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Quantity vs Quality

Citizens and anti-citizens in the Bulgarian protests of 2013

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Abstract

Protests are often waged against governments but can end up fighting the constituencies that rush to the defence of embattled governments. The enmity between the protest and the authorities thus bifurcates into an antagonism not only against the government, but also against another protest. This paper focuses on instances of such triangulation of social antagonism, and the effect they have on the discursive constitution of civic identities. More specifically, it traces the delineation of the boundaries of legitimate belonging to civil society and the community of citizens during anti-governmental and so-called counter-protests (or pro-government protests) in Bulgaria in the summer of 2013. Those boundaries were drawn along class, aesthetic, epistemic and ethnic lines.

I treat "civil society" as a contested terrain of competing discourses and show how protesters refocus it – contra Hegel's understanding of civil society as a "system of needs" – into the cultured domain of the greatest distance from material necessity and need. According to the protesters, what made 2013 stand out in the history of protests after 1989 is that people rallied behind immaterial things such as "European values". However, this strong anti-materialist view does not make the protesters independent from the materiality of class. Rather, one of the main points of these protest discourses was that the protests are the expression of the "new middle class", embodying civil society, and this was articulated with ruminations on what makes one an authentic citizen.

This self-designated "new middle class" which spoke on behalf of civil society came to imagine itself as the legitimate arbiter of what constitutes the public interest and belongs to the community of citizens, and denied the claims of other "interest groups" to be able to define the common interest. In this paper, I consider the protests and counter-protests as a class conflict unfolding on the terrains of civil society and citizenship, a conflict mediated by new articulations of (middle) class and civic consciousness. I draw on Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism which thematizes the antagonistic constitution of identities. I supplement it with a term of my own – the anti-citizen – against which a vision of the model citizen was discursively articulated by the protesters. The anti-citizen captures the ambivalent position of people who are formally citizens, yet symbolically excluded by the (self-appointed) legitimate representatives of civil society due to their alleged lack of knowledge and misguided political positions.

Keywords: citizenship, civil society, protests and counter-protests, aesthetics, class, anti-citizens.[2]

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Introduction

In 2013, Bulgaria saw two large anti-government protest mobilizations – in winter and in summer. The "Winter" or "February" protests, as they came to be known, erupted over electricity price hikes, and resulted in the government's resignation and snap elections. The "Summer" or "June" protest of the same year broke out over the controversial appointment as a head of National Security of a media corporation owner with suspected ties to organized crime.

The summer protest was met with pro-government rallies that came to be known as "the counter-protests". Anti-government protesters repeatedly emphasized that those rallies were not authentic expressions of civil society protest because they were either sponsored by the government or in other ways solicited by it.

Utilizing Discourse Theory, I approach the figures of the counter-protest, as articulated by activist-intellectuals of the protests, to analyze the vectors for inclusion and exclusion in the category of the citizen and civil society. I scrutinize what role discourses of class, ethnicity, aesthetics, knowledge and morality play in the construction and maintenance of the boundaries of citizenship. To this end, I draw on media articles and intellectual discussions about the nature of the conflict animating the protests. For example, the antagonism between the protesters and the counter-protesters assumed a sharp aesthetic form: "the beautiful" and "economically self-sufficient" citizens against the "ugly" and the "needy" "anti-" or "counter-citizens". Meanwhile, claims to superior knowledge on the part of the protesters were used to question the very civic competences, and what amounts to the same thing, the citizenship status, of the counter-protesters.

Theory and methodology

This paper treats "civil society" not as a social field populated by NGOs or interest clubs but as a *discourse* open to *polemical interpretation* and appropriations by actors locked in a struggle with each other. The same applies to the related notions of "citizen" and social class. I approach them not as tangible phenomena as they are usually treated by unrelated and disparate scholarly areas, such as citizenship studies or civil society theory (which deal with questions of how a state *formally* organizes membership and rights via citizenship laws, or what the material conditions and measurable distributions are of social classes in capitalism). I treat them as discourses mobilized by the protesters in the rhetorical constitution of their identity and objectives as a movement. In short, rather than exploring the concepts' long polemical history in academic debates, I will follow a fragment of their turbulent "social life" which does not respect heuristic separations and disciplinary divisions of labour.

In what follows, I will show how the Bulgarian protest wave of 2013 rendered culture and knowledge as the firm foundation upon which "authentic civil society" – and alongside it, "the authentic citizen" – alone can thrive. I detail the rise of what can be called a "neo-Montesqueian" discourse of civil society which complements (or as time will perhaps show, displaces) the dominant liberal Tocquevillian and Habermasian views which define civil society as the sphere of free associations (especially NGOs) and rational deliberation in the public sphere. Since we are in the domain of protest movements, I detail this semantic overwriting from the perspective of Ernesto Laclau's discursive theory of populism (1996, 2005).

Moving away from substantivist theories of populism, which identify and enumerate positive content in order to make sense of populist movements, Ernesto Laclau offers a formalist approach which defines populism as the elementary political gesture; the "us versus them" antagonistic relationship. He is uninterested in the ideological ("ontic") content of the antagonism. Instead, the "populist subject" emerges out of the specific combination of otherwise divergent demands into a single "chain of equivalence," whose unity is maintained by them being opposed to a shared enemy (1996, 2005). Thus, the "us vs. them" opposition stabilizes the chain of demands by suppressing, yet not obliterating, their internal differences.

When the chain forms, one of the demands emerges as the "master demand" representing the rest. Laclau calls this demand an "empty signifier" and the plural subject it stands for, the "popular subject". This popular subject's identity is a function of its opposition to an enemy, i.e. "the people" versus "the government". Once this antagonism arises, we are in the domain of populism or the political proper.

The political, worthy of this name, is only so when the social splits into Two – a popular subject versus the powers that be – thereby delimiting what Laclau calls "administration", which is his term for the ordinary operations of the polity when the government is able to satisfy demands when they arise (i.e. *politique* vs. *la politique* in Ranciere's 1995 terms). In the case of the Bulgarian protests of 2013 (which continue in various forms to this day) demands ranging from "morality in politics" to "judiciary reform" and "decommunization" were articulated around the empty signifier of the "citizens against the Mafia," as the main slogan of the protests signified.

