The Object
And The People
The Evolution of Material Culture in Romania and Bulgaria
Leah Valtin-Erwin
THE OBJECT & THE PEOPLE
The Evolution of Material Culture in Romania and Bulgaria

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BY
Leah Valtin-Erwin

Jim Wald, Committee Chair
Jutta Sperling, Committee Member

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INTRODUCTION

Every country in the former Eastern Bloc has its own unique box of communist-era things, metaphorical in some cases, physical in others. Some people might call it junk, others see precious treasure. The contents of each box are varied in kind and sentiment. Some are physical objects, like streetlights or automobiles, that reference the material offerings of the past, while others are legacies of material practice: rituals and traditions that developed under communism and now influence post-communist consumer practices like bargain hunting or brand comparison. The sentiment that accompanies these remnants are just as complex and varied as the things themselves. Some are regarded with nostalgia, some with bitterness, some with denial. The relationship between a post-communist country and the material legacies of communism, as defined above, is unique to the country in question and gives tremendous insight into their experiences under communism and in post-communism.

This thesis will track the evolution of two countries' relationship to those objects, practices and spaces in the context of the tumultuous rupture that was the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. Focusing on two case studies, the East Balkan countries of Romania and Bulgaria, I will analyze material culture during communism and after its demise, as well as the consumer experience in the difficult transition to capitalism. The turbulent years that this work covers, from the last decade of state socialism to the present, have produced an enormous range of material goods, practices for engaging with consumption and attitudes about consumption in individuals and the state. By exploring the relationship that the people of the Eastern Balkans have with material goods and consumer culture, I hope to provide useful insight into the post-communist experience.

Communism began its four decade rule in the Eastern Balkans directly after the Second World War, bringing economic policies of isolationism, state authority, and what seemed an invincible political system to the countries of Eastern Europe. Consumption in the Eastern Bloc was defined by economic policies of ideological communism as interpreted and implemented by each state, but also by authoritarian politics and, in later years, by shortage and poverty. Many in both the Bloc and elsewhere saw communism as Eastern Europe’s fate in the global order, its hold on the region impermeable and, to some, eternal.

In 1989, the communist regimes of East and Central Europe collapsed. Each country of the Eastern Bloc entered into a period of radical change, not least in terms of material culture. East Germans reunited with their Western capitalist countrymen and were exposed almost immediately to an abundance of Western goods. Poland entered a tumultuous phase of Western-imposed ‘shock therapy’, which entailed dramatic transformations of consumer systems as the once state-operated economy became increasingly privatized. Czechoslovakia broke up into its constituent national parts, Czech and Slovak, who were then tasked with simultaneously implementing Western-style capitalism and managing newly bifurcated national economies. All the East European countries entered some form
of capitalism in the 1990s, each bringing their own unique legacies of communist material culture with them.

By the mid-90s, it was clear to most East Europeans that the rules of the consumption game had changed. The priorities of the post-communist consumer had to adapt to capitalist market practices while tried and true methods of consumer survival honed under communism, like hoarding, were suddenly obsolete. The post-communist consumer had to develop new strategies for consumption whilst dealing with the immense legacy of strategies acquired under communism. These economic extremes, capitalist and communist, at odds with one another for the last half century, battled for first place in the post-communist consumer. The experiences of all post-communist consumers were shaped by and, for some, centered around, this struggle.

However, some countries were less equipped to implement capitalism than others. The most stark example of the disparity in post-communist economies is the trajectory of Eastern European accession to the European Union. In 2004, 8 post-communist countries were deemed economically and politically worthy of joining the EU: the Czech & Slovak Republics, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia. Concerns about the prudence of adopting these new, inexperienced and economically weak countries were voiced throughout Western Europe, but the accession has been ultimately heralded as a success, mostly for its role in bringing the post-communist countries into a modern, western, capitalist present.

In contrast, the post-communist nations of Romania and Bulgaria, the countries this work is concerned with, were denied membership to the European Union in 2004 and their accession process was delayed until 2007. EU politicians have called the Romanian and Bulgarian transitions from communism “painful” and cited economic unpreparedness as the primary reason for the accession delay. Romania and Bulgaria have consistently ranked as the two poorest countries in the European Union and have experienced the most challenging transitions of any post-communist country now in the EU. The economic environment of the Eastern Balkans dramatically influenced the development of a post-communist material culture as economic constraints made replacing communist consumer practices, products and spaces less immediately feasible. Thus, the initial eagerness to embrace capitalist material culture has dwindled in Romania and Bulgaria more quickly than in their wealthier neighbours, and consumer practices of socialism have not wholly disappeared.

This thesis charts the evolution of material culture of Romania and Bulgaria, the two larger countries of the Eastern Balkan region and historically the poorest of any countries in the European Union, from the 1980s onward. Neither country can be analysed, in terms of political history or economic experience, according to a “linear, logical narrative familiar to the West”, one that might be more representative of post-communism in Poland or

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Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an analysis of material culture’s trajectory in those countries as distinct from their post-communist neighbours.

I will deal with the legacy of communism in terms of material culture, which ranges in form from the nostalgic revisiting of communist-era consumption to the changing rituals and practices of post-communist consumers. The aim is to engage with a theme, material culture, that has been studied thoroughly in East Germany, Russia and Poland, and apply the same inquiry to the lesser understood countries of the Eastern Balkans, keeping in mind their radically different post-communist trajectory.

To establish a framework by which to understand material culture, one must first understand consumption to involve more than just the ‘buying of things’. Consumption is a system of practices, preferences and traditions through which people interact with material goods and the private sphere. Material culture, therefore, refers to a developed system of consumption practices and an attitude or set of attitudes regarding consumption, but also to the spaces in which consumption takes place. The nature of a community’s material culture is defined by three things: the spaces of consumption, the traditions and practices associated with consumption and the objects with which the consumption is concerned.

The first chapter will be devoted to a description of communist-era material culture, focusing on the final decade of communism to establish the practices that would influence the next era of material culture most significantly. The second chapter focuses on material culture’s role in the Romanian Revolution of 1989, where the most violent and tumultuous regime collapse of all those that took place in the region at that time occurred. The end of Bulgaria’s communist regime, while no less momentous politically, followed a trajectory more similar to those of the Central European states. I argue that Romania’s unique experience in 1989 can be partially traced to material deprivation and economic injustice and analyze how material goods and consumption played a role in the Revolution. The third chapter will act as an analysis of Bulgarian and Romanian sentiments towards consumption, exploring attitudes in the post-communist era and how they relate to the communist past. The fourth chapter will delve into the trends and changes in post-communist Bulgarian and Romanian consumption rituals, referencing the practices described in Chapter One that have either disappeared or persisted. It will also investigate the question of ownership and display by looking at evolving Bulgarian and Romanian relationships with personal belongings and decorative items. The final chapter will use the tourism market as its subject, exploring foreign consumption of so-called ‘communist kitsch’ products and spaces in Romania and Bulgaria.

These are countries that Western scholarship often forgets about, though several scholars have devoted their careers to learning more about the Eastern Balkans. The experiences of both countries with material culture, particularly as it relates to the memory of communism, are essential component of the larger picture of post-communist life in Eastern Europe.

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CHAPTER ONE

Material Culture in communist-era Bulgaria and Romania

Communism instituted state-constructed material shortage, state-imposed branding and state-controlled consumption for the consumers of Eastern Europe’s Soviet satellite states for just under a half century. Scholarly insight into the material culture that formed under these conditions is limited in quantity, particularly in regard to the Eastern Balkan states, but rich in detail, given the intimate and, in most cases, highly personalized nature of consumption practices. The increasingly severe material shortages that characterized the 1980s, the period this chapter is most concerned with, helped to construct a consumption culture of recycling, bartering and hoarding. The importance of Western goods as the necessary antidote to the aforementioned shortages also emerge as a significant component of the material culture of the 1980s. This chapter attempts to give insight into common consumer practices and desires of that period in Romania and Bulgaria.

SHORTAGE & ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION

In regard to the legacy or influence of communism’s material culture on that of present-day Romania and Bulgaria, one can easily trace much of its stamina to the penetrating hardship that accompanied the devastating economic shortages of the 1980s. Before the mid 1970s, shortage was less prevalent. The communist period immediately followed World War II, during which Romanians and Bulgarians both experienced catastrophic economic upheaval. Indeed, the success of the so-called ‘Sovietization of Eastern Europe’ can be primarily attributed to the Soviet’s role in the liberation of Nazi-occupied countries, like Bulgaria. Romania’s experience at the time of Soviet invasion was more akin to neighbouring Hungary’s, as both had collaborated with Germany throughout the war. In both countries, the war caused large-style destruction of the capitals and most of the countryside. As pre-war agriculturally-based economies, the Eastern Balkans faced the long and difficult process of rebuilding their economies, and they relied heavily on Soviet aid in the immediate post-war period to do so. As the governments worked hard after initial post-war hardships to prove that communism was the preferable lifestyle politically and materially, material prosperity grew in both countries. One Romanian woman from Timișoara, interviewed by researcher Alyssa Grossman, remembered that “a large variety of goods was available in the stores” and the products were mostly of high quality.

The 1960s and 70s continued to see considerable material prosperity in both countries, as the states launched an initiative to modernize the consumer market. Durable goods from refrigerators and washing machines to the new socialist automobile were available both physically (in regard to supply) and financially to consumers, as the early 1960s saw a marked increase in income level for many East Balkanites. People lived mostly comfortably, with great optimism for the material future of their rapidly modernizing communist economies.

By 1974, however, consumers discovered that “basic food products that had not been a problem so far were becoming few and far between”, and that their procurement took as
much strategy as with coveted Western products (as will be explored later).\textsuperscript{3} The material
culture of the late communist period in both countries was thus defined both by “scarce
food supplies” and other material goods and “the survival strategies this entailed”, while
the relatively satisfactory economic climate of the early 1970s and before made the
changes of the 80s that much starker.\textsuperscript{4} Particularly in Romania, where the communist
regime under the corrupt Ceaușescu regime controlled distribution of the country’s material
goods, which the dictator hoarded for himself, ordinary people were constantly challenged
by shortage in the last decade of communist rule. This shortage largely affected food,
clothing and nondurable goods like cosmetics and cleaning supplies, but was also
extended to resources like energy.

The items that began to disappear from shelves in the 1980s were those that contribute
most significantly to the construction of a comfortable and pleasing lifestyle. The absence
of adequate cleaning supplies, reliable electricity or gas and sufficient food stocks made
East Balkan homes less comfortable than ever before. Psychological discomfort
accompanied the physical changes. Without the ability to make choices as consumers
and design their material lives as they desired, East Balkan consumers found themselves
losing an important means of self-expression. The political ramifications of these changes
are huge: consumers felt unable to voice their opinions as individuals and completely
without say in their own domestic comforts. Consumers grew increasingly worried about
feeding their families, heating their homes and becoming entirely dependent on their
governments for comfort in the private sphere.

Observations from the late 1970s and early to mid 1980s, like Liviu Chelcea’s ethnography
of consumption practices in a Romanian village, argue that the primary rituals of
consumption in communist Romania (hoarding, creative reuse and the development of
social networks around consumption) revolved around an environment of shortage that was
both real and perceived. This distinction, so central to the consumer practices of the
communist consumer, refers to a particularly brutal method of state economic control that
accompanied general economic problems in the 1980s. As economic problems
increased, the state observed the domestic consumer’s growing dependency on their
government. They exploited that relationship by further limiting the choices for the
individual consumer and creating an atmosphere that put the state charge of the greater
consumer culture.

Economic shortages were certainly a reality of the communist period that the state could
do little to contend with (particularly given the pressure from the Soviet Union to remain
isolated from global markets). State socialist doctrine mandates that the wealth of a
population be collected and then redistributed by the state for the common good of the
people. This practice, in theory, eliminates economic class by removing individual

\textsuperscript{3} Smaranda Vultur, “Daily Life and Constraints in communist Romania in the Late 1980s: From the
Semiotics of Food to the Semiotics of Power”. In Remembering Communism: Private and Public
Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe. ed. Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou, and Stefan
Troebst. (Central European University Press, 2014.) p. 175
\textsuperscript{4} Vultur p. 181
monetary power from social dynamics (i.e. the individual). Furthermore, particularly in Romania, the state often tried to “erase the national debt by exporting all industrial and consumers goods”, leaving their constituents without. By the 1980s, both Romania and Bulgaria’s governments were in poor economic condition, and their people, hugely dependent on said governments, suffered from material shortage accordingly.

Realizing the potential to create widespread dependency on the government, the communist states of East and Central Europe manipulated the state-operated economies to reflect shortage beyond that created by economic problems. Beyond the government’s interest in keeping goods for itself, shortage served as a political tool in that mass deprivation caused the population to become even more beholden to the state for its resources. Historian Smaranda Vultur refers to the nature of the regimes’ relationship to shortage as having a “programmatic, premeditated character, meant to control the individual and the collective”. Vultur was told that “we were at their mercy,” in regard to “what was ‘available’ or ‘for sale’” in the shops at the beginning of the food crisis in the 1980s. Manufactured shortages, publicized domestically as the fault of an external, capitalist enemy, also allowed the state to accumulate wealth for itself and blame the West, thus provoking sympathy for the communist regimes. The population therefore experienced unending shortage, even when some goods were available for the state to distribute.

The East Balkans “suffered through severe shortages of such staples as food, clothing, fuel, heat, water and electricity” while other products were strictly rationed. Especially in rural Romania, “the supply of goods and services reached a critical situation” “throughout the 1970s and mainly during the 1980s”. In Bulgaria, the situation was somewhat less dire (and the culminating revolution of 1989 less dramatic than in the long-suffering Romania), but ultimately similar in the final years of communist rule. In both countries, the state placed strict regulations on food and other material consumption, including household appliances like refrigerators and vacuum cleaners. As the Romanian dictator seemed to grow increasingly mad with power, Romanian cities also encountered “constant power failures”, a complete lack of central heating and overwhelming shortages of food. People recall fights breaking out in the grocery lines between consumers desperate for food. The shortages throughout the Eastern Bloc, which led to long grocery lines and empty pantries, are routinely cited as one of the primary causes of the dissent in the late 80s.

Shortage therefore acted as the primary influence on the development of a material culture during communism. The practices of consumers were largely concerned with surviving

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6 Vultur p. 184
7 Vultur p. 185
10 Chelcea p. 22
11 Vultur p. 181
shortage and finding inventive ways to maintain reasonably comfortable lives. Ethnographic work has recorded a number of practices that developed in order to combat shortage. Consumers of communist-era Romania and Bulgaria were required to develop strategies to make the most of what they were able to acquire. These ranged from household hoarding to mandatory recycling programs, as consumers tried desperately to acquire what they needed. In addition to these practices, a consider development in communist-era consumer practices occurred extralegally, totally without state control.

THE SECOND ECONOMY & WESTERN MATERIAL GOODS
The environment of shortage also contributed to the development of an increasingly personalized second economy, where both acquisition and consumption occurred on an individual level, despite state attempts to communalize the economy. The extent of the shortages mandated that the individual look past the state-controlled economy and turn to the second economy. When the state center would not or could not supply what people needed, they struggled to do so themselves, developing in the process a huge repertoire of strategies for obtaining consumer goods and services. This facet of the period’s material culture, called the “second” or “informal” economy, spanned a wide range from from the quasi-legal to the definitely illegal. By 1989, it would constitute between 35 and 40 percent of the Romanian consumer’s income, though many used it solely for consumption, gaining income legally and making the most of their money on the black markets.

That second economy, “which provisioned a large part of consumer needs”, “was parasitic upon the state economy and inseparable from it”. It allowed for individual agency in consumption in three ways: 1) a consumer could seek out specific material items that they (rather than the state) categorized as a ‘need’ or ‘desire” 2) by bartering with goods for goods, services for goods or services for services and making most of the few assets they had 3) a middleman could accumulate goods meant for the state or import goods illegally from other markets and sell to consumers, thus controlling a segment of the economy without state oversight or regulation.

The personalized nature of the communist economic underbelly in the second economy made illicit consumption an activity of humanity, wherein social connections and personal relations determined ability to consume satisfactorily. Whereas a capitalist system, similarly individualized in terms of item or brand prioritization, eliminates individual defiance of an externally controlled economy by putting economic control in the hands of the consumer, communist economies, particularly those with such devastating economic shortage, encourage individual interference with a state-defined system.

The most challenging, but also most desirable goods to procure through the second economy were those manufactured in the West. For example, Kent cigarettes “became a stable part of the underground economy” because of their symbolic ability to provide

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14 Verdery p. 27
“enhanced feelings of status and modernity” for the consumer.\textsuperscript{15} Never mind that a pack a day “consumes an entire average Romanian salary”, the status these goods provided were priceless.\textsuperscript{16} Imported goods, ranging from pencil cases to French cheeses, signified both a certain worldly style that transgressed domestic culture and an adeptness at navigating the second economy. Even Chinese products, now widely considered in both Western and post-communist countries as inexpensive, low quality versions of domestic products, were considered “to be of superior quality to Romanian ones”.\textsuperscript{17} They were very difficult to obtain outside the black market, despite China’s relatively positive relationship with the Eastern Bloc. Even after sourcing the elusive item, a day’s salary could easily be spent on Chinese brand name goods.

Western products were made accessible through three distinct consumer strategies. First, “Yugoslav citizens coming to sell clothes, shoes, jeans, electronic watches, cigarettes or food” were able to cross the border with temporary work visas.\textsuperscript{18} Having broken from the Soviet Bloc in 1948, Yugoslavia held some amicable relations with the West despite their communist politics (and realignment with the USSR after Stalin’s death). Their markets consistently had greater access to Western goods, which were peddled to neighbouring Romania and Bulgaria. Specific border towns, like those in close to the Serbian (then Yugoslavian) border, were popular consumer destinations because it was easier for the migrant workers to drop off goods there than further into the country, where trains and cars were more likely to be checked for smuggled goods.

Though Yugoslavian contributions to domestic second economies existed throughout the Eastern Bloc, they were particularly prevalent in Bulgarian and Romania, for three reasons. First, the geographical proximity to both countries obviously made them more pragmatic destinations for Yugoslavians. Second, work and tourist visas were easier to obtain than in communist countries to the north or west, primarily because the economies needed income from foreign pockets so desperately. This was particularly true in 1980s Romania, where the economic situation was so dire that Ceaușescu also had to allow greater tourism from outside the Bloc than in other communist countries. Finally, the Eastern Balkans were subject to considerably less oversight from the Soviets than Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary. The political reasons for these discrepancies among the Soviet satellites are numerous and controversial, but inherently contribute to a unique experience in the Eastern Balkans, particularly in terms of cross-border smuggling.

If the Yugoslavian workers didn’t have what one was looking for, Romanians looked next to their own employment as means of procuring the coveted Western material goods. Some Romanian factories, such the train car factory in Arad, allowed for temporary work trips to Greece, Egypt and other Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries.\textsuperscript{19} This was very

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\textsuperscript{16} Ger and Belk. "I’d like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the Less Affluent World” p. 276
\textsuperscript{17} Alyssa Grossman. "Forgotten Domestic Objects”. Home Cultures 12.3 2015: 291-310. p. 303
\textsuperscript{18} Chelcea p. 22
\textsuperscript{19} Chelcea p. 22
\end{small}
\end{flushright}
unusual for countries in the Eastern Bloc, who stayed isolated from the world, and is largely
due to Ceaușescu's developing relations with Middle Eastern leaders. With a bit of
cleverness, a Romanian worker might be able to bring back some desired goods in their
suitcases. Some Bulgarians took advantage of their neighbour’s unusual relationship
with the outside world (albeit not the Western one), and often sought employment in
Romania or traveled to border towns in pursuit of Kent cigarettes or other products that
were unavailable at home.

Finally, there was a domestic culture, particularly in Bulgaria, for illegal production from
resources they had at their disposal. This included the illicit production of alcohol
(emulating Western brands) and pirating of Western music. Ultimately, all three strategies
required good social relations and a network of friends in powerful positions. The
importance of connections and networking in economic survival also extended to the
workforce. Employment, though officially guaranteed to all citizens, “required connections”
and “hiring decisions were rife with nepotism and favoritism”. Similarly, should one get
cought dealing with a Yugoslavian worker, smuggling goods from Greece or engaging in
illegal production, the consequences and your future depended greatly on who would vouch
for your loyalty to the state or, alternatively, pay off the arresting officers.

The networks for material consumption that formed under communism were vital in
procuring even the most basic food stuffs. One account recalls that because they “had
some connections who worked in a grocery store”, they were able to exchange a Bible for
some baking supplies. This kind of transaction played a role in a constant redefining of
value that took place, wherein a certain good (for example, the Bible) changes its value
based on the individual who desire it, not on government or market defined valuations. The
continuous revaluing of material goods is central to the consumer experiences of the
Eastern Balkans in both the greater 20th century and the communist era. The items at the
top of the material pecking order changed daily and from person to person, creating a
value measure that was inseparable from economic and political circumstance.

CONSUMER RESISTANCE
Many East Balkanites found consumption to be a satisfying method for quietly resisting the
communist regimes. Aside from the consumption of Western products, the best option for
consumption as resistance was the manipulation of the vast output of the communist
propaganda machine. With the communists’ move to eradicate organized religion in favor
of atheism and patriotism, pocket-sized portraits and statues of various figureheads
appeared on the market. The socialists might have expected the icon-like pictures of
Lenin, Stalin, Ceaușescu or Todor Zhivkov (the Bulgarian head of state) to replace images
of Jesus in the homes of their constituents. While this did occur, other people found it useful

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20 Chelcea. p. 22
22 Ghodsee p. 525
23 Vultur p.181
24 Ghodsee p. 527
to place images in less flattering or idolatrous corners of the home.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, paper mask likenesses of Ceaușescu were distributed across Romania for children to wear as if it were a superhero costume, but frequently were instead incorporated into quiet but scornful home theater.\textsuperscript{26} However, this kind of resistance also required a positive human network: the wrong audience could get you arrested for anti-communist activity.

Religion was officially discouraged in both countries but, despite the propaganda machine’s attempts to instate Lenin or Zhivkov as the new ideological leaders, attachments to faith never truly disappeared. This was particularly true in Bulgaria, where the Church is credited with preserving the Bulgarian language and protecting Bulgarian cultural heritage during the Ottoman period. Religion therefore also found entry into the material practices of consumers under communism, despite a general trend toward atheism. One Bulgarian man, interviewed by anthropologist Kristen Ghodsee, explains that he continued to purchases candles to benefit the church despite identifying as an “atheist fundamentalist”, a decision he associated with an allegiance to Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{27}

In other communities, the Bulgarian Muslim population faced their own challenges in adapting to the atheist state and maintaining cultural ties to their faith. Though many Bulgarian Muslims ceased their religious practices during communism, Qurans, amulets, and Islamic head and footstones remained a distinct material feature of their lives.\textsuperscript{28} These communities also benefitted economically from their relations with some Middle Eastern countries, including Turkey and Iran, both of whom “donated to develop the spiritual awareness of Bulgaria’s Muslim community”.\textsuperscript{29} Available in local stores, many of the religious goods, like Qurans and amulets, stayed in stock as other items disappeared because they came from abroad. Bulgarian Muslims thus had somewhat different economic experiences to their ethnic Bulgarian neighbours under communism, which would serve to shape the post-communist experience as well (to be discussed in Chapter Four).

