and political construction (1995, quoted in Young & Light, 2001), and central to which is the discourse of the "Other" – a group with different, and often conflicting values, objectives and beliefs, which can be both external and internal to the state (Graham & Howard, 2008). In this regard, Stuart Hall also reaffirms the importance of difference in the construction of identities (in the sense of shared systems of meaning-making), arguing within a Saidian discourse that meaning can only be constructed in interactions with the 'Other' (Hall, 1997:235), whereby the meaning of the Self takes shape by encountering, marking and attaching different meanings to an "Other". He argues that it is therefore impossible to know what English, Russian, Egyptian, Chinese or Australian identities mean without the different notions, images, feelings and characteristics that these national identities have been signified and represented by (Hall, 1997:5). The idea of framing the Self through its juxtaposition to the 'Other' is also reiterated by Douglas (1997:151-152, quoted in Graham & Howard, 2008) who, in addition, warns that discourses of the 'Other' can sometimes evolve into adverse senses of distrust and exclusion of those groups. An illustration of the negative implications of essentializing the 'Other' could be the practice of stereotyping, where a certain identity is reduced to a few simple features. Through strategies of representation which involve *"splitting"* the normal from the abnormal and the acceptable from the unacceptable, identities that do not fit the normal and acceptable models can thus be rendered excluded and stigmatized (Hall, 1997:258).

Mitchell (2000, quoted in Young & Light, 2001) further develops Anderson's concept of the *'imagined community'* and adds that the imagined bonds are invariably produced and reproduced by complex manifestations and exercises of power. In a similar note, Kaneva and Popescu (2011) reiterate that national identity can be understood as an imagination of the nation which is constructed by different power-wielding actors in society (Anderson, 1983 and Gellner, 1983, quoted in Kaneva & Popescu, 2011) and thus they reaffirm the relations between identity and power. This they examine in a study of the national tourism brands of post-socialist Romania and Bulgaria which demonstrates that national identity representations are a reflection of the choices which national elites, as well as marketing and branding 'experts', make in the process of re-imagining the national identity, thus unveiling the contemporary aspirations of the country and not necessarily the social and political realities in it. Recognizing the fact that constructions of national identity can be an instrument of power, Mitchell (2000, quoted in

Young & Light, 2001:943) warns that it is important to ask and reflect on the issues of what shared imagination is defined, and by what means it is reproduced and possibly contested.

Asserting the malleability of the concept, Park (2010) argues that national identity and nationalism reflect the shifting values and norms of culture and society and, because they are reflexive categories, they can vary depending on shifting societal contexts and circumstances. This is an especially salient argument for this study as it sets out to explore issues of identity transformations taking place in the context of the dynamic societal changes taking place as one ideology is replaced by another. Moreover, identity, or the sense of "*sameness*" and membership to a certain collectivity (Graham & Howard, 2008:5), is a construct which is ultimately "*negotiable and revocable*" and is inextricably linked to "*senses of time*" (Bauman, 2004:11, quoted in Graham and Howard, 2008:5). And as time changes, so can the common markers of identity – history, heritage, language, ethnicity, religion, nationalism – be adopted to serve different discourses of social inclusion and exclusion (Donald & Rattansi, 1992, Guibernau, 1996, quoted in Graham & Howard, 2008:5). For Deleuze and Guattari (1983:341, quoted in Landzelius, 2003:208) too, those identity attributes have *"many deceptive sojourns"* and can never be stable and fixed, and that is what gives identity a malleable character (Graham & Howard, 2008; Park, 2010). Furthermore, the building of national identities reflects the aspiration of nation-states to represent a particular culture and territory as one whole (Johnson, 1995, quoted in Young & Light, 2001:943). In this regard, nationalism is understood, on the one hand, as an ideology which determines the set of attributes of a nation and, on the other, as an instrument to associate the nation with a certain confined territory and in this way to enhance the state sovereignty (Mitchell, 2000, Johnston, Gregory and Smith, 1994, quoted in Young & Light, 2001:943).

Emphasizing the salience of discourses about the past in nation-building processes, Castells (2000) continues to argue that identity, though primarily being an intangible thing, made of words and feelings, is reified through history and rooted in collective and individual historic experience. A national identity, according to him, can be invented by the state which can impose a certain desired meaning on its citizens and reinforce it over long periods of time until it becomes instilled in people's bodies and minds. Thus, meaning turns into a shared experience within the people and in this way forms its national identity (Castells, 2000). He gives an example of that by showing how in Soviet Russia the Marxist-Leninist ideology was used to build the socialist society. And the principle it used (also used by liberalism) was that a new society could only be built through the rewriting of its past and the negation and re-interpretation of its historic identity into what the state decided to be their new national identity. Any alternative identity which could be used as a right of autonomy within the state was smoldered (Castells, 2000).

Liu and Hilton (2005) reiterate the crucial role of history narratives in the building of national identity. They contend that a people's history is an important resource of their sense of belonging, of internal diversity and of how they are related to other peoples. Moreover, they ascertain that representations of the history of social groups have a big role in determining how they relate to contemporary international politics and other exchanges (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Here I turn to the next important moment of this discussion, which aims to show the intrinsic relation between heritage and identity and how the former is invariably involved in the construction of national identities.

### 4.1.3. HERITAGE AS REIFICATION OF IDENTITY

Keeping in mind the intricacies accompanying the conceptualization of both heritage and identity, it follows that the relationships between them are many-faceted and variable in space and time. Graham and Howard (2008) assert that what becomes heritage is ultimately determined by the specific representations of identity that it portrays which must be consistent with the values, ideals and principles of a certain nationalism. Reflecting on the cultural and socio-political uses of heritage and the past, Lowenthal (1985, 1996, in Graham, 2002) argues that they function to provide both individuals, as well as nations with a sense of familiarity and direction, and more importantly, with validation and legitimation of who we are, where common interpretations of history, language, nationalism, ethnicity and other markers delineate specific communities through discourses of inclusion and exclusion (Donald and Rattansi, 1992 and Guibernau, 1996, quoted in Graham, 2002). According to Tunbridge (1998, quoted in Graham, 2002:1008), the significance ofthe significance of heritage to a people is so big that, if they are in any way deprived of it through migration or by means of its destruction, such as during war, they would try to carefully restore it or "recreate" it to what it should be. In addition, Graham (2002:1008) argues that what underlies such and similar discourses of the past and heritage is a sense of belonging constructed around place, which is a fundamental trait of identity. To be sure, place is understood as socially constructed, rather than fixed, and therefore having fluid boundaries. Places provide settings for people's lives, social relations, political activity, learning experiences, etc. and thus inevitably turn into sources of collective memory, as different meanings, symbols and emotions are continually inscribed on them. Ultimately, the meanings which people attach to places can contribute to the shaping of their identities (Knox & Marston, 2007:5).

Heritage has a long-standing track record of being advertently adopted as a way of fostering and reinforcing particular national identities in support of state structures (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994). Moreover, the link between national heritage and national identity is very organic, as the concerns about preservation of historically significant artefacts and sites were enhanced during the founding of the nation states of Germany, Italy and on the Balkans (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994:1) in the 19th century when the European states had to consolidate their national identification by assimilating or negating possibly competing heritages of other communities, and assert their power over their territories and people (Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000:183, quoted in Graham & Howard, 2008:7). In affirmation of the salience of national heritage for the nation state, Ashworth and Larkham (1994:7-8) suggest that in the contemporary international political, economic and cultural contexts, *"the rewriting of history to create popular identity with a newly emerging political and governmental structure is more the norm than the exception…"*.

As it was discussed in the previous sections, it is the malleability of heritage, its political and ideological implications, and its strongly symbolic nature that have made it a perfect means in the shaping and reinforcing of national identity (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994; Henderson, undated; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Perhaps the most preeminent reason why heritage is so profoundly and intricately implicated in the construction of identity is that heritage, the way it has been conceptualized here, is all about representations and the meanings that those representations create (Lowenthal, 1997, quoted in Munasinghe, 2005:253; Graham, 2002; Hazbun, 2004). Stuart Hall defines the practices of representation as *"[t]he embodying of concepts, ideas and emotions in a symbolic form which can be transmitted and meaningfully*

*interpreted*" (1997:10). In his terms, representations are actively involved in the process of constructing and shaping culture, social subjects and history (and by analogy, also heritage and identity), and are not simply reflections of them (Hall, 1997:5-6). Therefore, the production and consumption of national heritage and the representations that it creates participate in the construction, re-invention and even dissolution of national identities, whether that is recognized or not, as due to its defining and ideologically-laden characteristics, heritage is a powerful embodiment of notions and symbols of the nation, its territory and its nationalism (Palmer, 1999; Ashworth, 1994).

Some might argue that today's hybrid, multicultural societies with multiple and transnational identities render national place-bound identities as precluded, but as argued on multiple occasions above, place-identity and its framing in national terms still remains salient (Graham, 2002), and heritage is embedded in the same shifting spatial hierarchies (Graham & Howard, 2008). While talking about the network society, whose cultural expressions get derived from history and geography and mediated through technology and communication networks, Castells (1996, 1997, quoted in Graham, 2002:1006) argues that power in such a global society is invested in the images of representation, which determine how institutions will be organized, how people live their lives and how they adapt their conduct. Heritage, according to Graham (2002), is one of those fundamental means of communication, through which power, knowledge, ideas and values are transmitted in the global network society, for example through the representations of international tourism. Such representations contain and spread images of objects, people and places which construct meanings and imaginations of identities that essentialize and differentiate those people and places from others (Hall, 1997).

Foucault, on the other hand, is concerned with how knowledge and meaning get produced through discourse, or in other words, the language and the sets of ideas, images and practices, which frame the way we look at things, talk about them, study them, etc. (Hall, 1997:6). As I will try to demonstrate in further detail in section 4.3., such knowledge does not function in void, but is put in operation through institutional apparatuses and technologies, and is largely historically specific. It is associated with power and it, therefore, controls beliefs and practices and regulates individuals, as well as whole populations (Hall, 1997:49-51). In this sense, heritage constitutes knowledge (Graham, 2002) which is often constructed, owned and maintained by governmental structures and institutions that control its interpretation and representations (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994:2-3). National heritage as knowledge is therefore, not only a powerful means of constructing national identities, but also an instrument of those who wield power to control and regulate the conduct and social relations in society. In this respect, Mitchell (2002) very aptly illustrates the pedagogical and performative implications of culture and heritage when used as a top-down "expert" instrument in the nation-building process in Egypt. He argues that in the attempts of the state to destroy the village of Gurna in order to reconstruct it in the expert-rule Egyptian vernacular style, one can see a double intent. On the one hand, Mitchell argues that through heritage narratives the state aims to draw a clear line between what belongs to the nation and what to the Other, while on the other, by excluding the 'ignorant and lawless' villagers, and placing them in 'sanitized' new contexts, it tries to include them as a part of the modern nation of Egypt (Mitchell, 2002).

Thus, the manipulation of discourses and images of national heritage can have serious consequences as it is a potent instrument which power-wielding actors could use in controlling people and places (Ashworth & Graham, 1997; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009: 51). And because

heritage is not about history and the past per se, but about the representation and (re-) interpretation of the past, it is by definition a matter of *'discordance and lack of agreement and consistency'* (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1996, quoted in Ashworth & Graham, 1997:381), as there can be no universal and unproblematic interpretation of the past to which everybody can subscribe. Thus, in the context of globalization and growing multiculturalism, the recognition and emphasis of any one social group's meaning and interpretation of the past over that of another one potentially leads to the disinheritance of the latter and renders the constructed heritage as dissonant (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994; Ashworth & Graham, 1997). Such cases, for instance, emerge as a result of significant demographic shifts on certain territories, where social groups leave behind relics and memorial sites associated with their cultural practices, or in the case of the former Eastern Bloc, where socialist regimes left behind thousands of monuments of the ideology and the parties to remind of that past and fill with conflict contemporary interpretations of heritage and national identity (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994).

Another form of manipulation of notions of heritage and the past is the excising of certain traumatic or undesired periods or events from collective memory often by means of destruction or concealment of physical relics associated with them, their exclusion from or misrepresentation in educational and cultural institutions, as well as political and popular discourses (Ashworth & Graham, 1997; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009; Goulding & Domic, 2009). This is especially relevant in the cases of the former Eastern Bloc (both during the Regimes and after their fall) where ethnic minorities were and in some ways are still marginalized, or unwanted socialist pasts are obscured, as well as in states with colonial pasts, where indigenous peoples'cultures and legacies were opressed by their white colonizers (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009).

In a case study on the rewriting of the past in post-civil war Croatia, Goulding and Domic (2009) talk about another form of history and heritage manipulation, which involved the *"cleansing"* of national heritage by bringing to the fore the historic symbols of a dominant social group (in this case Croat) at the expense of the concealing or destroying the heritage of subordinate ethnic and religious groups in the country (being Serbs in this case). Byrne (1991, quoted in Goulding & Domic, 2009:87) argues that in multiethnic societies, it is highly possible that the dominant group uses its power to frame and re-write history, as well as decide the terms of national heritage, in order to impose their own identity as the identity of the nation, while at the same time actively and persistently eradicating the identity of marginalized groups. That includes measures such as transforming the names and interpretations of everyday objects in public space, the invention or re-invention of traditions, stories, and symbols representing the nation, and even the re-engineering of national language, in order to produce and reproduce a certain version of collective memory and national identity (Palmer, 2005 and Pretes, 2003, quoted in Goulding and Domic, 2009:88). In addition to that, in Croatia all partisan symbols of its past, such as statues and memorials, were erased from the urban landscapes and that was collectively embraced as a form of '*politics of absences'*, which illustrates that national identity is constructed not only based on the material reminders of the nation's past, but also on that which is absent and invisible (Goulding & Domic, 2009).

The following chapter will pay attention to the political uses of tourism and, building on the processes discussed above, will try to show the significance of touring places of cultural and historic heritage in the construction and projection of place-based identities.

## 4.2. THE POLITICS OF HERITAGE TOURISM

Tourism is one of the fastest growing and most pervasive industries in the world nowadays. Due to its enormous potential as a foreign-dollar earner, it has been actively embraced by governments as a strategic sector for economic growth and regional development. However, beneath the assumptions of the benevolent nature of tourism and the industry's economic rationale there is a strong undercurrent of political and personal interests, such as validation and legitimation of political regimes, ideological propaganda, international influence, attraction of foreign investment, image creation, nation building, practices of social ordering, patronage and self-enrichment. Therefore, due to its capacity to carry implicit ideological meanings, to project desired cultural representations to foreign travellers, and through them reach important political and economic actors, tourism has been widely adopted as a global cultural force and an integral aspect of foreign and domestic politics all over the world (Richter, 1980; Palmer, 1999; Light, 2000&2001; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001; Johnson, 1999; Hazbun, 2004; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009; Oakes, 2012; Henderson, undated).

In her analysis of the development of international tourism under martial law in the supposedly democratic society of the Philippines, Richter (1980) clearly illustrates and gives strong arguments about the ways tourism can be employed as a powerful political means. She suggests that President Marcos of the Philippines in the 1970's and 1980's took up the development of tourism as a strategic medium to refurbish the image of the country and especially to defend his own measures and position of power abroad. The images which the international tourism promotion campaigns projected were of a safe, hygienic and peaceful multicultural environment. However, it required from the tourists to turn a blind eye on the reality surrounding the tourist environments in the country. This story shows how beyond narratives of tourism as an economic development shortcut could stand efforts and ideas invested in the validation of an oppressive ruler's image on the international political scene, the legitimation of his otherwise unwarranted political actions, as well as the securing of his own and his affiliates' commercial interests lying with the tourism industry (Richter, 1980). More importantly, it demonstrates how tourism can be effectively employed by governments and other powerful actors to create and transmit globally desired representations of places and people, whilst obscuring the unsavory aspects of the local realities (Richter, 1980).

Another example of the political and ideological uses of tourism, and heritage tourism in particular, comes from the former communist totalitarian countries of Eastern Europe and Asia (especially before 1990) which had very strict policies in terms of admitting foreign visitors in the countries. On the rare occasions when this was permitted, tourists were only allowed to visit certain places, and only provided that they are accompanied by an appointed-for-the-purpose guide. The heritage sites that were visited were closely linked to the development of socialism and the ruling party in the country, aiming to convey abroad positive images of national pride with the achievements of the ideology (Hall, 1995, quoted in Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009:45) and to obscure negative events and images from the past. For this reason, the tourist itineraries in those countries mainly included visits to industrial sites, historic monuments and memorials depicting and praising the people in power (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Nowadays, the only country in the world which still maintains this type of inbound tourism is North Korea (Kim et al, 2007, quoted in Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009:45).

Furthermore, tourism cannot and should not be reduced to its commercial applications, because *"it is an ideological framing of history, nature and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs"* (MacCannell, 1992, quoted in Johnson, 1999:188). It, therefore, possesses strong implications in the production and reproduction of cultural representations and identities at various scales, and crucially so on the processes of national identity creation (Palmer, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Hall, 1999; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001; Hughes & Allen, 2005) both for internal and external audiences (Light, 2000 & 2001; Park, 2009). In this respect, the growing expansion of heritage tourism, which is based on the consumption of cultural and historical resources (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009a) and of particular framings of history, is especially involved in the production of national identity narratives (Urry, 1990, quoted in Johnson, 1999). Ashworth (1994:21) argues that heritage is inherently a place-based phenomenon and, *"whether or not heritage is deliberately designed to achieve pre-set spatio-political goals, place identities at various spatial scales are likely to be shaped or reinforced by heritage planning"*. In a similar vein, heritage as knowledge, embedded in place, functions to communicate the local to the global, and especially through the narratives and representations conveyed by national marketing and branding campaigns and international tourism (Graham, 2002). In this regard, heritage tourism can be seen as a place-promotion campaign that conjures and transmits powerful place-identity representations (Johnson, 1999; Hazbun, 2004).

For the domestic purposes of building the nation, heritage tourism has been embraced as a means of the state to foster a sense of identity and patriotic nationalism among its citizens (Richter, 1980; Park, 2010; McLean, 1998, in Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009:45). Park (2010) illustrates that by showing how domestic heritage tourism in South Korea is not merely the touristic gazing and consumption of different relics and artefacts, but more importantly so, it should be understood as a symbolic reminder of nationhood, evoking in people emotional sentiments about their nation and their shared past, as in the meantime it ultimately achieves the reinforcement of Korean citizens' own sense of belonging to the nation and the reaffirmation of their national values and identity (Park, 2010). On the other hand, the domestic uses of heritage tourism could involve attempts by the state to achieve a better social cohesion among the different cultural groups of the nation, as well as to gain legitimation, recognition and support for its political measures, as demonstrated in the case of the Philippines by Richter (1980). In a different context, Tim Oakes demonstrates how in modern-day China domestic tourism has been overburdened with important ontological implications in the state's project of building an ordered Chinese society of exemplary *'modern subjects'* (2012:106). Culture and heritage tourism, in other words, are adopted as a means of establishing certain norms of behaviour as moral and claim anything else as deviant. Museums and heritage villages are thus integrated in a process that aims to achieve the self-regulation of the modern subjects by promoting the virtues of the working-class community, encouraging healthy consumption and appropriate behaviour and thus keeping society in order (Oakes, 2012). In this case we can see how the use of heritage tourism also has strong Foucauldian implications of governmentality, to which I referred in sections 4.1.3 and 4.3., where heritage as discourse or knowledge, put to work by different technologies and institutional regimes, is deployed to control human conduct and regulate society.

However, the production and reproduction of national identity for foreign audiences through the representation and reaching out of the 'Self' to the 'Others' is where tourism is even more powerful (O'Connor, 1993, quoted in Light, 2001), as the discourses and representations it

creates strongly influence the ways nations are viewed (Pritchard & Morgan 2001; Urry, 1995, quoted in Light, 2001). The images and representations of national culture and heritage are selected and sponsored by several actors, most influential of which are the governments, indelibly pursuing certain nationalistic goals (Hughes & Allen, 2005), and are disseminated through national tourism marketing campaigns carefully preconceived within particular historic, cultural and political confines (Pritchard & Morgan, 2001).

This is very aptly demonstrated in the account of Kaneva and Popescu (2011), who made an elaborate analysis of Bulgaria's and Romania's national branding campaigns in terms of the national identities the two post-socialist states were trying to assert in the process of their European Union accession. Bulgaria's branding campaign in 2007, for instance, was highly aestheticized and reduced to a narrative which combined beach and mountain landscapes, beautiful young people, luxurious spas, hotels, golf courses, ancient Roman ruins and Christian monasteries (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011). Romania's campaign conveys a similar image of a country with a rich, multicultural rural past where the modern and the traditional meet. What can be noticed regarding both campaigns is that they featured representations of their alleged national heritage that were highly aestheticized and devoid of any historic or cultural context (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011), where the pre-communist (the traditional) and post-communist (the modern) periods were joined together and the communist totalitarian pasts were entirely excised from the images of national heritage, which is proclaimed to be a strategy of the post-socialist states to reinvent their images in the contemporary political and economic contexts in which they have been re-inserted (Verdery, 1999; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011).

In the following section I will address the engagement and symbolic role of objects and museums in the heritage and identity politics of the modern corporate state.

## 4.3. OBJECTS, MUSEUMS AND THE POLITICS OF EXHIBITING

In an attempt to build a model of the relationship between tourism and heritage, Newby (1994:212-213) argues that the final stage of the continuum is the *"imaginative reconstruction"* of culture and history, which sets out to factualize and materialize certain abstract elements of them, and ultimately make them marketable. This third phase in the relationship between tourism and heritage has, according to Newby, stemmed from the display of objects of cultural heritage in modern museums in order to project images of the past in what is deemed an appealing and *"appropriate setting".* By an assembly and recontextualizing of what is claimed to be authentic objects, museums seek to reconstruct and project an alleged *"original form"* of a nation's past (Newby, 1994:213-214).

As we can see, one of the central issues in the debate of the commodification of heritage and its role in the (museum institution and the) tourism industry are questions related to authenticity (Wang, 1999). Introduced by MacCannell in the late 20th century, the subject of authenticity has become especially relevant, yet rather ambiguous, in relation to history, culture and ethnic tourism where the touring of objects and representations of the past and the 'Other' are involved (Wang, 1999). Trilling (1972:93, quoted in Wang, 1999:350) has argued that the emergence of the concept of authenticity was in the museum,

*"where persons experts in such matters test whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore worth the price that is asked for them – or, if this has already been paid, worth the admiration they are being given"*.

With time, the notion of authenticity has reached out beyond its museum-linked usage and into almost every kind of tourist experience and has come to signify *"a sense of the genuine"* (Sharpley, 1994:130, quoted in Wang, 1999:350). Wang argues that this extended and complex notion of authenticity that covers a whole range of tourism experiences necessitates its differentiation into the authenticity of tourist *experiences* and the authenticity of *toured objects.* The authentic tourist experience Handler and Saxton explain as *"one in which individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a 'real' world and with their 'real' selves"* (1988:243, quoted in Wang, 1999). This basic distinction is, according to Wang (1999), a crucial premise to help understand the framework he suggests of analyzing authenticity in tourism. Reflecting on the ontological and epistemological grounds of three approaches – objectivism, constructivism and postmodernism, he thus infers and proposes three types of authenticity in tourism – objective, constructive and existential. *Objective authenticity*, as defended by MacCannell (1973, quoted in Wang, 1999) and Boorstin (1964, quoted in Wang, 1999) connotes the museum-linked idea of authenticity which involves touring objects that are perceived and recognized by the tourists as being originals (Wang, 1999). This type of authentic tourist experience evokes MacCannell's idea of 'staged authenticity', who argues that even when tourists think that what they are seeing is original and authentic objects, and thus having an authentic experience, they may be falling victim to a contrivance, which altogether makes their experience inauthentic. The notion of staged authenticity underscores a certain objectivist perspective of authenticity being only and exclusively related to the original (Wang, 1999).The second type of authenticity Wang terms *constructivist* or *symbolic*. He argues that this kind of experience is judged as authentic as a result of the social construction of the visited objects as authentic by various powers and perspectives, rather than the objects' inherent authenticity. In this case, authenticity is a "*projection of tourists' own beliefs, expectations, preferences, stereotyped images, and consciousness onto toured objects, particularly onto toured Others"* (Adams, 1984, Bruner, 1991, Duncan, 1978, Laxson, 1991, Silver, 1993, quoted in Wang, 1999:355). Such notions of authenticity are also largely context-bound (Wang, 1999). Lastly, Wang comes up with a third type of authenticity which, he argues, helps analyze those tourist experiences, which are not connected with touring objects and therefore cannot be explained by neither of the previous two types. He calls that *existential* authenticity and explains it, by referring to Berger (1973), as: *"a special state of Being in which one is true to oneself, and acts as a counterdose to the loss of "true self" in public roles and public spheres in modern Western society"* (quoted in Wang, 1999:358). In this respect, the meaning of authenticity is directly linked to the meaning of being and feeling true to one's own self (Wang, 1999), *"smashing"* the alienation of everyday life (Selwyn, 1996a, quoted in Wang, 1999), instead of being associated with objects.

However, this study's primary focus is not on questions about the authenticity of heritage objects or tourists' experiences while interacting with museum artefacts, but rather on the representations and prescriptions these objects create, and how those are articulated in the manufacture of social identity. One can notice that speaking of objects in this way – as being capable of creating representations and prescriptions – actually endows them with a certain degree of agency and power. In order to be able to understand what is meant by this and what the implications of it in the functions of modern museums are, it is important to have a look at

the key role of objects in those institutions. Lidchi (1997) has argued that museum objects (just like objects in general) possess two distinct characteristics: their physical presence and their meaning. Because of their endurance and ability to survive relatively undamaged in their authentic form, collected objects are adopted to reproduce the connection which museums have between the past and the present, and as symbolic embodiments of culture. Objects are thus often used as unambiguous evidence of the past that transcends the change of time and space (Lidchi, 1997). This uncritical understanding of museum objects, however, is problematized at the level of their meanings which, despite the promise of stability which objects' physical presence makes, can rarely be reproduced in their original versions. Referring to Barthes, Lidchi explains that objects have two orders of meaning – the first one is their denotation, or their descriptive power, which remains relatively stable and consistent, while the second one is their connotation, which guides people to the object's more abstract and associative level of meaning, and that can change over time. Objects' meanings, therefore, derive from the changing relations between their denotations and connotations. As a result, the way objects are understood and interpreted largely depends on time- and context-specific circumstances, *"the rules of social life, of history, of social practices, ideologies and usage"* (Lidchi, 1997:164-165). In this respect, Ames (1992:141, quoted in Lidchi, 1997:167) suggests that it is helpful if we think of objects as participating in a *"continuous history"* that unfolds from their origin to their present destination, throughout which their meanings get redefined time and time again.