Despite the widespread scholarly assimilation of populism and nationalism (visible in the "national-populism" misnomer), the Laclauian populist antagonistic bifurcation points to the limit of the official discourse of the nation. Nothing underpins the idea of modern nation more fundamentally than the notion of unity. Despite its internal pluralism and even antagonisms, the nation insists on its One-ness; the nation is the One embodied. It is a One in which the three Hegelian categories of the particular, the singular and the universal co-exist in an uneasy dialectic. Vis-à-vis other nations, and insofar as it asserts its distinction from them, the bounded nation is particularistic – *this* language, *this particular* religion or an assemblage of customs distinguish and delineate it from the rest. Vis-à-vis its internal pluralism and multiplicities, the nation is a singularity: "*despite our class, geographic and cultural differences, we are One and Indivisible"* (at least in the Republican versions thereof). It is also the site of a doubly limited universalism – limited by its own boundaries, on the one hand, and by the imperatives of capital accumulation, on the other. This universalism underpins modern citizenship through which the state supposedly recognizes all its citizens – and only them – as equal before the law, and demands

their loyalty to itself. (In practice, various exclusions afflict minorities, working populations, and different "superfluous" populations – from the point of view of capital – such as refugees).

As stated, the One of "normal political times" is equivalent to "administration": the state neutralizes demands from below by administering them. According to Laclau, the populist moment occurs when any unfulfilled demands articulate together in what he calls a "chain of equivalence" and go beyond a point of satisfaction and neutralization by the authorities, leading to the social splitting in Two: a political antagonism of "us vs them" ensues.

There is, however, a third element in the social antagonism of the Two we need to consider. "The long 2013" (Tsoneva 2017) of year-long protests in Bulgaria, did not direct its ire solely against the oligarchic government, but drew yet another fault line within the national One. This, the "middle class" (or "the authentic citizens", as the protesters argued) rose both against "the people" and the government. This discursive triangulation of the enmity brings the idea of civil society close to the way in which Montesquieu, long before the birth of anything remotely identifiable as a modern nation, theorized the social order in the French monarchy. Weaponizing "civil society" as an expression of the separation of powers that is most adept at checking absolutist power, Montesquieu grounded it firmly with the estate of the aristocracy, and its elaborate systems of mores and manners (see Richter 1998, Ehrenberg 1999). Norbert Elias's classic study about the gradual "courtisation" of the middle classes by aristocratic manners and ways of conduct in the guise of civility is an obvious point of reference here. "Civil" literally means the top-down process of dissemination of cultivation, culture, and manners from the courts to the lower social orders (Elias 2000). In our case, in describing their battle as the "citizens" or "civil society", defined as possessing superior knowledge and culture, against the twin enemy of the post-communist political elite and their gullible constituencies, the protesters operate with a Montesquieu-inflected theory of civil society in which the virtuous, cultured, and knowledgeable ersatz-aristocracy of citizens rises to safeguard freedom, morality and European values against encroachments from corrupt elites and welfare-dependent populations.

How does this triple fault-line affect Laclau's theory of populism? Despite his unwillingness to consider determinate ontic elements that make up the chain of equivalence, an examination of the ideological content of the chain yields substantial implications for its form. The Two of "us versus them" of the struggle turns into a Three, and *eo ipso*, accentuates some of the limits of the formalist framework of Laclau's theory (for more on this, see Stavrakakis 2004). So "the us versus them", or to stay true to the protesters' rhetoric, "the citizens versus the mafia" turns into the "middle class" Citizens versus the Masses versus the Mafia.

As a final theoretical point, I introduce my notion of the "anti-citizen".[3] It captures the effects that triangulating the conflict exerts on the imaginaries of citizenship. Participants in, and intellectuals endorsing, the protests define themselves as "authentic citizens" as opposed to the poor who demand "material" things (as in February 2013 or the counter-protests of the same year). The "anti-citizen" captures the confrontation between the self-described middle class protesters and the working poor as occurred in 2013. We can complicate the classic dyad in citizenship theory of citizens (those who are "in"), and non-citizens (those who are "out",

3 David Harvey's notion of "anti-value" from his 2017 book provided the immediate inspiration for mine.

i.e. foreigners) with the idea of the "anti-citizens", meaning those who are formally citizens of the polity but are discursively excluded or symbolically stripped of citizenship because they are not protesting for the "right things". The anti-citizen is similar to what Marx (1977: 141) called the "class of civil society which is not a class of civil society", a byword for "the proletariat" but here understood in culturalist terms.

Before I engage with the symbolic demarcation of the boundaries of civil society and citizenship, I will first outline the ways in which the antagonistic relation to the (post)communist elite is articulated by the anti-governmental protesters. I will then explore the critiques voiced by activist-intellectuals during the most acute phase of the protests in order to operationalize the notion of the "anti-citizen". This phase occurred during the pro-government demonstrations of 2013 which came to be known as "the counter-protests". Opposition to them culminated in calls for a thorough "cultural revolution" as a badly needed reform of the "gullible masses".

I draw on a range of articles and discussions by protesters and sympathetic commentators who shall be referred to as activist-intellectuals. Some of them come from elite artistic and scholarly circles, but their elite-ness does not preclude treating them as part of the popular subject of 2013 as they participated in and endorsed the anti-governmental protests in no uncertain terms (while scorning the February protests and the counter-protests). Their interventions were instrumental in lending the 2013 summer protests – an otherwise "motley crew" of all sorts of individuals and groups, as any big protest is – a coherent image and subjectivity as the protest of "the new middle class" (and even bourgeoisie, as per one pronouncement discussed below). The intellectual objectification of the dynamics and relations in the protest, the definitions given by the opinion-makers, were much more important for the constitution of the identity of the protest, than the "actual" or "objective" and diverse class habitus of the participants, which however must be recognized as having supplied the commentators with the original impetus to venture their definitions. In short, the identity of the protest as "bourgeois" does not come solely from any objective distance out of necessity enjoyed by its participants, but by the objectified fantasy of this distance; that is to say, as articulated/objectified by the protesters (and their intellectuals) themselves. While the protest participants are more numerous and irreducible to the amount of public interventions spurted on their behalf by "men of letters," the identity of the movement nevertheless depends strongly on (mediatized) discourses about its objectives and character, even when members of the movement disagree with their message, as I have witnessed on a number of occasions. However, for the purposes of this paper, I do not focus on internal disagreements but on select examples of articles and interviews which have been instrumental in fixing the boundaries and identity of the protest wave.

