

NOTHING EVER PERISHES:
WASTE, RACE, AND TRANSFORMATION IN AN EXPANDING EUROPEAN UNION

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF IMAGES	vi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Section I: Displacements and Disruptions	37
CHAPTER 2: SCAVENGING THE VOTE	37
CHAPTER 3: DISMANTLING THE PROMISE OF PROGRESS	71
CHAPTER 4: POLITICIANS ARE THE MOST RECYCLED THINGS IN THIS COUNTRY	100
Section II: Sustainabilities	132
CHAPTER 5: THE RACIALIZATION OF WASTE LABOR	132
CHAPTER 6: EVERYTHING HAS A BEGINNING, AN END, AND A DEBT	176
CHAPTER 7: INFORMAL RECYCLING	196
CHAPTER 8: FROM WASTE TO ENERGY AND BACK AGAIN	220
Section III: Substitutions and Inner Transformation	248
CHAPTER 9: PRODUCING RESPONSIBILITY AND EUROPEAN HABITS	248
CHAPTER 10: HE, WHO PROVIDES AND SUBSTITUTES	266
CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION	293
BIBLIOGRAPHY	302

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1: Red star that used to be atop Communist Headquarters leaning against a side wall of the Central Sofia Bathhouse. Photo credit: Photo by João Leitão, http://freesofiatour.com/blog/the-red-star-is-gone	28
Image 2: Monument to the Soviet Army painted over as American pop culture icons. Photo credit: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monument_to_the_Soviet_Army	29
Image 3: Fargonite settlement in Sofia, Bulgaria. Photo by the author	50
Image 4: Inside of Romani home. Photo by the author.	60
Image 5: Scuba divers preparing to clean underwater for the “Clean Bulgarian in One Day” campaign. Photo by the author.....	85
Image 6: Scuba divers returning with metal they found while cleaning underwater for the “Clean Bulgarian in One Day” campaign. Photo by the author.....	85
Image 7: Romani residents in a Romani neighborhood clean up for the “Clean Bulgarian in One Day” campaign. Photo by the author.	89
Image 8: Welcome poster at Romani conference entitled “The Contribution of EU Funds for Roma Integration.” Photo by the author.	104
Image 9: Vest distributed in conference welcome bag. Photo by author.....	105
Image 10: Sweepers in partial uniform. Photo by author.	105
Image 11: Romani protesters at the conference. Photo by the author.	106
Image 12: A still from TV footage of the protest with the caption, “The Roma- Eurointegration and Europrotest.” Photo screen grab taken by the author from bnt.bg	107
Image 13: Protest sign held here for the camera, post-protest, by one of the female protesters and a male protester. Photo by the author.....	108
Image 14: A still from TV footage of protesters raising red cards. Photo screen grab taken by the author from bnt.bg	110

Image 15: A man sleeping on a bench inside a metro station wearing the Ataka-sponsored shirt with text that reads “I don’t want to live in a Gypsy state.” Photo by the author.....	113
Image 16: Meme from Facebook.com	121
Image 17: Security guard at a landfill with the image of communist leader Todor Zhivkov hanging nearby. Photo by the author.	124
Image 18: Workers at a landfill in central Bulgaria. Photo by the author.	125
Image 19: Nylon bags into which landfill workers collect recyclable materials. Photo by the author.	126
Image 20: Discarded but functional chairs being sold at a landfill. Photo by the author.	128
Image 21: Industrial lake outside of construction debris landfill.	129
Image 22: Accumulated debris by industrial lake outside of landfill.	129
Image 23: Goat herders grazing outside of an urban landfill.....	130
Image 24: Mixed waste urban dumpsters in Sofia.....	148
Image 25: Vetka Choosing What to Take. Photo by author.	198
Image 26: Petko’s cart. Photo by author.....	199
Image 27: Photo of waste conveyor belt: to the left in the glassed-in area is the material for refuse-derived fuel (RDF) and right before that are items that the workers either brought with them or found while on the job. Alongside the conveyor belt, on the right, are the holes into which workers throw materials to be recycled in separate waste streams. Photo by author.	220
Image 28: Waste at a manual sorting installation site before sorting begins. Photo by author. .	221
Image 29: Waste at a manual sorting installation site before sorting begins. Photo by author.	222
Image 30: Waste crisis on the streets of Sofia, 2009. Photo by author.....	230
Image 31: Since at the time of research, RDF was only used in one cement plant in Bulgaria, in-process RDF materials were often stored outdoors like this, above. Photo by author.	242
Image 32: Yellow recycling bin. Photo by author.	249
Image 33: Blue recycling bin. Photo by author.	249

Image 34: Still from film, with watermark. 264

Image 35: Newspaper photos of *Vietnamskite*. Source: 24 Chasa..... 285

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Around 460 BCE, Empedocles declared that according to his understanding of a universal system, composed of earth, air, fire, and water, “nothing comes to be or perishes.” Rather these elements are continually underdoing rearrangement. “Beyond these nothing comes to be or perishes. For if they died continually, no longer would they be. What could increase this whole, and from what source? How too could it be destroyed, since nothing lacks in these? But these are what there is, and running through each other they suffer change continual but always are alike.” Ovid, nearly 500 hundred years later, in 8 CE, reaffirms Empedocles’s doctrine in the *Metamorphoses*: *Omnia mutantur, nihil interit* (“everything changes, nothing perishes”).

Premised on the fact that nothing ever does actually perish, this manuscript is an analysis of transformation, shaped through a variety of substances, objects, temporalities, qualities, metaphors, and phenomenological ways of being in the world—and being perceived in the world. I examine material objects undergoing various kinds of transformations and the people involved in those material metamorphoses, paying close attention to the intersections of humans and non-human objects in processes of change, stasis, temporal movement, and spatial organization. In order to explore this theme of transformation I focus on waste in its discursive, metaphorical, and material dimensions. This dissertation spans ten years of research in Bulgaria, from 2003 through the end of 2013. It encompasses a variety of field-sites making this both ethnographically based in Sofia, Bulgaria but also multi-sited within the city. It should be noted that this study takes place in urban space for the most part. But, just as “urban space is made up

of the historical layering of networks connected by infrastructures,” the city is connected firmly to spaces outside of Sofia (Larkin 2008, 7). Waste is constantly moving, having wider reach than the sites where I physically spent my time. This is a study of urbanization, but it is also an analysis of the process of movement, and therefore extends from Romani neighborhoods to Sofia’s urban center to landfills throughout the countryside and to EU headquarters in Brussels, from where many of Bulgaria’s regulations derive.¹

Waste functions as a lens through which to trace processes of transformation at a multitude of levels. I take this lens directly from my fieldwork because “waste” (*bokluk*) is used, in Bulgaria, as both a metaphorical and material means of dehumanization *and* human-object co-constitution. An analysis of waste, moving between metaphor and material, is not new. Ann Stoler writes of exactly this process by exploring how Fanon’s metaphors of decay merge with the physical, tangible destruction of the Algerian landscape (2013, 10). Stoler’s analysis of “ruin” is important as an exploration of the intersection of metaphor and actual processes of decomposition (Stoler 2013, 10). Stoler pushes us to question the lingerings and afterlives of colonial projects. Like Stoler’s account of ruin, my analysis of waste is an account of “waste” as both noun and verb, but also as material.²

The goal of this work is to show and analyze what happens when representation and material intersect. Traci Voylers, in her account of uranium mines on Navajo lands, attempts a similar project. She explains that landscapes of extraction are “forms of representation as well as empirical objects” (2015, 8, see also Rose 1993). Waste has force as both an empirical object (or classification of objects) and as a form of discursive representation, and the two realms are

¹ In this sense, I use the term infrastructure as frame through which I site the locality of this project, although, as I explain, “planarity” or “assemblage” might be an equally justifiable framework.

² Stoler writes about the material presence of ruin in with a different valence: “It remains in bodies, in the poisoned soil, in water on a massive and enduring scale” (Stoler 2013, 24).

sometimes tightly interwoven. However, I show that these metaphorical-material linkages can breakdown in the face of new political economic forces especially when humans-as-waste (metaphor) have a different potential for transformation than waste-as-thing (material).

With this as my framework, I ask the simple and enduring question: how does change happen? Using waste as the conceptual connector, I explore transformation on three planes, which move in and out of each other.³ First, I look at transformation—of tangible things categorized as waste—into other categories of material, into money, into heat, into energy. Second, I also look at waste transformations over time. I examine those transformations, which encompass “Europeanization.” I explore how Bulgaria changes, both in terms of European Union (EU) harmonization procedures and reactive measures to those policies, from the socialist period through 2014. Third, I trace the possibilities of—and hindrances to—transformations of the humans dealing with waste. I see these three kinds of transformation—material, temporal, social—as ongoing projects in planar, non-hierarchical relation with each other. I put these three kinds of transformation in relation with one other in order to reveal the kinds of material-human interactions upon which the project of Europeanization is predicated. I highlight how material transformations of things (i.e. soda cans into money, trash bags into municipal heat) take shape as part of human-material processes that refuse, reject, and inhibit the changing social positions of those involved in such waste practices. Ultimately, I show that Europeanization—which is enmeshed with larger processes of capitalist development, neoliberal work regimes, environmental degradation, unequal distributions of wealth and infrastructural access—is fundamentally predicated on paradoxically temporary and naturalized confluences of human beings and material things. That is, humans and materials become intertwined and co-

³ I draw broadly on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) description of the rhizome and Latour’s (1991) discussion of an assemblage as a way to provide conceptual structure to my project.

constituting, but only temporarily. There comes a moment in the process in which objects transform but humans don't.

Material transformations (namely non-human material stuff categorized as waste) and the humans involved in such metamorphoses put into stark relief the differences between the objects and subjects of transformation. In Bulgaria, humans who work with waste, commonly referred to as trash (*bokluk*) themselves, become part of the assemblages, networks, and infrastructures of waste, as though they were always somehow preternaturally supposed to be there. That is, until a moment where materials have more potential for change than the humans who work with them. These moments of divergence include the moment when baled light-weight nylon bags are burned to become energy for a cement plant, when a horse-cart full of plastic bottles becomes the money for a few loaves of bread, when a downtown Sofia vintage store owner shopping at the flea market (*Bitaka*) buys a bunch of old canvas bags scavenged from a trash bin to become urban hipster apparel. In all of these cases the objects take on new lives, as cement, money, hipster apparel.

However, the humans who were involved in the processes of object reclamation (in this case primarily Roma workers) cannot be transformed quite so easily. Whereas bottles are transformed into cash, Roma (and their material circumstances) are not transformed through their labor. European-legitimated transformation differs greatly from the kinds of materially based human transformation enabled by state socialism. Manual labor, as part of Bulgarian state socialism, was a means of creating a new type of socialist citizen (Fehervary 2013). "Social identity and the construction of self were profoundly tied to the act of transformation of the material world and the display of the products of this labor" (63). In this way, socialist-era industrialization and beautification projects "were based on the contention that physical labor

(especially collective labor had transformative powers and could rehabilitate even the most morally corrupt person from class enemies to Roma (gypsies)” (63). Transformation, through work, was an aim—and thus a so-called achievement—of state socialist work practices. In contrast, within a capitalist, Europeanizing framework humans aren’t as readily transformed alongside the objects with which they work. For this reason, as I show in the final section of the dissertation, material transformation has been supplemented by the promise of spiritual metamorphosis.

This futility of social transformation is not reserved for waste workers alone. As I show, even highly educated Romani activists find themselves struggling with the futility of trying to transform not only themselves but also the world around them, only to be caught in the tentacles of what many call “the octopus that is Bulgaria.” Europeanization’s success depends on increasing disparities of wealth and the ongoing classification of people, often along the lines of disposability. In a country like Bulgaria, disposable people include various kinds of ethnic, racial, and religious minorities, disabled Bulgarians, pensioners, former farmers, a variety of manual laborers, those with disabilities. However, in my ethnography, Roma are the human population most figurative and literally associated with garbage and its labor.

A visit to *Bitaka*, the largest outdoor flea market in Sofia, encapsulated this sense. *Bitaka* now sells a great deal of communist-era goods, which have very recently become the desire of “hipsters,” and are mostly scavenged from the trash. It also has a long history. In the 1980s and early 1990s *Bitaka* served as an integral part of both the socialist economy and the opening up to Western goods, at first imported through Serbia. In the 1990s it was the first place where one could buy Western jeans and music. However, over the course of the 1990s the market was physically moved to a concrete open yard and contained within a fenced-in area. Also, it became

known as a “Gypsy” market, both because it is where Roma often sell second-hand items, scavenged from municipal trash bins and as a derogatory typification of the market as a whole linking material waste items and Roma people.

While walking around I met a woman selling items she had clearly taken from the trash. She had them spread, haphazardly, across a blanket on the ground at the part of *Bitaka* that is unregulated and doesn’t require vendors to pay a vending fee. The other part of the market is on a blacktop and fenced in and vendors must pay 1 lev (.50 Euro cents) for each blanket of goods they sell. I looked at the items one vendor, Maria, was selling. She smoked and asked me if I smoked. I told her I didn’t. It was clear she wanted to talk. I asked her how the selling was going today. She told me life was hard. “Over here... we are like trash. They give more respect to dogs, than to us Gypsies.”

Here, I want to make clear that in the European Union most Roma do not work in the waste sector. That said, throughout Europe Roma are categorized *as* waste as evidenced by the deportation of so-called “discardable” Roma from France in 2010. Some countries are similar to Bulgaria in terms of the ethnic/racial makeup of its waste labor sector (e.g., Romania) while in other countries with large Romani populations (e.g., Russia, Poland, Spain) Roma are not disproportionately overrepresented in waste management. In fact, in the United States and Canada nearly no Roma work in waste management. Although there are no reliable statistics on Romani employment in Bulgaria, due in large part to longstanding histories of not accounting for ethnic origin in statistical information, the waste management sector in Bulgaria is by and far the largest employer of urban Roma and especially Romani women. When I worked for a municipally contracted waste management firm I was part of a team of forty-two women, forty of whom were Roma. All workers on the backs of garbage trucks were Romani men and the

drivers were nearly all non-Romani, white Bulgarians. From interviews with waste company officials and Romani NGO leaders I learned that this workplace demographic is an approximately representative sample of the ethnic makeup of urban waste management throughout Bulgaria. Especially in Sofia but also throughout the country, there are highly educated Roma teachers, lawyers, and activists who don't have anything to do with waste management. However, these Roma are often misrecognized and racialized by the Bulgarian public as not being "really" Roma, and thus the visibility of waste laborers on the street reinforces the stereotype that all Roma work with (and are) trash.

Waste labor in many places in the world, unlike in Bulgaria, is not linked with racial hierarchies. Carl Zimring provides a useful historical account of the changing value and ethnic makeup of waste management in the United States, showing how scrap labor functioned as a business for new immigrants since it required little literacy or spoken English skills. However, waste workers were predominantly minorities of East European Jewish, Irish, or Italian descent and specifically not African American or Latino.⁴ To this day, the ethnic makeup of sanitation workers in New York quarter is not too dissimilar. According to Robin Nagle, about a quarter are African-American, slightly less than a fifth are Latino, more than half are white, making a sharp distinction between Irish and Italian (2003, 27). It should also be noted that, unlike in Bulgaria, sanitation workers in the United States make a decent wage, with good benefits.⁵

⁴ David Pellow (2002) explains how the independence of informal waste labor was appealing to many. "This independence and entrepreneurialism are almost totally absent from the solid waste industry today, as larger companies, including transnational corporations, have taken over most of the business—industry became more rationalized in the 50s and 60s ironically at the same time African Americans and Latinos were breaking into the business."

⁵ Waste management in many Western European countries is also not racialized, but much more mechanized than it is in Bulgaria. In places like Germany, most cities use more machines than humans. Waste collection in South America is also not racialized as it is in Bulgaria, but related to class differentiation. Waste management, however, is more socially categorized/routinized in South Asia where low caste/class groups who were once responsible for dirty "labor" are now in the process of being replaced by poor, undocumented immigrants.

These linkages between “social trash” and the people collecting material waste are not inherent to Romani culture but are particular to specific historical conditions and institutional development. It might be easy to see Roma, their labor, and the infrastructure of their neighborhoods and make claims based on some sort of essentialized notion of Roma-ness. However, I argue that the connection between Roma and waste is deeply rooted in socialist labor policy and European transition itself. Just as the connection between Roma and waste is historically and politically contingent, so is their racialization as “black.”⁶

It might be apt to think for a moment about other groups that have been racialized according to their labor and then whose labor, in turn, functions to racialize them. For example, Noel Ignatiev writes about the ways in which Irish whiteness was never given but rather an ongoing project of racialization in which labor and social status became intertwined. “To Irish laborers, to become white meant at first that they could sell themselves piecemeal instead of being sold for life and later that they could compete for jobs in all spheres instead of being confined to certain work” (2-3). By functioning within certain labor spheres, Irish laborers then enforced their whiteness. Functioning outside of a segregated market went hand in hand with attempts to racialize themselves as “white” despite the fact that many Irish immigrants arrived in America after fleeing societies where they were oppressed. To become aligned with the white oppressors, not the oppressed, was a project of becoming “white.” Racialization, like Irish whiteness, emerges from particular historical conditions and institutions, much like that of the Roma.

However, the fact that Roma and waste in Bulgaria have become interlinked in the labor force and in everyday representation is significant for how transformation and racialization take

⁶ See Lemon on racialization of Roma (1995), (1998), (2000).

shape. A variety of compensatory transformations taking place emerged ethnographically from my research when the transformative potential of objects and human beings materialized and diverged. These divergences, between people and things, are a product of the same capitalistic forces that shape economic commodification and human labor potentials. When people realize that, unlike the bottles they collect, they won't be transformed through recycling, they engage in other kinds of transformations, infrastructural animations, and material means to find affective intimacies in the social and spatial worlds in which they live. I show how Romani street sweepers use humor to make the time pass, how they effectively animate an impoverished and impoverishing landscape in order to breathe life into instable infrastructures of everyday life. I also show how those scavenging through urban municipal trash bins for items to recycle forge intimate affections with those local shop-owners, neighbors, and animals with which they engage on a daily basis. As Romani waste workers use their labor to extend themselves out into the world, by forging social bonds with others on the street and creating relationships with Bulgarians with whom they interact as part of their daily labor, they still cannot forge the basis for systematic social transformation. Despite the sociality of the street, waste labor doesn't enable the kind of change afforded to the discarded objects with which the laborers work (cf. Munn 1986 on space-time extension).

