

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Nationalized Cosmopolitanism with Communist Characteristics: The Esperanto Movement's Survival Strategy in Post-World War II Bulgaria

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## Abstract

The case of the Bulgarian Esperanto movement under state socialism demonstrates a social movement can survive under authoritarianism by establishing a legitimate activist culture acceptable to the regime while pursuing its intrinsic goals. Bulgaria, a close Soviet ally, was a difficult case of movement survival. In the early years following World War II, the national Esperanto periodical *Bulgara Esperantisto* was a key organizing tool for the movement reporting on its activities, reaching out to potential recruits, and legitimizing the movement under the new communist-led regime. Examining the periodical's discourse over a two-year period, I find that the movement managed to carve a space for itself in the new political context by advancing a form of what I term “nationalized cosmopolitanism.” Bulgarian Esperantists were able to maintain activist networks nationally and internationally, pursue intrinsic Esperanto goals, and sustain cosmopolitan identities under unhospitable conditions. The movement successfully legitimated itself by drawing from three cosmopolitan sources: Esperanto cosmopolitanism, communist internationalism, and Bulgarian peasant universalism. In the context of the nation-state system, invoking the nation was an effective legitimation strategy, even for a movement with cosmopolitan orientations, even under a regime justified in universal terms. Espousing pragmatism and partnerships while avoiding conflict, Bulgarian Esperantists were able to thrive under the new communist regime, recruit new members, and reconnect with the global Esperanto movement. I conclude that a legitimate activist culture can adapt to a regime's ideology and institutional environment without necessarily being co-opted.

## Introduction

How do social movements survive under authoritarianism? Writing about the US context, Verta Taylor alerted us to the importance of social movement survival as “promoting the survival of *activist networks*, sustaining a repertoire of *goals and tactics*, and promoting a *collective identity* that offers participants a sense of mission and moral purpose” (Taylor 1989: 762). Yet, we know surprisingly little about social

movement survival under authoritarian regimes (but see Spires 2011). With the exception of occasional dissidents, such regimes appear largely unchallenged until uprisings surprise everyone (1989, the Arab Spring, etc.).

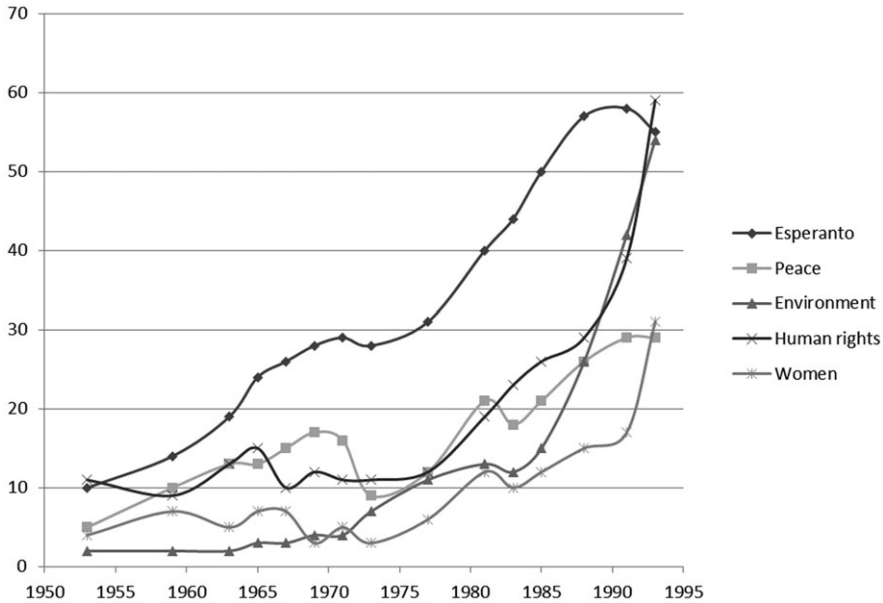
In this article, I use the case of the Bulgarian Esperanto movement under state socialism to examine how a movement can maintain activist networks, pursue social change goals, and sustain collective identities under an authoritarian regime where opposition is repressed. The Bulgarian Esperanto movement survived state socialism by establishing a legitimate activist culture acceptable to the regime but offering “free spaces” (Polletta 1999) for semiautonomous action. This process mirrors the process in democracies where insider status and legitimacy also facilitate movement survival (Edwards and Marullo 1995; Minkoff 1999). I examine the discursive foundations of Bulgarian Esperantists’ legitimation strategy as presented in *Bulgara Esperantisto* (Bulgarian Esperantist), their domestically oriented periodical, during its first two years of publication (1946–47) after the 1944 communist-led coup in the country. *Bulgara Esperantisto*’s issues published during this period offer a window into the movement’s activism and efforts to engage with the early construction of state socialism, connect with the local population and recruit new members, and reestablish international Esperanto contacts. Bulgarian Esperantists’ legitimate activist culture involved goals, tactics, and identity adapted to the regime’s ideology and institutional environment without necessarily being co-opted (see also Spires 2011; Straughn 2005).

A constructed language created by Ludwik Zamenhof<sup>1</sup> in the 1880s as a lingua franca for international communication serving as a foundation of global identity, Esperanto is a quintessential cosmopolitan project (Garvía 2015; Kim 1999). “[B]rotherhood and justice among all peoples” constitute the “internal idea” of Esperanto (Lins 1988: 40). Esperanto outlived its competitors among constructed languages because of the movement’s organization and ideology (Garvía 2015). The movement’s hybrid organization enables coordination at multiple scales (global, national, and local) and facilitates grassroots participation and commitment (ibid.; van Dijk 2008). Ideologically, the Esperanto movement advocates peace, justice, and mutual respect among different peoples and offers the international language Esperanto as a “neutral” aid mitigating international (cultural) inequality (Garvía 2015; Lins 1988).

Survival for social movements with cosmopolitan orientations—transnational connections and openness—such as Esperanto, is especially difficult under authoritarianism. In the Soviet Union, communist cosmopolitanism known as internationalism (Ray and Outhwaite 2016) contended with an antic cosmopolitan sentiment, manifested in antiforeignness, anti-Jewishness, and suspicion of intellectuals (Grüner 2010). The Stalinist purges of perceived foreign agents of the late 1930s and the 1940s, including of Esperantists, were its worst manifestations (Lins 1988). Legitimizing cosmopolitanism in the region, thus, must have involved considerable effort and a deep understanding of communism.

Both democratic and authoritarian states at times opposed Esperanto perceiving it as a threat to the nation-state system (Garvía 2015; Lins 1988). After playing an important role in the 1920s and the 1930s labor movement, Esperantists experienced the worst persecutions under Hitler and Stalin, who decimated the movement

<sup>1</sup>Zamenhof was a Jewish subject of the Russian empire born in the multiethnic city of Białystok, located in northeastern Poland.



**Figure 1.** Transnational social movement organizations with Eastern European members, 1953–93, based on Smith and Wiest's (2012) data.

in their countries (Lins 1988). The survival of the Esperanto movement under several state-socialist regimes—Esperanto being most successful in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Poland (Blanke 2007)—was thus not self-evident. Esperanto became the most institutionalized transnational social movement in Eastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. The Esperanto movement had the highest number of transnational organizations with Eastern European members (figure 1). Esperanto institutions (artistic, economic, educational, interest-based groups, etc.) flourished (*ibid.*). While Esperanto was the most tolerated transnational movement in state-socialist Eastern Europe overall, its fortunes varied by country and by period. Its earliest successes after World War II occurred in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia whereas Esperantists had a difficult time in Albania, East Germany, Romania, and the Soviet Union<sup>2</sup> (*ibid.*; Lins 1988). Among the countries where Esperanto flourished, Bulgaria experienced the least significant opposition to state socialism (Stamatov 2000). The Bulgarian regime was one of the Soviet Union's closest allies maintaining a close grip on society. I focus on Bulgaria because the Bulgarian case, as a difficult case for movement survival, is especially informative.

Under state socialism, the Bulgarian Esperanto Association became one of the strongest members of the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), with more than 5,000 members and about 200 local organizations (Lapenna 1974). Bulgarian

<sup>2</sup>The resurrection of the Soviet and the GDR Esperanto movements is attributed in part to Esperantists' efforts in other state-socialist countries (Blanke 2007). In Albania and Romania, Esperanto activity was limited throughout state socialism (*ibid.*).

