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'THERE ARE NO  
TURKS IN  
BULGARIA':  
VIOLENCE,  
ETHNICITY, AND  
ECONOMIC  
PRACTICE IN THE  
BORDER REGIONS  
AND MUSLIM  
COMMUNITIES OF  
POST-SOCIALIST  
BULGARIA

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## **“There are no Turks in Bulgaria”: Violence, Ethnicity, and Economic Practice in the Border Regions and Muslim Communities of Post-Socialist Bulgaria**

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### **Introduction**

Between June and August 1989 over 360,000 Turkish and Roma Bulgarians left Bulgaria for Turkey in what international humanitarian relief organizations at the time described as the largest collective civilian migration since the Second World War. During those months caravans of Turkish families headed for and crossed the south-eastern border. Lines of trucks, cars, and buses could be seen throughout the region, each piled high with people and whatever belongings they had been able to grab hold of and fit into the vehicles in a short time. Those who left abandoned home, land, and whatever they were unable to carry. In some cases, elderly and very young family members were also left behind. In August of that year, fearing that continued inflows would destabilize life in Turkey itself, the Turkish government closed the border to further Bulgarian immigration.

In my remarks here, I am interested in the ways in which the effects of policies of state violence visited on Muslim communities politically in the 1980s and the subsequent economic consequences of post-socialist regional economic collapse (what I shall refer to as ‘economic violence’) have shaped the path of transformation and produced a particular regional model of post-communist transformation. I focus on Kurdjali oblast, a predominantly Muslim, mountainous border region of the Eastern Rhodopes (Figure 1), and I hope to show how the forms of restructuring, re-linking, and internationalization that have emerged point to several important questions in post-socialist transformations.

At issue are questions about the ways in which the legacies of overt violence against ethnic minorities continue to influence the demographic structure and the conditions of life in regional, national, and

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transnational settings; that is, what is the role of state violence in structuring regional change? Second, how have impacted communities adjusted their lifestyles and practices to deal with economic crisis and rapid and intense de-development? Of particular importance here are the ways in which the mobilization of social and community resources forces us to rethink traditional notions of both economy and geography. Third, what are the new geographies of transformation that result? Specifically, in what ways are the social linkages and networks of the Turkish community producing new regional economies that are integrated into new trans-border and trans-national geographies? And finally, given my own specific interests in rural industrialization and small-scale manufacturing industries, how has the mobilization of social and community resources influenced the path of industrial entry and the forms of industrial organization in the newly emerging branches of production? That is, in what ways have the liberalization and internationalization of Bulgarian industries actually been structured and shaped by the social practices of people so recently impacted by such mass forms of state violence? Is it possible to think about a regionally specific model of industrialization and transformation shaped by the responses and struggles of marginalized ethnic communities?

These issues relate directly to three specific projects in which I am engaged.

- Expulsion histories and the emergence of mass unemployment in the south-eastern Rhodopes.
  - What is the role of state violence in structuring regional change?
  - What effects have structural adjustment policies had on peripheral regions?
  - How have impacted communities adjusted their lifestyles and practices to deal with economic crisis and rapid and intense de-development?
  - How does the mobilization of social and community resources force us to rethink traditional notions of both economy and geography?
- Family-to-family linkages among dislocated Turkish Bulgarians.
  - In what ways are the social linkages and networks of the Turkish community producing new regional economies that are integrated into new trans-border and trans-national geographies?
- Outward processing trade and the globalizing of production networks.
  - In what ways have newly globalizing industries actually been structured and shaped by the social practices of people so recently impacted by such mass forms of state violence and economic crisis?

### **‘The Great Excursion’ from Bulgaria: “The Largest Collective Civilian Migration since the Second World War”**

The expulsion/emigration was euphemistically known as the ‘Great Excursion’ and followed intense assimilation pressure and outright physical attacks from the nationalist Zhivkov government against ethnic minorities, particularly Turkish Bulgarians. In its efforts to construct new socialist, modern, Bulgarian, and importantly ‘Slavic’ citizens, the communist government forced minority populations to abandon

traditional cultural practices (such as language, dress, and religion) and assimilate to official ‘Bulgarian’ society.<sup>2</sup> Imprisonment, beatings, and even murder were among the tools used against whole communities in an effort to force compliance, culminating in the forced expulsions of 1989 and official government claims that “There are no Turks in Bulgaria”! In part, my project is to show how this erasure has not only had effects on the immediate conditions of life of people in the region, but continues in important ways to shape the lives and deaths of people under emergent capitalism and post-socialist economic transformations.

In fact, Bulgarian Muslims<sup>3</sup> comprise about 9% of the Bulgarian population and are heavily concentrated in the southern and northeastern regions of the country (Figure 2). The Turkish-speaking (or ethnic Turkish) population is further concentrated within these areas and their distribution is well illustrated by the 1991 electoral results for the predominantly Turkish party, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) (Figure 3). Ethnic Turks remain a predominantly rural population, with 68.5% of Turks still living in villages in 1992, compared to only 28.5% of Slavic Bulgarians (Eminov 1997: 82). Under state socialism, these were among the most economically marginal regions and settlements and their economies were closely tied to extractive industries. In the Kurdjali region, lead and zinc mining and refining were particularly important, as was agriculture, especially tobacco production.

Policies of discrimination, repression, and violence against Turkish Bulgarians and Bulgarian Muslims more generally, were not restricted to the 1980s, although they were particularly harsh in those years. There have been several major waves of forced emigration of Turkish Bulgarians and other Muslim minorities from Bulgaria (Table 1). Between 1878-1912 about 350,000 Muslims (Turks, Pomaks, Roma, and Tartars) emigrated from Bulgaria in response to the Bulgarian national revival after centuries of Ottoman rule. Between 1913-1934, under international agreements, a further 10-12,000 migrated each year. During the Second World War a further 15,000 emigrated. After 1948, communist party structures and policies were expanded quickly, based generally on soviet models of the day. Religious and confessional communities were discouraged, but ethnic communities were given broader ‘cultural’ freedoms. The People’s Education Act provided for the opening of public schools for Turkish, Jewish, and Armenian minority groups (Zhelyazkova 1998a: 15), but by the late 1940s and early 1950s it had become clear that ‘the free expression of ethnic identity’ was also a project of minority re-education. State policies

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<sup>2</sup> It has been suggested that the Zhivkov regime was also concerned about the more rapid growth of the Turkish Bulgarian population, in part because of the ways in which international agreements on the legal status of national minorities had been specified during the 1980s. I am unsure about the importance of this issue.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper I use ‘Bulgarian Muslims’ in its most general sense to refer to Muslims who are Bulgarian citizens. The narrower and more common usage of ‘Bulgarian Muslim’ to refer to Pomaks (as distinct from ethnic Turks and Roma Muslims) is not used here. Instead I use the terms ‘Turkish Bulgarian’, ‘Slavic Bulgarian’, and ‘Pomak’. On the use of the latter, see Brunnbauer (1999).

of forced collectivization of farms, a ban on reading the Koran, and communist party directives on women's equal rights, coincided with Bulgarian Communist Party attacks on the "manifestations of nationalism and religious fanaticism among the local Turks" (Zhelyazkova 1998a: 16) resulted in 1950-51 in the emigration of nearly 155,000 ethnic Turks to Turkey.