Instead of seeing their labor as part of European processes of ecological modernization, many (non-Romani) Bulgarians continue to perceive Roma on a spectrum of "social waste," which has come to include discardability, criminality, and most recently, terrorism. The labor that Roma do to keep Sofia's streets clean, to recycle waste that is in mixed container bins, and to make Bulgarians' trash disappear is not valued. Instead, police chiefs, recycling company bosses, and Sofia residents deride Roma for stealing "garbage" or defunct metal infrastructures.

In doing this they actually re-value these garbage objects as worthy of being stolen. This kind of derision transforms garbage into value, while at the same time re-categorizing those associated with the materials as discardable.

Here, I find one of Jane Bennett's questions useful: "What would the world look and feel like were the life/matter binary fall into disuse, were it to be translated into degree rather than kind?" (2009, 92). Bennett's push to destabilize categories of living vs. nonliving matter is useful in thinking through the transformation of humans and things as part of a world in which life/matter relations aren't binary. The horizontal planarity of living and nonliving actants is useful for thinking through agency. However, what I've found in my research is that there are hierarchies of agency even when these hierarchies do away with the life/matter binary. That is, the agency of some things and people just matter more than others within a Europeanizing framework. For example, metal within a Soviet/socialist framework was a much different kind of actant than the same metal within a postsocialist Europeanizing framework.

In the realm of waste in Bulgaria human life and non-human matter intersect in processes of change, exhibiting the hybridity that so many scholars of material things like to discuss.⁷ But, this assemblage-ness breaks down at very specific points on the spectrum in which waste-laboring humans go home at the end of the day, where they may or may not have electricity, may or may not having running water while the waste materials themselves are changing, metamorphosing into other kinds of commodifiable matter. We might say that the statuses of waste company officials don't change either, since they return, each and every day, to their large houses in the Sofia suburbs without fear of any changes (as opposed to Romani hope for transformation). Social status is much more durable than the materiality of its components.

⁷ See Latour (1991) and Keane (2007).

Not all material things have the same potential for transformation. Landfills are structures that highlight the relatively non-transformative potential of waste items that are stored at such sites. Part of the project of Europeanization entails trying to reduce the quantity of items sent to landfills by promoting a variety of other more valued afterlives for discarded things. As part of European Union waste policy this is numerically quantified by a progressive landfill tax that increased exponentially during the time of fieldwork:

2011 -1.5 EUR/ton
2012 – 4.6 EUR/ton
2013 – 7.7 EUR/ton
2014 – 17.9 EUR/ton

These amounts correspond to the amount, per ton, that the municipalities must pay for landfilled waste. This amount, while very quickly increasing is still seen, in a larger European framework, as very low compared to that in Western Europe where nearly no waste is landfilled.⁸ It is used as an economic incentive for municipalities in Bulgaria to avoid landfilling and instead invest in recovery and recycling. This is not only an environmental framework. An ideological framework also emerges from these policies in which European progress is tied *not* to landfilling, but to material metamorphosis and to transformation itself. For example, incineration might be the most obvious form of material conversion and has become incredibly popular in Western Europe. There, incineration becomes part of neoliberal ideologies of valuation, but in Bulgaria incineration still remains considered an environmental “hazard” since I was told by NGO officers, “Bulgarians might cut corners.”

As much as this is an ethnography of material and metaphor, this is also an ethnography of the processes by which differing potentiality for transformation takes shape and becomes part of social life. A great deal of what I’ve written is about change itself. In line with recent work on

⁸ See the Bulgarian Waste Management Act and the Bulgarian Ordinance 207/2010.

toxicity, poverty, late liberalism, and slow death, this ethnography is a study of the space between events.⁹ This is the study of what happens between postsocialism and European Union pre-accession, between EU accession and processes of “harmonization,” between a society that officially, since the 1980s, had no “minorities” and a country constantly stigmatized for its “Gypsy” migrants Western Europe. As Bulgaria is often considered (in media and, self-consciously, among many of my fieldwork interlocutors) a “Gypsy” state of Europe, its own Romani populations become further marginalized in Bulgarian efforts to shirk its past in favor of a European future.¹⁰ At the same time, Bulgarian Europeanization has depended on Romani bodies and Romani labor to accomplish its goals.¹¹ I saw this both in the early 2000s when Romani integration was a critical component for Bulgaria’s EU accession and in my last phase of fieldwork because cheap, Romani labor enables Bulgaria to meet its EU-imposed recycling quotas, which in turn keep Bulgaria from being sanctioned.

European minority integration initiatives have focused on education but ignored the poor conditions that Roma were living in, their segregated urban environments, and their overrepresentation in the waste labor sector. Although public policy aimed to integrate young Roma into mainstream Bulgarian public schools, their parents remain illiterate and unemployed. Concurrently, EU environmental policies mandated quotas for the recycling of packaging and household waste and many Roma, without other job prospects, came to depend on collecting garbage as their only means of income generation.

⁹ See Roitman (2013), Muehlebach (2013), Hoffman (2010) on “crisis,” precarity, disaster, Berlant (2007) on slow death, Povinelli (2011) on event and non-events, and Nixon (2011) on slow violence.

¹⁰ Bulgaria is not the only country in Europe to think of itself—or be referred to by Western European media—as a “Gypsy state.” Romania, Slovakia, and others also have high Romani populations and become seen as “Gypsy” countries.

¹¹ These European goals are so highly regulated, quantified, and standardized as to be funny. See Star and Lampland (2009).

Relying on manual labor skills developed in socialist factories, Roma began sorting through city dumpsters and collecting items to resell at semi-legal collection points. This reselling of recyclable goods to government-contracted packaging recovery organizations (PROs) allowed Bulgaria to meet its EU-mandated quotas. Thus, in effect, Roma employ socialist-era skills to help Bulgaria meet its European environmental sustainability standards while at the same time moving farther and farther from an ethnically integrated labor sector.

Choosing to study waste was not an arbitrary choice. As I watched Sofia, Bulgaria change between visits, from 2003 through 2013, I noticed how the physical and infrastructural landscape changed and how waste in particular—and various peoples’ relationships to it—transformed with it. When I first arrived in Bulgaria in 2003, I worked in a Romani education desegregation organization, attending weekly meetings with funders from international organizations like George Soros’s Open Society Institute and EU administrators for the massive amounts of pre-accession funding allocated for Romani integration so that Bulgaria could meet its human rights targets in time for European Union accession in 2007. These funds were easily accessible and a Romani movement was quickly developing.

In 2003 I worked with an NGO coordinating desegregation programs in six towns in Bulgaria. It was an organization run by Roma, for Roma, employing only Romani people, all of whom had been trained through Open Society Institute initiatives to learn English. They were the first generation of Roma cultivated for a place in a cosmopolitanizing European Bulgaria. They attended international conferences, hung posters of Martin Luther King on their walls, listened to Tupac, and invited young Americans to work as summer interns.¹²

¹² See Resnick (2009).

Upon returning to Bulgaria in 2006, I could sense that something was changing but, as I was there only for a week to attend the April 8th International Roma Day parade, it was difficult to tell if I had changed in my years away or if the landscape of both Sofia and Roma rights was changing. I did not return again until 2008, eighteen months after Bulgaria joined the European Union. I had expected to return to the organizations where I had previously worked, but they no longer existed. I visited one of the few surviving organizations that now seemed to open only intermittently and asked what had happened. One of the Romani managers there explained that EU funds were much harder to access than those of private donors to which they had become accustomed during the pre-accession period.

After Bulgaria joined the European Union, international private and public donors started to defund Romani initiatives, because it became “Europe’s obligation” to support its own populations. Pre-accession monitoring of Romani issues had stopped because Bulgaria’s accession served as a political index of having achieved its Romani integration targets. What this meant was that the Romani NGOs, nearly all of which lacked the kind of Roma “experts” that European Union funding required, either shut down or had to be taken over by non-Romani “experts.”¹³ Over the course of that summer, former activists explained what had happened and constantly talked about how disappointed they felt. More than one cried during our interviews.

Since I had expected to work through NGO networks, I found myself with no place to go and instead read novels on a park bench in central Sofia. With time on my hands and my attention wandering from my books I began observing the park itself, which seemed to always be in the process of being cleaned. Nearly all of the brightly vested park cleaners were women and nearly all were speaking to each other in Romani. I watched as park visitors threw garbage at the

¹³ I put the term “expert” in quotation marks because it was such a widely used term in the Bulgarian Romani NGO sector without being defined. Being from and living in Romani neighborhoods seemed never to qualify anyone as a nationally recognized “expert.”

cleaners without seeming to notice whether they were throwing their waste into the upright dustbins with which the workers collected debris or if they were hitting the workers themselves. It was as though the Romani workers were of the same category as the material they collected.

I observed the ways in which waste labor in Sofia was a markedly “Gypsy” job. I wondered about why there was this overlap of waste, labor, and people categorized as “trash.” How did the racialization of Roma, to which I was attuned, have an impact on labor opportunities? And, in turn, how did waste labor affect possibilities for upward social mobility? I knew that Romani unemployment, although difficult to measure, was at least double that of the Bulgarian unemployment rate. Although poverty levels are hard to determine due to problems in census reporting, the World Bank found that 71% of Roma in Eastern Europe live in poverty. In 2011, there was a study by a consortium of European Union affiliated organizations attempting to find an “at risk of poverty rate” of East European countries (which translates to the percentage of the population that lives on below 60% of the national median income). They found that in Bulgaria, 87% of Roma live “at risk of poverty” while only 49% of non-Roma living “nearby” Roma (and thus facing similar material but not social structural issues) were “at risk of poverty.” This is compared to the national “at risk of poverty” average which was 22%.¹⁴ I thought about the fact that for all the time I had spent in the Romani NGO sector I knew nothing about Romani labor integration. Nearly all pre-EU accession programs (and now whatever programs remained) were education related and targeted children.

This led me to question why this link between humans as “waste” and waste labor wasn’t being addressed by integration programs. Ultimately, I designed a project that traced “waste” in and out of language, urban spaces, emotional and sensory experiences of being in the world,

¹⁴ For comparison, Romania had the same level of national poverty (22%) but lower poverty rates for both Roma (78%) and Bulgarians living “nearby” (35%). See *Roma Poverty and Deprivation: The Need for Multidimensional Anti-Poverty Measures*.

infrastructural networks, and through processes of social and material categorization. This manuscript is about the Romani minority as much as it is about waste. In what I write proximities, intimacies, and enduring relationships to certain materials, like waste, constitute social hierarchization and reinforce systematic racialization. As Roma are dehumanized through their bodily relationships to physical waste and through the related metaphorical forces of those relations, waste becomes animated as part of a material-human social network.

This ethnography traces waste in and out of garbage cans, recycling installations, incinerators, the hands of waste workers and informal recyclers (“scavengers”), waste company offices, and the conference rooms of nonprofit recycling organizations, municipalities, inter-European forums, and the Bulgarian Ministry of the Environment and Water. I also look at waste as it is converted into other human and material kinds of forms of material, moral, and metaphysical substances. I follow waste as it is converted in various forms into money, becomes the bait for discourses on “criminality,” the fodder for articulations of European habits (and habitus), the foundation of charismatic Christian spirituality, and the material basis for family survival.

How does studying physical trash and waste management help us to better understand social hierarchy and the normalization of the position of Roma in European society? With that question already in mind, I investigate the relationship between waste, environmental sustainability, and attempts to Europeanize. How does waste enable, prohibit, and change notions of progress? And, how does a study of waste—as object and metaphor—help us understand how social hierarchy and racial categorization is not just made material, through everyday labor practices and lived infrastructure, but also so routinized that it seems as though it was always that way? Here, I draw on Bourdieu’s recognition that “every established order tends

to produce...the naturalization of its own arbitrariness,” referring to that which is taken as “natural,” as objectively real, as “doxa” (1977:166).

I conducted research in Bulgaria in the 2000s, a period of European instability and expansion. This timing makes this field-site ripe for analysis of how change happens, what the potential of progress (and subsequent disappointment) feels like, and how both humans and materials undergo metamorphoses (real and expected) as part of changing economic, legal, and national restructuring. By looking at processes of waste recuperation, resale, and recycling, along with ongoing labor and segregation legacies of the socialist past, it becomes clear that nothing ever actually perishes. Material objects we keep, those we discard, like racialized bodies and stigmatized labors, as well as the political and social pasts, are not erased in the face of “the new.” An empty plastic coke bottle, like the star atop Communist Headquarters, like a retired socialist political party, has to go somewhere. The past, in its human and material incarnations, never just disappears. Traces of what once was remain and those traces affect the present.

In this work I bring together literature on waste, materiality, and political economy with specific attention to racialization, postsocialism, and Europeanization.

WASTE AND RACE

Waste and race have been brought together in many scholarly approaches to both material waste and social stigma (Reno 2016, McIntyre and Nast 2011, Gidwani 2011, Voyles 2015). Mostly recently, focus has been placed on relationships between toxicity, race, and environmental justice (Hecht 2012, Nixon 2011, Murphy 2008, Agard-Jones 2013). Much of the work on environmental justice focuses on proximities. That is, toxic places are built and sustained near minority communities, which in turn reinforce the poverty and marginalization of those communities. We see this happening all over America, in urban Detroit, Chicago, in Gary,

Indiana, and on Native reservations throughout the Southwest (Bullard 1993, 2000, Checker 2005). It also happens throughout the world, in poor urban and rural communities, on indigenous land, in former colonies and colonized spaces, and throughout the former Soviet Union (Harper 2009, Petryna 2013, Stawkowski 2016). The logics of proximity have most commonly led scholars to a dead-end in which there are toxicities and they need to be distributed among all parts of the population. The solution becomes equal distribution of toxicity. The apt critiques of this approach by some environmental studies scholars remain strong: let's not focus on redistribution, let's focus on eliminating those toxicities.

My critique of these literatures comes, however, from another perspective, focusing on the logics of racialization. On one hand it is clear that humans without the cultural capital or recognized status to defend themselves against toxic harm become victims to it, over and over again. From these studies on toxicity come more theoretical approaches of harm's temporality. The approaches use a toxicity model to highlight the ways in which the invisible, the gradual, and the *longue durée* effects of material harm affect social structure by actually affecting bodies now and generations to come. When I first read these accounts I felt like I was reading what I should have already known. These concepts make perfect sense and do account for so much of the kinds of human attrition we see everyday.

However, I was also surprised by how little resonance these ideas had with my particular ethnographic engagement. It seems as though social science and the humanities have turned from focusing on the processes by which racialization happens, which often exist far outside of the body, back to the body itself. Toxicity is about residue, measurable in the body. While toxic residues in the body are significant in thinking about social categorization and racial hierarchy, I veer away from this approach, which is so deeply entrenched in skin, tissue, DNA, and

potentiality for replication in future generations. My ethnographic data has shown that, not surprisingly, toxicities do disproportionately affect Romani populations, which can be noted by the fact that Roma, on average, die ten years before their Bulgarian counterparts.¹⁵ However, even if a Roma woman's average lifespan is sixty-one years (vs. a Bulgarian woman's, which is 71.1 years), she does not experience her life as a slow death or slow violence. That is not what she thinks about every day. What she does have to face everyday, however, are the daily processes by which she is racialized. Like toxicity they too affect her children and their children and generations to come, but they are not gradually accumulating in the body. They are often visible, felt, and the outcomes of human and human-material interaction. My data shows that racialization often happens outside the bounds of the body and so in focusing on the materials of waste and the materials of its management, I hope to bring studies of waste and racialization back into the realm of the material and the social and out of the body.

A great deal of older work on waste management has used Douglas's notion of "matter out of place" as a starting point. As Josh Reno notes succinctly, "Douglas's structural-symbolic account- still runs strong in a great deal of waste studies work, especially in relation to social categorization" (Moser 2002, Scanlan 2005, Boscagli 2014, in Reno 2015). Although "discard studies," has since tried to supplement this structural-symbolic approach, waste studies literature often ends up circuitously engaging "waste" as both an emic term and a term of analysis. "Waste," is often defined through tautologies that remind me of some the tautological cycles that have arisen in debates over subject/object relations (see Keane 2003, 2006, Miller 1987).

¹⁵ See *Promoting the social inclusion of Roma – EU Network of Independent Experts on social Inclusion, December, 2011.*

I see waste as a subcategory of material studies. Therefore, I find it useful to link my work with waste studies in order to locate my work among others who have conducted similar inquiries in other places. Additionally, one of the major critiques of waste states in its current state is that it focuses on consumption, falling into the trap of making most important what is most visible. In fact, nearly more than 90% of all waste, worldwide, comes from industrial production and not household consumption (Gille 2007, Reno 2015, Kirsch 2014, O'Brien 2007, Little 2014). My work focuses on household consumption and the waste that is most visible on city streets. I focus on urban domestic waste knowing it is a minimal percentage of all waste produced. However, I do so because it functions as part of urban social life in ways that help us better understand the materialization of race and racialization in practice.

RACIALIZATION AND MATERIALITY

My work on waste contributes to conversations about materiality and racialization more broadly. I draw specifically on the work of Alaina Lemon who writes about the materialization of race in respect to Roma in Russia. Money, in a Russian context, functions similarly to waste in that “images of money and hard currency were firmly embedded in public stereotypes of racialized peoples” (1998, 46). Trade itself became seen “as the essential nature of ‘blacks,’” because marketplaces were one of the few places where Roma were most visible (Lemon 1995, 1999, 2000).¹⁶ Lemon provides the springboard from which I jump into one type of materiality: waste.

Despite the fact that waste derives from both consumption and production processes, I place waste in its own category of “thing.” In line with Miller’s understanding of the plurality of materialities, I see waste as both being a category in and of itself as also an amalgamation of a

¹⁶ Also see Lemon and Fikes (2002) and Lemon (1995, 2000) on the linking of Romani bodies with metro car materiality and metro station disorder.

diversity of nested materials/materialities. Miller explains, in line with Bourdieu, that “the less we are aware of [materials], the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behavior, without being open to challenge” (2005, 5). With that in mind, Miller preempts the ethnographer to question the relationship between subjects and objects (with subjects as the product of ongoing processes of objectification) despite the fact that, ethnographically, people often see themselves using objects. This notion struck me because what I noticed ethnographically was not that people experienced the world as themselves using objects, but as objects constituting them.¹⁷

In his approach to material culture, Miller explains, “much of what we are exists not through our consciousness or body, but as an exterior environment that habituates and prompts us” (2005, 5). To what extent does the object’s laying below the threshold of awareness enable its ability to “prompt us”? I question how experiences of waste differ between those people for whom waste is below the threshold of awareness (“out of sight, out of mind”) and those people who are actively and consciously dealing with garbage through their labor everyday. In a similar vein, it is often easier to say that skin color doesn’t matter when one’s skin color is white and thus, within a Western framework, the unmarked. Waste functions in just this way. Its role is often obscured in everyday life for most Bulgarian citizens, but is not so for those whose labor and livelihood depends on it.