**HOARDING, REPURPOSING & RECYCLING**

Aside from the certainty of shortage, economic uncertainty was the driving motivation of consumption rituals in the late 1980s. Given the uncertain offerings of the state market and the uncertain human aspect of the second economy, practices of hoarding, creative repurposing, and avid recycling quickly emerged among East Balkan consumers.

Regulation and state-controlled distribution made large scale purchases for large events like parties or family reunions impossible. Instead, one would have to hoard material goods over a long period of time, rather than using them immediately. One Bulgarian girl described for Alyssa Grossman how she would carefully calculate how much the functional,
pragmatic sweater her mother would always look for at the Bulgarian department store chain, Corecom, would cost “so that the change would suffice for a chocolate egg” that she would save for future indulgence.\textsuperscript{30} People learned to delay their instinctual, immediate desires (generally rewarded under capitalism) in favor of long-term saving and satisfaction.

As one Romanian women recollected for sociologist Liviu Chelcea:

If I was bringing, let’s give an example, ten chocolates because here there was none, you were not eating chocolate all the time; you were keeping them in a safe place and when you felt like eating something sweet, you took some. You didn’t have plenty like now. Now there is chocolate in every store.\textsuperscript{31}

The economic hardship of communism was ever present in daily life, but festive events and special treats, with their customs pre-dating communism, helped temper the realities of the time. The avenues of temporary escape were most potent if their material forms reflected affluence, i.e. multiple material goods (fancy napkins, decorations, etc) displayed by a single owner (the host). The practice of hoarding was therefore required to replicate the social practices of lost affluence as existed before the shortages, itself a method of coping with the difficult present.\textsuperscript{32}

Similarly, if one happened upon a rare item like lace or eyeglasses in a visit to the store, it was common to buy it immediately, in case it should disappear quickly, and develop a small surplus in your home.\textsuperscript{33} One woman acknowledged the intense irony of acquiring rare goods to Grossman by saying that, although she was eager to acquire something on the black market or on a lucky trip to the store, she often “couldn’t bear to actually use it”, because then its usefulness as a stored good would disappear.\textsuperscript{34} Stockpiles of rare goods helped soothe the uncertainty of shortage; to use them would, ironically, render them useless in the regard.

Eventually, shortage extended to affect everything from the luxurious to the basic necessity, and acquiring any material good had become an adventure by the end of the 1980s. One had to traverse an obstacle course of grocery store coupons, increased rationing and shortage, black market connections and an increasingly devalued currency. Saving and hoarding was vital to material survival, as future consumers created “small-scale surpluses” of certain items in their homes.\textsuperscript{35} These stores held rare goods, serendipitously acquired, and scraps from items that had already been used. “Whatever could be used, was saved”, according to another of Grossman’s interview subjects, a Romanian woman named Tania.\textsuperscript{36} Hoarding also affected the consumer process of gift-giving. Under communism,

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{31} Chelcea p. 35

\textsuperscript{32} Chelcea p. 20

\textsuperscript{33} Grossman p. 299

\textsuperscript{34} Grossman p. 299

\textsuperscript{35} Grossman p. 299

\textsuperscript{36} Grossman p. 299
\end{footnotesize}
“because of the scarcity of most consumer goods, it was not uncommon or considered rude to recycle gifts”. Unlike many capitalist societies, where fast fashion (nondurable, highly expendable goods meant for single use) is commonplace when it comes to gifts, communist societies relied on reuse, recycling, and long-term saving.

Unfortunately, hoarding was not always an option. For example, one couldn’t buy products, like batteries or ink, in bulk, because their availability was so limited. The end of any product required another trip to the stores. This was even true of the popular “seltzer water” bottles, which had a cartridge component that frequently had to be replaced. The practice of repurposing was therefore also particularly important for communist consumers, and many objects were creatively reused after their initial use. Even durable goods, which had appeared during the more prosperous 50s and 60s as described earlier, were recycled. One Bucharest resident recalled for Alyssa Grossman that their defunct refrigerator, when replaced, “became...a coop for the chickens in the countryside”. Socks, which were made cheaply from low quality yarn, were often worn three at a time: “first, the tattered socks, and then the ‘good socks’”. Marius, a Romanian man interviewed by ethnographer Alyssa Grossman, told her that acquiring new glass was almost impossible, because such expensive goods were rare. Instead, one “saved every pair you had, and when something broke, you would use parts from your other frames to repair it”. Other products had to be reproduced without any original hardware or ingredients. Pain and injury, for example, was often treated with “homemade brandy” or other home remedies because medication was so expensive. These rituals continued with all belongings, until every object was assembled from bits and pieces of others.

This practice was so popular that “magazines appeared that taught how to remodel and reuse objects”. The state embraced the culture of reuse, as it helped to temper the hardship of shortage, by encouraging consumers not to “fetishize” objects or “allow them only an instrumental purpose” before discarding. However, the state’s clever approach to repurposing was counteracted by the fact that many objects were used for decorative, rather than functional purposes, completely undermining communist claims that items should be purely functional in nature (which renders decorative branding purposeless).

The repurposing of material goods for decorative purposes was especially utilized in the rare instance that a consumer should obtain Western goods. As historian Andi Mihalache explains;

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38 Grossman and Kimball p. 12
39 Grossman and Kimball p. 11
40 Grossman and Kimball p. 14
41 Grossman p. 298
42 Ghodsee p. 525
43 Mihalache p. 221
44 Mihalache p. 221
“Western commercial goods, including foodstuffs, were attractive for another aspect besides their quality. They were gaining further value due to the pleasant aspect of their packages. In most of the cases, after a certain object was used, the packages received different utilizations: they were used as decorations in the rooms or kitchen, or for other domestic activities (depositing or cooking) or they were simply kept for their affective value”.45

Or, as interview subject Marius told ethnographer Alyssa Grossman of his youth in Romania:
“Whenever someone used to visit from the West, he explained, they would bring gifts in plastic bags. While the gifts themselves were important, the bags were also highly coveted because of the shortages in Romania at the time. People would wash and reuse them until they eventually fell apart”.46

However, the decorative packaging of goods was not exclusively a quality of Western goods. Homemade items, such as vodka or jewelry, were often stored in the leftover containers of more decoratively packaged goods, Western or otherwise. This helped to “deny the isolation/separation of socialist economy from the world” but also showed the unique nature of the socialist country.47 For example, items placed in repurposed decorative packaging were often qualified as “Bulgarian” vodka or “Romanian” jewelry, to distinguish it from the more authentic, less forcibly luxurified Western items of similar kind.48

Interestingly, ethnographer Gerald W. Creed observed that the Bulgarian villagers whom he witnessed practicing this ritual of luxurifying homemade goods were not unaware of the superficiality of decorative packaging. They explained to him that they understood “the added expense and cost of such packaging” and that “there was no necessary link between packaging and content quality”.49 However, they “still concluded that it was beautiful and attractive and that anyone would understandably prioritize nicely packaged goods over the unadorned goods of the Bulgarian socialist state.50

The repurposing of everything from refrigerators to the packaging they came in was equal parts economic necessity and citizen obligation. The official motto of the Romanian communist state motto on consumption was “Recuperate, Recondition, Reuse” (Recuperare, reconditionare, refolosire), which sounds similar to the American “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle”, but had more official backing and obligation than the pleading moral tone of the latter slogan.51 Teenagers were required to

45 Mihalache p. 221
46 Grossman p. 299
47 Creed p. 120
48 Creed p. 120
49 Creed p. 121
50 Creed p. 121
51 Grossman and Kimball p. 5
recycle basic materials like glass and return them to the state. Failure to complete such tasks was met with disappointment from parents, schoolmates and authority figures.

An important feature of late communism’s material culture, many people prioritized impressing and pleasing those you respected or wanted to respect you, which also served to humanize economic relations. Children were encouraged to be loyal to their parents with the hope that it would be the parents’ “zeal [that] led [them] to the rallies”. That loyalty was not only extended to, but also embraced consumption choices as a method for children to prove their good communist attributes to their parents. Adults learned how to be good communists from the state and, in turn, passed on those lessons to their children. Childhoods were greatly shaped by a reliance on parents, who themselves relied on the state, for their education as consumers.

In both Romania and Bulgaria, due to their relatively open relationship with the Middle East it was not uncommon for families to spend time “in Libya”, for parents to work “in Iraq”, or for children to sit home and eagerly await the “tons of presents” their parents brought from abroad. Ceauşescu’s relationship with the Middle East was unique in the Eastern Bloc and held a close friendship with Gaddafi, providing the Libyan dictator with inexpensive manual labour. He was notorious for working outside of Soviet interests, though he was rarely foolish enough to defy Russia outright. He sought, in the Middle East, an alternative market to the Western one, which was officially condemned by the communist Bloc, and, in doing so, gave his citizens an unusual exposure to foreign goods. For the children, these trips produced coveted items for boasting about to their classmates. For the parents, it was an opportunity to procure “something useful of high quality” for a lower price than was offered on the black market.

Some objects, domestic and foreign, were coveted for their ability to signify particular positive traits in their owners to those they wanted to impress. communist Romania’s “Super Ink”, for example, was valuable for the stains it left on fingers, which indicated diligence in a student. In the same way, imported pencil cases, especially those manufactured in the West or in China, that were acquired either on the black market or from relations returning from abroad, gave status to students in communist schools.

QUEUES & THE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE
Perhaps the most iconic image of communist market shortage is the queuing that took place outside grocery stores with empty shelves. This had always been part of obtaining

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52 Grossman and Kimball p. 5
53 Mineva p. 155
54 Mineva p. 156
56 Grossman p. 156
57 Grossman p. 302
58 Grossman p. 303
rarities, but by the 1980s, “milk, eggs, and meat implied the same endless queues” if the grocery stores even had them at all. Queues were intrusive, disrupting consumer rituals that, in capitalism, are usually private affairs. One never went shopping alone, instead spending hours with fellow shoppers waiting for the same basic goods. The lines were both long and wide: “When the queues were big, you could not even enter the shop”. In the more dire days of shortage in Romania, they also became aggressive, as people literally fought to reach the front of the line.

Explorations of the queue phenomenon gives insight into the government’s manipulation of shortage for political means. Although shortage was certain, actual item availability was totally unpredictable, and people continued to queue with the hope that what they wanted might be on the shelves. With this growing scarcity of basic food products came a tightening of the surveillance for which Ceauşescu’s regime was notorious. As people lined up for groceries earlier and earlier each month, earlier too did the agents of surveillance appear. People’s private lives grew smaller as their time alone, at home, grew shorter. People felt “under permanent siege” and that the state was aiming its war directly against their private lives. As power cuts, the result of both fuel shortages and the regime’s desire to keep the consumer dependent on their government, increased in frequency, the private sphere continued to shrink and consumers lost control over many aspects of their privacy. Political intrusion on the private sphere, both in regard to resource control and surveillance, made consumption a highly politicized practice.

Once in the store, shoppers presented the government allotted ration cards to the clerk, who then chose products at their discretion from behind the counter. This created an aspect of material culture almost entirely unique to communism, wherein consumers were beholden to the grocery store clerk for procurement of their desired goods. In addition, their individual material choices or desires, though by the end universal in the quest for basic necessities, had to be relayed to the clerk to be satisfied.

The one aspect of consumption that was private in nature occurred when leaving the store, purchased goods in tow. Because the goods were likely to run out and the queues likely to get rowdy, grocery store clerks found it useful to hide the purchases of their customers so that those waiting would not expect to be able to purchase the same goods. By the time a customer left the store, the goods, “already wrapped in bags, could not be seen any more”. The brown paper that covered goods made the already limited choices of the consumers that much more irrelevant.

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59 Vultur p. 175
60 Bădică p. 204
61 Vultur p. 185
62 Vultur p. 180
63 Vultur p. 185
64 Bădică p. 202
PRIVATE CONSUMER PRACTICES
The aspect of private material culture that is most evasive to researchers is the subject of personal, decorative belongings, or bibelots. These items, without significant monetary value, persist as sentimental representations of a lifestyle that the owner chooses. The display of these objects is a cultural ritual that not only indicates an individually-held relationship with materialism, but also shows the social value of material objects. Bibelots can range in the origin of their significance to the owner but are alike in that they are kept as an emotional choice, rather than a pragmatic, logical or functional one. For an owner, bibelots have “strong identity, family, memory, and transgenerational valence” and serve to remind the owner of those traits. To outsiders, these objects are considered worthless trifles, useful only for their decorative purposes. The owner chooses to bestow in the object a particular sentimental value. However, one important exception to the understanding of bibelots as purely emotional in value can be identified in the Romanian and Bulgarian cases. For the two countries, bibelots served as social currency during communism, as their existence demonstrated a particular social capability of the owner. The items “bourgeoisied the daily décor, creating the illusion that life was not only survival” in these economies of shortage.

Bibelot theory concerns itself with the display of personal belongings for a public audience and argues that the “accessories in our houses represent some cultural codes” which, in regard to the themes in this essay, are able to “tacitly resist the major social changes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries”. For example, while large-scale property, like residences, were confiscated and placed under state control by the communists after the end of the Second World War, Romanians and Bulgarians were able to hold on to smaller representations of their former lives. In Romania, many people kept porcelain figures from the pre-war culture in which Romanians revisited rococo fashion. This remained true in post-communism, when the collapse of Ceaușescu’s regime offered an opportunity to reimagine pre-war affluence as having extended to everyone, not just the upper elites (to whom the original hardline communists objected).

Daily rituals were created to preserve a semblance of the pre-war lifestyle. As one woman recollected to ethnographer Andi Mihalache, “I cleaned the rooms, I arranged our old objects and bibelots and I arranged the last roses from our garden in the crystal jar”. By engaging with the luxury items of the pre-war period despite their changed position under communism, people were able to use material goods to silently resist the new regime. The potency of material goods as tools of resistance can be linked directly to the relationship between culture (a shared sentiment among a given group) and its physical manifestation in the physical products produced or consumed by that group.

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65 Mihalache p. 217
66 Mihalache p. 226
67 Mihalache p. 218
68 Mihalache p. 225
The importance of intimacy to bibelot culture, which manifests as a reliance on personal closeness in order to understand an object’s significance as well as in the power of the bibelots to influence an individual’s social position, is interesting in juxtaposition to the impersonal nature of capitalist consumer culture. While the uniformity of material goods under communism assured that bibelots stood out as representations of an individual’s personal choices, the material diversity offered by capitalism cheapens the social value of the bibelot, as well as a portion of the emotional value. Though the emotional value of an object is often rooted in historical rituals like inheritance, it can also find its origin in uniqueness. For example, a lunchbox with American cartoons pictured on it was almost impossible to obtain under communism; doing so would certainly win a parent a degree of social respect (the social value of bibelots). Obtaining such an item would imply that the owner (or their parents) had successfully navigated the black market, and thus the owner would feel a degree of pride that they own such an elusive material item, while others have the standard issue version. The accessibility of goods under capitalism, however, distracts from both the social value (everything is easier to obtain, provided one has money) and the emotional value (pride related to an item’s uniqueness).

In both countries, the objects were able to remind and reassure the owner of their past and acted as tools of survival. In a communist setting, where most private or individual consumption is discouraged and limited by regulation, uniformity and economic access, bibelot ownership indicated an ability to gain access to aesthetic consumption and to define oneself materially. Individuals created “little museums” of bibelots in their homes, the purpose of which was twofold. First, as already explained, the composition of these objects served to symbolize a part of a person’s unique, individual identity and remind them of that identity in a uniform material culture. Second, the museums turned housing units, which were issued by the state after a massive redistribution and reorganizing of residences, into something familiar for their occupants. Bibelot museums customized spaces and informed visitors of the identity the inhabitants chose to portray. The public nature of private life under communism, which dictated that even personal opinions were the business of the state, impairs individual expression by restricting access to material rituals that clarify individualism, “hence the desire to individualize one’s little universe, to extract personal life from the public control” on the smallest level.

The material choices, particularly in terms of display, of a given community also speak directly to its feelings about the shared history. The communist-era choices, like hanging on to objects that symbolized pre-war cultural affluence, give some insight into the perspective of individuals (as opposed to that found in party propaganda) on their current environment. By choosing to display remnants of a different age, the individual is consciously assigning part of their personality to that age.

Under communism, consumption was framed as both irresponsible and treasonous, because engaging in it ignored the Party claim that it would control and distribute all material goods based on the categorical needs it defined for its constituents. Private

69 Mihalache p. 221
70 Mihalache p. 223
material desires of the individual consumer required connections, bravery and a great deal of luck. Consumption beyond what the State mandated was equated with individualistic greed and Western capitalism, and therefore political disloyalty, a slogan that most consumers knew by heart. It was not until the end of the 1980s in either country that such ideology began to be used against the state and disloyalty to communism, especially in terms of consumption, became a rallying cry.
CHAPTER TWO

The Revolutionary Object
Material Culture, Resistance & Romania’s Revolution in 1989

The Romanian Revolution of 1989 is perhaps the most infamous dismantling of all that occurred in the Eastern Bloc at that time. British historian Timothy Garton-Ash observed that “nobody hesitated to call what happened in Romania a revolution”, while he questions whether the occurrences in other states, including Bulgaria, “actually qualified for anything but a very loose usage of the term”. Tremendous political changes worthy of a loosely interpreted title of ‘revolutionary’ certainly occurred in the other East European states, and perhaps in a more positive manner: only in Romania did the revolution involve mass violence and the execution of the communist regime’s leader. In all other satellite countries of the Soviet Union, round-table political negotiations accompanied the enormous political changes of the time, while Romania’s communist regime was violently overthrown by force.

The final regime to collapse among the Soviet satellite countries, Romania’s trajectory was unique in its violence, the absence of negotiation or compromise between communists and the opposition, and its rapidity.

I argue that material culture played a pivotal role in demonstrating to the Romanian population that their state, its leader and, for some, the entire ideological backing of the system, had failed them. Basic needs, from electricity to food and running water, were left unmet by the government as it conspicuously hoarded the wealth of the nation for itself. Angered by the widespread suffering and the enormous state intrusion on the lives of its constituents, the Romanian people revolted against their leader, creating a unique revolutionary situation in a region engulfed by political turmoil. Ceausescu’s sultanistic lifestyle in the late 1980s, the material deprivation of Romanians that steadily worsened throughout the 1980s and the importance of Western goods on the Romanian black market that were uniquely accessible due to the dictator’s relationship with the Middle East all contributed to tremendous frustration and political disillusionment in the Romanian population. There are certainly other factors that brought about the worker protests, the violent government-civilian conflict in the streets of Romania’s major cities, and the culminating execution of the Ceausescus. Indeed, it was the frustration that built as a result of perceived consumer deprivation and economic injustice, accompanied by widespread concern about civil rights and the oppressive regime, that ultimately led to widespread motivation for and mass participation in the Revolution.

Common depictions of all the East European revolutions of 1989, during which the communist regimes in almost every Eastern Bloc country were toppled as a result of mass

protest, popular dissent and political negotiations of some form, cite the Eastern Bloc's isolation as the primary factor in regard to motivation. Many read 1989 "as a moment of emergence into light, or escape from isolationism", by which the East Europeans finally entered the Western world they had been kept from for the last half century. These readings assume that East Europeans lived entirely without Western products, exposure to depictions of what Western culture looked like, or an understanding of their relative position in the world's economies, for 40 years. Political scientist Alina Sajed has questioned these assumptions, which she claims have a patronizing effect, basing her argument on the evidence that most of these countries were far from isolated during the Cold War, despite their governments efforts to remain isolated. She explains that moving beyond "facile dichotomies" like "liberal-democratic openness [vs] nationalist-organic closure" is essential to understanding a major factor in how the 1989 revolutions began.

As the previous chapter demonstrates, Western goods were, in fact, a thriving part of the second economy in Romania (and Bulgaria) long before the revolution toppled Communism. The exposure to the West and its material culture was so crucial to the Romanian Revolution of 1989's success that, for some, it often trumped political frustrations in terms of revolutionary motivations. By many scholarly analyses, it would not be an exaggeration "to say that the revolution in Romania was based more on economic rather than political frustration". Most Romanians understood that it would be "impossible to have a true consumption revolution", as they desired "without an accompanying economic revolution". The cries and slogans of revolution were "most commonly expressed in terms of basic human rights and consumer goods", which they understood to be inextricably linked.

With an understanding of East European exposure to images of Western consumption, one can easily see why the promise of Western material culture acted a powerful motivator in all the Eastern Bloc revolutions of 1989. Aside from general enthusiasm to gain access to new, seemingly superior material goods in the West, there was a revolutionary component to the East Europeans' interest in joining the consumer culture of the West. Its image was used as protest, as inspiration and as resistance against the communist economic system that had crippled most of the countries of Eastern Europe, and Romania most severely. Those who had grown up under communism viewed embracing capitalist consumption, portrayed as the great evil of the West by the communists, as the ultimate betrayal of the reigning government. Consuming with Western consumer rituals, like fast fashion, brand comparison and the consumption of actual Western products, was a chance to physically enact an ideological movement away from communism. In embracing

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73 Sajed p. 551
74 Sajed p. 552
75 Ger, Belk and Lascu. "The Development of Consumer Desire in Marketizing and Developing Economies: The Cases of Romania and Turkey."
76 Ger, Belk and Lascu. "The Development of Consumer Desire in Marketizing and Developing Economies: The Cases of Romania and Turkey."
77 Siani-Davies p. 25
Western-style consumption, they found a relatively simple way to rebel against the system that had failed them.

The relationship with Western goods in pre-revolutionary Romania was one of hopefulness, but also reverence. Sajed, who grew up in Romania during the late years of communism, remembers:

“No encounter with a Western product was ever trivial. A pair of jeans, a T-shirt, a pack of gum and a chocolate were not trivial consumer goods, they spoke to us of ‘the world’, a place we desired, where there were no shortages and freedom was in abundant supply. Such trivial objects gave us hope, but also reminded us of the huge difference between ‘this country’ and ‘the world’, as Herta Müller would put it. In our eyes, they were not simply wonderful; they had to be wonderful, because they originated elsewhere, and they represented freedom, prosperity, choice, even the existence of carelessness”.