Esperantists had the opportunity to travel to Esperanto World Congresses and to host two World Congresses, in 1963 and in 1978 (Aleksiev 1992; Blanke 2007; Lapenna 1974), while freedom of transnational movement for most Bulgarians was limited. Esperanto achievements included stable organizations; professional offices; cultural houses; a cooperative; state support; strong publishing activity; language instruction in schools and universities; organized interest groups; cooperation with organizations within and outside Esperanto; tourism; a rich cultural life (choirs, theaters); radio programs; and articles about Esperanto published outside the movement (Blanke 2007).

The Bulgarian Esperanto movement gained momentum in the second half of the 1940s, a period during which Soviet Esperantists disappeared from the international scene following Stalin's purges of the late 1930s and the 1940s (Lapenna 1974; Lins 1988; Sarafov 1971). Because of their international contacts, Soviet Esperantists were suspected of transmitting critical information about the Soviet Union abroad and acting as bourgeois elements at home (Lins 1988). Despite the impeccable communist credentials of many Bulgarian Esperantists (*ibid.*; Oljanov 1988), their movement could never shake off the bourgeois label completely either. The Bulgarian movement also nearly stopped functioning during the Stalinist crackdown in the country, between 1950 and 1954, only to continue flourishing after Stalin's death extolling state socialism's achievements (Aleksiev 1992; Lapenna 1974; Sarafov 1971). Yet, in a self-study conducted in the 1980s, Bulgarian Esperantists critically admitted their members being overly educated (a quarter having university degrees), overly drawn from the white-collar class, and insufficiently representing workers and peasants (Ignev 1988). These contradictions raise the question: How did Bulgarian Esperantists legitimize their movement under state socialism?

I find that the Bulgarian Esperanto movement managed to carve a space for itself in the new political context by advancing what I call a form of *nationalized cosmopolitanism* with communist characteristics in its practices and in its rhetoric. Following Beck and Sznaider (2006), I use *cosmopolitanism* as a methodological concept describing practices and rhetoric envisioning persons as members of a global community. I show how Bulgarian Esperantists drew from three cosmopolitan sources: Esperanto cosmopolitanism, communist cosmopolitanism (i.e., internationalism) (Ray and Outhwaite 2016), and Bulgarian peasant egalitarian universalism. The next section discusses my theoretical argument and analytical strategy. The "Historical Background" section describes the three cosmopolitan sources Bulgarian Esperantists brought together. Then, I present my analyses of the textual material from *Bulgara Esperantisto*. I show how the Bulgarian Esperanto movement developed a legitimate activist culture in the country by nationalizing its cosmopolitanism and endowing it with communist characteristics that aligned the movement with the official state ideology. Rhetorically, the movement successfully leveraged available national and global discursive resources (Spillman and Faeges 2005) to legitimize itself in front of different audiences, especially the state and the local population. In the context of the nation-state system, invoking the nation was an effective legitimation strategy, even for a movement with cosmopolitan orientations, even under a regime justified in universal terms (e.g., Ray and Outhwaite 2016). In its self-reported practices, the Bulgarian Esperanto movement was not coterminous with the regime but pursued its own priorities

focusing on Esperanto concerns and coordinating Esperanto activities locally, nationally, and internationally. Espousing pragmatic partnerships while avoiding conflict, Bulgarian Esperantists were able to thrive under the new communist regime, recruit new members, and partake in the global Esperanto movement.

### Theoretical Framework and Analytical Strategy

Previous research finds social movements may adopt a variety of strategies to survive under inhospitable conditions. Some become co-opted (Chirot 1980; Johnston and Snow 1998; Ost 1989) or even facilitate the establishment of repressive regimes (Berman 1997; Riley 2005). Others may retrench into “abeyance structures” tightening their ranks and sharpening their militancy until more favorable conditions emerge (Taylor 1989). Occasionally, oppositional mobilization would develop (Johnston and Snow 1998). Recognizing the constraints of limited political opportunities without abandoning their struggles, movements under repressive regimes may adopt pragmatic nonconfrontational approaches. They may become skilled at “consentful contention” appealing to states’ ideologies (Straughn 2005). They may leverage government connections and limited information flows allowing officials to take credit for their successes (Spires 2011). They may gradually push the boundaries of cultural and legal norms (Chua 2012).

Social movement pragmatism makes sense given that even in democracies insiders are more likely to survive than radical organizations are (Edwards and Marullo 1995). Under repressive regimes, radical militancy is too costly. By contrast, organizations with more legitimate, institutionally acceptable profiles can adapt to changing environments (Minkoff 1999). Having a formal organizational status is another factor facilitating movement survival (Edwards and Marullo 1995). It is associated with legitimacy, especially in authoritarian contexts. As the most institutionalized transnational movement in Eastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, with the highest number of organizations in the region (figure 1), Esperanto is a theoretically and methodologically important case to examine to understand the role of legitimacy in movement survival under authoritarianism.

Legitimacy relates to yet another factor crucial for social movement survival, social capital. For a movement, social capital translates into resources, patronage, and community ties (Edwards and Marullo 1995; Edwards and McCarthy 2004). Under repressive regimes, personal networks are among the most important contexts for mobilization (Opp and Gern 1993). The institutional environment of authoritarian regimes may be especially conducive to reliance on personal networks as a typical problem-solving tactic, as in the Chinese *guanxi* (Chang 2011; Spires 2011). Movement survival in such contexts may be facilitated by nurturing broad connections among both ordinary people and state echelons.

To achieve legitimacy and acquire social capital under authoritarianism, social movements must meet the demands of two audiences, the suspicious state and the public they serve and/or among which they recruit new members. Bulgarian Esperantists, I infer, targeted these two domestic audiences by publishing their national periodical *Bulgara Esperantisto* (Bulgarian Esperantist) uncharacteristically

mostly in Bulgarian<sup>3</sup> during the early state-socialist period. To examine Bulgarian Esperantists' legitimation strategy, therefore, I focus my analysis on this periodical in its first two postwar publication years, 1946–47.<sup>4</sup> First published in 1919, *Bulgara Esperantisto* has appeared regularly since, with occasional interruptions (during World War II: 1942–45 and during the Stalinist period in the country: 1949–56) (Aleksiev 1992; Hernández Yzal et al. 2010; Lins 1988). Using periodicals to understand social movements is productive provided the periodicals' biases are taken into consideration (Earl et al. 2004). The 1946–47 issues of *Bulgara Esperantisto* exemplify the formative discourse of the Esperanto movement in the country under state socialism. Editorial continuity, evident in the person of Ivan Sarafov,<sup>5</sup> editor-in-chief between 1946 and 1947 and between 1964 and 1968 (Hernández Yzal et al. 2010), suggests relative continuity of Esperanto discourses and practices.

The 16 issues comprising a total of 128 pages of *Bulgara Esperantisto* published between 1946 and 1947 represent sufficient space and time to formulate a strategy for the movement in the new state-socialist country. *Bulgara Esperantisto* was an organizing tool facilitating Esperanto revival in the country not only by targeting the new state and potential recruits but also by focusing on pure Esperanto concerns. The publication of *Bulgara Esperantisto* was one element of a postwar revival of Esperanto in Bulgaria (and elsewhere) that included congresses, local clubs, radio broadcasts,<sup>6</sup> a cooperative, and publication of books, dictionaries, and other periodicals. *Bulgara Esperantisto* reported on all these developments. The data I analyze thus consists of all sections of the periodical, a total of 178, appearing during this two-year period, regardless of their focus. I accessed *Bulgara Esperantisto*, as well as most other Esperanto sources cited here, through the Esperanto Museum of the Austrian National Library, one of the largest and insufficiently explored depositories of Esperanto materials in the world.

Data analyses proceeded in two stages. First, I read all sections and inductively created codes for all themes I could discern in the 1946–47 issues of *Bulgara Esperantisto*. I organized the codes with the help of the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti. I did several iterations of coding with the goal of being as exhaustive as possible. In the second, deductive, stage of the analysis, I examined existing theories in light of the observed empirical data coded in the first stage. This was an iterative process too. I present the findings of the discourse analysis in two sections. The first section, dedicated to the practices of the movement as reported by *Bulgara Esperantisto*, demonstrates Bulgarian Esperantists' semiautonomy through their focus on Esperanto cosmopolitanism. The second section, "How Esperanto Survived Bulgarian State Socialism," dedicated to the rhetorical strategy of the Bulgarian Esperanto movement at the beginning of state socialism in the country, shows how the movement engaged with communist cosmopolitanism and with Bulgarian peasant universalism. Before I turn to these analyses, I provide some

<sup>3</sup>Until 1942 and starting again in 1957, *Bulgara Esperantisto* appeared in Esperanto. All translations from Bulgarian and from Esperanto are mine.