What is more, some anthropologists have suggested that objects, just like people, have a social life (Appadurai, 1986, Pinney, 1997, quoted in Rose, 2007b:217). What this entails in the way objects get studied, therefore, is that objects are not only thought of in terms of decoding their meanings, but importantly, in terms of the social practices in which they are embedded and the effects which that provokes (Rose, 2007b). In this sense, what is essentially argued is that objects do not bear any significance outside of their social life. Their meaning is constructed within the interactions between objects and the people that look at them or do something with them in particular contexts (Thomas, 1999, Pinney, 2004, quoted in Rose, 2007b:220-221). Furthermore, while interacting with objects, people relate to them in certain ways and thus themselves get produced by the objects in a mutually constitutive relationship (Pinney, 2004, quoted in Rose, 2007b:220). Through the lens of this anthropological approach, objects, and visual objects in particular, are thought to have three characteristics. First, they are *material* and have specific physical properties in the contexts they are located. Second, they are also *materialized*, which means that they have agency in the performative social contexts of their location. And the third aspect of the social life of objects looks at them as being *mobile* (Rose, 2007b:222-223). As visual objects (and objects in general) travel across space and through time, their value and meanings change (Appadurai, 1986, quoted in Rose, 2007b:223). This has inspired Thomas (1991, quoted in Rose, 2007b:223) to talk about the recontextualization of objects, as *"[i]n its social life and travels, an object passes through different cultural contexts which may modify or even transform what it means"* (Rose, 2007b:223). Rose, however, has argued that it is possible that objects' meanings do not get transformed as they travel from one place to another, but instead, their meanings extend to reach new places and audiences (2007b). As the recontextualization of objects is a central practice in the creation of a museum (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998), the social life of objects has enormous implications in the ideas and messages which those institutions project to their audiences, as in the process both museum objects and visitors get produced in particular ways.

Indeed, Ashworth has argued that, notwithstanding the fact that the justification of museums from their inception was mainly focused on their educational and enlightening functions, this is a simplification of their role in the process of *'socialization' "whereby the norms and standards of a society are passed on to new generations"* (Ashworth, 1994:14). To understand why museums can hardly be looked at as institutions that simply collect, safeguard and exhibit objects, artefacts and works of art (Vergo, 1993, quoted in Lidchi, 1997:155), but have rather powerful role in the use of objects for different political purposes, it is necessary to explore how the museum institution came to its existence and what functions it serves in society.

Up until the end of the 18th century, or what Bann labels the *"prehistoric"* phase of the modern museum, the collection and displaying of objects was undertaken by people of certain scholarly or aristocratic status (1998, quoted in Rose, 2007a:179). The objects of interest often consisted of *"the curiosities of art and nature"*, materials and artefacts that were deemed remarkable, extraordinary and exotic in some way, and that were thought to represent the bewildering aspects of the natural and artificial world (Lidchi, 1997:158). The artefacts were stored and displayed in personal *"cabinets of curiosities"* or *"closets of rarities"* (1997:155) and their arrangement seemed to account for no particular principles of ordering or classification according to specific periods, genre or school (Lidchi, 1997; Bann, 1998, quoted in Rose, 2007a:179). The collection of curiosities at that time implied a certain kind of intellectual pursuit and thirst for hidden knowledge that would allow one to understand the complex workings of the world (Pomian, 1990, quoted in Lidchi, 1997:158).

Henrietta Lidchi (1997) attends to the development of one such cabinet of curiosities from a personal collection to an expansive "*musaeum"* in 17th century England, a case that is remarkable for several different reasons. The *Musaeum Trandescantianum* hosted a large and varied collection of natural and human-made objects divided into two main categories – *"naturalia"* and *"artificialia"* – juxtaposing specimen from Continental Europe and those from the colonies. In addition, the objects and materials were described selectively, according to what the collectors found to be remarkable, those that were considered less extraordinary were left unnamed (Lidchi, 1997). The reasons why the Trandescant museum was so significant and exceptional were two-fold. On the one hand, its collection was no longer exclusive, as the specimens were displayed for both scholars and ordinary people from the general public to see, which was unlike any other collection in England in that period of time (MacGregor, 1985:150, quoted in Lidchi, 1997:159). As we will see later in this chapter, the public accessibility of museums has very important implications in the making of social identities and in various projects of the modern corporate states. On the other hand, the development of the *Musaeum Trandescantianum* foregrounds a few important features of the nature of museums, which are still very valid nowadays. Firstly, the assembly of such a diverse range of artefacts from different places on the world map in the enclosed space of the museum aimed to create a *representation* of the known world through the construction of a *"microcosm"*. Secondly, the way that the world was described in the Trandescant collection made use of two categories – the natural and the artificial. This essentially constituted an early *classificatory system*, which despite seeming inappropriate and insufficient today, was in consistence with the historically specific views and knowledge of the collectors at that time (Lidchi, 1997:159). Thirdly, in the act of opening the collection to a large audience, the *Musaeum* was a *motivated* representation of the known world that aimed to spread the accumulated knowledge not only among scholars and intellectuals, but also among ordinary people. And fourthly, the way that the objects in the collection were

selected, conserved and displayed was in accordance with a specific personal *interpretation* and world-view, which saw logic in that particular manner and not another (Lidchi, 1997:159-160).

What these features come to show is that museums are not random and unmotivated assemblages of objects, but rather museums use those objects to construct and evoke particular notions and representations *"of what the world is, or should be".* Importantly thus, museums do not deal with objective descriptions of the world, but particular values and meanings are inscribed upon them, and they are guided by certain historically specific classificatory methods and world-views (Lidchi, 1997:160). These aspects become ever-more valid and influential in the development of the modern museum as a cultural and educational institution throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

With the advent of modernity the quest for knowledge, the faith in reason and rationality, and the rise of the human sciences turn into an insatiable thirst for discovering the hidden order of existence (Oakes, 2012). Relentlessly striving to achieve that order and purification, modern societies were governed by an urge to seek out everything that was chaotic, uncivilized and savage or, simply put, 'Other', in order to map it, classify it and know it (Featherstone, 1995, quoted in Oakes, 2012). European colonialism could thus be viewed as the ultimate ordering project of modernity whose practices were justified by the almost noble-like idea of bringing order to a disordered world and civilizing the unruly (Mitchell, 1988, quoted in Oakes, 2012). The concept of culture was in this respect a key instrument of the ordering narratives of modernity.

Within the contexts of colonialism 'culture' was presented as *"a whole way of life"* (Rose, 2007a: 179; Oakes, 2012:111) and thus this notion was adopted as a way of explaining the differences in non-European people's behaviours, beliefs and practices (Oakes, 2012). Thus, at the backdrop of colonial practice, modern nineteenth century museums established as a powerful system of representation with scientific classificatory schemas, answering to specific periods, genres and schools (Bann, 1998, quoted in Rose, 2007a:179). Ethnographic museums were the institutions that served to collect, classify and display objects that were conceived to represent the cultures of colonized peoples, who were believed to be *'more natural'* or even *'primitive'*, *'illiterate'*, *'savage'*, *'less cultured'*, as opposed to the rational, civilized and cultured West (Lidchi, 1997:161; Rose, 2007a:180). However, as noted earlier about the nature of museums, they do not merely describe and mark out natural differences, but by inscribing specific meanings, they actually serve to construct cultural distinctions and identities (Lidchi, 1997). In Saidian terms, this historically-located process can be interpreted as a manifestation of the complex power relations between *'the West and the Rest'* (Hall, 1992, quoted in Lidchi, 1997:161)*,* by means of creating discourses of 'Otherness'.

On the other hand, understood as an articulation of civilization, the notion of culture was deployed as a normative regulation, a European-centered ordering discourse that served to maintain the boundaries between order and disorder (Oakes, 2012). In this sense, Tony Bennett problematizes the concept of culture as: *"a hierarchical ordering of the relations between different components of the cultural field, one part of which is defined as a lack, an insufficiency, a problem, while the other is viewed as offering a means of overcoming the insufficiency, resolving the problem"* (1998:91, quoted in Oakes, 2012:112). Mobilizing the concept of culture in this sense has been witnessed in the practice of the institutions of church and colony that aimed to better the morals of the working class and to domesticate the savage. This kind of strategic

employment of culture has a Foucauldian connotation of governmentality in the sense that it evokes practices of self-inspection and self-discipline (Oakes, 2012).

Inspired by Michel Foucault, Tony Bennett and Donald Preziosi make a similar critique of the modern museum and art gallery, by viewing them as institutions of subtle governance and social control rather than in their enlightening functions (Bennett, 1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a; Preziosi, 2003). A central point in Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish* is the development of disciplinary institutions (prisons, asylums, hospitals) and a new set of professions (warders, psychiatrists, doctors, policemen) which profoundly changed the exercise of punishment from the practice of physical torture in medieval Europe towards a subtle institutional routine to maintain social order. The new kind of punishment relied on a particular organization of space and visuality, which served to cause self-inspection in those who have been labeled by 'experts' as mad, criminal, degenerate, or ill, and thus induce them to alter their behaviour to observe the norm (Rose, 2007a). The sense of permanent visibility of one's conduct constituted an invisible, but omnipotent power which created the 'docile body', the body which was *"caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions"* (Foucault, 1977:11, quoted in Rose, 2007a). Foucault argues that this kind of visuality was achieved through *surveillance* - an effective means of keeping social order, which become widely implemented in modern capitalist societies. He explains that disciplinary institutions work in two ways. On the one hand, they function through their institutional apparatus which is made up of the particular forms of power/knowledge (e.g. laws, regulations, morals, architecture, etc.) and the discourses which these articulate (Hall, 1997b:47, quoted in Rose, 2007a). On the other hand are the institutional technologies, which Rose defines as *"the practical techniques used to practice that power/knowledge"* (2007a:175). She has further argued that photographs and other visual images can be considered as an institutional technology in Foucauldian terms, as they were used by disciplinary institutions to make visible the distinctions between normal and abnormal and thus to assert their claims of truth (Rose, 2007a).

In the sense that museums and galleries deal with visual images and visualities of different objects, those two institutions and the social effects they produce have been critiqued from a Foucauldian perspective. Drawing on Foucault's work "*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison"*, Tony Bennett underlines that just like other modern institutions, museums and art galleries, open to the general public in the nineteenth century, used culture and science discourses as a tool for social regulation and control (1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a: 179). He argues that such discourses saturate modern museums and galleries with power and turn them into *"disciplining machines"*. Their institutional apparatus could thus be clearly explained in Bennett's words as he writes:

*"the museum, in providing a new setting for works of culture, also functioned as a technological environment which allowed cultural artefacts to be refashioned in ways that would facilitate their deployment for new purposes as part of governmental programmes aimed at reshaping general norms of social behaviour."* (Bennett, 1995:6, quoted in Rose, 2007a:179)

Crucially, Bennett notes that what contributes immensely to the power apparatus of the museum is a scientific discourse which claims and classifies certain cultural objects as 'truthful', 'scientific', or describing the progress of history, which in turn produces what he calls a 'regime of truth'. Further, these statements of truth are effectively reproduced and conveyed by the institutional technologies of the gallery and the museum. Haraway (1989:35, quoted in Rose,

2007a:183) describes those as the techniques through which the desired meanings are effected. Hence, the institutional technologies of the gallery and the museum through which they practice their power/knowledge include their layout, decoration, modes of object display and interpretation, as well as the spaces behind the exhibits, etc. (Rose, 2007a). In this sense, objects, dislocated from their original contexts are relocated into the classificatory arrangement of the museum or gallery and placed under a glass case or framed and hung on a wall, thus evoking in the visitor a sense of seeing the truth. In addition to that, Rose pays attention to how certain meanings of truth get produced and spread in museums and galleries, not only by displaying them in cases and frames, but also through the effects that particular *spatial organization* in those institutions create, by placing different objects in certain relations to one another. She argues that all these institutional technologies serve to recreate and bring to the fore certain kinds of information over others (Rose, 2007a). Referring to Bal (1991:32, quoted in Rose, 2007a:186), Rose contends that a certain rhetoric of 'realism' deployed in the technologies of display (e.g. labeling and describing) precludes any doubts of the visitors in the knowledge that is being conveyed.

Further, Bennett notes a significant difference between the definitions of 'culture' applied in the two types of institutions, since while museums refer to the concept as 'a whole way of life', as discussed earlier, art galleries make use of 'culture' which is closely related to Western understandings of art and aesthetics or, in other words, that which ennobles and uplifts the human spirit (Bennett, 1998, quoted in Rose, 2007a:180). For him, the different definitions of culture put to work in the discourses about museums and art galleries have strong implications in the type of audiences which those two institutional apparatuses produce. On the one hand, he argues that modern museums in the nineteenth century were mostly concerned with opening up to the *"morally weak, probably drunk, working-class man"* in order to cultivate him and bring up in him a civilized subject (Bennett, 1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a:182). On the other hand, he notes that galleries make use of more implicit notions of culture and art that can be appreciated and understood only by some and not others. Thus, drawing on Bourdieu and Darbel (1991, quoted in Rose, 2007a) Bennett writes that art theory, which is employed in galleries to mediate between the visitor and the art objects on display, is only accessible to *"middle-class gallery-goers"* who have the kind of education and 'taste' that allows them to see through the hidden order of meanings which art has been ascribed to represent (1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a:182). In that sense, he finds that there is an inherent contradiction in the idea of the institutional apparatus of the gallery that ostensibly seeks to civilize and discipline, and yet remains inaccessible to certain social groups.

Importantly, Bennett (1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a:180-182) also makes a contention that museums and galleries as cultural and educational institutions often funded by national governments, serve not only to civilize and produce 'docile bodies', but also to create citizen-subjects of their nation. Thus offering the objects and images on display in the form of an educational and, perhaps, even entertainment activity, museums and galleries do not only construct a particular kind of 'truth', but they also produce and discipline certain kinds of visitors (Rose, 2007a). The ways in which museum and gallery goers are involved in the disciplinary practices of those institutions can range from rather obvious ways, such as having to follow a prescribed spatial route or to observe certain rules and prohibitions during the visit (e.g. no smoking, no consumption of food and beverages), to subtle means of regulation of social conduct. Bennett explains the latter by reshaping Foucault's argument on the workings of the

surveillance method and suggesting that the 'automatic' operation of power in the institutions of the museum and the gallery is maintained by the visitor's knowledge that they are being observed by other visitors, as well (Bennett, 1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a:191). Rose, referring to Foucault's idea that where there is power, there is also resistance to it, argues that it is still rather questionable how effective the disciplining technologies of museums and galleries are, as visitors may find ways to contest or go round such strategies (2007a). Furthermore, drawing on Ames (1992), Lidchi argues that as museums in the 20th century are rapidly forced into a commercially-orientated and competitive field, as well as more and more concerned with their public image, the messages which they convey must be to some extent congruent with the collective views of their audience. The potential effects of negative publicity thus endow the public with a large degree of control over the museum enterprise (quoted in Lidchi, 1997).

Preziosi (2003) takes the reflection on the museum as a modern disciplinary institution a step further by linking it to the construction of social and national identities. He argues that modern museums and their artefacts on display are subtle instruments for the production, accumulation, transformation and reproduction of knowledge about history, how we relate to it, and therefore, about who we are and with whom we belong. Further, Preziosi contends that central to the modern institution, which museums are, is their disciplinary and prescriptive nature where, by exposing, classifying and interpreting heritage artefacts, the modern corporate state seeks to define the 'true', *"predictable linkages between citizen-subjects and their object-worlds"* (2003:173). In this respect, the object of 'art' is itself often museumified as a heritage on display, as a powerful reminder of the relationship between the human subjects to their nation and history. The problematic of art in this case, according to Preziosi is not contained in whether art is good or bad, or whether it does truly represent a nation's history, but rather in the status of art as a modern *"fantasm"* (2003:174), or an instrument of state control, nationalism and capitalization. Its own art is a heritage which every discernible people must have; without art, there is no history and no 'us' (Preziosi, 2003). Importantly, art is problematized as being a powerful means of symbolization of people and their national culture and history, thanks to it being a *"pan-human phenomenon"*, or in other words, a *"universal language"* (Preziosi, 2003:174). In a similar vein, Gillian Rose underlines that twentieth century discourses of art construct it as something which has to be contemplated in order to reveal universal truths (2007a). In this sense, 'citizen-consumers' are the locus upon which certain desired meanings of identity and purpose are constructed and imposed, as they are being convinced of being part of their true *"stuff"* (Preziosi, 2003:173). Thus, Preziosi conceptualizes the modern museum as a project in which two interfusing practices are simultaneously put at work. On the one hand, is what he calls the *"temple of art"* where, through the fabrication of images of heritage, identity and citizenship, citizen-subjects are disciplined as the desired, true members of their nation-state. On the other hand is the *"exposition"* through which citizens are transformed into consumers, through the construction of them and other peoples as commodities (Preziosi,2003:174). Moreover, underlining the hegemonic influence of Western European cultural and institutional norms, he suggests that any improvement in understanding of modern museums and their purposes related to the manufacture (and not simply re-citing) of heritage and identity in the developing world means clearly seeing Europe looking at the developing countries imagining Europe seeing them (Preziosi, 2003:181).

Perhaps, this is also another aspect relevant to the understanding of why the imaginative reconstruction of history, heritage and identity is so intently pursued in many states from

Central and Eastern Europe, while the tourist industry has been appropriating more and more of the material legacies from the former communist regimes (Newby, 1994). The following chapter of this work will thus seek to explore how heritage tourism is implicated in the post-socialist national identity transformations in Central and Eastern Europe.

## 4.4. THE POLITICS OF HERITAGE TOURISM IN POST-COMMUNIST IDENTITY TRANSFORMATIONS

Before I continue with any theoretical and empirical accounts of the use of heritage tourism in the contemporary identity politics and transformations in the contemporary post-communist states of Central and Eastern Europe, it is essential to first provide an overview of what the processes of transition entail and how that has led to the need of radical image transformation of the former communist states of Europe.

### 4.4.1. POST-COMMUNIST TRANSFORMATIONS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

In the aftermath of the 1989 events which led to the demise of the Soviet bloc and the overthrow of the communist totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, the newly-emerged states awoke in an utterly different international context which demanded that they embark on a long-term process of adaptation and state restructuring towards capitalist democratic states (Verdery, 1999; Young & Light, 2001; Blokker, 2005).

The process of their re-organization has been termed post-socialist/post-communist transition. The very concept of 'transition' stems from studies in biology and population dynamics (Hall, 2008) and has been defined as *"a gradual, continuous process of societal change where the structural character of society (or a complex sub-system of society) transforms"* (Martens and Rotmans, 2005:1136, quoted in Hall, 2008:413). Hence, the process of transition implies a movement from one given state to a different end-state. In the wake of the collapse of communism, what that ultimately meant for the CEE countries was that the end-state of the transition would be their transformation into Western type democratic market economies (Hall, 2008; Blokker, 2005). Hall (2008) referred to that as the European Union 'transition project' the guidelines for which were stated in the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria laying down the requirements for the accession of the applicant states of CEE into the supranational structure (Vachudova, 2005, quoted in Hall, 2008; Dimitrova & Dragneva, 2001).

The ways in which 'transition' has been conceptualized in theory and applied in practice have, in recent years, been rendered problematic as they have been influenced by modernist approaches which assume a single 'correct' model of state development and by doing that the narrative of 'transition' strongly resembles the grand narratives of communism which it so keenly strives to reject (Blokker, 2005). To be sure, the transition process as such assumes that the singular pathway to the development of democratic, capitalist economies, as the universally correct model of development, will be achieved through the adoption of Western-type political, economic, judicial and financial institutions that will help re-organize the CEE states in accordance with Western hegemonic norms (Arnason, 2000, quoted in Blokker, 2005). In this sense, the process of transition ultimately stands for the complete and utter renouncement of every single feature of the socialist regimes and the dismantling of the structures, which people living behind the Iron Curtain had known to be the norm, in parallel with the espousing of the

Western European model of capitalist growth-based development (Verdery, 1999). For instance, whereas central planning was a symbol of inertia and isolation, market forces were associated with dynamism and openness. In furtherance, the subordinated homogenous societies under communism, seen as the apathetic, passive, and state-dependent people ('*homo sovieticus*'), were juxtaposed to the autonomous, active, entrepreneurial and participative individuals ('*homo economicus*') in the progressive Western European societies (Blokker, 2005).

Another problematic assumption of the European transition project is that about the existence in the post-communist states of elite reformers who are going to head the process of radical political and economic transformation (Blokker, 2005) without having taken into account the widely spread historic contingencies of the totalitarian rule which among other things involve the uninterrupted presence of former influential figures from the state administration or the state repressive apparatuses (the so called *nomenklatura*) within the post-communist democratic political circles (Verdery, 1993; Hall, 2008; Harrison, 1993).

Most of the literature reflecting the process of post-communist transition in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has been focused on the procedural implementation and technical aspects of the political and economic restructuring (Verdery, 1999; Blokker, 2005). Political transition has emphasized the building of the democracies through political pluralization, democratic elections, constitution writing, building NGO's and the civil society, while economic restructuring has been seen as a set of macro- and micro- process of privatization, ensuring the convertibility of the national currencies, price liberalization and overall macroeconomic stabilization (Young & Light, 2001). Studying and representing the process in this way, has led to the narrow association of the term transition with prescriptive, normative forms of politico-economic post-communist transformations (Hall, 2008; Verdery, 1999). Those studies have failed to acknowledge the magnitude and character of the changes since 1989 and have also ignored the fact that the regime has had much more durable impacts on these states than many have thought (Verdery, 1999; Young & Light, 2001; Blokker, 2005).

In this respect, Verdery (1999) suggests that in order to study and understand the processes of post-communist transition, what needs to be realized is the all-pervasive influence of the communist ideology that had, during state socialism, permeated every single stratus and aspect of the political, social, economic and cultural life of those societies. From that follows that post-communist changes should not be viewed reductively but rather as an all-out political and cultural transformation of the ways people make sense of the world, the meanings they inscribe to their new freedom, their senses of identity and belonging and nationalism, their ideas of moral (Verdery, 1999). Furthermore, the cultural shifts also involved the return to heterogeneity and religion, and ultimately, the need to come to grips with the issues related to the ethnic and religious minorities within the former communist states, whose identities communist nationalism projects had suppressed for half a century (Verdery, 1993; Blokker, 2005).

Thus, post- communist state transformations have been driven by the forces of the international context of democratic rule and global capitalism in which they got inserted after 1989 (Verdery, 1999; Young & Light, 2001). The shifts involve not only the processes of political pluralization and democratization, but rather crucially, the revision of people's political and national identities which need to be in accordance with the new Westward orientation of the CEE states. This has meant that their new national identities are based critically on the rejection of the communist past and all values that it inscribed. The disassociation with communist pasts and

identities has had particularly important cultural and economic implications for those states, such as being eligible to receive any financial aid and foreign investment to help with the reconstruction processes (Verdery, 1999, Hall, 2008) in the contexts of the rampant domestic economic instabilities caused by high inflation rates, the weakened financial currencies, and the rising unemployment rates (Kostov & Lingard, 2002).

Recognizing and acknowledging the profound impact of various historical contingencies on the contemporary development in the Central and Eastern European states, this research is based on the assumption that although the process of post- communist transition has a number of similarities, one should refrain from generalizing narratives of post- communist change and politics, and instead each case must be treated as unique (Verdery, 1999; Blokker, 2005). In other words, the nature of the post-1989 transformations in different states can only be fully grasped if they are approached from a case-specific point of view that accounts for the unique historical dependencies in each of those states (Blokker, 2005).

## 4.4.2. THE ROLE OF HERITAGE TOURISM IN THE IDENTITY TRANSFORMATIONS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

One of the "*upheavals of transition*" is that it uprooted previously fixed communist symbols and meanings of nationhood (Nadkarni, 2007:612, quoted in Kaneva & Popescu, 2011:194). That included the fact that national heritage was rendered in a flux as the states were transitioning from one ideology that left behind numerous material reminders, to another one (Tymothy & Nyaupane, 2009) that required a radical refurbishment of the old heritage landscapes (Verdery, 1999). In a response to the new and dynamically changing market demands and the need for market differentiation, as well as the reinsertion in regional and international political alliances, the countries of the CEE were compelled to work on the renovation of their national identities and representations, in order to convey an image of stability, democratic freedoms and a market open to foreign investment, travel and trade (Young & Light, 2001; Hall, 2008), an image that can be considered acceptable in their new "European home" (Hall, 2003).

In order to grasp the identity politics of post-communism, it is essential to understand the identities imposed by state communism (Graham, 2000, quoted in Young & Light, 2001) and the homogenization projects of the regime (Verdery, 1993). Before the events of 1989 the ruling party would launch different projects to homogenize the nation. Through assimilation processes the state attempted to erase all subordinate religious and ethnic identities in order to create one single national identity. The aim of such projects was to achieve the adherence of every person to the socialist ideal and, ultimately, to legitimize the party's political representation of one monolith nation (Verdery, 1993; Young & Light, 2001; Castells, 2000). Thus, the state created the nation through discourses about what was 'Us' and what was 'Them', or essentially, the 'Other'. Those discourses represented capitalism and the West as the 'Other'. However, after the collapse of communism, the same strategy remained, but the sides were reversed. And in the case of post-communist transformations, national identities had to be re-invented for both internal and external 'consumption', which involves providing an answer to two crucial questions: *"Who are we?"* and *"How do we want others to see us?"* (Young & Light, 2001:947).

