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Theodora Dragostinova’s *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State in the Global Cultural Scene* explores how the Bulgarian communist elite used culture as a platform to leave their imprint and participate in the thickening network of globalization of the 1970s-80s. Locating the book in the historical conjunction of these two decades, Dragostinova tells a story that blurs the borders between the national and international, the local and the global; the author demonstrates how culture became for Todor Zhivkov, the Bulgarian communist strongman, and his entourage an important tool for both domestic legitimization and international prestige. Dragostinova also elaborates how Bulgarian communist elites used soft power as a trump for gaining material benefits. Depending on the region it engaged with, Bulgaria’s cultural expansion sometimes produced tangible positive results, while at other times it generated contradictory outcomes.

First of all, it is sound to state that *The Cold War from the Margins* tells a story that defies the geographical ontology that both nation and Cold War have imposed for a long time on historians. By exploring the history of Bulgaria from a global perspective, and by using Bulgaria as a lens to write a global history, this book demonstrates how outdated are the categories of the analysis, which, like straitjackets, have cuffed into hermetic boxes our understanding of the history of the second half of the twentieth century. This book is a reflection of the paradigm shifts in the field of historical studies: especially the challenges that are coming from many quarters to either the Eurocentric approach or the analysis focused on big actors. Dragostinova demonstrates how to write simultaneously a national and global history with Bulgarian primary sources—thus giving a great example to the scholars of Balkan history how to write important global stories with the region’s archives.

There are two major contributions that this study brings to the history of the Cold War, Eastern Europe, and even world history. First, its focus on culture as an important variable for understanding both globalization—this marks a departure from the bulk of the works that explore glob-
alization, which mainly focus on politics, economics, and technologies—and the relationship between its use for domestic and for international purposes. Second, the pericentric approach: by putting the lens in the margins, it inquires into the role that peripheral actors, like Bulgaria, played in tightening the screws of globalization across both sides of the Iron Curtain and in directions that defy the West-East and North-South axes. Indeed, Cold War from the Margins marginalizes the two later axes and places at its center the East-South axis of interconnections and exchanges. By shedding light on oblique rather than horizontal or vertical flows of people, technology, ideas, knowledge, and investments—as has been the norm so far—Dragostinova's book demonstrates an unexplored and neglected landscape of the 1970s-80s, which, contrary to what has been believed so far, has been extremely dynamic and outstandingly rich.

Questioning the ontology between domestic and international goals and by interlinking them, Dragostinova argues that official culture has been a critical component for the Bulgarian communist regime in both strengthening its power domestically and increasing its prestige internationally. Indeed, cultural diplomacy offered to Bulgarian president Todor Zhivkov and his entourage a space of autonomous action in the world independent from Moscow, thus defying the belief that Bulgaria was an obedient lieutenant of the Soviet Union. At the domestic level, the Bulgarian communist leadership used nationalism and the narrative of Bulgaria's contribution to European civilization to legitimize its power. The 1300th anniversary of the establishment of Bulgaria, in 1981, was a critical moment in this endeavor. Dragostinova explains that the celebrations interlinked the socialist present with the glorious past, where historical longevity catapulted socialism in a national context into a distant and bright future. Besides not using the rhetoric of patriotism to strengthen the bonds between the Sofia regime and Bulgarian society writ large, through the “cultural front” Zhivkov co-opted large segments of the professionals engaged in symbolic production. Indeed, the ambitious project of cultural diplomacy and legitimization of power through nationalism opened venues for social mobility within the Bulgarian communist power structure.

However, as Dragostinova shows, cultural diplomacy had controversial results, depending on the geographic area. In the socialist countries in the Balkans, internationalist brotherhood did not replace nationalism with its competing historical narratives and territorial claims. Sofia's initiatives encountered a cold reception and generated strong reactions. However, this did not happen with NATO members Greece and Turkey, which in 1974 went to war with each other over Cyprus. Both countries, besides having a series of unresolved national issues with Bulgaria, were also located in the rival capitalist camp. In these two countries, especially in Greece, the Bulgarian jubilee received greater and warmer attention. Hence, the use of official culture as a platform to test regional cooperation across the Iron Curtain deepens our understanding of interbloc and intrabloc relations during the Cold War. As Dragostinova observes, compared to sharp ideological confrontations of the late 1940s, a series of initiatives during the detente of the 1970s-80s strengthened cooperation among the Balkans states, regardless of their political regime. The culture was an important medium for forging and facilitating the new regional political climate in the last two decades of the Cold War.