Waste thus has a type of force. I focus on what waste *does* and how it compels people to do things, to react, and to interact with the local landscape and the social world. Waste enacts a force not only upon those who work with and handle it each day but also among those who never have to see it aside from their own personal garbage in their homes. Romani waste labor is not

¹⁷ See Althusser on similar relations between humans and things.

stigmatized just because it is a manual handling of trash but because it is the management of other peoples' trash. The waste has force because it is typically the excess of white Bulgarians, with the ability to discard much more than their Romani neighbors due to higher incomes and standards of living. Roma thus labor in service, or servitude, to their Bulgarian counterparts. Waste thus links different elements of society, enabling white Bulgarians to discard at will and forcing Roma into a labor sector in which they must clean up other peoples' refuse.

Although theories of materiality have questioned the relationships between subjects and objects, often in endlessly circular relation, I look instead at how people and objects become part of the same processes by which racialization takes place and race becomes materialized. This kind of racialization takes place within a context of a Europeanizing Bulgaria, which has its own relationship to changing materialities, especially of waste, labor, and those related to ethnic and racial minorities.

Socialist Bulgaria had a unique way of dealing with its many minority populations. This difference in socialist-era policy and practice had lasting effects on Bulgaria's social configuration, which has since shaped Bulgaria's project of Europeanization. The lasting legacies of socialist-era minority policy have had significant impact on how European Union policies intersected with both local labor and racialization practices.

Bulgaria was the closest aligned satellite state of the Soviet Union. That is, socialist Bulgaria was politically, economically, and closely aligned with Russia. This allegiance to Russia began at the end of the Ottoman period when Bulgaria credited the Russian army with saving them from the Turks in 1873. Under the rule of Georgi Dimitrov, Bulgaria aligned itself with Soviet politics and policies from the start of the socialist period. In 1948 when Stalin denounced Dimitrov's model of socialism and foreign policy initiatives, Dimitrov, unlike Tito,

“climbed down and engaged in a humiliating self-criticism of his ‘errors’” (Dimitrov 2001, 23).

According to historian Veselin Dimitrov, Georgi Dimitrov had no choice since Bulgaria was already so dependent on Soviet support and party leaders were strongly aligned with Moscow (23). From then on, Bulgaria outwardly adopted a top-down Soviet program while making any local adjustments “on the sly” (23). Bulgaria, in both ideological and geographic juxtaposition to Yugoslavia, served as the true Soviet satellite state that Tito’s Yugoslavia emphatically refused to become. Despite massive flaws in transposing Russian-developed Stalinist models of industrialization into a resource-poor Bulgarian landscape, Bulgaria managed to create “a vast if inefficient industrial sector” (25). This industrialization focused a great deal on heavy industry, which entailed building Kremikovtzi, a massive metallurgy plant in Sofia despite the fact that its ores had to be imported from the USSR and transported for over 300 kilometers from the Black Sea port at Burgas (Crampton 2011).

The Soviet Five-Year Plans functioned to alter the landscape of industry, agriculture, and daily living in Bulgaria and in doing so changed people’s relations to their material worlds. Bulgarian socialism was to be built through “her industrialization and electrification and through the collectivization and mechanization of farming” (Hristov 1980, 222). When Todor Zhivkov became First Secretary of the Party’s Central Committee, he outlined the goals of the third Five-Year Plan: “A continued building of the socialist society...through a faster growth of the material production facilities and through raising the socialist consciousness of the working people. Which will create conditions for better satisfaction of their continuously growing material and cultural needs” (227).

Gille explains that the Marxist economies of the 1960s and 1970s “differ from classical economics in that they see waste not as an anomaly but rather as a systemic problem” (2007, 25).

In this way a study of waste management in Bulgaria draws together an analysis of utopian futures, material presents, and the possibility of human-material transformation. This need for transformation changed over the course of the socialist period in Bulgaria.

By looking at policy toward Roma in particular it is possible to see communist ideology as itself changing and transforming in practice. For example, in the mid-1950's, Bulgaria followed a Soviet model of establishing the Roma as a distinct ethnic group based in folklorization of Romani culture and the publication of Romani language periodicals. Despite the premise of ethnic appreciation, by marginalizing and aestheticizing Romani culture, Bulgaria attempted to forge a "pure" (monoethnic) Bulgarian state. It used the 1940's slogan to which it aspired: "for a pure Bulgarian nation" (Marushiakova and Popov 1997, 175). Over the course of socialist rule, Bulgaria's slogan became "for a united and monolith Bulgarian socialist nation" in which Roma were completely assimilated and in which Romani language and traditions were outlawed (175). In this late socialist period of total assimilation, Romani citizens were effectively hidden from public life (and sometimes even hidden behind concrete walls that bordered their segregated neighborhoods) (176).

In many ways socialist-era Roma were treated like capitalist era waste: as an anomaly to be hidden, pushed out of sight, ignored. Whereas Soviet waste policies incorporated waste and resource excess into the means of production, Romani people were handled as the true socialist "waste" item, to be either transformed to the point at which they were no longer recognizable as that which they once were or be removed from public awareness altogether.

EUROPEANIZATION CLEANING UP AND OUT

People experience temporal disorientation, a constant waiting and uncanny familiarity, as they contend with a material world that will not fade away despite markers of historical

“change.” Many people I met with living in Romani neighborhoods experienced Europeanization as something that might be as temporary as the socialist period was for them. They explained that they are waiting for socialism to return. The temporal disorientation of experience: has the political-economic system changed, or does it remain the same in all but name? I track shifts between various kinds of time: historical, expected and experienced (Munn 1992). I underline the ways in which historical time and experiential time shift in and out of one another: the new European temporality I address is not only one of how the content of time is experienced but how the form that time takes—and how it is felt—often goes against expectation.¹⁸ What we would otherwise call historical time is felt in unpredictable ways, often at odds with the ‘felt time’ of everyday life. For example, Europeanization supposedly entails specific kinds of democratization and yet most citizens experience the most democratic of forms—elections—as material manifestations of non-democratic transfers of power very much linked to the past.

I write about the intersection of vectors of time and materiality. Temporality is indexed directly in material objects. That is to say, time takes its toll on materials—they break down, they waste, they decompose; it is the substance of planned obsolescence. However, material objects also index temporalities, as objects are haunted by their pasts and projected futures.¹⁹

When Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007, it had to meet specific criteria in the realms of justice reform, minority integration, opening markets, and environmental

¹⁸ Chakrabarty writes “Subaltern histories are therefore constructed within a particular kind of historicized memory, one that remembers history itself as an imperious code that accompanied the civilizing process that the European Enlightenment inaugurated in the eighteenth century as a world-historical task. It is not enough to historicize ‘history,’ the discipline, for that only uncritically keeps in place the very understanding of time that enables us to historicize in the first place...for to talk about the violent jolt the imagination has to suffer to be transported from a temporality cohabited by nonhumans and humans to one from which the gods are banished is not to express an incurable nostalgia for a long-lost world” (2000, 93).

¹⁹ While life histories may linger in their fibers, their own materiality haunts the people who handle them, especially if such objects were, at some point, categorised as ‘trash’ (see Lemon 2009 for Russian comparison). With these hauntings in mind, we can ask: How is the uncanny felt in the material world? What is the material equivalent of déjà vu, or the waiting for something that supposedly already has happened?

sustainability. European Union funding came in waves, preparing the country for accession and then promoting its post-accession full integration into the European community.²⁰ To become European was equated with turning nearly everything considered to be communist into a performance of European civility.²¹ There were many initiatives designed to *clean up* Bulgaria, physically harmonizing the Bulgarian landscape with the standards of ecological preservation outlined in EU directives. This was accompanied by financially cleaning up what were considered “excess” funds spent on NGOs, which was part of an effort to disentangle the public sphere from the vestiges of socialist networks. There were also EU projects designed for *cleaning out*, getting rid of corruption, destroying traces of a “dirty” communist past.²²

European cleaning and converting happened through EU regulations, national harmonization policies, but also through processes of shaming the past. There is an ongoing tension between the ideals of Europeanization and the lasting vestiges of both socialism and the economic crises of the 1990s. However this tension is put in action within a financial landscape that prevents full renewal—due to massive misuse of funds--and instead relies on various kinds of recycling, processes of transforming old structures into forms that can be called “new.” In Bulgaria this take shape in the form of reusing socialist-built buildings, like dorms for

²⁰ This refers to pre-accession PHARE funding. Phare, originally created in 1989 as the Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies (PHARE), expanded to all EU accession countries in 2004 and 2007 (including Bulgaria) as a way of assisting in massive political and economic change.

²¹ See Herzfeld on cultural intimacies (2007) and Eran Livni on Bulgarian “chalga” music and concepts of “being civilized” (2014).

²² This process of cleaning “up” the past in order to make space for a new material and ideological regime is not new to Bulgaria. After Ottoman liberation in 1878, mosques were converted into churches and Sofia city was reshaped, looking westward in order to form a sense of European legitimacy (see Gigova 2010). Socialist purges also used a similar logic, focusing on the human dimensions of political shift, “cleaning out” by killing former leaders in order to make room for the new regime (see Fitzpatrick 1999). The process of cleaning up and cleaning out also took place in the post-transition period as street names were changed and communist infrastructure and monuments were moved or destroyed (i.e. the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in 1999).

Vietnamese guest workers for poor Roma Sofia residents, a socialist-era movie theater as a hipster bar, and Soviet-style mineral water sanatoriums as 4-star spas.²³

MAKING THE PAST NEW

As is the case in much of Eastern Europe, there are material commemorations of the past that linger. They are often too hard and expensive to dismantled and ideologically tied into national politics in ways that incite debates that usually amount to a standstill. One such example was the Monument to the Soviet Army located in central Sofia, across the street from Sofia University. This monument was erected in 1954 as a ten-year anniversary tribute to the Russian Army's "saving" of the Bulgarians during World War II.²⁴ It also serves as the largest and most centrally visible Monument to Russian Soviets. While some mausoleums and homes of communist leaders, including that of Georgi Dimitrov, have been torn down in the years since 1989, others have been turned into museums (i.e. the home of Todor Zhivkov is now a national museum), materially durable monuments remain throughout the country.

The famous—and infamous—star that was once atop the Communist Headquarters in Sofia moved locations for over twenty years, hidden for a large part of that time in brush behind the abandoned public bathhouse before finally finding a home in 2013 in the Museum of Socialism in the outskirts of Sofia.²⁵

²³ See Aenasoaie (2016) on how Roma in Piatra Neamt, Romania were relocated in a repurposed former communist chicken farm outside the city, using EU funds.

²⁴ During WWII, Bulgaria was allied with the Axis Powers. In late 1944, the Soviet Red Army had begun advancing into Central and Eastern Europe and Bulgaria. On September 9th, 1944, before the Red Army could reach Sofia, Communist Bulgarian resistance forces known as "the Fatherland Front" overthrew the existing government and established a Communist Bulgarian government now allied with the Soviet Union and the Allied powers. Did the Red Army "save" Bulgaria? While the Red Army's presence in Eastern Europe certainly helped shift the balance of power in Bulgaria generally, the coup succeeded without the Red Army's aid.

²⁵ A separate project traces the history of this bathhouse in terms of changing segregation and social life in Bulgaria, focusing on bodily hygiene and water a substance and site through which racialization takes shape, even during the socialist period.



Image 1: Red star that used to be atop Communist Headquarters leaning against a side wall of the Central Sofia Bathhouse. Photo credit: Photo by João Leitão, <http://freesofiatour.com/blog/the-red-star-is-gone>

The Monument to the Soviet Army still remains where it was first erected, although in humorous political protest it has been getting constantly transformed. In June 2011, the army in the monument was painted overnight and the Soviet soldiers were painted as American popular culture characters, including Superman, the Joker, Robin, Santa Claus, Ronald McDonald, Wonder Woman, Captain America, Wolverine and the Mask. Beneath the graffiti read, “In step with time.” Then, in February 2012, the monument was painted again and soldiers were masked in the guise of Guy Fawkes, in solidarity with anti-ACTA protests.²⁶ In August 2012, the monument served as a protest for the Pussy Riot arrest when the soldiers were clad in Pussy Riot masks and photographed. In February 2013, the Bulgarian national colors were painted onto the faces of the soldiers, which was seen in newspapers as a tribute to the victims of Bulgarian Communism. In August 2013, it was painted pink in honor of the anniversary of the Prague Spring, with an inscription below in both Czech and Bulgarian, “Bulgaria Apologizes.” In February 2014, the monument was painted in the colors of the Ukrainian flag to support the

²⁶ These were protests against the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement.

revolution with the inscription “Glory to Ukraine” in graffiti below. Then on March 2, 2014 the monument was painted in reaction to the invasion of Russian troops with the inscription, “Hands off Ukraine” and a crossing out of the original dedication of the monument, “For the liberator Soviet Army from the grateful Bulgarian people.”



Image 2: Monument to the Soviet Army painted over as American pop culture icons. Photo credit: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monument_to_the_Soviet_Army

This communist monument, although not destroyed, has functioned not as traditional sort of “ruin” but as the canvas for political creativity in a country fraught with tensions between past, present, future, always negotiating between Europe, Russia, and the United States.

Resonances of this tension move from the overtly political and aesthetic to the realm of energy, as debates over how to deal with EU-induced energy loss in Bulgaria, due to the shutting down of two Soviet-era reactors at the Kozloduy Nuclear Plant, which had been providing nearly 44% of all energy in Bulgaria. At the time of my research the United States was trying to convince Bulgaria that they could remedy their energy situation, without relying on Russia, by

inviting Chevron to begin hydraulic fracturing or fracking in the center of the country.²⁷ Protests ensued and eventually Bulgaria became the second European country, after France, to ban fracking. However, tensions surrounding how to develop energy infrastructure--whether to look toward Europe, the US, or Russia—remain strong.

Finally, I address the practice of looking “toward Europe.” I was surprised by how often Europe was discussed as something foreign. Shop fronts at the central train station had advertisements, “Tickets to Europe,” as did convenience stores through the city that sold “European chocolate” or “European wine.”²⁸ Despite Bulgaria’s being part of the European Union since 2007, most Bulgarians didn’t *feel* European. Rather, they always measured themselves against Western Europe, in terms of income, minority issues, environmental sustainability, legal frameworks, and overall senses of transparency. And, they almost always came up short.

The chapters that follow are written in such way as to not be linear but to, like the processes of transformation I write about, move forward and loop back. There may be repetition, which at once lends them to being read individually but, perhaps, better read as a whole. There is no “theory” chapter. There is also no “history” chapter. This is because history is not context to this narrative but a central figure in it. History, like the sweepers, like recycling firm CEOs, like the flea market where trash gets sold, are evoked and referenced throughout. Likewise, my methods, although outlined in the introduction a bit, are discussed in each chapter, since this project had many modes of engagement and various methodological concerns and practices.

²⁷ Fulbright scholars told me, after the fact, that their Bulgaria Fulbright orientation included a section delivered by a US embassy official on the benefits of fracking in Bulgaria. U.S. embassy officials told new Fulbright scholars to try and mitigate local fears about fracking being harmful for the environment.

²⁸ See Fehérváry (2013, 44-45), Chakrabarty (2000), Gal (1991).

Although the form isn't a true mimicry of the content of this text, I try my best to convey the felt experience of the kinds of transformation central to my ethnographic fieldwork.

TEMPORARY TRANSFORMATIONS

Eastern Europe has undergone tremendous change over the past 20 years, including the end of socialism, joining the European Union, and dealing with the international outrage over the westward migration of its largest minority group—the Roma. Bulgaria faced two major hurdles when it attempted to join the European Union in the early 2000s.²⁹ First, European officials made inclusion of the socially and economically “vulnerable” Roma minority mandatory for accession.³⁰ Second, the EU demanded reform of Bulgaria’s socialist-era waste management system in order to promote recycling and comply with EU environmental sustainability standards.

“Change” was not something that could happen “naturally,” as we too often think it does (or hope it might). Change was what Bulgaria’s accession into the European Union depended upon. Accession was not only reliant on Bulgaria meeting specific markers and goals outlined and funded during the pre-accession period, but also depended on political, social, economic, and environmental kinds of quantifiable, measurable, visible breaks with the socialist past. This included the privatization of formerly state-owned utility companies, putting into practice various kinds of “transparency measures,” statistical measures of Romani inclusion evidenced by school attendance rates, busing to desegregate the school system, among other things. It was important that postsocialist Bulgaria was visibly and measurably different from European

²⁹ Other hurdles started with the original 31 chapters of *acquis communautaire*, the accumulated rules and laws of the European Union, but as accession neared the primary points for remedification focuses on “social inclusion social dialogue, anti-discrimination and public health,” “nuclear energy and safety,” “environment,” as well as “motor vehicle insurance, financial management and control of future structural funds, as well as animal diseases.” [Monitoring report on the state of preparedness for EU membership of Bulgaria and Romania, Brussels, 26.9.2006]

³⁰ “Vulnerable” was the term used in EU documents to refer to the Romani population. This connects with debates in anthropological literature on vulnerability, precarity, agency, and suffering (Robbins 2013, Muehlebach 2013, Allison 2012, Millar 2014, Hankins 2014, Neilson and Rossiter 2008).

Bulgaria. When European Union policies are “harmonized” in newly accessed countries, they manifest in the kind of discrete and visible changes, which are inevitably short-term (and often short-sighted).³¹

Despite—or perhaps because they were—visible changes, these attempts at Europeanization were in many ways temporary. I say that these changes were temporary because they were “quick fixes,” much like the quickly-made and shiny constructions of 1990s Bulgaria, which looked good from the outside but never changed structures from the inside and often fell apart quickly.³² Bulgarian officials and leaders who had to comply with EU regulations were so concerned with materializing change and making it visible that these changes often happened at the expense of substantial transformations, which might take longer to materialize and show less quantifiable results. What this means in practice, is that short-term solutions to long-term problems, which provide measurable and visible results become prioritized in order to meet EU standards and avoid sanctions. In the realm of Romani integration, this practice could be seen in Romani organizations changing their programs to focus more directly on summer school enrollment of children instead of more long-term goals like job retention. In the environmental sustainability sector, short-term goals included packaging waste recovery and recycling, which was easily measured and which standards could be met using already-existing informal Romani labor (as opposed to more long-term goals like changing Bulgarian urban residents’ discard habits so they would use the colored bins on the street).