That the material products “most highly regarded originate[d] outside of the country” was the first inclination that the Eastern Bloc consumers were being deprived of that which others had and they desired. Scarcity or rareness alone did not give Western products their status. Instead, their ability to signal “some kind of relationship with the West”, perceived as “the center of progress, development, and modernity” made them valuable to all frustrated consumers under communism. It was those images of the West that Romanians contrasted with their own situation and the conclusions were almost universal: they were being deprived of the lifestyle they desired.

DEPRIVATION & ECONOMIC INJUSTICE
It was clear to the Romanian people of the late 1980s that their economic situation was abnormal, even within the Eastern Bloc. Romanian writer Ana Blandiana’s prominent poem entitled “Totul”, or “Everthing” was distributed illegally in the late 1980s and describes the discrepancies between goods found “inside the country, from the weevil-filled flour to the dirt-tasting coffee” and those in the outside, or West: “unadulterated food and fast-moving grocery lines”. Food shortages were an enormous problem for the Romanian consumer. Many shops ran out of everything but “pickled vegetables and usually inedible preserves”, while rationing was continuously made stricter throughout the last decade of communism. The same shortages applied to all material goods, expanding to include even basic domestic products by 1989. Even store clerks, previously in a powerful seat of material bargaining, were unable to gain access to sufficient store supplies to demand, as had

78 Sajed p. 564
80 Bar-Haïm p. 212
82 Siani-Davies p. 9
previously occurred, exorbitant payment from their patrons. This was increasingly noticeable as the second economy, which had thrived in Romania throughout the previous decade, began to stagnate in the 1980s and fewer people had access to goods of any kind.

Widespread deprivation and perceived economic injustice, both symptoms of overwhelming shortage, creates a "psychically uncomfortable condition" which is, in turn, exacerbated by the perception that one is undeservedly without when others around you prosper. This was the experience of Romania in the months before the revolution, as "poverty and economic hardship", along with exposure to images of a materially affluent West and the regime’s sultanistic consumption of material wealth, “fuelled a widespread sense of injustice”.

As shortage in Romania intensified, that Romanians understood their experience in the context of global experiences elsewhere would prove crucial in motivating and mobilising the population to revolt. Domestic depictions of Western culture ultimately served as a powerful point of unity in the revolutionary cause. Interestingly, the Romanian state media tended to skew depictions of Western culture toward the realm of material culture. The official television and radio depictions of the West were limited to the most tangible and conspicuous images of Western anti-communist consumer culture. Ceausescu’s televisions often broadcasted images of Western material culture, intending these reports to be received as images of distasteful capitalist indulgence.

The dictator’s “ambition to beat the West with its own weapons” used depictions of Western consumption as propaganda to keep his citizens loyal to his pledged communist ideology by demeaning images of conspicuous consumption. The side effect of this skewing, however, was that most Romanians’ visual imagery of the West was of material affluence. The ironic outcome, though a few might have looked upon such images with disdain, saw most Romanians focusing instead on the stark contrast between the quality of life in the West and that which they experienced at home. It would seem that “communism had managed to accomplish the fetishization of objects even better than capitalism” in its attempts to portray the problems with Western culture. Furthermore, the consumers of late communist Romania, suffering under extreme shortage and political repression, were “constantly told by the state propaganda apparatus” that theirs was a golden age of Romania, led by a glorious leader with the best interests of his people in mind. The reality of daily life held stark contrasts to its depiction in state propaganda, fostering a growing disillusionment with the state and its media output.

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85 Siani-Davies p. 25
86 Sajed p. 566
87 Sajed p. 565
88 Siani-Davies p. 13
Along with the media output of the Romanian state, the media that Western countries were able to get into the Eastern Bloc also prioritized depictions of material culture. U.S. policy, both implicit and explicit, in Eastern Europe was to “bring down communism with images of abundance and luxurious consumption in the West”.\textsuperscript{89} One example of such practice is the introduction of McDonald’s restaurants to Eastern Europe in the last years of communism. These restaurants, the “emblem of capitalism and the visual evidence for the drastic social changes” desired in Romania, would later serve as vital spaces for revolutionary assembly, but initially acted as ambassadors of Western consumer culture to the hungry consumers, particularly the youth, of the Eastern Bloc.\textsuperscript{90}

The youth population in late communist Romania, though unwilling to totally disregard the laws of the state until shots were fired in Timișoara in December 1989, eagerly rebelled through “the display of Western goods and the immersion into Western culture”, using the West as their hero and rejecting the heroes offered by the State. Among the youth population, and gradually among other generations, a practice developed of “intense preoccupation with Western commercial artifacts and the transformation of them into symbols” of resistance.\textsuperscript{91, 92} They listened to Western music, watched Western movies, “fantasize[d] about traveling in the West”, sharing all of this with their parents, neighbours and teachers.\textsuperscript{93} As they showed off “their Western acquisitions” and shared tips on keeping “up to date with pop culture from the West”, Romania’s youths contributed enormously to the sense of inequity developing quickly among Romanians.\textsuperscript{94} By the late 1980s, many Romanians, particularly “city-born youth”, desired “personal consumerism and a compatible lifestyle” as they understood to exist in the West.\textsuperscript{95} This would prove vital in establishing a common plight of all Romanians against communism and served to root anti-communist resistance solidly within the consumer experience.

In addition to the stark comparison provided by the images and goods of the West, domestic material inequities were increasingly prominent as Ceaușescu’s rule continued to revolve around the material desires of the dictator. As shortage grew worse for the average citizen, the Romanian dictator was steadily accumulating material wealth in his residence, the ironically titled Casa Poporului, or ‘Palace of the People’, and Ceaușescu’s policies were entirely “self-serving” and “megalomaniac[al]” by the late 1980s.\textsuperscript{96}

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\textsuperscript{89} Ger, Belk and Lascu. “The Development of Consumer Desire in Marketizing and Developing Economies: The Cases of Romania and Turkey.”
\textsuperscript{91} Bar-Haïm p. 211
\textsuperscript{92} Bar-Haïm p. 210
\textsuperscript{93} Bar-Haïm p. 210
\textsuperscript{94} Bar-Haïm p. 208
\textsuperscript{95} Bar-Haïm p. 205
had learned that, in regard to consumption “conspicuous behavior would make others envious and could have unpredictable consequences”, and thus learned to consume in private.\textsuperscript{97} Ceaușescu’s ornate palace, fancy cars and lavish parties for the upper ranks of the Party represented a radically different consumer practice than what was possible for the average Romanian. Modesty is considered an integral part of the Romanian nature, and its material antitheses, exorbitant or conspicuous consumption, was a crucial contributor to the dictator’s deteriorating moral authority and legitimacy. His “pathological vanity” manifested in conspicuous displays of his own wealth and luxury living, which counteracted the dominant political rhetoric of national shortage and sacrifice for the greater good.\textsuperscript{98} Though the entire economic system of Romania produced gross material inequalities that divided the country into Party and otherwise, it was the personality cult that circulated around the dictator, plastering his face on every streetlamp, that would eventually make him “the universal scapegoat and focus of grievance.”\textsuperscript{99}

Framing their world against that which the Ceaușescus lived in and that which they perceived to exist in the West, in their palace in the center of Bucharest, Romanians were “brought...face to face with their feelings about the present moment”.\textsuperscript{100} They felt “angered because they [felt] they [had] no means for attaining” the material prosperity they perceived to exist in the West. They knew their government, the heads of which were not suffering at all, was doing nothing about it.\textsuperscript{101} Party officials, and their families, had “access to exclusive official outlets” where they purchased Western goods that they would “ostentatiously display”.\textsuperscript{102} Indeed, it was popular practice to join the Party, not out of ideological conviction, but with the expectation of access to rare material goods. The only Romanians with consistent access to goods of any kind, let alone rare goods, were “those who knew the ‘right people’”.\textsuperscript{103}

Romanian dissident writer Andrei Codrescu, who returned to Romania in the midst of the Revolution, observed the Romanian sentiment regarding the Ceaușescus’ conspicuous material accumulations:

“There was something more than simple shock at the decadent riches of tyrants that bother my friends here, and the drunker we got, the more clearly I saw it. It was almost as if at one time they had believed Ceaușescu when he told them that they all must make sacrifices. They had believed that he, too, sacrificed. To have it revealed that he lived in this way was indecent”.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{97} Bar-Haïm p. 206
\textsuperscript{99} Siani-Davies p. 24
\textsuperscript{100} Popescu p. 56
\textsuperscript{101} Gurr p. 50
\textsuperscript{102} Bar-Haïm p. 215
\textsuperscript{103} Siani-Davies p.33
Even before the Revolution began in December 1989, a violent clash between protesters and police had occurred on November 5, 1987. A group of factory workers in Brașov had expressed their discontentment with the regime as they “tore down and burnt in a huge bonfire much of the panoply of communist symbolism that festooned the city”. Once the Revolution began, the dictator fled the capital with his wife and a few loyal security guards and government higher-ups before being arrested and put on trial by the revolutionaries on December 25th. Whilst on the run, the dictator kept a briefcase containing his financial records handcuffed to his own wrist, refusing to let anyone carry it for him. These records became a fixation for revolutionary Romania, and were allegedly used against him at the trial. So too were the Romanian people obsessed with Ceaușescu’s infamous gold Rolex wristwatch, which he checked repeatedly during the trial, causing some to speculate that it was “a sophisticated locator or communicator”, though most believe he was simply impatient.

Elena Ceaușescu “offered the men who arrested them one million dollars” in exchange for helping them to escape, but her offer was refused. Both were reported to be “indignant” at the meals they were presented with once imprisoned and he “demanded a new suit” as he was accustomed to wearing each day. Ceaușescu’s reign, right through their arrests, was marked by their economic privilege that they gained at the expense of those they governed. Their final sentence, imposed by a military tribunal of revolutionaries, was “death and confiscation of private property.”

A final component of the frustration and indignancy that accompanied the severe shortage of the 1980s is the common Romanian self-representation as a Western culture in a Slavic region. Rooted in the Romance language heritage and historical relationships with France, Italy and Germany, many Romanians, including the communist leaders, emphasize their uniqueness in the East European region and draw on images of historical affluence to support that distinction. This sentiment has also been positioned in relation to material culture. For example, 19th century Romanians used France as “the point of reference in fashion and...luxury items”. The “ban of luxury” goods and living under the communists only increased Romanian perceptions that Communism usurped Western culture’s rightful place in Romania.

As Eastern Europe and communism had become synonymous since 1948, Romanians were indignant that they had been lumped in with their Slavic neighbours whom they had long deemed inferior. This was a common sentiment across the Eastern Bloc countries, each of whom found their own reason to conclude communism was an aberration in their

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105 Siani-Davies p.35
106 Codrescu p. 46
107 Codrescu p. 43
108 Codrescu p. 43
109 Codrescu p. 47
111 Ochkovskaya p. 281
nation's rightful historical path. It was particularly strong in Romania, however, because they had been distancing themselves from their region for longer than most, though Hungarians and Estonians could make a similar claim to linguistic/ethnic distinction. Because Communism in Eastern Europe was so strongly linked to Russia, the Slavic patriarch, many Romanians blamed Slavs for their misfortunes in the latter half of the 20th century. The assumption that “we do not really belong here, we belong in the West” where material affluence was the norm was a particularly potent source of frustration for Romanians.\textsuperscript{112}

As Alina Sajed puts it:

“This is one of the myths...that sustained, during the communist period, many Romanians' sense of loss, betrayal and profound desire for something that used to be and that is no longer ours”.

Romanians in the last months of 1989, surrounded by the crumbling regimes of the Eastern Bloc, understood the ideal material culture and consumption prospects to exist “only in the capitalistic West, and certainly not under 'really existing socialism'”, which was increasingly losing legitimacy in Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{113} Romanians felt the stark contrast between their own lives and material experiences and those they saw depicted on television, however interrupted by communist slogans condemning conspicuous consumption and material wealth. They had become disillusioned with Communism, more so as shortage worsened, and focused their minds on the rightful or deserved Western-style affluence that they felt the communists had deprived them of. Romanians living under communism would “nostalgically muse about ...the golden age of modern Romania” when the West was most closely in their grasp.\textsuperscript{114} Stuck at the bottom of the economic barrel of the communist world, “the West, with its affluence and freedom, became a sort of Paradise on Earth” for the Romanian population.\textsuperscript{115} The Revolution began with these images of the West in mind, as much a reaction to material deprivation and shortage as to political woes.

And so, the Romanian Revolution was as much a struggle between shortage and material prosperity as one between political oppression and democracy. The “economic catastrophe sweeping the country” had left people frustrated and fed up with their own country and they began to ask for more.\textsuperscript{116} It would not be incorrect to say that the material culture of revolutionary Romania was a political battle in and of itself, given that “goods were invested with a high degree of political significance”.\textsuperscript{117} As Alina Sajed explains, it was “this desire of the socialist consumer to be seduced by these Western objects and to absorb the message they conveyed that made it possible” for revolution to begin.\textsuperscript{118}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{112} Sajed p. 554
\bibitem{114} Sajed p. 555
\bibitem{115} Petrescu p. 229
\bibitem{116} Siani-Davies p. 31
\bibitem{117} Siani-Davies p. 31
\bibitem{118} Sajed p. 565
\end{thebibliography}
two primary examples of such coveted and politicized objects, the radio and the television, arguably served as the most important weapons of the revolution.

TELEVISION & RADIO
The images of Western material culture that so greatly influenced Romanian perceptions of domestic material culture primarily came through television screens. Televisions had begun broadcasting Western shows and movies under the period of liberalization in the 1970s when Romania began to move away from Soviet influence. With this liberation, Romanians also encountered “an influx of Western tourists who came to marvel at the ‘ancient traditions and culture’”119. These tourists were a valuable source of information, particularly for their knowledge of Western popular culture. They introduced Romanians to the notorious American soap opera Dallas, which would become the most popular television show in communist Romania.

The radio gained usefulness as a tool of resistance, both before and during the Revolution. In contrast to the television’s depictions of the affluent West, the radio broadcasted the voices of Romanian dissidents, exiled by the communist regime. The single most revered household object in all communist-era homes, the radio, acted as the doorway to the West and to their lost compatriots, dissidents who lived in exile. The radio waves existed “between the two worlds, connecting the body of the Romanian citizen with the exiled voice”.120

Radio Free Europe was the primary source of escape for Romania’s radio audience. The station “featured Romanian dissident intellectuals” and “kept [the Romanian people’s] minds awake”.121 Nightly sessions, whispering in through the crackle of poor reception, educated Romanians about the West and all the things they lacked in the East. Radio Free Europe became “a unique source of uncensored information for Romanians”.122 As shortage grew worse and the Romanian government tightened its control over the Romanian people, radio broadcasting, the last escape route to Western culture, saw its audience diversify and grow. The radio served as the primary “medium of transmission which allowed for the redistribution of sound” in the late communist era, filling many living rooms with the state-censored media as well as the dissident sound from abroad.123 In this way, the radio bridged the gap between “the public political sphere speaking from the West and the private sphere of the silent individual listening from the East”.124

The consumer interaction with the radio became ritualistic, as is often the case with important consumer goods. The volume dial, in particular, was subject to a constant game of adjustment for the ideal measure of the discernible and inconspicuous, as there was

119 Sajed p. 567
120 Popescu p. 51
121 Sajed p. 566
123 Popescu p. 49
124 Popescu p. 50
always the “fear that someone else is listening.” Similarly, the “radio often move[d] around the room” in pursuit of a “pure signal, the one wave that the state had forgotten to jam.” In their minds, all a Romanian had to do to resist the state and join the West was move the radio around the room to find a suitable wave. So was the activity of the average Romanian evening: shut away in their homes, temporarily entering the rest of the world through an object. The next morning, information that had leaked from the West through the radio was discussed in whispers among close friends.

The state, which had long been censoring television shows, became increasingly frustrated with its “inability to control the bodiless sound emanating from an object they had simply overlooked”. This was true all over the bloc: “We’ll give you the Zomo (riot police) before we give you the TV.” said a senior party official in the Polish Roundtable talks, responding to a query about making television public but not politicized, forgetting the other household object that might disrupt the regime’s control of the people. The radio was broadcasting the voices they had tried to silence. And speak they did, with harsh criticism of the regime that had banished them. In June of 1989, a Radio Free Europe program “unfavorably compared Ceaușescu to Stalin and Hitler” in response to a violent clash with refugees on the Romanian-Hungarian border. The radio thus functioned as a private, illegal mode for the “consumption of both goods and ideas” they could not have engaged with without it. It turned private spaces into the kind of public space people longed for: one with political truth and transparency and the ability to voice one’s opinion without penalty.

The radio helped to create a level of frustration and anger necessary for revolutionary activity to build, but also provided the listener with the political context of the Eastern Bloc revolutions happening around them: “On November 30, the Romanian service broadcast a detailed report on the Velvet Revolution, contrasting it with the stagnation in Romania”. This, among many other similar reports, gave Romanians the sense that they had not only been left in the dust by their Western brothers of history; they were being left behind in the Bloc. Having grown accustomed to comparing themselves to the West, they now “found themselves in an invidious position vis-à-vis not only the West, but also other Eastern European states”, including neighbouring Bulgaria, which had begun its anti-communist transition in November. The radio would go on to “strengthen its signal” in Romania as the revolution began and “provide Romanians with information totally censored in local media”, but its most important role was in the early months of 1989: exposing Romanians to that which others had and they lacked.

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125 Popescu p. 51  
126 Popescu p. 51  
127 Garton Ash p. 27  
128 Popescu p. 53  
129 Johnson p. 319  
130 Sajed p. 552  
131 Johnson p. 323  
132 Siani-Davies p. 47  
133 Johnson p. 324
Once the Revolution began in the last month of 1989, televisions and radios were a crucial instrument of communication for Romanians, as “the only means by which Romanians through the country were kept up to date with the Revolution and with the entire situation at the time.” Once the “telephonic links to Timișoara were cut”, the importance of television and radio increased even more. One man, Cristian Lupu, “fought to protect the Romanian Television headquarters” from the violence on the streets. When the National Salvation Front (NSF), the major revolutionary group that would eventually set up a provisional government, took control of television station, turning it into their headquarters, they played a pirated copy of E.T. Most Romanians “experienced the Revolution live on TV”, giving television a “key role” in the mobilisation of the population. Pre-revolutionary Romania was “an atomized society with only individual voices of protest” and the unity of television viewing and radio listening was crucial to the mobilisation of the population to revolt. The radio had the effect of “un-silencing the public”, connecting them to their common frustrations and mobilising the masses. Ross A. Johnson, former director of Radio Free Europe, claims he has “yet to meet a Romanian who lived in the country in 1989 who does not remember listening to that broadcast”.

The roar of revolution thus entered Romania in “the body of [objects]”, “erupt[ing] in living rooms speaking the thoughts held by many” and empowering Romanians with the images and voices of the West. As scholar Irina Popescu puts it:

“And thus a revolution begins - when people finally realize the mask they decorated with anxious fearfulness masked nothing else but their own discontent...There were people in Romania that lived tied to their radio program as astronauts in space are tied to their oxygen source” (Liiceanu, 2006, p. 115). There were people that fell asleep to the radio, allowing the lullaby of sound to tuck them in. There were families that gathered for dinner, placing the radio near the table, as if it too required sustenance. But listening is not enough. The people got tired of listening on December 16, 1989, and finally started searching for their voices. Timidly at first, they gathered, looking frantically throughout the streets, hoping to find a road sign directing them to their unique sounds. Unsure whether or not the sounds they emanated made sense, they nevertheless begin to speak, as if for the first time. And at that moment, the radio had finally been taken out of the living room and

135 Codrescu p. 33
136 Cesereanu p. 326
139 Johnson p. 314
140 Popescu p. 50
141 Johnson p. 324
142 Popescu p. 52-53
placed in the middle of the city, its volume turned high enough to energize even pavement to action.  

REVOLUTION

Most historians and observers agree that the first major outbreak of revolutionary activity, which occurred on December 15, was in response to the eviction of László Tőkés, a pastor in Timișoara who encouraged his congregation to protest outside of the church where he resided. Tőkés’ primary argument concerned the question of authority in the private sphere, as the state claimed he had no right to keep residence in the church. This early moment of opposition shows the profound resistance to state intimidation and authoritarian control, particularly in regard to the private residential sphere, that would influence the events to come. Four days after the protests began in Timișoara with “three hundred Hungarians, Romanians, Serbs and others minorities form[ing] a human chain” and shouting anti-communist slogans, historian Smaranda Vultur observed the rapidly erupting strikes and protests outside of Party headquarters in Bucharest. The Revolution’s slogans quickly expanded to include all aspects of state intrusion on the private sphere, most notably in regard to food consumption. The chants and speeches condemning the communist regime included demands for “bananas and chocolate for the children”, “food for our children” and ‘we want bread!”.

Vultur also observed an aspect of communist material culture prevalent in the early days of the Revolution: only a “few minutes” after the first violent clashes with the government in Timișoara, “people were already standing in line” behind a trolley of apples and, by morning, “[queueing] for desired fruit in time for Christmas and the New Year”. Similarly, historian Peter Siani-Davies claims that the morning of December 22 was calm, “with municipal transport operating and food shops open”. The common experience of suffering and economic hardship, as was the Romanian experience in the 1980s, had been “reinforced, as years passed, in the solidarity of waiting in lines”. Queues were also the primary location for sharing information, heard on last night’s radio broadcast, about the protests appearing all over Romania.

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143 Popescu p. 56-57  
144 Siani-Davies p. 57  
145 Codrescu p. 27  
146 Vultur p. 178  
149 Vultur p. 178  
150 Siani-Davies p. 87  
151 Siani-Davies p. 43
Both personal “vehicles and a newspaper kiosk” were “set ablaze” in the early protests, the destruction of property acting as the most conspicuous display of revolutionary fervor and seriousness. ¹⁵² Timișoara’s Unic, “the biggest shop in the city centre”, saw its windows smashed in as protesters displayed their frustration.¹⁵³ In contrast, as more people joined the fight, the growing confidence contributed to a unifying sense of triumph and destruction gave way to joyful celebration, albeit tempered by the ongoing violence. People began to see their countrymen as brothers again, and not comrades to suspect and be wary of. Parents brought their children out into the streets, and “there was singing and sharing of food”.¹⁵⁴ Shortage seemed to disappear for the eleven days of revolution as the nation’s resources were brought together and shared among all, particularly after “the government freed the secret stashes of the Party and put oranges and coffee into stores”.¹⁵⁵ The same sentiments were extended to fighting, during which children carried “water and food”, “supplies and bullets” to soldiers. The entire population donated their material goods to the revolutionary cause.¹⁵⁶ When a resistance fighter was killed, their mourning loved ones were offered “apples and bread”.¹⁵⁷

The most brutal revolutionaries used the coveted Kent cigarettes, the most prized symbol of Western material culture in communist Romania, to burn the eyes of several security officers.¹⁵⁸ Others tried to get the army on their side, placing “flags in the barrels of the machine guns” that confronted them during protest marches and handing apples, “cigarettes, meat and bread to the young conscripts”.¹⁵⁹ Many confronted the soldiers by telling them: “You are our brothers!”¹⁶⁰ These offerings, initially met with refusal and stoic silence, eventually helped the revolutionaries get the military to turn on the government that had intentionally kept them weak to soothe the dictator’s paranoia. Romania’s military had been largely abandoned by the dictator in favor of his secret police. The country’s defense spending had been frozen in the early 1980s and many soldiers held “the perception...that Romania had one of the lowest rates of defense spending in the world”.¹⁶¹ They were ill-equipped and unmotivated to protect the communist regime, having felt the impact of shortage as acutely as the revolutionaries, and were ready to join the other side.