The One becomes Two

The next two sections detail how the summer protest activist-intellectuals conceive of their enemy in the face of the government. It is an example of how the One of the nation splits into Two along the antagonistic frontier between "us" and "them", and the popular subject emerges. The discourses below consider this enmity in very radical terms, almost as species difference.

In a newspaper interview, entitled "the New Middle Class Rebellion", the renowned Bulgarian theater director-cum-protester Yavor Gardev endorses, and defines the 2013 summer protest as an expression of "civil

society" understood as a community of self-respecting free citizens. Democracy, he says, rests on the free expression of the will of the free citizen. This is profoundly a non-economic and non-materialist mode of being: *"There is a category of citizen who insist on their free will. That is to say, they do not sell their vote."* For anyone familiar with recent political debates raging in the Bulgarian public sphere, this is an obvious allusion to the question of election rigging and the market in votes, in which Roma voters are the prime suspects. Gardev's interlocutor accepts the premises of the statement and provides a counter-example from the protests: a famous banner of the summer protest stating *"I am not paid. I hate you for free."* Gardev agrees with the contrast and adds:

> *Today the most productive and innovating social stratum is not represented in Parliament. It does not recognize itself mentally and culturally in the MPs. [...] I would call these protesters in Sofia an emerging middle class. They hold their destiny in their own hands because they possess the necessary intellectual capabilities to make a living. Maybe it sounds rude and undemocratic but this stratum looks at the people in parliament as if they were monkeys, [...] wild animals [...] It is not politically correct because we are all people but I hear this in the vocabulary of the protesters. This is about a species difference à la Darwin. […] It is as though the protesting stratum lives in a foreign country. It is reduced to the position of right-less pariahs, while these are precisely the free people. People who have ideas, who are productive because they are moving forward the economy and our social life.* (Petkova 2013)

Framing the enemy in civilizational and evolutionary terms, Gardev calls the political elite "another anthropological type" which he admits to detesting. This "type" differs from the protesters in that it is "not intelligent enough" (ibid).

Echoing this, the renowned and widely translated Bulgarian novelist Georgi Gospodinov, whose very first article about the summer protests called the protesters "beautiful" (a descriptor which stuck both with their proponents and detractors) ventures his explanation about the roots of the crisis rattling Bulgarian society, to which the protests are a response:

> *Underneath the financial crisis lies another crisis, personal, global, and more difficult to see as it cannot be exhausted with bank failures. [...] It's a crisis of morality, cultural crisis and a crisis of the meaning to live here. [...] I have a civilizational problem* [with the behavior of politicians]. (Atanasova, 2014)

When asked what can be done about this crisis, Gospodinov states that the solution is to:

> *inculcate taste through reading. For me, to be a person of taste is also a political problem. The big problem of our politicians is not ideological [...]. The big problem is with the mentality and* [lack of] *taste.* (ibid)

Thus defined, the problem requires intervention right into subjectivity (in addition to pervasive calls for lustration). The crisis cannot be tackled by redistribution, or financial regulation of any similar economic policies because it runs deeper than economics: it is a non-material crisis of taste. Notwithstanding the fact that people like Gospodinov speak about the political elite, the source of the malady is often perceived to originate in the *demos*.

For example, Georgi Ganev, the chief economic expert of the Center for liberal strategies, a Sofia-based think-tank, argued that the antagonistic parties in the 2013 protests are not two but three: *"The poor are not*

alone. [...] This is about the formation for quarter of a century [since 1989] *of a coalition between the paupers and the oligarchs."* (Ganev 2013) According to him, what holds the coalition together is the exchange of votes for welfare:

> *The decades-long [...] coalition between totally dependent paupers and oligarchs has relegated Bulgarian society to the muddy swamp it inhabits today. Against this crystal-clear coalition which tries to secure the eternal reproduction of poverty, welfare handouts and stealing [...] rose up the Bulgarian bourgeoisie. Yes, the bourgeoisie. I shamelessly abandon the euphemism of "the middle class" and still more shamelessly want to rehabilitate the term "bourgeoisie" [...].* (ibid)

The deficiencies in the constituencies of the oligarchic elites are thought to be remedied only by the "Cultural revolution," as the summer protest portents.

Evgenii Daynov, a liberal intellectual and think-tank director, defined the summer protests as a cultural revolution: "[the then PM] *and his clique triggered a cultural revolution, at the end of which Bulgarians will stop being peons, moochers and servants"* (2013) (presuming this is what they used to be before the 2013 Revolution). In other words, what democracy lacks are democratic subjectivities (i.e. citizens), but the protest will finally produce them. The citizens must replace the docile and dependent "populace" which prevents the completion of the Transition. Further, the Cultural Revolution, according to Daynov, transforms communism into an aesthetic problem:

> *If your problem* [with communism] *runs as deep as aesthetics, it means that you are from another culture. Because they reached such a depth in their rejection* [of communism]*, the Poles became the most successful ex-communist nation.* [In contrast], *no matter how many times Bulgaria declares its "euroatlantic civilizational choice", it won't "fix itself" unless the culture of helplessness (of the population) and that of cynicism (of the ruling elite) is replaced by the contemporary culture of the citizen.* (2013)

In other words, mere evolutionary change or institutional reforms cannot turn the culture of the citizen into the dominant one. No less than a Cultural Revolution is needed to do that.