In 1958, the Second Plenum of the Politburo changed state policy towards ethnic minorities from one of 'free expression' to a more restrictive and narrower conception of Bulgarian national and ethnic identity. These were the policies of 'assimilation'. First tested on Roma communities, they involved the publishing of bilingual newspapers only in Bulgarian, closing of the Roma theatre, and changing Roma names to more typically Slavic forms. In 1958, the Council of Ministers decreed that the 20-30,000 Roma living in Bulgaria were compelled to settle at the particular place they were living when the decree was passed. All horses and carts were confiscated by the state (Zhelyazkova 1998a: 17). By the 1960s, state policy aimed at creating 'socialist citizens' and 'good Bulgarians' had turned to one of repressive and forcible integration of all Muslim minorities into what was called 'Bulgarian society'. Public elementary and secondary schools for ethnic minorities were closed and all syllabi were 'Bulgarianized'. Newspapers were only published in Bulgarian and Turkish language theaters were closed. In 1964, efforts at name-changing were extended to Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) in the Western Rhodopes, but resistance prevented further extension of this practice at the time.

The Pomak renaming campaign was re-launched in 1972-74, following widespread propaganda efforts to characterize Turks in Bulgaria as a 'fifth column' of Turkey, as alien, and as disloyal, and in 1984/5, to the policies of circumscribing the practice of religion, forms of dress, and cultural activities (including the right to play music and read literature), were added the forced changing of Turkish names to Bulgarian/Slavic names. The effect of these policies amounted to a virtual declaration of civil war against the ethnic Turkish population of Bulgaria and a military occupation of ethnic regions.<sup>4</sup> Zhelyazkova (1998a: 18-19) describes the process in this way:

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<sup>4</sup> This was particularly true in Kurdjali because of the strategic importance of the Bulgarian-Greek and Bulgarian-Turkish border to Warsaw Pact and NATO countries. I use the term 'ethnic region' to denote a region which has a large proportion (although not necessarily a majority) of its population belonging to one or other of these groups. In using this term I do not seek to mobilize a discourse of ethnic or majoritarian nationalism or make assumptions about such 'ethnic' identities. I use the term first to counter the erasure of ethnicity and cultural difference in discourses deployed against the region and people. Throughout I presuppose that 'ethnicity' refers to attributes that are ascribed to, or chosen by, people who are seen to be or see themselves in various ways to be different from any nationally sanctioned characteristics. I also assume that these differences are themselves historically and socially constituted, often in ways that respond to attacks from the outside that strive to deny certain rights and freedoms. That is, I treat ethnicity as a non-essentialist category that has material and political consequences in the ways in which it is deployed and used.

The state applied various forms of compulsion – intimidation by the local administrative authorities, economic blackmail, or overt violence. The routine procedure of filling in the application for changing one's name was usually accompanied by beating even women and children. In the several cases of organized resistance in the rural areas or in small country towns, the government used fire arms and, indeed, human lives were lost. Often the highland villages met the dawn blocked by army and police, and the blockade used to remain until the last village-dweller adopted a new Bulgarian name. Thousands of people, members of the Turkish community, were arrested and, often without being brought to trial or after being given summary justice involving an in-camera court procedure, were sent to prison or forced to labour camps. All this was carried out in top secrecy and complete information obscurity.

Subsequently, the use of Turkish in public was banned, Muslim traditional dress was forbidden, as were festivals and folk music. University departments of Turkish philology were closed. Hospital and clinic health records were destroyed, and most bizarre of all graveyards were destroyed and the “names of dead parents and ancestors were changed in the files of the municipal courts” (Zhelyazkova 1998a: 19). Slavic Bulgarians were drawn into paid networks of informants, to surveil and report on infractions of these prohibitions by their Turkish neighbors, thus breaking long-standing solidarities and introducing tensions within communities, which were further deepened by propaganda work by the state that began to characterize the Turkish minority in ‘anti-state’, ‘subversive’, ‘separatist’ terms. Employment practices were discriminatory throughout the state sector and Muslims found themselves heavily disadvantaged both economically and regionally.

In the spring and summer of 1989, Bulgarian Turks engaged in mass protest actions against the name changing policies. Clashes with army and the police resulted and several were killed or injured. In what might be the most cynical move of the ‘revival process’, Todor Zhivkov opened the border to Turkey in 1989 and forcibly deported several thousand of the protesters and other community leaders, triggering the largest of the forced emigrations (Zhelyazkova 1998a: 11-12). Between June and August 1989 over 360,000 Turkish Bulgarians had crossed the border, abandoning houses, land, and belongings.

The ‘Grand Excursion’ resulted in drastic changes in the demographic and economic structure of villages and towns in all marginal ethnic regions, and especially in the region of Kurdjali (Table 2). Agricultural and manufacturing production was disrupted, land abandonment occurred, and village depopulation was widespread. Whole villages emptied as families left for Turkey. Djebel, in the southern part of Kurdjali, provides an example of how far things went. In May of 1989, protesting five years of an escalating assimilation policy, more than 1,000 citizens participated in a nationwide Muslim hunger strike and public protest.

In southern regions, especially in Djebel, the authorities began widespread beatings, going from house to house and indiscriminately beating the inhabitants. Similarly, those caught in the streets faced arbitrary beatings and for three days, beginning on 22 May – ‘Bloody

Monday' nobody in the city of Djebel was allowed to leave their house... Many, especially those expelled in or before May, were given only a few hours notice and were not allowed to take more than a small bag and no money. All were obliged to leave houses and other valuables behind.

(Poulton 1998: 156-157)

Because of state persecution and subsequent economic difficulties, out-migration from Djebel has been extremely high. Between 1985 and 1992, the population of the *obshtina* decreased from 22,851 to 10,994. During the same period, the population of the town decreased from 18,211 to 8,700. Current estimates by local officials suggest this had declined even further by 1999 to around 7,500. These demographic changes have had direct and indirect effects on the ways in which economic and political liberalization have occurred in the region. That is, structural adjustment and democratization have been reworked through a particular regional demographic structure with important effects on the structure and practices of economic life in the region.

### **From Political to Economic Violence**<sup>5</sup>

The mass out-migrations of 1989 contributed directly to the demise of Todor Zhivkov, as opposition groups opposing the treatment of minorities in the country merged with other opposition groups (such as environmentalists) to form a broad democratic human rights coalition that was able to bring about political change in November 1989. For many of those expelled and many who remained behind, the rather limited forms of democratization that followed the ouster of Zhivkov in November 1989 nevertheless brought immediate political freedoms and legal rights. As a result, about 120,000 of those expelled or who emigrated returned almost immediately.

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term 'economic violence' in this specific instance to denote the social and economic consequences of the application of political and economic liberalization in poorly regulated or unregulated circumstances. That is, 'economic violence' seeks to articulate a concept of responsibility and legacy of state and individual action in which the forces of primitive accumulation were allowed to hold sway over other forms of economic restructuring, in which the state itself fed off its own capacities and infrastructures, and in which marginalized people and regions were (often knowingly) sacrificed to the ideology and technics of structural adjustment. I adapt the term from Michael Watts *Silent Violence: Food, Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*. (University of California Press, 1983). I am, of course, aware of the kinds of objections that might be raised to using the term 'violence' in this way, particularly from those who are concerned about the loss of focus and attention on individual and mass physical trauma such usage might yield. But I remain unconvinced by attempts to circumscribe 'violence' to acts that result in immediate bodily and/or psychological trauma, and instead choose to keep open the category of 'violence' to include the psychological effects of mental abuse and physical threat, the cultural impacts of violence on television and in films, the slow pollution of communities, the use of state power to circumscribe life opportunities and possibilities for expression, and the effects of economic policies aimed at the undemocratic reallocation of social surplus with tragic consequences for lives and bodies.