Immediately after New Year’s, the military became the police force for the provisional government led by the revolution’s political group, the National Salvation Front. This change in title represented a major change in the responsibility of both government and law enforcement:

¹⁵² Siani-Davies p. 72
¹⁵³ Vultur p. 179
¹⁵⁴ Codrescu p. 29
¹⁵⁵ Codrescu p. 54
¹⁵⁶ Codrescu p. 37
¹⁵⁷ Codrescu p. 118
¹⁵⁸ Cesereanu p. 318
¹⁵⁹ Siani-Davies p. 74
¹⁶⁰ Codrescu p. 28
¹⁶¹ Siani-Davies p. 39
“The militia had been the terror instrument of the communist party. The police, which had its roots in *polis* ("community") would, it was hoped, function only to keep the peace”.¹⁶²

The newspapers were similarly transformed. They now served the people, offering information about “an astounding number of new laws passed by the National Salvation Front” rather than government propaganda of previous newspapers.¹⁶³ This change, ironically, brought about the first post-communist queue as people lined up to read the first truly informative newspapers in decades.

Once it was clear that the Revolution was likely to succeed, the Romanian exiled dissidents began coming home, some after more than five decades. Most came by way of Hungary and Yugoslavia, which had opened their borders in previous months. With the exiles came “trucks full of relief supplies, medicine, and urgently needed blood”.¹⁶⁴ People and goods crossed the border, welcomed by the same guards who had risked their lives letting in British cigarettes, dissident novels, and American movies from Yugoslavia (and, to some extent, Hungary) for the last two decades. Incoming luggage went unchecked, their contents no longer a threat to the prevailing Romanian leadership, and many exiles brought celebratory champagne to their countrymen.

Ceaușescu and his wife were ultimately “put to death by a firing squad after the summary trial by a military court” on December 25, 1989.¹⁶⁵ The execution television coverage paralleled his speech of December 21, also televised live, which had ended with the masses he bussed in to listen to him deciding that they had had enough and erupting into protest. The image of his dead body “filled the living rooms of billions of people all over the world” and would become the symbol of the Romanian Revolution, the only violent break from communism in the Soviet Bloc.¹⁶⁶ Their bodies were buried without major publicity or fanfare, but their legacy and wealth were not spared from the anger of the masses. Perhaps the most powerful message of all revolutionary activity, Elena Ceaușescu’s “fabled haute couture, following years in store, was eventually donated to Europe’s last remaining leper colony” in Tichilești, ironic given the regime’s insistence that the disease had been eradicated.¹⁶⁷ The other many possessions of the Ceaușescu’s were auctioned off at their villa to international buyers, hundreds of whom came to Romania to see the dictator’s wealth. The Revolution had revealed the true extent of the dictator and his family’s “excess in a land of poverty” and turned the population, more so than most other Eastern Bloc populations, unequivocally against them.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² Codrescu p. 23
¹⁶³ Codrescu p. 88
¹⁶⁴ Codrescu p. 30
¹⁶⁵ Codrescu p. 25
¹⁶⁶ Codrescu p. 25
¹⁶⁷ Siani-Davies p. 25
¹⁶⁸ Siani-Davies  p. 25
The end of the revolution brought the loss of 1,104 Romanian lives, including Ceaușescu and his wife Elena, and the collapse of communism in Romania. Inasmuch as political liberation from the dictatorial regime was in the minds of Romania’s revolutionaries, consumer goods, or lack thereof, and economic frustration helped brought people to the streets. This is echoed in the sentiments of the Romanian people, whom Vultur references when she argues:

“If some say that the Revolution started in Timișoara in Maria Square not only because this important crossroads was close to the Reformed church where Reverend László Tőkés had locked himself up, but also because there was a grocery nearby where people queued for the monthly minimal amount of oil, sugar, flour, and butter.” 169

The Romanian population was mobilized by myriad reasons, most of which directed their anger toward Ceaușescu. However, the role of perceived economic and material injustice clearly contributed enormously to the motivation of Romanians to fight for a new order. Along with the Bulgarians, who toppled communism through nonviolent protest and political negotiations in November of the same year, and the rest of the Eastern Bloc, Romanians entered capitalism with material culture and consumption in their minds. Post-communism, idealized among revolutionaries and their followers, would turn out to be a vexing process of transition, partially as a result of the material culture post-revolutionary Eastern Europe expected. That the revolution had instilled in Romanians a sense of injustice framed by material consumption would ultimately prove a major factor in shaping the next quarter century of East Balkan life.

169 Vultur p. 193
CHAPTER THREE
Post-communist Attitudes Toward Capitalism & Consumption

As mentioned in the previous chapter, understandings of the political changes in Eastern Europe in 1989 as periods of enlightenment for previously isolated societies are weakened by the reality of communist material culture, which had a surprisingly knowledgeable relation to the West and its products. However, those same depictions of the ‘revolutions’ or ‘transitions’ (the terms used for each country’s experiences are disputed) usually include the East European anticipations of the arrival “of the world of tomorrow which rejoiced in liberty and prosperity”, as a group of scholars of Romania, Catherine Durandin, and Zoe Petre, George F. Jewsbury put it in their analysis of post-communist Romania. That such expectations were held and not met is essential in understanding the frustration, disillusionment and ultimately, nostalgia, that characterized post-communism in both Bulgaria and Romania.¹⁷⁰

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe brought about an entire region’s worth of the “most sudden shifts to market economies” in the modern era.¹⁷¹ While some, perhaps those observing East Germany, Poland, or the Baltic countries, “have announced a total global victory for capitalism” with the transitions of the formerly communist East European states, the on-the-ground reality is much more sordid, particularly in the less affluent and less geographically-blessed Eastern Balkans countries of Bulgaria and Romania.¹⁷² For these countries, as well as many others including the more prosperous economies listed above, history continues to “shape the transformation in each locality”.¹⁷³ This can be understood as the legacy of communism, and its effects left behind in the transition to its antithesis, capitalism, are many.

Unlike many of their post-communist neighbours, Romanians and Bulgarians were hard-pressed to find examples of success in their transitions to democracy. The problems that appeared in Bulgaria and Romania’s transitions are multi-faceted in origin. In both countries, the economic changes of post-communism were rocky. The Romanian government was wary of strict economic policies after the violence with which the Revolution had toppled the previous regime. Instead, they chose to “[relax] the constraints that had been placed on household consumption” to curry favor with the post-revolutionary population.¹⁷⁴ A “dramatically decreased standard of living”, exacerbated by political corruption, coupled with disappearing access to the rapidly closing Western markets, and lofty but unmeetable expectations in the initial years of post-communism, made the Eastern Balkan transition the least successful of any satellite states. Both the Romanian and Bulgarian governments restricted exports to those that could not benefit domestic consumption needs, while importing domestic goods that couldn’t be produced at home.

¹⁷⁰ Durandin, Petre and Jewsbury p.1
¹⁷¹ Ger and Belk. "I'd like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the Less Affluent World" p. 273
¹⁷² Ger and Belk. "I'd like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the Less Affluent World" p. 275
¹⁷³ Ger and Belk. "I'd like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the Less Affluent World" p. 275
¹⁷⁴ Light and Phinnemore p. 129
This resulted in a severe drop in income for manufacturers of exports, making cheaply produced, low quality products the only imports available to either country. The disappointment experienced by Bulgarians and Romanians alike in the post-communist period has caused major fluctuations in each country’s understanding of consumption, particularly in regard to its role in the material culture of the West.

In Romania, the transition to capitalism was “marked ... by an inefficient sluggishness insofar as the creation of democratic institutions”, including a new culture of consumption, was concerned. Despite “post-communist euphoria”, the general sentiment of Romanians in the 1990s was one of despair. Bulgaria’s transition to communism, though less abrupt than in Romania, where the totalitarian regime was overthrown in a matter of days, was similarly tumultuous and painful for its residents. Both countries underwent significant economic transformations, including the privatization of property that the communists had collectivized. Though the transitions of all post-communist states were difficult, Bulgaria and Romania suffered more than any other satellite state in their transition and were rocked by post-communist corruption, organized crime and poverty, and both experienced major economic collapses, Bulgaria in 1997 and Romania in 1999.

While most East Europeans, though still poorer than West Europeans, have made huge economic strides since reunification and transition from communism, post-communist Romania and Bulgaria have been shunted to the economic outskirts of Europe, and many live meagre lives even in comparison with communist-era shortage. The popular understanding is that not much has changed, particularly in terms of the economy of daily life. Bulgarian and Romanian standards of living continue to be two of the lowest “among the new and prospective members of the European Union”. Bulgaria’s average income, though ever so slightly higher than in Romania, is “six times lower than that in the Czech Republic, and almost half the population in both countries live at or below the poverty line”. The “shortages, rationing of staples, and corruption” that plagued the communist period have not disappeared as many thought they would with the transition to democracy and capitalism. “Inflation and unemployment, are now becoming rampant”, the latter of which was famously nonexistent under communism. The immense economic difficulties have made Bulgaria and Romania home to the largest economic emigre population in the European Union, as people routinely leave in search of work to feed their families at home.

176 Turcuş p. 63
177 Durandin, Petre and Jewsbury p. 173
179 Ranova p. 25
180 Ger and Belk. “I’d like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the Less Affluent World” p. 278
182 “‘We Lived Better under Communism!’ Bulgaria Then and Now”. *Toiler’s Struggle*. Wordpress, 13 Dec. 2013. Web,
The disillusionment and frustration with capitalism in the Eastern Balkans began with the economic experience of post-communism which, as demonstrated, has been a largely negative one. While the final years of communism saw major economic downturn, particularly in Romania, the promise of capitalism has thus far not been fulfilled in the Eastern Balkans. They see very little improvement in the economy of daily life, leaving people bitter and disappointed about their newfound capitalist lives. Aside from inevitable frustration with domestic economic woes, the discrepancies in economic experience between the Eastern Balkans and their post-communist neighbours serve as another major source of bitterness with the capitalist system. As Professors Güliz Ger and Russell W. Belk, experts on post-communist consumption practices, put it:

“As long as all were suffering equally and the affluence of others was not too glaringly evident, relative consumer poverty [in the Eastern Balkans] was easier to take. But now their undeniable relative deprivation among the world’s consumers breeds frustration”.183

Eastern Balkanites have encountered Western perceptions of a successful transition to capitalism as a given in Eastern Europe with bitterness, as they look around their lives and see shortage essentially identical to that of the final years of communism. The term ‘disillusionment’, used by many scholars to describe contemporary Bulgarian and Romanian attitudes towards capitalism and consumption, does not accurately represent the complexity of post-communist markets. Whereas many Bulgarian and Romanian consumers may feel ignored or disappointed by capitalism, the reality is that, for most, “it has not materialized” at all.184 In other words, the freedom which capitalism seemed to promise, albeit unattainably idealized, have not truly come to either country for several key reasons, the greatest of which is poverty. Most Bulgarian and Romanians, limited by the low salaries of post-communist economies and the high prices of capitalism and the global markets, are unable to gain access to any material goods beyond the bare necessities. As Gerald W. Creed observed during an anthropological trip to Bulgaria, most “have stopped purchasing consumer goods and services altogether, instead they struggle for subsistence and actively seek to minimize market participation”.185 A true capitalist market in the Eastern Balkans has not been able to develop because consumers are unable to participate.

Nevertheless, consumption (and its producer, capitalism) itself has gained a decidedly negative connotation in post-communist Europe, making post-communist consumers somewhat disappointed in what they hoped would be a universally positive system. The limitations of the “common analytical formula that assumes communist limitation and capitalist opportunity” are most visible in the Eastern Balkans, where post-communism has experienced quite the opposite.186 Under communism, consumers had money but no goods. In post-communism, goods are bountiful in both number and variety, but
inaccessibly financially. By forming expectations of capitalism, which promises an abundance of goods that never existed in communism, in a communist context, where financial prosperity, Bulgarians and Romanians essentially set themselves up for disappointment.

The quality of material goods available in post-communist Romania and Bulgaria has also drastically decreased since the early years of post-communism. Western goods imported early on have become impractical market items considering the economic limitations of both countries and have been replaced by “primarily Turkish and Chinese” goods of lesser value and quality. Low income women seeking to recreate Western styles at a lower price often visit open air markets, where cheaply imported clothes from Turkey are sold. This is a cheaper option for vendors, tourists and locals, but also leaves Bulgarians and Romanians feeling frustrated by the lack of durable, high quality goods. Consumers feel like imposters trying to blend into the Western fashion scene with goods produced cheaply elsewhere, and many mourn the inaccessibility of Western-made goods. The fact that these cheaply produced, low quality products are marketed by Muslim, East Asian or Roma salesmen is similarly vexing, particularly as East European countries gain a reputation in the West for low quality material production. The common sentiment of the East Balkans concludes: “So, if you are what you consume in the capitalist world, the current profile of goods available to Bulgarian villagers is an indictment: cheap products from marginal countries peddled by social inferiors”.

What is most confounding, and therefore frustrating, about this replacement of Western, high quality goods with low quality goods of the Middle East and Asia is the memory of Western quality goods obtained on the black market during communism. Given the cost prohibitive nature of Western goods in the post-communist age, it is an ironic reality that, for some, Western goods were more accessible during communism than after it. So, in fact, the material goods of the communist era, and the legacy they have left on the post-communist period, are not solely the literal products of the communist state economy. Instead, the high quality, Western made goods obtained on the black market with communist-era financial prosperity also function as material legacies of the communist period. This memory of Western goods have made the material realities of post-communism, with low quality imports from less desirable regions, all the more stark. This has initiated a process of nostalgic yearning for communist-era goods produced by the state, which were at least better quality than the low quality imports available now. As their Western-made counterparts, hoarded and meticulously displayed under communism,

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187 Creed p. 123
188 Ranova p. 27
189 Of course, many or most of the material goods consumed in the West are imported from the Middle East and Asia as well, or at least created there by Western companies. That is not a particularly understood fact in the Eastern Balkans, however, where an idealized vision of the Western is so pervasive.
190 Jung p. 582
191 Creed p. 123
are too expensive, and their replacements too substandard in quality, the goods of the communist yesteryear seem fairly desirable to the frustrated post-communist consumer.\textsuperscript{192}

Another particularly frustrating aspect of the transition is the effect that adding Western products and market competition, along with so-called “modern” advertising of foreign material goods, to a mix of corruption and economic shortage has had on East Balkan consumer desires. The abundance of newer, shinier, seemingly better quality goods has “been like rocket fuel to Romanian consumer desires”. They therefore are left desiring both the “latest desiderata” that are advertised and basic necessities that are even harder to obtain with post-communist salaries.\textsuperscript{193} “Consumer demand has grown rapidly”, but wages have decreased sharply.\textsuperscript{194} Some have tried to achieve the revolutionary dream of achieving both financial and material prosperity by working several jobs, while others have turned to organized crime as the only means of earning enough money to access the material goods marketed to them. For some, “witnessing the explosion of consumer goods, the decline of real income, the newly opened window on the rest of the world and the increase in disparity of incomes”, particularly in the Eastern Balkans, has been catastrophic.\textsuperscript{195} These are people who “grew up in socialism and now work and live in post-communist societies...in severe poverty, their basic dignity trampled” and, unlike any of their neighbours to the north or West, have been mostly ignored by tourists and abandoned by the West and their Eastern Bloc comrades.\textsuperscript{196}

The immense disruption caused by the end of communism had side effects far beyond the economic or political spheres. People all over the former Eastern Bloc, but most loudly those in less affluent countries like Bulgaria and Romania, “lament what has been stolen from them: ‘We had jobs. We had security’.\textsuperscript{197} Most of all, they lament the failure of capitalism, as exists in those countries today, to give them what they wanted when they dismantled communism, largely independently, and chose to look westward. Although “many of these desired consumer goods have become available in Romania” since the revolution, “the income to buy them has not, with most Romanian incomes averaging $20 - $40 (U.S.) per month. It is impossible to have a true consumption revolution without an accompanying economic revolution and the latter has hardly begun”.\textsuperscript{198} This can certainly be observed as truth in the Eastern Balkans, where affluence or the ability to consume has yet to come to more than a select few.

The Romanian and Bulgarian cases are made infinitely more complex by the expectations formed during the 1989 revolutions. In both countries, as in most of their Eastern Bloc neighbours, the revolutions/transition occurred in response to economic conditions as to

\textsuperscript{192} Creed p. 123  
\textsuperscript{193} Ger and Belk. “I’d like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the Less Affluent World” p. 278  
\textsuperscript{194} Ger and Belk. “I’d like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the Less Affluent World” p. 278  
\textsuperscript{195} Ger and Belk. “I’d like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the Less Affluent World” p. 278  
\textsuperscript{196} “‘We Lived Better under Communism!’ Bulgaria Then and Now”  
\textsuperscript{197} “‘We Lived Better under Communism!’ Bulgaria Then and Now”  
\textsuperscript{198} Ger, Belk and Lascu. “The Development of Consumer Desire in Marketizing and Developing Economies: The Cases of Romania and Turkey.” Lascu.
political unrest. While the ‘revolutionary’ nature of the what happened in Romania remains largely unchallenged, Bulgarians refer to their 1989 ‘revolution’ instead as “the change”.199 The peaceful protests, political negotiations and multistaged ousting of the communist dictator and, later, the communist party were significantly less climactic than their parallels in other countries. They understand the transition from communism as a major upheaval in daily life more than as a political change. The relatively timid nature of Bulgarian communism and state power, particularly in comparison to neighbouring Romania, meant that its people were relatively content until the economic downturn of the late 1980s. The revolution, prompted by the uncomfortable reforms spurred by Gorbachev’s glasnost policy, was thus primarily a protest of the economics of daily life. Similarly, according to Ger and Belk, the Romanian revolution “was at least as much a result of consumer longing and frustration as it was political longing and frustration”.200 As pre-revolution Romanians had access to Western goods, and the freedom they represented, only on the black market, the notion of legalizing and legitimizing their consumption was extremely tantalizing, particularly given the environment of shortage that helped to prompt the revolution.

Before and during their revolutions, Romanians and Bulgarians viewed the world of Western capitalism and consumer culture with optimism and excitement. Western capitalism shone before them with the appealing more is more slogan of capitalist material culture; consume all you desire of the endless options the West provides. A chief player in the protests against and final demise of communism in Eastern Europe, the economic fragility of the communism system that exposed itself in the mid 1980s was used as a compelling reason to embrace capitalism. The revolutions of 1989 promised economic freedom and prosperity to the countries that turned to capitalism. Thus, when the Bloc-wide anti-communist movements began, the promise of a capitalist market was envisioned with the cash flow of communist Bulgaria. Consumers “expected they would be able to acquire the priorities they targeted for purchases, much as they had under communism, only now with many more desirable objects available”.201 The usefulness of a significant cash flow as communist consumers experienced was limited by the small number of options provided by the state-run market.202 They expected that adding a capitalist market to their communist wages and economic practices would result in the ideal position of material and financial wealth. The communist legacy has manifested in revealing a disappointing nature in the once longed-for capitalist system. That the expectations of capitalism were formed under communism has caused consumers to “incorporate elements of communist practice into a framework defined by socialism’s antithesis”, thus rendering any functioning aspects of the capitalist system all the more paralyzed.203

The post-communist consumers ultimately entered capitalism seeking what one might call, in the context of post-communist economic woes, the unachievable combination of

200 Ger and Belk. “I’d like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the Less Affluent World” p. 277
201 Creed p. 121
202 Creed p. 119
203 Creed p. 124
financial and material prosperity. As Gerald W. Creed explains; “These experiences provided many Bulgarians the raw material for a utopian image of capitalist transition in which a convertible currency and available goods would be combined with communist resourcefulness in getting money and the manipulation of social relations to radically improve their lives.”

They were disappointed. As the first section of this chapter explains, the experience of post-communist consumers in the Eastern Balkans has been shocking in its difficulty. But more frustrating for consumers than capitalism's actual shortcomings were the “expectations of capitalist consumption in relation to the communist context of their imagining” that made post-communism “so devastating and shocking” in the impoverished Eastern Balkans.

Capitalism delivered an abundance of goods in a variety of brands, but most Bulgarians were unable to afford anything but the cheapest products. The “ability to get money evaporated just as quickly as the goods appeared”. Because the products initially being sold in early capitalism were largely imported from the West, production activity in the Eastern Bloc ground to a halt. Some workers lost their jobs or had significant pay cuts, but most just found that their communist salaries were not applicable to capitalist prices. This continued into the late 1990s, when in Bulgaria “little production or consumption beyond basic subsistence” was occurring.

Aside from expectations constructed during the revolution, another component of post-communist material culture in the Eastern Balkans, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, is the relatively unique harkening back to pre-war cultures, symbols and traditions. Passed down through generations, particularly in families that had been wealthy before the communist takeover, the fetishization of the pre-war period, in both style choices and pop culture, has been observed throughout the region.

The relationship with the pre-Soviet, pre-communist past has been instrumental in perpetuating unrealistic expectations about the post-communist experience. By picturing pre-war affluence, consumers in the late communist period conjured “idealistic images of a market inherited from pre-communist times and nurtured by its absence during the Soviet period”. Instead, the pre-war affluence was unachievable both in an economic sense, given the deficit left by the communists, and in the sense that it had been built up in people's imaginations over the preceding five decades to resemble an unreachable system of material luxury.

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204 Creed p. 121
205 Creed p. 122
206 Creed p. 122
207 Creed p. 122
208 Creed p. 124
The few who do have money in the Eastern Balkans are also less willing to "embrace conspicuous consumption", as encouraged by political leaders domestic and international, because doing so is associated with "criminal activity" or corruption. The rare few under communism who had both financial and material prosperity were, on the whole, heralded for their successes in navigating the black market. To consume was an act of resistance against the all-powerful but largely unsatisfying state-run markets. In contrast, under capitalism, the wealth of the post-1989 economic elite is attributed to the corruption that has plagued the region since the end of communism. In particular, EU (and EU economic standards) late-comers Bulgaria and Romania, with their non-EU neighbours Moldova, Ukraine, Bosnia, and Serbia, have been particularly susceptible to rampant corruption in the communist aftermath. The crimes ranged from “gasoline running to embargoed Serbia, to drug dealing, to extortion” of neighbours and political corruption, all of which contributed to the economic problems of the 1990s.