To repeat, according to these voices, the (post)communist crisis we have to tackle is not material (utility bills, poverty, inequality, etc.) but cultural/civilizational/moral and aesthetic. These discourses put the whole operation of the production of political distinctions firmly on cultural and aesthetic grounds. This ties to the intellectuals' understanding of the level of democratic development of the country. The fact that Bulgaria is a liberal democracy and an EU-member state is merely a veneer that covers its opposite. Namely, Bulgaria is only formally a democracy, as its liberal institutions are lacking in substance. This substance is taste, "citizen" culture, love for reading books, beauty, rigor, and as such it is immaterial, spiritual, and sadly lacking in the majority of the population seduced by the "welfare populism" of the oligarchs.

Who are the two sides in Daynov's "cultural barricade"?

> *On the one side is the government (and its [...] cliques) which stands for the Asiatic-serfdom culture, characteristic of the space between Brest-Litovsk and Shanghai. On the other side there are the protesters, united by their attachment to the European civic culture.* (ibid)

On this understanding, "civic culture" (racially localized in "Europe" as opposed to "despotic Asia") is supposed to rectify the deficiencies by the allegedly skewed institutionalization of liberal democracy, yet it is also more foundational than the political institution-building. Culture emerges as primary to politics; it is the transcendental ground on which politics itself can function:

> *the more enlightened part of society* [knows] *that not all divisions can be submerged in the typical Left-Right divide; there are more fundamental differences which transcend it. Namely, the differences between the civilized and the barbarians. Only civilized people can split into left- and right-wingers, whereas the barbarians should not be let into the quarrel because they will simply beat up and rob the arguing parties.* (ibid)

More recently, confusing the Latin etymology of the word "polite" (from Latin *polire*, to polish) with the ancient Greek for citizen (*politēs,* which comes from *pólis*), Daynov (2017) opines that "citizen" literally means "he who is polite" (or cultured), and attributes this definition to Aristotle. In contrast, Aristotle defines "the citizen pure and simple" not at the level of their manners but as somebody who has "the right to participate in judicial functions and in office" (2009: 1274b, also Johnson 1984). Despite the skewed representation of Aristotle, this definition exerts a performative effect in that it is productive of particular civic identities. The indexing of citizenship to "politeness" forms part of the neo-Montesquian vision of civil society, as predicated upon culture and manners, that the activists have engineered in the course of protesting.

In a similar Manichean vein, but with a pronounced medicalized edge, the world-renowned Bulgarian opera singer Alexandrina Pendatchanska, who was an ardent supporter of and participant in the summer protests, stated that:

> *the carcinogenic formation of oligarchic Octopus* [of ex-secret service apparatchiks] *has put the body of the state to a terminally ill condition in which the means of democracy cannot maintain it alive, let alone cure it! [...]. What do we do when our body is facing physical disintegration and is dying? Do we care if the right hand or the left hand reaches for the medicine, or do we exert all our strength to take the pill, to swallow it and to overcome the disease?* (Pendatchanska 2013)

Words like "disease", "cancer", "barbarians" code a Manichean struggle between "Good" and "Evil", "civilization" and "barbarism" which is a non-dialectizable battle to the death marked by non-resolution (except at the cost of the radical exclusion – nay, incision – of the opposing party). One is not supposed to tolerate a tumor; one operates on it. It is a version of the conservative clash of civilizations theme, only it is localized into the same nation-state torn asunder between two warring camps: civilization (the protest) and anti-civilization (the government).

However, despite the ire directed at the "communist" elite, the criticism of the so-called "facade" democracy comes to express the drive to improve the democratic order by way of elevating, educating or excluding, if need be, the deficient voters. And this happens to be the majority of the population, as philosopher and theologian Kalin Yanakiev asserted, when he bluntly stated that the events of the summer of 2013 represent *"the protests of the Bulgarian quality against the Bulgarian quantity."* (Offnews 2013e)

The antagonism led some commentators to assert that there are not one but two Bulgarias.

In order to appreciate the comments above, we need to read them together with the larger discursive frame they inhabit. This context is the discourse about the "two Bulgarias". (By extension "the two Romanias"; see Nastase 2014 for a symptomatic, non-reflexive application of the term). In Bulgaria, this discourse became very salient with the summer protests of 2013, but its roots go deeper. It is outside the scope of this paper to offer a genealogical reconstruction of the discourse which is an offshoot of the symbolic division of the country along the urban-rural axis; the putatively "Balkan" or "Oriental" culture in the countryside vs the "European" mentalities in cities, the "forward" and the "backward", and so on (see Isin 2002 on the distinction between "European" and "Oriental" identities operative in the production of occidental citizenship).[4] The discourse's versatile repertoire of bywords about class and class distinctions makes it easy to mobilize by public opinion-makers both during protests and in the staid phases of social confrontation.

> *It is obvious that in Bulgaria two beginnings are locked in a struggle: the first is of the mass, post-socialist Bulgarian and the other of the less mass, modern Bulgarian* [of the protests]. *Today we witness the star moment of the mass Bulgarian.* (Daynov 2015)

Award-winning literary and cultural critic (and also university professor) Boyko Penchev provides one of the clearest visions about the "two Bulgarias" dichotomy, again in a commentary about the protest year. According to him, while the first Bulgaria understands justice as "full fridges for everyone", the second Bulgaria defines justice as "to each according to their contribution", thereby putting the old communist dictum[5] in a neoliberal, self-responsibility frame. The first Bulgaria, he continues, waits for the politicians to distribute wealth while the second creates it and expects from the politicians to secure the rule of law so that they "won't lose their motivation to create". The first Bulgaria believes every populist politician who promises welfare handouts; for the second, the ideal politician is a judge imposing the rule of law rather than playing the role of a "warehouse gatekeeper". They also believe in personal responsibility, whereas the first Bulgaria blames capitalism for its low wages. The attitude to capitalism is in fact crucial: the second Bulgaria "reasons that if capitalism works in Belgium but not in Bulgaria", it must be because of the way it was implemented in the country by the communists and the secret services (Penchev 2014).

As the opera singer Alexandrina Pendatchanska put it, the summer protest was a "real citizens' protest, which cannot be reduced to utility bills", as in February 2013 (2013). On this understanding, the real citizen is a hard-working, ascetic, self-help anti-communist who roots for "values" instead of "material trivialities". This automatically delegitimizes social discontent with worsening work conditions, wages, public services and suchlike.