They returned, however, to a region ravaged by the out-migrations and to an economy that was quickly undermined by the effects of economic liberalization and political deregulation. Neo-liberal structural adjustment policies began in Bulgaria in earnest 1991 (Bristow 1996) and had a serious effect on employment and social well-being almost immediately, with rapid declines in national employment levels and increases in unemployment (ILO 1996/97). Between 1990 and 1994, household income inequality increased, as did the proportion of households with low-incomes (increasing from 13.6% to 67.1%) or in poverty (increasing from 2.1% to 32.1%) (UNICEF 1997, quoted in Smith 2000). Declines have also been geographically uneven and, because regional and ethnic identities are so closely linked, Muslim regions have been among the hardest hit (Ministry of Regional Development and Construction 1996; see also Begg and Pickles 1998 and Pickles and Begg 2000). Neo-liberal policies and their impacts have interacted with the existing organization of industry in three ways.

First, networks of nomenklatura, mafia, and social relations (*blizki*), crucial during the command economy, persisted (see Creed 1998 and Begg and Pickles 1998). Second, when exposed to world markets labor intensive industries located in rural and peripheral regions suffered mass unemployment as enterprises were closed and equipment and production was withdrawn to core plants (Begg and Pickles 1998). Once again, these tended to be ethnic regions. Because of the history of their creation, these branches of industry were the politically least powerful. Lacking the positional power of large state enterprises of the commanding heights of the economy and the strong nomenklatura links of large enterprises, few were able to adapt in the short-run to Ministry edicts to cease operations, the predatory practices of mother firms, or the hardening of budget constraints. Third, the social relations of production in these assembly workshops were predicated on flexible labor contracts and seasonal shifts in labor allocation.<sup>6</sup> These flows in and out of factory work, and the organization of production to allow for periodic demands on workers' time for agricultural work, became important elements in the willingness of managers to close workshops after 1989. These were also important experiences for workers, who remained largely quiescent in the face of such closures, even though for many workshop employment was one of their few sources of formal income and an important component of their household budget.<sup>7</sup>

Neo-liberal legislation and market exposure combined with organizational and sectoral legacies of the command economy to further disadvantage the Kurdjali region. Rapid de-collectivization, the loss of CMEA (Council for Mutual Economic Aid) markets for apparel, textiles, and tobacco, and the peripheral

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<sup>6</sup> See Pickles (1995) for an account of parallel labor flexibilities in large state enterprises.

<sup>7</sup> Worker opposition and strikes have occurred in the industry in Kurdjali in the 1990s, and some have been successful in raising wage rates and changing working conditions. But with the exception of occasional newspaper accounts, I am unaware of any systematic assessment of worker unrest in the contemporary workshop economy in the region.



nature of Kurdjali workshops and branch plants within the command economy structure all resulted in massive labor shedding. Between 1990 and 1993, Kurdjali lost 70.3% of its jobs compared to 21.3% for the nation, and in 1992 69% of Kurdjali's labor force was classified as unemployed or economically inactive (NSI Kurdjali 1997: 135).

In 1996, Bulgaria's regions were redefined based on economic performance since 1989 (MRDC). The mountainous regions continued to be disadvantaged with "funds in material production and infrastructure three times lower than the national average" (MRDC 1996: 27). Among the four Bulgarian *okrugi* designated as the most depressed districts were included Smolyan, and Kurdjali (the two others were Vidin and Pernik). Continued decline in these regions was reflected in high unemployment (Begg and Pickles 1998), high out-migration (Wyzan 1998), and differential labor shedding in the workshop economies. Branch-plant closure was endemic throughout the region and the Ministry of Regional Development and Construction (1996: 22) even argued that depressed and peripheral districts were the:

...districts in Bulgaria where transition period critical events are most exposed. The affiliate economy existing there was the first to sustain the economic crisis. The affiliates and departments of large enterprises from central districts have been closed nearly 100 per cent.

From the smallest to the largest, manufacturing firms in the region lost orders, experienced budget difficulties, closed workshops, and shed labor quickly. After 1990, national manufacturing employment declined precipitously, with proportionally greater declines in Kurdjali than nationally (Table 3). Poverty rates increased dramatically and, even worse, basic infrastructure (from kindergarten and child care to primary and secondary education to health care to bus service and road quality) was allowed to deteriorate rapidly. The proportion of Bulgarians falling below internationally set poverty indices increased and processes of de-development deepened.

Conditions in Muslim and especially Turkish regions were particularly dire because of their specific state socialist industrial structure. These regions were predominantly agricultural, with labor-intensive and small-scale family tobacco farms predominating. In the mountainous regions of southeastern Bulgaria, large-scale centralized mining operations were the primary industrial employer for men, and large textile factories and small-scale clothing and shoe workshops provided employment for women. But after 1991, these collapsed quickly and mass unemployment and economic crisis came to typify Turkish Bulgarian regions (Begg and Pickles 1998; Pickles and Begg 2000). Georgieva (1998: 45) has suggested that since 1989 between 500,000–700,000 Bulgarians left the country primarily for economic reasons, while local officials suggest that as many as 200,000 - 400,000 may have left from regions with large Muslim populations (Field interviews).

## The Geographical Traces of State Violence: “...incessant work and maximum economies...”<sup>8</sup>

For those remaining, economic conditions deteriorated quickly. Early reforms in Kurdjali led to what elsewhere Michael Burawoy (1996: 1109) has described as ‘economic involution’; “a process of economic degeneration in which the economy feeds on itself” through a reworking of exchange relationships instead of a fundamental change in the relations of production. In this process, the role of powerful economic actors in orchestrating relations of exchange and the social networks that support them was crucial. This was certainly the case in the large state enterprises in the commanding heights of the economy and in many core enterprises of lower-value added branches in Bulgaria. These were effectively ‘privatised’ in ways that are now well known, involving little public participation: branch plants were closed to protect the jobs and wage bills of core enterprises and workers, the resources of state enterprises were ‘pirated’, and viable enterprises were ‘taken over’ by manager privatisations of one kind or another. These social networks were extremely powerful and effective. But, in the early stages of transition they disadvantaged Kurdjali and ethnic Turks who, because of their already marginalized socio-economic status, were unable to benefit from such rapid and large-scale forms of primitive accumulation (Pickles 1995; Begg and Pickles 1998; Begg, Meurs, and Pickles 1999). Only in public sector employment did ethnic Turkish employment increase in absolute and relative terms after 1989, and this occurred in large part because of the local power of the MRF. For the general population, regional economic decline and mass unemployment mobilized kinship, friendship and social networks to sustain family and community members.<sup>9</sup> Social networks have been particularly important in the circulation and distribution of remittance and pension incomes, and non-commodified food supplies. These have been important in shaping the re-emergence of industrial capital in the region. It is to these social networks that I now turn.