This sentiment also directly stems from communist era understandings of conspicuous wealth. Both official and social understandings of those who represented their financial prosperity with material consumption were negative. The communist state depicted consumption of material goods beyond basic necessities as wholly treasonous to the tenets of communism, which depends on the sacrifice of individual consumption and state-distribution of goods. Unofficially, it was commonly understood that any conspicuous wealth was only made possible by cooperation with and favoritism within the Party. Any material goods accumulated through that black market were kept inconspicuous, so those who flaunted it had to be connected. These consumers were resented by those without such connections as receiving special treatment in a theoretically egalitarian system.

Though present corruption is generally agreed to be declining in prominence, many in the Eastern Balkans “continue to witness the violent settling of debts and conflicts between organized crime bosses”, and the decade between 1995 and 2005 saw 50 corruption related-murders in Bulgaria alone. Those suspected of partaking in such corruption are considered the dregs of society, responsible for much of the post-1989 woes. Previously, the communist system of paternalistic surveillance, which came from both the state and the private sphere as encouraged by the state, made it unlikely that crime would go unreported. Crime, particularly low level or ‘street’ crime, was unusual and many people felt much safer than in contemporary Eastern Europe. Not only does the capitalist present seem, for many, worse on a day-to-day basis, but the criminal activity around them is far more prominent than it was in the past.

A side effect of the suspicion and mistrust surrounding conspicuous consumption has been the trend toward smaller scale consumption practices. For example, Creed observed several villagers in Bulgaria with small stores, an “insecure investment” given the “limited shopping”

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209 Creed p. 123
210 Creed p. 123
211 Ranova p. 27
212 “We Lived Better under Communism! Bulgaria Then and Now”
possible in rural Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{213} Still, this style of consumption is deemed preferable to the conspicuous consumption of luxury items. Some efforts to challenge the perceived connection between conspicuous consumption and criminal activity have also been noted. In Bulgaria, for example, a feminist group called “United Colors” has been outspoken in its support of a new fashion in androgynous dress that is ornate and flashy. This style, they claim, serves as both “a rejection of traditional women’s roles and the dominant post-communist image of wealth this is associated” with corruption\textsuperscript{214}.

In recent years, widely held perceptions of Western-style consumption in contemporary Bulgaria and Romania have turned to disillusionment, bitterness and nostalgia for the communist time. The early shine of capitalist material culture has long since worn off, and the struggle to survive economically in the competitive and ruthless capitalist market of the European Union makes satisfying participation in that culture all but impossible. The quality of life is drastically lower for most Bulgarians and Romanians, and the economic safety net of the communist government has disappeared into the corrupt governments that occupy these countries today. Post-communist consumers are unable to engage with capitalism in the same way as Western consumers precisely because of their communist origins and the economic legacy left by the communist regimes. The economic woes of contemporary Romania and Bulgaria have brought about a distinct sense of nostalgia for economic system past.

The common characterization of the post-communist period, as it continues today, concerns “the change from having money and no goods, to have goods and no money”.\textsuperscript{215} Though the preferable system is still difficult to choose for most Bulgarians and Romanians, it is significantly less clearcut than one might expect given the preponderance of anti-communist sentiments present in the late 1980s. What has emerged from this paradox, which is clearly defined by the seemingly oppositional conditions of financial wealth and material wealth, is a nostalgia for the material goods of communism.

The popular memory of communism remains a negative one, perhaps dually rooted in experienced and the so-called ‘victor’s propaganda’ of the West, which portrays communism as the unequivocal enemy of freedom seekers. However, there is an evident sentiment of nostalgia in the Eastern Balkans that accompanies those negative memories that can be directly attributed to the post-communist poverty, frustration and disappointment. There is a nostalgia in the Eastern Balkans that is unique from versions in their more affluent neighbours (Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary). Particularly in Bulgaria, where the communist regime was considerably less brutal than in Romania, one can hear ironic jokes about the ‘good’ parts of communism, when one’s economic means were at least predictable.\textsuperscript{216} As nostalgia for communism, most visible in its material form,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{213} Creed p. 123
\item \textsuperscript{214} Ranova p. 25
\item \textsuperscript{215} Creed p. 123
\item \textsuperscript{216} In Bulgaria, the nostalgia for communism is perhaps more realistically founded than in Romania, where the final years of communism were economically devastating and the state was largely unwilling or unable to provide the goods that people needed to survive.
\end{itemize}
increases in Bulgaria and Romania, one can easily attribute its rise to “the frustration that many Bulgarians” and Romanians feel about their dramatically decreased standard of living since the transition to free markets and liberal democracy began in 1989.

An early component of these countries’ “intense process of redefining national identities, both for their own citizens but also for the eyes of the wider world” was a reorganizing of national priorities. As “post-communist states … eager to project new identities as young, modern, European and capitalist states with an emphatically international outlook”, both countries had initially entered a phase of rejection in terms of the communist past, partially accomplished by embracing the pre-communist period of nostalgically perceived affluence. By remembering the communist period in terms of restrictions on consumption and the pre-communist period in terms of material accumulation, Bulgarians and Romanians were easily drawn into Western capitalist markets as eager, willing and previously untapped consumers. However, the main sentiment echoed by contemporary Bulgarians and Romanians alike in regards to the concept of materialism is that embracing capitalism, with all its access and variety, came with great ideological and personal sacrifice. The present attitudes toward the end of communism reflect less on that triumphant day when the regime was violently toppled, but on the fallout: the unemployment, the forced retirement, the dramatic explosion of prices.

 Acting as a complicating factor in the memory of communism is the processes of modernization that began in Bulgaria under the communist regime in the 1970s. In Bulgaria, “the last years of communism constituted an economic boom time with contract farming and diverse income options offering significant cash returns”. In fact, the agricultural industry of Bulgaria allowed state-distributed “consumer necessities, such as bread, sunflower oil and sugar” to be acquired relatively inexpensively, and consumers were able to begin purchasing “discretionary items/activities”.

Individual or household access to durable material goods, like televisions, electric washing machines and refrigerators, increased tremendously in the period between 1965 and the early 1980s. To some, the sacrifices that came with post-war communism seemed, at the time, to be giving way to the benefits promised them by the communist Party. Similarly, in Romania, a campaign for industrialization, though ultimately followed by a “sharp economic downturn” in the late 80s, had “raised Romania’s per capita GNP to 37th in the world by 1977”, though those numbers are somewhat disputed given the unreliable reporting of the Ceaușescu regime. It was only in the mid 1980s that a Bloc-wide economic slowdown made these goods inaccessible again. The stark differences in

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217 Light & Young 516
218 Mihalache p. 227
219 Creed p. 119
220 Creed p. 119
221 Ghodsee p. 31
capitalism, though perhaps not radically different than the realities under late communism, has caused tremendous frustration in the Eastern Balkans.

What does economic success have to do with material culture? Central to material culture is the relationship of a given community to consumption and the ability to consume to the extent they perceive as representing success. Ultimately, the negative evaluations of contemporary Bulgaria and Romania in terms of capitalism and consumption are a product of several lenses. The economic situation of the Eastern Balkans has made consumers unable to consume at the rate they desire and the national market unable to implement the kind of Western capitalist markets desired by those consumers. Instead, people stare longingly in windows at goods they cannot afford while simultaneously lamenting the lack of access to high quality, Western-made goods.

Historian Maria Todorova points out that the so-called post-communist nostalgia observed in the former Eastern Bloc, and particularly in the Eastern Balkans, “does not imply wishing it back” because “not all aspects are missed”. Instead, particular losses, primarily the economic ones that are felt immediately and on an individual or family basis, are lamented as products of the post-communist era.

The particular feeling of nostalgia that accompanies that post-communist experience for many “is not only the longing for security, stability and prosperity but also the feeling of loss for a specific form of sociability”. The material culture of the capitalist consumer, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, is relatively isolating in comparison to that of the communist consumer. Under communism, not only are one’s consumer decisions (theoretically) constructed with the collective in mind, but the procurement of goods, particularly as shortage continued to define the late communist economies, was an entirely social ritual. One had to reach out to family and neighbours for goods they could not come by themselves or else navigate the complex second economy, which required negotiating and networking. By contrast, the capitalist consumers enters the store with a list of his or her own needs, or those of their immediate family unit, and proceeds to enter the consumer rituals like brand or price comparison on his or her own. Thus, a significant component of the nostalgia observed for communism, particularly in the realm of economic or material culture, is the changed dynamic of social relations as a part of the consumer experience.

A notable form that such nostalgia for the communist past took is the dual process that begins with a “recognition of the communist archetypes”; in the case of material goods, a particular product, which is then followed by “identitarian distancing in a humorous vein”. It was from this practice that the notion of communist kitsch was born. The concept’s manifestations in commercial goods and personal belongings will be discussed in the next

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223 Todorova, Maria. “Daring to Remember Bulgaria, Pre-1989”
224 Todorova, Maria. “Daring to Remember Bulgaria, Pre-1989”
225 Todorova, Maria. “Daring to Remember Bulgaria, Pre-1989”
226 Turcuş p. 66.
chapter, but its origin offers great insight into the particular variant of nostalgia that accompanied post-communism.

With nostalgia inevitably come the enormous task of facing the individual pasts of each country, but easier than confronting the crimes of the communists was embracing that which uncontroversial. Nostalgia, especially as observed in the former Eastern Bloc, is somewhat rose-tinted, and perhaps the easiest component of the past to embrace was its reliable and consistent, albeit bland, material products. While not always reliable in terms of sufficient quantity, one could at least expect that that which was produced was of durable quality and was familiar, which the products of the capitalist market were not.

In the midst of the developing atmosphere of nostalgia for the communist period came a redefining of what it meant to be a communist. In Romanian director Stere Gulea’s 2013 film *Sunt o babă comunistă* (I’m an old communist hag), which dealt primarily with the subject of nostalgic yearnings for the bygone communist period, the protagonist reflects on the complexity of this phenomenon:

“...but I don’t know why, all this nostalgia could hardly be labelled communist. I mean I might know. Maybe because in the old days, we called communists those who gave fiery speeches during boring, long meetings. Those who stuck to the party line without seeing left and right, without a care for people and without understanding the particular situations. For us, it was not the party members who were communists, but the politricks and the zealots. I did not regret those guys. Now the communists were the ones who had lied, who had taken by force, put people in prison, tortured them, and so on. I was neither. What kind of a com­munist was I? But if those were the communists, did it mean that I wanted communism without the communists? But was communism possible without “those kinds of communists”? If not, did I still want communism?”

In this case, the post-communist citizen is finding difficulty in navigating her identity as a communist, as she was defined under communism, or as an post-communist anti-communist, as the transition paradigm would require her to be.

In Galea’s *Sunt o babă comunistă*, the protagonist’s mother remarks on her own nostalgia for the communist period, using the same imagery repeated by many disgruntled, disappointed post-communists. She describes a full fridge (with specific foodstuffs chosen by the state), full, secure employment (in state-approved, state-run professions) and free living quarters (in state-designed apartment blocks). Ultimately, it would seem that the sacrifices made by East Balkanites during the transition to capitalism have not been validated by the freedom they hoped capitalism would bring.

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227 Turcuş p. 63.
228 Turcuş p. 67
229 Turcuş p. 68
230 Turcuş p. 73
A distinct nostalgia for the communist period, and in particular, the material goods of the communist markets, does exist in the former Eastern Bloc. It is particularly apparent in the Eastern Balkans, where many communist goods never had the chance to leave the shelves. Still, a renewed interest in and fondness for the goods of the communist era has arisen as a symptom of the disappointment surround the transition as discussed in this chapter. The next chapter will discuss such nostalgia in detail, while also observing the subconscious consumer traditions and rituals that developed under communism which persist in contemporary Bulgarian and Romanian consumer practices.
CHAPTER FOUR
Material Culture and Nostalgia in Post-Communism

The introduction of capitalist markets has put consumption on an “upward trend” in the East Balkans, particularly in the realm of household goods.\textsuperscript{231} The new markets offer a wider variety of goods and, at least initially, consumption was a desirable way to express the fought-for freedom of post-communism. However, as Chapter Three describes, Bulgarian and Romanian consumers have been hugely affected by the economic problems of the post-socialist era. The post-socialist consumption practices, though characteristically distinct from those developed under communism, have been severely inhibited by the overall decrease in consumption brought on by the financial crises.\textsuperscript{232} In particular, the 2008 financial crisis, which affected global markets as well as domestic ones, produced a marked decrease in consumption in the Eastern Balkans (and other parts of Europe including Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal.) Nonetheless, consumption is a more common practice than ever before in the Eastern Balkans, despite the criticism, complaints and frustration discussed in the previous chapter. The emerging material culture of contemporary Bulgaria and Romania is also partially influenced by the rituals that developed under communism, while other components are more closely linked with a defiance of that past. It is with both aspects that this chapter is concerned.

ARCHITECTURE, URBAN IDENTITY, & THE SPACES OF CONSUMPTION
Both countries “had to deal with a significant ‘left-over’ communist urban landscape”, including spaces created for communist-style material consumption, one that was “highly discordant” with the demands of Western consumer style.\textsuperscript{233} Cities, the primary spatial showcase of the communist regimes, were filled with “places showing to the domestic public and the outside world what the state is, what the national identity is, and how the polity imagines the rest of the world in light of its own position”.\textsuperscript{234} As visiting dignitaries and political figures from communist or other friendly countries (like those in the Middle East) were usually received in the cities, it was there that the most obvious physical representations of communist ideology were found.

The capital cities of Bulgaria and Romania, Sofia and Bucharest, respectively, were particularly prominent theaters of communist architectural display, of which a good deal was too large to physically transform or, as some desired, to destroy, after the communist regimes collapsed. In particular, Bucharest, which suffered under the megalomaniacal Ceaușescu regime for two and a half decades, underwent major architectural changes as

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{232} Scutaru, Saman and Pauna p. 821
\bibitem{233} Light and Young p. 515
\bibitem{234} In addition to importance of architecture in displaying the communist persuasion of a city, the Eastern European communist regimes gained power in the aftermath of the Second World War, a period which demanded that cities be rebuilt anyway. Thus, many communist cities were almost entirely reconstructed by the communist regimes, with the communist classicist architectural style in mind., Light and Young p. 516
\end{thebibliography}
the regime sought to “remake the nature of Romanian society” to fit the needs of both communism and the dictator. Similarly, the Bulgarian communist regime was renowned for its construction of paradigmatic communist classical architectural spaces, many of which continue to occupy central Sofia today. This feature of communist city planning extended to grocery stores, shopping malls, market places and private residences. The economic troubles of post-communism also made it difficult to transform the communist features of these spaces to reflect the new political orientation and priorities of either country immediately after the collapse of the communist governments. It was in these spaces, decked out in communist-style design and intended to serve communist practices, that the post-communist Romanian and Bulgarian entry into capitalism began.

In all post-communist countries, spaces of consumption changed drastically to suit the needs of the post-communist national identity. Many wanted to do away with the physical legacy of the communists completely as part of a broader strategy to redefine national priorities in the post-communist age. However, the economic hardship in Bulgaria and Romania made ‘destroy and rebuild from scratch’, as was the technique in more affluent countries, impossible. In Romania, the new government in Bucharest chose the cost-effective option of redefining space in terms of practice rather than aesthetics. Large gymnasiums built by the communists were opened to the global public for merchant and trade fairs, symbolizing both openness to globalization and an embracing of consumerist practices. Capitalist-style branding, including the labeling of Bucharest as “Little Paris”, which evokes its pre-communist French architecture, served to portray post-communist capitals as consumption-oriented spaces like their Western counterparts.

The spaces of consumption in a country or region can be deliberately designed with the consumer practices of a given community in mind, or gradually defined through an ongoing process of consumer action (albeit influenced by the mandates of a state or community leader). In the communist world, as is most often the case, both processes occurred to create the spaces of consumption that existed at the end of the communist regimes. Many architectural remnants of the now defunct communist regimes have been dismantled to make way for post-communist consumption rituals, though, as mentioned, this has been limited by the economic problems of post-communism. It has proved more difficult to dismantle the culturally ingrained ways of interacting with spaces of consumption, an issue that posed major problems for post-communist countries.

A particularly interesting new facet of consumer spaces for post-communist Bulgaria and Romania was the changing relationship between consumer and store clerk. Grocery stores, accustomed to the uniform material goods and regulated material demands of the communist consumer, were rather ill-equipped to deal with the quantity of and demand for Western products that began to appear after 1989. Most clerks were trained under communism and expected consumers to be totally self-sufficient in the store. In post-communism, however, the clerk’s role has changed to someone to consult for wisdom about the quality of a given product. The abundance, both in variety and access, of

235 Light and Young p. 519
236 Light and Young p. 517
capitalist material offerings inevitably made post-communist consumers confused and overwhelmed. They looked to the sales clerks for information about the new products and were unhappy to find the same employees with the same detached demeanors behind the shiny new counter. In addition, the changing requirements of the store clerk coupled with a substantial increase in the number of Westerners in East Balkans stores has introduced a new culture of service, wherein politeness and the needs of the consumer are prioritized.

Another consumer space transformed by post-consumers are the numerous antique stores found throughout many major East European cities. “Until 1990 ... an ‘antique store’ in Romania meant a store where one could find second-hand books... After 1990 ... the antique store started to mean, like in the whole civilized world, a store where old beautiful objects are sold”. This redefining of the concept of ‘antique’, perhaps the most subjective and politicized of material goods in terms of value, speaks to a changing perception of material history in post-communism. The communists rejected the history, and in particular the material history, of pre-communism and used it to represent bourgeois wealth, greedy and unscrupulous consumption, and other pillars of capitalism that communism sought to topple. In the 1990s, the easiest focal point with which to move past communism was the pre-communist history. Thus, antique stores were transformed to look like their Western counterparts: filled with high-value material goods of the (pre-communist) past.

A further example of a space, albeit a more abstract one, whose rituals drastically changed after the transition to capitalism can be observed in the traditions of weddings. Rozaliya Guigova’s ethnography of changing Bulgarian wedding rituals focuses on three primary material items of significance in the modern Bulgarian wedding: the decorated cake, the chicken dinner and the ‘sponsor’s stick’. The wedding cake, in particular, reflects the changing relation to material goods in post-communism. Whereas the traditional (extending through the communist period) Bulgarian wedding cake was agonizingly prepared by the bride’s mother and female relatives, post-communist weddings overwhelmingly feature cakes that are ready-made, pre-ordered, and designed to reflect designer wedding cakes from the West. This change can be attributed to increasing access to Western products, but also indicates a trend towards efficiency over ritual. Rather than devote themselves to the time consuming, financially unrewarding process of preparing the traditional wedding cake, the consumer chooses to expedite the process, consequently prioritizing Western products.

RITUALS & PRACTICES OF CONSUMPTION
What ghosts remain of communist-era consumer rituals? While the Bulgarian wedding traditions date to pre-communism, there are countless consumer practices and spaces, constructed and refined under communism, that have been redefined in post-communism.

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237 Mihalache p. 226
238 In a similar fashion, other holidays or celebrations, like Christmas or Easter, with traditional rituals have been redefined by Western material goods in post-communism. Rozaliya Guigova "Anthropological interpretation of the meaning of ritual objects in the contemporary urban wedding in Bulgaria." Journal Of Ethnology And Folkloristics 7, no. 1 (2013): 83-104. p. 84
This is a theme explored thoroughly in the East German, and specifically Berliner, cases, but relatively unexamined in the Eastern Balkans. Do cities comprised of predominantly communist consumer spaces and understandings of consumption even have room for looking backward, or do the practices reflect the material culture of the past more than they do the present?

I will examine the ‘ghosts’ or legacy of communism in terms of consumption practices, before exploring the material items those practices involve. As discussed in Chapter One, communist material culture was partially characterized by reuse and reinvention of material goods that created multi-purpose objects and dealt with issues of immense shortage. In post-communism, however, the preservation and cherishing of material goods, rather than their implementation in practical consumer rituals, was directed at new objects: those produced under communism. Given the limitations placed on the post-communist markets by economic problems, the consumer rituals associated with Western capitalism were only partially adopted, leaving room for communism’s practices to stick around. Brand comparison, a ritual of Western markets where people roam the shelves in search of high quality brands, only occurs when people have the money to pay for more expensive brands. Fast fashion, in which the quickly evolving trends of fashion and cheaply produced clothes allow for clothing consumption at short intervals, was impractical for Bulgarians and Romanians because even inexpensive Western goods were economically impractical. Therefore, many post-socialist consumers of the Eastern Balkans kept to their socialist-era consumer rituals, outfitting themselves in the bleak but durable clothes of the past and choosing only familiar brands that were more affordable than the new products.

Material or monetary wealth acquired by the small segments of the population who prospered from the transition was initially displayed conspicuously, though this eventually became stigmatized because it implicated corruption. Those who came into wealth early on, through housing privatization or other transition related changes, carried the newest technology and “wore thick gold chains” or similar items to indicate their successful entry into capitalism. 239 This frustrated the vast majority who did not benefit financially from the transition for reasons beyond pure jealousy: the wealth they were conspicuously without “had once theoretically belonged to all of them”. 240

Though the bland packaging of communist goods no longer needs to be made up for and the uncertainty of market availability is no longer a strategic concern, the strategies of communist-era consumer culture remain present in the practices of many East Balkan consumers. On the subject of creative reuse of Western products and their packaging, interview subject Marius remarked “Now we’re left with this fixation for plastic bags”. 241 The inclination to buy rare goods at the moment they appeared on shelves, regardless of function or necessity, has not disappeared for consumers after communism. The shortage of late communism was so shocking that the survival strategies acquired during it remained in many consumer practices of the post-communist age.

239 Ghodsee p. 525
240 Ghodsee p. 525
241 Grossman p. 299
Many people lost domestic pastimes, like knitting, after the goods they required became widely available. Those practices, which required strategy and concerted efforts to save goods, no longer represent the same amount of effort and accomplishment as they once did. In recent years, however, as nostalgia appears on the post-communist landscape, these hobbies have returned as “emotionally rewarding” ways of reconnecting with habits of the past. Other have noticed a discernible de-prioritization of values involving family and social relationships as crucial aspects of economic engagement, which in turn has inspired individual resolutions to revisit those values.

Rituals in the spaces of consumption were also transformed by the transition to capitalism. In the above example of in-store interaction between clerk and customer, one can observe the new practice of asking the clerk for advice or expertise, a ritual which is derived from the material variety present in post-communist markets. It seems that all consumer practices have been affected by the transition, but those developed under communism are remembered through the spaces they once occupied and the goods they involved. As ethnographer Alyssa Grossman gathered from her work in Romania:

“It’s not that such activities no longer occur today, but the actual items in our collection were no longer being used for such purposes. Certain technologies connected to these objects have been replaced by more “efficient” and “modern” ones. (Many people now buy preserves instead of making them themselves; socks with holes are often thrown away rather than mended; porcelain kitsch has been replaced with other fashions of plastic kitsch.) They had become remnants of the past, containing fragments of memories from a time no longer immediately visible.”