Thus, while communism was suddenly represented as a political and historical aberration (or the new 'Other'), the new national identities had to be based on its total renouncement (Verdery, 1999). 'Europe' then came to represent all values and systems that were opposite to those under

state socialism (Light, 2001), and therefore the accession of the CEE countries to the European Union was seen as an assimilation project which assumed the disposal of everything that was Eastern, non-European (Other) in favour of the adoption of images and ideals that convey Europeanness (Kuus, 2004, quoted in Blokker, 2005; Hall, 2008). Often as we will see, this was achieved through a process where collective amnesia or selective history interpretations and representations were necessitated, imposed and widely embraced (Verdery, 1999).

For the countries of Central and Eastern Europe tourism has presented a great opportunity, not only for its attractive economic imperative in times of radical economic restructuring (Light, Young, & Czepczynski, 2009), but also as a means through which to re-invent themselves and to affirm their self-images and aspirations both to the world and to themselves (Light, 2000a; Light, Young & Czepczynski, 2009). The selective and powerful imagery tourism conveys, has thus been a very critical political instrument of the former Eastern bloc states in the process of disassociating from their communist pasts, while at the same time asserting their Westward-looking political, cultural and economic orientation (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998, in Light, 2001; Munasinghe, 2005; Murzyn, 2008; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011).

Thus, after the overthrow of communism the CEE states, once an unknown and secretive zone behind the Iron curtain, became accessible for the West, and international tourism arrivals in those countries started experiencing a marked growth. During the first few years immediately after the events of 1989, there was a more pronounced growth of tourism to the countries which shared borders with the European Union (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Poland), but later in the 1990's and early 2000's that encompassed the states further to the East (the Baltic countries, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, etc.) while for different internal political reasons, other countries, such as Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, have lagged behind (Light, Young & Czepczynski, 2009).

One way through which the CEE nation-states could re-invent and promote themselves on the international tourism market was through the re-interpretation and representation of their national history and heritage (Light, 2001). And indeed, a significant part of the post-socialist growth of international tourism was due to the interest of Western European tourists in the historic capitals (Prague, Budapest, Bratislava, Warsaw, Riga, Tallinn, Bucharest, Sofia, Ljubljana, Dubrovnik, etc.) and other secondary cultural centers throughout the CEE, such as Krakow, Gdansk, Debrecen, Plovdiv, Split and Brno. Apart from urban cultural and historical heritage, the rural areas and preserved pre-modern traditions of many countries across CEE have attracted significant attention and have become one of the centerpieces in tourism strategies and national marketing campaigns of countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Poland (Light, Young & Czepczynski, 2009). In addition, a few countries from the region have promoted a darker side of their heritage, related to their Jewish heritage and the Holocaust. Examples of that can be visited in Poland (Kazimierz district in Krakow, Myrzin, 2006, quoted in Light, Young & Czepczynski, 2009), Germany (the Jewish Museum and the Holocaust memorial in Berlin (Jansen, 2005, quoted in Light, Young & Czepczynski, 2009)), etc. In the case of the Jewish heritage across CEE, Light, Young and Czepczynski note that its commodification is accompanied by an altered interpretation, which is at present focused on commemorating the victims of the atrocious events during the Holocaust, whereas during the communism the emphasis was laid on the socialists as liberators (2009).

### 4.4.3. COMMUNIST HERITAGE AS "DISSONANT HERITAGE"

A very distinguishing aspect of heritage tourism in Central and Eastern Europe is the presence of material reminders of the countries' communist pasts (Light, Young and Czepczynski, 2009). Despite the contemporary Westward aspirations of the post-socialist countries, the process of re-imagining of their national history and identity has in many cases been impeded by the long-lasting presence of their communist material legacies (Light, 2000a). Thus, the question of how to come to terms with the heritage from the communist past has rendered a lot of ambivalence in public opinions and been for a long time a very politically-charged matter across the region (Light, 2000b; Ivanov, 2009).

The immediate reaction of the CEE states during the first part of their transition period was to try to dispose of any existing material reminders of the communist regimes as a symbolic form of breaking up with and breaking free from an oppressive past, which involved actions such as the marring and removal of socialist statues, the continuous neglect or even demolition of monuments and memorials associated with socialist pilgrimage (e.g. mausoleums of party leaders), the renaming of streets and squares that had been named after significant dates, places and personas for the regime, etc. (Verdery, 1999).

However, the recent years have seen a growing number of post- communist countries inserting their communist heritage within cultural tours and travel itineraries (famous examples are Szoborpark in Budapest, the Berlin Wall and Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin, the House of the People in Bucharest (Light, 2000a; Williams, 2008) and the Nowa Huta district in Krakow (Stenning, 2000)). The stakes in this problem involve the economic gains which the destinations can earn given the growing demand for the tourist consumption of communist heritage sites and the difficulties such international representations of the former socialist countries will pose to the processes of their post-communist self-reinvention (Light, 200b).

Light (2000a:157) has defined 'communist heritage tourism' as *"the consumption of sites and sights associated with the former communist regimes"* in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe. Some have argued, however, that beneath its benign cultural, educational and even entertaining purposes, lies the issue of the complex relationship between tourism and the politics of representation and identity in the CEE region, mixed with the desire of the states to maximize commercial gains from the sector (Light, 2000a&b; 2001; Murzyn, 2008). However, as it becomes clear from the ambivalence and complexity of the concept of heritage, as well as the politically-overburdened nature of tourism representations, the construction and representation of communist heritage in the post- communist states of CEE and the national identities it promotes can be viewed as an ideologically charged, ethically problematic and possibly contested process (Light 2000a&b; Stenning, 2000, Williams,2008: Ivanov, 2009), and even more so than other cases in the developed world (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009), considering the momentous political, economic and cultural transformations the region has been going through since 1989 (Verdery, 1999).

Light (2000a&b) and Young and Kaczmarek (2008) have argued that communist heritage creates profound dissonances in relation to the post-socialist identity politics in Central and Eastern Europe. On the one hand, in exploring the case of Romania, Light (2000a&b) proclaims that often this type of heritage is externally constructed, by a specific type of heritage tourists and through representations and discourses in Western-published travel guides, as those states

represent everything that the West is not. That is, from the perspective of post-modern Western European tourists, the CEECs offer an opportunity of gazing upon the political and economic, non-Western, "Other" (Light, 2000b; Light, Young & Czepczynski, 2009). To take matters beyond merely gazing, from a Saidian perspective, Western discourses about the Orient actually *create* a distinct "Other", and in the case of communist heritage tourism in CEE, this can provide an angle from which to look at the active, (politically-driven) production of a Communist Other (Hwang, 2009). At the same time, this interest of foreign tourists in the communist legacy of Romania and other CEE is not understood and appreciated by local people, who prefer to put this part of their history behind them. Instead, what Western representations of communist heritage achieve is the perpetuation of stereotypes about the states of Central and Eastern Europe and of its image of an "Other", which potentially makes the representations of communist heritage as the antipode of those countries' contemporary aspirations to construct their modern democratic identities (Light, 2000b). On the other hand, Young and Kaczmarek (2008) add that in some cases the dominant post-communist identity that certain CEE states are pursuing to construct are being contested at the local level, showing how in some cases communist heritage is displayed and acknowledged for particular reasons (Young & Kaczmarek, 2008).

Young and Kaczmarek (2008) aptly summarize three dominant scenarios in the process of post-communist identity transformation through the selective representation of history and heritage. Notwithstanding the fact that they talk about the construction of urban identities, I would argue, based on extensive literature reviews, that those three scenarios well overlap with the strategies for post- communist national identity renovations. The first one, they argue, is a strategy bringing to the fore and promoting pre- communist pasts which often represent a certain epoch as a "Golden Age" in the nation's history, while at the same time 'snipping out' or obscuring their communist pasts (Young & Kaczmarek, 2008). Through a particularly selective representation of their historic pasts, which often simply merges their pre-communist and post-communist periods together (Verdery, 1999), they attempt to represent a "Europeanized" heritage and political identity which is aimed at the smooth re-integration of those states in the political and economic structures of Western Europe (Light, 2001; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011).

The case of Romania is a good illustration of the first scenario of Young and Kaczmarek (2008), and of Ashworth's idea of dissonant heritage, in the respect that communist heritage is a contested heritage as, while it is largely constructed for and by foreign visitors to offer them the opportunity to gaze upon the cultural and political "Other" of Western Europe (Light, 2000b), it is the antipode of the image of a modern democratic, capitalist and pluralist country (Light, 2000a, 2001) which the country seeks to promote abroad. To be sure, Romania's post-communist nation branding campaign makes no mention of that period of the nation's history and is rather focused on representing the country's modern image and its heritage based on pre-communist rural traditions (Light, 2000&2001; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011). However, in view of the increased interest in communist heritage tourism in the country, the coping strategy of the Romanian government has consisted of the selective and careful representation and interpretation of the communist heritage sites, which for the large part is rendered in a way that excises the meanings which the sites have carried throughout Ceausescu's dictatorship and instead presents those heritage artefacts as products of Romanian art and architectural genius (Light, 2000a&b).

The second scenario of addressing communist heritage in Central and Eastern Europe has to do with the representation of the communist or Soviet pasts in explicitly negative terms, as a token

of asserting the countries' anti-communist attitudes and their democratic identities (Young & Kaczmarek, 2008). Stenning (2000) illustrates this scenario, by examining the shifting constructions and representations of communist heritage in the case of Nowa Huta in Poland. Nowa Huta (translated as 'new steelworks') was a pre-planned industrial town established in 1949, in order to host the first integrated industrial plant of Poland, while beneath its purely technical purposes the town and the steelworks were conceived as a *"deliberate piece of social engineering"* (Hardy&Rainnie, 1995, quoted in Stenning, 2000:100) to reinforce Krakow's socialist identity (by urbanization and industrialization) and to counter its image of a *"bourgeois"* city (Carter, 1994, quoted in Stenning, 2000:101). During the socialist period Nowa Huta was in a way both a strong reminder of the absolute power of the Communist Party and the Soviet ideological influence, as well as the contestation of totalitarianism by students, intellectuals, workers and newly-emerged environmental movements, which eventually played a crucial role in the overthrow of the Communist Party in 1989. The end of Communism has largely led to the continuous marginalization of socialist industrial projects, such as Nowa Huta, as Poland, similarly to other countries in CEE has been experiencing the processes of post-communist transition through democratization and marketization, driven by the state's accession to the European Union. These changes have particularly strong implications for places such as Nowa Huta as it renders them in a position of shocking uncertainty about their role and identity in deeply transformed contexts. In response to that, some of the practices of adaptation have included features shared among most CEE states, such as renaming streets and squares, previously named after communist leaders and important events, after national historical heroes and revolutionaries, etc. Nowadays, cultural and educational tourism are central to the post-communist rejuvenation and reconstruction of Krakow as Poland's *"intellectual heart"* (Stenning, 2000:112), shifting away from heavy industry towards service and high-technology based economies. At the same time the district of Nowa Huta has been represented as an *'industrial aberration'* in Krakow's past (Stenning, 2000: 114). Interestingly, the online travel guide "In your pocket" describes Nowa Huta as *"the bastard child of a devastated post WWII Poland"* and *'the direct antithesis of everything cuddly Krakow is"*, a town that *"offers a surreal look inside the false dawn that was communism"* (In Your Pocket, 2013), which again demonstrates how Western narratives continue perpetuating the image of those places as "Other".

Another example of the second scenario is provided by Wight and Lennon (2007) who make an analysis of the KGB Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius, which is part of Lithuania's dark tourism tours. The interpretation in the museum is sharply focused on topics such as the atrocities inflicted by the KGB parts and Soviet crimes against Lithuanians, the Lithuanian resistance against the Soviet repression, and Lithuanian solidarity (an idea based on records of Lithuanians saving Jews from the Holocaust; the motive of solidarity is also mirrored in Nowa Huta's renaming of streets (Stenning, 2000)). This selective representation and interpretation of the museum's exhibition can be viewed as a way to condemn the Soviet forces as cruel oppressors, and to reinforce the continuous disassociation of the Lithuanian national identity from its communist past and their pride in their distinct identity (Wight & Lennon, 2007).

The third scenario encompasses the cases throughout Central and Eastern Europe, where the post-communist identity transformation processes recognize specifically selected elements of the states' communist pasts, however, in ways that evoke ambivalent attitudes and contestation (Young & Kaczmarek, 2008). In this respect, Young & Kaczmarek (2008) undertake to examine the complex and ambivalent processes of post- communist identity formation in the case of the

Polish city of Lodz. The settlement does not possess a substantial medieval past, which is why the dominant identity discourses in the process of post- communist transformation capitalize on its "Golden Age" of rapid industrialization and urbanization in the 19th century. This discourse has been seen as one that obscures the contribution and participation of the USSR and Russia in the development of the city, as well as conveniently matching the national goals of capitalist and democratic "Europeanization". However, an alternative local narrative of the city's "Other", more undesirable past, has emerged to question this post- communist urban identity narrative, dominant not only on a national but also on a CEE –wide level. This different discourse is based on the acknowledgement of the socialist past of Lodz and the embrace of notions of Russian culture and heritage as a constitutive part of the 'harmonious multicultural past' of the city (p. 66:2008). This account also illustrates the complexity of post-socialist identity transformations, as they get constructed and performed within processes of interaction on several different levels – from the individual to the international (Young & Kaczmarek, 2008).

In addition, by illustrating the case of Szoborpark in Budapest, Williams (2008) shows a very peculiar way of a Central European nation to come to terms with its communist past. Unlike other commemorative practices where sites and monuments with historical significance are preserved in their authentic places to evoke a sense of the past, Szoborpark hosts a collection of communist statuary which has been removed from its original settings and placed in the distant outskirts of the capital city as a token of giving the collection a different and re-negotiated meaning (Light, 2000a; Williams, 2008). The repositioning of the statuary, however, should not be simply viewed in *"out of sight, out of mind"* terms (Williams, 2008, p. 186), but rather as a whole new way of viewing the communist past through the lens of the post-communist transition realities, which still bears rather divergent meanings for different groups of the Hungarian society, for tourists, tour operators, academics, etc. (Williams, 2008). Moreover, aside from being situated in a different place, the arrangement and layout of the statue park has been preconceived in a distinctly metaphorical way (Jencks, 1991 in Light, 2000a), causing Western commentators to label it a 'theme park'. The layout has been described by Light (2000a:168) as follows:

*"The park is arranged in the form of a straight path, from which "figure-of-eight" walkways lead off (so that the wandering visitor will always return to the true path!), around which statues and monuments are displayed. In the centre of the park is a flowerbed in the form of a Soviet Star. Eventually, the path ends abruptly in a brick wall, representing the "dead end" which state socialism represented for Hungary: visitors have no choice but to walk back the way they have previously come."*

At first sight, Szoborpark would suggest that Hungary has made a clean break with its communist past and, by being comfortable with displaying it for tourists in the form of an 'open-air museum' or a 'theme park', just like in modern capitalist societies, it has definitively put it in a chapter labeled "History" (Light, 2000a; Williams, 2008). However, a closer reflection on the act of removing the statues from their original contexts, where they would have continued imbuing public spaces with a particular 'undesired' meaning (Johnson, 1995 in Light, 2000a), and their re-positioning in newly-created, carefully preconceived, artificial contexts, suggests that there are more complicated processes of Hungarian post-socialist identity renovation at work than what is initially perceived (Light, 2000a). Stripping or devaluing the original political meanings off the statues, thus, is revealing of the state's desire to close the gap between itself and Western Europe by demonstrating to visitors a "Europeanized" identity that has turned its

back on its communist past and the Soviet ideological influence (Light, 2000a; Williams, 2008). On the other hand, the mere act of preservation of the statues as a reminder of the country's communist heritage, and the continuing nostalgia for that period among some circles of Hungarian society (Nash, 1993 in Light, 2000a), are signs that the "Europeanized" national identity which the government is trying to construct is not an unquestionable one (Light, 2000a; Williams, 2008).

The following section will introduce the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia and argue as to the reasons why I have chosen this particular case study to base my research on and the questions that this case poses about how the representations of communist heritage the museum projects can be related to the post-communist renovation of Bulgarian national identity.

## 5. CASE STUDY – THE MUSEUM OF SOCIALIST ART – SOFIA, BULGARIA

More than two decades after the overthrow of communism, during which the issue of how to come to terms with the ubiquitous legacies of the totalitarian rule of 1945-1989 was of utmost political and public sensitivity, September 19th 2011 marked a cornerstone in the post-communist cultural and political transition of Bulgaria. The event in question is the opening of the Museum of Socialist Art (MSA) in the capital Sofia as the first state-initiated cultural institution to focus specifically on the communist period in Bulgaria (Vukov, 2012). Since its very inauguration, however, the Museum of Socialist Art and the selection and interpretation of its collection become a highly controversial topic and subject to heated debates among political and intellectual circles and the wide Bulgarian public, demonstrating that opinions and feelings regarding the communist history and legacy of the country are still radically divergent and remain unresolved (Vukov, 2012).

While there has been a recognition among Bulgarian society for a long time of the need to begin reflecting on both the profound intangible impacts and the material heritage which the communist past had left behind, the form in which the government decided to do so was in a museum that displays works of art that have been produced during the communist period (Vukov, 2012). The collection of the Museum displays a spacious statue park with 77 monumental sculptures, as well as an exhibition of 60 paintings, 25 easel pictures, and a screening hall for documentaries from the communist period ("Actualno", 2011a; Vukov, 2012), all within the constraints of the cultural and art framework of the communist period in Bulgaria (Vukov, 2012).

Culture was of a particular importance during the years of the totalitarian regime, as it was the foundation upon which the socialist society was to be built. In order to lay down a sturdy foundation, the Communist Party had to create a new culture which is *"national in its form and Socialist in its content"* (Todor Pavlov, quoted in Kiossev, 2003:189). Cultural policy was an exclusively state and party concern and the definition of a national heritage was a priority. Art, literature and the revision of history were instruments of ideological propaganda and indoctrination with which the state and its institutions set out to cultivate its subjects. Mass action called for a mass rhetoric (Kiossev, 2003). Rituals and public meetings, doctrinaire clichés, state-commissioned art projects – all praised the glory of the Bulgarian Communist Party, its leaders and heroes, the Soviet troops, Lenin, Marx and Engels. The state elite and

'experts' created the cultural canon that prescribed the hierarchy of Bulgaria's artistic works. Anything that was not compliant with the principles of 'correctness' was policed and subject to censorship (Kiossev, 2003), while the 'dissident' authors were often persecuted.

Hence, it is partly due to the propagandist nature of the objects of Bulgarian socialist art showcased at the Museum that has sparked tensions around its concept, as within the transformed socio-cultural and political realities of post-socialist Bulgaria, according to some observers, this art could be considered as an attempt at perpetuating a renounced ideology (Vukov, 2012). One of the rationales of the choice to showcase the communist period in an art museum was explicitly stated by the then minister of finance of Bulgaria – namely, to create a profitable enterprise which will respond to the rising international tourism demand for communist heritage in CEE (Simeon Dyankov, Bulgarian Minister of Finance (2009-2013), quoted in "Actualno", 2011a; Vukov, 2012), as already witnessed in other countries from the former Eastern Bloc. Bulgaria, however, had been one of the few former communist states which stalled for so long on questions regarding the representation of its communist heritage.

In fact, until the inauguration of the Museum of Socialist Art in 2011, the Bulgarian government had tacitly abdicated from issues related to the enduring presence of the communist monuments and symbols across the country and the meanings they conveyed in the transforming contexts after 1989. Thus the fate of those monuments was either to resign to neglect and the collective amnesia in Bulgarian society or be taken down and dismantled (Vukov, 2012) as a token of the discontinuation of an oppressive regime. In a similar fashion, regional and national museums encouraged the process of silent disinheritance as their artefact collections and representations of history "paused" shortly after communism was established in the country. Throughout the years there had already been a couple of unsuccessful attempts for the creation of a museum dedicated to that part of Bulgarian history, which led to speculations about a form of collective amnesia being institutionalized in Bulgarian society (Vukov, 2012).

In trying to "catch up" with other CEE states which have already revamped and sold their communist pasts, and recognizing the economic rationale and potential consumer demand for gazing on the remains of communism, the contemporary center-right government decided to address this void in collective memory (Vukov, 2012) and finally *"put communism where it belongs – in history, and in a museum"* (Simeon Dyankov, quoted in "Actualno", 2011a) *"...in order to start talking about the future of this country"* (Vezhdi Rashidov – Bulgarian Minister of Culture (2009-2013), quoted in "Actualno", 2011b).The Museum of Socialist Art was thus created as a branch of the Bulgarian National Art Gallery (officially called Bulgarian National Museum of Fine Arts) with the major contribution of the then Minister of Culture – Vezhdi Rashidov (Picture 1), himself being a prominent Bulgarian sculptor, who started his art career in the years of communist rule.

The inauguration of the Museum, seeking to present it as Sofia's new tourist attraction of an enormous potential, as a successful economic enterprise and as an act of commemorating communist legacy as a part of history which present-day Bulgaria has already moved past, did not manage to surpass the deep controversies that accompanied the project. They were triggered on the one hand, by the suspicions that the museum was a result of a top-down politics and approaches, as the news for its creation was spread only on a short notice prior to its opening and no known public deliberations were held on the topics and the interpretations of the exhibit (Vukov, 2012). In addition, the name, the concept, the art exposition itself and its

interpretation have spurred many debates as to the actual purpose standing behind the opening of the museum.

One of the main threads of the argument has focused on the choice of the government, after years of silence on this problem, to come to grips with the communist past in a form constrained only to art works, arranged in a seemingly random and confusing way, and utterly devoid of historic interpretation and contextualization. Further, the decision to label the museum "socialist" rather than "communist" or "totalitarian" has been largely contested as a way of re-writing history. Also, the fact that the Museum was directly associated with the figures of Prime-Minister Boyko Borisov, who in the 1990's used to be the personal guard of the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party Todor Zhivkov, and the Minister of Culture, Vezhdi Rashidov – also related to that period, provoked many to think that this project was an attempt at one-sided, nostalgic representation of the communist period (Vukov, 2012).



Picture 1: Ex-Minister of Culture Vezhdi Rashidov at the opening of the Museum of Socialist Art with a sculpture of Georgi Dimitrov in the background
Source: Vagabond, 2011

The reactions to the Museum of Socialist Art on the political scene were largely divergent, as well. On the one end of the spectrum was the laudable opposition of the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS) who condemn the lack of critical reflection on the concept and art collection of the museum as an attempt of the government to *"abuse", "re-write"* and *"impose"* a certain representation of history and art that seeks to *"re-habilitate"* the communist regime. Moreover, they call the museum and its *"chaotic preparation", "a political instrument rather than a means of preserving Bulgarian history and art"* and appeal for a *"true"* museum of totalitarian history which needs to *"remind of all sides of the regime"*, but at the same time their letter emphasizes multiple times on the oppressions and crimes against innocent *"victims of the regime"* and the *"failed human destinies"* (SDS, 2011)

On the other far end of the spectrum of critiques was the statement of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the former President of the country Georgi Parvanov, who critiqued the Museum of Socialist Art as a very limited representation of the *"very productive years of the country"* during the communist rule and emphasized on the continuous presence and functioning of the products of that epoch such as the National Palace of Culture, and different industrial plants which *"can hardly be put in a museum",* which could be interpreted as an

implicit response to the political discourses about closing the page of communism and intended to remind that certain legacies of the communist period are still alive today (Georgi Parvanov, quoted in "Novinar", 2011).

The ambivalence and the radically divided positions that surround the question of how to better represent and interpret the communist heritage of Bulgaria are rather depictive of the complicated and unresolved attitude which Bulgarian society still has in relation to its communist past. The Museum of Socialist Art is itself a token of the difficulties accompanying the issue of how to narrate that part of the country's past in a more critically reflective way without resulting in a collision of perspectives (Vukov, 2012). What is important is that many questions about the establishment of this particular museum as a way of confronting the communist past after two decades of avoidance remain unanswered to this day (Vukov, 2012). The lack of reflection on what that part of Bulgarian history means to the different groups of society may have turned the Museum of Socialist Art into a field of contested heritage.

In sum, I have decided to base my research on the case study of the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia, because it constitutes the first attempt of the Bulgarian democratic government to officially address the communist heritage of the country, and therefore it indicates the state-approved framework of images and representations of the communist period in the contemporary context of post-socialist transformation. Furthermore, the case is intriguing because it carries abstract meanings which the government seeks to project for both external and internal cultural consumption. On the one hand, the Museum seeks to represent a largely neglected part of the nation's history through the lens of the present-day cultural and political circumstances within the country and in relation to its Westward-oriented policy. On the other hand, the choice to tackle communist heritage through a collection of art works, after so many years of silence on the matter, has been considered as dubious, unreflective and maybe still carrying a whiff of *"politics of avoidance"* as argued in an analysis by Nikolai Vukov (2012). Additionally, the ambiguity of the MSA is further fuelled by the fact that while it has been conceptualized as a museum, its collection focuses upon art objects. Although both the art gallery and the museum as modern institutions have emerged to serve similar purposes, as outlined in section 4.3, Bennett (1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a:180) has made a distinction between the audiences that get produced in the two institutions, as well as the specific discourses with which the museum and the gallery classify the objects on display. It is, therefore, interesting to unravel whether Bennett's distinctions have any bearing in the case of the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia. Importantly, this case is also significant as from its inception the way communist heritage has been represented in the museum has turned into a field of controversy and contestation (Vukov, 2012). It is thus important to try to see through the representations and narratives of communist heritage the Museum of Socialist Art seeks to produce and what they mean for the post-communist construction of Bulgarian national identity, as well as to understand how the way communist heritage is interpreted and represented in the Museum is being perceived and even contested by Bulgarian citizens.