³¹ I put the term “harmonization” in quotes because this is the technical European Union term for creating a common standard across the European Union. The term might be a bit misleading because it nearly often means changing regulations in a newly access country to conform to standards already established by European Union legislation. It is not bi or multi-directional.

³² See Sonia Hirt on postsocialist cities (2012) and Max Holleran (2015) on Bulgarian mafia baroque-style construction.

By focusing on what was measurable, visible, and quantifiable, meeting European Union goals became a (short-term) project-based series of programs.³³ Standards are produced, and reproduced, in conjunction with deleting the processes of their own development.³⁴ I am not the first to focus on the standardization of European Union programs. Lengwiler writes about the humorous (and somewhat satirical) controversy over the European Union regulating the “curvature” of the banana.³⁵ The “European Union is notorious for overregulating the most detailed aspects of human life” (Lengwiler 2009, 201, also see Jung 2010). Everything that happens in the European Union seems to require more and more documentation and more regulations that, in turn, need to be harmonized in local contexts.

Over the course of my research this became important not only in Romani NGO sector programs but also infamously in the closing and reopening of Sofia’s Suhodol landfill. The landfill, which had been deemed full in 2004 reopened, due to massive protests, in 2006 with a renewed capacity.³⁶ The actual landfill had not changed, but due to political pressure the measurements by which capacity were analyzed had changed to accommodate the political (and not material) environment. The “standards” by which the landfill were deemed full or not, as “objective” as they seemed at first, changed drastically in due time as other options (besides reopening the landfill) for quelling protest seemed impossible.³⁷ The standards for environmental

³³ A focus on “projects” instead of long-term sustainable and institutionalized programs had become a critique of many Romani activists and NGOs with whom I met, who explained that after EU accession, in order to stay afloat, Romani NGOs needed to focus on short-term quantifiable targets, which in the long-term did not provide the kind of help Romani communities actually needed for long-term advancement. Over the course of my research the NGO sector became somewhat mocked, called “the sector,” since it had become a self-propagating life force, determined by funding sources and project opportunities rather than local needs.

³⁴ Despite the fact that standards are ostensibly aimed at clarification, Lampland and Star analogize standards to “black boxes in their own right” (2009, 9).

³⁵ See Lampland and Star (2009).

³⁶ See chapter on “FROM WASTE TO ENERGY AND BACK AGAIN” for a more in-depth explanation of this.

³⁷ “Fudging numbers” is often linked, especially in Bulgaria, to corruption. However, in many cases, the standards themselves are much “softer” in practice than they might first seem. This also comes up in Bulgaria’s recycling targets, which strategically shifted in 2010 once the European Union began measuring Bulgaria’s recycling against

sustainability are subject to flexibility and transformation, as we see in the case of the ever-changing capacity of Sofia's landfill (which, at the time I left Bulgaria at the end of 2013, was still in use). However, as this ethnography shows, the potentiality of people might not be as flexible.

This became perhaps most apparent in July 2012. I woke up on the morning of July 19th, to find a series of Facebook posts and text messages from friends telling me to “GO IMMEDIATELY TO THE PRESIDENT’S WEBSITE!” I Googled, clicked and found my way to the office website of the Bulgarian President’s office, of Rosen Plevniev. A document had been uploaded that morning: the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma.³⁸ However, the document was saved as “13.NationalStrategyIntegrateMangali.pdf” (original saved PDF image below):



13.NationalStrategy
IntegrateMangali.pdf

The term, *mangal*, is the most derogatory term in the Bulgarian language to refer to Roma or Gypsies and is often considered the social equivalent of the “n-word” in English. The PDF, once released in the media, was quickly changed to “NationalStrategyIntegrateRoms.” It becomes

already set practices. This meant that, in order to ensure meeting their goals, Bulgaria declared 0% recycling at the start of the regulation implementation period since all future goals were based upon the initial number. (See <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/managing-municipal-solid-waste/bulgaria-municipal-waste-management>, 2013). This is not something that happens only in Bulgaria or in countries overly represented as “corrupt.” See Washington Post article on Christine Todd Whitman’s emphasis on granting “state and local governments and industrial polluters more flexibility in meeting federal anti-pollution standards” (in Lampland and Star 2009, 173).³⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_bulgaria_strategy_en.pdf but downloaded as this in its original form.

clear that despite integration efforts, and even in relation to those European framework documents focused on Romani integration, the Roma remain *mangali*.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

The chapters in this dissertation are arranged in such a way to begin with the framework of a Europeanizing Bulgaria, moving between the explicitly political framework of elections (and voting) and the materialities of those politics. In the first section, *Disruptions and Displacements*, the reader is brought into the world of Bulgarian—and European—politics and waste. Chapter two frames the state of European-era Bulgaria politics from the perspective of one of the largest Romani neighborhoods in Bulgaria. In Chapter three, the narrative transitions into an explicit discussion of the materiality of politics through the lens of metal and scrap metal. Chapter four focuses on another valence of political-material life in Bulgaria, that of politicians themselves, many of whom have been in power since the socialist era.

The second section of the dissertation, *Sustainabilities*, is a play on the colloquialism of sustainable resources and environmental practices. It is designed to provoke the reader to think more about what else is sustained alongside projects focused on a utopian notion of “environmental sustainability.” Chapter five focuses on street sweeping in Bulgaria and the lives and work of the women who clean Sofia’s streets. Chapter six delves into the political economy of street sweeping in Sofia, showing how waste laborers manage to get by in a Europeanizing era of loan-taking and increasingly racialized disparities of income. Chapter seven focuses on the kind of informal recycling (or “scavenging”) that actually sustains EU-mandated recycling quotas, which otherwise wouldn’t be met through formal means. In chapter eight the reader enters transformation from the most material basis, when waste is converted into usable forms of energy through incineration processes.

The last section of the dissertation moves from material transformations to human ones. Chapter nine centers on the Europeanization of waste habits in light of European-mandated colored bin recycling programs intended to both help the environment and maintain Bulgaria's EU quotas. Chapter ten focuses on spiritual transformation of Romani charismatic Pentecostals who, without the means to material change in their everyday lives, turn to spiritual worship in which the material lack is replaced by spiritual gain.

Section I: Displacements and Disruption

CHAPTER 2: SCAVENGING THE VOTE

VOTING DAY

Thousands of people stood outside School 890 on a Sunday morning. Some were children, but most were middle-aged. They were waiting to vote. It was early in the morning but the main street of *Levanka*, one of Sofia's largest Romani neighborhoods, was crowded with men drinking beers, looking anxiously at pedestrians who walked up and down the road as though in quiet anticipation of something still waiting to take shape. The normal lively buzz of the neighborhood seemed frozen in slow motion, freeze-framed and eerily hushed as though a blanket had been draped on top. It was quiet but pulsing with energy. It was only quiet on the streets up until the schoolyard. Entire families gathered in the schoolyard of School 890, preparing to vote and discussing the process in Romani. Two police officers stood guard at the entrance, creating a funnel to allow people to enter.

It was voting day in *Levanka* and I soon learned that those men on the street drinking beer were just waiting for the best offer as they tried to figure out who to vote for, based on who paid the most per vote. Trying to discern what exactly was going on was difficult. When I'd ask the men standing along the street, "what's up?" they'd just smile back and say everything was OK. One man I knew from the neighborhood called me over, assuming that as a visible *gadje* (white person, non-Romani) walking through *Levanka* on election day I must somehow be part of the electoral process. Quickly, a woman nearby called out, "come on, stop. She's going to

Nadka's," explaining that I was visiting my host family up the hill, where my good friends lived and where I often spent holidays and lived part-time during my free periods.

I spent the day moving between School 890 and my friends' place up the street. I was working in School 890 as a volunteer interpreter helping a Danish delegation of volunteer election monitors, which was collaborating with the local Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. Since I conducted fieldwork and spent time in *Levanka*, I was assigned to the local team working at the polls inside School 890. School 890 was infamous for being the largest nearly 100% Romani elementary school in Sofia. From election morning through vote counting in the evening, I helped in translation and election procedure documentation, taking breaks during the lunch hour to visit my friends and to get a sense of what was going on from the perspective of neighborhood residents.

I sat in my friends' café, eating, drinking, and talking to whoever walked in. A neighbor entered the café complaining in Romani—and clearly embarrassed to be speaking on front of me—that she wasn't paid the 20 *leva* she was promised for her vote. When I asked her, in Bulgarian, what she meant, she just laughed and explained that these "stupid Gypsies were selling their votes." Close friends entered the café and also complained, sheepishly, about non-payment but derided the act of vote selling when asked directly about the day. Nearly every frustrated patron talked about election day with distance, as though it were always some other people looking to sell their votes. It soon became clear that many *Levanka* residents found vote selling shameful; they knew that their selling of votes was both indicative of the poverty in which they lived and was highly stigmatized as "criminal" in the mainstream media. As we discussed the days' affairs, the TV aired footage of Roma selling their votes throughout the country, focusing on vote-selling (not vote-buying) as a sign of the country's democratic demise.

Nobody wanted to admit to selling his or her vote. When I undertook election-monitoring training just days before, led by the head of a German green party, I learned that there were many ways to prove for whom one voted. For example, vote-sellers could take photos of a filled-in ballot with a cell phone or they could submit an already filled-in ballot and upon leaving the polling station hand over an empty ballot as proof of their vote. However, local Bulgarians involved in monitoring often told me that in Bulgaria the Roma were often too afraid not to vote for whoever was paying them and so showing proof was sometimes not even necessary. Over and over again customers all neighbors and friends, entering the café explained that they wouldn't vote for anyone. They wanted, at least idealistically, to be able to vote for no one. However, in reality, many were forced, by dire economic circumstances, to vote for whoever paid the most. To vote for no one was the best form of protest. Not voting was power. Voting itself, which in *Levanka* become inherently linked to selling oneself, was shameful.

WE ARE NOT CRIMINALS!

I arrived at Nadka's café on that voting day months after the boss of an NGO I had been volunteering at in *Levanka* passed away. After his death, Nadka's family invited me to eat, work, and live with them in their home near *Vargila*, the center of the neighborhood. They ran a café in the front room of an addition to their home and served most of their neighbors who needed coffee or diapers or a sandwich. They purchased goods in bulk at the big-box, wholesale *Metro* store and then resold the items in individual or smaller units, including single cigarettes and plastic cups of oil sold by the ¼ cup. They sold espresso to workers in the morning before the 6am work rush to a variety of manual labor positions; they served sandwiches to school kids during and after the school day; and they sold last-minute cooking ingredients during the evening meal when mothers sent their toddlers with coins to pick up some hot peppers or a few tomatoes

or a packet of onion soup mix. The family would sit at a wooden picnic table inside the café, taking turns to help customers, while they ate and watched TV and helped the 9-year-old of the family with his homework.

During the election period in October 2011, I was spending my time with the family, especially with Nadka, the mother of the house and boss of the café. I asked Nadka what she thought of the situation in *Levanka*. She emphasized the lack of options for political engagement. Shekfa focused on the political jockeying and election-period ethnic violence against Roma, which had become severe by the time elections were held.

I think that at this point the Bulgarians have shown their hatred towards the Gypsies...and I think that there is no one to protect us. This is what I think. Is all because of the elections. It's all done this way so we can choose some party and the people who are up for the mayor's position and for the president's are giving us this program, which we are grasping for just like drowning men. [They're hoping] that all Gypsies are going to vote. Now they're doing it in a more intelligent way, not like before. They used to buy us off with a sausage (*kebabche*) and ten leva, now it's for the price of a life...So they are going to come to the neighborhood (*mahala*) and they're going to destroy us, they're going to send us to India. Siderov [the leader of the ultra-nationalist, ring-wing *Ataka* party] is arming the Bulgarians- he wants laws for arming the Bulgarians.... And he thinks he's going to win the elections this way, but that's not the way. It's going to get worse.

Nadka makes clear that the emphasis on Romani votes comes not from Bulgarian (or European) pursuits of free elections but from “their hatred towards the Gypsies.” And, the Roma, like “drowning men,” are desperate for whatever money they can make. Nadka's response explains the shame patrons of the café expressed. Most Romani residents of *Levanka*, during state socialism, had worked in nearby factories for soda beverages, metallurgy, shoemaking and often recounted the recent socialist past when they lived “normally” and worked hard. Only since the 1990s they explained, were they desperate enough to actually sell themselves for a few bills.

When I asked Nadka if the Roma would vote, given the period of far-right violence in which the elections were taking place, she idealistically forecasted the situation. She suspected

that although, in her words, Roma are “simple” and “uneducated,” “they’re not going to vote.” “If you keep pushing people and harassing them, they’re not going to sympathize with you.” She used a trope that was frequent in discussions I had about the role of Roma as outliers in Bulgarian society: “How are you going to support a country and a nation that doesn’t want you in it?” Although Nadka thought Roma *shouldn’t* vote given the fact that they were being used as pawns in a political landscape that seemed to be built upon populist, anti-Roma rhetoric, it was clear that many Roma actually were voting.

Positing Roma as society’s discard, she explained that nobody comes to the neighborhood to ask what people really need. Imagining an underlying fear, that indeed I found prevalent in many Bulgarians’ discussions of *Levanka*, she asked, “What are they scared of? They shouldn’t be scared of the Gypsies.” Nadka went on to negate the common notion of Gypsies as threat because after all, “Gypsies don’t go after president’s seats, or mayor’s, not even prime minister’s. A Gypsy is happy to have dinner on the table, for the kids to be around him, even if they’re naked and barefoot, what matters is that they’re healthy. To feed them with a piece of bread, that’s what pleases them.”

Like many conversations with Romani people of her age, who grew up during the socialist period, Nadka explained that although Roma don’t want power, they just want to get by:

Why doesn’t a Gypsy want power? What is this power? So, if a Gypsy has decided to steal, he needs what he has stolen, because there’s no work. All of the factories are closed; they put all the Gypsies in *Chistota* [the generic term for street cleaning/waste management companies]. When someone starts looking for a job, if you’re darker and not well dressed, you’re not welcome to clean even the toilets. And, howcome there was work before?! And how come I’ve raised three children and I’ve brought them up... Because I’ve worked under Bai Tosho [familiar reference for Todor Zhivkov, literally “Uncle Tosho”] and we’ve even worked two jobs so that the kids could go to school, to be clothed, to be fed.

Nadka, like many Romani and working-class friends I had who had come up age during state socialism nostalgically remembered the time of Bai Tosho as a time when they had jobs that paid a living wage. This longing not for state socialism *per se* but the time of Bai Tosho was a common trope in my fieldwork. Unlike the work of many scholars of postsocialism, the deictic node of the “normal” is not spatial. “Normal” does not connote the West.³⁹ Rather, in the case of Roma and many other former manual laborers in Bulgaria, the “normal” is the steady labor and steady income of socialism.

Nadka often referred to the period during the 1980s when she raised her children as “normal”: the children went to an integrated school, she had a good job in a textile factory, they had a beautiful garden at home, and they had Bulgarian neighbors down the street. Now, the trope of Romani criminality has come to define her everyday life and trigger even more nostalgia for a somewhat romanticized past when Bulgarians and Roma got along and were all “middle-class.”

At the time of our discussion, the Kiril Rashkov case, or the case of Tsar Kiro, was ubiquitous. On September 23, 2011, 19-year-old Angel Petrov was killed in the small village of Katunitsa. At the time it was alleged (and later proven in a criminal court) that Angel Petrov was killed by Simeon Yosifov, a relative of Kiril Rashkov, an infamous crime boss who also happened to be Roma. In response to the killing, residents of Katunitsa protested. They began burning houses and cars belonging to the family of Rashkov and demanded the family leave the village immediately. Nadka thought about this:

And what if Kiril Rashkov is a criminal? What does that concern me? That I guard my life, I pay my bills, I don't break the law. I've brought my children up and my children are neither thieves nor conmen. So let them come to see how every family lives and not how it is shown by the television when they go to *Cambodzha* [literally, Cambodia, the

³⁹ See Fehérváry (2002, 2009, 2013) and Galbraith (2003) and others on postsocialist notions of “normal.”

name for the poorest section of *Levanka*] where they're the simplest, the most uneducated, the dirtiest and the laziest. Let them see families like mine. We used to be middle class, we used to live well, we used to have money for vacation and we used to have money to send the kids to camp.

Comparing the current state, of now "European" Roma integration, Nadka cites public discourse that places blame, through an articulation of criminality, on Roma for the demise of Bulgaria. However, she makes clear that there was a time in the near past when Roma weren't in the position they are in now. They weren't derogated as existential criminals but were working class citizens who were part of both state-socialist daily infrastructure and a socialist utopian model of family life where kids went to camp, parents worked, and whole families took vacations. For Nadka, democracy is disappointment. Nadka remembers when Sofia wasn't as full of ethnic hatreds as it was during the election period, after the Katunitsa case.

Ever since those democrats came 20 years ago, for whom we also jumped and rejoiced, thinking that better times were ahead for the Gypsies...Ever since then there has been discrimination in the workplace, discrimination by kids in schools and in kindergartens. And, now they [the rightwing] want to ship us out of Bulgaria. This has never been the case before. I grew up free...

She explains that what has changed is the political framework in which Roma have become seen as trash:

And what happened now?! "Gypsies don't pay their electric bills, the Gypsies steal," "The Gypsies have put the country in bankruptcy!" Why don't they turn their eyes towards how Bulgarians live, the ones in Parliament? [Why don't they look at] how the people who want to be in Parliament live? They're all criminals. Much bigger than Kiril Rashkov. What kind of criminals are the Gypsies? And what kind of a criminal is Kiril Rashkov? Well, they turned him into a criminal. Who has been hiding him all those years? Why did they close their eyes while he was making his schemes? And, now Kiril Rashkov doesn't pay taxes, but is he the only one that doesn't pay taxes? The most famous and the biggest don't pay taxes, all over the world. Oh, look at Kiril Rashkov – *the Gypsy!* So when a Gypsy decides to do something, it's all out in the open but when a Bulgarian decides to do something, it's in the dark.

Nadka articulates the structures of visibility in which Kiril Rashkov emerges as a Roma criminal but function to keep Bulgarian criminals "in the dark." She explains that it is, ironically, actually

the government who lies, cheats, and steals. Election day serves as a microcosm of these frameworks of visibility and blame. Those who are the biggest thieves stay in the “dark” while those on the street become those on the news.