The objects themselves have either been thrown away or stored in the homes of the post-communist consumers. Much like the communist homes that held meticulously arranged and displayed bibelot collections, the private residences of post-communist consumers prove useful sources in the exploration of post-communist consumer values.

MEMORY IN HOME AND OBJECT
Scholarly inquiry into the so-called lieu de mémoire, or memory space, that communism occupies, is often interested in material, artistic representation and academic curriculum. Indeed, the 2006 report on Romanian communist repression and illegality “has been criticized by some for its incompleteness and failure to include victims' testimonies” or narratives at all, focusing instead on archival sources from the regime itself. That the brutality of the communist regimes, particularly in the 1980s in Romania, was “still very

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242 Grossman p. 301  
243 Grossman p. 305  
244 Grossman and Kimball p. 6  
245 Mineva p. 157  
246 Grossman p. 292
fresh in the minds of researchers”, making the exposure of those crimes their highest priority.\textsuperscript{247}

There is an important distinction between Bulgaria and Romania in this regard. The narrative in Romania has been, perhaps more than any other country in the former Eastern Bloc, “exclusionary and ubiquitous” in its condemnation of communism.\textsuperscript{248} Bulgaria’s common account “coexists with a secondary discourse, marginal, but nonetheless present”.\textsuperscript{249} Because communism in Bulgaria, particularly in the later years, was significantly less violent, brutal and invasive as in Romania, their memory is somewhat more nuanced. In both countries, however, prevalent narratives that focus on broad political narratives have the effect of distancing individuals from their history. As people have called for more inclusive, subtler accounts of the recent past, scholarship has opened up to include individual narratives of daily life.

Part of the necessary realm of human narrative, the relationship formed with household objects is often overlooked as a potential source of information as to the legacy of communism in contemporary material culture. When the regimes collapsed, most marketed goods left the shelves, leaving only personal belongings as physical artifacts of individual experience under communism. The most widely published research into the relationship between household objects and the memory of the communist past in the Eastern Balkans comes from scholars Alyssa Grossman and Andi Mihalache, both of whom focus on Romania. However, their theory is applicable across the Eastern Bloc and in Bulgaria in particular, where housing privatization occurred early into post-communism. Both use the domestic interior, or private living space, as anthropological sources that offer considerable insight into a relatively unstudied component of the communist legacy.\textsuperscript{250} The personal spaces and belongings of those who experienced both communism and its aftermath have proved extraordinarily informative, though many of these researchers’ subjects initially claimed that they had no source material to offer in the way of communist-era goods.\textsuperscript{251}

An important factor in the evolution of human-object relations is the frequency with which a family shifts residences. This was commonplace in the Eastern Bloc throughout the Cold War. Many people, particularly in Romania, were uprooted after the Second World War, encouraged to urbanize during the early years of communism, required to turn large homes into multi-family residences and eventually obligated to examine their property holdings after the collapse of communism and subsequent restitution policies of post-communism. The “urban systemization plans” in Bucharest, part of Ceauşescu’s plans to create his communist utopia in the Romanian capital, caused “entire old neighborhoods ...to be torn

\textsuperscript{248} Todorova et al p. 13
\textsuperscript{249} Todorova et al p. 13
\textsuperscript{250} Grossman p. 292
\textsuperscript{251} Grossman and Kimball p. 3
down; buildings and streets were disappearing overnight”. This meant that people were forced into increasingly smaller and less private residential spaces: each building was comprised of several households, each dependent on the next for everything from black market tips to bathroom time.

For numerous families, the communist-era home was therefore defined less by the physical structure or building, but by its contents. In particular, the corners, cabinets and table tops whose decoration could be arranged by an individual or specific family became the primary representation of home. The ability to make choices about the material representation of one’s life was extremely limited, by the market and the economy of shortage. Indeed, for one Romanian man, interviewed by researcher Adriana Mihaela Soaita, his home was “the bed you were born” and nowhere else, because it was only in his bed that he was truly independent and able to present his life as he wished.

Since the revolutions of 1989, both Bulgaria and Romania have transitioned to a system in which, somewhat remarkably, “over 90% of the housing stock” is privately held. Most families have at least one permanent place of residence, which have come to be understood as reflecting “core meanings and essential qualities” that the owner identifies with. The home space is a private one, its goings on independent of anyone but the family it houses. Homes are filled with the items they carted around through the last century as well as those they have accumulated in capitalism.

The choices of consumers to prioritize the consumption of certain goods, to house or display certain goods in their home, or to keep certain goods after the waning of functional, political or cultural use or value, give tremendous insight into how they understand the material world they occupy. “The contents and spatial organization of the home” reflects “certain relations, identities and values” that the curator either holds or wants others to perceive them as holding. Many East Balkanites turned to “strategies of self-building” by which they developed and built on land informally or even illegally to create the post-communist residential landscape that represented individual identities of the creators.

Decorative items, particularly the bibelot figurines that were so important under communism, are carefully arranged and presented by those who occupy a space, whether they know it or not. A home’s “calculated decor” says just as much as a messy room. An individual, acting as a kind of curator of the space which is private and personal to them,

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252 Bădică p. 205
254 Soaita p. 80
255 Soaita p. 70
256 Soaita p. 71
257 Grossman p. 292
258 Soaita p. 70
chooses a particular aspect, era or ideological component of the past that they most strongly identify with and then uses material goods to reflect that identity. In its appearance, construction and attached personal sentiment, an object assumes what French-American scholar Didier Maleuvre calls “‘costumes of moods’ for the particular eras to which they belonged”.

Grossman, whose work references information from her “own miniature, material archive”, also distinguishes between the two roles a place of storage, like an attic or basement, can play as depositories for domestic material goods. The first role is as “carriers of memory”, or spaces where objects with attached emotional significance (sentimental value) are collected as physical manifestations of a person’s fond memories of that which those objects represent.

Such spaces can also become dumping grounds for unwanted, discarded or forgotten objects. As Grossman explains, “attics, cupboards, closets, and spaces under the bed often contain artifacts that have accumulated over the course of many years, or that have been tucked away and disregarded for long periods of time”. The scholarly value here is that of nostalgia’s antonyms: rejection, denial or motivation to look optimistically forward in time, as well as the opportunity for fresh insight. Those goods are useful to anthropologists as the rediscovery of “abandoned, devalued or obsolete objects” can be useful in “breaking] up the unquestioned” relationship to the past that interviewees might otherwise stick to. They differ from “artifacts of propaganda or deliberately collected souvenirs” in that their presence in a consumer’s life is either unintentional, indirectly related to the politics of the time or deemed uninformative.

The sudden recollection of that object, its role in the past and the sentiment it carries for the owner proves a useful technique for researchers seeking uncensored memories. An object that seemed ordinary and unremarkable before the Revolution might now be seen, by virtue of its distinctly communist make or branding or just the time period it recalls, might now hold certain recollective power. Thus, objects that had been forgotten are “now associated with the communist past” and allow consumers to re-engage with aspects beyond the popular tendency to vilify all of communism. Grossman found that her interview subjects, when confronted with objects they had forgotten or stored away, were able to offer her “spontaneous, unrehearsed ruminations” on both communism and its aftermath. Not only do rediscovered objects elicit new insights into the past, they also give “fresh insights into

260 Grossman and Kimball p. 3
261 Grossman p. 294
262 Grossman p. 294
263 Grossman p. 294
264 Grossman p. 296
265 Grossman p. 295
266 Grossman p. 295
contemporary life”, producing unidealized thoughts on the present when compared to a more idealized version of the past.\textsuperscript{267}

Grossman’s subjects produced memories of communism that varied in sentiment and factualness. She found that new interactions with old, forgotten objects helped perspectives “depart from more established cultural narratives” about the past.\textsuperscript{268} Some lamented the “obsessions’ and ‘deformations’ they developed” as a result of the consumer culture necessary for survival under shortage.\textsuperscript{269} They understood themselves to be inadequate consumers in the present market, unable to truly engage with the fast fashion practices of capitalism or the abundance of goods in their stores. Others criticized the regime for its strict control of the markets and praised the present system for making basic goods reliable and accessible. One man was, somewhat surprisingly, critical of the consumption culture he associated with communism, as he remembered “all the things that were uselessly consumed”.\textsuperscript{270}

In contrast, Grossman found certain interviewees more positive about the past. They felt that they have developed “qualities of autonomy and resourcefulness” that made them shrewder consumers under capitalism.\textsuperscript{271} They complained that the present system was no less uncertain than the former, given the high unemployment and low salary rates. In light of that, they have found that the traits and skills they developed in a communist consumer context maintain their usefulness in capitalism.

Interestingly, just as the value assigned to an object shifted based on individual need or desire in communism, certain objects lost their value to the post-communist consumer. For example, a Romanian woman Grossman worked with had collected knitting needles whenever she found them. The only ones she kept were those made by her father, which she had stored away during communism in favor of continually collecting more functional versions. Now that high quality needles were consistently available, “ones that she had previously coveted but now considered dispensable” lost their value, while her now elderly father’s handmade ones became sentimental and therefore precious.\textsuperscript{272}

The objects that people remember or have kept that relate to the communist past serve as “symbols of their experiences” and define the specific individual experience.\textsuperscript{273} Indeed, that scholars have observed in Romanians the perception of materialism “as an empowering and self-enhancing expression of control and freedom” might well be due to their relationships to objects as carriers of specific, individualized experience.\textsuperscript{274} Once economic troubles dictated that personal belongings once thought to be obsolete would

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{267} Grossman p. 294
\item \textsuperscript{268} Grossman p. 302
\item \textsuperscript{269} Grossman p. 300
\item \textsuperscript{270} Grossman p. 304
\item \textsuperscript{271} Grossman p. 300
\item \textsuperscript{272} Grossman p. 301
\item \textsuperscript{273} Ger and Belk. “Cross-cultural Differences in Materialism” p. 62
\item \textsuperscript{274} Ger and Belk. “Cross-cultural Differences in Materialism” p. 63
\end{itemize}
have to be dragged out of the closet until higher quality versions could be afforded, the consumer memory of communism began to revisited. What occurred next did so in all post-communist countries, though at different rates and to different extents. A cultural nostalgia, which prioritized the material goods of communism, began to develop in countries whose revolutions were thought to mean the loss of communist life for good.

**OSTALGIE: OBJECT CULTURE & MATERIAL NOSTALGIA FOR COMMUNISM**

There are different names for the ‘adoration of communist things’ in the post-communist age, the most famous of which is ‘Ostalgie’, a term that combines the German words *ost* (East, as in communist East Germany) and *nostalgie* (nostalgia). East Germany, and in particular East Berlin, has become famous for its return to the material goods of the communist period. Everything from the famous Spreewald gherkins, a brand of pickles, to the infamous Trabant car, now driven ironically by nostalgic Germans and tourists alike, have reappeared (or persisted) in German markets as East Germans attempt to reclaim the half century of culture that all but disappeared soon after reunification with the economically dominant West Germans.

Liliana Milkova, an art historian whose work focuses primarily on East Central Europe, uses Freud’s analysis of psychic trauma to explain why the “delayed response” of post-communist countries ultimately “takes on a manifestly visual form”. She goes on to analyze the trauma of the post-communist world, caused by the abrupt collapse of power in 1989, and characterizes it by “these insistent reenactments of the past in the form of images”, like those provoked by material objects. In mourning the loss of the familiar past in post-1989’s absoluteness, albeit a complicated past, Milkova has observed “substitutive objects such as images of or items that had belonged to the lost” body or time. In particular, the abstract loss of ideology, however contested or rejected, may well best be filled with concreteness. While not entirely persuasive, given that many, especially in Romania, were eager to see major change occur, it is certainly true that the enormous changes provoked anxiety in the consumers of East and Central Europe, particularly in the economically frustrated Eastern Balkans. In particular, all countries, in negotiating their relationship to communism and, in some cases, initially rejecting communism as a part of their culture or history, have experienced profound changes in their relationship to the past in general. Ultimately, for some, “the use of traditional objects or those associated with the communist past may provide a tool for mourning”, or at least for processing, the changes of the past quarter century.

In Bulgaria and Romania, material nostalgia for communism manifests itself somewhat differently from its place in more affluent countries like Germany. There was no economically prosperous West Romania or West Bulgaria to unify with, and so the cheaper communist goods were not immediately replaced by Western replacements or neighbours

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276 Milкова p. 89
277 Milкова p. 89
278 Milкова p. 89
who were knowledgeable about them. There was no economic prosperity at all, so the imports of Western goods were more limited than in the Czech Republic or Hungary, where capitalism brought prosperity much more quickly. Thus, there was initially no reason to ‘bring back’ the material goods of communism, and no obvious or nearby material culture to replace them with. They stuck around for a short time, quiet reminders of the communist past and the disappointing capitalist present.

In Bulgaria in particular, scholars of Ostalgie (or the Bulgarian language version, sotz-nostalgia) were curious about the relative lack of interest in communist-era goods that was prevalent in the early years of post-communism. It seemed to some that the memory of communism, and knowledge of its brutal economic legacy that had left Bulgaria in the European economic dust, was too serious for Bulgarians to approach with levity. Carolyn Emigh, a Fulbright scholar in Bulgaria in 2008, questioned “What kind of space and time is necessary for communism to become kitsch in Bulgaria?”.²⁷⁹ Trabants and other communist-era cars can still be seen driving the streets of Sofia (or, more likely, sitting in its parking lots waiting to be fixed). There are presumably numerous families with well-worn (or untouched) copies of Todor Zhivkov’s books. But, in the early years of post-communism, there were few attempts to commodify these products, to their fellow Bulgarians or to the Western public, which arrived in tourist buses, albeit half-empty in the early years, with Western wallets and the greed of victory in their post-Cold War eyes.

Romanians also resisted capitalizing on communism or embracing the material goods of the past as eagerly as their neighbours, though Bulgarians remained the most resistant to any sort of re-embracing of communist consumer goods of any post-communist country. In Romania, one can perhaps attribute the late arrival to ‘communist nostalgia’ culture to the nature of Romanian communism. The brutality of the Ceaușescu regime, which caused tremendous suffering in order to satisfy and finance the leader’s megalomaniacal dreams, ended in the only violent revolution in the Eastern Bloc. Many Romanians, though unable to physically leave the country, sought to rebuild their lives in post-communism with as much distance from the communist regime as possible.

Once “all typical socialist goods disappeared from the market”, a way was made for the more expensive, higher quality, and widely desired Western goods to fill the shelves.²⁸⁰ Romanian and Bulgarian goods, particularly those that evoked specific memories of communism, were criticized for their relative “inadequacies”.²⁸¹ The goods that became functionally or stylistically obsolete were either “gotten rid of” or shoved into storage.²⁸² Early post-communist fears that the revolutions had only produced a temporary respite from communism made communist material goods unpopular. The “general feeling that it [communism] would last forever” was so powerful under communism that people were not

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²⁸⁰ Mineva p. 159
²⁸¹ Grossman p. 306
²⁸² Grossman p. 298
totally convinced by the absoluteness of the post-revolution victory narrative.\textsuperscript{283} Tour guides and teachers who encountered material remnants of communism would explain that they were used “during the difficult times of the 1980s”.\textsuperscript{284}

The most popular Western products were those that consumers had developed some familiarity with during communism. The popular Kent cigarettes, for example, remained very popular despite the introduction of other, better quality brands. People also sought out tools of self-expression, like typewriters (and later, computers) that had been deemed “dangerous” to the sanctity of the regime.\textsuperscript{285} Early on in Bulgaria, red lanterns gained an interesting status as the primary indicator of a Westwardly aligned owner. The red lanterns first appeared in Sofia hanging from the doors of the first Chinese restaurants after communism and now symbolize the “globalization that came with the democratic changes and capitalist market economy.”\textsuperscript{286} They “gradually permeated the local urban landscape throughout Sofia”.\textsuperscript{287} To many in both Romania and Bulgaria, Chinese food was “considered a symbol of ‘normal life’ which they felt they were deprived of during state socialism.”\textsuperscript{288} The post-communist consumer had seen Americans consuming Chinese food on television and heard of its prominence from those who had traveled abroad. Chinese eateries, which appeared early on as capitalism settled in to the major cities of the Eastern Balkans, became major spaces of consumption as far as Western culture was concerned.

In both countries, food culture and consumption in post-communism has allowed for quick and temporary entry into the desired Western goal of the long and rocky transitions. Consuming the food of the ‘other’ is to accept it into your mouths and your lives and to reject the system which kept this cuisine from you. Similarly to Chinese restaurants, McDonalds maintained its role as “the symbol of modernization and globalization.”\textsuperscript{289} As these companies enter the post-communist region as budget eateries, while local restaurants still expect communist-era access to cash, they are “relatively cheaper than most Bulgarian” equivalents and thus have further appeal.\textsuperscript{290} They, along with “the swoosh of Nike, and more recently the green letters of Starbucks”, have the effect of standardizing central city life across “diverse global communities.”\textsuperscript{291} Exotic food consumption, like that of bananas, which only appeared in Romania after 1989, were experienced as “strange but ‘good’”, perhaps because strangeness was what had been missing from their diets and lives.\textsuperscript{292} It is “not simply to imagine and romanticize the experience” of Western food consumption (or variety), but to actively participate in Western consumption culture.\textsuperscript{293}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{283} Bădică p. 206
\bibitem{284} Grossman and Kimball p. 13
\bibitem{285} Bădică p. 208
\bibitem{286} Jung p. 580
\bibitem{287} Jung p. 580
\bibitem{288} Jung p. 580
\bibitem{289} Jung p. 583
\bibitem{290} Jung p. 584
\bibitem{291} Jung p. 588
\bibitem{292} Sajed p. 564
\bibitem{293} Jung p. 580
\end{thebibliography}
great majority of post-communist consumers “prefer global brands to local ones”, as being part of an international material cultural is considered a preferable practice to the isolated culture attempted (though not achieved) by the communists.\textsuperscript{294}

Despite widespread interest in Western material culture as the future of East Balkan consumption practices, some were wary of the Westerner, particularly as Western corporations continued to buy up local companies in neighbouring countries. The legacy of communist propaganda encouraged a “fear of western, decadent foreigner, who brought with him all the vices of the West”, and people began to be more critical of the changes around them.\textsuperscript{295} As the disillusionment, frustration and bitterness with capitalism grew, and it became clear that the communist era was “obviously over”, many market manufacturers in the Eastern Balkans sense an opportunity to capitalize on these sentiments.\textsuperscript{296} When the images that referenced communism totalitarianism, which appeared “immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall”, became redundant, and the Western brand names financially inaccessible, they had to look elsewhere for inspiration.\textsuperscript{297} And so, a market of goods consisting of “images of socialist everyday life” was formed.\textsuperscript{298}

A variety of products were reintroduced to the East Balkan consumer markets. Revived products in Bulgaria included “plain wafers (called the ‘people’s wafer’ today), a brand of lyutenitsa (tomato and pepper relish)” and chocolate brands Krava and Kuma Lisa.\textsuperscript{299} Popular magazines got in on this emerging markets as well. Playboy’s first Bulgarian issue featured the once-beloved communist pop singer Lili Ivanova.\textsuperscript{300} Others featured throwback stories that began On this date thirty years ago....\textsuperscript{301} The products that became popular were heralded for having “outlived communism”, the system they thought could never be broken.\textsuperscript{302}

Sweets, a particularly desired communist product that disappeared after 1989, provide a useful insight into the nature of communist nostalgia. Candy and chocolate act as markers of childhood, when more practical goods are not yet important. A major component of communist nostalgia is the almost universal nostalgia for one’s childhood that many adults experience. As the post-communist markets “reinvented the childhood favorites of a whole generation”, so too came a re-remembering of the communism that raised them.\textsuperscript{303} The campaigns were careful to base their nostalgic takes on the past to prioritize a nostalgia “not for communism but for youth” as existed during communism.\textsuperscript{304}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{294} Ochkovskaya p. 293
\textsuperscript{295} Durandin, Petre and Jewsbury p. 9
\textsuperscript{296} Mineva p. 161
\textsuperscript{297} Mineva p. 161
\textsuperscript{298} Mineva p. 161
\textsuperscript{299} Mineva p. 160
\textsuperscript{300} Mineva p. 162
\textsuperscript{301} Mineva p. 162
\textsuperscript{302} Mineva p. 163
\textsuperscript{303} Mineva p. 160
\textsuperscript{304} Mineva p. 160}
Food in general has played a particularly important role in the reproduction of daily life under communism. The culture of shortage was so pervasive, particularly in Romania, that most material consumption, by necessity, revolved around food and similar basic needs. Food became extremely central to the communist consumer experience, as consumer choices in grocery stores or markets were weighty ones. This relationship to food has reemerged in post-communism as consumers revisit their relationship to all consumer choices. As Romanian historian Smaranda Vultur explains:

> The theme of food appears in all these testimonies in various forms: as an image of deprivation: what was missing or was (occasionally) available in the shops; as a constant preoccupation of daily life: specific practices related to obtaining food (standing in line, absurd savings), solutions for dealing with limited food supplies, as well as new types of social relations and mentalities (some still persistent today); as an opportunity to explore social differences and power relations, often measured in terms of one's access to various supplies (which sometimes also included the distribution of supplies); as a definition of a time of limitations and gaps; as an opportunity to identify the forms of coercion and control exerted upon the individual.\(^{305}\)

Products, particularly food products, were marketed in reproductions of their original packaging - the importance that packaging had held in the material culture of communism made this necessary.

The reappearance of communist products has caused some scholars to remark that “communism is fashionable again in Romania all over Eastern Europe”.\(^{306}\) While it could be argued that it was never fashionable before, just the mandatory way-of-life, the important distinction that must be made is that the communism being referenced in contemporary Eastern Europe is not its political or ideological side, but its “visual wrapping”.\(^{307}\) That is, the communist nostalgia culture that has appeared in Eastern Europe focuses primarily on communist-era material goods, not on politics. Furthermore, material goods before the period of shortage in the 1980s were relatively certain where goods in capitalism were not. Thus, nostalgia formed “for the material security of communism across Eastern Europe”.\(^{308}\) The origins of that particularly variant of nostalgia are many, but, in the Eastern Balkan case, can be easily linked to advertising campaigns in the second decade of post-communism.