<sup>4</sup>Between 1948 and 1950, financial difficulties led to Bulgarian Esperantists only publishing *Internacia Kulturo* (International Culture), a collaboration of Balkan Esperantists. *Bulgara Esperantisto* occasionally appeared as an insert to *Internacia Kulturo* during these years.

<sup>5</sup>Sarafov also wrote a history of the Bulgarian Esperanto movement (1971).

<sup>6</sup>Radio Sofia began broadcasting daily programs in Esperanto in 1945.



historical background for the three cosmopolitan sources from which Bulgarian Esperantists drew.

## Historical Background

### *Esperanto Cosmopolitanism*

The success of Esperanto compared to other constructed languages is attributed in part to the movement's ideal of creating a future of peace, justice, and mutual respect among different peoples (Garvía 2015). Esperanto attracted many followers of universalist ideologies, notably pacifists, socialists, and anarchists who saw it as a means to pursue their political goals (Lins 1988). The Esperanto movement focused on linguistic justice promoting linguistic universalism, diversity, and equality. Esperanto was conceived as a solution to the so-called international language problem, addressing the language of international communication (Garvía 2015; Lins 1988). As a universal helping second language, Esperanto was touted as a “neutral” means of international communication bridging multiple and equal national languages and cultures (Garvía 2015; Lins 1988). In addition to its language advocacy, the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), formed in 1908, advocated practical internationalism, for example facilitating correspondence among civilians from opposing sides and delivering food, clothing, and medicine through its delegate systems during World War I (Lins 1988).

What made Esperanto attractive to cosmopolitans made it suspicious to nationalists. Esperanto was perceived as a threat to the nation-state system and at times vigorously opposed by nation-states, particularly those striving for global power (Garvía 2015; Lins 1988). To survive opposition and persecutions, early Esperantists distanced themselves from politics establishing “neutrality” as a principle of the Esperanto movement (Lins 1988). Political neutrality made Esperanto compatible with different political movements, on the left and on the right, including Nazis (*ibid.*). Neutrality took the political edge off of the Esperanto movement while allowing members to pursue political goals.

Leftist Esperantists opposed the neutrality principle envisioning Esperanto as a tool for achieving labor's goals. They established a political branch of the movement, the labor-Esperanto movement, forming the Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda (SAT) (World Anational Association) in 1921 (Blanke 2007; Lins 1988). Esperanto was used for correspondence and voluntary journalism, especially after the Comintern's 1924 decision to promote exchanges between Soviet workers and workers around the world (Blanke 2007; Lins 1988). The labor-Esperanto movement, however, suffered from divisions affecting the broader labor movement (Blanke 2007; Lins 1988). In 1938, communist Esperantists returned to the “neutral” Esperanto movement attempting to exert influence from within in opposition to the “cosmopolitan” SAT (Lins 1988). In 1947, Bulgarian and Yugoslav Esperantists tried to take over the neutral UAE rejecting neutrality and promoting antifascism, peace, and democracy (*ibid.*).

As a transnational movement, Esperanto faced an organizational problem. Some Esperantists believed activists familiar with their national contexts were best suited to directing the movement in any given country; others favored centralization (Lins 1988; van Dijk 2008). Following a 30-year conflict over the structure and role of the UAE, the global umbrella organization for the neutral Esperanto movement, and

the role of national associations, the national associations prevailed (van Dijk 2008). In 1934, it was decided UEA would only be responsible for external relations, international information, support for the Esperanto Academy in charge of the language development, and organization of World Congresses (ibid.). In 1947, UEA officially became a federated organization of largely independent national associations (ibid.).

National Esperanto associations were autonomous to face the conditions in their countries as best as they saw fit. National associations were central nodes linking the global movement and local circles. Local circles facilitated grassroots participation and commitment recruiting members, offering language instruction, organizing local activism, hosting visitors, and designating delegates. National organizational autonomy allowed Esperantists to adapt their cosmopolitan efforts to national contexts.

### ***Communist Cosmopolitanism***

The second type of cosmopolitanism from which Bulgarian Esperantists drew was Soviet or communist cosmopolitanism, known as “communist internationalism,” which had its own complexities and contradictions. Integrating Marxism’s universal aspirations and Soviet state-building concerns, it developed in opposition to Western cosmopolitanism, referred to disdainfully just as “cosmopolitanism” and associated with bourgeois capitalism and imperialism. The “national question,” reflecting the reality of national divisions superimposed on class distinctions, was a major contradiction within Marxism (Kolakowski 1978). While some communists, such as Luxemburg, opposed national self-determination (ibid.), the Soviets and other communists faced the reality of nation-states pragmatically accommodating nationalism.

Communist internationalism had multiple currents. As a political movement, communist internationalism started as an antiwar effort breaking off from other internationalists who supported their governments in World War I (Nation 1989). Lenin, however, associated the proletarian class struggle with antiimperialist national movements (ibid.). The Communist International (the Comintern), the organizational arm of this political movement until 1943, included parties representing nation-based communist movements (ibid.). In 1935, the Comintern adopted the popular front strategy of forming broad national coalitions against fascism. The “national line” politics was one implication of the Comintern’s popular front strategy (Sygkelos 2011). Political internationalism was thus antiwar, antifascist, revolutionary, and patriotic.

Intellectuals, who played an important role in promoting internationalism, ushered in “a cultural turn” in the 1920s and the 1930s (Clark 2011: 10) as a second communist cosmopolitan current. Cultural internationalism involved boundary work that was “both confrontational (against the ‘West’, ‘capitalism’, ‘imperialism’ etc.) and integrative (towards ‘progressive forces’, ‘the wretched of the Earth’, ‘friends of the Soviet Union,’ etc.)” (Rupperecht 2015: 285). Intellectuals were “enticed by the possibility of a transnational cultural space, an intellectual fraternity or a transnational confederation of leftists” (Clark 2011: 31). Soviet writers and translators developed a world cultural canon placing Soviet culture at its center (Clark 2011; Gould 2012). Literature and translation, however, played multiple



and contradictory roles, from constructing a transnational cultural sphere to bolstering Russian and Soviet identity, and providing avenues for critical thinking and subversion (Ray and Outhwaite 2016). Consequently, the Soviet regime was suspicious of cultural internationalism but also depended on it, as it enjoyed broad popularity, among intellectuals and among ordinary people, and helped legitimize the Soviet project (Ray and Outhwaite 2016; Rupprecht 2015).

Supporting the Soviet state, patriotic intellectuals helped institute a third communist cosmopolitan current, a Soviet development project, as an alternative to the so-called Western civilization. Challenging Western discourses of Russian and Eastern European barbarism (Todorova 1997; Wolff 1994), this civilization-building initiative moved from a sense of inferiority to the West to a “Stalinist superiority complex” (David-Fox 2011). Soviet nationalism touted the Soviet Union as the homeland of socialism (Brandenberger 2002; Todorova 1992) elevating Moscow and Russian culture as the center of a “fourth Rome” (Clark 2011). International contacts “confirmed the ostensible superiority of the Soviet system—morally over the West, economically, technologically and culturally over the rest of the world” to both the Soviet and the international public (Rupprecht 2015: 286). “[C]ultural diplomacy, . . . the systematic inclusion of a cultural dimension to foreign relations, or the formal allocation of attention and resources to culture” became an essential aspect of Soviet foreign policy as it was for other major powers during the twentieth century (David-Fox 2011: 14). Its purpose was to promote the Soviet model as an alternative global modernization and development strategy to Western civilizational models.

The successful legitimation of other forms of cosmopolitanism in state-socialist Eastern Europe likely depended on the discursive mobilization (Spillman and Faeges 2005) of one or more aspects of communist cosmopolitanism. Patriotism combined with world peace and international cooperation would be legitimate. The world would be imagined as a shared space of progressive cultural exchange. Development aligned with the Soviet model would be counterposed to Western civilizational hegemony (cf. Molnár 2005). Esperanto was well suited to meet the challenge of mobilizing communist cosmopolitanism.