Despite the façade of democratic elections, Nadka explains, nobody is actually democratically elected in Bulgaria. It is always through the buying of votes. In this sense, European, democratic ideals, are upheld through a certain kind of (criminalized) Romani labor. It is easy to say that Roma are electing their leaders, but according to Nadka and my own research, most Roma are so impoverished that they see elections as a potential income generator. Nadka explained:

And how are these people [the mayor, president, prime minister] elected? Through the bought votes, the Roma votes. You live without a sewer system, without water, our rights trampled on and the Bulgarians always say that the Roma live off the country’s back. But, I don’t get it! That some get 125 leva to support 5 children, and how can you manage to raise 5 children on 120 leva and to “integrate” them, as they say? Where are funds for the integration? That money is not only in the [pockets of] Roma bosses, but in Bulgarians’ [pockets] too because they [the Bulgarians] are the first who come up with the idea for these funds, not the Gypsies.

“Being in the pockets,” is a common articulation of corruption, and during my time in Bulgaria there was a constant question of “in whose pocket” the European funding for Romani integration was going? Romani activists with whom I had worked were always looking for signs of who was getting the money, knowing it wasn’t them. It was clear that with European Union access came an insurmountable problem. Whereas in the postsocialist pre-EU-accession period, funds were directed to Romani organizations directly, European Structural Funds, after accession, were distributed through the national Bulgarian government office dealing with minority integration.⁴⁰

41

⁴⁰ During the period of my fieldwork, the head of that office was a notoriously anti-Roma politician, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, who as part of the election period initiated audits of many Romani organizations throughout the country,

Soon after EU accession in 2007, it became clear that Roma integration wasn't successful. Unemployment in Bulgaria in 2011 was 11.4%, overall, according to Eurostat. In cities the rate was lower: 7% unemployment compared with the rural unemployment rate of 17.2%. Although the unemployment rate for men (12.3%) was slightly higher than that of women (10.4%), the most notable differences were in ethnicity. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Human Rights (FRA), the overall Bulgarian unemployment rate was 12.3%, while the Turkish unemployment rate was 25.7%, and the Romani unemployment rate was 49.8%. In a country where nearly half of all Roma are unemployed, it is clear that top-down integration efforts are not working as the European Union had originally intended. Given these statistics, Nadka's concern about what has happened to *Levanka* seems aptly located in political and economics transformation of Bulgaria as a whole.

A GYPSY COUNTRY?

Citing the common refrain that “while most countries have their mafia, in Bulgaria the mafia has its country,” Nadka echoed protesters that focused on the link between political “corruption” and displacement of tropes of criminality onto the Roma:

Everyone has a loan from the bank to pay up and a mortgage, and everyone is sick and everyone is in need...but this is [our] country. We were born here. And what, do they plan to do what Hitler did and put us in a gas chamber? Let them, but first they should do this with themselves, because this is no nation. Why, in other countries, when someone is put on trial, he goes to court, he's banned from entering politics, and here the biggest politicians are criminals. Can someone who is a criminal be able to run for a mayor or a president? I ask. Well, he's going to turn this country into a criminal country. And all those people who are able, they [move] out of the country...Everyone is looking into the trashcans and bins. They [Roma] work in *Chistota* and they don't get paid for 5-6 months, and they're afraid to say something because they're Gypsies and they might get fired, and they are like silent members [of society]. But, when election time gets near they think of us.

which included temporary imprisonment of some Roma NGO leaders (one of which died of a heart attack during this period).

⁴¹ Ironically, protesters from the anti-Gypsization movement I discuss late had ideas, which aligned with Nadka's.

Nadka remarks on two very widely publicized phenomena in Bulgaria. First, she articulates the strange paradox that criminality and political life in Bulgaria are so interwoven. Friends often explained to me that many Bulgarian politicians enter politics as a means to avoid prosecution. The most famous case of this practice was when the Galevi brothers, accused of racketeering, ran for parliament in what most Bulgarians believed was a way to manipulate the legal system since parliamentarians are not able to be prosecuted. Although Nadka is at one level displacing criminality onto people in positions of power, she is also reaffirming the very real landscape of political life in Bulgaria.

In this statement, Nadka also reiterates the refrain about Bulgarian migration: those who can leave do and the rest scavenge through trash bins. While there is a literal component to what she explains, she also likens the Bulgaria that people leave as itself refuse. However, it is the Romani population that is left to clean up Bulgaria, literally. They work for *Chistota* and they don't get paid on time, she explains, but they are silent. They provide a service, cleaning the streets of Sofia, but are not valued for labor. They are only valued when they can provide votes. In the socialist "normal" past, Roma worked and were valued for that labor. However, ever since the end of socialism, Nadka explains, life has become difficult and she links this with democracy itself:

Ever since democracy, there has not passed a month without someone dying, young people. Doesn't someone see at how many people die young, of all the diseases, and all the diseases from worry. People live difficult lives. The death rate among Roma has gone up. My neighbor dies at years old...from what? Nothing... So, we paid the electric bill, what [money] are we going to eat with? It's all lost its meaning Elana... All I wanted to say was that life has become meaningless.

Nostalgia for socialism has been a key part of postsocialist analysis of Eastern Europe. Fehérváry explains succinctly in a footnote, "scholars have shown that what appeared to be 'nostalgia' for the former socialist state was better understood as an attempt to reclaim the value of living

during that time, re-contextualizing the mass-produced goods and popular culture of those decades as meaning-holding artifacts, tangible reminders of a shared history, and at the same time, as a conscious reconsideration of the capitalist commodities once so admired” (2009, 426).⁴² In line with the reclaiming of value, I locate Nadka’s nostalgia as an idealization of a potential future in which life might make sense again. She’s nostalgizes the past because the present feels so “meaningless.” She has an image of what could be and that just happens to be located in a felt experience already lived.⁴³

VOTE SELLING

Elections in Bulgaria have somehow become more about the vulnerability of a poor population to sell their votes for 20 leva than the politicians getting elected on the basis of mass movements of vote buying. A February 18, 2012 Council of Europe report on the elections of 2011 states:

Whilst evidence of vote-buying is difficult to trace – it is by nature a secret activity, transactions are in cash or in kind - and Congress observers found nobody who admitted personal experience of it, but there was widespread belief that the problem is a real one. The OSCE, although being unable to substantiate reports of vote buying, has assessed several as credible.⁴⁴ In addition, a survey conducted by Transparency International Bulgaria (TI) dated 21 October 2011⁴⁵ found that 10 percent of the respondents declared that they, or a friend of theirs, were offered money to vote for a particular party or candidate in the elections. In addition, 12 percent of voters said they were to be ready to sell their vote. (*#29 of the report*)

The Congress delegation learned that the going rate to buy a vote is currently estimated at around 20 lev (10 Euro). This represents a day's wage to an average Bulgarian monthly salary of 600 lev (300 Euro), and considerably more to the poorer off. The TI survey mentioned above found that 58 percent of respondents thought poverty [was] the reason why people sell their vote. The Congress interlocutors pointed out that vote buying is more of a problem for municipal elections than for the presidential elections as, in many cases, perhaps only 200 votes need to be bought to make a difference in the result. (*#30 of the report*)

⁴² See Fehérváry (2009), Berdahl (1999), Boyer (2006), Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004)

⁴³ It would be interesting in future work to posit this nostalgia for socialism in juxtaposition of writing on precarity

⁴⁴ OSCE/ODIHR LEOM Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions 31 October 2011 (LEOM 31/10/2011)

⁴⁵ <http://blog.transparency.org/2011/10/21/why-do-citizens-sell-their-vote/>.

All Congress teams witnessed, in their local meetings with candidates, that accusations and counter-accusations of pressure, undue influence and selling/buying of votes are issues in Bulgaria that divide and fragment communities. These accusations were particularly aimed at the most vulnerable in those communities - often the Roma - who, through political campaigns intolerant to minorities, may also be presented as the source of the problem. The mistrust generated by such allegations extends through the election campaign to the whole voting process, affecting public confidence in the outcomes. The TI survey mentioned above found a transparency index of only 3 for the public perception of these 2011 elections – where 1 is lack of transparency and 10 is close to full transparency. (#31 of the report)

From the Council of Europe report, as well as my post-election meetings with the Danish delegation, the OSCE, and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, it was repeated that vote selling and not vote buying was actually the problem. Popular news specials focused on the Romani selling of votes, and this had severe ramifications for both Roma on a local level as well as a Bulgarian Romani public.⁴⁶ The act of vote selling became criminalized as part of a larger populist political landscape in which Roma were depicted as criminals and thieves. Popular media faulted them for the unravelling of the promise of democratic society. This effectively rendered them not just democratic “refuse” but as polluters of the democratic ideal. Vote selling was portrayed as synonymous with undoing democracy, as though the poor Roma waiting for 20 leva, a day’s labor (since most of whom often worked for daily wages totaling that amount), were those at fault for both the problematic elections of 2011 as well as the shame of Bulgaria on the larger, European stage. Recursive prejudices were transposed from shame at an international level, to a European level, to a national level, and finally to the lowliest group in the nation, the Roma. In other words, the Roma at the bottom of the social totem pole, often those who are unemployed, impoverished, in need of 20 leva, become seen as the destruction of both the Bulgarian state, the European Union as an entity, and progress itself.

⁴⁶ This isn’t quite the video, but worthwhile to see: <http://vbox7.com/play:0220fe5b71?p=favourites&id=657969>
<http://news.bg/interviews/b-minchev-v-kolev-iskame-ednakvo-tezhko-nakazanie-i-za-1-i-za-100-metra-otkradnat-zhp-kabel.html>

TURKISH SOAP OPERAS, THANKS TO THE MAYOR

Entering any Romani neighborhood in Bulgaria, and in a large part of Southeastern Europe, entails a variety of sensory phenomena. There's often a strong smell of burning objects, usually wood or coal but sometimes, especially in the dark days of winter, garbage or old furniture. There's also usually deeply pot-holed roads, except sometimes, as I was told, right before election periods. It was typical before election periods to see construction crews paving roads. Once in *Levanka*, weeks before an election, I witnessed crews reinforcing the main road's safety speed bumps. Aside from smoke, roughly paved roads, horse-carts (and horse excrement), there are usually a large number of satellite dishes.

I use as my primary example a Romani neighborhood that I refer to in my chapters on street sweeping and evangelical Christian churches, known commonly as *Fargonite* or "Boxcars." This neighborhood is one fabricated by Bulgarian officials to house displaced Romani inhabitants. It is comprised of army train cars repurposed as long-term "temporary" housing from Romani residents evicted from a neighborhood where an *IKA* supermarket was built. *Fargonite* is one of the most visible and poorest Romani neighborhoods in Sofia, sitting at the crossroads of the highway from Serbia and Boulevard Evropa (Europe Boulevard).



Image 3: Fargonite settlement in Sofia, Bulgaria. Photo by the author.

Beside repurposed train cars are makeshift houses, constructed from discarded materials, concrete, metal sheets, and using old fabric or debris for insulation. As visible in the photograph above, these makeshift and government-appointed temporary homes also often have satellite dishes attached to their roofs. My first visits to *Fargonite* were with an evangelical church that had wanted to convert the community and built the first church in a train car. Soon after visiting with the church pastors, I returned back with an American church member for a few days when the census was being conducted. Since it was a neighborhood typically not frequented by visitors save for church members, residents wondered what was going on. With a mix of confusion and hope, they saw official-looking Bulgarians come and set up tables, asking for identification, and they thought they were either getting paid for the elections or, as the children most vocally expressed, getting apartments.

Having dealt with promises from the local mayor for over a decade, residents had long ago become disappointed. Despite being promised sanitary living conditions in public housing facilities for over ten years, most evicted Roma families remained in the train cars and many

heads of house had turned to alcohol to compensate for their disappointment. The pastors from *One Life* church explained that the community had recently started throwing stones at anyone entering the neighborhood, which they explained was the manifestation of longstanding frustrations. However, since I was seen as an affiliate of the church, residents took turns bringing me documents and listening to me explain what was going on. “No, you weren’t getting new housing.” “Yes, there are Bulgarians here.” The pastors had explained that they should say they are Pentecostal Christians so that they were marked on census as Christians but not of the typical Bulgarian Orthodox variety. The pastors warned that the presence of foreigners might also signal that an election was coming, because, after all, that’s how all of the homes got satellite dishes. Knowing the common caricature of Romani women sitting around watching Turkish soap operas, politicians compete for votes by supplying homes with satellite dishes.⁴⁷

SAUSAGES AND BEER

Who or what has the power to undo democracy? This is often a question for which minorities and immigrants, especially in Bulgaria, were the answer. However, in order to understand how democracy—in its utopian imaginary form and in practice—functions in Bulgaria one must look to sausages (*kebache*) and beer. In the voting period, among politicians, non-Romani citizens, and Romani neighborhood inhabitants alike, people said that politicians could buy vote in this poor country with a “few sausages and a beer.” This refrain, “a few sausages and a beer,” became a common stand-in for the amount necessary to pay people to do things, whether it be paying a policeman to get out of a ticket, a poor Roma citizen for a vote, or a pensioner for a piece of land to use for fracking. Although “a sausage and a beer” was a trope

⁴⁷ For a prime example of this see “Komicite,” Bulgaria’s version of Saturday Night Live where the figure of Lyuba the Gypsy is always portrayed as watching Turkish soap operas.

used to reference both the poverty of Bulgarians and the cheap way they could be bought, this phrase often became material.

During the election period of May 2013, I accompanied a politician campaigning for a position in the Bulgarian parliament and representing a party with a member running for prime minister. In Bulgarian politics, politicians can run in two districts throughout the country, in which she may or may not have personal affiliation. I traveled with this politician, who I call here Peter, to a region in which he had no personal affiliation but which he was in charge of organizing. Peter invited me to observe his campaign in the mid-size Eastern Bulgarian town, called here Vabrava. After twelve months of listening to me complain about the need to approach Romani communities as informed voters, not just vote-sellers, he called and excitedly explained he was ready to campaign in the Romani neighborhood in Vabrava and invited me along. I agreed to join him.

We started off before dawn on a Wednesday morning. Peter picked me up in his SUV, driven by a hired driver, and his political campaign manager in the backseat where I climbed in. We drove across the country towards Vabrava, meeting with party officials along the way. We stopped at a hilltop restaurant that was part of a restored and plasticized castle in central Bulgaria, the parking lot of a nearly abandoned bread factory, while I sat in the backseat observing and understanding only parts of hushed conversations. Finally, we arrived in Vabrava in the late afternoon and sat down in the headquarters. In the office, we planned what we would do over the weekend.

I was introduced to the local officials, who implemented whatever was decided in the Sofia headquarters. This made Peter the leader and boss to which they reported. However, they were all locals, born and bred in Vabrava, while Peter had only visited as part of his political

campaign. They caught up Peter on what had happened in Vabrava since he visited the month before, and they planned what they would accomplish and how they would do it over the next few days. The plan included campaigning in the large central park of the town, visiting outlying villages and campaigning at the pensioners' centers there, attending a rally for the prime ministerial candidate, and visiting to the largest Romani neighborhood (*mahala*) in Vabrava. Niki, one of the local campaign workers, was a booker for casinos, hotels, and weddings and often hired Romani musicians for these events. He was our "in" in the *mahala*.⁴⁸

Niki and Peter discussed when, where, and how they would campaign in the Romani *mahala*. I listened and took notes, until Peter introduced me to Niki and said that I was there to consult about how to go about the campaign because I was, in Peter's words, "the expert." Niki looked at me and laughed, congenially shrugging me off. They began discussing what to do the neighborhood. Niki, in his fast-talking music producer kind of way, explained that they would go to the neighborhood, start with his musicians, and then hand out the sausages, some sodas, and a few beers. I listened and tried to restrain myself from interrupting. He explained that we'd need some ice cream or something for the kids. Peter looked to me, asking quietly, if this seemed like a good idea. Finally, I intervened, recommending no beers and no sausages in favor of decent discussion. Peter agreed, and Niki reluctantly conceded.

VISITING THE NEIGHBORHOOD, I MEAN GHETTO

As we prepared in the party headquarters, we discussed how to best show up in the Romani neighborhood. Preparations involved what to wear, what cars to drive, what to bring. Peter made sure we'd travel in the small sedan of one of the local party leaders, not his own

⁴⁸ Unbeknownst to me until that point, I was also the "in," as I had recently been on the national television for my street sweeping gig and gained a certain kind of popularity, if not fame from that as the "street-sweeping American" [*Amerikanska chistachka*], which incidentally led to the other nickname I earned as the "American Gypsy" [*Amerikanska Tsiganka*].

SUV. He explained to his driver, “we will go with Sasho's car, we will not use this one. You can rest some more for now. We will not be taking the jeep to go there. We need to look more modest...is what I mean.” We discussed what to take with us and we decided to leave the jackets in the car, the laptop safely at the office, and talk about what might happen. Peter, in a hushed voice explained, “I just don't want to see any belly dances when the journalists come,” worrying that the music we would provide to gather people could have negative effects on the campaign’s publicity. Niki, the “veteran” of the neighborhood, tried to dissuade the group from worrying about their laptops and personal items. “You will get the idea of what I trying to explain you, when you see it...at least they let people in this part of the neighborhood and Bulgarians as well. In the typical ghetto parts of these [Roma] neighborhoods it is very hard for outsiders to enter.”

We parked outside of the center of the neighborhood, by a plot of open space surrounded by communist-built apartment blocks. A band played loudly on outdoor speakers and a table had been set-up with posters of the prime minister candidate taped to the sides of it. Children were running around, and mothers were standing with arms crossed and watching or sitting on the building stoop eating sunflower seeds. Campaign materials torn up by the children functioned as confetti strewn all around the table covering the entire space.

Peter talked to Niki, “the point is not to play them because we are trying to persuade people from the neighborhood to take money before agreeing to manipulate the vote. They should just vote yes, for whoever they are told, because this is the future of Bulgaria. And they are hungry, they have to eat.” Marina, a local party administrator, took the microphone that had been set up and called the group together as though a shaky elementary school teacher on the first day: “Come on everyone let's gather a bit up. We are very scattered at the moment and we

have to gather so everyone can hear. Come on everyone please join here. We have a new friend here and I am expecting you all to join soon here.” Once a small group began to assemble, she nervously addressed the group again, “Hello again everyone! First of all I would like to thank you for attending and for taking part of your free time to come here among us today...to help our political organization. Today among you are our candidates for deputies in the next parliamentary elections. Here among you today is also our leader who has come especially from Sofia and has included a visit in his program today here with us. I really look forward for our meeting to go in friendly atmosphere, because we are not here today to agitate you. We came here today to come to know you and your social problems. We are also here to hear your concerns, your problems, and mainly to hear what do you want to be changed in the system... Hello, do you hear me...So I will give to word to Peter in a few minutes and after that we will be most happy and open to receive your questions so we can discuss them together.”