# 6. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The primary objective of this research is to explore how contemporary discourses and representations of communist heritage in Bulgaria are implicated in and influence the post-communist transformation of the nation's identity. In order to achieve this in the investigation of the case study of the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia, the study aims, on the one hand, to explore how the art objects selected and claimed as national heritage are embedded within and produced by the discourses of the museum institution, and the effects that this creates in terms of the production of particular social identities (Rose, 2007a). On the other hand, the research also aims to understand how visitors of the museum interpret the exhibition of communist heritage artefacts and its narrative, and how that relates to the meanings they attach to those objects and to their sense of national identity. And last, but not least, this study also seeks to explore the representation of Bulgarian communist heritage at the Museum of Socialist Art in terms of what makes it an issue of dissonance and contestation among the domestic audience. Therefore, I continue by resting my assumption on the variety of positions and criticisms in reaction to the concept and rendering of the Museum of Socialist Art I discussed in chapter five. Next, the research objectives are transformed into one main research question and three research sub-questions which will guide the execution and analysis of this study.

**Research Question:** What are the implications of communist heritage tourism in the post-communist renovation of Bulgarian national identity?

**Sub-Question 1:** How is Bulgarian communist heritage represented and interpreted at the Museum of Socialist Art?

**Sub-Question 2:** How do visitors perceive the representation of communist heritage at the Museum of Socialist Art?

**Sub-Question 3:** What makes the representation of Bulgarian communist heritage at the Museum of Socialist Art a case of *"dissonant heritage"* for domestic visitors?

# 7. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will provide an overview and argumentation of the selected research design, the data generation and analysis techniques, as well as a short reflection on my own positionality as a researcher who is actively involved in the creation of knowledge.

## 7.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The methodological approach I have adopted to fulfill the objectives of this research is an explorative single-case study, which Yin (2003a:13, quoted in Xiao & Smith, 2006:739) has defined as: *"an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident"*. The reason I have selected this particular research design is that I believe that studying complex and perhaps even controversial phenomena, such as the one currently in question, must seek to explore and understand them within their physical settings, historical backgrounds and specific socio-cultural and political contexts, as the development of such phenomena is inextricably

linked to and constituted by their contexts. That, according to Stake (2000, quoted in Xiao & Smith, 2006:739) is one of the main vantage characteristics of the case study approach. Furthermore, it allows for a qualitative, interpretive approach towards the investigation and analysis of the various practices and meanings which get constructed and come to existence within specific social and historical contexts (Hartley, 1994:212, quoted in Xiao & Smith, 2006:740).

In this sense, a case study approach to studying the construction and representations of communist heritage in Bulgaria is a suitable design strategy since, as outlined in an earlier chapter, the theoretical underpinnings of the study are based on the contention that the meanings inscribed to heritage take shape within discourses, which are always embedded in the temporal and spatial frames of specific societal, political and historical contexts (Hall, 1997; Castells, 2000; Harvey, 2001; Graham & Howard, 2008). In addition, while the rationale of exploring this problem through a case study seeks to interpret the phenomenon through the lens of the theoretical and conceptual ground of this research, I recognize that, due to the intricate nature of such problems, the former may not be an all-comprehensive framework. Therefore, while the conceptual framework has been used as the definitive point of departure in generating and analyzing the empirical data, my own background knowledge of and experience with the context, as a Bulgarian citizen, has come to complement it, where necessary, in the course of the research. Aware of the critiques, related to the methodological challenges which the case study approach may pose during research, possibly leading to un-confirmable conclusions (e.g. Campbell, 1961, 1975 & Gummesson, 1991 & Rose, 1991 & Yin, 1981b, 2003a, quoted in Xiao & Smith, 2006:739), I am going to try and address the research quality criteria of validity and reliability through method triangulation and documenting my observations through photographs. For further accountability of the techniques of data generation I have used, the interview guides used in this study are provided in Appendix 1. Overall, Yin (2003a, quoted in Xiao & Smith, 2006:739) and Xiao and Smith (2006) argue that a case study research strategy can make use of multiple sources of data and techniques for data generation, such as document studies, observations, interviews, surveys, focus group interviews, etc. Next, I will outline the techniques of generating data that are deployed in this particular research.

## 7.2. DATA GENERATION

First of all, it is important here to underline that as a social science researcher, adopting a constructivist perspective, I subscribe to the idea that recognizes the active role of researchers in the construction of knowledge, and therefore in this study, I talk about what Jennifer Mason terms the generation of data (2002:52), rather than data collection. The latter, in my view, implies that data are 'out there' and researchers can merely collect them as givens and, therefore, rejects the notion of knowledge as inherently constructed. The methods for generation of empirical data, which I have deployed in this research, include observations, semi-structured interviews and textual reviews/document studies. In this respect, as sources of data were treated the setting and object exhibition of the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia, visitors and their interpretations of the phenomenon, as well as textual documents regarding the topic of the Museum of Socialist Art, such as the official concept-proposal of the Ministry of Culture, comments in the MSA Visitor Book, online news and magazine publications related to the researched problem, etc.

To start with, given that this study seeks to explore the construction and performance of a certain socio-political phenomenon (in this case communist heritage) within its "natural" setting and context, a suitable method of data generation is through observation. What I was interested in investigating in this specific case was the setting of the museum, including its physical and spatial organization as this revealed various data, which could hardly be captured by any other technique (Mason, 2002:85). Importantly, Barbara Kirshenblatt- Gimblett (1998), who is engaged with the study of heritage, tourism and museums, explains that central to the creation of museums are the practices of detachment, fragmentation and repositioning of objects. What is crucial about this is that through the removal of objects from their original surroundings and their repositioning in a new space and context, or in this case the museum exhibition, new meanings are inscribed to those objects. Museum exhibitions can therefore be seen as spaces of abstraction that bring together objects and artefacts never before seen standing in the same place at the same time and demonstrating specific relationships which cannot be witnessed under other circumstances (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). She then continues to argue that the new meanings, with which objects on display are endowed, lie with the people who create the exhibitions. This is what she calls the *"agency of display"*, as there is always certain knowledge implicated in the construction of an exhibition, and thus the exhibition turns into an exhibit of those who create it and their intents (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Furthermore, as argued in section 4.3, objects themselves bear no significance outside of their social life; that is, only when they are embedded in particular social practices and contexts do they begin to obtain meaning and signify a certain something (Rose, 2007b:220). Moving certain objects from the contexts for which they were produced into brand new contexts, and embedding them in particular social practices as participants in specific social interactions, therefore, creates a relationship where the objects and their multiple users mutually shape each other (Rose, 2007b:220).

As outlined in section 4.3, museum displays have the power to convey messages of memory, individual and collective identity and other projects of the modern corporate state (Lidchi, 1997; Preziosi, 2003). In this particular case, it was therefore critical to investigate the objects and representations on display at the Museum of Socialist Art in terms of the national heritage discourses they manifested and how that came to influence the post-communist identity transformation of Bulgarian citizens. Therefore, during observations at the Museum setting I paid attention to the different technologies of display at the institution (Rose, 2007a). That is, art objects were observed not as a simple assembly of artefacts, but rather the way that objects were displayed and contextualized in the museum space, their situation in relation to one another, the layout and floor plan of the exhibition, as well as their assigned interpretation (as on their labels, captions and information panels) (Lidchi, 1997; Rose, 2007a). In this way I aimed to look for the discourses on the past and its connections to the present which those institutional technologies foregrounded and prescribed (Hwang, 2009). Further, other visual and spatial aspects of the museum were observed, such as the architecture and entrance hall of the museum, the use of decorations and colors in the museum space, as well as any possible route recommendations and rules for behavior during the museum visit (Rose, 2007a). Similar observations were made in the souvenir shop and café of the Museum. This kind of observation strategy meant, however, that art objects were not to be observed and interpreted in terms of the thematic content which paintings and sculptures supposedly portrayed (Rose, 2007a). In addition, visitors were observed in terms of how they interacted with the objects on display and whether they followed the implicit and obvious rules of behaving and looking at the exhibit (Rose, 2007a). While studying the museum institution in this way can reveal certain discourses

of heritage and the social identities sought to be established, by observing the 'cues' which are supposed to trigger the 'appropriate' behaviour, reaction to and understanding of the exhibition (Rose, 2007a), a significant limitation of this method is that it does not account for the feelings and interpretations of visitors themselves (Hwang, 2009).

Thus, in order to gain a comprehension of the meanings and interpretations which both domestic and foreign visitors of the museum made, I used a method adopted by Park (2010) within an ethnographic heritage tourism study in South Korea. The method includes engaging visitors and staff in *'casual conversations'* (Spradley, 1979, quoted in Park, 2010:123), which is an effective participatory tool enabling the researcher *"to approach people in more naturalistic ways and avoid imposing situations"* (Park, 2010:123). Compared to formal interview situations, casual conversations held at the investigated setting aim to encourage people to express their views and feelings in a more unaffected manner, and therefore that allows for a better understanding of how interviewees make sense of what they observe and helps obtain tacit and implicit knowledge (Boyle, 1994, quoted in Park, 2010:123) about the discourses within which the meanings of communist heritage and national identity are constructed. For this purpose, questions were posed regarding the visitors' experiences, memories and feelings in relation to the way Bulgarian communist heritage was articulated in the museum collection, as well as about their "*beliefs and convictions*" (Welman & Kruger, 1999:196, quoted in Santos & Yan, 2008:886) about what aspects of it might have been re-framed or left out altogether. I, as the researcher, adopted the role of the 'interviewer-traveler' who *"wanders through the landscape and enters into conversations with the people encountered"* (Kvale, 1996:5, quoted in Park, 2010:123).

In total, I performed 22 semi-structured interviews at the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia. The sampling strategy I used was purposive sampling (Boeje, 2010:35-36) as I was aiming to reach a diverse range of meanings and interpretations of the problem and, therefore, looked for people of different generations, social backgrounds and positions, having different experiences with and vantage points in relation to Bulgarian communist heritage. The participants in my research had various origins – Bulgarian citizens of different generations (in their 20's, 30's, 40's, 50's and 60's), as well as foreign tourists from Western and Southern European countries, the USA, and one Chinese dissident, who escaped the country in the 1970's. Among them there were art experts, several students of art, history and architecture, university lecturers, a writer, a political scientist, a tour-operator, an artist-photographer, as well as a couple of elderly museum keepers (see Appendix 2 for details on the participants). There was no particular order in addressing the interview questions as that was defined according to the situation at hand to ensure a more natural flow of the interview; the participants' answers were not interrupted and time was allowed for extended answers, as suggested by Santos and Yan (2008). In addition to the casual interviews with visitors and museum staff, for the further elucidation of the research questions posed in this study, three qualitative semi-structured interviews were held (Mason, 2002:63-67) with the head of the National Art Gallery, the director and the curator of the Museum of Socialist Art in order to obtain information and knowledge about how choices were made regarding the selection, arrangement and interpretation of the museum exhibition, as well as about decisions of what to be left out. All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed in textual form.

Finally, in order to reach as comprehensive understanding of the researched issue as possible, I carried out a document study on sources such as the Ministry of Culture's official concept-

proposal for the MSA, the MSA Visitor Book, publications in electronic culture and news magazines, related to the researched topic, as well as alternative projects of remembrance and interpretation of communist heritage. I believe that this method was effective in expanding the specter of data relevant to the researched problem and the case of the MSA, helping to pick out different opinions and attitudes on the topic of Bulgaria's communist heritage, not limited to the artefacts displayed at the MSA only, but also acknowledging the existence of alternative attempts at heritage representation, outside of the state-supported one. In addition, I think that the textual reviews could complement the knowledge about how communist heritage in the case of the Museum of Socialist Art was perceived by a wider sample of people than those I could observe and interview during the short period of time I spent on the setting.

## 7.3. DATA ANALYSIS

When the data was generated and transcribed in a form ready for analysis, it was subject to interpretive reading, which aimed to reach through or beyond the data (Mason, 2002:149). This type of reading was again guided by the assumption that the researcher is an inextricable part in the process of knowledge construction, because interpretive reading is essentially concerned with what the researcher sees as the interviewees' interpretations and understandings of the social phenomenon in question (Mason, 2002). Interpretive reading helps provide an understanding of the tacit norms and rules within which the interviewees function and construct meanings, as well as of the discourses that they are possibly influenced by in the process. In the case of analyzing data generated from the exhibition observations, interpretive reading involved an emphasis on my own interpretations, as a researcher, of the narrative that was being produced by it (Mason, 2002). To improve the accountability of such an approach, I documented my observations with photographs of the setting and the exhibition, and kept memos on my own reflections on the setting, specific and mundane situations which I observed or participated in (Mason, 2002).

Next, acknowledging that the data is socially constructed and can therefore be subjective, partial and discursive, due to being subject to different interpretations, my task, as the researcher was to assemble the knowledge bits and pieces into a comprehensive analysis of the studied phenomenon (Park, 2010). In order to deconstruct and reconstruct the discourses and power relations taking shape through the visual display of objects of art and heritage in the museum institution, the data were analyzed in terms of *"their key themes, their claims to truth, their complexities and their silences"* (Rose, 2007a:187). In this respect, the techniques of discourse analysis, suggested by Gillian Rose (2007a) and largely based on Foucault, were put to work. This means that I had to explore how certain objects claimed as national heritage were embedded in and produced by the museum institution, and the effects that this created in terms of the production of particular social identities (Rose, 2007). The research questions served as a guide in the final construction of the analysis.

I acknowledge that discourse analysis as a visual critical methodology has certain limitations, which have already been implied earlier, namely that it is less concerned with the content of the images on display themselves and the possible conflicts that might exist within the institutional practices, as well as does not strongly tend to researchers' reflexivity in its conventional understanding in the social sciences (Rose, 2007a). With regard to reflexivity, Phillips and Hardy (2002, quoted in Rose, 2007c:148), however, assert that "*[a]cknowledging the constructed nature*

*is what constitutes discourse analysis's reflexivity*", while Tonkiss adds that, since discourse analyses constitute but a mere perspective of their analysts and thus cannot argue to be the only true version of the researched issues, what substitutes the notion of reflexivity is "*a certain modesty in our analytic claims*" (Tonkiss, 1998:260, quoted in Rose, 2007c:168).

In this respect, I must underline here that I intend to make no bold claims to objectivity and generalizability, as those inherently lead to obscuring and oppressing other knowledges and interpretations that may exist on the subject (Rose, 1997). As mentioned earlier, I share the understanding of many critical geographers that the knowledge we produce is always situated in complex contexts and power relations, as well as shaped by our own tacit assumptions as researchers. For the same reasons, it is also read and interpreted partially and subjectively (Rose, 1997), which is why I recognize that the problem I set out to investigate could have various alternative readings from the one I offer in this report. Here, I must also say that, despite Foucault's objections to positionality accounts, based on the assumption that we as researchers cannot be autonomous enough in order to position ourselves in a particular unchangeable relation to the research we do (quoted in Rose, 2007c:168), I still feel it is important to mention that this was a project of very personal significance to me. As a Bulgarian, who was born behind the Iron Curtain, but is largely a child of the complicated effects of the post-communist, democratic transition period in the country, I undertook this research as my quest to understand how even today, 24 years after the change, my nation's communist past continues to shape our social identities and perhaps also the ways Bulgaria is represented and perceived in Western imaginations.

In addition, I am aware that in the process of studying and writing about the phenomenon I set out to explore, I may have intentionally or unintentionally excluded or erased details which could have produced certain effects on the research (Rose, 1997). Such is the case with the data I generated on the content and themes of the art works on display at the MSA, on the conflicts within the management structure of the institution, and the disputes within the art circles in Sofia regarding the dubious inclusion of certain prominent art works in the MSA display. Despite possibly adding relevant insight and nuances into the problem, the limited time available for my research project, as well as the nature of the research objectives, brought me to the decision to leave those data out. As much effort as I made to document and account for the reasons which led me to do that, and thus interpret data in a particular way, such an attempt at 'transparent reflexivity' could not deliver a promise that there should be or are going to be no gaps and discrepancies in the ways different people would approach or interpret the subject-matter (Rose, 1997). Gillian Rose, therefore, calls for researchers' humbleness in the process and suggests:

*"What we may be able to do is something rather more modest, but, perhaps, rather more radical: to inscribe into our research practices some absences and fallibilities while recognizing that the significance of this does not rest entirely in our own hands"* (Rose, 1997:319).

In the following chapter I discuss the results of my research.

# 8. RESULTS

Before I continue to outline the research results I begin with a short description of the context of the Bulgarian transition, since gaining an insight into an ambiguous subject-matter, such as the museum articulation of Bulgarian communist heritage at the Museum of Socialist Art (MSA), requires its situation within the complex changes and processes taking place in the country's post-communist politico-economic and social life. This aims to help view and position the different communist heritage discourses, which emerged during my research, from the perspective of/in relation to/ the country's contemporary development. Further, the chapter will delineate three main discourses based on the museum narratives on the one hand, and the visitor-object interactions on the other, as well as the effects which the former and the latter produce in terms of the post-communist re-construction of the Bulgarian national identity. Having done this, I will continue with a summary which will frame those discourses in terms of the research questions, drawn in chapter six.

## 8.1 THE CONTEXT

To begin to comprehend the discourses shaping the problem of (museumizing) communist history and heritage in Bulgaria and how that past still weighs on the present development of the country and its nation, one must take a closer look at the contemporary post-communist contexts, within which the Museum of Socialist Art emerges as a metaphorical manifestation of the social and political parallels and tensions boiling under the surface.  24 years since the end of the regime, in the eyes of an external observer, Bulgaria may, at a first glance, seem as a country which has (nearly) completed its transition from state communism into a liberal democracy. And indeed, ostensibly there are the democratic elections, the representative government, the freedom of speech, and Coca-Cola, MacDonald's, and Starbucks brand logos twinkle on top of enduring, communist-times buildings in every major city in the country. However, at a closer inspection, it becomes evident that the achievements of the so called transition process in Bulgaria (compared by an interviewee to "the obscurantism of the Middle ages") for the past two decades have included many undesired effects which the Bulgarian people rallying for freedom, democracy and improved living standards at the beginning of the changes had not hoped for. In other words, the democratic elections have more often than not resulted in a mere rearrangement of the same "political oligarchy"  (Horvat & Štiks, 2012, no page numbers indicated) that turned participation in politics into the most profitable business (Vassilev, 2011), the discourses defining the supposedly free market have mainly centered around words such as 'monopoly', 'oligarchy', and 'cartels' (Daynov in Vagabond, 2013), while according to the Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders, in 2013 Bulgaria was ranked 87th in the world, showing just how limited the freedom of speech and the independence of the press is in the country (Reporters Without Borders, 2013).

The European Union has been the main player in the post-communist restructuration of Bulgaria for the past two decades. The 1993 Copenhagen criteria draw out the series of reforms the country must implement, as well as the relationship between the applicant as the docile student that must comply with the rules and the European Union as the tutor and supervisor, who is responsible to *"educate, discipline and punish"* the Balkan state in the process of its transition (Horvat & Štiks, 2012). Horvat and Štiks (2012) have critiqued the strategy of the European Union in the post-communist Balkan countries' integration process as a neo-colonial "*mission*

*civilisatrice*" which has remained oblivious to certain trends and contingencies endemic to the region, such as the corruption and nepotism of the political classes, and has therefore compromised the countries' post-communist transformation, feeding into the social division and the opening of large income gaps. Bulgaria's EU membership granted in 2007 was the long-awaited reward which was expected to come with "*the democratic and economic pay off*" (Horvat & Štiks, 2012). However, six years after the integration of Bulgaria into the European Union, there is a wide-spread gloomy sense of unfulfilled promises and neglect (Horvat & Štiks, 2012).

In fact, the term 'transition' has gained a painful connotation in Bulgarian society, as the immediate consequences of the market-driven 'reforms' were the shutting down of Bulgarian industry and agriculture, the rise of unemployment rates, inflation, the decline in wages, the dissolution of social welfare and, as an effect, the persistent impoverishment of the Bulgarian people (Vassilev, 2011, no page numbers indicated). Official statistics show that in 2012 Bulgaria was the poorest EU member-state with GDP per capita as low as 47% of the EU average (Eurostat, 2013). At the same time, organized crime, nepotism and cronyism have been thriving, alongside embezzlement, smuggling, influence abuse and protection rackets, to the consistent detriment of the living standards and social and economic rights of ordinary citizens (Vassilev, 2011). Hence, in the context of Bulgaria's continuing integration in the European Union, the country has been subject to repeated monitoring and punishment procedures, justified with the failure of the state institutions to fully implement the required measures and complete the so called transition process.  Such discourses of '*incomplete transition*' (Horvat & Štiks, 2012) also imply the continual existence of unbroken ties between the communist totalitarian past and the democratic present of the country.

At the backdrop of the convulsive economic environment, the political situation in the country has been rather unsteady, as well. In 1990, Bulgaria was the first state of the former Eastern bloc to re-elect the Bulgarian Socialist Party, a direct successor of the Bulgarian Communist Party which ruled the country in the second half of the 20th century (Kostov & Lingard, 2002). They won the elections in 1994, too. Following the economic crisis of 1996, in 1997 a democratic pro-Western government was elected, hoping it would bring the much desired positive changes to life (Daynov, in Vagabond, 2013). Instead, the capitalist reforms continued to take the shape of shady privatization schemes, public spending cutbacks, rampant corruption and social neglect. With the massive withdrawal of trust in the political elite and the model of governance (Daynov, in Vagabond, 2013), the elections in 2001 and 2005 produced a phenomenon dubbed in Bulgarian society as *"voting for the lesser evil"*, which did not bring any change of the status-quo.

However, in 2009 GERB (translated as Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria) – a new player on the national political scene, with a pro-European, anti-Communist and anti-corruption rhetoric united the votes of the majority of the Bulgarian citizens and won the elections. What the most recent government, led by ex-prime-minister Boyko Borisov, accomplished though was far from addressing the post-communist economic, political and cultural crises strangling the Bulgarian nation, but rather led to the further interfusion of the state and the judiciary system with the organized crime circles, the business oligarchy and the media, the further concentration of state power and finances, the undermining of the rule of law and the legitimacy of the institutions (Daynov, in Vagabond, 2013). In addition, justified by the threats of the global financial crisis, draconian fiscal austerity measures were taken, cutting down public spending in all sectors by 20%, further aggravating the socio-economic immiseration in the country (Vassilev, 2011). As a result, in the winter of 2013, prime-minister

Boyko Borisov resigned following a massive wave of protests against the low standards of life and the dysfunctional and corrupt government and administration, whose rule was often compared to a mafia clique and a totalitarian regime.

Not surprisingly, the recent parliamentary elections in May 2013 were indicative of the severe democratic deficit in the country. The election turn-out was little over 50% (CIK, 2013). The new government was composed by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), with the majority of their electorate being citizens over the age of 60 (Dnevnik, 2013), and the centrist liberal party Movement for Rights and Freedoms, whose principal electorate is the Turkish ethnic minority in the country. Many Bulgarian citizens refused to vote for any of the political parties competing in the parliamentary elections for lack of trust in them that has evolved into a full-blown, general political apathy. Others have been '*voting with their feet*', opting to look for opportunities for 'normal life' abroad, as by 2011, according to data quoted by Vassilev (2011), 1.2 million Bulgarians, many of whom young and active people, had emigrated from the country.

The evident connections between the major political parties, the ex-communist *nomenklatura*, and powerful businesses of questionable, and often criminal, character standing behind the parties and sponsoring them, have ruined the political legitimacy in the country, as ordinary citizens no longer see any difference between their corrupt political elite and the organized crime groups (Vassilev, 2011). At the same time, the employment and income insecurity, the consistent governmental neglect of culture and education policy reforms, the repeatedly failed trust of the people, the lack of punishment for powerful figures that have systematically abused their influence, and, in general, the deepening distrust in the legitimacy of political elections, the democratic institutions, and the judiciary system over the years of transition, have to a great extent stifled the development of a strong democratic civil society and the sporadic attempts of resistance have been greeted time and time again with the further consolidation of the status quo.

The most recent example of that are the current anti-governmental protests taking place in Bulgaria. Hardly a month had passed since the early elections and the introduction of the new government, led by prime-minister Plamen Oresharski of the BSP, when the country erupted in massive discontent from the reforms carried out by the cabinet, as well as refusing to accept the dubious appointment of ministers and other leading figures, many of whom were either involved in the communist secret police, or were implicated in corruption schemes in the past. Moreover, some respected journalists and academics have speculated that the tactic of the new government is reminiscent of attempts at reinstating the Russian political and economic influence in the country and taking a step back from its European orientation. In a recent commentary on some of the new cabinet reforms Bulgarian journalist Ivo Indzhev referred to Russia as "*the masters of Bulgaria*" who "*demonstrated the imperial rule of 'divide and conquer' to an old province that dared imagine for a short while that it can stick its tongue out to its metropole.*" (Ivo, 2013). In a similar note, the German investigative journalist Jürgen Roth warned in a commentary on the recent political events in the country, including the structure and composition of the new cabinet of ministers, led by Prime-Minister Plamen Oresharski, that: "*What is now taking place in Bulgaria is a tragedy not only for the Bulgarian people. It is a tragedy for Europe as a whole. The new government can lead the country in one direction only – toward the Kremlin of Putin*" (DW, 2013).