Indeed, it is in the language of culture and the way the Bulgarian professionals of symbolic production tailored their message that we see how Sofia authorities tried to open new grounds for cooperation across the ideological divide. To reach out to the largest possible audiences, the producers of Bulgarian official culture wove a tapestry of messages with national, European, and universal threads. The different layers that composed the package of the Bulgarian official culture gave to
the Sofia regime the flexibility to deploy and adapt its messages according to the area and the sensibility and priorities of their audiences. To increase and promote its prestige throughout the world, the professionals of Bulgarian cultural diplomacy crafted a language that, in the final instance, bypassed the ideological imperatives of socialism.

Thus, when operating in Western Europe and North America, the Bulgarian officials emphasized the historical contribution of their country to the broader European culture. On the other hand, the Bulgarian regime tried to avoid reciprocity in cultural exchanges with Western countries. Identifying contemporary Western culture, including consumerism, as an instrument that would subvert socialist values and its legitimacy vis-à-vis Bulgarian society, Sofia filtered Western cultural diplomacy and selected only those artifacts that appealed and strengthened its official culture and its emphasis on European high culture. Hence, Bulgarian officials not only adapted their message to foreign nonsocialist audiences but also forced Western cultural diplomacy to adapt to Sofia's terms.

When operating in the Global South, though, the Bulgarian officials eschewed the emphasis on European civilization and highlighted the universal values of Bulgarian culture and its role in the development of human civilization. Speaking on behalf of humanity, the Bulgarian communist regime integrated Marxism-Leninist language of anti-imperialism and anticapitalism with its quest to increase international prestige and forge ties with the emerging Third World countries—a goal that was did not preclude gaining access to new investments and reaping material benefits. Dragostinova demonstrates the important role of distinguished personalities, especially among women, in the ambitious Bulgarian endeavor of cultural diplomacy. The relaxing of the relations between the rival blocs during detente and the competition to win the heart and minds of the Third World, created ample room for important Bulgarian political figures to promote exchanges across axes that until the 1970s had been neglected. Perhaps the most important of them was Liudmila Zhivkova, the minister of culture and daughter of Todor Zhivkov. As Dragostinova explains, the vision, ego, and commitment of Liudmila are crucial for understanding the Bulgarian offensive in the global cultural scene during the 1970s-80s. Cambridge-educated, with a keen interest in Eastern religions and a fascinating personality, Zhivkova transformed herself into the face of communist Bulgaria's cultural diplomacy. Her role in promoting both her country and her father's regime demonstrates the critical importance of the agency of politicians from small countries, including women, in exploiting the room detente created for people to navigate the malleable boundaries of the last two decades of the Cold War.

Simultaneously, the friendships Zhivkova built around the world during her tenure as minister of culture are representative of the many connections that Bulgarian specialists and academics built in the Global South due also to her energetic diplomacy. As Dragostinova argues, these connections survived the end of the Cold War, although she does not articulate in what ways they continued after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Expanding on this issue becomes very important when we consider what is currently taking place in many ex-socialist countries that have joined the European Union. Ex-socialist countries that have joined the European Union are building walls across their borders with non-EU members in order to keep emigration from the South at bay. Bulgaria is one of them. Thus, besides many connections forged during the Cold War, the relations between former Soviet bloc countries and those of the Global South are complicated and filled with contradictions. In her epilogue, however, Dragostinova discusses another legacy of the cultural front of the Bulgarian communist regime: nationalism, which, as elsewhere in the Balkans, is still a major ideological force. It may also explain the at-
titude toward emigration and broader challenges
of post-Cold War globalization.

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