### ***Bulgaria, Cosmopolitanism, and Nationalism***

The period of the mid-to-late 1940s represents a critical juncture in the institution of state socialism in Bulgaria. Toward the end of World War II, in an Allied powers’ agreement, Bulgaria was allocated to the Soviet sphere of influence (Resis 1978). With the Soviet army at the border, a popular front coalition led by Bulgarian communists staged a coup on September 9, 1944 and established a new regime. The several years that followed provide crucial insights not only into how the new regime set the foundations of state socialism in the country but also into how Bulgarian society grappled with making sense of the new reality and engaged in new institutional building. It was during this period that Bulgarian Esperantists, acting independently from their Soviet counterparts in a local context of relative pluralism (Gallagher 2001; Lins 1988), positioned their movement as a useful contributor to the new state-building project. Institutional and meaning-making innovations

created during this period would influence future developments in a path-dependent process.

Bulgaria offered a fertile ground for different forms of cosmopolitanism. Throughout the twentieth century, Bulgaria was subject to Balkanism, denigration of the Balkans, European civilization's internal other, practiced by Bulgarians and by foreigners alike (Todorova 1997). Bulgaria was considered a "backward" country in need of development (Rothschild 1959). Bulgarian elites felt a disdain for the "backward peasant mass" (*ibid.*: 2) and often sent their offspring abroad for education, who, upon their return, promoted European civilizational models.

Yet, following Bulgarian autonomy (1878) and independence (1908) from the Ottoman Empire, peasants constituted an important political force. In 1919, peasant leader Aleksandar Stamboliyski became Bulgarian prime minister. Stamboliyski advanced an egalitarian civilizational model grounded on a universal ideal of the noble, pure, and wise peasant (Rothschild 1959). After the 1944 coup, Bulgarian communists tapped into this egalitarian culture and sought collaboration with peasants to legitimize their new regime (Gallagher 2001; Rothschild 1959).

Leading Bulgarian communists, however, were not only educated but also served in official capacities in the Soviet Union and advocated communist internationalism and the Soviet model of development (Rothschild 1959). For the Soviets, the Bulgarians were the best Bolsheviks because their party roots were Russian, the interests of the two sides aligned, and the Bulgarians accepted the Comintern as one leading party (*ibid.*). Before becoming Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) leader in 1946, Bulgarian Georgi Dimitrov served as head of the Comintern.

Dimitrov was one of the architects of the popular front strategy adopted at the Comintern's Seventh Congress in 1935. A response to the rise of Nazi Germany, the popular front strategy involved creating broad national coalitions opposing fascism and war. In Bulgaria, such a coalition called the Fatherland Front, including communists and peasants among others, ruled the country after the 1944 coup establishing state socialism in the country. The popular-front strategy evolved into "national line" politics, bolstered by the centralization and bureaucratization of communist parties engaged in state modernization (Sygkelos 2011).

Bulgarian nationalism involved the Macedonian question, a conflict among Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia (later Yugoslavia) over the identity and governance of a southwest Balkan region. The three neighboring communist parties defended their countries' respective interests in Macedonia (Rothschild 1959). International cooperation, particularly promoting Macedonian national identity as part of a Balkan federation, offered a solution Bulgarian communists embraced (Rothschild 1959; Gallagher 2001). Soviet fears about the power of such an entity thwarted Bulgarian participation eventually leading to severing Yugoslav-Soviet relations in 1948 (Gallagher 2001). Bulgaria experienced a Stalinist crackdown until Stalin's death. Bulgarian nationalism acquired a universal character, as a fight against the nation's enemies: fascism, imperialism, the bourgeoisie, and reactionary elements (Sygkelos 2011). International cooperation, with the Soviet Union but also with other, less powerful, nation-states, remained an integral component of it though. Bulgarian communists thus drew from multiple cultural resources to construct their state-socialist project including the Soviet development project, competing with European civilizational models, communist internationalism integrating international cooperation and

leftist nationalism, and peasant egalitarianism. Bulgarian Esperantists (communist and noncommunist) would bring Esperanto cosmopolitanism to this cosmopolitan and nationalist cultural mix. A key to Esperanto's success in Bulgaria was the movement's legitimization strategy in the second half of the 1940s.

Next, I show how Bulgarian Esperantists used the pages of *Bulgara Esperantisto* to mobilize available cosmopolitan discursive resources to legitimize their movement in the country at the beginning of state socialism to make the pursuit of their intrinsic Esperanto goals possible. With their history of labor-Esperanto activism, nonconfrontational pragmatism, and connections with the new regime, Bulgarian Esperantists were well positioned to bridge Esperanto cosmopolitanism and communist cosmopolitanism. Given their roots in the country, they knew how to marshal peasant egalitarian universalism to mobilize local participation. Their national association had the authority to direct Esperanto development as it saw fit in the Bulgarian context. As rooted cosmopolitans (Tarrow 2005), Bulgarian Esperantists tried to make themselves useful deploying their cosmopolitan cultural capital in service of their country's new state building project. The resulting nationalized cosmopolitanism with communist characteristics allowed them to survive and thrive under state socialism while remaining committed to their Esperanto activism.

### Cosmopolitan Esperanto Activism in Post-World War II Bulgaria

Esperanto has strong roots in Bulgaria. Bulgarian Esperantists were members of four transnational Esperanto organizations in 1953 and of 43 by 1988 (Smith and Wiest 2012). Bulgarians were among the first Esperanto enthusiasts in the late 1880s establishing local and national organizations affiliated with both the neutral and the labor-Esperanto movements (Aleksiev 1992; Lapenna 1974; Sarafov 1971). Bulgarian Miloslav Bogdanov published the second-oldest albeit short-lived Esperanto newspaper in the world *La Mondlingvisto* (The world linguist) (Aleksiev 1992; Lapenna 1974). The Bulgarian movement formed a national association and held its first regular national Esperanto congress<sup>7</sup> in 1907 (Lapenna 1974). The state officially started supporting Esperanto instruction as an elective in Bulgarian schools<sup>8</sup> in 1912 (Blanke 2007; Lapenna 1974).

Activity publicized in *Bulgara Esperantisto* in 1946 and in 1947 indicates Bulgarian Esperantists' priority was to maintain the movement's autonomy in pursuing Esperanto cosmopolitanism in Bulgaria. I find that during Bulgarian state socialism's formative years, Bulgarian Esperantists cared mostly about building a peaceful global community through Esperanto. They worked to spread the Esperanto language, communicate with other Esperantists directly at meetings or indirectly through publications or correspondence, and organize themselves. Bulgarian Esperantists' cosmopolitan activism revolved around equal global communication and exchange. They coordinated Esperanto activism at multiple scales,

<sup>7</sup>No national congresses occurred in the periods 1912–18, 1941–44, and 1949–55 because of the world wars and of Stalinism (Sarafov 1971).

<sup>8</sup>Esperanto was proscribed in Bulgarian schools between 1928 and 1931 for its association with forbidden internationalist, Bolshevik, and anarchist ideas (Lapenna 1974; Lins 1988) and during Stalinism (Aleksiev 1992).

connecting with the global movement, planning national actions, building local circles, and strengthening the movement's organization and membership.

### **Pursuing Esperanto Goals**

Esperanto is synonymous with an idealist pursuit of a peaceful global community in which persons and cultures are equal. Esperantists have a term denoting this ideal community, namely *Esperantujo* (the Esperanto community/country) (Velitchkova 2021). *Esperantujo* also refers to places and times when Esperantists practice the international language Esperanto. For Esperantists, meetings are important because they represent *Esperantujo*. During the formative years of state socialism, Bulgarian Esperantists participated in building a global community by promoting local, national, and international Esperanto meetings in their national periodical. A significant portion of sections in *Bulgara Esperantisto* were dedicated to meetings, 41 (23 percent) in 1946 and 52 (25 percent) in 1947. In 1946, almost half meeting-related sections discussed international meetings, followed by 42 percent dedicated to national meetings, and 29 percent mentioning local meetings. By the following year, local Esperanto activism was on the rise with 42 percent of meeting-related sections discussing local gatherings, 35 percent focusing on national meetings, and 27 percent promoting international meetings.