Extended family networks have always been a common feature of daily life in ethnic Turkish communities. As in Bulgarian families generally, networks of *blizki* or close people are structured in terms of family and locality networks, age, school, army, and marriage cohorts, and even year-of-birth affiliations (see Cellarius 2000, Creed 1998, and Ledenova 1998). These networks (and many others) operate as stronger or weaker functioning systems of reciprocity, trust, and debt that individuals, families,

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<sup>8</sup> Georgieva (1998: 57).

<sup>9</sup> Not all these ‘mobilizations’ involve direct financial or material support, although often they do. The ‘mobilization’ of such support networks can just as easily involve the deepening of already existing masculinist and patriarchal practices. Certainly in non-Muslim Bulgarian households such *blizki* have probably contributed as much to increases in alcohol and cigarette consumption as they have to direct economic or material subventions of the household. In ethnic Turkish Bulgarian households such *blizki* networks also contribute to marital conflict in situations in which (as wives describe them) unemployed husbands and sons “sit around” while wives and daughters go out to work.

and whole communities use on a regular basis, but can call upon to a greater extent in times of difficulty and need (Czako and Sik 1995). Besides providing material and social support, such *blizki* also operate as channels of communication and exchange, providing opportunities for learning and increasing the chances of interaction, contact, and support to a degree not possible for individuals who are not so ‘networked’.

*Alternative forms of cash income*

During the period of the command economy, Kurdjali’s economy relied on the trinity of tobacco, mining, and apparel. After 1989, employment for men in agriculture and manufacturing collapsed quickly, and mining slowly declined. Enterprise closure was especially swift and definitive in those branches of industry typically employing male workers. Unlike apparel workshops, where managers and workers held out hope for at least short-term contracts and a limited return to work, other sectors were closed permanently and often machinery was sold-off or shipped out to core enterprises in urban areas (Begg and Pickles 1998) (Table 4). With employment declines in agriculture, manufacturing, and mining, male workers were particularly hard-hit by recession. The number of ethnic Turkish men working on migrant labour contracts (especially in construction) increased substantially, and as a result these men are absent from towns and villages for long periods during the year. One important consequence has been the institutionalising of a household economy based on migrant male labour remittances, which in turn has contributed to changes in basic gender roles and work responsibilities within the household.

With men unemployed or absent from the villages, women were forced to deepen their historical reliance on agricultural work and off-farm employment. Under state socialism, women were already heavily involved in off-farm employment and this continues, with women comprising one-half of the formal labour-force (National Statistical Institute 1996, 1998). Because agricultural labour is seasonal, workshops (especially apparel assembly) absorbed the surplus labour of the village. In what follows, I want to suggest some of the ways in which this articulation has been important in shaping the specific pathways and industrial forms emerging in the resurgence of the apparel industry.

In some cases, households have little or no access to land or resources or ability to farm whatever land is available to them, and only a minority has access to formal or informal sources of income. In these situations state pensions and time-limited unemployment benefits provide the only source of income. As in post-colonial economies, remittances and pensions support large numbers of people beyond the immediate recipients. In one context, however, transition did open up new avenues for ethnic Turks, and the region more generally, through the emergence of forms of merchant capitalism. The mass emigration/expulsion of ethnic Turks in 1989 and the subsequent return of some of those who left created

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exchange and trading networks that have had profound effects on the regional economy. With the advent of more liberal social and economic policies, borders have been opened and traders have been able to normalize trade relations that were once seen to be illegal. Throughout the 1990s, traders travelled regularly between Bulgaria and Turkey exchanging goods and money legally and illegally, and maintaining links among family and village networks. The ‘Turkish trader’ is now a well-known figure throughout rural Bulgaria (Chevalier 1999), supplying low-cost imported consumer goods to all areas of the country. Because of language, proximity, and this history of cross-border contact, the border to Turkey has emerged as an important trading zone and the local economy has become further enmeshed in broader national and international networks of exchange, movement, and association. Neighbourhoods and even entire villages in Turkey were settled by Bulgarian Turks. Many maintained contacts with family members in Bulgaria and refugees and labour migrants often entered Turkey with their assistance. Such flows of refugees, emigres, and returnees consolidated and extended the trans-border reach of these families, creating new diasporic and trans-national geographies of movement and exchange and opening opportunities for new kinds of investment (see Zhelyazkova 1998c).

After 1989, legal and illegal imports of consumer goods across the border from Turkey boomed. ‘Turkish traders’ selling imported low cost clothing, shoes, toys and appliances were quickly able to establish their position in the Bulgarian market. Managers of Bulgarian apparel firms, particularly those competing for national markets, complained bitterly that this competition hurt local producers. Certainly, Turkish social and cross-border networks and experiences fostered the rapid emergence of a petty merchant class among Turkish traders, and some of these were able to leverage their positions and markets into substantial sources of accumulation. Moreover, such patterns of migrant work and trading also seem to have played a role in shaping the actual paths of entry of new cross-border apparel contracting and direct investment, with Turkish and Greek firms predominating in the start-ups of the early 1990s (see Pickles and Begg 2000). Turkish entrepreneurs and traders, in particular, were among the first international investors involved directly in the region’s apparel industry, either through the establishment of new factories or in trading and labour arbitraging for locally owned firms.<sup>10</sup> As with initial Greek investments in the western part of the country, the first Turkish<sup>11</sup> ‘entrepreneurs’ tended to work on short time horizons, extracting profit from short-run contracts and sometimes deploying highly exploitative, even illegal, work practices. As one informant explained, “They take in young girls, work them long hours six or seven days a week until their eyes or their fingers fail, and then they throw them out.” These entrepreneurs were also among the more ‘creative’ in the production systems they were willing to deploy

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<sup>10</sup> Larger-scale Turkish investment has also entered the region, notably in the planned Turkish hydro-electric and recreation complex in the hills above Kurdjali.

<sup>11</sup> There were examples of both Turkish and Bulgarian nationals in this category.

to ‘make contract’. In one case, a Turkish contractor arranged with a local mayor to establish a village-wide ‘putting-out’ system, in which cloth and patterns were supplied to women in the village who worked piecework from their homes. The mayor operated as the clearing agent and subcontractor. In another case, a ‘Turkish’ investor had managed to set up a sweatshop in former office space rented from a local authority. The ‘enterprise’ closed within weeks and ‘local lore’ had it that it had re-opened in a neighbouring village. A third case is, perhaps, more typical. Here a Bulgarian Turkish man had opened a small workshop employing half a dozen sewers, mainly from his own extended family, fulfilling contract orders for uniforms for the German army, contracts he had learned about while previously working in a large state apparel enterprise.

As apparel enterprises become increasingly linked to larger national and international buying chains, the importance of these kinds of locally specific linkages and legacies may diminish as the cultural practices of the broader economy are becoming more important determinants of struggles over wages, contracts, and the competitive position of regional producers. It is to these broader social conditions that I now turn.

*Re-peasantisation, the deepening of subsistence production, and natural resource use?*

In what more generally Smollet (1989) has called “the economy of jars,” rural and urban Bulgarians have long supported each other through informal kin exchanges. Indeed, Chevalier (1999: 11) found that all forms of village exchange, including monetary, now operate largely within family and village networks: “several changes have occurred which provoke a new expansion of the familial and personal spheres, a withdrawal into kinship and local identity.” Produce, including large quantities of jarred preserves, continues to make its way (as it has for many years) from village to city, and children and grandchildren contribute with occasional weekend and summer-time farm labour. Money is increasingly important to the pensioned villager in these village-city exchanges (Chevalier 1999), but for many whose access to money is restricted to welfare distributions, pensions, and remittances, subsistence production, food gathering, and networks of reciprocal exchange have also remained important.