As Marina tried to assemble the group, I stood on the sidelines, filming beside a radio journalist who seemed more interested in recording me than in the actual campaign visit. I stood beside a woman eating sunflower seeds who clearly wanted to talk and be recorded. She asked me what I was doing there so I explained to her that I’m not actually a politician, just a student documenting the entire process. She recognized me, she exclaimed. “Have you been here before?” I explained that maybe she’s seen me on TV, since a few months prior bTV, a major national TV network, aired footage of my work as a street sweeper. “That’s it!!” she called out and grabbed her husband and a few friends to meet me. Meanwhile, Peter stepped in, and she offered him some of the sunflower seeds we were eating. While Peter tried to make conversation, Marina told me he needed to address the crowd.

Peter stepped forward, looking purposefully casual in jeans and a baggy white t-shirt. “There’s something wrong with this microphone,” he complained. “These seeds that Zlatka brought are very good so I can't speak at the moment.” He finished eating his sunflower seeds and then began, “This here is not an agitation my friends. We don't...I came here to tell you only one thing. Just think before you go to the election and vote for the one you want to, but be proud and honest people. I wanted to...I came here today, not to give you a speech and promises, no, nothing like that. I came here today to take a walk among you and to have a discussion with you. I came here to tell you, that even though I am a candidate for a deputy in the next parliament, I am not here to bribe you to vote for me. I am not here to treat you beer and barbeque, and I will not make fun of you like all the others do.”

Peter continued:

You are Bulgarians as well but Bulgarians that everyone make fun of. I need your children to be well educated so they can find a better job tomorrow and hire my children to work for them. This is what I am aiming for and what I want to happen. I will not agitate you now. After the elections no matter if I am deputy or not I will come for sure again. I see that you have people here that take care of you and are looking after you, you have your own leaders, so we should cooperate with them to see how we can solve some of your social problems and make things better. Although I want to tell you that there is this one candidate I don't recommend you to vote for, you have see him before, and you probably have greeted him before and maybe cursed him before, as it is said. Everyone else that will try to bribe you for this election will send someone else to agitate you and they will not come personally to do the job. And this is exactly how they are making fun of you with all that. They will bribe you again and you will live in this misery and this big social mess again. If you want better roads and streets in the neighborhood - you will have them when you stop selling your votes for small amounts of money. It's easier for other politicians to bribe you and after that to leave you to live in this misery.

Targeting vote selling in general, instead of specifics of the electoral campaign, he continued to explain, “when you don't allow them to bribe you then you will be rightful citizens to demand all kinds of things.” Peter puts forth a kind of citizenship based both in voting and demands. Peter suggests a political framework in which short-term financial gains can be replaced by a kind of

righteous citizenship. What he doesn't account for is the fact that demands might not always—or ever—be met. Peter went on to reiterate that he was not there to agitate the crowd:

We are just people that appreciate you. I don't trust in policy, policy is only splitting people. I want you to be proud of yourselves people and I am asking you for it. You can vote for whoever you want to, just don't forget you should be proud people. I want you to show to all the people that think you don't know nothing that it is actually on the contrary, I know you do know very well all and understand it. I know you understand it event though some of you have no even finish university I know you are quite aware of everything. This is what I want to see after 20-30 years. I want to see these children here well educated and living in better social conditions. It will be harder for the elderly people but we have to start from somewhere... I will take a walk now with you and please feel free to share all kinds of problems you have with me... I will take a walk among you now and if there is a coffee shop nearby we can go all together and take a coffee while discussing all.

Although Peter wants to walk among the residents and drink coffee, there is no coffee shop nearby. There's not much of anything nearby. But, the audience does have some questions they want to raise. A Romani woman takes the microphone quickly:

Hello, Sir. First of all I want to thank you for making time for us in your busy schedule, but why do you do that now, when the elections are almost knocking on our door? Is this when you only decide to solve some social problems that the Gypsies have in order to gain more votes?

Peter explains, sweating a bit in the May morning heat:

Yes of course you are right. This is the first time I come to you citizens...but I will not lie to you now like most of the other candidates for deputies in the next parliament would do. I have been in [other neighborhoods] and Sofia until now and all those Gypsy neighborhoods or you may call them ghettos look exactly the same and have the same problems. As I repeated multiple times I did not come here to ask you to vote for me or agitate you. I want you to understand that there is a person who can...Wait, let me finish my sentence...This is why I said as well that I will not promise you anything. I just want one thing from you - be proud and don't let others to make fun of you and bribe you. Because this all is also making fun of your human rights. If you don't want to, then don't vote, just don't get bribed...and [if you do] then again you will be in the same social misery like [you are in] now, it just doesn't work that way citizens. Because, because...

The woman interrupts:

Because she [the mayor of the town] actually promised to make things better, to make the neighborhood conditions better, to educate our children and in the end the mayor did not

fulfill any of those promises. And we are actually at the point we started from. It seems like our Gypsies have been socially abandoned. We have no places to live, no money to pay our bills, no working positions and we are always given only empty promises.

Peter: This is exactly why we are not making any promises, we are just coming to know each other.

As I stood there, a man in the audience start speaking aloud, to whoever was in earshot:

Man: But this is why people don't want to vote on elections at all, because they were bribing us way too much before, like a couple of meatballs and sausages [*kebabche*] can do the trick.

Elana: Yeah you are going to eat that one time, and after that, what....

Man: It's because we are voting for them, but they don't agree with our opinion and do nothing for us.

A woman nearby joins in:

People are actually afraid, and we are quite fed up with all already. These changes are not such you can make for one day...but for 5 years, they just feed themselves, nothing more. This is mission impossible. We are fed up, no more.... We have children to feed, rents to pay, bills. With 130 leva pension tell me what I can do. I can't even go to work anymore because of my problems with the legs...

Another woman joins the conversation:

Woman 2: I don't even have a place to live in. [The current mayor] promised to give us places to live in and now we are suppose to vote, really.

Woman 1: It's all their fault.

W2: Yes, they all promise indeed and do nothing in the end. They just make promises until we vote for them and after that they forget about us.

W1: They do their agitation campaign with music and barbeque and that's it.

W2: If they were helping us now actually, it would have been a pleasure to vote.

M1: How can the social funds and support they give us per family be only 36 leva? I can't even send my kid to school with 36 leva.

W2: You can't raise a kid with 36 leva.

M1: And there are no working positions for us anywhere.

W3 [Maria]: I just don't trust even a single politician anymore. I want to vote but... there are no such people anymore. Everyone is desperate, because there are no working positions for young people...[they] only drink and start to gamble. They don't even have money for food... With 8 kids. I am also diabetic and I need medications... He [Peter] wants to eat too, I know. All the politicians just feed themselves and don't care for the citizens..... The DPS political party... they promised funds for the Gypsy people and in the end funds were lost at the higher level of authority. Everyone is part of one big mafia. And you want me to vote? I will not vote for anyone I just want all politicians out of my life.

M2: And have you seen what is happening now in [this neighborhood]. This is actually a problem only for national minorities, no matter where you go, only national minorities problem... look at the roads here and we don't even have money to send our children to school.

The last woman to join the conversation, Maria, sees that I have a camera around my neck and asks me to film her “for the Americans to see”:

Maria: I want my pension to be higher! I can't even buy food for myself with 128 leva! I also have 2 kids... Where is our money actually? The politicians are taking everything for themselves and most important they don't want to help us... I just want to live in a calm and honest way, without any high crime rates. I want the government actually to help us and I want to have my own place to call home instead of paying rents all the time. I wish they were giving us at least 150 leva, which will be somehow better if you understand me.

Elana: This is not normal.

Maria: See you are not from around here, and you can also tell that this is not normal. I wish they were giving me at least 350 leva, I think we should live in a less miserable way with that and will be better. I can't send my children to school.

At this point, Peter walks over to our conversation and Maria invites us up to her apartment, which is in the housing block where we are standing.

We walk up the unlit stairs to Maria's apartment. After unlocking many locks, the apartment glowed from the sunlight coming through the gauze-draped windows and the lavender wallpaper. The linoleum flooring was brown and coming up at the edges but the floral wallpaper was shining in the sunlight and the furniture was arranged, in typical Bulgarian fashion, with

matching decorative glassware atop multicolor crochet doilies on all usable flat surfaces and ornate picture frames of the children throughout.



Image 4: Inside of Romani home. Photo by the author.

Maria and her husband offer us Bulgarian Easter cake and juice, explaining they are Muslim and don't drink. Maria's daughter, Christina, enters and they talk about how hard it is for her in school, with boys that taunt her and teachers who don't pay attention to what goes on. Maria worries that it is not safe for Christina in school. Peter responds with stories of his grandfather and the importance of education, as though reciting campaign slogans.

After sitting in their home for about fifteen minutes, Niki comes looking for us, frantic, "I am going back down because I have too much work and people will be waiting for us. We will be waiting for you if you want to come as well. They are waiting for us in the nearby apartment building. All the women have heard you are here and now they are in front of the entrance and waiting." Peter tries to reassure him, "Ok, we will go soon there too. Honest families are very rare nowadays. I remember very well how my family was when I was little and how much discipline and good manners were important. It was unthinkable to abuse a girl or to bully her..." Maria explains the details of Christina's problem in school, "One of the boys that actually managed to rip off my daughter's dress. [He] is from not such a good family, his parents are

divorced. His mother is in Germany working all the time...it's shameful to raise your hand against my girl. I might be a Gypsy but I don't want to raise my daughter in such an environment, I want to raise her in a normal environment. It is not really normal when things like that start to happen.” She continues, “We also want to stop this practice where they bribe us during every election for votes with 50 maybe 100 leva and with barbeque and music as well...” Niki appears at the doorway and motions, again, for Peter to leave. We all exchange phone numbers.

Before leaving Peter recounts, “We are like the lost generation, and the question is like....well I am not speaking about mine but...about the pensions of the father and mother.” Christina’s father interjects after remaining silent for most of the conversation until that point, “I don't think we have even make it to pension, we are going to die or starve until then, because of the lack of work.” Peter is quiet. Before leaving he tells Christina’s parents, “if you give your children the right kind of education.... if you can send him to school, to learn and learn more, because this is the most important.”

They explain that their son finished twelfth grade and now has to work as a day laborer because he can’t find any steady work, “He wakes up in 6 in the morning and comes back home at 10pm, making 10 leva each day.” Peter nods, “Because there is no industry now. What [sector] does he work [specialize] in?” Maria explains, “He is good in everything, but mostly in computers...when they see he is black...when they see him they just turn him down.” Her husband interjects, “What are our children suppose to do, stay hungry? He must have money for breakfast. What is he suppose to do by lunch, stay hungry? Why are they even learning? Can they get hired after finishing their education? Is there work? I don't think so.” Peter tries to interject with a story, “I have learned from my grandfather...” but Maria interrupts him, “Of course he has finished 7th grade. But, tell me, for what? For what purpose? There is no work.

And sometimes they are racists when they have to hire someone. If they continue doing this it will be all the same.”

“When they see he is black they just turn him down.” Maria and her husband express their desire to work and to imagine a future in which education amounts to income. Despite pressures on Roma integration via education, they explain that upon seeing that their son is “black” [*cheren*] employers don’t want to hire him. Peter, although seemingly interested in what they have to say, talks past them. Here, we see the ways in which politics and everyday Romani life miss each other. Peter wants to campaign in a Romani neighborhood in a “European,” modern way. Instead of buying votes, which is expected in Bulgaria, he tries something new. However, he talks over the people trying to explain the conditions of their everyday existence. Maria clearly explains the reason for the stasis in the life of her family: “There is not work. And sometimes they are racists when they have to hire someone. If they continue doing this it will be all the same.” But, Peter does not hear her. Instead, he waxes nostalgic, “We never really hated each other and it has never been [like this]” and relates the current state of racial discrimination to electoral populism, “I think at the moment this whole fake scenario with the hate is because it is just convenient for some people.” Maria interjects, “There is no work, no working positions anywhere, what are we suppose to do without work? I am just getting enraged because I can’t raise my children properly that way.” Peter stumbles over his words, “We are going to keep you safe from all that...because we are all Bulgarians down to the last one.” Maria continues, “And from where am I suppose to take money to pay my bills, they want me to pay for the water, for the electricity and the rest... and, if other people are not working too, what are they suppose to pay with? If they had normal work of course they would pay their bills. If there is no work for they, they just cut...[the wires to tap into electrical lines].” Her husband interrupts, “There is just

no work at all.” Peter, needing to leave, explains, “Even if we don't win these elections we will come again for sure.”

Peter has no way to reply to Maria who desires “normal” work, echoing Nadka’s claims about the normalcy of labor and income during socialism. She explains that without “normal” work, nothing is normal. Instead of paying for electricity, her neighbors tap illegally into electric wires, which is then deemed a criminal act. Maria makes connections between nodes in a network that starts with labor and ends with labor. People want to work but can’t get employed and so manage to make due the only ways they know how, which in turn catalyze more anti-Roma sentiment, which in turn limits labor opportunities for Roma. Peter, however, doesn’t respond directly to what she is saying. He can only promise his ongoing presence and provide well-meaning platitudes.

We begin to walk down the stairs and Niki escorts us quickly out of the building as he tries to ensure we don’t end up in a neighbor’s apartment. Once we are inside the car, it is quiet.

Peter reflects on the experience:

Those people up here really cool. And also he's [the father] wearing a Turkish hat and they are speaking with Maria in Turkish. Their daughter is called Christina, by the way and they are from the Jehovah witnesses. This whole thing is really fucked up. And, their apartment is like 38 times cleaner than mine. But generally speaking every apartment is probably cleaner than mine, because I have not been long home in the past 2 months...You should work a bit more with that kind of people. But anyway we will get people very impatient if we only sit here and talk. We will make them very, very impatient.

Niki: If we keep doing this yes...

Peter: No worries, people will remember you with the good things only.

Marina: They gather every Sunday at 3 pm in the club here. Well, they just gather for discussion, I mean every Sunday they gather to talk and to discuss things from life.

The human contact between Peter, his local associates and the Roma residents does not result in big epiphanies or social transformation. In a sense, what happens is an acknowledgment of just how much it would take for actual political change to happen. Peter remarks on how clean Maria's apartment is, as though realizing that Roma homes aren't what they look like from the outside. Often the communist-era apartment buildings they live in were shoddily and quickly constructed and never maintained and so Roma homes require even more upkeep to keep them tidy. By positing their clean apartment against his messy one, Peter alludes to an understanding of the systematic differences that result in differing materialities. He knows he can't change their lives in one visit and it is unclear if he really understood what they were telling him, but he does notice that their apartment might not be as dirty as it would appear from the crumbling infrastructure in which it is housed.

VOTING IN LEVANKA

Voting day didn't end as hopefully as it began. From the end of the voting period until the vote counting was completed, I was allowed to document what happened in one schoolroom in *Levanka*. I was working in a semi-official capacity as an interpreter for the Dutch election monitors but I was also filming the process for my own research, with the permission of the election monitors and the staff in the room, who shrugged when I asked them if I could film their proceedings. I translated to a Dutch woman who was monitoring, who had no idea what was going on most of the time. I'd explain, in English, what was being discussed, what was happening in what order, and any issues which arose. We had both been trained the previous day by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee on Bulgarian voting laws, what is and is not permissible by staff in a voting facility, and what our role as international observers entailed. The gist of the training emphasized that we were only supposed to observe what happened, not change any

outcomes. If asked, we could provide assistance but our job was to watch, and record, if permitted.

After spending the day talking in Nadka's café with local residents about their feelings about the elections, I returned to School 890 as soon as the polls closed. Soon after I arrived, the classroom doors were locked and the counting began. As per Bulgarian voting law, representatives from each party on the ballot are allowed (one per room) to observe the counting. The idea is that by permitting a variety of observers, the counting won't be contested. There were also a few (low-paid) staffers who had been in the room all day, handing out ballots, pencils, and making sure the procedures went off according to plan. Although we were in *Levanka*, most staffers were not Roma and irritated by having to spend the day in the Romani neighborhood.

Once doors were locked, and after a Bulgarian monitor went door to door, letting us know when counting could begin, party observers had to stand on the edges of the room to make sure they observed—but never touched—the ballots. The staffers began to open the clear Plexiglas box, sealed with a signed piece of white paper, in which the ballots were stuffed. Ballots were legal-size pieces of white paper with names, numbers, and empty boxes in black ink. Voters had to take a ballot, stand in a curtained-off area in the corner of the room, take a pen and place an "X" next to the number of the party or politician they were voting for, and then fold the ballot in half or thirds in order to place it into the slit at the top of the Plexiglas box sitting atop the table where the staffers sat.

As I watched the opening of the voting box and the unfolding of ballots and the counting, the staffers were calm and seemed bored. The voting box for the mayor of Sofia was mostly left empty, as were most of the boxes related to national elections. However, there were a few

positions, for local representatives, which were continually marked. As I watched the counting, the party observers began to get more and more involved. The only party observers in the room were from two Roma parties that had heavily campaigned in the neighborhood for the local election. As the staffers started to tally the votes, the two Roma boys in the room offered to help by holding up ballots to help the process move faster.

The staffers allowed them to do this until it began to become tense in the room, after about four hours of counting. Counting consisted of unfolding paper ballots and placing them into piles, each pile representing one politician indicated by number. At one point the female (non-Roma) staffers became frustrated as the boys began to argue over the piling up of some ballots for a local representative.

Ani: It's those boys.

Eli: Here, 56. I'm telling you . This is the group, where they came [into the room earlier to vote].

Ani: But this is invalid, [another] invalid, invalid.

Eli: Hey, here's 56.

Ani: 56... 56.

Eli: 56...who is 56?

Ani: Here.

Eli: Sellouts, sellouts... Which is this political party?

Ani: They were giving money...

Eli: This population [Gypsy population] is not okay with their thinking.

Ani: Why not? That's why they ate all those steaks.

Eli: Hey, someone here voted for Sofianski. I don't know. There's not going to be sausages (*kebabche*). He put 59 [instead of 56].

Ani: Ohhh, 59. Here it is...give me the invalid one.

Eli: Come on, it's fine.

Ani: Ah?

Eli: Come on [faster], [or] they'll leave me to sleep in the neighborhood [*mahala*].

Ani: 56...the photos.

Eli: Well, it's clear now that they were paid beforehand.

Ani: [5]6, [5]6...

Eli: There's [5]6 more, what do you want? There's nothing more. Besides 56, there's nothing else.

Ani: There's 57 with me.

Eli: It's only 56 and 57 going around.