Spreading the Esperanto language was of primary concern to Bulgarian Esperantists as a means to building a global community. Accordingly, language instruction received special attention on the pages of *Bulgara Esperantisto*. Thirty-eight sections (21 percent) were dedicated to it in 1946 and 59 (28 percent) in 1947. In the summer of 1946, the Bulgarian Esperanto Union organized a 10-day training for teachers and translators considered essential for the growth of the movement in the country, the publication noted. *Bulgara Esperantisto* featured a regular section dedicated to beginners including a brief Esperanto text followed by its Bulgarian translation, reading questions, and linguistic remarks. *Bulgara Esperantisto* also promoted Esperanto learning materials, such as a multipurpose Esperanto reader for advanced language courses and for self-directed learners containing historical and literary materials.

By far, the most popular theme discussed in *Bulgara Esperantisto* concerned Esperanto publications. Publications demonstrated Esperanto was a viable language and connected Esperantists globally. In 1946, 77 of the 178 sections (about 43 percent) dealt to some extent with publications. Seventeen of the sections discussed books and seven mentioned dictionaries; the majority were related to international Esperanto periodicals. Local clubs were encouraged to organize collective subscriptions to have copies of each of the periodicals available to club members. Readers of the Bulgarian periodicals were encouraged to send issues as gifts to their international pen pals. The Bulgarian publications supplied informational and educational materials, engaged with the socialist project, publicized Bulgarian cultural achievements, and promoted material items that symbolized identification with the Esperanto community. Similar to the role *Bulgara Esperantisto* played, other publications promoted by the periodical created symbolic linkages among local Esperantists and the international community.

The most overtly political aspect of Bulgarian Esperanto activism in the 1946–47 period was the grassroots diplomacy strategy realized through correspondence. Correspondence emphasized Bulgarian Esperantists' linguistic competences and

was the key contribution they believed they could make to their country (see next section). At the 1945 congress of Bulgarian Esperantists, the association reportedly made a decision to begin a coordinated campaign of international mass correspondence (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946c: 3). Correspondence occupied significant space on the pages of *Bulgara Esperantisto*. Twenty-six (15 percent) sections in 1946 and 58 (27 percent) in 1947 mentioned correspondence. Bulgarian Esperantists' post-World War II correspondence strategy echoed the 1924 Comintern decision to promote interworker exchanges and labor-Esperantists' use of correspondence throughout the 1920s and 1930s (Blanke 2007; Lins 1988).

### **Coordinating Esperanto Activism at Multiple Scales**

When they relaunched *Bulgara Esperantisto* in 1946, Bulgarian Esperantists took the three-scale work of the movement for granted anchoring transnational, national, and local Esperanto activism. Despite the transnational orientation of the movement, the magazine regularly focused on Esperanto events of national importance. In fact, most sections dedicated to plans and to calls to action published in *Bulgara Esperantisto* in 1946–47 had a national scope reflecting the institutional importance of the nation-state as the primary location of Bulgarian Esperantists' activism. The second page of the inaugural postwar issue, for example, was dedicated to the forthcoming 29th national congress of Bulgarian Esperantists, which was to take place in the southern Bulgarian town of Asenovgrad (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946a: 2). Consistent planning of national activities, together with the regularity of appearance of national Esperanto periodicals, suggests the national scale was essential for the activism of Bulgarian Esperantists.

As participants in a transnational movement, Bulgarian Esperantists often discussed Esperanto issues and events at the global scale on the pages of *Bulgara Esperantisto*. In 1946, the largest number of reports (46 percent) had an international scope indicating the desire of Bulgarian Esperantists to stay abreast of developments concerning the Esperanto movement globally. The first post-World War II issue of *Bulgara Esperantisto*, for example, included a report on the 40th anniversary congress of the Swedish Esperanto Federation attended by participants from nine countries. The issue also advertised the relaunch of *Heroldo de Esperanto* (Esperanto Herald), a monthly publication of the global Esperanto movement. By reporting on a vibrant international movement activity, Bulgarian Esperantists imagined themselves as part of a global community.

The international focus of the Bulgarian Esperanto movement was broad (albeit mostly Eurocentric) suggesting an interest in more horizontal international relations than the Western-centric or the Soviet-centric cosmopolitan approaches would suggest. Foreign countries mentioned in five or more sections in 1946 include France (in eight sections), England and the Netherlands (in seven sections), Austria and Poland (in six sections), and Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the USSR (in five sections). In 1947, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Sweden, in addition to an expressed interest in regional Balkan cooperation, appeared in five or more sections as well. Mirroring the Dimitrov–Tito discussion of a Balkan federation (Gallagher 2001), Esperantists would forge their own Balkan cooperation. The 1946 inaugural issue of *Bulgara Esperantisto* informed readers about an international conference to take

place in conjunction with the national congress bringing together Esperantists from two other Balkan nations, Slovenia and Romania. The writers believed interorganizational collaboration, a common publication, and an exchange of materials, literature, newspapers, and magazines would build international solidarity as an important element of a global community<sup>9</sup> (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946a: 2).

The Bulgarian Esperanto movement also sought to strengthen and increase the number of its local branches. *Bulgara Esperantisto* was honest about the financial concerns motivating in part local activism and encouraged local clubs to report the collected membership dues to the association (*ibid.*). The magazine praised the local hosts of the national congress and the Balkan conference from the Asenovgrad club for their successful recruitment efforts. The club had increased its membership from 30 to 54 members in a year. From 1946 to 1947, the number of reports on local activism published in *Bulgara Esperantisto* more than tripled, from 14 to 51, amounting to 43 percent of all reports published in the later year. Local reports would often be accompanied by praise or by disapproval guiding the direction of local activism. Bulgarian Esperantists were busy building the grassroots foundations of a global community and *Bulgara Esperantisto* was eager to direct and report on this activity.

In its inaugural postwar issue, *Bulgara Esperantisto* stated it was a central organizing tool for the Bulgarian Esperanto movement. The movement worked hard to create a stable organizational structure, recruit members, and ensure the financial stability of its local and national organizations. Overall, 58 (33 percent) and 81 (38 percent) of sections were dedicated to the movement's organization in 1946 and in 1947, respectively; 28 (16 percent) and 17 (8 percent) of the sections in the two years discussed membership; and 21 (12 percent) in 1946 and 32 (15 percent) in 1947 considered finances. The movement struggled with finances. For example, the first 1946 issue indicated wartime "paper shortages" had not allowed its earlier relaunch. Members were asked regularly to subscribe to periodicals and to pay their dues. Through their organizing efforts, Bulgarian Esperantists were able to maintain autonomous activist networks nationally and internationally, pursue intrinsic Esperanto goals, and sustain cosmopolitan identities under inhospitable conditions. These accomplishments raise the question: How was the movement able to survive under state socialism?

### How Esperanto Survived Bulgarian State Socialism

In the second half of the 1940s, the Bulgarian Esperanto movement was in a position to create its own survival strategy. It was not subject to Soviet influence because cross-national contacts with Soviet Esperantists were severed as their movement was decimated by the Stalinist purges (Lins 1988). Meanwhile, Bulgaria still enjoyed relative albeit decreasing pluralism (Gallagher 2001). Given the existence of two Esperanto factions in the country before the war, neutral and labor-Esperantists (Aleksiev 1992; Lapenna 1974; Sarafov 1971), the Bulgarian Esperanto movement could have adopted a number of different strategies in relation to the new regime. Because Esperanto is similar to messianic movements where the message and the

<sup>9</sup>The most notable outcome was the publication of the magazine *Internacia Kulturo* (International Culture).



strategy converge (Garvía 2015), this early period of its development under Bulgarian state socialism is crucial for understanding the later fortunes of the Esperanto movement in the country.