Clarke (1998) and Smith (2000) have each argued that in Eastern Europe more generally labour market flexibility brought about by neo-liberal employment policies promoted a reversion “to subsistence production as wages fall below the minimum necessary for physical survival” (Clarke 1997: 25). Thus, they see one response to economic immiseration having been a return to the land, an effective re-peasantisation or the production of a rural proletariat. Under conditions of mass unemployment, rural dwellers have drawn more heavily on the resources available to them (land, social connections, natural resources) as survival strategies. The UNDP Report for 1998 also suggested that during the 1990s a “majority of Bulgarians became reliant on survival strategies, such as household/urban agriculture” (p.11),

with more than one third of households producing their own fruits, vegetables, and preserves on small plots. But, Meurs (1999, 2000) has argued that this ‘strategies of survival’ argument misreads the historical importance of private production for domestic household consumption (see also Smith 2000). In her view, subsistence production never did cease being an important element in household economies throughout the period of communist rule. While, neo-liberal adjustment policies resulted in unemployment rates of over 90% in some villages and land restitution broke-up the co-operative farms and returned title over small parcels of land to farmers, there is little evidence of an increase in subsistence production. Instead, as total household budgets declined after 1989, the relative importance of subsistence production from small-plot farming increased. Between 1989 and 1996, while income from household plots rose from 14.7% to 22.6% of average income, the contribution of salaries and wages fell from 55.9% to 39.5% (hermes.nsi 1999). This is what Meurs (2000) calls a ‘truncated transition’ – simply put, people are living and dying poorer.

More recently, Clarke (2000) has also questioned the ‘myth of the dacha’, arguing that there is no general return to the land in similar circumstances in Russia, in part because access to land and the ability and resources to farm it was uneven. In short, those with resources have been able to farm while those in greatest need as a result of loss of employment income have been unable to either gain access to sufficient land or, where land is available, do not have the resources or know-how to cultivate it. In this sense, there has been a differentiation of the population based on access to resources and know-how. While those with access to land and resources to farm have increased their levels of activity and dependence on production, those most in need and lacking access to land and resources have, for the most part, been unable to compensate for loss of waged income by turning to agriculture. Instead of a re-peasantization or a deepening of subsistence production as a survival strategy, people without land and resources have been forced to survive at much lower levels of economic well-being and are, as a result, much more at risk of illness and malnutrition. Meurs (2000: 1) seeks to further nuance this reading. Instead of a de-monetization occurring in the rural economy, to which rural households must adapt, Meurs argues that rural households have “a logic of their own, distinct from the neo-liberal logic of macro policies.” That is, household processes are not responses to state policies, but instead are adaptations originated by autonomous households which were only weakly integrated into the macro-structures of central planning in the first place. Pre-socialist and now non-capitalist agrarian practices suffuse the rural household economy and cannot be reduced to either. In Smith’s (2000) terms, since these are non-market processes, the current transformation must be seen as consisting of a plurality of economic practices, both capitalist and non-capitalist. In this view, households were differentially integrated into state structures prior to 1989 and these differences provide the legacies and conditions from which current adjustments to

economic crisis are occurring. For Meurs (1999: 6), since rural households were heavily engaged in non-socialist production prior to 1989, with large amounts of household time spent in simple reproduction, we cannot see current subsistence production either as a ‘distinct survival strategy’ in the face of economic crisis or a non-capitalist agrarian holdover from socialism. Instead, she suggests, they are continuations of earlier forms of simple reproduction and are not adaptations or forms of resistance to new circumstances.

These arguments are important correctives to the too easy characterization of agrarian production as reactive to economic crises, but they also need to account more fully for the meaning of ‘continuity’. For Burawoy and Verdery (1999) such explanations depend on notions of culture and history as static, failing to adequately account for the ‘re-workings’ and ‘re-articulations’ present in apparently similar practices at different times and in distinctly different social and economic circumstances. Further, in postulating autonomous and parallel forms of economic practice (socialist and non-socialist, capitalist and non-capitalist), both Meurs and Smith may not pay sufficient attention to the ways in which such modes of production may be historically and regionally articulated, and the ways in which such semi-autonomous spheres were always also articulated in rural household economies. In the context of north-eastern Italy, Holmes (1989: 9) has pointed to this ‘liminal’ status of the ‘worker-peasant’ household economy:

The members of each liminal group employ a mosaic of productive arrangements in their day-to-day lives and over the course of their labor careers. In rural households, individuals engage in agrarian and industrial wage work, mining, construction, and a range of scavenging activities, as the family moves through the domestic cycle. Despite the diversity of nonfarm employment, ties among family and kin to a common round of agrarian activities make the rural household the center of peasant-worker livelihood and society. Thus, worker peasantries are sustained by individuals who, in their efforts to secure a livelihood, create linkages between rural households and the wage nexus. Six major groups composed the peasant-worker social organization of Rubignacco [north-east Italy] during the first half of this century. Each group was characterized by a slightly different constellation of productive involvements and hence a discrete set of relationships to landlords, employers, government offices, political parties, and even the church. As a result, each of these social groups displayed a different relative status and economic security, a different political predisposition, and a different potential for change and reconfiguration.

In our present case, this points again to the importance of a consideration of the flexibilities workers have constructed for regulating their entry and exit from waged employment, whether under state socialism or emergent peripheral capitalism, and the ways in which seasonal availability of ‘free’ household labour, remittance and pension economies, and home production have historically been important for the forms and practices of industrial employment. The fact that labour shedding after 1989 could occur on such a scale and at such a rapid pace without corresponding labour or social unrest can only be understood, I argue, in terms of this legacy. The loss of jobs brought serious economic hardships to many families of workers, but households had long been used to extended periods of lay-off and non-work followed by calls to return to work as orders came in. In this sense, too, the rapid return to work as

new factories opened in the 1990s was a form of business as usual, building into the new private factories the very same flexibilities (and powers) that such labour contracts presuppose.

As a result of employment uncertainties for all household members, food production and *blizki* have been intimately related in Bulgarian social and economic life. In relative terms households have become more dependent on non-formal sector sources of subsistence, exchange, and income. These include land-use and natural resource extraction practices such as collecting on common lands and public forests, hunting, free-range grazing of sheep and goats, and wood gathering for heating and construction, along with associated wood and leather craftwork (Cellarius 1999, Chevalier 1999, Pickles *et al* 2001). As wage income and state benefits declined, these - like subsistence farming and gardening - became relatively more important.<sup>12</sup>

In these examples, social practices are also - importantly - border practices. In this sense, the struggles of even the most remote village and farmer are articulated with national and international cultures and economies, an articulation clearly illustrated by the hand-written timetables of taxis and buses leaving for Bursa and Istanbul posted in remote villages throughout the region.<sup>13</sup> The effect has been the construction and deepening of trans-border geographies and trans-national linkages. It is to these that we now turn.