An observation that could be made based on the trends I mentioned above, is that the significant and consistent participation of the Bulgarian Socialist Party in almost every government mandate since the fall of the Regime in 1989 is rather telling of the existence of a distinct phenomenon, which has been more or less common across many of the post-communist states in Eastern Europe – namely the so called *"communist nostalgia"* or *Ostalgia* (wordplay with the German word for East – 'Ost', and the word 'nostalgia'*)*. Slovenian sociologist Mitja Velikonja (2008: 118-134) has found that the phenomenon consists of two strains: the passive one is characterized by sentimental cherishing of the symbolic legacy of the 'good old times', while the active one displays a tendency among people to look critically at the present dysfunctional reality through the lens of the accomplishments of the communist regimes and their ability to unite the masses towards a cause. Despite the democratic state-building and all other changes associated with the Western orientation of Bulgaria, based on my interview data, both strains of Ostalgia seem to be present in the post-communist development of Bulgarian society, showing that two decades after the collapse of the totalitarian regime attitudes and emotions towards the communist past and heritage are still unresolved and strongly divided. Horvat and Štiks (2012) critique the popular interpretation of the problem of communist nostalgia as a desire of the people to go back to living under the conditions of state socialism similar to the sort of 'slaves grow to love their chains', as it merely evades seeing through the uncomfortable truths about the transition process and the dysfunctions of the kind of liberal democracy that has been building in post-communist societies. Instead, they suggest that in order to understand the predicaments in the post-communist transformations in those countries, one must try to see post-communist regimes as a "*conglomeration of political elites, attached businesses and their Western partners, media corporations, NGOs promoting the holy union of electoral democracy and neoliberal economy, organized crime (itself intimately related to the political and economic elites), foreign-owned predatory banks and, finally, a corrupt judiciary and corrupt unions*", a combination of players which have their eyes on the plundering of the remaining resources (Horvat & Štiks, 2012).

How does the emergence of the Museum of Socialist Art (during the most recent government of PM Boyko Borisov) fit in the picture of the turbulent post-communist transformation in Bulgaria? Moreover, what was implied in the recent words of the MSA director that "…*despite all the administrative and museum-practice related imperfections and controversies of the Museum of Socialist Art, Bulgaria needs it* [the museum] *now more than ever…*" (Sega, 2013)? Part of the rituals symbolic of the break-up with an oppressive totalitarian past in Bulgaria was the transformation of the heritage landscape (Verdery, 1999). While during its rule, the regime had made itself ubiquitously present through thousands of memorials, monuments and areas designated for the commemoration of the anti-fascist resistance movement and the glorious construction of the socialist state, after 1989 many of those reminders were immediately taken down of their pedestals, destroyed or simply abandoned to the mercy of the elements. For years on end, there was no explicit official stance on the matter of the preservation of the communist material legacy, which was reflected in the complete lack of governmental policy about it (Vukov, 2008; Ministry of Culture, Concept…, 2010). For the most part, the history of Bulgaria during the second half of the 20th century was simply snipped out from history books and museum narratives in the country, which fits the first scenario of dealing with post-communist identity transformations suggested by Young and Kaczmarek (2008), which I discussed in section 4.4.3. Although there had been a few ideas for the creation of a museum devoted to the communist past which had to display a revised public discourse and representation of it, none of

them was really materialized (Vukov, 2008:no page numbers indicated). The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov had been suggested as the most appropriate setting for such an exposition, but in 1999 it followed the destiny of other destroyed monuments and a flower garden was laid in its place (Vukov, 2008), turning it into the symbolic grave of Bulgarian communism.

Moreover, in line with the country's Western orientation, inbound tourism was adapted to the contemporary needs of the country's post-totalitarian, capitalist democratic re-invention, consequently excising communist heritage sites and artefacts (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011) from organized tourist packages. One of my interviewees, a middle-aged tourism geographer whose career started as a tour guide of English-speaking tourist groups in the 1990's, explained that: "...*as a guide who accompanied the groups, my job was to make the tourists stick with me at all times and to see the world through my eyes. Though they did show a lot of interest in communism and asked about post-communist life, I didn't tell them...In fact, I would tell them a lot more about other things in Bulgaria. About its very old culture, about the beautiful nature, how ordinary people live in the villages...* " This aestheticized image displaying Bulgaria as a country of rich and diverse nature, history and culture aimed to frame it as a safe, somehow romanticized and, most of all, "*normal*" destination (quoted from an interview with a Bulgarian tour operator (male, in his 50's), 2013), attempting to disassociate it from any undesirable images of its past behind the Iron Curtain.

Until the emergence of the MSA in 2011 and apart from a couple of temporary exhibitions during the transition years, the artefacts of the totalitarian regime failed to find their place in a museum setting (Vukov, 2008). Some of the quoted reasons for that included the lack of funds and the insufficient will to execute a project that would most certainly achieve one thing – another conflict in society and in the political circles, just like the events devoted to the commemoration of the victims of the totalitarian epoch that had invariably been accompanied by mixed and controversial interpretations (Vukov, 2008). In that regard, Nikolai Vukov (2008) suggests that the root of the lack of museumization of the communist heritage in Bulgaria for such a long time after the collapse of the regime must be sought in the symbolic role of the museum institution as a main instrument of ideological propaganda and indoctrination employed by the ruling party. In fact, similar to Castells' (2000) account of the use of culture and the revision of history in communist states for the construction of homogenous and orderly society fully compliant with the one-party rule, in Bulgaria the museum institution was, too, employed in the hi-jacking and reconstruction of national history and identity discourse in order to demonstrate the existence of the socialist idea all along and the logical road to the establishment of the socialist society in the Bulgarian state from Antiquity through to its glorious triumph over the fascist monarchic oppression in the mid- 20th century, all the while using chronology (Vukov, 2008) as a method of enhancing the truthfulness and validity of the discourse.

The National Museum of the Revolutionary Movement (established in 1950), the National Museum of the Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship (established in 1958) and many other similar national and regional museums were embodiments of the museumized communist totalitarian propaganda, party self-legitimation and the centralization of national history discourse (Vukov, 2008). Workers and peasants were all required to visit museums and their organized special activities by the power of contracts binding state enterprises to ensure that this happened with no exception. After 1989, however, it was presumed that those contracts did not matter anymore. The National Museums of the Revolutionary Movement and the Bulgarian-Soviet

Friendship were closed down and their holdings were for the most part taken over by the National History Museum, the National Art Gallery and the National Art Academy (Vukov, 2008). As a whole, the museum institution in Bulgaria suffered a steep decline, because many citizens lost interest in museums as they kept associating it with the same old practices and history narratives of state communism (Vukov, 2008) that were no longer in sync with the "New Times". An alternative conceptualization and visualization of the recent history of Bulgaria needed to be institutionalized (Vukov, 2008).

However, as one of the participants in my research pointed out, finding a critical and balanced approach to narrate the communist past as history is a complicated task, considering that the experts responsible for it would be the same people who had been writing history books and designing museum exhibitions during the regime, educated to believe in the state version of history as the only true narrative (a PhD student in history, in her 20's, interview data, 2013). As the production of alternative discourses on communist heritage and history proved to be "*difficult*", because of the sense of "*disorientation*" caused by the profound post-totalitarian societal and political changes (Verdery, 1999:35) and the multiple parallel attitudes toward the recent past, the response of the cultural and educational institutions in Bulgaria was to remain silent on that period for the large part (Vukov, 2008). Nikolai Vukov (2008) explains the complexities related to the post-communist museum representation of communist heritage in Bulgaria with the concept of the "*unmemorable*" heritage (based on the notion of the "*limits of representation*" explored by historians, such as Saul Friedlander (ed.), 1992, quoted in Vukov, 2008). For him, the unmemorable is a "*case of simultaneous remembering and forgetting*" a kind of heritage that is considered "*unworthy*" of public representation or, otherwise put, it signifies:

*"… things that are not subject to forgetting but face restraints in representation, that are stored in the mind but not employed in narratives, that are preserved as memory traces but not embodied in materialized forms." (Vukov, 2008: no page numbers indicated)*

Indeed, the refusal of the general public and the state institutions to consider any of the material legacies of communism as cultural and historical heritage that has to be preserved during the first two decades after the end of the regime, the avoidance of meaningful reflection on the communist past as evidenced in its passing mention in the educational system and the lack of its representation in the museum institution, should not be considered as a mere act of erasing 'unworthy' heritage in order to better fit into the new politico-economic contexts. Instead, the problem must be explored within the meanings which different groups of people in post-communist Bulgaria attach to that heritage from the perspective of the present, and the discourses which are formed in the process, in order to look for a balanced critical approach to conceptualizing communist history and heritage of the country, while taking into account the multiplicity of voices.

Indicative of the arising need in Bulgarian society for such meaningful reflection on the communist past is the recent emergence of a few projects aimed at the recollection of different aspects of it. One of those projects is the creation of an online forum called "I lived Socialism" (through Sofia Echo, 2005) by Bulgarian contemporary writer Georgi Gospodinov, where participants of different generations could share their authentic personal stories and experiences of life under socialism, as well as an online exhibition called "Inventory Book of

Socialism"[1], both of which were collected in book form in 2006 (Vukov, 2008). By giving predominance to individual memories, these projects aimed to avoid creating a superimposing narrative (Vukov, 2008) which would almost certainly result in generating further polemics in society and politics. Another very recent example is the project of three young Bulgarian artists, born in the 1980's, who created an online museum showcasing hundreds of specimen representing the visual arts in Bulgaria during socialism. The project, established in 2013, is called SOCMUS[2] and its collection displays objects varying from cinema and theatre posters through to post stamps and political posters, all produced under the regime. In addition, the online museum hosts a blog where people of different generations, including artists, could share their feedback, ideas and memories. In addition, in 2012 the University of Sofia held, for the first time since 1989, an academic conference devoted to the legacy of Lyudmila Zhivkova – the daughter of Dictator Todor Zhivkov and an avid cultural ambassador of the People's Republic of Bulgaria in the 1970's. The event aimed to reflect on and evaluate her contributions, which, however, ended in a public scandal instigated by members of the democratic political alliance, condemning the conference as "*an attempt to use the University to support the rehabilitation and spreading of the propaganda of the BCP/BSP*" (Sega, 2012). Despite the general lack of official museum representations of communism in the country before the opening of the MSA, these few projects suggest that rather than resigning this part of history to forgetting, the discourse transformations and re-conceptualizations of communist heritage had already started taking shape in alternative spaces of remembering and heritage preservation, with most of them being transferred to the Internet (Vukov, 2008).

As mentioned in chapter five, the first state-supported representation of communist heritage in post-totalitarian Bulgaria - the Museum of Socialist Art – opened doors in September 2011, in Sofia (Vukov, 2012). The project was initiated and carried out by the Ministry of Culture within the most recent government of GERB and Prime-Minister Boyko Borisov. It was a part of a "Concept for the Leading Museums in the Capital", submitted in January 2010, which envisioned cultural heritage as "*a measure of the standard of life and a resource for sustainable development, especially in the sphere of culture tourism*" (Ministry of Culture, Concept…, 2010:4) and emphasized the role of the modern museum as a "*mediator orientating visitors in the historic environment and spreading knowledge and information about heritage, as well as preserving it*" (Ministry of Culture, Concept…, 2010:5). The concept listed a proposal for the re-conceptualization and refurbishment of three museums of art and history in the capital city, as well as the creation of a museum of totalitarian art. The alleged purpose of this concept of the ministry of culture was to "*transform Sofia into a sustainable and attractive European cultural centre by developing and displaying its rich and diverse cultural and historic heritage along the lines of the global and European trends in approaching heritage*" (Ministry of Culture, Concept…, 2010: 3). In other words, what could be seen in the sudden interest of the government in projects promoting Bulgarian cultural and historic heritage is what George Yúdice refers to as the "*expediency of culture*", or the use of culture as a resource, which has the capacity to circulate globally, for the accomplishment of socio-political and economic purposes (2003:9-11). In this sense, the proposal reveals the underlying purpose of "Europeanization" of Bulgarian culture and heritage and, thus, the need to emphasize the European belonging of the Bulgarian nation.

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[1] For more information on the "Inventory Book of Socialism", visit: http://ica-sofia.org/en/archive/visual-seminar/resident-fellows/item/64-an-inventory-book-of-socialism?tmpl=component&print=1
[2] For more information on SOCMUS, visit: www.socmus.com

With regard to the proposal for the museum of totalitarian art, the concept was rather laconic, but it justified it with the fact that Bulgaria was one of the last ex-communist countries which at that point had no museum devoted to its totalitarian past, since for a long time "*the material legacy of the era was of no interest to the system of cultural heritage*" in the country (Ministry of Culture, Concept…, 2010:7). Other details in the proposal included the potential setting of the museum - to the east of the city centre and, therefore, "*excised from the historical centre of Sofia and thus allowing for the impartial interpretation of the exhibition, devoid of any other historic meanings*" (Ministry of Culture, Concept…, 2010:21). In other words, the Ministry's original concept of the Museum of Socialist Art may speak of intentions of the state institutions, through the detachment of communist artefacts from their original or context-related historical surroundings, to produce and impose a 'sanitized' and aestheticized narrative of the legacies of the recent past, stripped from any alternative, and possibly (politically) undesirable, meanings they may hold.

In section 4.1, however, I discussed the inherently value-laden and subjective nature of heritage (Harvey, 2001), which is all about meaning and representation (Lowenthal, 1997, quoted in Munasinghe:253, 2005; Graham et al, 2000, quoted in Timothy & Nyaunpane, 2009), turning any singular, superimposed heritage narrative into a source of "*dissonance*" and "*contestation*" among the multiple meanings and interpretations different social groups attach to that heritage (Ashowrth & Larkham 1994; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Therefore, I investigated the case of the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia in terms of the institutional discourse on communist heritage it produces and the linkages it establishes between the recent past and the present development of the nation, on the one hand, as well as a variety of meanings and interpretations visitors of different backgrounds attached to the artefacts on display, on the other. During my research at the Museum of Socialist Art I encountered a multitude of stories and recollections, which I have united into three main narratives, each of them contributing uniquely to the post-communist renovation of Bulgarian national identity.

I will start with the institutional narrative, or the official heritage and identity discourse as articulated through the selected communist artefacts, their embedding within the museum space and practice, as well as in the narrative of three museum experts I interviewed. Namely, they were the head of the National Art Gallery (an art historian, female, in her 50's), the Director of the MSA and Deputy-Director of the National Art Gallery (an art historian, university lecturer and former Deputy-Minister of Culture in the period 2002-2004, female, in her 60's), as well as a curator at the MSA (an art historian and university lecturer, male, in his 30's). The second narrative will address two rather opposite positions of a group of Bulgarian citizens (in their 40's, 50's and 60's), for whom the MSA exhibit was a symbolic reminder of a significant part of their lives, spent during the years of the totalitarian regime. And lastly, the third narrative will deal with the positions of two distinct groups of MSA visitors, who also participated in my research, a few young people from the so called "transition generations" of Bulgarian citizens (in their 20's and 30's) and several foreign tourists. These two groups were however united by their use of the museum space and the artefacts as a learning ground, where they could gain more knowledge about a past which was rather unfamiliar to them.

Shopping can be one of the very "*delights of tourism*" (Horne, 1984:248). The modern museum, too, as a commercially-oriented enterprise, participating in the competitive field of the cultural industry (Ames, 1992, quoted in Lidchi, 1997) and as a site of image and object appropriation (Horne, 1984:249) – both literally, and figuratively – often includes spaces which could satisfy its profit-driven nature. More often than not, those spaces will be taken up by a souvenir shop and/or a leisurely museum café where visitors can buy "*another proof of appropriation*" (Horne, 1984:249) of the images and ideas of the places and objects they tour. The souvenir shop and the museum café can thus be seen as the metaphorical centerpieces of consumerism and the capitalist enterprise of the modern museum. What images of the capitalist transition of post-totalitarian Bulgaria would a visitor of the MSA buy and take away with them?

Upon entrance in the small souvenir shop, situated right under the café terrace, the visitor will be greeted by the seller, whose language skills are limited to Bulgarian, plus several key words in English. To the right of the entrance, they will see a wooden wall unit, decorated with several kitsch trinkets and souvenirs, such as coffee mugs, t-shirts, statuettes, badges, magnets with the stereotypical symbols and faces of 20th-century communism, a limited number of books on socialist realism and Bulgarian communist monuments, as well as DVD's with examples of Bulgarian cinema under the communist regime. All in very short supply. In the eyes of a Bulgarian visitor, the entire experience of the souvenir shop could easily be likened to shopping in communist-times local 'mixed stores', whose shelves, much like the ones in the that shop, often stood rather under-stocked due to the scarcity of consumer items. Likewise, the museum café – a spacious hall with a terrace, rented out to an external entrepreneur, completes this sense of scarcity, as whilst the space could be a consumer hot-spot, its plastic chairs and tables remain empty most of the time, and its bar is as under-stocked as the community cafes during state communism.

In that sense, the shop and the café at the MSA can be seen as fitting metaphors of the lurking communist legacies still strangling Bulgarian transition capitalism. Unlike the expectations of the economic restructuration to bring better life standards to the nation, privatization and investment projects over the past 24 years have often served short-term corrupt, clientelist and nepotistic interests of a limited circle of people with power, instead of following a consistent and adequate socio-economic policy and, in effect, proving detrimental to the ordinary citizens of the poorest of the EU-27. Thus, without necessarily consciously realizing it, in the way these spaces of the Museum of Socialist Art are designed and managed, a visitor could pick up an image of a post-communist Bulgaria still struggling with the bequests of its past, showing just how powerful the messages of the modern museum and heritage tourism are.

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At the end of May this year the president of Bulgaria, Rosen Plevneliev, spoke at a press conference explaining why he refused to sign a decree on the appointment of a former member of the communist secret investigation services (the repressive state apparatus) as a Bulgarian ambassador abroad by stating that:

"*It is my foremost principle to look ahead (to the future), rather than backwards (at the past). To not look back on the contingencies of the totalitarian regime and the [ex-] communist services, but most of all, to look ahead, towards a democratic Bulgaria, open to the wide world. If we do not wish*

*to have the [world's] doors closed to us, we need to show the new, modern faces of Bulgaria."* (President Rosen Plevneliev in Vesti, 2013).

While at first glance this is related to an event that has little to do with the subject-matter of this research, I believe it is a good demonstration of the post-communist political language dominating the self-legitimating and positioning measures taken by the government, regardless of its mandate. It emphasizes the ultimate goal to transform the country into a modern, liberal democratic state, with the tutelage by and in close collaboration with its European partners. How does this political discourse relate to the Museum of Socialist Art and the representation of communist heritage in Bulgaria?

As mentioned earlier, the power of heritage lies in its malleability and the knowledge, images and values it is invested with (Harvey, 2001; Graham, 2002), which allow for its instrumental use to serve different commercial, political and cultural purposes of the present (Ashworth & Tundbridge, 1999; Graham & Howard, 2008). The representation of heritage, thus, and its inclusion in the systems of domestic and international tourism, especially through museum display, is a strongly effective means of communication of desired images and ideas from the local to the global scale, in this way differentiating peoples and places, creating distinct identities, as well as assisting state control and regulation of individuals and whole nations (Hall, 1997; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1999; Graham, 2002; Bennett, 1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a). As the ownership of heritage artefacts and places is most often held by governmental institutions, they also wield the power to decide on the ways those objects and places will be put to work and the heritage discourses they are going to produce or re-produce (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994:2-3) in accordance with their specific ideological, political, commercial or even personal interests. Translated in the terms of this particular case study, the articulation of communist heritage at the Museum of Socialist Art can be viewed as a state cultural enterprise and a political statement aiming to establish a specific position of the modern, democratic Bulgarian nation-state in relation to its communist totalitarian past of the second half of the 20th century, to the attention of both domestic and foreign audiences, and therefore serving certain politico-economic agenda.

As the first state-initiated museum in post-totalitarianism to house a collection of objects, produced during the communist regime, the Museum of Socialist Art shows the ultimate materialization of the contemporary state discourse regarding the meaning and representation of communist material heritage. The political and socio-cultural significance of this project is accentuated when one considers the fact that up until 2011 none of the material legacies of that era, be it art works, buildings or everyday paraphernalia, had the legal status of heritage (Ministry of Culture, Concept..., 2010). In this sense, by placing a select range of artefacts produced during communism in a museum setting, the Museum of Socialist Art constitutes the first governmental act, in the post-communist history of Bulgaria, of inscribing communist heritage with the meaning of national heritage. One detail is crucial, however, and it is that the museum is a product of a top-down approach, designed and carried out by a group of art experts and museum workers, employed by the institutions belonging to the Ministry of Culture, and led by Minister Vezhdi Rashidov himself, who is also the master-mind behind the MSA project. The broad public views had not been consulted prior to the project realization (Vukov, 2012). In other words, the MSA is not merely a place with educational and entertaining functions, but the attempt of the government to narrate and impose a certain version of the Bulgarian communist history and the way post-communist Bulgaria nowadays relates to it. What is the museum's discourse, how is it manifested through the artefacts and the institutional technologies of the

Museum of Socialist Art and, since the power of discourse is that it is productive (Rose, 2007c:143), what are the effects that it creates?

## 8.2.1 A TOUR THROUGH THE MUSEUM OF SOCIALIST ART

To start with, if one decides to pay a visit to the MSA in Sofia, the task of finding the correct location of the museum will not be an easy one. Situated in a neighborhood east of the centre of the capital, the Museum is set on the premises of a restored building which belonged to the Ministry of Culture, amidst landmarks, such as the Traffic Police Headquarters, the Technical Library of Sofia, the high-rise business centre buildings and communist-style residential flats. The way to the MSA has not been signposted anywhere in the city for the past two years it has been functioning. If one does manage to find the right location, they have to cross the mall-like passage through the business towers (Picture 2) only to encounter a sight which can be anything but expected. That is, in order to enter the museum premises, a visitor is stopped at a large front gate where a warden in a police-like uniform inside the booth will usher them through it (Picture 3). Once having entered the museum park, the first thing that catches the eye is the large red star, which topped the former House of the Bulgarian Communist Party until 1990 when it was taken down. Discovered in a shattered state lying in the back yard of the mineral baths building in Sofia, nowadays the red star welcomes the visitors of the MSA, situated right across the front entrance (Pictures 4 and 5).
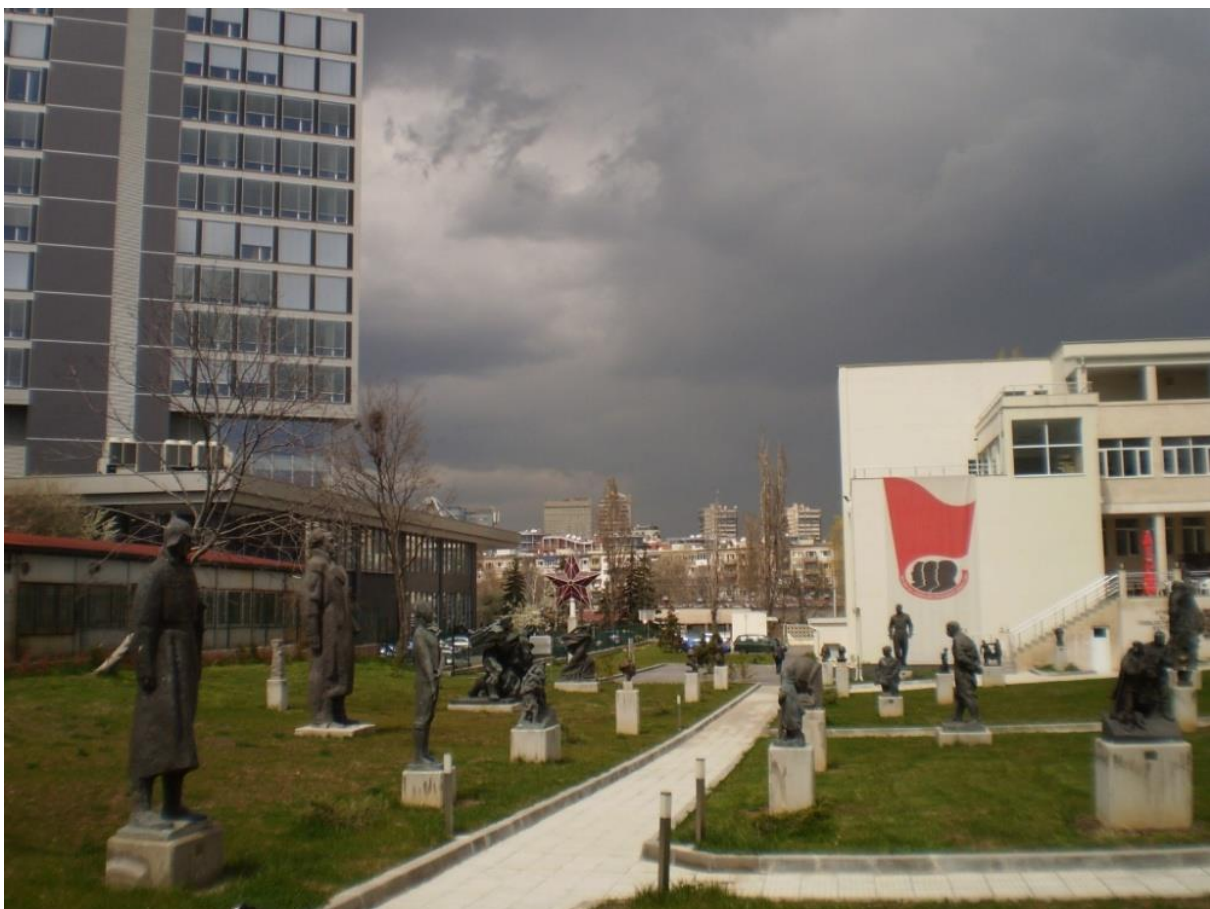


Picture 2: The business towers (to the left) in the background of the MSA

Picture 3: The front gate and the warden cabin at the entrance of the MSA.