To ensure Esperanto survival under Bulgarian state socialism, Bulgarian Esperantists produced what I call a nationalized cosmopolitanism with communist characteristics. Bulgarian Esperantists maintained Esperanto networks, pursued Esperanto goals, and sustained cosmopolitan identities by creatively combining elements of three cosmopolitan sources available to them, Esperanto cosmopolitanism, communist cosmopolitanism, and Bulgarian peasant egalitarianism. This section shows how Bulgarian Esperantists created this legitimate activist culture on the pages of *Bulgara Esperantisto*. They demonstrated patriotism linking their cosmopolitanism to Bulgaria's national interest and to the state-building project of the new regime. Discursive strategies involved emphasizing Esperanto's role in improving Bulgaria's international standing, working for just peace, and promoting comprehensive development along communist ideals. The movement created symbolic ties between itself and the new regime through advocating movement-state partnership, through highlighting its history of labor activism, and through employing a labor-friendly rhetoric. Accentuating an ethics of fellowship associated with peasant universalism made Esperanto accessible to the local population among which Esperantists recruited new members. In the following text, I elaborate on these tactics. Several factors facilitated Bulgarian Esperantists' ability to legitimize Esperanto in post-World War II Bulgaria: Bulgarian labor-Esperanto history, pragmatism, and personal ties with communist leaders. The success of Esperanto in Bulgaria during state socialism can in part be attributed to labor-Esperantists' activist history and leadership continuity (Aleksiev 1992; Blanke 2007). A Bulgarian labor-Esperanto association only existed between 1930 and 1934 due to persecutions of communists in the country (Lins 1988; Oljanov 1988). As noted, in 1938, communist Esperantists returned to neutral national associations where they exercised considerable influence (Lins 1988). After adopting the strategy of armed struggle against fascism, many Bulgarian communists were arrested and exposed to Esperanto in prison (Lins 1988; Oljanov 1988). Two hundred twenty-seven Bulgarian Esperantists reportedly died as partisans, in prison, or fighting in the Spanish Civil War (Lins 1988). Labor-Esperantists who survived the war helped legitimate the Bulgarian Esperanto movement under state socialism.

As with other movements under authoritarian regimes (Spires 2011; Straughn 2005), nonconfrontational pragmatism was another reason for Esperanto's success in Bulgaria under state socialism (Aleksiev 1992). When the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) recommended the dissolution of the Esperanto association as unnecessary during the Stalinist period, Esperantists used the strategy of delaying and avoiding the question to keep the organization officially active (Lins 1988). The Esperanto cooperative established in 1945 continued functioning quietly importing materials and distributing them among Esperantists (Aleksiev 1992). After it weathered Stalinism, the movement had to acknowledge the superiority of BCP; its periodicals published the party's political reports; its congresses had to receive the blessing of BCP; its budget had to be prepared "in consultation" with the international section of the party (*ibid.*). The promotion of Bulgarian cultural and tourist attractions contributed to softening of state controls (*ibid.*). Bulgarian Esperantists

also relied on their personal ties to facilitate the work of the movement (ibid.). Esperanto “friends” among the party and state leadership advocated for the movement (ibid.). Esperanto activist Asen Grigorov was secretary to Georgi Dimitrov, the country’s famous communist leader (Blanke 1988; Lins 1988). Dimitrov reportedly told Grigorov that Esperanto was a neutral channel of information about the “new democratic” Bulgaria (Lins 1988: 461).

### ***Raising Bulgaria’s International Standing***

Embracing socialist patriotism was a key element of Bulgarian Esperantists’ legitimation strategy. This pragmatic tactic allowed the pursuit of cosmopolitan goals and identities and the flourishing of domestic and international ties. At the beginning of 1946, as Bulgarian Esperantists began to reestablish their activity, they found their country and themselves in a context of international hostility and isolation. The country’s historical association with Germany (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946b: 1), combined with its allocation to the Soviet sphere of influence (Resis 1978), had brought Bulgaria’s international standing to a low point. Bulgarian Esperantists were keenly attentive to the country’s international reputation, diagnosing it as a key problem to solve:

In many countries: England, America [*sic*], France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and others, significant portions of the people’s masses are not aware of the true situation in our country. This is due to the enemy propaganda in these countries. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946b: 1)

The periodical identified wartime British Prime Minister Winston Churchill as the representative figure of such enemy “intrigues” and associated them with war-mongering (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946b: 1). Once misinformation was identified as the culprit for Bulgaria’s threatened international standing, the Esperanto movement decided to raise international awareness of the country’s domestic achievements. The periodical encouraged Bulgarian Esperantists to be in service of their “democratic” society through developing broad international connections (ibid.), linking Esperanto cosmopolitan practices to the state-socialist project.

In pursuing Bulgaria’s national interests, Bulgarian Esperantists aligned their concerns and strengths with the government rhetoric of popular participation. With their international ties and international language competences, Bulgarian Esperantists were well positioned to play key roles in grassroots diplomatic efforts. Correspondence as a form of grassroots diplomacy was a type of activism to which labor-Esperantists were accustomed and that could raise international awareness and contribute to the national communist cause. The following paragraph summarizes the thinking of the time:

We had to present to the world the truth about our free, democratic, and loyal motherland. We had to show to the world the genuine efforts of our people to strengthen our democratic achievements, to eliminate the remnants of fascism, to overcome the economic difficulties, and to achieve a fast, well-deserved, just, and dignified peace . . . We did this not by using the traditional official ways of

international and diplomatic relations. The new approach that we adopted was the approach of direct communication and connections of the broad segments of our people with the peoples in other countries, through individual and collective correspondence. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946b: 1)

### **Striving for Just Peace**

Expressed pursuit of peace was another legitimization tactic connecting Bulgarian Esperantists' patriotic and international aspirations to communist cosmopolitanism. Peace was so important to them in the wake of World War II that *Bulgara Esperantisto* dedicated its 1947 New Year issue to it. With World War II looming dangerously from the recent past, Bulgarians were apprehensive of the potential negative consequences of a low international standing. From being a reluctant German ally to moving under the Soviet sphere of influence, Bulgaria did not make many friends during the war (Gallagher 2001). To Bulgarian Esperantists, the post-World War II peace appeared fragile and endangered by "imperialist" and "reactionary warmongering," so they saw their role to be to actively engage in the struggle for peace (1947e: 2). A resolution adopted by the 1946 congress of Bulgarian Esperantists, discussed in *Bulgara Esperantisto*, identified just peace as the primary goal of Bulgarians at the time reflecting their national and their cosmopolitan priorities:

All the best national efforts are put into the struggle for attaining a just and dignified democratic peace and for guaranteeing the continued right to development of the country. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946c: 3)

The signing of a peace treaty between Bulgaria and the Allied powers after World War II was considered a foundation for world peace and thus not only of national but also of international importance (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947b: 2). Leading to their 1947 congress, Bulgarian Esperantists reaffirmed their commitment to peace:

At this congress, with all due solemnity, we will manifest our power and will to engage in even more energetic work and struggle to build our people's republic, in defense of peace and democracy in the Balkans and in the entire world and against the warmongering organizers of a new bloody world war. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947e: 1)

The assumption was that Esperanto, as a neutral means of equal international communication, was especially well suited for peace building. For example, the publication informed its readers of the decision of the newly founded Japanese Institute for Perpetual Peace to use Esperanto together with English as an official language for its reports (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947b: 7).

### **Promoting Comprehensive Development**

Bulgarian Esperantists' embrace of comprehensive development was a third legitimization tactic visible in *Bulgara Esperantisto* that helped their movement survive

state socialism. It involved merging Esperanto with other forms of cosmopolitanism and linking national and global concerns. The goal of achieving comprehensive development was seen as inseparable from the goal of achieving peace. The nation-state was assumed to be the natural unit of development for humankind but only in the context of cooperative international relations. The following excerpt from the 1947 New Year's issue brought peace and comprehensive development together most clearly:

The blessed beams of peace will shine on the last countries still disconnected from the all-human family. Permanent peaceful neighborly relations will form again. Humanity will dedicate itself to quiet and peaceful creative work. A life of peaceful development will bustle again bringing back to life boons that had faded. Letters, magazines, books, and mutual visits will be exchanged. Libraries will be full of readers and creators. Noble competition between nations will take place. The victory will belong to that nation which harbors limitless possibilities for creativity in the fields of science, culture, and civilization. In this, we, Esperantists, will demonstrate our most elevated role of connecting peoples from the entire world, with the help of Zamenhof's wondrous creation, the international language Esperanto. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947a: 1)

Mobilizing patriotism, Balkanism, communism, and globally resonant Enlightenment ideals, the following excerpt equates Esperanto activism with the comprehensive development work of the cherished Bulgarian institution of *chitalishta* (culture houses/community centers):

*Chitalishta*,... homegrown products of the great period of our Enlightenment, ... [helped Bulgaria] catch up with the developed peoples . . . . Following September 9, 1944,<sup>10</sup> an era of new flourishing and comprehensive development began for *chitalishta* . . . Esperanto and *chitalishta* have a similar character and do a similar kind of work. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947d: 1)

In the comprehensive development project that the Bulgarian Esperanto movement promoted, not only the international and the domestic but also the cultural, the economic, and the political spheres were intertwined. Themes *Bulgara Esperantisto* encouraged subscribers to discuss with their foreign correspondents, for example, included the cultural, economic, and political achievements of the country (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947b: 2). Recommended topics included women's issues, the two-year national economic plan, Bulgaria's peace treaty, fight against fascism, and democratic policies.