An ad campaign launched by Coca-Cola in 2000, which featured footage of leisure and private life over the last 40 years, “restored to the public eye socialist interiors, clothes, and famous pop songs”.\(^{309}\) A communist-era soft drink, *Etir*, was offered in reproductions of its original casing “with old labels deliberately stuck askew”.\(^{310}\) Similarly, the international gas

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\(^{305}\) Vultur p. 178
\(^{306}\) Bădică p. 202
\(^{307}\) Bădică p. 202
\(^{308}\) Ghodsee p. 524
\(^{309}\) Mineva p. 160
\(^{310}\) Mineva p. 160
company OMV launched a campaign in Bulgaria that referred to “sotz-nostalgia”, or nostalgia for communism, that reintroduced consumers to the now vintage goods of the communist period. OMV’s restaurants “offered classic ‘socialist dishes’ such as macaroni pudding”, which transported consumers back to their childhoods and to the communist period of the 60s and 70s, where food and goods were never in short supply. Other companies joined the game until communism’s daily life (or, at least, an idealized version of it) was represented in “soap advertisements, vintage objects and television series”.

Thus, it was the private sphere that first began to be fondly remembered by the increasingly poverty-stricken countries of the Eastern Balkans. The nostalgia that formed had little to do with political ideology, instead fixating on “a general cultural memory of socialism”. As consumers observed their disappointing surroundings, they began to recall that which they had under communism. Memory looked beyond the final years of shortage under communism and came upon the 60s and 70s. For many, particularly the middle generations whose youth had occurred only in communism, it was childhood that they remembered. As one interview subject in Bucharest recounted for Grossman, “this object is one of the very ordinary objects I grew up with, but now it provokes in me a funny nostalgia…” Even something as simple as plain white socks conjured memories of how, as young communist students, their socks were “supposed to always be impeccable”.

Bibelot culture, as discussed in Chapter One, also changed significantly in post-communism. The importance of bibelots and their display lost much of its communist-era social value. Small, decorative items that, championed under communism as indicators of individualism, now “only embodied a fetish of the poor” and are looked on with disdain by Western onlookers. Tolerated by communist leaders as a small concession to materialism for the sake of large sacrifices (privatized housing, for example) made willingly, bibelots have lost their prioritized place. Some material goods, like fashion, automobiles and housing, have been increasingly used to exhibit individuality, while bibelots are regarded as value-less trifles.

The bibelot’s role as a decorative material good has been invigorated by the decorative value of all communist-era products. Because more technologically advanced objects gradually became available in post-communist markets, communist-era goods were devalued both functionally and in regard to monetary value. In the post-communist capitalist marketplace, the function of communist goods became obsolete and were therefore “more interesting for what they were than for what they [could become].” They gained a new sort of value: an emotional/social one. “The defunctionalizing of some things (empty bottles, ashtrays, cups, etc.) increased their power of signification”, and they became coveted for

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311 Mineva p. 160
312 Bădică p. 202
313 Ghodsee p. 523
314 Grossman and Kimball p. 12
315 Grossman and Kimball p. 14
316 Mihalache p. 223
317 Mihalache p. 224
their decorative value\textsuperscript{318}. Decorative here is not used pejoratively, but as an indication of a different variety of currency, one that uses aesthetic properties to establish certain social value. The display of bibelots is used to define both an individual consumer (by the choices they make during consumption) and their relationship to the past.

In addition, the dual purpose identified in an object by the communist consumer (the initial, branded use and the pragmatic or decorative reuse) has shifted in post-communism to emphasize the dual purposes of marketed use and reuse for nostalgia. While the purpose of an object under communism prioritizes decoration to be observed by others (and thus acting as social currency), the post-communist item prioritizes individual observance and memory\textsuperscript{319}. In the case of post-communist countries, that individual observance has come to support the pervasive culture of nostalgia.

The products revived in the wave of communist nostalgia that appeared in Eastern Europe were generally not products desired for their superior quality or functionality. The “aluminum ice tray[s]”, for example, that required a “cumbersome way of trying to extract the cubes” from the tray were decidedly less efficient than their Western made counterparts, but reappeared in people’s homes anyway\textsuperscript{320}. They were “commonplace commodities” that evoked a time, a culture, and a lifestyle that consumers sought to recreate or relive. Indeed, the effectiveness of a commercial or advertising campaign in actually selling the product is “irrelevant”, according to Bulgarian anthropologist Milla Mineva\textsuperscript{321}. The economic problems of the post-communist era make actual bought-and-sold consumption rates an unrealistic way of determining the effects of these campaigns. Instead, the primary importance of such campaigns was the “nostalgic, recycled” and rose-tinted idea of communism that was developing in consumers' minds\textsuperscript{322}.

Some Balkanites are concerned about the representations of communism that the nostalgia industry and culture offers. Many consumers seem willing to overlook the shortage that characterized the 1980s, and, to some extent, the entire communist period. Advertisers embraced the emerging fondness for communist material goods by including idealized images of the communist past for consumers. Sausages and frankfurters were advertised with depictions of grocery store “shelves from the time of socialist, with a slight difference - the shelves were packed” with goods\textsuperscript{323}. Adults who yearned for childhood, households who sought financial stability and economic help and, in all generations, those who still quietly defended the tenets of communist ideology, observed faux newsreels “about a cooperation farm featuring communist slogans, labor, comradeship, and abundance” and found solace in these campaigns\textsuperscript{324}. Consumers frustrated with international products, once obtainable on the black market, now legalized but

\textsuperscript{318} Mihalache p.228  
\textsuperscript{319} Guigova p. 83  
\textsuperscript{320} Grossman and Kimball p. 9  
\textsuperscript{321} Mineva p. 160  
\textsuperscript{322} Mineva p. 160  
\textsuperscript{323} Mineva p. 160  
\textsuperscript{324} Mineva p. 160
economically inaccessible, found in the products of communism a localized market by which their own identity was represented in some form. “By treating communism as a local specificity”, the post-communist markets have discovered a potential material identity for their markets to be associated with, both domestically and by tourists.325

Those wary of the nostalgia culture’s selective memory feel that “what seemed to be lacking” in the multitude of mediums sotz-nostalgia has invaded “are the images of communist reality”.326 As the first generation whose upbringing occurred after communism enters adulthood, and therefore industries like education and television, concerns have been voiced that the brutality of communism will be forgotten. This frightens those generations with firsthand experience in communism’s harsh realities, many of whom still expect the regime to clamp down again.

What can be observed in the East Balkans, as well as most of their post-communist neighbours, is a revival of communism, not as political ideology, but “as everyday experience”, albeit an idealized version.327 Much like global nostalgic trends referencing the daily life of the 1950s and 1960s, sotz-nostalgia in Bulgaria and its sibling in Romania are references to a calmer, more predictable “everyday life long gone”328. The popularity of the communist nostalgia trend had useful depoliticizing motivations as well. The “mandatory moralizing denunciatory” attitude towards the communist past left many people, particularly those with fond memories of childhood, confused about personal feelings of nostalgia.329 In Romania, any nuanced memory of communism has the potential to provoke “discomforting moments of debate and sometimes heated dispute”.330 By materializing nostalgia, rather than politicizing it, “a space for normal communication” about the everyday experience of communism was created that was largely apolitical.331

325 Mineva p. 161
326 Bădică p. 202
327 Mineva p. 161
328 Mineva p. 161
329 Todorova et al p. 13
330 Vultur p. 177
331 Mineva p. 165
CHAPTER FIVE
Visiting Communism: Tourism & Material Culture

When it was clear that communism had left Eastern Europe, tourists who “came to ‘see’ the communist past” poured into the more geographically accessible countries like East Germany and the newly formed Czech and Slovak Republics. Prague, in particular, is now the fifth most visited city in Europe, with Budapest close behind. Romania and Bulgaria have been less traversed than the Central European states, but are certainly not immune to the impact of modern tourism and continue to receive large numbers of foreigners each year. Foreign correspondent and author Robert D. Kaplan writes that, in post-communism, even the most obscure towns and cities, “like Sighisoara in Transylvania are ‘teeming with tourists’”. Inevitably, if somewhat ironically given the circumstances of the region’s newfound accessibility and openness to the West, many tourists seek insight into communism. This trend has created a complex situation for the Eastern Balkan countries, who rely heavily on the income from the tourism industry but are frustrated by the popular demand that prioritizes the communist history over the histories most East Balkanites would prefer to highlight.

Tourism, itself a form of consumption by which foreign visitors gain access to information, architecture and other representative material legacies of a place, provides useful insight into the relationship between material culture and the communist past. In the post-communist countries, where the struggle to define a post-communist identity is constant, and in particular, the Eastern Balkan countries which are less known to Westerners, tourism is a crucial component of modern politics. Tourism allows visitors to “[increase] their knowledge and understanding of the country”, but is censored by a national desire to present itself a certain way. The “importance of national history and memory at times of national revival”, such as the transition from communism, cannot be exaggerated and is reflected in how a community (national or smaller) presents itself through tourism. However, especially when economic problems necessitate early and relatively flexible engagement in the tourism industry, identity also “emerges as a negotiated product of the development of tourism” in a specific geographic region or surrounding a historical event or period.

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332 Bădică p. 206
334 Smale. “‘In Europe's Shadow,' by Robert D. Kaplan”
336 Light p. 158

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The rituals of all tourist consumption are censored, encouraged or delineated by a numerous factors, domestic and external. In many cases, national identity is an integral part of a tourism industry, as those industries seek to help a country “present ‘itself’ to ‘others’” in the specific way the current government deems most useful.\footnote{Light p.158} Tourism industries are also shaped by “manufactured [ideas] about place” that stem from foreign guide books and global politics, and occasionally find those ideas to conflict with domestic ones.\footnote{Kelly D. Ragalie, “Dracula and Dictators: The Changes in Tourism in Romania After the Fall of Communism” (2014). University Honors Theses. Paper 66. p. 6} The forces bringing the tourists to communist heritage sites are not solely those in the countries themselves, but include travel brochures and guidebooks, many of which portray these spaces as ones of intrigue and mystery. Tourists to the Eastern Balkans, and the greater post-communist region, frequently prioritize sites that are “discordant...with the identity politics” of post-communism, because the sources that direct them to it are not participating in those politics.\footnote{Light p.159}

There are, of course, many benefits to a successful, if controversial, tourism industry beside the economic ones. In both countries, “the reinterpretation of the recent past started on an absolutely negative note” as newspapers, television, radio and political speeches all revolved around the crimes of the late communists.\footnote{Iskra Baeva, and Petya Kabakchieva. “How Is Communism Remembered in Bulgaria?: Research, Literature, Projects”. In Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe. ed. Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou, and Stefan Troebst. (Central European University Press, 2014.) p. 71} The tourism industries were responsible for educating foreign visitors and clarifying the approved sentiment towards communism for locals. Early post-communist tourism agencies had “intentions to develop sustainable tourism, focusing on the environment, rich culture, exotic foods and historical architectures”, rather than the recent past.\footnote{Ragalie p. 9} As scholar Duncan Light explains: “Through museums and other heritage sites foreign tourists can be told the ‘national story’, presented so as to affirm and reinforce national identity and self-image”.\footnote{Light p.158}

However, the international audience and their understandings or expectations of the East Balkan countries have also played a crucial role in defining the contents of East Balkan tourism in the post-communist period. Along with ‘Dracula’ and ‘Transylvania’, the infamous Ceaușescu regime is Romania’s most appealing attraction.\footnote{Ragalie p. 6} Bulgaria’s identity amongst foreigners is not as clearly defined, largely by virtue of its more lenient communist regime and its less climactic end, both of which were given relatively little news coverage in the West in comparison with neighbouring Romania. Romania receives only slightly more tourists each year, but when the large numbers of Greek budget tourists who visit Bulgaria’s beaches each year without further interest in the country are excluded from those figures, it becomes clear that Romania is by far the more attractive tourist option. Even so,
both countries are at the bottom of the tourism barrel in East Central Europe, and the first priority of their industries is to make them better-known at all costs.\textsuperscript{345}

The “infrastructure of the tourism industry” has been radically transformed in the post-communist period to suit the interests of an entirely different tourist population than existed under socialism.\textsuperscript{346} Tourism in communist Romania and Bulgaria was essentially limited to domestic tourists and some of their Eastern Bloc neighbours (rules varied by country). Some adventurous Western tourists still sought out the Transylvanian region for glimpses of vampires, but Western attention was otherwise largely non-existent. Romanian tourism was particularly limited by the political environment of historical inquiry, which focused solely on propagandic representations of the communist present. Robert D. Kaplan’s journey to find the site of the infamous 1395 Battle of Rovine in Romania’s Wallachia region ended with guesswork and a local historian apologetically informing him “that such sites are often obscure.”\textsuperscript{347} A further issue that has inhibited tourism is the “spatially diverse” nature of tourist sites in the Eastern Balkans, which are mostly rural, and the relatively isolated nature of the countries themselves.\textsuperscript{348}

CULTURAL AND HERITAGE TOURISM

In all countries, one prominent issue of modern tourism that locals have had to contend with is the relatively new enthusiasm among tourists for cultural and heritage tourism. What has emerged simultaneously but largely unrelatedly with the transitions of post-communist states is a global tourist group that “[rejects] mass tourism in favour of more specialized and small-scale tourism experiences”, particularly those they feel give them unusual insight into the reality of the host country.\textsuperscript{349} These groups, many of whom are of younger generations, “seek out places spatially removed from traditional tourist circuits”.\textsuperscript{350} Adding to the appeal of communist heritage for this group is its intellectual appeal as history that contrasts that which their countries experienced.\textsuperscript{351} They practice cultural and heritage tourism in the post-communist world, seeking information about the world that had been hidden from them for the last half century.

Cultural tourism refers to the practice of seeking out cultural indicators, like folk dance or local food, that are particular to the visited country. Despite the many changes outlined in the previous chapters and the complete overhaul of the regime itself, the history of the Ceausescu regime is understood to be “synonymous with Romania today”, as communism or state socialism is with almost all East European nations. A connection is thus formed between domestic culture and the recent past, in spite of domestic complaints.

\textsuperscript{345} Ragalie p. 28
\textsuperscript{346} Ragalie p. 7
\textsuperscript{347} Smale “In Europe's Shadow,” by Robert D. Kaplan
\textsuperscript{348} Ragalie p. 8
\textsuperscript{349} Light p.160
\textsuperscript{350} Light p.160
\textsuperscript{351} Light p.160
Heritage tourism generally refers to the specific groups of tourists that seek out historical sites and sights. However, scholar John B. Allcock, whose work focuses on memory and tourism in the Balkans, argues that heritage tourism presents “one version of that past...which has come to be sponsored as appropriate and acceptable”. While the version represented in a given tourism industry has historically represented the demands of tourists, the immense question of identity that arose in the aftermath of communism made the domestic, host country voice a second major factor in the East European case.

Communist heritage tourism is usefully and succinctly defined by Light as “the consumption of sites and sights associated with the former communist regimes”. This has been a particularly challenging market for Bulgaria to adapt to. The material goods and physical legacies of Bulgarian state communism were less tangible than those in other countries and the communist history was less well-known to foreigners. The most popular physical remnants of communism in Hungary and the Czech Republic/Slovakia are those that remind the consumer of the 1956 Revolution or the Prague Spring, the anti-Stalinist uprisings that caught global attention during the Cold War. Bulgaria had no equivalent exposure to the Western media, and thus had to use the everyday experience of communism as their primary point of reference for the tourism industry.

Romania saw more successful commodification of the communist past than in Bulgaria, but was still noticeably less interested in ‘kitsching’ communism or presenting its physical legacies to tourists than its neighbours in the former Bloc. Predictably, and, as noted, impossible in Bulgaria, the first items to be commodified, meaning reproduced and marketed for consumption, were those that evoked the Revolution. The infamous Romanian flags with the communist seal ripped from the center, waved valiantly by the revolutionaries in 1989, became popular with tourists and the emerging political youth. The flags appeared in museums and on street corners, both as reproductions and originals.

Foreigners are more likely to seek out and practice cultural or heritage tourism than residents, particularly those in countries focused on modernizing or Westernizing their nation. Therefore, the cultural heritage that is preserved is not necessarily representative of reality or domestic preferences in terms of historical memory. For example, kitsch items, which are easily identified as foreign from the tourist’s own heritage, have become wildly popular among visitors to Bulgaria and Romania. High demand requires that vendors stock those items, rather than those more authentic to domestic culture or history. When tourists are “provided with only what they wish to see”, the interests of the local community in either preserving their heritage or promoting industries that are environmentally and economically conscious are not represented.

352 Allcock p. 100-101
353 Light p. 157
355 Petroman, et al. p. 410
Enormous pressure is thus placed on the visited community, most of whom are rural and impoverished, to adjust their representations of their own culture to suit the desires of tourists. The sense that the communist era is a part of Romanian or Bulgarian heritage is held primarily by tourists, as many locals reject the idea because the notion of heritage implies both value in and “obligation” to the past.\textsuperscript{356} By way of example, one only has to look at the the National Museum of Military History in Sofia, where the fragmented depictions and facts regarding communism imply that the Cold War and communism were simply an “impediment on the road of Bulgaria to joining NATO”.\textsuperscript{357} In this case, the fact that a heritage industry exists around communism counters the common domestic opinion that communism was an aberration from the rightful historical path of the country. Many East Balkanites would prefer that tourist destinations, like Ceaușescu’s Palace in Bucharest or the enormous monument to Soviet-Bulgarian Friendship in Varna, be ignored by tourists in favor of the legacies of earlier period.

A further major concern among these communities is that heritage offerings to tourists “are not specific to the area” - they are “surrogate art”, that which replaces real products of the community.\textsuperscript{358} Most heritage tourism that focuses on ‘traditional’ communities presents folklore that “typically is not framed by reference either to the region or to the locality”.\textsuperscript{359} Instead, the rituals, customs, and material goods presented to tourists are intended to represent a national identity that has been agreed upon outside of the locality or even outside of the country. In Slavic languages, like Bulgarian, the word for ‘folk’ is identical to the word for ‘national’, indicating that the national identity and folk life aspects of tourism are not representative of regional diversity.\textsuperscript{360} This trend affects rural Romania and Bulgaria in particular, “where there is a shortage of resources and where kitsch is the only way to make a profit”.\textsuperscript{361} Items, like folk costumes, that summarize, or inauthentically aggregate, the numerous cultural traditions of these countries, are considered easier for tourists to consume, but give false or incomplete information about the places they visit.

Furthermore, many tourists have come to interpret observations of nostalgia for the communist past, like those in the previous chapter, in quite the opposite way from the role it actually plays in post-communist life. What frustrates the residents of places visited for their exhibits of the communist past, curated or organic, is that the material nostalgia discussed in the previous chapter is, theoretically, only for them to experience. They understand tourists to act as appropriating forces, taking the complex subject of material nostalgia for communism and simplifying it to make conclusions about the communities they visit. Instead of existing solely as a cosy, nonthreatening respite from the desired but difficult move Westwards, material nostalgia for communism has begun to be understood by

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\textsuperscript{356} Allcock p. 109
\textsuperscript{358} Petroman, et al. p. 410
\textsuperscript{359} Allcock p. 105
\textsuperscript{360} Allcock p. 106
\textsuperscript{361} Petroman, et al. p. 410
\end{flushright}
tourists as an indication that the post-communist states are looking backward. This contributes to the problems created by the forms of heritage tourism that focus on the ‘traditional’ aspects of Romanian and Bulgarian rural society and visit towns and villages that satisfy tourists’ interest in ‘backward’ Eastern Europe.

The interest in ‘traditional’ communities and traditions originates in a misunderstanding of anthropology’s goals in the observation of local customs. Many Western tourists, eager to expand their perceptions of the world by visiting places different from their own heritage, ignore the origins for the seemingly ‘traditional’ nature of community’s practices, many of which stem from immense poverty. That Romania’s rural communities happen to be “anchored...in an archaic way of life, traditionalist” as a result of economic problems, but are idealized as having agency to choose that life, might well produce a false Western understanding of the Romanian reality.

Indeed, many communities in both countries complain that local traditions have been “subsumed within this notion of folklore as the foundation of ‘national culture’”, while the “images of a rural past”, most present in impoverished villages, are given priority over actual local customs. The communists emphasized “folk dancing, classic culture and sports” as alternatives to the vilified consumption culture of the West. Folk culture, defined by the communists to be a single national heritage, was the “apolitical” choice of emphasis for communist propaganda in regards to identity, but inevitably became extremely political in its neutralization of regional/local identities. In the post-communist age, local communities have attempted to engage with their cultural traditions and are concerned about the effects of tourism on this practice.

Unfortunately, the rural populations in both Bulgaria and Romania have come to see “their only hope in the commodification of their abject position via the tourist market for folklore and rurality”. Tourist come seeking visions of the ‘old world’ in the provincial villages of the Eastern Balkans and the locals feel obliged to fulfill those wishes, despite their own inclinations to Westernize. They place “their own culture and identity” into the markets of consumption, thereby reestablishing a link, albeit a less proud one, between culture and consumption. Ultimately, the willingness to embrace folk tourism in a region that desperately sought Westernization so recently speaks to how thoroughly excluded the Eastern Balkans are from the global consumer culture.

Kristen Ghodsee, one of the foremost scholars of Bulgaria, conducted substantial research into tourism and Islam in Bulgaria. She found that the religious revival of Islam in Bulgaria after the collapse of the atheistic communist state is often perceived as having a negative

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363 Allcock p. 108
364 Bar-Haïm p. 209
365 Bar-Haïm p. 209
366 Creed p. 124
effect on the tourism industry in towns and villages where Islam is prevalent. One woman in the town of Devin in southern Bulgaria complained that they had profited from tourism until the large central mosque was built. She claimed that tourists had left for “quieter villages” what they perceived as more ‘traditional’ or ‘authentic’ aspects of Bulgarian culture

In recent years, both countries, albeit to different extents, have revisited the value of genuine representations of cultural heritage. Many are resistant to giving the tourists what they seek, because doing so forces them to confront the legacy of communism as a part of their cultural heritage. Their post-communist movements towards Western culture are “frustrated by tourists’ interest in the ‘heritage’ of communism”. Unfortunately, many villages, upon whom cultural tourism’s kitschy nature has already intruded and redefined their value for tourists, fear that the damage has already been done. Others, though, have seen more enthusiasm for the economic benefits of tourism and resent factors that detract from a locality’s tourism potential. Some locals “place great hope in the ability of a thriving local tourism industry to provide work for the young and bring [their] community together again”. They fear that to “avoid kitsch” would come with “the risk of diminishing tourism flows”.

The economic benefits of tourism simply cannot be overlooked by locals with political objections. Tourism stands to be a crucial economic aspect of post-communist rebuilding. According to a survey by Gina-lonela Butnaru, “over a half of Romania’s surface has potential to be tourist attraction”. Bulgaria’s landscape, while lacking the mystical attractions of Romania’s Transylvania region, has been recognized for its beachside potential and is popular among Greek and Turkish tourists seeking cheaper alternatives to their own coasts. Amazingly, Romanian tourism values, including the number of registered visitors and the amount of profit from those visitors, are “still below those recorded in the last years” of communism. The vast majority of Romanian tourists come from other Central European countries, meaning that the industry must meet the desires of Western tourists in order to secure their business.