### **Living on the border: “It’s best for one to live between two countries”<sup>14</sup>**

Surprisingly little research has been carried out on what happened to those who left the country in ‘the Great Excursion’ and the circumstances they faced. The International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations has recently released a detailed report on the situation: ‘*Between Adaptation and Nostalgia: The Bulgarian Turks in Turkey*’ (Zhelyazkova 1998b) and I draw upon this report here to supplement my own field research. Although the report’s primary focus is on adaptation to Turkish circumstances and nostalgia for Bulgarian homes, landscapes, and practices, it is possible to construct a partial picture of the kinds of cross-border activities that have emerged in recent years. The report itself

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<sup>12</sup> This is particularly the case where new markets have also opened up for the products of forest gathering. Three examples are notable: international markets for local mushrooms are managed through travelling buyers often supplying markets in Italy, the war in Kosovo increased demand for cut-timber, and (in the absence of any other economic opportunities in 1997 and 1998) Rhodope households pushed the limits of potato cultivation in order to have some commodities for barter. The growing dependence on forest resources is well illustrated by the case of one village in a rural district of the Western Rhodopes. Here 100% of respondent households now depend upon locally collected firewood for heat, 50% collect herbs, 42% use ‘common’ forest lands for pasturing cattle and sheep, and 27% use them for collecting foodstuffs (Staddon 1999).

<sup>13</sup> In this paper I do not discuss the broader effects of the militarization and more recent demilitarization of the border regions. These processes obviously have had an enormous influence on the kinds of practices and linkages that have emerged in the area.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Georgieva (1998, 51).



tends to downplay the importance of linkages, contacts, and networks of support among Turkish Bulgarians in Turkey. But the anecdotes and interviews they report also tell of a community in which, despite tensions and difficulties in housing and feeding new immigrants, strong relations of reciprocity and exchange have emerged among the communities on each side of the border.

Turkish Bulgarians have long dreamed of a day when it would be possible to move freely across the border that separated families throughout the Cold War period. Many Turkish Bulgarians who have lived in Turkey for many years and have become dual citizens in Turkey still maintain family and village contacts. Family members visit each other in Turkey and in Bulgaria, and gift exchanges are common.

In our interviews, the informants kept mentioning the names of their close or distant relations, neighbors and friends, who had “left for Turkey”. Everywhere, at all village and town bus-stations, hand-written notes announced the weekly time-tables of buses traveling to Bursa, Istanbul and Izmir. Almost all informants spoke of journeys to Turkey. In scores of homes, informants would show with satisfaction the articles in their homes’ interior they had received as presents by their friends and relatives or had brought themselves from Turkey....

(Georgieva 1998: 47-48)

They expect their children to matriculate in Bulgaria and to train at university there, because they think standards are higher. Some even return for health care and in some cases there are reports of doctors being brought to Turkey from Bulgaria because of the fear that local doctors were not adequate to the task.

For many of them it is attractive and profit-yielding to practise their profession in part-time employment during the winter season in Turkey, and return during the spring-summer season to cultivate their own plots of land in Bulgaria, to sell the crop, to enjoy the beauties of nature and the contacts with relatives and friends, and in the autumn to return again to their well-paid jobs of skilled workers, technicians, etc.

(Zhelyazkova 1998a: 39)

The result of these, and many other, practices that maintain contacts with people and land in Bulgaria has been the emergence of a series of independent and richly textured trans-border communities, each of which circulate money, goods, individuals, and knowledge as needs arise. Initially functioning as social networks that absorbed the worst horrors of assimilation and expulsion policies for newly arrived residents in Turkey and to sustain those experiencing intense hardships in Kurdjali, these communities of support and exchange have – particularly since 1989 – been mobilized as networks of mutual exchange of both material and symbolic support.

In fact, the role of social networks in fostering responses to the economic crisis wrought by liberalization is, however, far more complex than can be captured by categories such as ‘networks of support,’ remittances, subsistence agriculture, and natural resource extraction practices. In one particularly interesting example, lacking few effective economic options, leaders in one Rhodope village have drawn upon family and other social networks to develop a particularly novel and, in the short term, effective

collective response to economic crisis. Consciously modeled a migration strategy on Turkish Bulgarian experiences, contacts were used, familial and friendship ties were mobilized, and resources were pooled to send ‘starter families’ to emigrate to Germany and the United States. Initial immigrants overseas and family and professional contacts in Sofia provided the necessary legal assistance, return remittances, and jobs for family members. Villagers provided local support for families to relocate to take up these opportunities. Over sixty families from this village have already moved to the United States in this way. The precise and manifold ways in which ‘social adjustment’ is occurring remains an issue for further investigation.

### **Industrial resurgence, *ishleme*, and alternative forms of internationalization**

Traditions of reciprocity, non-wage labor, remittance, private farming, and off-farm employment in tobacco processing have proven to be important enabling elements for the re-emergence of assembly production of apparel for global markets (*ishleme*) (Table 5). It is generally argued that export processing industries, especially in apparel, seek labor pools that are characterized by ‘free’ labor, low wages, and disciplined female workers. To some extent this is true. But three related factors are also crucial. First, *ishleme* enterprises need labor flexibility to hire and fire workers as orders require. Second, managers increasingly need flexible workers who have the skill to adapt to the changing demands of customers, especially as contracts begin more and more to specify that products must be of high quality. Third, intense competition within the global apparel industry necessitates that managers must control upward pressures on wages. In Kurdjali, a variety of responses to maintaining competitive advantage through holding the line on wage pressure have emerged. Many enterprises seek to maintain current wage levels, which are low by international standards but may be average for the region. To do this, managers have creatively extended the labor pool (sometimes illegally by hiring workers below the ages of 17 or 18 without permission from the state), recruited new workers across wider areas, relocated production, set up subsidiary workshops in surrounding villages, or subsidized costs of goods such as food or transport). In other cases, enterprises are allowing wages to rise but only through worker agreement on increasing control over the work-process, raising production standards, or flexible assignment of tasks. In many firms, strenuous efforts are made to recapture worker wages through on-site subsidized cafes, shops, and health services.

*Ishleme* contracts must be constantly renewed and new contracts and buyers found. As a result, product lines change frequently to accommodate buyer specifications, who are themselves involved in predicting, matching, and creating consumer demand for material, design, style, and quality of clothing. Under these

conditions, flexibilities in production and employment are increasingly critical to the success of producers supplying such markets and bidding for contracts.

Export processing industries are benefiting from comparatively low-wage labor in regions of high unemployment. But, low wages are sustained only to the extent that household budgets are supplemented by complex non-formal economic practices. *Ishleme* firms thus articulate in diverse ways with the labor demands of household economies. In so far as they do, they reproduce and reconfigure the broader social and economic flexibilities that sustained Turkish households during the worst years of state socialist political and economic dislocation and that are now necessary under conditions of highly segmented processes of labor market restructuring.

With men unemployed or absent from the villages, women have been forced to deepen their historical reliance on agricultural work and off-farm employment. Under state socialism, women were already heavily involved in off-farm employment and this seems to be continuing, with women comprising one-half of the formal labor-force in 1986 and 1992. Because agricultural labor is seasonal, apparel assembly absorbed the surplus labor of the village. But, it is this articulation that has also been important in the resurgence of apparel assembly for global markets. At the same time, historic household strategies and social networks have begun to ‘domesticate’ the apparel assembly operations.