### **Reaching Out to the Communist-led State**

Reaching out to rather than opposing the state also became part of the pragmatic legitimation strategy of the Bulgarian Esperanto movement under state socialism visible in *Bulgara Esperantisto*. The proposed movement-state partnership was

<sup>10</sup>The date of the communist coup in Bulgaria.

justified in the name of national interests and of global security. Through an interview with an Austrian Esperantist and minister for food, Dr. Hans Frenzel, Bulgarian Esperantists argued that small countries needed to be leaders in adopting Esperanto because big powers already considered their languages to be international languages (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946a: 4). Dr. Frenzel reportedly believed Esperanto could help avoid conflicts through improved understanding among nations. Esperanto, the interview continued, could also facilitate international trade. The conclusion was Esperanto should be introduced as a mandatory subject in schools and the state should support the effort. A symbiotic relationship between the Esperanto movement and the state was believed to be beneficial for the country and for world peace. Consequently, *Bulgara Esperantisto* was eager to point out advancements in the state-movement partnership. The postwar government, the publication argued, unlike the prewar regime, created beneficial conditions for the development of the Esperanto movement (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946c: 3).

*Bulgara Esperantisto* modeled what a collaborative relationship with the state could look like without neglecting the Esperanto movement's priorities. The first post-World War II issue of *Bulgara Esperantisto* reported on a labor-Esperanto meeting in Nancy, France, where local state leaders pledged their commitment to introducing Esperanto in schools. On numerous occasions, the periodical gave the example of the Austrian state's support for Esperanto with the apparent intention to encourage a similar role for the Bulgarian state. For example:

Important announcement: The Austrian ministry of Education allowed the instruction of Esperanto in schools. The official announcement includes teaching plans for Esperanto. The first national examinations for teachers of Esperanto will take place in the fall. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946a: 8)

The relation between the Esperanto movement and the Bulgarian state, as reported in *Bulgara Esperantisto*, involved instrumentality. While proclaiming allegiance to the new regime, the movement pursued its own goals. The following example illustrates the point, to a comic effect. A 1947 *Bulgara Esperantisto* article entitled "September 9, the Great Day of Freedom, Is Celebrated by Bulgarian Esperantists" started with "The thirtieth anniversary congress of Bulgarian Esperantists coincides with the bright date marking the third anniversary of the people's antifascist rebellion." The article continued with a lengthy inventory of key words associated with the communist regime including among others the "labor competition" in pursuit of the national "economic plan," elimination of "fascist" elements and "reactionary agents," the communist leader Georgi Dimitrov, and the USSR. In an odd twist of logic, the article exclaimed in conclusion: "Let all members of the association be counted! Let all subscribers of *Internacia Kulturo* and *Bulgara Esperantisto* pay their subscription dues!" (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947e: 6). Evidently, the author of the article was preoccupied as much with the state as with procuring members and financial stability for the movement.

In other instances, however, the reported closeness of the relationship between the movement and the communist state appears passionately sincere. Bulgarian Esperantists and the state are presented as allies striving for the same national comprehensive development goals:

The Esperanto youth of the town of Lom will demonstrate in action their *affection for the people's power*<sup>11</sup> when they facilitate the achievement of the two-year plan not only in terms of cultural and educational goals but also in terms of economic goals. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947e: 5; italics mine)

### **Writing a Shared Cosmopolitan History**

To legitimate their aspirations to partner with the new state, Bulgarian Esperantists emphasized the shared history of the labor movement and the Esperanto movement. The first task of the first issue of *Bulgara Esperantisto* after World War II, outlined in its leading article, was to claim its history as a “progressive” publication aligned with the struggle against fascism, intertwining the histories of Esperanto and of communist cosmopolitanism. The presence of 13 sections dedicated to history in the 1946 issues of *Bulgara Esperantisto* suggests an effort to situate the movement on the right side of history, namely as part of the international class struggle. The important page three of the inaugural postwar issue was dedicated to one of Bulgarian labor-Esperantist heroes, Angel Petkov (Anjelo), on the fifth anniversary of his passing. A eulogy from Kostadin Bujukliev remembered Anjelo for his love for his people and for his hatred of their oppressors. Anjelo had worked on developing “international democratic solidarity” for a dozen of years. Among his listed accomplishments were mass recruitment, language instruction, editorial work, organizational leadership, and fearlessness when facing difficulties and repression. He had reportedly enjoyed receiving letters from factories and mass organizations from the Soviet Union, France, England, Czechoslovakia, and other countries. In conclusion, the eulogy exhorted Bulgarian Esperantists to follow Anjelo’s example and develop mass international connections, engage in popular education around the world informing people of the achievements of the country, and work for a just peace and a future without exploitation, war, and misery (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1946a: 3). Linking the history of Esperanto in Bulgaria with the history of the labor movement was an effort by the movement to position itself on the side of the new regime.

### **Relating with Labor**

*Bulgara Esperantisto* recognized the need to continue connecting with labor for Esperanto to remain legitimate in the new political context. One proposed strategy was to create a popular movement by building coalitions with “mass” organizations. Tactical advice given by the periodical links the correspondence tactic with the coalition-building tactic: “For help with writing letters, contact the cultural and educational sections in those mass organizations of which you are members: unions, cooperatives, *chitalishta* [culture houses], etc.” (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947b: 2). Involving the “masses” also meant building local Esperanto groups. Referencing a “comrade” and “mass participation,” the following section illustrates such efforts but also hints at their instrumental character:

<sup>11</sup>“People’s power” is a euphemism for the communist-led government.



In the village of Glavatsi, in the region of Vratsa, the Esperanto group organized an evening of literature and music, which enjoyed mass participation. The comrade Venko Georgiev opened the gathering with a relevant speech, followed by reading of poems by Zamenhof and by Bulgarian writers, of stories from the Esperanto life in our country, of letters from abroad, etc. At the end, many expressed desire to join the open Esperanto course and the local Esperanto circle. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947c: 6)

The movement's traditional cultural work, however, was not sufficient, according to some. As constructive criticism addressed at the movement, an anonymous "elderly fellow thinker"<sup>12</sup> expressed his opinion on the "future perspectives" of the movement as follows:

The Esperanto movement will not succeed unless it begins economic and practical work in addition to its cultural and educational work . . . [The needed] element, according to us, is to undertake any common collective work . . . The Esperanto literature should highlight practical knowledge applicable in life, such as professional guides . . . in the area of the various industries, trades, and arts . . . Esperanto must indeed be the language of labor democracy. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947d: 2)

*Bulgara Esperantisto* followed the advice of this "fellow thinker" and promoted volunteer brigades engaged in collective economic activity. The establishment of an Esperanto cooperative, in addition to serving the Bulgarian Esperanto movement's financial needs, exemplified the preferred economic organizational model of the time. Despite such efforts, Esperanto never became a working-class movement in the country (Ignev 1988). Reading books, newspapers, and magazines and communicating with others, especially from abroad, remained the primary reasons why people were interested in Esperanto (*ibid.*).

### **Facilitating International Fellowship**

As Bulgarian Esperantists worked to establish local circles and recruit new members, they needed messages that resonated with the predominantly peasant Bulgarian population steeped in an egalitarian culture. Advocating an ethics of fellowship associated with Bulgarian peasant universalism proved successful. Bulgarian Esperantists joined Bulgarian communists in embracing the term *drugar/ka* as the Bulgarian translation of "comrade." In Bulgarian, the term for the common communist greeting also means "fellow/friend/mate," referring to familiar strong personal ties between persons of equal standing carrying expectations of care and reciprocity. The use of the term and related expectations further strengthened the association among the new regime, Esperanto, and the local population.