Elana: Why just those numbers?

Ani: Well we don't know.

Eli interjects and explains that all of the votes for 56 and 57 must be because the Roma population had sold those votes for meat.

Eli: Because there was lamb [meat] today, that's why.

Mitko [Teenage boy 1 working for #56] (sarcastically): Because we sold ourselves.

Ani: Well, there's an 8 here.

Eli: Here's the 8.

Ani: Ah, it's invalid here. Good job! Come on! You marked 57 well. No go away!

Eli: Well, these men are brainless.

Ani: Here are the invalid ones...where are they?

Mitko: I have a brain.

Alex [boy working for #57]: Well they are not brainless. Why do you call these people

stupid?

Ani: Well because they sell their votes...

Eli: And now 57.

Ani then brings up the votes-for-meat allegation:

Ani: You'll count carefully...there was lamb meat here!

Mitko [coming up behind me, suddenly]: Delete it now or I'll break it. I am telling you. Don't make me angry.

Elana: You'll break it?

Mitko: I'll break it.

Elana: But why do you...

Mitko: You can't take pictures here.

Eli: You don't have the right to take photos here. You do not have the right to take photographs.

At this point, Eli calls a guard in the school to come in and confiscate my camera. He arrives and takes the camera, unsure how to use it, while I take the memory card out quickly and hide it in my armpit. The election observer calls to the Bulgarian head monitor for help. They start by arguing and then manage to find a common ground in which I can only observe and translate but can't take photographs. I end up crying in the hallway but then manage to compose myself and watch as they finish counting and the piles of counted votes are tallied, bagged and put in an armored police car to be driven to headquarters.

As I stood outside of the school, watching police officers drag bags of votes into armored vehicles in the dark, I was left wondering why I was almost kicked out of the room. Ani and Eli made comments throughout the voting indicating that the only people who voted in this election, in this district, were paid-off with lamb. They weren't saying anything novel but they were

reiterating a common trope about “Gypsy vote selling” that clearly angered the party representatives in the room.

According to OSCE reports of the October 23, 2011 elections:

All interlocutors met by the OSCE/ODIHR NAM expressed concerns over possible vote-buying and voter intimidation, particularly in the municipal elections, which are considered crucial by most interlocutors. Minority groups, especially Roma, are perceived as most vulnerable in terms of such possible electoral irregularities and interlocutors commented that particular attention should be paid to this issue. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors also pointed to wealthy municipalities with business interests at stake as potential areas where electoral manipulations are anticipated, especially in the municipal elections. Further, it was noted that schemes for vote buying are becoming more sophisticated; particular concerns were expressed as to some contestants bribing election commissioners.

International findings concluded that election fraud had been a large part of the 2011 elections, especially in light of mass anti-Gypsy protests and intimidation (and imprisonment) of Romani leaders in the days and weeks leading up to elections. While international findings interpreted buying of votes, alongside intimidation, as part of the larger structure of poverty and political manipulation, most local Bulgarians, as seen in election staffer Ani’s focus on “lamb,” see vote selling as a crime of “stupidity” and opportunity.

Despite the selling of votes in Romani neighborhoods, which looks like “stupidity” from onlookers, even Roma express shame over the situation. They don’t want to be so desperate that they have to sell their votes to make money, to pay their electricity bills, to buy food for their children who themselves can’t find work. Elections may be apprehended as part of a Europeanizing democratic framework, but they are actually one of the few places within a capitalizing Bulgaria where Roma are not disposable. In response to the elections, Nadka focuses on the “normal” socialist past compared to the capitalist present in which Roma go through the trash of whatever is left of Bulgarian, cleaning streets for Bulgarians and never getting paid on time. Maria articulates how hard it is to receive an education in a so-called “free” Bulgaria and

then never be hired because of the color of one's skin. It becomes clear that exactly at the moments when democracy seems to materialize, in elections, in campaigning, in free labor market, certain groups become disposable. They are "black." They are discriminated against. They are made fun of. However, they never do perish. They are still important to politicians who want to win elections.

CHAPTER 3: DISMANTLING THE PROMISE OF PROGRESS

Moving from a phenomenon in which Roma are blamed for undoing the European promise of democracy in the space of democratic elections, here I explore scrap metal collecting in Bulgaria, which is part of another kind of infrastructural dismantling. Infrastructural dismantling, or “ruin” as it was locally called in Bulgaria, was commonly considered to be a) the unraveling of the potential for a “normal” postsocialist, European democracy, and b) the fault of the Romani minority.

Practices like scrap metal dealing are used in anti-Gypsy populist politics, TV news, and everyday discourse. Through links between this popular view of Roma as scrap dealers and longstanding anti-Roma racisms, these scrap practices have become socially (and legally) categorized as “criminal.” I address the ethnic and racial politics of ruination, recuperation, and processes of what I term the “criminalization of ruination.” While ruin—of abandoned buildings, communist monuments, and defunct roads—is commonly attributed to vagaries of political demise, neoliberalism, and failures of the welfare state, we too often ignore the very real processes by which both infrastructural and political “ruin” happen. I demonstrate how certain kinds of ruination are blamed upon minority groups, like the Roma, and through this racialization ruination becomes criminalized. It is important to note that these racial politics and discourses of criminality emerge within a particular material framework in which metal has shifted from being an important component of state socialist heavy industry and citizenship to something usually encountered in terms of scrap or refuse.

As certain kinds of ruin processes are stigmatized as being criminal, other kinds are valorized as creative. That is, while ruination is tied to creative processes in certain (white, elite) contexts, it is also seen as a node on a network of criminality that moves between petty thievery to “terrorism.” While this categorization takes shape throughout everyday life in Bulgaria, Bulgaria’s inability to actually change material waste and electoral infrastructures—leaves gaps for these processes to maintain themselves.

RUINS OF/FOR CAPITALISM

Ruin is part and parcel of capitalistic processes. Theorists have explored the role of those who pick up the pieces (without access to raw materials), from the "recuperator" (Edensor) to the "bricoleur" who uses whatever is “at hand” (Levi-Strauss). Roma in Bulgaria could be seen in these very terms, as they are often forced to take up the pieces of what is left over and do something new with them, in order to generate income outside of integrated labor markets to which they don’t have access. By examining metal collection, it becomes clear how political and material infrastructural demise become the fodder for criminalization and dehumanization, on one hand, and sources of income generation on the other.

When processes of ruination, of infrastructure and the political system, are blamed on the people most visible, then perhaps the controversial European Union language denoting the Romani minority as “vulnerable” might actually be accurate. Large mafia structures, which have significant influence in Bulgaria, are not being targeted. Rather, the impoverished sellers, not the *buyers*—of votes, of scrap metal—are the ones being criminalized. Those who are targeted are the people who are using whatever is “at hand” to generate an income. In doing this what is criminalized is a certain kind of poverty-induced labor –it’s recuperative, it’s functional, and it’s sometimes the only way to make a living.

I address the role of scrap metal collection as a form of undoing the state, through the physical *disarticulation* or dismemberment of public infrastructure. Scrap metal collection in Bulgaria, through ideologies linking it as a form of Romani criminality and destruction, becomes seen as *metonymic* for deconstructing the state, albeit an already fragile one. Scrap metal collection in Bulgaria, much like in other places, is often linked with criminal networks. Instead of being seen as larger processes of “greening” or sustainable development or recycling, “scrapping” is linked to thievery, stealing from the state for personal profit.

Scrap metal, as the core of state-socialism, had been seen as a symbol for the communist state. However, the role and representative entailments of scrap metal changed between the socialist and postsocialist periods. In the words of Zsuzsa Gille, metal was “not only strategically important but also symbolically the most relevant industry of state socialism” (Gille, 61). According to Gille, “it seemed that if only all steel and other metal wastes could be collected, the rate of growth for the heavy industries could be maintained despite all difficulties” (2007:61). However, in the postsocialist, post-EU-accession period, scrap metal has become semiotically attached to the Romani minority as it is also synonymous with both the demise of the promise of “Europe” and Bulgaria itself. Scrap metal has become synonymous with the destruction of democracy, of the material dismantling of a now fragile state.

Scrap metal recuperation during state socialism advanced the state’s steel making industry, but in the era of Europeanization, Bulgaria no longer produces steel. During state socialism, a great deal of iron ore was imported from the Soviet Union, which was used to make Bulgarian steel—along with whatever scrap was recovered. The workers that labored at Bulgaria’s main metallurgy site, Kremokovtzi, included a large percentage of *Levanka*’s Romani population. Many of my friends in the neighborhood and parents and grandparents who had

worked there. However, with the end of socialism, the factory was privatized and production was outsourced to the European Union, Turkey, the US, and China. It has become more cost effective to buy steel abroad, use European Union funds for infrastructure projects, and at the same time figure out the least expensive ways to make do with the infrastructural ruins and remnants that still exist. Scrap, however, is still collected—mostly by informal recyclers who sell it to collection points—in Bulgaria but then exported abroad for profit.

As opposed to communist ideology, the ideologies upon which postsocialist Europeanization is founded aren't about building industry. Rather, Bulgarian Europeanization entails a reduction of heavy industry and related infrastructures (like rail) in favor of investing in highways and airports. As EU funding is dedicated to building infrastructures for cars and planes, Europeanization also entails dealing with the remains of already-built public infrastructures. These public infrastructures, like railways, are not just material and physical spaces but functioned in the valorization of the laborers who created them. Many of those same people involved in the labor of heavy industry are those most disposable in the era of Europeanization when heavy industry has moved abroad and new kinds of expertise are valorized within a free market European economy. In this new post-industrial era, there are those who are able to move abroad or look “towards Europe” but then there are those people without the same access and without other means of income generation, not the “engineers” of society but the *bricoleurs*, who must make do with what's at hand, even if what's at hand is pretty much (materially and politically) falling apart.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ As Tim Edensor explains, “the quest for more profitable products, expanded markets and cheaper ways of manufacturing things, together with the inexorable quest for producing new goods and services, produces periodic crises of accumulation where surplus labor and capital drive down prices and profit. One response to such crisis is to suddenly drop less profitable elements of the production process, often simultaneously moving production from one area or country to another, and then to devalue them so they can later be redeveloped. Those buildings deposed of in this fashion are thus temporarily or permanently rendered useless in industrial enterprise” (Edensor: 4).

I examine the “criminalization of ruination” as part of material and political shifts in Bulgaria with severe consequences on how and what labor is valued. This results in a changing position of Roma vis-à-vis the Bulgarian state. While during socialism, many Romani manual laborers were deeply embedded in state development, within a democratic framework Roma are discussed either “criminals” or “terrorists.” In this common Bulgarian viewpoint, Roma are the destroyers of the promise of democracy.

Europeanization depends on a very different kind of development than that of state socialism. As manual laborers, Roma are no longer part of development but become seen as extraneous and harmful. In a well-circulated research paper by Pol Primett, an agency focusing on scrap metal theft “led by the UK's National Crime Agency and includes partners from 8 EU Member States” I found the following explanation of metal theft in East Europe:⁵⁰ “What seems clear in particular is the involvement of numerous individuals from Eastern Europe and the Balkans - especially but not only from the Roma ethnic minority – which operate in the metal theft sector, either independently or in association with more or less organised criminal associations” (Pol_PRIMETT Research Paper February 2013). As the Bulgarian metallurgy industry has shrunk and the focus on scrap collection at the level of production has ceased to exist, the reusing of metal that defined state socialism has become tied to minority criminalization, or the criminalization of a specific kind of poverty.

Edensor is useful for thinking of ruination in terms of providing the possibilities—or affordances—for capitalistic recuperation and creativity. In some ways Edensor’s recuperator is akin to a more politicized version of Levi-Strauss’s bricoleur who “is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand’, that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions” (Levi-Strauss,11).

⁵⁰ <http://www.pol-primett2.org/content/618/about-us>

When Bulgarians talk about scrap metal, their first associations are the dismantling of railroad tracks, a public bench that has been cut into strips, or a highway sign that has been melted down into something that can be resold by the kilo. Whereas during state socialism scrap metal was linked to industry, or production, in the post-EU-accession era, scrap is associated with the ruin of once “public” goods that have been repurposed for individual, economic means.

As an intern at the Ministry of the Environment and Water in Bulgaria, located in downtown Sofia, I spoke with Julia, the head of “large object” recycling. She explained the recent changes to the waste law:

After July 2014, people will be allowed to return old metals but they will not be given money for it. The more accurate term here is that [this work] will be ‘voluntary.’ And this has a purpose. It is meant to decrease the rate of metal theft because now people collect because they get paid for it. They [recycling points] check ID cards now but there is always some way to lie or cheat. So, now the companies that collect the metals for recycling have to pay...it’s not actually paying but in order to collect metals you need a bank guarantee for 25,000 leva, and after that you pay 5,000 leva for every new waste collection site you establish...And if you somehow break the law, then your bank guarantee will be used. But, this can only happen if the minister orders it. First it must be proven that you’ve broken the law and only after that can the guarantee be used.

Citing criminality as the impetus for the law, she explained that the “purpose was to decrease the theft of metals, including manhole covers, telecommunication installations, different kinds of monuments...they steal even such things. Now, in order to accept such kind of waste at your collection site you need to see documentation of where it comes from.” She explained that if someone takes a manhole cover, for example, she would need documentation from the Ministry’s Office for Waters and Canalization explaining that this cover was broken or unusable and therefore the person who brings it in as scrap is in “rightful possession of it.” She continued, “[without the certification] You have no right to take it because it is property of Water and Canalization. Or, with the monuments in the parks, with what right are they going to take them?” I asked if people were really trying to turn in metal monuments. She looked at me like I

was crazy for even asking. “Of course,” she explained, “[They take] those busts of different people they put in the parks. At least some of those cannot just be taken because some are made very well. But what else are they stealing? Many things! Road signs as well, but now if the police go to the metal collection site and discover road signs, the license of the company who owns the collection site can be taken away.”

Julia links the theft of public infrastructure and the “sturdiness” of socialist-era monuments. Many people I met often referred to the “sturdiness” of state socialist monuments, which seemed to belie material ideologies of state socialism itself. Despite complaints about the system, most Bulgarians tell the story of the destruction of Georgi Dimitrov’s mausoleum in Sofia. The mausoleum was built in 1949 to hold the embalmed body of the first Communist leader. As part of Bulgarian state socialist pride, it was built in only six days. However, when the mausoleum was destroyed by the “democratic” government in power in 1999 the first three attempts at demolition completely failed. It wasn’t until the fourth try, comprised of a series of smaller blasts, that the mausoleum was demolished. I couldn’t help but think that the sturdiness of communist infrastructure also signaled other, less material, legacies of state socialism as well.

I asked Julia if the destruction was being done by just regular citizens.

Julia: Yes, mostly unemployed people, who consider this the easiest way to earn some money. They steal and after that go and try to turn in what they have stolen to the collection sites for money.

E: And are there results [from the new law] in regard to these kinds of stolen metal?

J: Yes there are. New information is coming in all the time. During the first half of the year there was a decrease [in metal theft] and after that the percent of thefts increased again, then decreased. But, in general, they are less than before because now [collection] companies are more careful.

From there, Julia articulated both a trope common to discussions about Gypsies being the demise of the Bulgaria state:

But there always are those who steal the train rails. A month ago there was a case when 1km of train rails were stolen. One rail is a couple of meters long and weighs a couple of tons. With what do they lift that weight? With some special kind of equipment?

E: Where did this happen?

J: The rails just went missing. Which means someone has taken them and they will be recycled... and that is us, Bulgaria.

E: Where was this?

J: It was in Sofia. And they said the place from where the rails were stolen is not guarded or the security people check on it only very rarely. The thieves know when there is nobody around – like Friday, Saturday, and Sunday—and they had enough time to steal them. And, on Monday there is the surprise that 1km of them is missing. Sometimes the problem is that the rails bounce sometimes from the way they are bolted together and it is easy to remove them. And, if a train passes on them it can cause a crash. This is the problem. These are very bad things they do. This might even be considered an act of terrorism. I don't know the exact penalties for such theft but in any case it's not very big and this is why such things continue to happen. These people [who do this] are mostly from Romani origin but there are some Bulgarians too... most of these people are in perfect conditions for working but the majority of them don't want to...they want to do things easily and they have no education. Some of them don't even have the very basic level of education and they can't work, but I think this is the case in many countries, not only ours. It is very hard to integrate such people.

It was in fact true that during the weekend of May 24-25th, 2013, nearly a full kilometer of the Poduyane-Birimirtsi rail line was stolen during the night. Mainstream news accounts called for the act, in line with Julia's discussion, to be deemed "terrorism" due to the danger of ruining the transportation infrastructure. Despite the fact that the railroad line was no longer in use, due to reduced funding for public infrastructures like railways, the case still triggered public audiences to place blame on those who stole the tracks.

News shows covered the theft in sensationalist terms. On one mainstream program, the reporter begins, "During the years different representatives of the rail infrastructure have been asking that such felony is treated and punished as terrorism, not just robbery, because of the enormous danger hidden in such damages in the infrastructure." The program continues with this same newscaster standing beside a rusty railroad track explaining that one meter of rail weighs forty-nine kilograms. The amount that was stolen was close to fifty tons. The reporter introduces

Biser Minchev, representative from the National Railway Infrastructure Company, and asks about his account of what happened:

BM: It happened during the celebrations on May 24th. It is a completely shameless robbery. This is an enormous problem for the National Rail Infrastructure Company. Everything gets stolen- cables, contact wire, rope, rails, fastenings, but still, in such quantity...

Reporter: Such big quantity...

BM: Yes, there hasn't been such [a large amount] of [railway] line stolen until now.

Reporter: With us is also Lubomir Todorov, Director of the Office for Classification of Information and Internal Security for the National Rail Infrastructure Company. Mr. Todorov, how often do trains pass through this railway route?

LT: Well, trains do not pass. Traffic has been stopped since February. The reason is that the same types of theft have happened a countless number of times and that has stopped movement.

Todorov blames small-scale theft for the railway shutdown, although according to many other reports, lack of funding is actually to blame. He continues:

They also put things on the rails to stop the traffic. The idea is to stop the freight trains. When they stop, there are attempts at robberies of the freight trains depending on...even if they are carrying only scrap metal that gets stolen too. This is the reason why we constantly have robberies in the region of Birimirci Poduyane train station and even at the Poduyane train station. And those robberies are enormous. I can tell you that from the whole infrastructure we have 417 robberies that are costing us 652,000 BGN, from the beginning of the year until now.

The reporter asked, “With one sentence, how is that change going in Bulgaria?”