We can render this dichotomy as an opposition between the "vulgar materialism" of the masses ("full fridges for everyone") versus the idealist struggle for the rule of law and the common good of the value-pro-

4 Rural" vs "urban" and "modern" vs "oriental" symbolic divisions similarly underscore the recent protests in Armenia over the acquisition and destruction of Yerevan's Cover Market by an enterprising MP (see Andriaans 2017). Similarly, the Yerevan protesters mobilized the *"imaginary threat of 'oriental' Yerevan [...] to produce a cross-generational self-reference of urban middle classes as 'civic Yerevan' (ibid: 150) in the process of an intense confrontation with the 'oligarch's constituencies'",* as Andriaans calls the counter-protesters who supported the renovation of the market because they were promised jobs and economic development.

5 *"From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs."*

ducing classes in society; between the "lazy masses" expecting the welfare state to take care of them vs. the hard-working, austere, self-reliant, and self-responsible creators; in the final analysis, between a communism that still has not departed and an authentic capitalism that is yet to arrive.

Two becomes Three: the citizens vs. the masses and the elite

Around the 2013 summer protests, the discourse of the "two Bulgarias" burst forward with fresh force. For example, the public intellectual and journalist Tony Nikolov, who regularly contributes to the conservative web-portal "Kultura" opined that the two Bulgarias are less marked by material inequality than by an inequality in the ability to understand and appreciate freedom:

> *These two Bulgarias do not know how to speak to each other, not because they speak a different tongue or enjoy different material conditions. They differ in their sense of freedom. The first Bulgaria belongs to those who worry about their future, let's call it the free Bulgaria. The other is the feudalized and humiliated Bulgaria, the Bulgaria of the people bussed into protests and counter-protests. The counter-Bulgaria of unfreedom, governed with the medieval methods of coercion.* (2014)

Again we have a spiritual and idealist definition of a class of people defined in terms of sensibilities and dispositions to appreciate freedom, as opposed to the poor who protested their inflated utility bills in February or let themselves be bussed around the country.

The process of discursive amalgamation of the corrupt elite with the corrupted voters which marked the triangulation of the political antagonism in the summer of 2013 surfaced most forcefully during the so-called counter-protests in support of the ruling coalition, to which I turn now.

The first of the so-called counter-protests of 2013 was convened in the center of Sofia towards the end of June. Then there was a march in August 2013 and one in November of the same year. The immediate reason was the veto of the then president Rossen Plevneliev on the proposed actualization of the budget for 2013. The PM at the time explained that the state needed to borrow 1 billion BGN in order to meet the payments of indebted state companies, to pay the state debts to private contractors, and also to ensure the planned refurbishment of some hospitals (Money.bg, 2013). Despite the overt emphasis on propping up businesses, the justifications were immediately interpreted by the anti-governmental protesters as intentions to beef up welfare spending in order to buy public approval for the embattled government. This opposition to the budget actualization reached its climax on the 40th day of the anti-governmental protests, when the protesters blocked the Bulgarian Parliament's exits and clashes with the police ensued. The protesters opposed the new budget the grounds of refusing to pay for debt that would be spent on the poor, turning the protest into a seminal pro-austerity riot. Donatella della Porta (2016: 3) treats the Bulgarian protests as part of the global anti-austerity resistance on a par with movements in Greece, Turkey, Spain, etc. If a social movement occurs in "times of austerity", this does not necessarily make it anti-austerity. For instance, the 2013 summer ones were not only far from any critique of austerity and neoliberal inequalities, but produced a great deal of their own justifications thereof.

As Laclau was at pains to show, every identity is a chain of equivalence composed of a plurality of non-commensurable and distinct elements whose coherence is ensured and stabilized by the existence of a mutual enemy. In short, every "I" is an un-selfsame assemblage of elements held together by a non-I. Translating this into the imaginaries of citizenship, and turning away from the figuration of the enemy in the government, I show how the discourses surrounding the counter-protests constitute the normal citizenry of the authentic citizens against what I call the "anti-citizen". I treat those utterances as technologies for determination of the boundaries of "authentic" citizenship and civil society.

Defining the anti-citizen

There are several determinate criteria for the delineation of the citizen from the anti-citizen. These criteria appear as dyadic oppositions. One such opposition runs along the axis of "spontaneous vs. organized." Thus, while the authentic civil society protest was said to be "spontaneous" in the sense of unmediated voluntary gathering of citizens on the street, the counter-protester was recognized as "involuntary" and "organized" from above. One way the anti-government protesters and sympathetic media could discern this was by the presence of buses.

Bus-spotting became a salient activity, propelling the interpretative efforts of the protesters to unmask the authenticity of the counter-protesters. For example, Protest Network, the leaders of the Summer protests of 2013, warned their followers that "the buses are coming". Unlike the citizens who arrive by bike, in private cars or on foot, the counter-protest makes a conspicuous and thus suspicious announcement.

Atanas Tchobanov, a civic activist who runs the Bulgarian version of Wikileaks, was alarmed that the buses in which the counter-protest participants were driven had parked on disabled badge-holders spots, yet were not fined. Tchobanov speculated that the police were complicit with the counter-protests. The news outlet Offnews echoed his concerned and reproduced his investigation (2013d).

It should be noted that the large pro-democracy protests from the early 1990s in Bulgaria were also "organized" by the anti-communist opposition and unions, and participants from outside Sofia were bussed in; yet, in no way did this engender a sense of inauthenticity. We can treat the rejection of "top-down organization" animating the 2013 anti-government protests as symptomatic for the crisis of representation that has affected liberal democracy. Democratic institutions (especially collective organizations such as political parties or trade unions) seem less able to exert symbolic and representative authority, as revealed by falling electoral turnouts and party/union memberships. Representation's legitimacy falters, visible in the protesters' exclusion of the counter-protesters from the sphere of "authentic protest" because of the way in which they arrived in Sofia to express their support for the government. On the protesters' understanding, the bus is the negation of authentic civic activity, supposedly driven by spontaneous self-organization. This is nowhere manifested more clearly than in this pro-summer protest headline with very suggestive quotation marks: *"Buses drove in 'self-organized' people to the counter-protest."* (Offnews, 2013a). Today, any top-down organization smacks of communist-era manifestations [*manifestatsii*], as the main organizer of the summer protests, Assen Genov, asserted. Genov assimilated the counter-protests to communism because they remind him of the "servile

sycophancy to those in power". The latter *"waved their hands and received directed congratulations through tasteless, clichéd* [and identical] *posters"* (ibid).