The embrace of fellowship is visible in *Bulgara Esperantisto*. In 1946, seven sections were dedicated to solidarity and six sections to friendship. In 1947, 17 sections were dedicated to friendship, 9 to hospitality, and 7 to brotherhood. International

<sup>12</sup>"Fellow thinker" is an Esperanto term for fellow Esperantists.

fellowship was a common motivation for participation in the Esperanto movement. The following excerpt from an article titled “Fellowship through Esperanto” illustrates Bulgarians’ fellowship expectations:

In *Laborista Esperantisto* (Labor Esperantist) from the Netherlands, we read the following: “My wife, who has been suffering from a chest disease for a few years, is pregnant. There exists a vaccine to protect the child from this disease . . . [but it was] unavailable. Three weeks before the birth, I wrote to a correspondent in Denmark . . . Six days later a response arrived from his wife . . . “Send me the address of your doctor. I will do everything that is possible to help you.” Ten days later, I received the vaccine. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947d: 4)

Fellowship-related terms referred not only to relations between persons but also were extended to abstract categories, including the state, carrying the familiar ethical expectations globally. For example, at their 1947 conference, Bulgarian Esperantists reportedly committed to establishing brotherly international relations. The following example illustrates the seamless transition between the use of fellowship terms at the person and at the group levels:

A beginner Esperanto course was organized in the small village of Vratsa drawing in some twenty participants, primarily among the youth. Radoy Faldjiyski, a dentistry student, leads the course. He opened the course with the talk: “Esperanto: Origins, development, present, and future” underlining the importance of the language as a means of mutual familiarization and brotherly cooperation among nations. There is great enthusiasm. (*Bulgara Esperantisto* 1947b: 8)

## Conclusions and Implications

The survival of the Esperanto movement in state-socialist Bulgaria indicates that social movements can survive in authoritarian contexts by developing legitimate activist cultures. Even in the case of cosmopolitan movements such as Esperanto, these cultures may incorporate concerns about the nation. In the context of the nation-state system, patriotic discourses (Spillman and Faeges 2005) can be an important aspect of movements’ legitimation strategies. Activist cultures may also integrate goals, tactics, and identities demonstrating affinities with regimes’ ideologies. As authoritarian regimes elevate such ideologies as part of their countries’ nation-state building projects, ideological allegiance may be indispensable for legitimation in movements’ survival strategies. Despite needing to demonstrate national and ideological allegiances, social movements may still find “free spaces” (Polletta 1999) for maneuvering in pursuit of their intrinsic goals.

The Bulgarian Esperanto movement under state socialism and similar civil society formations under authoritarianism in general can be thought of as a type of movement abeyance structures allowing actors interested in social change to weather inhospitable conditions (cf. Taylor 1989). While in democratic contexts movement abeyance may facilitate radicalization (ibid.), under authoritarian regimes, abeyance structures may display affinities with dominant ideologies and may avoid risky contention and protest (e.g., Straughn 2005; Spires 2011). Legitimacy is an important factor affecting social

movement survival not only in democracies (Minkoff 1999) but also under authoritarianism. As challengers of the status quo social movements may find it difficult to maintain legitimacy, especially under authoritarian regimes. Under authoritarianism, social movements must meet both the state's and societal legitimacy criteria. Movements can take advantage of contextually available practice and discourse repertoires to legitimize their activities and survive. As a result, activist cultures that institutionalized movements develop under authoritarianism may differ from activist cultures in democracies. The Esperanto movement in state-socialist Bulgaria is an example.

Movement survival is important because the activist cultures movements develop sustain activist networks, repertoires of goals and tactics, and collective identities (Taylor 1989: 762). Activist networks keep public spiritedness and the possibility of social change alive. Activist goals set a standard of what is worth pursuing. Under authoritarianism, activist goals may align with regimes' expressed goals, such as achieving peace and comprehensive development according to state-socialist ideals. Consequently, activists may adopt tactics that accommodate their high-risk environment. For example, they may deploy nonconfrontational pragmatism, seeking partnerships with key constituents, such as with labor and with the peasantry but also with the state, and/or relying on personal connections (e.g., Opp and Gern 1993; Spires 2011). As activists navigate loyalties in the context of the nation-state system, national identities may be important aspects of activist identities even for activists with cosmopolitan orientations such as Esperantists.

Maintaining activist networks and instituting activist cultures consisting of legitimate repertoires of goals, tactics, and/or identity can have long-term consequences. The survival of the Esperanto movement during the half century of state socialism in Bulgaria indicates that public spiritedness under authoritarianism is not impossible. Persons could find outlets for public engagement outside the official structures of the party-state. The Esperanto movement succeeded in serving as such an outlet in several state-socialist countries. An important legacy of Esperanto and of similar civil society formations was the existence of persons experienced in public engagement and connected to others with similar experiences. The distinct repertoires of goals, tactics, and identities activists adopted were likely transposable; activists could later deploy these repertoires in different spheres.

The Esperanto case suggests that aligning activist goals with the goals of authoritarian regimes is one legitimization strategy movements can undertake. Bulgarian Esperantists believed they could pursue peace and contribute to the civilizational model involving comprehensive development valorizing all social spheres that Bulgarian state socialism purported to advance. While owing to the Soviet model (Clark 2011; David-Fox 2011; Ray and Outhwaite 2016; Rupprecht 2015), the Bulgarian state-socialist civilizational model as understood by Esperantists was distinct from it. Bulgarian Esperantists looked up to the Soviet Union but they had other role models too (cf. Molnár 2005). They strove for horizontal cooperative relations internationally. Bulgaria's own history and institutions provided examples to follow as well (cf. *ibid.*). Standing behind a comprehensive national development project in which culture was valued as much as the economy and as politics made sense to cultural producers, such as Bulgarian Esperantists. Eventually, in an ironic twist, the intelligentsia became a driving force behind the 1989 transformations as state socialism began to fall short of reaching its civilizational goals.

Until 1989, however, overt opposition to state socialism was not a legitimate activist tactic. Instead, activists privileged nonconfrontational pragmatism, sought partnerships, including with the state, and relied on personal connections (e.g., Opp and Gern 1993; Straughn 2005; Spires 2011). Such tactics were presumably more legitimate and more efficient in accomplishing activist goals in an authoritarian context than confrontation was. Future research should explore the implications of having such tactical repertoires. For example, these may explain why Eastern Europeans continue to value the role of the state in persons' lives (Inglehart et al. 2014). In 1989, Bulgaria and several other Eastern European countries where civil society worked with the state experienced negotiated democratic transitions. These peaceful transitions contrasted with the violent transition in Romania, for instance, where civil society had been repressed severely. Did civil society's non-confrontational tactics foster social peace, including during the transition to democracy? A tactical repertoire including reliance on friendships and on personal connections to accomplish goals must be consequential too. Blurring the line between the private and the public spheres calls for examining possible parallels between the Bulgarian *vrazki* (connections/friendships) and the Chinese *guanxi* (Chang 2011; Spires 2011). The general implication is that authoritarian political contexts produce distinct tactical repertoires, with long-term consequences.

Movement survival for Bulgarian Esperantists under authoritarianism also involved complex identity work of negotiating affiliations with ideologies dominant in the national context. Rallying behind a shared identity allows finding common ground amidst differences. Invoking national identity can have a unifying force at the national scale, especially for actors seeking legitimacy, such as the newly established state-socialist regimes or the Esperanto movement. Movements and regimes share an investment in the institution of the nation-state to which they belong. Unsurprisingly, nationalism is part of the state-socialist legacy in Eastern Europe despite communism's cosmopolitanism (Ray and Outhwaite 2016; Todorova 1992). Even Esperanto, the quintessential cosmopolitan movement, became nationalized in state-socialist Bulgaria.

Nationalizing cosmopolitanism does not erase it but complicates it. Cosmopolitanism becomes "rooted" (Tarrow 2005) in overlapping domestic and international politics. For Bulgarian Esperantists, nationalized or rooted cosmopolitanism involved thinking, acting, and creating symbolic connections at multiple scales (locally, nationally, and internationally) simultaneously. Under state socialism, Bulgarian Esperantists' cosmopolitanism was intertwined with communism (cf. Ray and Outhwaite 2016). Tapping into Bulgaria's peasant egalitarian culture, Bulgarian Esperantists also advocated a native variant of cosmopolitanism emphasizing universal fellowship. Legitimizing Esperantists' cosmopolitanism in state-socialist Bulgaria involved combining it with discourses associated with patriotism, with communism, and with an ethics of fellowship (cf. Molnár 2005; Ray and Outhwaite 2016). Despite the specter of nationalism, cosmopolitanism continues to matter in Eastern Europe today. Maintaining peaceful international relations and engaging in a variety of international collaborations (with the European Union, NATO, Russia, etc.), for example, have been driving principles of Bulgarian foreign policy following the fall of state socialism. For actors feeling vulnerable nationally and internationally, building peace and collaborations may be both a moral and rational strategy rooted in a pragmatic cosmopolitan culture.

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