It is, in fact, the very complexity (and social and historical depth) of ‘peasant-worker’ household economies in Kurdjali that have played an important role in the particular form of cheap wage economy that has emerged in recent years; wages and uncertain work regimes are underwritten by other forms of family income. But it is these same complex patterns of alternative though limited livelihoods, and their necessary demands on flexible time, that suggest that there are limits to efforts that seek to generalize ‘gulag’ production in the region. First, the diversity of production forms and relations in the region is hard to capture under the rubric of low-wage assembly production (although more than any other single descriptor, this is an accurate one). Second, low wages and despotic work practices are already being met, albeit on a limited scale, by worker resistance and pressure for better conditions. And third, these very conditions of social reproduction are now producing capital deepening and higher value production, as manufacturers realise the marginal utility and practical necessity of improved wages and working conditions for a relatively well trained, disciplined, and highly flexible workforce.

Local apparel producers are adjusting quickly to make use of whatever resources they have at their disposal to maintain their position in a highly competitive industry. For some, this still means taking every advantage of desperate workers who will work long hours for low wages. In other cases, new imperatives are forcing trade-offs with wage costs. First, workers themselves are increasingly resisting the exploitation they face. They do this in many ways, but one way is through their defence of seasonally flexible work

arrangements. In some cases, workers have attempted (often unsuccessfully) to form trade unions and (more successfully) to push for higher wages and better working conditions. For those firms that are increasingly constrained by international buyer demands for higher quality and quick turnover times, workers are becoming a more important resource than just 'nimble fingers'. They are being asked to take responsibility at each stage of production for quality control and to agree to the kind of 'storming' practices long familiar under state socialism, in which contract deadlines are met through extra work hours (see Pickles 1995). Where higher quality and higher value are involved, sweatshop arrangements can only work for short periods of time, although there are clear efforts by some manufacturers to sustain them. Indeed, in several cases where high quality international buyers carefully regulate the working environments in firms with which they deal, managers have been found to be subcontracting work from the monitored and sanctioned 'clean' factory to 'hidden' sweatshops nearby (Georgieva 2000).

In other cases, however, even where production is directed almost entirely to export-processing and assembly of imported materials on contract to international buyers, the needs of the industry may be congruent with at least marginal pressure from workers to increase wages and conditions. While low wages are the primary driving force behind the geographical relocation of apparel production to Eastern Europe (especially under EC OPT regime arrangements), competitive pressures within the industry and their articulation with specific regionalized social formations are giving rise to a wide diversity of industrial forms and workplace arrangements on the ground.

The combined effects of out-migration and demand have been to create local labor shortages within Turkish communities. One result is the re-working of state socialist practices of flexible labor arrangements within factories. In villages and towns with tight labor markets (a phenomenon increasingly found in the settlements throughout the region), managers continue the longstanding practice of permitting female workers to schedule work-time around the seasonal demands of agricultural production, especially tobacco. As under state socialism, current managers struggle to orchestrate production under conditions of labor shortage and seasonal competition for labor-time. For the female workers, flexible labor time permits the women of the village to articulate formal and informal work regimes and to rely on multiple economic strategies in situating where other forms of household income (particularly male wages) may not be available. Indeed, one consequence of labor shortage for enterprises with increasingly demanding international contracts has been the emergence of some marginal labor pressure for improved wages and working conditions. As international marketers and name-brand buyers demand higher quality production under strict supply deadlines, the ability of workers to maintain flexible labor-time arrangements and even to leverage increases in wages and improvements in working conditions increases, 'gulag Europe' notwithstanding (see Begg, Pickles, and Roukova 2000).

In some enterprises, efforts to restructure work practices in order to meet international quality controls, to retain workers, to ensure workers remain on premises, or to capture some portion of wages back from workers have resulted in the expansion of services for workers on-site. In enterprises with strong orders, strict quality demands, and fixed deadlines, managers and owners are adding coffee bars, restaurants, shops, and other facilities to the factory. In other enterprises, where workers have been hired from a wide area and therefore must travel long distances to work, providing free or heavily subsidized food has become an essential pre-requisite for maintaining quality production throughout the working day. Reminiscent of integrated state socialist firms, these socialized factory operations nonetheless represent new forms of factory regime in the region aimed explicitly at the restructuring of shop-floor relations and the extension of control systems to production (see Burawoy 1985).<sup>15</sup>

Under state socialism, employment and subsistence practices embedded in family and village relationships marginalized the ethnic Turkish population. This marginalization deepened even further with neo-liberal economic adjustment policies, resulting in the collapse of employment and the rise of mass unemployment after 1990. These conditions and responses to them in turn have further differentiated traditionally segmented labor markets; limited increases in bargaining power for female apparel workers are emerging in regions with high male unemployment. One consequence is a deepening articulation of a dynamic industrial branch that is increasingly tied to international marketing structures with formal and non-formal household economic practices geared to economic survival. Apparel (and shoe) enterprises experiencing an industrial boom in a regional context of mass unemployment, household poverty, and predominantly female wage-earners are, thus, reworking state socialist forms of ‘domestication’ and producing new forms of industrial organization and practice. These combined histories have created the conditions for the emergence of a new form of economic growth in the region: a boom economy based on export processing in apparel (*ishleme*) in the midst of economic circumstances of great deprivation. One result is the reworking gender and class relations within Muslim households and communities, while another is the reconfiguration of transborder linkages and flows and the constitution of transnational communities and economies that we are only beginning to recognize.

Together these provided the conditions for the emergence of new firms in a highly competitive international industry. But the new firms have had to adjust to the social conditions in which they have emerged, and in many cases have found those conditions valuable in their own efforts to manage costs and

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<sup>15</sup> Labor shortage in a growing industry combined with the permeability of the Bulgarian-Turkish border has provided some Bulgarian Turkish women with a different option. Highly educated and well-trained workers in Kurdjali apparel firms migrate to equivalent firms in Turkey where they are command higher wages and, because of their skill levels, have better opportunities for promotion. Such labor migration further diminishes the bargaining power of firms located in Kurdjali.

deal with uncertainty in contracting and pricing. Seasonal agricultural labour demands necessitate flexible labour contracts, but also result in greater willingness among workers to tolerate variable working hours and periodic lay-offs. Traditional and new natural resource uses are crucial elements of many household budgets, but they also reduce pressure on wages. Pensions, remittances, and petty trading similarly inject new, albeit limited resources into the household economy, but remittance and trading economies also provide opportunities for learning about other economic opportunities that might otherwise not be available to village communities. In this sense, at least, village life is ‘remote’ only in the sense of distance from urban centres. Culturally and economically villagers tend to be highly integrated into national, and in some cases international, circuits, and practically they have - I think - shaped the organizational and production forms of the emerging new firms.

### **Conclusion: “Working-off-the-past”**

On March 6, 1990, the Bulgarian Parliament enacted a law on the Names of Bulgarian Citizens officially condemning the forced name changes as a gross violation of civil liberties and enabling the restoration of Turkish names (Eminov 1997: 20). Article 36 (2) of the 1991 constitutions stated that “[c]itizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian shall have the right to study and use their own language” (Eminov 1997: 139). Similarly, the new constitution gives any citizen the right to develop “his [sic] own culture in accordance with his ethnic self-identification” (Eminov 1997: 140).