Picture 4: The Red Star atop the House of the Bulgarian Communist Party before 1989
Source: http://e-vestnik.bg/5936


Picture 5: The Red Star exhibited at the MSA

Having passed by the ticket booth, the visitor arrives in the sculpture park, which is the only permanent exhibition of the MSA. The park itself is a green yard space, where the sculptures, most of them products of the socialist realist framework, are ordered along a paved path and over the grass lawns in a chess-like pattern (Pictures 6 and 7). There are no signs indicating that walking on the grass is prohibited, and yet most visitors stick to the paved path only. The path is straight with intersections, cutting the green areas into equal squares. There are no benches in the area, which invites the visitor only for a short walk among the sculpture exhibit and does not predispose them to longer observation and contemplation.
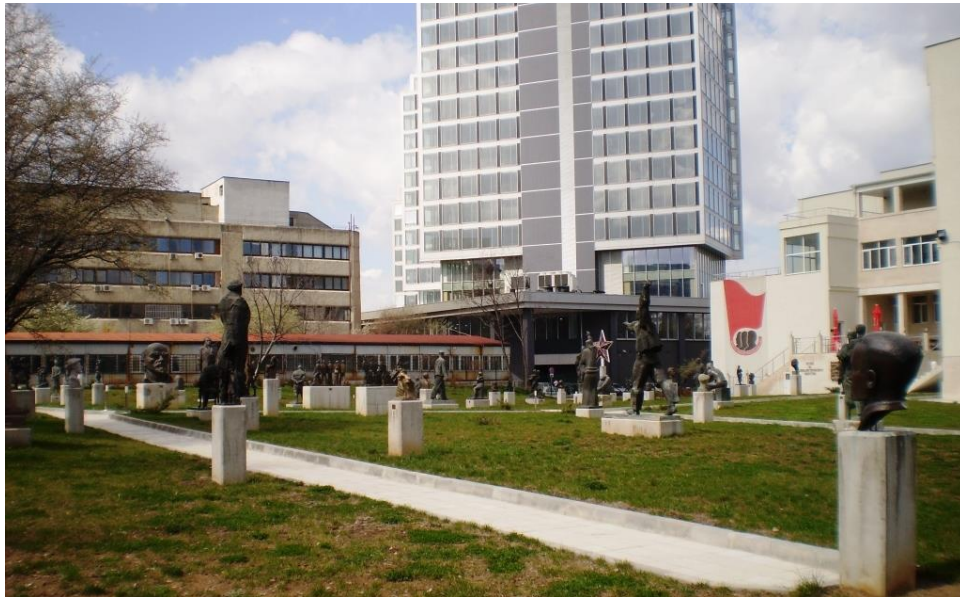


Picture 6: Museum park panorama with business towers in the background



Picture 7: Museum park panorama with MSA building

The themes on display within the collection centre around the personality cult, typical of the more stringent Stalinist totalitarian sub-period of the era. The majority of statues, busts and heads picture the prominent leaders and other political figures of the Bulgarian and Soviet regimes – Lenin, Georgi Dimitrov, Vasil Kolarov, Dimitar Blagoev, etc, which have been carved in stone, tall and massive, portrayed almost like omnipotent, god-like figures (Pictures 8 and 9). They are situated in the central places in the park, as if overlooking the smaller figures of the bare-foot but sturdy women from the land cooperatives, the laborious "shock workers", the happily working children, the partisans in the anti-fascist resistance, etc. (Pictures 10, 11 and 12). The only information about the sculptures is displayed on their captions which, in a conventionally laconic way, mention only the name of the sculptor, the name of the work, the year it was created, and the institution which at present owns it (Picture 14). Walking in the park, observing the sculptures, the visitor might notice their poor condition – some have already been affected by corrosion while others are covered in bird feces (Picture 13), making the grass lawn look more maintained than the artefacts themselves. The view is reminiscent of a graveyard meant to become the last resting place of those images from the past, the statues resembling their tombstones.



Picture 8: The Statue of Lenin from the former Lenin Square in Sofia

Picture 9: Sculptures of Georgi Dimitrov



Picture 10: Partisans leaving for battle

Picture 11: Partisans in a battle with the Red Star and the "Republic" in the background



Picture 12: Women in the cooperative farm



Picture 13: The working poet (Nikola Vaptzarov)

Picture 14: A caption of a sculpture

Following the path, it will lead the visitor to the entrance of the exhibition hall, which seems equally poorly adapted to host art collections. The hall itself is relatively small, divided into three transitional sections by large columns (Picture 15 and 16). There is no consistent narrative in the way the paintings have been ordered in the exhibit (in fact, the general principle seems to be the lack of principle in the arrangement, or merely trying to fit them as the space configuration allows), but the overarching story-line which can be made out begins with the secret establishment of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and continues with the planning of the September 1923 anti-fascist uprising, various scenes of the partisan movement, including their torture and apprehension by the oppressive fascist government, as well as the triumphant arrival of the Soviet army on the territory of Bulgaria (liberating the country from Nazi occupation), joyously welcomed by partisan troops and in the homes of peasants. Other themes which can be identified include the tutelage of Bulgarian workers by Soviet experts, bringing innovative and rationalizing methods in the national industry and agriculture, the building of roads, dams, bridges and factories, as well as praising the leadership of the chieftains whose ideas brought glory to the socialist nation (Pictures 17, 18, 19 and 20). In short, the collection was comprised of products of the propagandist totalitarian art, commissioned by the state. Interestingly, it also underlines the element of surveillance and social control in almost every painting, with the figure of the policeman present in many of the paintings. The exhibition itself is rather inadequately lit, as light projectors illuminate the paintings so brightly that some of their details remain obscured to the visitor's eye. Just like in the sculpture park, the only information on display is provided in the captions. There are no information panels, nor any interactive methods of interpretation. There is no tour-guide, either. The only personnel in the exhibition hall, apart from the warden, are three keepers – two elderly women that do not speak any foreign language and a young woman, who never speaks, due to a mental illness.

Picture 15: Museum gallery



Picture 16: Museum gallery

Picture 17: Scenes from the establishment of the Bulgarian Communist Party in the Balkan



Picture 18: A scene from the heavy industry in communist Bulgaria

Picture 19: Valko Chervenkov in a wheat field with electricity lines (left) and factories (right) in the background



Picture 20: A remake of St. George and the Dragon

For a full experience of the MSA, the visitor would be directed to the video hall down the stairs – a dark room with no windows, lit by halogen light, a low ceiling and black-and-white photographs, capturing moments from formal functions and meetings, hanging on the white walls. This is where a short documentary on the building of Bulgarian socialism is screened, subtitled in English. Naturally, as a film produced under the totalitarian rule of Todor Zhivkov, serving the Bulgarian Communist Party, the documentary commends the spirited and dedicated workers, united around the honorable cause to build with their own hands their nation and the mainstays of socialism, as well as the love of the docile pioneers, marching and forming up on the squares of Sofia, for their leaders waving benevolently from the tall terrace of the Mausoleum. The audio blasts uplifting refrains from beloved patriotic and communist propagandist songs. Out of the video hall and into the souvenir shop, this is the only way to exit. For those visitors who are determined to learn more about the museum exhibit and the Bulgarian communist past, few sources are available at the souvenir shop. The museum has no catalogue, just a small pamphlet in Bulgarian and English, signed by the director, and available for a charge of 2 leva or 1 euro (Pictures 21 and 22).

# ТОТАЛИТАРНО ИЗКУСТВО

от колекциите на Националната художествена галерия и Националния исторически музей

(от средата на 40-те години до средата на 50-те години на XX век)

Йото Върбанов, Петър Петров, Д. Николов
*Сталин, края на 40-те години*

Yoto Varbanov, Peter Petrov, D. Nikolov
*Stalin, the end of the 40's*

Петър Михайлов
*Георги Димитров на Лайпцигския процес, 1957г.*

Peter Mihaylov
*Georgi Dimitrov during the Leipzig trail, 1957*

# TOTALITARIAN ART

in the Collections of the National Art Gallery and the National Museum of History

(from the mid-40's to the mid-50's of the XX Century)

на корицата: Дечко Узунов и бригада от художници –
Бойчо Григоров, Лиляна Дичева, Калина Тасева, Владимир Гоев
*Конференция на ТКЗС, 1951-1953г.*

on the cover: Dechko Uzunov and a brigade of artists –
Boycho Grigorov, Lilyana Dicheva, Kalina Tasseva and Vladimir Goev
*Conference of the Co-Operative farms, 1951-1953*

Picture 21: Front and back page of the exhibition pamphlet

The current exposition presents a selection of artistic material from the pre-democratic past (the time of the so-called "Classical Socialist realism"), which have previously been owned by no longer existing institutions such as the National Museum of Revolutionary Movement, and the Museum of the Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship. At present, these resources are possessed by the National Museum of History. The National Art Gallery participates in the exposition with several works, which are emblematic of the art of the totalitarian sub-period. This stock gives the opportunity to form a representative sample of items of the semi-official art from the mid-40's to the mid-50's of the past century – a period of drastic state administration and imposition of the aesthetics of the Socialist realism. Lately, there are attitudes to re-think the specificities of the time, and from the time-distance of the decades that have passed to revalue the totalitarian phenomenon in art. The approach to the pieces of art is a positive one, based on historical composure and professionalism. Representation of this part of the Bulgarian visual experience of the Socialist era can hardly cause any ideological traumas now. The contemporary analysis is devoid of any nostalgia or irony. These works have been created in the reality of a state-party monopoly and they are exemplary of the official conjuncture of their time. At the same time, many of the authors of the parading Socialist art have parallel artistic existence of non-commitment to the state canon and ideological doctrine.

The art, that we are presenting, has the value of an ideological material, and sometimes of an agitation or propaganda, and is realized in artificial conditions, which crucially rearrange, edit, correct and censor history, and reality. Only during the totalitarian sub-period of the Bulgarian art does the so-called "Socialist realism" exist as a method, characteristic to states under monolithic totalitarian regimes. The current pieces of art are a product of the normative aesthetics of the totalitarian time, combined with the conformism of some artists – circumstances, leading to depersonalization of the act of creation.

The principles of the semi-official approach include basic features of the work made to order of the totalitarian time:

– Construction of a well-ordered, unconditional, and unchangeable world, which has to be historically steadfast

– By default, time has stopped at the "right moment", and has claims to last forever

– There are patterns forming, which represent pompous terms such as feat and heroism.

– The compulsory subject-matters are demonstrations, strikes, rallies, conferences, summits, brigades' labor, etc., which must represent crucial moments for the peoples.

– Every particular episode of the revolutionary movement and the laboring daily life, every image (especially those of the political figures), are conferred with the title "historical".

– The images of the party leaders are idealized, mythologized, and popularized, and the leaders themselves are pronounced to be chieftains for the needs of the ideological propaganda.

– The mandatory pathos in the thematic figural compositions is claimed to be epic in the context of the inevitable illustrative representation.

– In terms of style, the rules are borrowed from a misconstrued academic system, which rejects the personal manner and is pronounced as "Social realism" by the normatvive critique.

The exposition "Totalitarian Art in the Collections of National Art Gallery and National Museum of History from the mid-40's to the mid-50's of the XX Century" is the second one after the opening of the Museum of Socialist Art in Bulgaria.

Bissera Yossifova
deputy director of the Bulgarian National Museum of Fine Arts

Photographer: Yavor Popov
Translation: Galia Kraicheva
Printing: Georgi Petkov

Museum of Socialist Art

Picture 22: Introduction to the exhibition by the MSA Director

## 8.2.2 THE FORMAL NARRATIVE OF THE MUSEUM OF SOCIALIST ART

Based on my direct observations at the museum setting, the main part of which I described above, as well as on my interactions with the head of the National Art Gallery, the curator and the Director of the MSA, in what follows I will render my interpretation of the formal institutional discourse manifested through the artefacts and the institutional technologies of the museum. However, before I proceed I cannot forgo mentioning that by discussing mainly the formal museum narrative here, I do not mean to obscure other discourses that exist in parallel within the institution, its staff and management. What I mean to say is that during my observations of the daily routine and practices at the museum, I noticed certain tensions whereby discourses among the museum personnel contested the dominant, formal narrative, supported by the government and upper management of the institution. To be sure, while the formal narrative sought to decouple the objects on display from their historical and political meanings and present them solely as the most representative examples of a specific art genre and period in Bulgarian art history, some of the staff members approached the exhibit largely from the perspective of their personal and collective memories (which I have addressed in section 8.3), and the Director of the MSA herself spoke of constraints laid by the upper management regarding the museum's projects and organization (discussed shortly in sub-section 8.2.3).

Overall, the way Bulgarian communist history is described by the Museum of Socialist Art paints a rather benign picture of the great accomplishments of the regime and the orderly and secured life of a united and disciplined Bulgarian society. Goulding and Domic (2009), writing about the manipulation of history and heritage in post-conflict Croatia, argue that a nation's identity is often built not only on that which is visible and on display, but also the absent and the silenced. To a person who is familiar with Bulgarian history or the history of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, as a whole, the absences at the MSA, as a museum dedicated to that era are strikingly evident. In a nutshell, all negative aspects of the regime – the labour camps, the show trials, the scarcity, the forced expropriation of lands, the oppression of the minorities and dissidents (including artists), etc. – is missing in the representation of Bulgarian communist heritage at the MSA, and is conveniently justified by the concept of the museum which only displays art works compliant with the state art cannon during the regime. This, however, makes the official narrative highly problematic for those groups of society whose experience with the totalitarian era was not unproblematic, and I will come back to that in the following sub-sections.

As I argued in section 4.3, outside of their social life and of the practices in which they are embedded, objects themselves have no meaning (Rose, 2007b:220). However, the detachment and recontextualization of certain artefacts and their inclusion in a new set of practices, which is characteristic of museum practice, ascribes those objects with new meanings (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998) and shapes the people who interact with them (Rose, 2007b:220). In this regard, I believe that to understand the institutional discourse produced at the MSA, it is essential to first take a look at the road of the artefacts from their original places to the museum and think about the ways their meanings have transformed with the passage of time. Although that kind of information is unavailable at the MSA itself, after speaking with the employees, the curator and the Director of the museum, I found that the majority of artefacts displayed in the outdoor park

and the exhibition hall had been originally created to stand on the central squares of different cities and towns in Bulgaria (such as the statue of Lenin from the former Lenin square in Sofia (Picture 8)), while others were once displayed in community centers, libraries, at the National Palace of Culture, in offices of the BCP and the Komsomol, in front of the Mausoleum (the famous sculpture "Republic" (Picture 23)), as well as in the collections of disassembled institutions, such as the National Museum of the Revolutionary Movement and the National Museum of the Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship. After 1989, in what some of my elderly interviewees called "*the years of the euphoria*", many of those monuments were toppled and stored in backyards or basements of community centers, galleries or museums, some of them remained on their original spots, while the art works from the two no longer existing totalitarian museums were transferred to the holdings of the National History Museum, the National Art Gallery and the National Art Academy. When the MSA project kicked off, those art works were dusted off and were subject to an evaluation by an expert commission at the Ministry of Culture which decided on their artistic and historic value. The approved ones made it to the MSA's permanent or temporary (rotating) exhibit.

Picture 23: Sculpture of the "Republic"

Donald Horne, in his book "The Great Museum" (1984:29-30) says that: "*…None of the meanings we give these relics, however, were meanings the relics had when they were alive.*" Following the path of the communist artefacts in Bulgaria shows just how drastically their meanings have been changing throughout the decades. During the totalitarian regime some of them were created and displayed as monuments which praised and immortalized the dictators and leading ideologists, as the all-knowing father-figures, which would lead the masses into a brighter, communist future. Others sought to portray the exaltation of the masses, the achievements of socialism and the resistance movement, but regardless of whether they were loved or hated, they were symbols of a system which was never going to break. The system was the taken-for-granted status quo, just like the presence of the statues and the portraits was taken for granted. The collapse of the regime in 1989, however, shook up the oppressive norms and assumptions of the Bulgarian society and the system's material reminders found their demise or were sent to oblivion, symbolizing the triumph of democracy and the re-birth of a society, freed from its oppressors (Verdery, 1999). Exactly 21 years after, some of those artefacts were taken out from their vaults and moved to a green, quiet, hidden city corner, away from the capital hubbub, where they finally found their (possibly) final resting place. Their task during their retirement at

the MSA seems to be to pose as the graveyard of a non-democratic regime, which is now resigned to history.

In addition, the conceptualization of communist heritage through socialist art seems to be a cautiously estimated decision, which is adopted to construct a specific discourse of the link between Bulgaria's communist past and post-communist present. Preziosi (2003:174) warns of the problematic of art as a "*modern fantasm*" and a "*pan-human phenomenon*", which is a powerful means of symbolization of nations and their history, of state capitalization on those symbols, as well as an instrument of social control. This powerful and universalizing discourse of art constitutes the regime of truth of the Museum of Socialist Art, and was very clearly echoed in the words of the three art experts I interviewed during my research. They were unanimous with regard to the appropriateness of art to illustrate the social and cultural norms and values, as well as the significant aspects of life during a specific historic epoch. In other words, they adopted the art works on display at the museum as an authentic historic evidence of life under the totalitarian regime in Bulgaria, as demonstrated in the words of the head of the National Art Gallery: "…*what else can you illustrate time with?! The strongest reminder of it, the thing which will always remind of the elapsed time…is art, the products of art. After all, this is what actually remains [of the past]…*" The most important quality of art, according to that same expert, is that it is a carrier of "*universal human values, regardless of the ruling ideology*", which never lose their importance, even if the entire system of organization in society changes.

In this respect, in the case of the MSA, it is 'expert commissions', who decided which universal human values to be preserved and put on display, which possibly stands at the root of the problematic institutional representation of communist heritage at the MSA. The curator of the MSA, who participated in those expert commissions, emphasized keenly on the requirements for the high artistry and plastic qualities of the selected art objects. He added in passing mention that the artefacts were also assessed on the basis of: "*the extent to which a certain art work complies with the criteria of a heritage monument of national significance. That is, it has to be historically significant.*" In addition, he made it clear that the art works had to be congruent with the art framework of the Bulgarian totalitarian regime, or namely:

"…*those were the principles of art, imported from the USSR, which heavily influenced the art in Bulgaria then, and which could also be seen in the art of the Third Reich in Germany, or in Italy…this idea of the mightiness of the human spirit and body within the regime…the personality cult…this is entirely state-commissioned art, partly relating the national progress…the industrial and agricultural growth…and those related to the revolution…*" (MSA curator, interview data, 2013)

All three art experts I interviewed, however, were rather evasive in providing any specific argumentation as to the selection of those very criteria to classify certain communist artefacts as 'historic heritage of national significance', while leaving other artefacts out. Wanting to know more about the selection criteria, used in the decision-making process, I had to persistently probe for information which the experts seemed reluctant to give away, due to its potentially political subtext. Both the head of the National Art Gallery and the MSA curator explicitly mentioned that they "*disapprove of connecting art with political messages and agendas*" (interview data, 2013) which, in my view, may be partly connected to a commonly spread negative interpretation of the terms 'politics' and 'political' in the country.

Another important aspect in the choice to represent history through and within an art museum has to do with the audiences the institutional apparatus seeks to produce (Bennett, 1998, quoted in Rose, 2007a). In the sense that the Museum of Socialist Art preserves and displays art objects and, therefore, makes use of art theory and rhetoric to mediate between visitors and the exhibited artefacts, the institution employs notions of 'high' culture which, according to Bennett, are accessible mainly to "*middle-class gallery-goers*", who possess the kind of education and 'taste' to be able to appreciate and understand the meanings which the art objects have been ascribed to represent (1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a:182). In that respect, most of the visitors I observed and interviewed, both domestic and international, were indeed educated as well as experienced museum and gallery-goers who often drew comparisons between their personal impressions from different museums during the interviews. However, despite the intentions implicit in the concept of the museum and the rendering of the art exhibition, which may target visitors interested in art and 'high' culture, during my field research I found that the majority of the visitors I observed were largely motivated by the exhibition's historical and political connotations.

Moreover, within the museum space visitors could be morally and culturally 'uplifted', through the implicit inscriptions of 'acceptable' forms of behavior, including "*ways of walking, dressing, talking, etc.*" (Bennett, 1995, quoted in Yúdice, 2003:10), whereby self-inspection is enforced by a sense of permanent visibility (Foucault, 1977:11, quoted in Rose, 2007a). Based on my observations at the Museum of Socialist Art such inscriptions of norms of behaviour were implicit in factors, such as (but not limited to) the lack of seats within the museum exhibition, which discouraged visitors from spending too much time in viewing, contemplation and relaxation; the museum keepers who always whispered or spoke quietly, implying that loud conversations are unacceptable; the surveillance cameras, as well as the presence of uniform guards, generating a sense of constant visibility and therefore the need for self-discipline. However, unlike in other museums, at the MSA there were no written signs or information panels explicitly prohibiting behaviours, such as entering with food and beverages, taking photographs with flashlights, etc. Instead, visitors were reminded about them by the museum keepers, whenever the occasions required it.

In the following section I address the question of the audiences of the MSA.

## 8.2.3 THE AUDIENCES OF THE MUSEUM OF SOCIALIST ART

In order to understand the politics behind the institutional heritage and identity discourse, it is necessary to consider the audiences which the MSA targets and attracts. In short, the target audiences of the museum, based on my interviews with the museum experts and employees, are the young generations of Bulgarian citizens, as well as foreign tourists, since, by the words of one of the experts: "...*young Bulgarians from the transition generations have a fresh perspective on the communist past, devoid of [emotional] prejudice, while foreigners, who haven't lived behind the Iron Curtain tend to have a more critical look on our past*...". Indeed, during my observations at the museum setting in April and May, the majority of visitors, with a few exceptions, were young Bulgarian citizens (in their 20s, 30s and 40s) and foreign visitors coming from Western and Southern Europe, the former Soviet Republics, China and the USA. In view of the museum users, the institutional narrative can be seen as a discourse taking effect on two fronts – the domestic and the international.

On the one hand, considering the complex effects of the post-totalitarian transition in Bulgaria, ranging from the declining political and institutional legitimacy, through to the economic immiseration, and the crisis of democratic values in the nation, the post-communist revised approach towards the country's otherwise obscured communist history in the form of an art exhibit can be interpreted as an act of promoting an aestheticized, mild version of Bulgarian communist history, among the "*children of transition*" (Daynov in Vagabond, 2013), who are educated museum- and gallery-goers (cf. Bennett 1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a), but have had no first-hand experience with the regime. The young generations of Bulgarian citizens have been embraced as the white sheet of paper on which the state institutions can begin to re-write a "*shameful*" history and heritage in terms which will better suit the political, economic and cultural purposes of the country, as well as inscribe the new sets of norms and disciplines that aim to cultivate a liberal democratic nation. More specifically, the institutional narrative at the MSA seeks, in that respect, to impose an image of the totalitarian past which is 'familiar, but somehow exotic' (Peckham, 2003), devoid of traumatic episodes, and therefore, allowing for the past to remain in the past and for post-communist Bulgarian society to embrace democracy and consumerism.

In addition, the conceptualization of Bulgarian communist heritage through art can be seen as a cautiously calculated representation of an ambiguous past, which still causes a lot of tension among the (strongly politicized) elder generations of Bulgarian society and within the political circles, as, according to the Director of the MSA: "*art is always a subject of one's own, personal interpretations*". The lack of museum interpretation and contextualization of the MSA exhibit was justified by her with "*the insufficient time-distance to find a balanced approach*" and the resulting constraints to interpret communist heritage, due to its controversial character. She added that one of the aims of the MSA was to "*avoid the politicization of a matter, which is still rather acute and sensitive for some generations*" and to "*allow for its re-evaluation and re-interpretation by people of different generations and different viewpoints in order to find the truth*". She laid particular emphasis on the top-down constraints she had been facing in managing the further development of the MSA, which she explained, on the one hand, with "... *fear that it may be misconstrued* [by the democrats] *as an attempted overthrow...they are indignant because they see it* [the MSA] *as an apology and commendation. Of the epoch!*" On the other hand, she critically related that "*fear*" to features in the post-communist political development of the country which are reminiscent of the totalitarian past, and which might further delegitimize the country's government, if exposed somehow. To be sure, she referred to the continual seizure of authority by a limited circle of powerful people, or the way she put it: "...*but the MP's, regardless of how their party belonging changes with time, need to continue sitting in the parliament! Right? What matters is that you're still an MP!* [singing]*'This is the name of the game!'...Those communist-time popular tunes still sound so topical today! And here is what they're afraid of*!"

Similarly, in a press interview, the Director argues that the MSA's new project exhibition (opened on May 17, 2013) featuring political posters made during the totalitarian regime has been "...*met with fear* [by her higher-ups]...*I don't know what we're so afraid of, either. Is it Stalin, Mao or Chervenkov? ...Or is it a fear that certain individuals may recognize themselves as the new totalitarian chieftains?*" (Sega, 2013). And here one may see another layer of complexity, added to the problem of museum representation of communist heritage in Bulgaria. The continuing division of attitudes due to the fact that a few generations of Bulgarian citizens are live carriers

of a dissonant past, and the parallels which may still be observed between the totalitarian and post-totalitarian development, and which I alluded to in section 9.1, such as the systematic grip on power by people related to the former communist nomenclature (including the repressive apparatus), the governmental control over a significant part of the media and over the supposedly independent juridical system, the corruption and favoring of monopolistic and oligarchic groups, etc., all result in striking a balanced and yet critical interpretation of the recent past and its legacies all the more challenging.

Therefore, the benign representation of the regime in the MSA collection, as well as the lack of explicit interpretation of the artefacts and their historical meanings, resulted in accusations by some right-wing political parties that the MSA in its current format is "*an attempt at the rehabilitation and re-legitimation of the totalitarian regime*" (SDS Declaration, 2011). Although such explicit interpretation may be missing for the time being (for part of the reasons quoted above), there are other aspects of the MSA which implicitly demonstrate the intentions and position of the state discourse. These can be revealed, for instance, in the mere detachment of the objects from their original settings and their re-location in a distant corner of the city, overshadowed by the high-rise business centre buildings, thus framing communist heritage in a way that takes away its life and sends a message: 'these historic artefacts are no longer fit to remain in public space, as they do not represent the contemporary contexts of the country'. Alternatively, the insufficient maintenance of the exhibition, the staff made up of elderly people who rarely communicate with the visitors, the lack of historical contextualization of the exhibition, the lack of signposting leading to the MSA, the large gate barricading the museum, can all be seen as signs of continual silencing of the voices of history and heritage which may remind visitors of certain aspects of Bulgaria's present predicament and expose their path-dependent character. After all, the control over knowledge holds the control over power.