Many, in both countries, have found that their greatest commodity is the communist past because it was held hostage from Western eyes for so long. While early statistics on post-communist tourism reported an increase in foreign tourists, that number has steadily began to decline in 1994, largely due to initial domestic unwillingness to accommodate tourist interest in communism, and it was clear that domestic tourist industries would have

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368 Light p.157
369 Ghodsee p. 28
370 Petroman, et al. p. 409
371 Ragalie p. 6
372 Alexandru, et al. p. 333
to make changes.\textsuperscript{374} Prioritizing the communist past in the Eastern Balkans has proven lucrative for the tourism industries and the places it occupies. Ultimately, Romanians and Bulgarians have had to face the “identity versus economy” dilemma that makes abolishing tourism because one doesn’t approve of that which the tourists seek impractical.\textsuperscript{375}

There are two domestic bodies at play in repurposing communism for tourism. First, the official state tourism industries, which exist on both national and regional levels, plays an instrumental role in developing the national identity of post-communism that has affected the material goods produced by its markets. However, in the immediate aftermath of the the regimes’ collapses, “tourism development was lacking and not a priority” of the new governments.\textsuperscript{376} Very few policymakers focused on protecting and preserving the communist historical sites, as is often the case after a revolution. When official attention was turned to the tourism industry, they found that many historical sites has been looted, destroyed or vandalized.\textsuperscript{377}

However, officials have had to adapt to include the communism period as a tourist attraction, given the immense tourism potential in that history. This was initially difficult practically as well as emotionally, as censorship continued to protect the communist archives.\textsuperscript{378} Quickly, however, tourist interest dictated that it was an economic necessity, and “hotels, restaurants and transportation systems” have since entered into the nostalgic tourism sector.\textsuperscript{379} Marketed to tourists as the authentic communist experience they were denied access to for half a century, kitsch reproductions are now “very often used to decorate the environment” of themed hotels and restaurants.\textsuperscript{380}

Secondly, the agency of local peoples in presenting their locality in a particular way should not be overlooked. Many rural Bulgarians and Romanians, though initially reluctant to compromise the integrity of their towns and villages, have resorted to tourism as a means of earning money. Laughing at both vampires and communism, most towns have souvenir stands with Vlad the Impaler’s face on a mug or a hammer and sickle pendant. They do not necessarily recognize these attractions “as part of their true culture”, which is distinct to each region and locality, but are financially reliant on their consumption by tourists.\textsuperscript{381} As a nostalgic memory of communism becomes increasingly prominent, a “dramatic increase in the uses of the past for...touristic purposes” has also been observed.\textsuperscript{382} Seeking tangible ways to interact with their nostalgia, domestic visitors to communist-themed hotels or theme parks have steadily increased in recent years. As one reviewer of nostalgia in Bucharest explained, “Few things scream money and elegance like soft yellow lighting”.\textsuperscript{383} 

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Light and Phinnemore p. 210
\item Light p.159
\item Ragalie p. 7
\item Ragalie p. 7
\item Ragalie p. 8
\item Ragalie p. 8
\item Petroman, et al. p. 410
\item Ragalie p. 9
\item Todorova, Maria et al. p. 3
\item Smale "'In Europe's Shadow,' by Robert D. Kaplan"
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Recently, a ‘retro tourism’ industry has gained ground in Bulgaria, with activities such as retro skiing or riding on retro trains.\textsuperscript{384}

Rural residents, for whom communism has essentially been redefined by contemporary tourism, have had to adapt their own local identities and one could easily conclude that, “by featuring communism as a local specificity, it becomes a local curiosity”.\textsuperscript{385} That is, the lens of the tourist, when used by the local, gives new understanding to the past and helps them acknowledge the complexity with which they understand their past. The effect this reality has on the evolving national/identity politics of both nation and locality is one of “‘disembedding’ local or nationally produced senses of identity” and replacing them with an identity produced by tourist demand.\textsuperscript{386}

This commodification of history, particularly a history whose memory is so deeply politicized, is inevitably controversial, regardless of domestic participation. The emphasis that the tourism industry, both unofficial and official, have placed on communism has produced country (and, indeed, Bloc) wide debates about “what is ‘truly’ Romania” or Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{387} The struggles surrounding the physical remnants and material legacies of communism demonstrated that “the process of forgetting...is itself contested” as communities struggle with rejecting the ideology of the past while remembering the lives who suffered.\textsuperscript{388} Even the historical significance and value of the study of communism, much less the touristic consumption, is contested by those who want to reject its occurrence altogether.\textsuperscript{389}

Ironically, in the controversy over the rightful place of communist heritage sites and material objects, the communist past becomes politicized and therefore given the attention that many feel it does not even deserve.\textsuperscript{390} Some have embraced this reality, proposing that tourist spaces and goods be used as spaces “through which these ideological processes can be mediated”.\textsuperscript{391} That approach has appeared in Romania, where communism’s mark is arguably the darkest, and in particular, in Bucharest, where the urban physical legacy of the past is inescapable.

ARCHITECTURE & THE PALACE IN BUCHAREST
Tourist interest in the communist past has not been received warmly by the populations of post-communist Europe, though there are those who recognized and capitalized on its economic potential early on. Where heritage tourism finds conflict with the local population in the post-communist region is in their post-1989 quests “to construct new, post-communist identities” that either reject, forget or condemn the ideals of the communist

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item Papp and Raffay p. 29
\item Mineva p. 161
\item Light p.159
\item Ragalie p. 7
\item Light p.164
\item Light p.167
\item Allcock p. 110
\item Allcock p. 109
\end{thebibliography}
past. This includes the “rejection of identities created” under communism and an embracing of identities established, or perceived to have been established. Because “few people in CEE would regard the legacy of four decades of state socialism as [one] of value”, they are frustrated by the considerable tourist interest in that subject. Romanians, for example, “find it simply incomprehensible that foreigners should want to visit” the physical legacy of Ceaușescu, but Western tourist interest has, perhaps inevitably, gravitated towards it.

As Romanians encounter their first opportunity to freely tell their own histories of repression, more tourist interest in Ceaușescu and his regime has been observed, particularly in the Romanian capital. As stories of the dictator’s brutal secret police force, ruthless opposition to abortion and conspicuous greed appear more prominently in Western understandings of Eastern Europe, that history began to be featured heavily in tourism industries. A “long-established trend in the tourism industry”, the attractions in Western guidebooks, often part of “an obsession with ‘death and disaster’”, make up a “dark tourism” industry and have brought many to Romania in recent years.

Though many sites have been replaced, destroyed, vandalized or simply allowed to erode, other communist heritage spaces have been intentionally preserved. For the most part, the preservation of these sites does not speak to a local desire for the political system to return, or even a respect for the particular aspect of the past these sites represent. Instead, their existence in post-communism, and the ability of the local population to decide for itself how it will represent and interact with them, allow for history to be “re-written and re-worked to forge and reinforce new national identities”. The literal party line on how these spaces should be engaged with can be stripped of its legitimacy, rejected and replaced with one more individualized, or at least suited to the Westward momentum of the present nation.

In contrast, other sites remain, not due to the conscious re-working of their meaning, but due to economic constraints that make demolition of apartment buildings, destruction of socialist monuments or even replacing street signs all the more difficult. The “monumental public buildings” of Bucharest and “plethora of tower blocks built for industrial workers” in Sofia have stuck around in post-communism.

The “architectural follies” of Ceaușescu that have been commodified by the tourism industry include Casa Poporului, or the Palace of the People, the administrative center of the dictator’s regime and the third largest building in the world. Ceaușescu’s infamous architectural masterpiece, “intended to demonstrate to Romanians the authority and power of the communist state”, continues to do exactly that in its massive, impermeable structure.
The palace was constructed at the expense of an entire neighbourhood of residences, leaving many city dwellers bitter and disgusted by its mammoth proportions and opulent features. Its close association with the brutal Ceaușescu regime and the destruction of large portions of downtown Bucharest was so distressing that “many Romanians would willingly have seen it torn down”, though others choose to represent the sacrifices and efforts of the many Romanian workers who helped to build it.\textsuperscript{401}

In the post-communist period, the parliament building has become “the focus of tourist curiosity” among visitors to Romania.\textsuperscript{402} Though this frustrates many Romanians, the declining tourism industry’s effect on the national economy gives them “little choice but to respond - albeit with reluctance - to the tourist appeal of the building”.\textsuperscript{403} The parliament building is advertised in most tourist guides to Bucharest, offers guided tours in numerous languages and has been featured “increasingly in promotional material for holidays in Romania”.\textsuperscript{404}

The tourism around the parliamentary palace gives insight into the means of representation available to post-communist societies and how they choose to engage with the options. The Palace has become one of the primary images of Romania, despite domestic opposition. Realizing that the economic situation necessitates its commodification and display, Romanians have found agency in choosing for themselves what the guided tours emphasize. Using the dark intrigue of communism to entice visitors, “Romanians can introduce the world to the real Romania along the journey”.\textsuperscript{405} They emphasize the Romanian people’s contributions, the new orientation of Romanian politics, and the palace’s grandeur as a feat of Romanian architectural prowess. These tours, which completely reject the dictator’s original vision for the palace, are described by Duncan Light:

> During the guided tour visitors are told virtually nothing about the building’s history, Ceaușescu’s role in its construction, or the context in which it was built. Instead guides focus on other themes. First, the tour draws attention to the physical dimensions and scale of the building, including the number of floors and rooms and the dimensions of some of the largest rooms. Second, the materials and craftsmanship of the building are stressed. In particular the building is presented as being built almost entirely of Romanian materials, and containing the nest examples of Romanian craftsmanship. Third, the tour emphasizes that this is a working political building, and the seat of the Romanian parliament. To reinforce this theme a small museum has recently opened in the building which traces the origins of parliamentary democracy in Romania in the nineteenth century. Finally, the tour includes some of the
When tours reach the basement, they are told of the “violence and terror” that characterized the communist period in Romania, just in case anyone was taking the positive aspects of the Palace to be an indication of the benevolence of communism in Romania.

MATERIAL LEGACIES & TOURISM

When one narrows the physical legacy of communism to focus on the material legacy with which this work is concerned, the complexity of dealing with it increases substantially, because the legacies of material culture are significantly less tangible (as they includes practices as well as objects) than architecture. While in the rest of the former Bloc, “establishing museums, unveiling memorials, publishing memoirs and marketing communist nostalgia products” occurred throughout the 1990s, Bulgaria, and to some extent, Romania, has not experienced a materialization of tourist products in quite the same way. A CD guide to Bulgaria, published in 2006 by the Bulgarian Tourism Authority, depicts Bulgaria as if communism has had no lasting mark, showing a “country of ancient origins, rich culture heritage and beautiful natural scenery” that “has never been under the spell of communism”.

In regard to factual, written history (as opposed to that which is processed through material goods and kitsch hotels or theme parks), Bulgaria has yet to open a museum dealing with a complete or comprehensive history of communism, while Romania’s Museum of the Victims of communist and of the Resistance opened in Sighet in 1995. Five years later, the Romanian government established, with the help of Romanian Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, an International Commission of the Holocaust, which works “to put an end to falsified history and the practice of denial”, paving the way for similar institutions concerned with the history of communism. Monuments to the victims of communism, the least controversial of all memorializations, are prominent in Romania, particularly in sites where the revolution took place. In Bulgaria, however, it was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that such monuments began to appear, “most of them in competitive proximity to former socialist monuments” which locals complained about. The memorial chapel near the National Palace of Culture in Sofia “failed in becoming a common site of memory” for tourists or locals due to its intense controversy.

Bulgaria’s Institute for Studies of the Recent Past has published numerous scholarly works concerning the complex legacy of communism, many of which have led to proposals for

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406 Light p.171  
407 Ragalie p. 19  
408 Kazalarska p. 1  
409 Kazalarska p. 2  
410 Kazalarska p. 7  
411 Durandin, Petre and Jewsbury p. 21  
412 Kazalarska p. 7  
413 Kazalarska p. 7
prominent sites and monuments dedicated to the topic. The Institute’s scholars “[organize] relevant exhibitions” and “[aim] to found a museum with documents and artifacts from the recent past”. Another Bulgarian institution, the Museum of Socialist Art, was opened in the fall 2011 and “consists of a park exhibiting socialist sculpture, a hall for temporary exhibitions, and a video room showing documentaries from the socialist period”.

So, both the objects, material practices, and heritage sites of communism mostly remain in the Eastern Balkans, as well as in other parts of the former Bloc, for tourists to explore. As word of material nostalgia, as discussed in the previous chapter, reaches the ears of adventurous Western tourists, visitors to the former Bloc have become increasingly interested in the material goods of communism, in addition to the larger monuments and historical sights. The goods of daily life in communism have moved past the souvenir segment of the larger historical tourism industry and into an industry of their own.

KITSCH, HUMOR AND COMMUNIST GOODS

Though only recently a problem in the Eastern Balkans, all post-communist tourism industries have had to deal with a finite supply of communist heritage products. In Berlin, tourist demand for pieces of the wall “has exceeded supply: there are widespread reports of the (unpainted) inner wall being hastily spray-painted and broken off to be sold to tourists”. Tourism industries, such as that around the Berlin Wall, prioritize the customer over historical factuality in many of these cases, contributing to a “staged authenticity in tourism” that undermines authentic representation of the past. Similarly, the Bulgarian and Romanian tourism industries have resorted to mass producing items identical to those produced under communism to satisfy demand for such goods. There is a common anthropological argument claiming that “discussions on authenticity tell more about the locals than the ‘authentic others’”. Using that argument as a frame, one can explore the impact of kitsch and reproduction culture, as well as humor, on the material legacy of communism.

Scholarly understandings of kitsch are divided:

“Some specialists in cultural tourism and not only consider kitsch immanent to nature, while others state that nature never creates kitsch since it is the product of society which seeks to solve the issue of the shortage of natural or man-made cultural tourism resources, altering material and spiritual values specific to a certain community”.

Clearly, the latter occurred in both communist consumption, where artificial reproductions of Western products were commonplace, and in post-communism, where the communist goods are valued as tourist attractions and must be artificially reproduced to meet

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414 Baeva and Kabakchieva p. 78
415 Baeva and Kabakchieva p. 82
416 Light p.166
417 Light p.166
418 Jung p. 592
419 Petroman, et al. p. 410
demand. The parallels here are not lost on the post-communist consumer, for whom humor, irony and kitsch serve as useful ways to interact with the material legacy of the past and its impact on the present.

However, it is crucial to understand that the concept of kitsch is extremely fluid and subjective. This is particularly true in post-communist cultures, where consumers had, as discussed in Chapter One, replicated and reproduced Western products they could not acquire. What might seem a kitsch reproduction of Western goods to a Westerner might have an entirely different meaning for the post-communist consumer. However, the irony and humor that accompanies kitsch in most of its manifestations is certainly present in the post-communist region.

Even during communism, humor played a vital role in processing the circumstances of the present. Most East Europeans cannot "imagine...childhood during communism without the texture and reality that political jokes provided". The Romanian Revolution's first rumblings were in the "bitter jokes and crude stories about Ceausescu" that had become everyday rhetoric by the mid 1980s. The post-communist world has encountered humor in both its rejection of communism and in its memory of it. The goal of proving to the West one's new allegiance, which had to come with a rejection of communism, was partially accomplished through the "recognition of the communist archetypes" that existed in the West, and a subsequent "identitarian distancing in a humorous vein".

Indeed, many Westerners and former Eastern Bloc-ers alike refer to the material goods of the past as part of a "communist kitsch" wherein products were designed purely for function or for distinction from their flashy Western counterparts and are consequently of low quality and laughably poor taste. One ironic example is that of Romania’s Ceauşescu regime, which reportedly “removed original paintings from the National Gallery and replaced them with fakes” in order “to decorate the walls above their gold toilets”. The kitsch qualities with which many consumers now identify as part of communist material culture are exaggerated when one considers the numerous ‘communist-style’ products produced today for the contemporary market. However, that designation has also given rise to a culture of irony in nostalgia wherein post-communist consumers embrace the poor quality, uncreatively branded material goods of the past.

The kitsch nature of communist-era consumer goods was embraced by consumers and developed into a powerful tool of memory. Alyssa Grossman’s research partner, Selena Kimball, observed in the material goods they collected that “these mundane things from another era were visually intriguing, even oddly beautiful” to the post-communist consumer. What she discovers there is a positive reconnecting with communist-era goods that has occurred in the post-communist states that is framed by an understanding of the

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420 Sajed p. 562
421 Siani-Dawes p.25
422 Turcuş p. 65
423 Codrescu p. 72
424 Grossman and Kimball p. 5
valuelessness of communist product. In the realization that these goods no longer have market value, there is a welcome sense of relief. In ridiculing their past value, the post-communist consumer can happily situate themselves in the material culture of the present.

The role played by humor, irony and kitsch can therefore not be overlooked when examining material nostalgia for communism. The commercials and advertising campaigns that helped to produce an atmosphere of nostalgia did so in a “very ironic” fashion which “deliberately plays upon nostalgia”. The culture of kitsch is pervasive and “has become an accessory of modern life in many areas”. Some Eastern Balkanites have found the material culture of post-communism to be both “unstable [sic] and alienating”, a fact which scholar Alyssa Grossman views as a contributing factor to the prevalence of post-communist selective memory and, subsequently, nostalgia for communism. They have therefore embraced the kitsch nature of the products that are familiar and comforting.

At this point, communism in Eastern Europe is being dealt with as the only period in history “that is not regarded as sacred and may therefore be subject to irony, play, and jokes”. As one Romanian man put it to Grossman, “We’ll think of anything to get a laugh out of our own misfortune”. The culture of kitsch, as pertains to the reproduction of communist goods for the tourism industry, acts as the vehicle for that chosen mode of processing and “has become an accessory of modern life in many areas”. Kitsch rejects the idea that the value of these goods (or their reproductions) is found in their “cultural heritage” in communism, prioritizing the irony of nostalgia or tourist festishization for them instead. That they are of poor quality, taste or political affiliation is precisely the point for those, tourist or resident, who embrace the kitsch component of communist nostalgia. Adding value to the material goods of the communists and offering it for consumption by the West allows ‘communist kitsch’ to act as the final punch in the post-communist consumer’s toolbox of resistance.

The ‘communist kitsch industry’ spans tourist markets both domestic and international. Even in the U.S., “there’s a flood of “communist” products on the market” that use Lenin, Stalin, the hammer-and-sickle image, and the whole communist era as branding material. Romania and Bulgarian markets have not been exempt, though there is perhaps less tolerance for communist satire and irony than in any other post-communist state, given the recent trauma of the late communist period. Still, red star pins, communist gas masks, pioneer bandanas and other similar products appear on the street corners of Sofia and

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425 Mineva p. 160
426 Petroman, et al. p. 410
427 Grossman p. 294
428 Mineva p. 161
429 Grossman p. 305
430 Petroman, et al. p. 410
431 Petroman, et al. p. 409
Bucharest for the tourists who want evidence of their adventures in Eastern Europe. When “the topic of communist symbols in free countries” comes up, the debate is split between those who argue free speech at all costs and those who figure communist symbols are promoting intolerance, violence, and all the other problems associated with communism.433

For those who enjoy or embrace kitsch reproductions or ironic branding, part of the fun is in the “sticking-it-in-the-eye of the old Bolshevik bastard”, or whichever communist figure deserves your anger at the moment of purchase.434 Excluding perhaps the youngest generations, these domestic consumers of kitsch and irony are “under no illusion about that system” which preyed upon them for four decades, but have decided that laughter and satire should get priority over evil.435 What turning the literal products of communism and their cheap reproductions into targets of Western (and domestic) consumption does, ultimately, is make “commercial products out of their most cherished symbols”.436 It is, arguably, not for Western countries to do, but can be appreciated as a valid form of processing in the post-communist region.437 Danny Ginsburg, creator of the soft drink ‘Leninade’ in Los Angeles, told journalist Jay Nordlinger that he has “known people from the former Soviet bloc who just love the stuff - the kitsch. For them, it may emphasize liberation”.438

Others, especially in the older generations, “just don’t find the humor in such products”.439 Many, both in Eastern Europe and in the West, compare this phenomenon to the rare commodification of Nazi symbols and imagery that almost always receives instant and universal criticism. The “double standard” felt by the victims of communism, in relation to those who suffered under Nazi occupation, is potently reflected in the commodification and consumption of communist goods. Legislation has dealt with the issue of communist symbols in a variety of ways in Eastern Europe. Such symbols are banned in Hungary and Lithuania, while a similar proposal appeared in Poland in 2009. Like in Romania, “few Poles have qualms [about] equating under law the iniquities of Nazism and communism”.440

Though there there have been concerns voiced about kitsch culture, echoed throughout the Eastern European states by voices who fear judgement from the West, there is a unique legitimation of kitsch taking place in the former Eastern Bloc. Kitsch, in the form of inauthentic reproductions or “counterfeit” products of communism, marketed for the domestic and tourist populations has gained authenticity in its role in representing the daily life of communism.441 As kitsch reproductions of cultural goods becomes a true component of a community’s market offerings, kitsch is therefore itself authentic.

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433 Nordlinger. “Undies, comrade? The problem of products bearing communist symbols”
434 Nordlinger. “Undies, comrade? The problem of products bearing communist symbols”
435 Nordlinger. “Undies, comrade? The problem of products bearing communist symbols”
436 Nordlinger. “Undies, comrade? The problem of products bearing communist symbols”
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439 Nordlinger. “Undies, comrade? The problem of products bearing communist symbols”
440 Nordlinger. “Undies, comrade? The problem of products bearing communist symbols”
441 Petroman, et al. p. 410
By associating communist-era material goods with the concept of kitsch, which brings connotations of poor quality, bad stylistic taste and the prioritization of mass consumption over niche/luxury marketing, the seriousness of the communists’ economic control was made laughable. Furthermore, the concept of kitsch also introduces the notion that products of this kind are kept out of sentimental, as opposed to practical or stylistic, value. communist-era products are reintroduced to post-communist style because they remind consumers of their past, but not the communist past. Because, as discussed previously, the acquisition of bibelot was itself a defiance of communist control over consumption, these objects act as a reminder of that resistance. Offering them for tourist consumption is contested, largely because it seems to remove control from the post-communist consumers over engagement with their own complex past.

Ultimately, foreign and domestic consumers seek out material goods in the same way tourists seek out physical sites and sights as an opportunity to reinvestigate the past on their own terms. The Romanian and Bulgarian experiences with material culture in the last thirty years have been tumultuous, to the say the least. That consumers might have some agency in how they process, represent and educate other about that journey might be the most liberating part of post-communist age.
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