Discrimination against Muslims has declined substantially and for a few years, at least, the Muslim minority populations (especially ethnic Turks) experienced something of a cultural revival as a result of their re-linking with the broader Muslim world. Between 1989 and 1992, the number of functioning mosques rose from 300 to 920 (Eminov 1997: 63). Subsequently, mosque building was supported by funds from Libya, Iraq, and the United States among others, leading to the construction of a further 329 new mosques by 1995 (Eminov 1997: 21). Literature and broader cultural practices (dress, practices, and speech) underwent a vigorous revival.

There are, however, at least four important senses in which the legacy of violence still functions as a kind of historical trace of ethnic nationalism or as a kind of silent violence. In this sense, the process of working-off the past is only beginning. First, despite the best efforts to create a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic state, the government’s own Europe-centered Bulgaria 2001 Program does not escape the language of Slavic nationalism, linking as it does ‘Bulgarian education’ to “Christian values” even as it asserts the separation of church and state (Section X). Second, despite the re-emergence of a democracy movement in 1996-97, the practical understanding and exercise of democracy in Bulgaria remains marginal to the

technocratic, managerial functioning of state bureaucracies. In this context at least, state policy is not open for negotiation. The result is that, third, commitments to a neo-liberal model of integration into the international economy have deepened the patterns of economic and social inequality bequeathed by state socialism. Consequently, these patterns continue to reproduce and influence the path of regional transformation. But, fourth and finally, the historical legacies, social linkages, and geographies of political and economic violence continue to structure life in the villages and towns of the region as they continue to be re-integrated into international and trans-national networks.

In this sense, the democratization process itself has been a ‘working-off’ or ‘working-through’ (Habermas 1997) of the legacy of ethnic division and violence under nationalist centralism by ethnic Turkish Bulgarians themselves. It has also been a ‘working-through’ for Bulgarians more generally.

In a recent article -- ‘Turks and Bulgars make up’ -- the *Economist* (February 27, 1999, pp.46) suggested that: “Few Balkan countries have succeeded in patching up an old quarrel with a neighbor, let alone when this involves being nicer to a disaffected ethnic minority. Surprisingly, Bulgaria has pulled it off.” In forging a new path toward Europe, the former Bulgarian government of Ivan Kostov (elected in April 1997 and defeated in the May 2001 elections) transformed the nationalist policies and practices of former governments. European Union enlargement is “vital” for Bulgaria, and government leaders repeatedly stress that the ‘new Bulgaria’ subscribes to EU “philosophy and system of values... based on the principles of tolerance and European solidarity” (RFE 2/799. See also Leonard 1999; Xinhua News Agency 1999).<sup>16</sup> As a consequence, minority rights and the consequence rapprochement with Turkey, have become central issues, litmus tests for the EU, and crucial policy concerns for the new government (Pond 1999).

In this sense, the new nationalism of the Kostov government was, in part, predicated on overcoming the ethnic nationalism of previous governments and a forging of a new ‘internationalism’ – Bulgaria in Europe. If Zizek (1990: 60) was correct to diagnose the first flush of neo-liberal transition as one in which national chauvinism flourished as a kind of “shock-absorber” against the hardships of economic reform (and it certainly can be said to have done so in Bulgaria between 1989-1997), ten years later – and in Bulgaria at least – it may be the case that ethnic nationalism is becoming less ‘functional’ to state aspirations for economic integration into an international economy and transnational European polity.

How, then, have a legacy of violence against ethnic minorities, the deepening of social and regional networks, and the reworking of cultural resources affected the regional development model of Kurdjali? The combination of nationalist policies of violence and expulsion, discrimination in formal employment,

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<sup>16</sup> The geopolitical rhetoric of successful reform aimed at integration with Europe is not new with the Kostov government. In 1992, then Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger described Bulgaria as “one of the great but largely unsung success stories of post-communist Europe” (Eagleburger 1992).

regional investment to foster nationalist goals of assimilation, and the differentially high impacts of neo-liberal adjustment policies (with their own forms of social and regional economic violence) provided the very conditions that have enabled an economic boom based on export processing for global markets to occur in the region. The legacy of ethnic nationalism is important in understanding the structure and forms this new internationalization is taking.

The path dependent nature of these regional transformations does not also mean that the path of regional economic transformation is determined. Marginal and violated peoples and regions, in this sense, are not doomed to repeat their 'victimhood', but nor are the effects of victimization easily overcome. Instead, the social networks and cultural practices of marginal and violated people and regions that served as resources for dealing with nationalist modernization policies of the party state now serve as 'capacities' for new forms of economic activity (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Gibson-Graham 1996; Smith 2000). But they do so under conditions in which only for a small proportion of the population are employed and then under very tenuous -- and at times highly exploitative -- circumstances.

Smith (2000) argues - drawing on Lipietz (1992) - that 'defensive restructuring' (involving low-wage, cost advantages, and large-scale worker flexibility) is the norm for peripheral Slovakian regions with substantial Hungarian minority populations. This has also been the story of economic change in the peripheral regions of Bulgaria with substantial ethnic Turkish populations. But there are signs that small and medium size firm creation is increasing, that highly segmented labor markets are tightening, that firms are investing in capital deepening and better working conditions, wages and benefits are improving, and that local linkages to support training programs and worker retention are being developed. That is, that a form of 'offensive' restructuring in the apparel industry might be emerging. If this is the case, then one reason lies in the demands for quality, speed, and flexibility within the global apparel industry. But one reason also lies within the capacities of local people to shape regional futures. In their struggles to survive the political and economic violence lodged against them, Turkish Bulgarians have forged non-capitalist, extra-capitalist, and hyper-capitalist economic practices in local, trans-border, and trans-national settings. The new border geographies and cultures of economic life were borne of fire and necessity, but seem to me at least to have emerged quietly unaccounted by the state theorists and economic planners. It remains an open and interesting question, therefore, whether recent programs for regional development (including major road building programs linking Bulgaria and Greece and Bulgaria and Turkey, and plans for a major east-west corridor) will enhance and sustain these borderland geographies and cultures. Such transport routes will certainly make the everyday lives of Turkish Bulgarians much easier in the immediate term. But their experience of economic modernization projects to date suggests that a healthy skepticism may be warranted. To date the regional development organizations pushing for infrastructural projects such as



road building have shown little appreciation of, or concern for, the cultural and economic practices and geographies I have been discussing. Instead, they have been captivated either by internationalist discourses of tourism, sustainable development, and ‘craft’ production or by the possibilities of deepening the region’s embeddedness in international production systems.

In the preceding arguments I have tried to bring to light these traces of silent violence that continue to circulate in the economic transformations underway in the ethnic region of Kurdjali. I have also been sensitive to the need – at the same time – to avoid re-inscribing deterministic notions of change and social capacities. Instead, it seems to me important to map out some ways in which a non-essentialist reading of economic practices can begin to focus on the ways in which the ‘actually occurring transition’ is transforming the lives of individuals, households, and settlements throughout the region, and is itself shaped by them.

In the case of Kurdjali, the legacies and silent violence of state socialist policies continued to circulate, neo-liberal policies are reworked in and through those legacies, and the current mix of economic practices is interestingly ambiguous. ‘Poverty’, ‘de-development’, and ‘export processing’ capture economic aspects of the regional development model that has emerged. But it is a form of regional economic crisis and, more recently, new forms of assembly for global markets that are predicated on pre-existing industrial structures and social networks, and are articulated with flexible household economies. Insofar as these articulations are resources for social action, the question of regional economic futures will also be open to transformation of one sort or another.

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## [Appendix](#)