On the other hand, in light of the contemporary politico-economic contexts and interactions of Bulgaria, the Museum of Socialist Art can be considered as part of the country's post-communist re-invention and re-positioning on the international scene. Unlike the Museum of Terror in Budapest, or the Museum of the Genocide Victims in Vilnius, the title of the Museum of Socialist Art may not, at first glance, evoke an explicit idea of the story which the Bulgarian 'museum of communism' tells, and thus, nor of a certain judgemental political stance the country takes up in relation to its totalitarian past. However, although a foreign visitor at the museum will not hear a dramatic story of the communist oppression, or learn about many historical facts, here is an excerpt of what that visitor would read in the only source of museum interpretation – the pamphlet written by the director of the MSA:

"… *Lately, there are attitudes to re-think the specificities of the time and, from the time-distance of the decades that have passed, to revalue the totalitarian phenomenon in art. The approach to the pieces of art is a positive one, based on historical composure and professionalism. Representation of this part of the Bulgarian visual experience of the Socialist era can hardly cause any ideological traumas now. The contemporary analysis is devoid of any nostalgia or irony.* …" (Bisera Yossifova, undated)

Essentially, this short statement alone, typed in black and white, represents the official narrative which the museum seeks to construct and spread – Bulgaria has now overcome the contingencies of the totalitarian regime. The link to the past which this museum forges from the perspective of the contemporary development of the country seeks to demonstrate a non-

judgemental reflection, showing that Bulgarian society has healed from its traumatic past and is embracing its liberal democratic identity. Moreover, it implies that this is an objective and therefore truthful evaluation and representation of part of the nation's communist heritage, guaranteed by the *professionalism* and *historical composure* of the experts who created the exhibition. The political correctness of the museum discourse is underlined by the last sentence of this statement, claiming that "*The contemporary analysis is devoid of any nostalgia or irony*" thus taking up a careful and sensitive position with regard to the audiences of the museum, ranging from Bulgarian citizens who experienced socialism to foreign tourists from Western Europe, the former Eastern Bloc and Asia, including China. In effect, the mere choice of the concept of the first post-communist museumization of Bulgarian communist heritage to focus on art, rather than a collection of historical documents and artefacts, for instance, can be seen as an attempt at a politically correct representation of a complex part of Bulgarian heritage which still evokes controversial interpretations, not only within the politically polarized Bulgarian society, but also in the greater picture of the country's international relations with the European Union and NATO, on the one hand, and Russia (the *Liberator* – both from Ottoman rule in 1878 and Nazi occupation in 1944), on the other, in effect seeking to legitimize the policies and actions of the government on all fronts and thus maintain the status-quo.

In the following section I will further deepen the complexity of the problem of communist heritage museum representation and its implications in the post-communist renovation of the Bulgarian national identity, by turning to two distinct narratives present among the generations of Bulgarians who saw their lifeworlds transforming as one system was overthrown by another.

## 8.3 TO REMEMBER: THE NARRATIVES OF THOSE WHO LIVED SOCIALISM

Death - for some it brings grief, while for others it may be a relief. The grave, as a final resting place of that which is dead, can thus be a strong symbolic reminder of what is buried in the past and keep the memory of it – good, bad or both – alive. Walking in the sculpture park of the Museum of Socialist Art, a secluded, peaceful and green place, one may see many different images. One of them may be the image of a graveyard, where people and elements embodying the communist totalitarian system of Bulgaria in the 20th century have arrived to their final destination. The eulogy, however, is still being disputed, as witnesses of the system's rise and demise have known it and experienced it differently. While for some, the graveyard of Bulgarian communism may remind them of the "good, old times" and a sense of security which were irreversibly lost, others may see in it the tombstones of their dead oppressors.

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"*Ars longa, vita brevis*" said one of my interviewees, explaining that so long as there are people to appreciate it and interact with it, art always lives on. During my research, I encountered and interviewed a number of visitors for whom the artefacts at the MSA were something more than just objects of the plastic arts made of granite, bronze and gypsum, appealing to the eye and signifying (or teaching about) an unknown, and even somewhat "exotic" past. For those Bulgarian citizens who lived through socialism, the collection at the MSA held monuments which they had been passing by on their daily route to work or had been memorializing during state festivities. For some of them, these artefacts still evoked emotional memories of a past which had in one way, or another, marked their youth. The way people observe, interpret and make sense of heritage artefacts is by attaching particular meanings and values to them, which

however are subject to change with time (Hall, 1997; Harvey, 2001; Graham & Howard, 2008). This section reveals two radically opposing narratives about Bulgarian communist history and heritage from the perspective of the present, united however by the function of the artefacts on display as triggers of personal and collective historic memory, showing that a superimposed heritage discourse can create dissonances in society, and especially so when there are still living witnesses of the past being revisited. What I found during my research, is that the ways these Bulgarian citizens made sense of the artefacts and perceived the representation of communist heritage at the MSA was tightly related to their unique experience with the regime and with the changes during the post-communist transition of the country.

## 8.3.1 THE 'OSTALGIC'

As I alluded earlier, the phenomenon of communist nostalgia (Ostalgia) can be observed in transitional post-communist societies, where the changes brought by the collapse of the system and the Western orientation of the countries have been failing the expectations of people who believed in the promises for freedom and a better life (Velikonja, 2008; Horvat & Stiks, 2012). Who are the people in Bulgarian society who nowadays look back on the near past and feel nostalgic for it? Within the frames of my research, they were those citizens who had a good experience of life under socialism: those who took up certain positions in the state administration and economy, which allowed them the kinds of freedoms most other citizens could not afford; they were also those ordinary people, who saw their lives get significantly improved by the social policies of the regime and the mass development of electrification, transport and infrastructure, which had been unavailable to them before that; they were those people who, from today's perspective, did not in any way feel negatively affected by the measures during the regime, unlike those throughout post-communism.

The discourses within which these interviewees ascribed meaning to the artefacts of communist heritage drew on juxtaposition between what life was like back in "*the good old times*" and for the past 24 turbulent years. The common terms (emotions) which they used to describe the times before 1989 were "*secure*" and "*content*". Their stories revolved around the moral values, discipline and order of society, where there had been more unity and respect for the common purposes and for other people. Everybody had a home and a secure job, received free medical care and education. The pay was low, but at least the money they received sufficed to ensure all necessities of the family and the household, and it even took them to a vacation twice a year (often partially state-subsidized). For them, that was a society where everybody knew where they belonged and what their role was. There was little crime and no fear. The economy was very productive and, in the 1980's, the nation reached its all-time high of 9 million people. Summed up by the words of a 61-year old woman: "… *the system was organized in such a way that everybody had enough to live a secure life on. We didn't deprive ourselves of anything important. It's true that the pay was lower than what it is nowadays, but back then there were no people living in misery…there were no beggars, no bums…and so.. [taking a deep breath]…and that's why people regret, at least the elderly who felt much better and happier back then [laughing], they regret that those times are gone*…"

In contrast, the contemporary situation of the country and their lives under post-communism were painted largely through the use of opposites, implying the sense of disillusionment and disappointment with the current model of capitalist development. Life during the post-1989 transition times, those Bulgarian citizens described in the interviews as "*insecure*" and marked

by the loss of core social values, such as trust, care and respect for the others. Instead, according to a few of my interviewees, "*radical individualism*" was leading to the "*moral decay of the younger generations*" and damaging the bases of the Bulgarian nation. They also talked about the economic restructuration of the country describing it with the effects those changes have had – the "*depopulation and neglect*" of the villages, the "*poverty*" and "*deprivation*" they have been forced to live with, the loss of the social security safety net and the fact that their children felt pushed to leave the country, no longer seeing their own future in Bulgaria. Interestingly, in their narrative one could notice a tendency to blame the post-communist predicament of Bulgaria on the spoils "*brought by capitalism*" and on the resulting corrupt "*pseudo-democratic*" political elite, without giving much connected thought about the relations between the capitalist restructuration and the contingencies of the communist past.

## 8.3.2 THE 'CRITICS'

In parallel with the discourse of communist nostalgia exists another within which communist heritage was framed as a symbol of a "*shameful*" and "*obscurantist*" past, a "*black stain*" in Bulgarian history. This discourse resounded in the stories of a couple of my interviewees, who had either personally experienced the constraints and repressions of the regime, or had a relative whose life had been negatively impacted by it. In this respect, the destruction and non-representation of communist heritage for the first two decades after 1989 was defined by one of the participants in my research, a middle-aged tourism geographer, as "*a form of salvation to a certain extent*", because "…*when there is something which bothers you deeply, your instinctive reaction is to try to put it behind you and try to forget*". When reminiscing about the period of their lives, spent under communism, they referred to it as "*the darkest years*" of their lives. These people were very critical of the official representation of communist heritage manifested in the museum, defining it as "*partial*" and "*dangerous*". Their narrative on the totalitarian past was constructed around aspects of it, such as the detention camps, the manipulation and censure of history, the "*psychological repression*", the creation of passive and dependent people, who "*were never taught how to use their grey matter to question anything*", as well as the "*cleansing*" of the Bulgarian dissident intelligentsia and artistic circles of the 20th century.

Unlike the people representing the nostalgic narrative, these found the fault for the current crises strangling the nation in problems, such as corruption, nepotism and cronyism, which they defined mainly as path-dependent phenomena. In the words of an artist photographer in his late 50's: "… *to my mind, the roots of all these problems today come from that wretched past. Everything can be traced back as a consequence from things in the past.*" This group of people eagerly compared the post-communist government of the country to the Regime, mostly illustrating it with the uninterrupted participation of the ex-communist "*apparatchiks*" or "*the primitives, who come from factories and the bureaus.…half-educated, and they take the lead of the state*", still applying the same methods in the post-communist transformation of Bulgaria. The post-communist development of the nation was described by one of them, the artist photographer, as "*the continual triumph of vulgarity and mediocrity*", envisioning the governmental neglect of the cultural and educational sectors, the capture of politics by the oligarchy and organized crime, and the consequences of all that for the younger generations' value system, and therefore for the future of the nation. For this group of people, the "*real*" communist legacies were not to be seen in material artefacts, but in the "*submissive mindset*" of

generations of Bulgarian people, as evidenced in the lack of a strong and active Bulgarian civil society.

Both of the groups I address within this narrative talked about Bulgarian society as "*democratically immature*", in order to approach and assess its communist past in a balanced way. However, while for the critics above"…*our society hasn't yet reached the moment when the bad faces of communism can be revealed without causing tension*…", for the nostalgic group "…*not enough time has passed to begin to appreciate the good things accomplished during communism*…". Although obviously being contradictory, both positions have value in them, and must be accounted for, because the legacies of a dissonant past can hardly be construed in one direction or the opposite one without ignoring the meanings and values of social groups that are left non-represented and thus disinherited (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1996, quoted in Ashworth & Graham, 1997 and Graham & Howard, 2008; Ashworth, 1994; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009).

What could be observed in the way both groups interacted with the objects exhibited at the MSA was that they were pointing out to the sculptures, symbols and paintings which were most well-known to them and which had been part of their everyday surroundings before they were toppled. These were the Red Star (Pictures 4 and 5), the statue of Lenin that used to stand on the former Lenin square in Sofia (Picture 8) and the sculpture heads of the members of Dictator Zhivkov's family (his daughter Lyudmila Zhivkova and his wife Mara Maleeva-Zhivkova) that had originally been exhibited at the National Palace of Culture. Interestingly, for some of those men and women the Red Star "*was not made of rubies, as we believed back then, but just of red-tinted glass*", and one of my interviewees (in her 50's) noted that "*Lenin looks a lot smaller out here*". In addition, some of the busts and statues on display were, according to the artist photographer (in his late 50's): "*the same as the ones which once used to be in the garden in the city centre, and we used to call it the terror park, because it was scary to pass them at night and see them as if they were looking at you* (laughing)." Such comments, said in a humorous manner, reveal the way the meanings of those objects have shifted in the past two decades for a group of people who witnessed their fall. They also show how distant the norms and life as they were under communism seemed from the perspective of today for both the 'Ostalgic' and the 'Critics' of the recent past.

## 8.4 TO LEARN: THE NARRATIVES OF THE TRANSITION GENERATIONS IN BULGARIA AND THE INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS

In this section I address two discourses within which the artefacts of communist heritage displayed at the Museum of Socialist Art are viewed and treated by certain visitors as a source of different kinds of understanding and knowledge about the communist past of the country and the totalitarian systems of 20th-century Europe.

### 8.4.1 THE TRANSITION GENERATIONS IN BULGARIA

"*In sorrow youth passes, in sorrows and pains, / Angrily boils the blood in the veins; / Lowering brows - the mind cannot see, / Is it good or evil that is to be. [...] / Age in, age out / Reason and conscience have tried to fight it, / Rebels have died in pain and doubt. / But tell me, how could they hope to fight it? / The world is used to dragging its burden, / To evil and tyranny as its sole guerdon. / It kisses the iron hand of the thief, / From lying lips takes its belief; / Be quiet and*

*pray when you are beaten, / Let your flesh by beasts be eaten, [...]".* (Hristo Botev, "The Struggle", first issued in 1871; source of English translated version: heritage2001.tripod.com, 2013)

So goes "The Struggle", a poem written by Hristo Botev - a Bulgarian poet, journalist and revolutionary icon, who was actively involved in the Bulgarian liberation insurgencies against the Ottoman rule in the 19th century. Due to his avid social ideas, during the totalitarian regime his name, biography and literature were appropriated by the BCP to further ascertain their legitimacy and historical grounds within the nation. It is by no surprise then when one sees Hristo Botev's portrait present in the background of a painting at the MSA where five young left activists swear in the idea of communism, laying one hand on a book and the other on their chests, accepting the ideals with firm belief. This beautifully rendered painting, however, has found its place hanging in isolation, in a back corner of the museum hall, right next to the restrooms (Picture 24). Such positioning of this particular painting, even if done without much connected thought for it, might raise questions, such as: What do today's young Bulgarian generations derive their common values and ideals from? What history do they identify with? What happens to young people's sense of belonging to a certain people and their common value system if the links with their ancestors' past have been severed or obscured? And, why is it that the words of the poet-revolutionary written more than a century ago still sound so valid today? Why have they been resigned to silent isolation in the corner, next to the restrooms?



Picture 24: Five young activists swearing on the communist idea (with restrooms to the left)

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Lowenthal (1985, 1996, in Graham, 2002:1008) argues that history and heritage function to provide individuals, as well as nations with a sense of familiarity and direction, and crucially, with validation and legitimation of who we are and with whom we belong. In that respect, the systematic avoidance or stifling of meaningful reflection on history and the representation of heritage could create distortions or dissolutions of the sense of belonging, of personal and collective identity. Since the beginning of the changes in Bulgaria in 1989, the new generations of Bulgarians have been raised in a socio-cultural and political environment where the modern history of Bulgaria makes a pause between the years 1944-1989. A significant part of the material reminders of the totalitarian past were removed from the urban spaces, helping to erase a half-a-century layer of history from the heritage landscape of their country. The officially approved history books after 1989 mention very little about the totalitarian period in Bulgaria and parents often do not help continue the link of historic memory, as many of them, based on my interviews, as well as personal experience and observations, consider this "*heavy and uninteresting*" period to be a history "*not that worthy*" of remembering and "*nothing to take pride in*" (tourism geographer in her 40's & PhD student in history, interview data, 2013). Hence, the rare occasions of analyzing and commemorating the legacies of the communist past have been causing silent indignation among the elder generations in society. Further, the "*children of*

*transition*" (Daynov, in Vagabond, 2013) have been witnessing public quarrels and debates over the fate of socialist monuments which have been slowly disintegrating throughout the years. Around every election campaign, they have seen how political rivals and their supporters exchange accusations for the exacerbating economic situation in the country, while one of the most popular discourses, also present during the anti-governmental protests in the country of the summer of 2013, has been that "*the dirty communists brought the country down*". And yet, at the same time their grandparents live with a visible sense of nostalgia for the "*good old times*", making the picture of the communist past of their country even more confusing.

As an outcome, a large gap in the nation's historic memory has been opened, effected by the lack of consistent state cultural policy of preserving and analyzing the communist heritage, as well as by the silence of people from the elder generations who, perhaps inadvertently, without realizing the consequences, have helped interrupt the continuity of collective memory, which is now evident in the difficulty many young Bulgarians experience while trying to meaningfully identify themselves as Bulgarian. Several of my interviewees were, in fact, young Bulgarian citizens (in their 20's), who had decided to visit the museum in order to "*learn about what things were like before we were born*" or "*to get educated about the socialist times and art*", because "*the bigger part of those things we haven't seen, as they had been taken away from public space before we could understand what they stood for*" (interview data, 2013). It comes as no surprise then when one hears three young artists say: "...*As a part of the transition generation, who is still in search for their own identity, we have been feeling a large void ... for the past has not yet been thoroughly analyzed and made sense of...*" (Socmus, 2013). In this respect, the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia, as the first realized post-communist museum representation of Bulgarian communist heritage was seen by my young Bulgarian interviewees as a way of starting to fill this void. By the words of one of them, a young woman: "...*in order for us to identify with our nation nowadays, we need to know that history; we have the right to know our nation's heritage... and this museum shows an interesting perspective of it*".

Based on my observations and the interviews, I could note that the objects on display did not evoke any emotions or particular personal associations in the young Bulgarian visitors (in their 20's and 30's). They looked at it with a detached curiosity, without the ideological trauma or the burden of personal experience which was present in the narratives of their elder fellow Bulgarians I spoke with (in their 40's, 50's and 60's). They perceived the exhibit as a part of their parents' and grandparents' lives, as well as a representation of not that familiar, almost "*exotic*" part of their nation's history. In the eyes of these Bulgarians, the totalitarian regime was a thing of the past and its museumization was a sign that: "...*we have overcome it, in the sense that...we simply start accepting it*" (interview data, 2013). Moreover, in the representation of the communist past at the MSA some of them identified a valuable lesson which the "*disunited*" post-communist Bulgarian society should, in their view, learn from – "...*the ability of the whole nation to unite around a common ideal... and legitimate leadership*". They related the images they saw at the MSA to the fragmentary approach to the post-communist transformation of the country as: "*Every four years, everything changes; that kind of continuity, integrity and unity is gone now, and we have no common ideal, either. For the past 20 years, it seems to me, people haven't had a common purpose to work towards*" (interview data, 2013).

In this perceived absence of a common national ideal in the post-communist society, the young generations of Bulgarian citizens are struggling to negotiate their sense of national identity in an environment where the majority of the population has been impoverished (often including their

own families), the cultural and educational sectors have been continually neglected, the government has interfused with oligarchic circles and the judiciary institutions have proven unreliable, having failed to punish those who have been abusing their political and/or economic power. In the light of the post-communist development in the country, one of my interviewees (a young man, in his 30's) saw in the MSA a potential to provoke young Bulgarians to reflect on the present status quo and always question the state discourse, instead of blindly accepting it as the truth, because: "...*looking at this exhibit, it makes me think that things haven't changed much since then... The question always is: what is the true truth? Back then many people were perhaps led to believe sincerely in some ideals. And behind those were standing big interests. It is the same thing these days...This exhibit is nice, it is a thought-provocation toward the present development.*" Here, as well, the critical idea that the communist legacies are to be found in people's mindsets, rather than in the material could be noticed. However, the material reminders were seen as triggers and sources of critical reflection on the immaterial legacies.

Unlike their grandparents and parents, who did not have the choice of whether to stay in their country or leave it, many of these young Bulgarians have been travelling, studying and living abroad, which has enhanced their need to look for what it means to be Bulgarian in a globalized world. In the light of the present political crisis in Bulgaria, which I mentioned earlier, triggered by the dubious policies, actions and appointments of the new coalition cabinet of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the centrist Movement for Rights and Freedoms, the capital's streets have been regularly inundated with tens of thousands of protesters. They have been calling out for a change in the political system, and the disjointing of the political authorities from the oligarchic circles, the judicial system and the media. Interestingly, these protests have been largely organized and attended by students and young working people, many of whom have had some kind of experience abroad, witnessed many different practices and have started questioning and becoming critical of the unscrupulous governmental practices in Bulgaria. Moreover, they have become aware that they have the power to bring change for the better. These recent events have led many to infer that the transition generations have begun laying the grounds for a stronger democratic society in post-communist Bulgaria (Euronews, 2013).

Yet, in this globalized world, for some of my young interviewees, the elusive idea of their national identity, coupled with the aggravating socio-economic and political situation in the country and an instilled sense of disempowerment have resulted in an "*inferiority complex*" or, as one of my interviewees, a PhD student in history put it: "...*a complex of the fact that you're a Bulgarian, that you've been born here, that you live here, that you come from this small country, which has a history of being such and such...instead of having been born in America, for instance.*" That sense was enhanced in them also by assumptions, such as "...*most probably the rest of the world looks down on us, because of what we are, the fact that we've been a part of that system...*" (Interview data, 2013). In the following section I address the narratives on communist heritage among the foreign visitors at the MSA, who I managed to observe and interview.

## 8.4.2 THE INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS

There seems to be something really ironic in the location of the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia. At first glance rather usual – a residential neighborhood with tall, look-alike panel flats (Picture 3), built in the spirit of the socialist urban construction reforms in the capital (in the 1970's and 1980's), perhaps as part of the state's social containment and homogenization

projects. A skyline typical of Bulgarian cities and towns, which however seemed to look quite different in the unaccustomed eyes of foreign visitors. The irony, though, could be most easily spotted in the late afternoons when the tall business centre (Picture 6), with logos of companies from the pharmaceutical, oil, retail and entertainment fields, would cast its shadow over the premises of the museum, day after day, symbolically reminding people of historical events from two decades ago when Western civilization triumphantly overshadowed a system and ideology which kept a large part of post-World-War-Two Europe behind an Iron Curtain.

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It is argued that the concept of communist heritage has been constructed through Western discourses and representations of the CEE states which offer travellers the chance of gazing upon the remains of Europe's non-Western 'Other' (Light, 2000b; Light, Young & Czepczynski, 2009), and which has fascinated the post-modern Western tourist in search for authenticity and, possibly, a reaffirmation of their own Western or European identity. The foreign visitors at the MSA I observed and interviewed were people with specific types of interests and motivation. Some of them were young (in their 20's and 30's), students in art, history, international relations, etc., exploring the "*authentic*" relics of an 'Other' system and ideology which they had only read and heard about, but which had collapsed long ago, leading many to believe in and interpret Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History?" as the triumph of Western civilization and liberal democracy as the superior form of human government (Fukuyama, 1989). Others were middle-aged and elderly, middle-class Westerners whose youth had been marked by the Cold War and the division of the world, for whom life beyond the Iron Curtain had seemed "*scary*", "*obscure and difficult to conceive*" (a Danish man in his 70's), or provoked a fascination, as in the case of an English visitor (in his 40's), who reminisced: "…*You know I grew up in the…when I was smaller I often wondered about the Soviet Union, and so for me, I have a lot of fascination about the Soviet period, even if…you know, maybe it had positive and negative aspects, but I look at it with a kind of…nostalgia, even if I was not there… which is very strange in a way to say*". This demonstrates just how various the meanings were that foreign tourists ascribed to artefacts of a past which, despite many of them had not experienced first-hand, is still a part of European and world history.

As seasoned travellers, the foreign visitors had often wandered in the capital city for hours trying to find the Bulgarian 'museum of socialism', with a tourist map or a guide-book in hand. Most of my foreign interviewees at the museum were eager to share a lot about their experiences of other post-communist destinations, museums, monuments and compare them to their impressions of post-communist Bulgaria, while others shrugged shoulders, like one German tourist who merely stated: "…*but I've been of course to other similar places like in Moscow, in St. Petersburg, Budapest and in Prague, and I find that they all look the same to me.*" Once at the MSA in Sofia, some of the foreign visitors took the time to observe and contemplate on the objects and images on display, while others scurried through the sculpture park and the museum hall, bought a souvenir from the museum shop and left, having merely registered the stereotype "*communism*". In the latter sense, tourism, "*[l]ike butterfly-collecting … is a mere matter of classification unless we can learn how to "read" at least some of the stereotypes*" (Horne, 1984:29). Simply visiting museums in order to tick them off of a "*ceremonial agenda*", without contemplating the displayed against one's personal meanings, and not just by the popular stereotypes, and without taking into account other possible meanings the artefacts may have

carried, is a tourism marked by the motivation and practice of acquisition – of places, images, stereotypes (Horne, 1984:248-251).

Most of my foreign interviewees' associations with the communist totalitarian regime were mainly centered on the gory aspects of repression such as the "*death camps*", "*show trials*", "*scarcity and hunger*" and "*lines for food*", which they also summarized as "*the real life under communism*" (an Irish man in his 70's). Such claims must make one question the politics underlying similar Western discourses on communist and totalitarian heritages, as well as the power relations between countries in the West and the former Communist Bloc that get constructed as a result. Somehow logically, the benign image of Bulgarian communism portrayed by the museum collection, as well as the lack of critical interpretation and contextualization of the artefacts led some of the foreign visitors I interviewed to criticize it as a partial representation, which "*makes people think you're still kind of fond of communism*" (a Danish man in his 70's), a representation that does not take into account alternative discourses according to a Spanish lecturer (in his 40's), who suggested: "*But it would be good to have a balance, no? Of what happened, no? The positive and the negative aspects, and different points of view, the people supporting communism, and the people against it. To have the voice of all of them represented…*" (Interview data, 2013). Similar opinions gathered in the visitor book of the museum stood out, as some visitors from Western Europe and the Baltic states condemned the museum of "*perpetuating the propaganda*" and preventing young Bulgarians from "*maturing as citizens of a democratic Bulgarian future*". According to those visitors, a museum of communism was there for people nowadays to "*learn from the mistakes of the past, so as not to repeat them*", and to be "*the graveyard of communism*" (data from the MSA Visitor Book, 2013). The latter resounded in the words of an Austrian man, who interpreted the Museum of Socialist Art in a political context as a clear indication that Bulgaria had started to reflect on its totalitarian past in order to put it behind, but was nevertheless skeptical that this was the case among all Bulgarians: "*….When it is in a museum, it has always the impression of "It's gone, it's over!" but mostly a lot of things aren't over… I can imagine easily that there are still people, also here, thinking about the good old communist times*".