Not only does the counter-protesters' mode of transport convey a "top-down organization" (as opposed to individual civic spontaneity), but their banners were said to reek of inauthenticity, too. For example, the Bulgarian TV channel bTV finds it noteworthy that "the participants in the demo carried brand new flags of Bulgaria as well as identical banners with identical messages which were moreover industrially made rather than handmade" (bTV, 2013) presuming, therefore, that authentic protest means handmade banners.

In contrast, protesters and sympathetic media repeatedly emphasized that the banners of the summer protest are handmade, individual, creative, witty and well thought out. The question of creativity resurfaced in many other angles throughout the protests, spurring even a definition of the citizen along these lines (discussed below).

Creativity in the production of slogans became a signature of the anti-governmental protests, immortalized in a book dedicated to preserving the diversity and innovation associated with the slogans (Dnevnik 2013). Certain individuals acquired fame for their banners. As one of the reviews of this book states, *"the slogans unmistakably testify to the artistic energy of the street."* (Igov 2014). A review of the book in the *Capital* weekly, Bulgaria's foremost liberal paper, states that the slogans are diverse but *"the common ground between them is their wittiness and the articulation of principled positions, rather than insults"*, emphasizing civility (Mousseva 2013). Yet, one of the widespread slogans in the protests, resurrected from the 1997 anti-communist protests, to be hurled at the 2013 government, was "red scum", and it was included in the volume. Another review of the book tries to excuse the slogan: *"red scum is not an insult but color characteristics"*, and says that *"this is* [one] *of the many slogans, some of them very witty, smart and expressive"* (Igov 2014).

To conclude this section, while the slogans from the anti-government protests merit book publications, unreflexive social science articles (e.g. Evtimova 2014, Georgieva 2014), and countless media endorsements, those of the counter-protests are described as dull, unimaginative, repetitive and mass-produced, thereby not meriting the effort involved in committing them to memory, nor print.

Facial and racial vision and division

Differences in outward appearance loomed large from the beginning of the 2013 polemics. The manifest poverty, unkempt looks, and "outsiderhood" of the counter-protesters was interpreted even racially. For example, a website which set up operations as an official news outlet for the protests described the counter-protesters in the following terms: *"three strong guys with Turkish features, each holding a plastic cup with mint liquor [...] we hear Turkish speech among the Bulgarian words"* (quoted by Nikolova 2014: 51).

Another large pro-government rally was described by the same media as attended by *"red molluscs, gypsies and Turks"* (using the extremely offensive racist slur *"mangali"*) (quoted by Nikolova 2014: 63). A further example of racialization is found on the website http://klisheta.com/protest, which was created by an anti-government protester as a table with the most widespread talking points of the government in one column, and counter-arguments in another column, to be used by the protesters. It features a test with pictures through

which the knowledgeable observer can test their ability to distinguish a protester from a counter-protester. To score 100%, one only needs to designate all the pictures of men and women with a darker complexion and/or poorer teeth and clothes as a "counter-protester".

A most telling expression of the pervasive racial profiling happened when Assen Genov, one of the leaders of the protests, an online entrepreneur and a foundation co-founder with a long record of reputable civic activism, chased a group of Roma from the counter-protest and recorded everything on camera (Blitz, 2013). A similar incident occurred on the 40th day of the protests, when a Roma boy was racially profiled and protesters chased him in order to capture him. This too, was recorded on camera.

The reduction of the counter-protesters to "Roma" and "Turks" was also enforced by media sympathetic to the protests with online galleries of pictures as well as with video interviews from these rallies featuring overwhelmingly Roma- and poor-looking people (i.e. Offnews, 2013c). For example, the Offnews website shares one of its dispatches from the counter-protests with the following introduction: *"Faces and voices from the counter-protests. Most of the faces are dark* [murgavi, a pejorative synonym for 'dark' used predominantly to describe the Roma], *while most voices are inarticulate".* The article then informs us that "40% of the participants are Roma and Turks" (Offnews, 2013b) The author of the piece does not take the counter-protest seriously, calls it "comical" and proceeds to interrogate the participants on their reasons for attending.

At some point, his questions make a man visibly uncomfortable so he switches to another participant whom he describes as "murgav" and *"visibly looking like a* [member of the Roma] *minority"* (Offnews, 2013b). In short, "minority appearance" signals the presence of an anti-citizen. Inasmuch the authentic citizen is imagined by the protesters as someone like them (i.e. protesting, informed, educated, economically independent, and so on), those who fail to sympathize with the protests or question are rendered as anti-citizens.

In addition to appearance, knowledge and reason become prerequisites for the exercise of true citizenship, and by extension, how those who are (perceived to be) lacking in these capacities are considered incapable of exercising proper citizenship. Thus, corresponding to the rise of the knowledge economy emerges the knowledge citizenry.

For example, a widespread opinion about the counter-protests has it that, having been organized or sent by the government, these people did not know what they are actually protesting against/about. (As opposed to the enlightened and informed citizens from the anti-governmental protest.) Quiz-like interviews with counter-protesters, produced both by protesters and journalists, proliferated in order to demonstrate the supposed lack of knowledge on part of the government supporters. A disconcerting way of selecting interviewees through racial profiling was common (though not only "racialized" counter-protesters became objects of vilification).

For example, a journalist from Offnews, which strongly backed the anti-governmental protests, picked his first interviewees via avowed racial profiling: *"we go to one of the few counter-protesters with lighter skin and ask him »why are you here? What do you protest against?«"* The man, who seems unaccustomed to speak on the media, responds that there are more competent people to answer this question. The journalist interprets this as "top-down organization" and proceeds to ask who paid, questioning the motivations of the participants. (Offnews, 2013b).