For some foreign tourists, such as people with socialist affiliations from Southern and Western Europe, and Chinese tourist groups, the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia may have turned in a sense into a pilgrimage site. Although I did not get a chance to personally observe or speak to such visitors, in my daily conversations with two of the museum employees, I was told that "*Chinese groups, when they come, they really like the museum and they congratulate us on it*" and "*…after the museum had opened, some journalists came to cover it for the Italian newspaper "Republic", and in their article they showed the picture of Lenin over there… and last summer we had many groups of Italians, most of them were with left political convictions, but the Italians, they too have socialist parties there*" (interview data, 2013). This could also be observed in the comments in the Visitor Book, some of which praised the idea of the MSA and simply exclaimed "*Comunismo siempre!*", "*El socialismo es el unico futuro!*", as well as "*We enter the era of the socialist revolution!*", written by visitors from Spain, Italy, Belgium and France.

Comments like these, coming amidst series of protest events in Europe and around the world, against neo-liberal reforms which keep indebting economies, forcing them to apply stringent austerity measures, bringing high unemployment rates and enlarging the income gaps, might imply that socialism is being looked to for possible answers and alternatives to the dysfunctions and side effects of the capitalist model of development. In fact, a Spanish professor in economics

(in her 50's) who I managed to interview during her visit at the MSA, suggested that capitalism nowadays is "*getting out of control*". And interestingly, all that resounded in the words of an English man (in his 40's) who, while looking at the paintings in the museum hall contemplated: "*But I think, also, there are a lot of good things about the communist period as well, because living in… well, the West, or living in…where we live, I think capitalism has gone wrong a bit! And so, actually, I think that they need to replace it with something!  I myself, my political tendencies are sort of, slightly sort of middle of the right, so I just wonder, you know…, what would replace capitalism? Because I think actually, I think we need to have something to counteract capitalism… is my thought*". In that sense, gazing on communist heritage was, for some of the MSA foreign visitors, also a way of looking back to a past system of socio-economic organization, contemplating on its various aspects from the perspective of the present and possibly searching for answers to the challenges of the current mode of development.

A few young foreign visitors, on the other hand, looked at the collection of communist artefacts in a playful and comic way, often posing for funny pictures with the sculptures and even playing pretend with them: "*…I would so like to have that star in my apartment and hang my hats on it* [laughing]". At a first glance, for them, the objects of communist heritage did not seem to have much deeper value, other than aesthetic, entertainment, and simply informative of the "*European history and diversity*" (a group of four English men in their 20's and 30's). One of them, an Austrian student in art history, noted: "*So…if I see this sign now, but I have to say, I'm a Western European, I didn't grow up with it…I see it more as a relic of an old time which has the need to get rebranded…but for sure, it would still remind me of communism*…" However, in the ways they interacted with the objects on display and the way they referred to countries of the former Eastern Bloc as "*them*", as opposed to "*for us in the West*", one could see processes of identity building at work where the young Western visitors confirmed their own Western identity by gazing on and setting themselves apart from the images on display, while simultaneously constructing notions of the 'Other'.

Regardless of their different backgrounds and unique experiences, the foreign visitors I interviewed had come to Bulgaria to gaze on the lifeless remainders of communism, for one reason or another, but many of them left with a renegotiated image of a distinct 'Otherness' – that of post-communism, or still everything that the West is not. To the Western visitors I spoke with, Bulgarian post-communism evoked associations with "*inefficiency and political corruption*", "*poverty*", "*mafia*" and "*criminal immigrants*" (Danish man in his 70's; three Basque students), or on the more poetic side: "*more authentic*" ( Two German and Italian men in their 20's or 30's), "*something a bit quirky, something a bit different*", "*a kind of attraction – in a strange way*" (English man, in his 40's). What underlies such associations and definitions is a continual juxtaposition between the 'Self' and the 'Other', where communist heritage artefacts were seen by some as more than just history and were employed in the construction of an image of a post-communist 'Other'; the latter, being the result of an 'incomplete transformation' of a former communist totalitarian state into a Western-style democracy. In this sense, through touring heritage sites, gazing on the relics of the communist past, and later on drawing out differences and similarities between various places of Central and Eastern Europe they had visited and experienced, those foreign tourists were, knowingly or unknowingly, participating in the construction and perpetuation of social differences between the West and the ex-communist 'Other' (Light, 2000a&b).

## 8.5 IN SUM

Having outlined and discussed the three main groups of narratives on Bulgarian communist heritage, derived from the data in the course of this study, let me come back to the questions with which my research began.

First of all, my study sought to explore the way Bulgarian communist heritage was represented and interpreted at the Museum of Socialist Art. To begin with, the mere fact that the first official post-communist narrative on the controversial communist past was conceptualized through art objects and the rhetoric of art has got several important implications. As a "*pan-human phenomenon*" and a universal language (Preziosi, 2003:174), art is invested with meanings and values which symbolize and send out messages of national identity and the links between nations and their history. In the case of the Museum of Socialist Art, what is at stake in the representation of communist national heritage has to do with Bulgaria's post-communist national identity transformation and politico-economic assertion as a young liberal democratic country. This process of image and identity (re-)construction takes place simultaneously on many different scales – within domestic and the international contexts (Stenning, 2000) and the touring of communist heritage sites, monuments and museums as part of the global heritage industry, has thus been employed as an attractive and subtle way of producing and spreading desired images and notions of national identity (Light, Young, & Czepczynski, 2009). In that sense, the act of detachment and re-contextualization of communist artefacts in a museum setting could be construed as the stripping of their original meanings, while re-framing them as symbols of history, and rendering them no longer congruent with the country's post-1989 reality. In addition, the rhetoric of art adopted by the MSA implies that the targeted audiences of the institutional narrative are likely people with the kind of education, experience and 'taste' in consuming 'high' culture that allows them to comprehend the abstract messages and meanings invested in the art exhibit (Bennett, 1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a:182). Not surprisingly, based on my direct observations in the setting, the MSA was visited mainly by foreign tourists and young Bulgarian citizens who fitted that profile of museum- and gallery-goers, and had not had any first-hand experience with the communist regime.

Moreover, the artefacts' classification and display through the technologies of the museum institution allows for certain kinds of knowledge and information to be brought to the fore over others, as well as the validation of the 'truthfulness' and 'objectivity' of their representation through the discourses of science, expertness, art theory, etc. (Rose, 2007a). Hence, the one-sided, benign representation of Bulgarian communist heritage within the exhibit of art works produced according to the norms of the totalitarian canon raises questions as to the social and political stance of the country in relation to its totalitarian past. The absence of any mention of the negative aspects of the Bulgarian totalitarian regime, coupled with the missing critical interpretation and historical contextualization of the communist artefacts can be construed as an act of continual censuring of the alternative voices of history. The "*difficulty*" of providing a balanced interpretation of communist heritage and history was explained by the art experts, who participated in my research, with the ideologically- and emotionally-overburdened nature of the communist material legacies among generations of Bulgarian citizens who are living carriers of an ambiguous collective memory.

In addition, the formal institutional discourse on Bulgarian communist heritage, displaying a partial image of the regime, may seek to prevent the audiences from seeing through connections

between certain problems of the country's turbulent post-communist development and its totalitarian past, thus ensuring the status-quo serving the interests of the political elites and the oligarchic circles is maintained. Such non-judgemental, politically-correct representation of communist heritage may also seek to achieve the legitimation of the Bulgarian government in the context of its integration in the European Union and NATO, on the one hand, and its continual relations with Russia, on the other. However, the lack of public discussions on the concept and interpretation of the first post-communist museum devoted to an ambiguous part of the Bulgarian past means that state-employed expert rule and commissions have ultimately decided on which human values to be preserved and displayed to symbolize Bulgarian national heritage and identity. The superimposition of a certain discourse on national heritage can be particularly problematic given that the meanings and values which people attach to heritage objects are highly subjective and were dependent on their personal experiences with the communist past and the post-communist present.

Therefore, I set out to examine how visitors of different backgrounds perceived the institutional representation of communist heritage at the MSA. Based on the ways the MSA visitors I observed and interviewed interacted with and interpreted the museum collection, as well as taking their social backgrounds into account, I derived several main discourses on communist heritage. To those from the generations of Bulgarian citizens (in their 40's, 50's and 60's) who had a significant part of their lives under the communist regime, witnessed its fall and the changes during the transition period, the MSA was a place of recollection. One group of them, who saw their lives improving during the regime, or occupied positions of privilege within the state allowing them to benefit from the kinds of freedoms inaccessible to ordinary citizens, looked back on the recent past with a sense of nostalgia. These interviewees associated it with a sense of security, high moral values and contentment, while the changes during the transition period they described much in the opposite way – as bringing a sense of insecurity, moral decline and immiseration. This is very much indicative of what Velikonja (2008:28) also suggests about the phenomenon of nostalgia, or namely: "*By glorifying the past, it criticizes the present, telling us more about what is wrong now than what was better in the past.*" Other representatives of the older generations I interviewed had a more critical view and defined the years before 1989 as the darkest period of their lives. They spoke of communist heritage as a reminder of a "*shameful*" and obscure past the legacies of which still strangled the development of the Bulgarian nation nowadays, as they were to be found within the mindset of people born and raised during the regime.

The young Bulgarian citizens I interviewed, part of the generations who grew up in the politically and economically unstable years of the post-communist transition period, were drawn to the MSA in order to begin filling in a void in their sense of national identity, left there due to the collective memory gap which the non-representation of communist heritage during the first two decades after 1989 had left open. For them, learning about a period of their parent's lives and their nation's history that proved rather defining in terms of the post-communist development of Bulgaria, was a necessary puzzle piece in their sense of belonging, validation and self-legitimation as Bulgarian in a globalized world. The narratives on communist heritage among the foreign tourists I observed and interviewed were also united by their motivation to learn more about a system and history which few of them knew well. Some of them criticized the MSA representation as "*praising*" and "*perpetuating*" the propaganda and a signal that the communist legacies still prevented the Bulgarian nation from "*maturing as a democratic society*"

(MSA Visitor Book, 2013). For others, the communist heritage displayed at the MSA was a source of contemplation on the dysfunctions of modern capitalism, and of the possible future of socialism as an alternative answer to the challenges of contemporary development. Regardless of their motivations, the touring and gazing on communist heritage was engaged in a process of construction of social differences and 'Othering', where the image of post-communism occupied the place of communism as the non-Western 'Other' in Europe.

Taking into account the multiplicity of discourses which make up the ways communist heritage is thought about and made meaning of, one realizes how complex the problem of its representation is. Based on the results of my research, I believe there are two main factors which make the representation of Bulgarian communist heritage in the case of the Museum of Socialist Art a good example of the notion of "*dissonant*" (Ashworth, 1994) or "*contested*" (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009) heritage. On the one hand, the construction of a superimposing narrative at the MSA which seeks to represent a desired image of a controversial past, serving the contemporary political, economic and perhaps, even personal, purposes of the government, but without acknowledging the multiplicity of meanings and understandings different social groups attach to those artefacts, is a recipe for conflict. The silencing of those alternative voices of history excludes or marginalizes their meanings and values and leads to the disinheritance of large groups of people within the nation, who do not subscribe to the official discourse, as argued by Ashworth and Larkham (1994) and Ashworth and Graham (1997). On the other hand, the consumption and appropriation of images of Bulgaria's communist heritage by foreign, more often than not Western tourists, leads to the perpetuation of stereotypes of difference within Western discourses and, as a result, the power relations between the West and the post-communist 'Other', which according to Light (2000b), is the anti-thesis of the liberal democratic identities countries from Central and Eastern Europe seek to construct in their post-1989 contexts.

# 9. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Post-communist identity transformation is an intricate process happening simultaneously on multiple scales – from the individual to the international – and shaped within the interactions between the different levels (Stenning, 2000; Young & Light, 2001; Young & Kaczmarek, 2008). We could look at the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia as but a mere hub where identity-building processes are taking place through the embedding of Bulgarian communist heritage in a 'sanitized' setting, deprived of its life and its deep-rooted and complex meanings, and displayed before the gazing, image-appropriating eyes of domestic and international tourists. The images visitors are 'encouraged' to see and take away, materialized by the museum cues for 'appropriate understanding' (Rose, 2007a) portray a Bulgaria which has accepted and overcome its controversial communist past, and are yet designed in a rather cautious and politically-correct manner with regard to the country's international relations with both the European Union, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other.

However, when one tries to look beyond the obvious 'cues' of the museum, they could see a different picture than the one intended by design. For instance, upon entering the museum hall, in between two of the columns separating the gallery space in sub-sections, a visitor will come across a frail, young woman – one of the museum keepers – who suffers from a psychological disorder. She sits in silence on her chair, facing the floor, while four bronze-colored Stalin statuettes stand upright in front of each of the columns, as if guarding the young woman (Picture 25). It was this same picture I saw day after day during my field work, in which I could not help but recognize the post-communist predicament of Bulgaria. More specifically, in the image of the frail, stooping, young woman I saw the shaky and insecure development of the post-totalitarian democratic state and the Bulgarian democratic society, continually held back and destabilized by the lurking legacies of the recent past which, in the current contexts of post-communist transformation, keep causing disorientation and uncertainty of who or what we, the Bulgarian nation, are nowadays, where we stand and where we are headed.



Picture 25: The Stalin row

One thing is, thus, becoming more and more evident in the case of post-communist Bulgaria and the abundant legacies of its communist totalitarian past. While the official state narrative places this recent past in the chapter of history and keeps emphasizing on the espousal of the European norms and values that will build a strong and prosperous Western-style democratic state, without actually taking into account the complexity of meanings, attitudes, emotions and

memories related to the communist legacy of the country among ordinary citizens, and rendering those alternative discourses obscured by a top-down, superimposed one, the forced partial collective amnesia will keep displaying symptoms of "*collective schizophrenia*" (the term is borrowed from Anthony Georgieff, in Vagabond, 2011), as the ill-designed post-communist development of the country has aptly indicated so far. So long as complex memories of the past keep being swept under the carpet, instead of being accounted for through a systematic critical reflection on what they mean for the nation's present, the legacies of the totalitarian regime will keep strangling Bulgaria's social, political and economic life, while the democratic identity of the nation will remain just a convenient, good-looking façade.

And here is where the words of the MSA Director I mentioned earlier already begin to make sense. Why does Bulgaria need the Museum of Socialist Art, despite (or because of) its controversial nature, now more than ever? The answer lies within the nature of the modern museum as a disciplinary institution (Bennett, 1995, quoted in Rose, 2007a). What the museum institution can do is to fabricate and impose a narrative suiting the state's present economic and political agenda which, however, further suppresses the multiplicity of meanings and interpretations, and possibly ends up aggravating the symptoms of "*collective schizophrenia*". Alternatively, Horne (1984) suggests that the modern museum, in its function of popularizing cultural artefacts possesses "*…a subversive potential – for challenge both to expertness and to the ruling order*" (Horne, 1984:252). In this sense, the MSA could help alleviate or even cure the nation's "*collective schizophrenia*", by providing a creative space open to different groups of people to renegotiate the various meanings and emotions which had been stifled all along and, having analyzed the good and the bad, to help them move on and build that "*normal life*" that is so acutely deficient, according to the discourses of the current protests against the government and corruption in the country. It all depends on the path of development down which the museum institution in Bulgaria and the MSA in particular will choose to take national memory. It also depends on Bulgarian society to be a constant corrective of the work of institutions, similar to what Michel Foucault called the 'real political task' of society, or namely:

*"… to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent, to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence that has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them."* (Chomsky and Foucault, 1974:171, quoted in Flyvbjerg, 1998:223).

As far as the limitations of this research are concerned, the limited period of time during which the data was generated, namely the entire month of April and the first two weeks of May 2013, means that meanings and interpretations of visitors from other social groups may not have been accounted for in this research, such as visitors from the former Soviet Republics and the People's Republic of China, for instance, who I did not personally have the chance to encounter during the field work period at the MSA. In addition, due to the limitations of the employed visual methodology, focused on the 'social life of objects' (Rose, 2007b) and their embedding within museum practices, through the institutional technologies of display (Rose, 2007a), the exhibited art objects were not analyzed in terms of their thematic content. The latter could have complemented the analysis of the institutional discourse on communist heritage, which is why it could be considered as a possible point for further research in the case of the MSA, as well as other cases of museum narratives materialized through visual objects, such as art works or photographs. With regard to the symbolic role of museums in the socio-political and economic

projects of the modern corporate state, future research on the ways the 'subversive potential' of museums can be employed to counter superimposed expert and official discourses (Horne, 1984:252) in the re-branding of contested heritages may be a valuable point for consideration. In the case of the Bulgarian Museum of Socialist Art, in particular, future research may be necessary in the construction of re-negotiated, alternative narrations and interpretations of the recent past within its exhibition, taking into account the different positions in society.

In section 4.4.1 I mentioned that this research builds onto the assumption that despite the common processes taking place in the post-communist re-structuration of the countries from Central and Eastern Europe, each of those nations has a unique set of historical dependencies (Verdery, 1999; Blokker, 2005) and, therefore, so, too, are their manners of addressing and coping with identity transformation to be approached as unique. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of post-communist identity transformations and contemporary re-negotiation of collective memory of the communist past, future research may focus on the ways different forms of remembrance take place in alternative spaces, such as the Internet, private galleries, local community centers, various student projects, etc.. In addition, taking into account the increased opportunities citizens of Central and Eastern European countries nowadays have for travelling, studying, working and living abroad, an interesting point for further research into post-communist identity transformations would be to consider how their international experiences, as well as possible encounters of stereotypes of post-communism abroad, possibly come to influence the re-invention of those nations' identities.

It is important here to underline that the results of this study, as outlined above, constitute my own understanding and interpretation of the data generated about the museum setting and exhibition, as well as of the way the participants in my research made meaning of and interpreted the MSA display of communist heritage. I acknowledge that the data are socially constructed, contextual and discursive and, therefore, subject to different interpretations (Mason, 2002). That is to say, I have no intention to make claims to objectivity and generalizability, as those lead to obscuring and oppressing other knowledges and interpretations which may exist on the subject (Rose, 1997). In addition, while the results of this study have no pretension to being representative outside of the data generated within the frames of this research and the sample of participants in it, I believe that they could still provide some relevant insight into the implications of communist heritage tourism in the post-communist identity transformations taking place in Bulgaria, as well as other countries of the former Eastern Bloc. My own background and personal involvement in this project, as a Bulgarian citizen, part of the 'transition generations', but also as an international student, I would not consider as a pitfall. On the contrary, I believe it gave me the strong motivation for this research, and the kind of background knowledge and experience which allowed me to relate to my interviewees and better understand their interpretations of the issue at hand, to make connections between past and present developments in the country, as well as see through the kinds of human experiences and perspectives which were part of the construction of the different discourses on communist heritage discussed in this study.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDES USED IN THE RESEARCH

**Interview guide 1 – art experts**

- Who are you, what is your role within the museum institution?
- How did the idea about the museum come about? (Who instigated the project? Who were the contributors to making the project happen?)
- What are the purposes of the museum?
- What are the reasons why the concept of the museum is focused on art (and not anything else) from that period of Bulgarian history?
- How was the location of the museum chosen?
- On what principles were the objects in the collection selected? Who was responsible for the selection?
- Where were the objects obtained from? (Were the objects state-owned or from private collections? What were their original places like? How had those objects been treated after 1989 and before their exhibit? Was any extensive restoration of the objects necessary? Who took care of that?)
- What about the intangible heritage from that period (such as the music, rituals, etc.)? Do you think they can be represented in the museum, as well? How? (Or, if not, why not?)
- On what principles was the museum exhibition designed? (What story do the exhibition and its layout seek to narrate to its audiences?)
- How were the decisions taken regarding what information about the objects to display and what to leave out? Who was involved in designing and interpreting the exhibition?
- Were there any conflicts or differing positions regarding the selection, display or interpretation of the artefacts? (Were there any public deliberations on questions regarding the concept and interpretation of the museum? If not, why not?)
- (What is the reason for the lack of museum guides and richer interpretation of the objects?)
- How is the museum promoted in the country and abroad? In what light is it promoted?
- Who are the intended users and audiences of the museum? (Domestic, foreign, age groups?)
- What kinds of people visit the museum? Where are they from? What is their motivation to visit this particular museum? Do they come with guides or independently? What kind of questions do they ask the museum staff?
- What messages does the museum seek to project among its (domestic and foreign) audiences with regard to Bulgarian socialist past and who we are now? (hints to myself: regarding history, national identity and politics) What else does the exhibition teach its observers?
- How, in your view, has the way we look at those (emblematic) objects changed in comparison to the years under socialist rule?
- What were the reactions of the different audiences with regard to the museum? Why, do you think, were the reactions to the museum so ambivalent? What were the main critiques?

- Why, in your view, did it take so long for a museum on socialist thematic to be brought to existence in Bulgaria in comparison to many other states in CEE? (Why did it happen during the mandate of this particular government and not earlier ones? What was the role of Mr. Vezhdi Rashidov in it?)
- Anything I didn't ask about but you would like to add?

## Interview Guide 2 – Domestic Visitors

- How did you learn about the museum?
- What motivated you to visit the museum?
- What were your expectations with regard to a museum devoted to socialist heritage? (Were they met?)
- How are the objects at the museum making you feel?
- What kinds of memories and associations does the display (or particular objects perhaps – e.g. the red star, the statue of Lenin, portraits of Todor Zhivkov) evoke in your mind?
- Were you familiar with any of these objects prior to your visit (and what they represent)?
- What do these objects mean to you personally as a Bulgarian?
- How do you interpret the choice of the ministry of culture to address Bulgarian socialist heritage through an art collection rather than anything else? (Overall attitude – favourable/unvafourable?)
- What lessons do these artefacts and the exhibit as a whole teach you about our socialist past and our national heritage? How do you, as a Bulgarian citizen, identify yourself with that?
- What would you have done differently about representing our socialist heritage if you were at a position to decide?  (Does this exhibit succeed to represent Bulgarian socialist heritage? What, in your view, might have been omitted to display or tell about our socialist heritage? Why? What else belongs in this museum in terms of objects and information?)
- What about the intangible heritage from that period (such as music, performance arts and rituals)
- How is the way you look at and experience these emblematic objects (e.g. the red star, Lenin, Marx, Zhivkov statues and portraits) now different from back then during socialism?
- What does the exhibit/artefacts tell you about who we used to be back then and who we have become today as a nation?
- Why, in your view, did it take so long for Bulgaria to start addressing its socialist heritage?
- After the visit: What feelings and messages have remained in your mind after you've seen the exhibition?
- Would you recommend the museum to others? What would you tell them about it?

## Interview Guide 3 – Foreign Visitors

- What did you associate Bulgaria with prior to your visit in the country? What did you know about Bulgaria?
- How did you learn about the museum? Did you have any difficulty reaching its location?
- What motivated you to visit the museum?
- What were your expectations with regard to the exhibition prior to your visit?
- How is the exhibition at the museum making you feel?
- What is your initial reaction to the objects you see on display? (What do you like and what don't you like about it? Favourable/Unfavourable attitude as a whole?)

- What kind of memories or associations does the display (or particular objects perhaps – e.g. the statue of Lenin, etc.) evoke in your mind?
- What lessons do you learn about Bulgarian socialist past (and what those objects represented during socialism)? Was there anything that struck you as surprising? How do the lessons from the museum correspond to what you knew about the countries of the Eastern Bloc before 1989?
- How is our country any different today in your opinion? (What images does the museum project about Bulgaria today in relation to its socialist past?)
- Would you recommend the museum to others? What would you tell them about it?

## APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANTS

**Table 1:** Participants in the research

| No: | Number of Interviewees | Nationality | Sex | Age | Occupation | Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | One | Bulgarian | Man | 30's | Art Historian; MSA curator | 02-04-2013 |
| 2 | Three | Basque | - 1 Man<br>-2 Women | 20's | Students | 04-04-2013 |
| 3 | One | Bulgarian | Woman | 50's | Museum employee | 04-04-2013 |
| 4 | One | Bulgarian | Woman | 60's | Museum employee | 05-04-2013 |
| 5 | Two | Bulgarian | -1 Man<br>-1 Woman | 30's | - Tour agent<br>- Art gallery worker | 06-04-2013 |
| 6 | One | Irish | Man | 70's | Political Scientist | 09-04-2013 |
| 7 | One | Chinese | Woman | 60's | Writer | 09-04-2013 |
| 8 | One | Bulgarian | Man | 20's | Student in art | 11-04-2013 |
| 9 | Three | English | Man | 20's, 30's | Unknown | 14-04-2013 |
| 10 | Two | Bulgarian | -1 Man<br>-1 Woman | 20's | Students in architecture | 16-04-2013 |
| 11 | One | German | Man | 40's | Unknown | 18-04-2013 |
| 12 | One | Italian | Man | 30's | Unknown | 18-04-2013 |
| 13 | One | Bulgarian | Woman | 40's | Tourism Geographer; University Lecturer | 19-04-2013 |
| 14 | One | Bulgarian | Man | 50's | Tour operator | 19-04-2013 |
| 15 | One | English | Man | 40's | Unknown | 21-04-2013 |
| 16 | One | Bulgarian | Man | 50's | Photographer | 23-04-2013 |
| 17 | One | Bulgarian | Woman | 20's | PhD student in history | 24-04-2013 |
| 18 | One | Bulgarian | Woman | 50's | Art Historian; Head of the National Art Gallery | 25-04-2013 |
| 19 | One | Austrian | Man | 20's | Student in art history | 26-04-2013 |
| 20 | One | Danish | Man | 70's | Pensioner | 28-04-2013 |
| 21 | One | Bulgarian | Woman | 60's | Art historian; Director of the MSA; Former Deputy-Minister of Culture | 30-04-2013 |
| 22 | Three | Spanish | - 1 Woman<br>-2 Men | 40's, 50's, 60's | Professor in economics; University lecturers | 02-05-2013 |