The media even used dispatches from the counter-protests produced by "citizen-journalists" (OFFnews, 2013b). A video shot by the anti-government protester and social entrepreneur Krasimira Hajiivanova shows her asking from behind the camera two young Roma men from the city of Plovdiv if they had been paid to protest. The men denies receiving any payment but Hajiivanova concludes *"Right, all clear. You got 20 BGN each"*. Then she asks if they were given water and food, which they confirm. Finally, Hajiivanova inquires about their reasons for attending the protest. The hesitation to respond on part of the counter-protesters prompts her to answer instead of them: *"you don't know why you're here"*. She baits them with fake answers only to expose fully what she knew all along: they do not know why they are protesting; they have been organized "from above", and they were paid, mirroring from "below" the corruption reigning from above (Offnews, 2013b).

Although formally Bulgarian citizens, the counter-protesters, especially those who bore detectible "racially different" marks, were cast outside authentic citizenry because of the perception of them as "organized from above", or because they did not demonstrate knowledge, had representative spokespersons, and were allegedly even paid to rally behind the government (without solid proof). In short, as simultaneously in- and outside of legitimate citizenship, they are anti-citizens. While even illiterate people can be citizens, the protester discourses point to another understanding of the conditions for citizenship which tie it to knowledge. This, together with the importance accorded to skin colour or facial expression, complements of the process of aestheticization of the protest identity to which I turn next.

Aesthetic vision and division

In this section I tackle the question of the role of aesthetics in the protests. An aesthetic dimension seems inevitable in social movements and protests. Most recently, the Black Lives Matter movement was captured by a powerful image of an upright black woman facing two heavily armed policemen. The Macedonian anti-governmental protests of 2015 were similarly "summarized" by an image of a young woman using a police shield to apply lipstick.

The Bulgarian protests of 2013 deliberately sought the expressive capacities of art, so much so as to elevate them to the level of the principle that organizes the very identity of the protests. In other words, the protests became known, and distinguished themselves from their twin enemy of "the mafia" and the "anti-citizens" by virtue of being creative and artistic. They also came to be known as the protests of "the smart and the beautiful," after Gospodinov's influential essay written in the first day since the protests outbreak, entitled "The protester is beautiful" (2013). A white piano together with the distinctive hand-made posters and a real ballerina "embellished" the area in front of parliament, while citizens expressed their distaste at communism with unique hand-made costumes and songs.

A host of performances further reinforced the creative and middle-class character of the protests. For example, the protesters built a symbolic "Berlin wall" out of cardboard boxes, the subsequent destruction of which came to express their firm pro-European geopolitical and "civilizational" orientation.

But as much as activist-intellectuals try to maintain the separation between the low and lofty orders of aesthetic dimensions of the protests, the "lowly" reasserts itself in the final analysis. The only means available

to activist-intellectuals to judge how far (or not) the population has progressed on its cultural elevation, is crudely material. For example, much like the amplification of the significance of "racial" otherness of the Roma, this happens through the objectification of sexualised bodies for the purposes of discerning who belongs to civil society and who does not.

Consider for example, an essay by prof. Kalin Yanakiev's – who established the opposition between the "quantity and the quality" I referred to earlier – titled *On the aesthetics of the protests*. Yanakiev compares the aesthetic qualities of the protests and counter-protests and more specifically the day (July 14, 2013) when a young female summer protester dressed up as "Liberty" from Delacroix's painting *Liberty leading the people.*

The same day, a woman from the "counter-protest" ironized the "Liberty" impersonator and also appeared bare-breasted at her rally.

This is how prof. Yanakiev interprets both performances in his essay rich in sexist, ageist and fat-shaming expletives:

> [A] *most grotesque contrast* [emerged] *when a voluptuous, fat and vulgar, middle-aged woman showed her breast to the venerable government supporters with which she tried to rebuke the euphoric-celebratory and simultaneously sparkling, joyful-ironic "reenactment" of the famous painting of Delacroix which a group of* [anti-government] *protesters reproduced not coincidentally on this day,*[6] *and with an obvious "wink" to the French ambassador* [who endorsed the protests]. *Why the counter-protester fury had to execute the striptease in question, what "joke" could have been in it, nobody understood. The only thing that became clear is that the counter-protest is in a grotesque way completely lacking even a modicum of a sense for "performance", a sense for the artistic enlivening of the open public space, a sense of humor.* (Yanakiev, 2013)

For all the emphasis on the immaterial, spiritual and lofty qualities of the protest for European values, it takes a quick look at the shape of a woman's breast to determine who belongs to which side of the divide. In the final analysis, the material vision, in its most vulgar modality (i.e. "sagging" or "pointy" breasts, "fat" or "thin" bodies) reasserts itself in order to stabilize the division between the citizens and the anti-citizens:

> *For example, look how charmingly (and yes – beautifully, almost erotically) the maidens wrap their bodies with the national flag. The flag is almost blossoming on their bodies. Now compare with the* ***standardized*** *size, the threatening* [aggressivity] *of the flags, waved like* ***partisan sticks*** *by most of the "counter-protesters".* (ibid, emphasis added)

It is not only aggression but a standardized "communist" aggression. In yet another instance, prof. Yanakiev assimilates the counter-protests to communism:

> *despite the fact that the* [anti-government] *protesters are in their tens of thousands, we don't see the "mass person"* [chovekat-masa] *raging in them. It is not "the people"* [narod] *manifesting, but many, many faces. In contrast, the counter-protests seem to consist of the descendants of those who, 70 years ago* [the beginning of Socialism], *called the writers, officers, university lecturers awaiting their trials in the so-called People's Tribunal, "fascists" [...].*

6 The day in question was July 14, 2013. For all of Yanakiev's university titles and cultural erudition, he seems not to know that the painting refers to the July Revolution 41 years after 1789.

Nothing signals individuality more poignantly than the face. In this vision, while the counter-protesters form a grey mass, the protest is the sum of the colourful individual faces that compose it, without ever losing their individuality. The counter-protest dilutes its individual elements into an undifferentiated mass. The protest, in contrast, affirms the individuality of its members. A simple table can illustrate more clearly the binary oppositions the professor operates with.

Protest	Counter-protest
Liberal	Communist[7]
Individualist	Mass
Creative	Imitative
Knowledgeable	Ignorant
Beautiful	Ugly
Erotic	Vulgar, pornographic
Individual faces	The masses and the people *[narod]*
Spontaneous	Directed
Disinterested	Interested in things "crude" and "material"
Polite	Rude
Citizens	Anti-citizens

Against the erotic beauty of the protest, Yanakiev pits the threatening ugliness of the counter-protests:

> *Now compare the faces of the protesters [...]. No matter what angry and radical answers* [they] *give, they are still smiling, they treat the interviewers amicably and look them in the eye. In contrast, the counter-protesters are rude with the reporters, and look desperately for their "leader" standing close behind them, who hastens to take the floor from them and shoots up the message drafted* [by someone above] *for today.* (Yanakiev, 2013)

Beauty goes hand in hand with knowledge about the protests' objectives and demands. In contrast, ugliness comes with rudeness, dependency on someone higher up the hierarchy to give the "correct answers", and a lack of knowledge about what the counter-protesters are doing there. Even the anger is different, the difference stemming from the authentic citizenship the protesters enjoy by virtue of their knowledge and culture:

> *The* [counter-protesters] *are singularly angry, when they are in a larger group, or hate organically – when they are on their own – those who are "paid by the West", because the latter are witty and have colorful faces, in short, are diverse because* ***they are citizens.*** (ibid, emphasis added)

We can thus speak of the bodies of the citizenry and the anti-citizenry. One of the bodies is the beautiful, playfully erotic body, inhabited by the spirit (of the well-read, self-conscious, cultured, beautiful, rigorous protester). The other body is not taken by, but overtakes and thus destroys the spirit: it is the ugly, twisted, crooked, hungry, racialized, materialist and pornographic body of the counter-protester shamelessly flaunting her saggy breasts.

What bearing any of this has on the imaginaries of citizenship? Let's hear prof. Yanakiev again:

> *Naturally, the most basic difference is in the fact that the participants in the Sofia protests are citizens (and I don't put any association with the place of origin or occupation in this term).* ***And the citizen, by***

7 This does not refer to what people attending from the counter-protest actually say about communism or Liberalism, but what Yanakiev thinks their presence signifies.

> ***essence of his*** [sic] ***mentality, is spectacular, witty, artistic.*** *It is no coincidence that the revolutions of the past 30 years are "velvet" revolutions – that is to say, revolutions of the moral-aesthetic order, of the logos* [slovesnostta]*, and this is especially important – of the readiness to prevail through self-sacrifice and not via raw power.* (Yanakiev, 2013, emphasis added)

We can call Yanakiev's ruminations a "creativity theory of citizenship" because the properties and titles of citizenship derive from "creativity" instead of being automatically assigned to just about anyone at birth, as per the constitution. As the professor emphasizes, he takes citizenship not as contingent upon one's place of residence of occupation but as an innate substance which is moreover unevenly distributed: the mentality of the individual who is immutably creative regardless of whether or not he engages in a particular creative activity. Since it does not derive from activity or practice, this is an essentialist understanding of citizenship. It is citizenship as substance.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) suggests that in distinction inheres an indirect, apolitical form of domination. The aesthetic ruminations of intellectuals demonstrate that domination through taste can be directly political or harnessed for political ends, such as the symbolic roll-back of political equality in modern citizenship and its replacement by a more conservative-aristocratic understanding of political membership as an exclusive category, as the deployment of aesthetic categories for the purposes of defining the identity and citizenship status of the different protests demonstrates.

Conclusion

Contrary to scholarly pronouncements that *"[t]he value of civil society lies in that it provides a space for alternative views, debate, and dissent"* (Amarasuriya, 2015: 55) the anti-government protesters who claim to act and speak on behalf of "civil society" deny the right of pro-government protesters to hold legitimate political opinions because of the way they look ("minority-looking", "poor", "uncreative"), because of their ethnicity, because of the nature in which their rally was organized ("bussed in", "socialist-era manifestation"), and simply because they support – allegedly by being paid or forced to attend the rallies – a government that suffered a radical loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the protesters. "Civil society" for its self-appointed legitimate representatives becomes less of a space for voicing "alternative views, debate, and dissent" than a space for the articulation of a "single" social interest whose only legitimate expression is provided by themselves.

As the case shows, civil society can become the exclusive space for people with knowledge and culture, members of "the new middle class"; in short, for the executors of the new "cultural revolution" tasked with finalizing the incomplete transition to a Western-style democracy and the free market. In that sense, it deploys a Montesquieu-inflected version of civil society as the domain of "gentlemanly" culture, morals and manners, supplemented by beauty – by definition unevenly spread – which alone confer the right to speak in public, as opposed to a nominally inclusive Habermasian public sphere which pretends to not care about social class and demands that everyone be treated as equal for the duration of the deliberation. This neo-Montesquieuan civil society maps the tripartite discursive split of society into the elites, the mobs and the cultured middle classes which my notion of the anti-citizen captured.

I have shown how aesthetics, knowledge and class (in both senses of the term, as in social class and as an attainment of a level of refinement and quality) played a role in the constitution of the identity of the anti-government protesters as a "middle class" vis-a-vis their twin enemies in the guise of the governing elites and their gullible constituencies, and thus radically narrowed the scope of legitimate belonging to civil society and the community of citizens.

The discourses scrutinized are still in the domain of the imaginary, and no-one in Bulgaria has been stripped of citizenship yet for failing to demonstrate civic competence in a newspaper interview, or for taking the bus to attend a protest. However, these exclusionary discourses are symptomatic and pose a danger for democracy should they gain a wider traction. They signal a departure from the more egalitarian visions which animated the early 1990s transition to democracy that pitted the whole of society against the communist *elite*. In contrast, the 2013 revival of the anti-communist opposition entertains self-congratulating visions of itself as the "Bulgarian quality" versus the Bulgarian "quantity" (= the communistic *masses*), lending it a decidedly elitist and post-democratic character.

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