BM: Well, I will tell you. We implemented some changes in the law for waste management. [These changes] introduced some more restrictive means when it comes to the waste collect points, but it is a fact that it didn't produce the result we expected.

The reporter followed-up, “What are you doing on your side to prevent this from happening?

Can you stop such robberies? Can you foresee it in a way? We know that there must be a person that walks around [and guards] the area...”

BM: There is, there is. We have built a system for figuring out security issues that work without a problem. We have constantly people on the schedule, who go around the area. After the celebrations a police car from Sofia has started to make rounds in the area. That is also another cost...

Reporter: And in spite of that the thefts was not stopped in time. I say good morning to the main inspector Borislav Tulev who is the director of the local police transport station. Mr. Tulev, a huge felony was committed here during the holidays, 24th, 25th, 26th...are there any suspects?

BT: There are suspects. In RUTP Sofia (*Sofia Regional Office of Transport Police) they are currently taking actions to find the perpetrators.

Reporter : Do they know the how this felony, this theft, was carried out? How many people did it? What equipment did they use? We already mentioned that just one meter of those rails weighs 50kg. It's hard to imagine the weight of 1km, how all of that was carried away from here...

BT: Look, the technology is simple, with cutting, the transportation I would say was by hand. There must have been good organization for such a large quantity, for those robberies there is...we have talked to the prosecutor's office...

Reporter: We already know that you have suspects. Two last questions since we are running out of time. I'll ask you for short answers. First, has the number of such thefts increased?

BT: No. From New Year until now there has been only one, and that was in Kyustendil. That one has been solved, and the perpetrators have been caught.

Reporter: Last question, we understood that the people around here on the outskirts railroad have complaints, from the warehouses and companies that work here - what are those?

BT: There are different manufacturing companies. Their complaints are that the electricity stops, cables are stolen, their phones stop. The same things [happen] everywhere where there is Gypsy population close to the railroads.

Despite the factual evidence, Julia's story, corroborated with other Bulgarian officials, carries with it not the particularity of a specific occurrence but the longstanding trope of the "destructive" Gypsy. Julia's story, although actually grounded in recent events, links up with larger narratives of Romani destruction of public infrastructure, and by metonymic means, the state itself.

Julia's story in particular relates to a common trope of "Gypsy destruction" I heard narrated, without factual evidence, over and over again as a justification for why Roma live in the segregated neighborhoods they do.⁵¹ These kind of pervasive tropes are hard to locate in a particular source, since they are so well dispersed into popular jokes, oral histories and stories told to me by a variety of friends. However, I remember most clearly a waste official telling me

⁵¹ See Dina Iordanova on socialist era films in the region, such as *Larks on a String* (1969).

the story of the Gypsy who brought his horse indoors. He explained that state socialism was good to Roma. The state provided Roma with public housing, which was effectively free. It was warm, safe, and clean. His friend was living in one of these buildings. Then the Gypsies moved in. And, before they realized it, the Gypsies had brought their horse into their apartment with them. Soon thereafter, they saw smoke coming from the windows of the apartment, and truth be told, the Gypsies had been tearing up the floorboards to make a fire.

Here, we see that tales of Romani destruction run deep in the Bulgarian imagination. However, both the recent account of railroad theft and so-called memories of Roma destruction of communist-era apartments functions as both a form of Roma racialization and a critique of the fragility of utopian state enterprises. On the one hand, the context of state socialist infrastructure—whether a state appointed apartment or public railroads—functions as an equalizing background against which the particularity of Roma destructiveness can be foregrounded. This functions as a way to racialize Roma in a particular way. By equalizing the material surroundings, the Roma stand outside of a system as a means of depicting them as inherently destructive. Second, these accounts also function through the process of racializing Roma to also put into question the power of the state to build infrastructures that promote “good” citizenship. Even the most utopian plan, like the socialist-era railroad, falls into disrepair with time and can fall “prey” to the people waiting to destroy it.

THE DESTRUCTION OF A DEFUNCT LINE

Debates ensued in online comments sections under articles and videos related to the story. While some comments under the article about the rail line dismantling focused on justifying the links between “*mangali*” (derogatory term from Roma) and trash who have moved out of the landfill and into other areas of waste thievery, other comments focused on the fact that

while it might be implied that this is “Gypsy work” (*tsiganska rabota*), it clearly is too sophisticated and organized to be the work of Roma and instead must be the labor of “pure Bulgarians”. Others reaffirmed typical anti-Gypsy sentiment focusing on the fact that Gypsies are “uncomprising” and “always just want a free ride.”

These same commenters highlighted the fact that integration (*integracia*) means that everyone needs to respect the rules. In this genre of commentary, I read many reformulations of other common tropes: “this parasitic ethnicity pulls us down...” Others focused on the idea of recycling and its link to thievery, explaining that someone stole the public metal to make “their own private railroad to the village. The question is at what collection site the rails are sold as recyclables.” This line of commentary focused on Gypsy links to other thieves, namely in the realms of business and policing.

Most interesting, beneath many of these comments someone, self-affirmed as the Chairman of the Bulgarian Association of Consulting Companies in Railroad Construction, Governing the “Eurotransproject” Ltd and manger of the project “Technical Assistant for Development of Railway Junction Sofia,” explains the case in terms of post-EU-accession progress. The chairman explains that this issue of railway ruin is not just one of criminality but due in large part to the fact that the railway lines themselves have become defunct. He details how the railway between Poduyane and Birimirtsı stations went out of service in 2002 as part of a program intended to save money by freezing “unprofitable” railway routes in Bulgaria. Before shutting down the line, they had to reroute it through the central Sofia station, which subsequently turned out to be problematic since the Sofia station wasn’t equipped to deal with the extra traffic. Other parts of the frozen line have faced other issues of “misuse,” including that in some places local residents used the train line as a parking facility. He concludes with his

main argument: railroad stations in and around Sofia need to be modernized in order for the railway lines in Bulgaria to become part of a European rail network. He writes, “the construction of a new intermodal terminal, Poduyane...when properly conducted transport policy in Bulgaria will become a major point of transit for trains in the Euro corridors IV and X. Much of this transit traffic will pass on the railway link through Birimirtsı. Looking ahead, if the transit freight traffic is not redirected outside Sofia, it will be impossible for the Central Railway Station in Sofia to meet its expected main functions – to conduct long-distance, suburban, and urban [passenger] trips.”

The Sofia railways, like railways throughout Europe, are international. Stopping short the routes in one location affect not only the entire country but also the relative accessibility of that country to the rest of Europe. However, this accessibility is no longer as important as it once was. Railroads were once the materialized promise of state socialist progress but are now being quickly eclipsed by road and air travel and commercial transport. While it is easy to conceptualize railroads as linking European states, with the proliferation of highways and air travel, Europeanization is no longer dependent on rail transport. Thus, the scrapping of public infrastructures, like the “ruination” of the democratic voting process, are seen as an extension of Roma criminality despite the fact the process of EU accession itself is so deeply flawed that it might be considered itself already a “ruin.”

SCUBA-DIVING FOR METAL, GYPSY FOR AN AFTERNOON

In May 2012, I took part in a bTV (a mainstream news channel) campaign to “Clean Bulgaria in One Day.”⁵² The project was part of a program initiated by young, mostly English-speaking newscasters and producers who wanted to focus on both community and environmental

⁵² This is the holiday I mention earlier, which is linked to the Soviet-era “voluntary cleaning” day, *subbotnik*, in most older Bulgarians’ conceptual framework.

sustainability by challenging the country to clean for one day and see what could happen. What they didn't expect was that while a lot of young people got involved, many older Bulgarians associated the campaign with very similar socialist campaigns to clean Bulgaria before the commemoration holidays on November 9th. Despite mixed feeling about the communist period, this bTV campaign was mocked as being a funny "invention," which in reality was just an old socialist tradition of "voluntary" cleaning.

As part of the annual cleaning day, I traveled throughout the country to observe and participate in a wide array of cleaning activities—from cleaning the parks of Sofia to cleaning the area where horse-carts accumulated junk in front of *Levanka's* main primary school to the Black Sea Coast town of Sozopol where a group of scuba divers went underwater to collect whatever garbage they could find. I was invited onto a boat with a close-knit crew of male scuba divers, many of whom dove in their free time in Bulgaria, Greece, and as far away as Thailand, Egypt, and Indonesia. It was an elite crowd of businessmen, most of whom were in their mid-40s and nearly all of whom owned SUVs, their own scuba equipment, and spoke English.

When I arrived at the dive center in downtown Sozopol, I was greeted by a bunch of men who seemed more than happy to have a woman on their dive. There was an air of male bonding, albeit in front of a bTV camera crew and female reporter, as we prepared two small boats to take a nearby deserted island. As we prepared for the dive, the divers expressed concerns about the fact that there wouldn't be enough trash close enough to shore to make the story worthwhile for the TV crews. Additionally, they really wanted to start the season not by diving offshore but off a boat. In two boatloads we traveled to the island, stopping first at a dock so the divers could put on their equipment and dive with nets into which they could collect any found waste.

As they went underwater, I watched from the boat. They would come up every now and

then, reach an arm out of the water, and show what they had collected. It was mostly debris from boats, tire parts used as bumpers for the boats, and stray pieces of metal. At the end, once the divers had finished, they sat in the boat, holding up the pieces of metal they found and humorously called themselves “Gypsies” of the sea. Scrap metal was associated, first and foremost, with Romani scrap metal collection.



Image 5: Scuba divers preparing to clean underwater for the “Clean Bulgarian in One Day” campaign. Photo by the author.



Image 6: Scuba divers returning with metal they found while cleaning underwater for the “Clean Bulgarian in One Day” campaign. Photo by the author.

After the dive in Sozopol I traveled across the country that evening in order to clean the area behind *Levanka*’s main elementary school the next morning at ten a.m. I was met with camera

crews upon arrival. Scuba divers cleaning the sea inevitably provoke deeply entrenched stereotypes of Roma as scrap metal collectors. At the same time, “Gypsies” cleaning their own neighborhoods is similarly sensational and through media representation reinforce links between Roma, trash, and waste labor. However, what is remarkable about Roma cleaning their own neighborhood is not that Roma are cleaning. That happens, in public, every day. What is unique is that they are not cleaning from a position of labored servitude but instead for and in their own neighborhood. This defies most Bulgarians expectations. Just as Peter (in Chapter Two) is surprised by the cleanliness of Maria’s apartment, the Bulgarian public is also enthralled with the image of Roma, so often seen as connected to waste, cleaning their own neighborhoods.



Image 7: Romani residents in a Romani neighborhood clean up for the “Clean Bulgarian in One Day” campaign. Photo by the author.

As I was leaving *Levanka* after cleaning, a group of elderly Romani women and men came up to me and explained that the reason the large field in front of the school was used as a dump was because the horse-carts that go around the city collecting recyclables and things for parts dump the excess waste in this pit. They suggested that the trucks create a pit so that the

horses can't climb into the area. It was the first time I ever heard an explanation for the waste in the neighborhood.

This served as a useful logical counterpoint for many non-Romani Bulgarians who only saw the outside of Romani neighborhoods, from the road or TV, and decided that Roma must be preternaturally connected to waste. External areas in Romani neighborhoods are often covered in trash for a variety of reasons. These include the fact that horse carters often have no other place to dump what they collect and cannot use. Horsecarters have for years also been paid to dispose of waste in Roma neighborhoods for a fee. Often producers of hazardous waste pay Roma to transport waste to their own neighborhoods in order to avoid paying the hefty costs of disposing of waste in EU-legislated ways (in landfills, into incinerators, etc.). The trash in Romani neighborhoods typically results from illegal dumping or lack of waste management infrastructures. Many Romani neighborhoods are not on the waste management grid due to legal gaps in neighborhood recognition as well as due to *chistota* budget cuts. Because the waste in public areas of Roma neighborhoods is often the most visible, from passing trains or from the outskirts of the areas, most non-Romani Bulgarians assume that Roma live in filth. However, were they to actually enter Romani homes, they would realize how clean, well-kept, and meticulously cared for they usually are.⁵³

THE PROBLEM WITH COLLECTION POINTS AND THE NEW LAW

Over the course of 2012, Bulgaria's waste law was deeply reformed. A large percentage of collection points were shut down due to changes in the law that made requirements for the

⁵³ There is also social pressure on women to keep the home clean. Many women I knew cleaned what seemed like all the time. However, most never complained because they said it helped relieve their anxiety or that it was just "habit."

collection of recycled metal nearly impossible.⁵⁴ Whereas up until 2012, someone could take metal and recycle it for cash (by weight) at any of the hundreds of collection points throughout the country, the waste law established that the selling of scrap metal needed to be done in particular locations, with certain registrations, and payment required both a bank account and a photo ID. The Bulgarian Ministry of the Environment and Water, together with many municipalities, made the sale of metal highly regulated, at least in theory.

Debate in Sofia ensued between the Bulgarian Association for Recycling (BAR), a non-profit group supported by scrap metal recyclers, and Sofia Municipality. BAR often appealed to human rights for the protection of Romani livelihoods, which conveniently, supported their shareholders. The bill called for regulations to ensure that metal was not stolen but rather actual “scrap,” as it also initiated a longer process of closing down private collection points in favor of municipally owned recycling stations where they would collect recyclable materials for free from citizens. The Bulgarian Association of Recycling (BAR) equated this to municipal “stealing,” since it would provide often-corrupt municipalities with a source of income generation. In effect, the municipalities would be taking over the role of the “stealing Gypsy.” In a newspaper article the head of BAR, Vladimir Dimitrov, explained: “Its [the reform’s] real aim is to radically redraw the scrap metal market and give the lion share to a few big companies and organizations to the detriment of hundreds of small scrap yards, which have been operating for more than ten years.”

Nadia, the spokesperson for the Bulgarian Association for Recycling, explained the waste law on metal to me during a meeting. Apparently, a new law was passed on June 15, 2011 that

⁵⁴ See National Waste Law amendment on scrap: The Minister of Environment and Water shall be the national competent authority for implementation of Council Regulation (EU) No 333/2011 of 31 March 2011 establishing criteria determining when certain types of scrap metal cease to be waste under Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 94/2 of 8 April 2011), hereinafter referred to as "Regulation (EU) No 333/2011".

focused on voluntary closing of recycling points that traded in metal. They needed to conform to the new regulations or be forcibly closed down by February 2012. She explained that according to BAR, only 500 sites shut down since the law passed while government officials who, according to Nadia “lost their list,” claim that over 1,000 shut down. As Nadia explained, and as was confirmed by EU waste management consultants I interviewed, those sites that “closed down” on paper actually just went “underground” and are still working illegally.⁵⁵

Nadia explained that the law itself was unconstitutional as it mandates that metal recycling points can only exist where there is a municipal general spatial plan. However, two-thirds of Sofia is without a general spatial plan. The loophole, according to Nadia, is that the municipality can run metal waste collection sites *anywhere* and do not need to conform to this rule. The new law mandates that ID cards need to be checked before metal can be sold, payments must be done via bank transfer, and video of all sales must be recorded.

Nadia explained that this, as is the norm in Bulgaria, would only lead to mafia structures reinventing and hiding businesses. Sofia municipality, however, also began its own metal collection sites. However, they don’t pay for scrap, couching this issue in terms of “metal theft,” explaining that they don’t want to incentivize the stealing of metal from public infrastructure. When I asked Nadia her opinion she claimed that only 1% of all metal scrap was actually the result of theft. Instead, she explains that the municipality riles up voters with the premise of metal theft to gain support for their project, which promotes only mafia structures and their own income generation.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Often, these “illegal” recycling points have financial deals with local authorities and are condoned, despite not being permitted by national legislation.

⁵⁶ The actual waste management act, in its 2012 version, states:

Article. 39. (1) Delivery and acceptance of WFNFM which are not of household character, including those representing cables and power lines, wiring of any kind and size elements for electronic communications infrastructure, and parts of railway rolling stock, track, including security, signaling and communication

Aside from Nadia and BAR, private business owners were also upset by the waste law. In a meeting with Stefan, a waste industry entrepreneur that I met in the town outside Sofia, he explained his concerns with the new waste law.

When private thefts of public goods occur, whether it's manhole covers, utility poles, cables, etc., this is a big problem. [They sell them at] private collection points [*punktove*] and nobody can restrict their access. However, if the municipality is the owner [of the collection points], then any stolen materials won't be accepted. But, I do not believe this will have such a large effect given the fact that even small foundries can clean them [the traces of their source] and so there are many ways for making money from theft. The bad part is that the only thing Bulgarians care about is stealing as much as possible.

Stefan is a proponent of the municipality taking over private collection companies since he believes more regulations will help to reduce criminal activity. However, using the common anatomical analogy for state corruption, he explains, "it comes from the head" and "not from the people." He explains that those living with minimal income see politicians and public figures stealing "above" and so decide that they can steal much lesser amounts. "Everything smells from the head...corruption in Bulgaria is of unthinkable size; there is nothing you can do." He went on to explain the situation when bales of waste were shipped from Sofia across the country, many of which ended up in his hometown, Plovdiv. "Do you know what amounts of money got poured into that thing? It's crazy!" The technology for bale pressing is German and often baling waste is what is done before waste is burned. However, in the Bulgarian situation, baling was a temporary way to store waste while landfill space could be negotiated. What was never expected were the chemical reactions that occur inside baled waste: "Here we thought that when they bale press them, the waste will stay inside, without any reaction because there's no anaerobic access.

equipment and all installations, all elements and parts of the road infrastructure such as road signs, guardrails, metal lids from manholes, street lighting parts or water supplying systems and facilities, and pre-metallised monuments or parts or elements thereof, should be only in the presence of a certificate of origin issued by persons whose activities are formed on the basis of written agreement.

But it's nothing like that!...There is no logic in the politics of ecology in this country, everything is subjected to thievery.⁵⁷

By 2007 a of total 372352 tons of waste from Sofia Municipality were packed in bales and stored near Sofia's three major highways or exported across the country. According to the *Environmental Impact Assessment Statement concerning investment proposal "Building an Integrated Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Treatment System for the Municipality of Sofia,"* "the accumulation of baled or disposed municipal waste without separation dooms not only the present-day but also the future generations from the adjoining areas to continuous exposure of generated pollutants in the atmospheric air, the most significant of them being greenhouse gases from methane and carbon dioxide" (114). In conversation with an academic waste expert in Sofia I was told that baled waste is at risk of explosion or, in Bulgaria, was sometimes secretly burned in order to make it disappear.

VERONIKA

It might be easy to say that Roma don't steal train tracks. Perhaps it happens but I've never witnessed it or heard about it and think it is relatively rare. More often, Romani communities, without other means of income generation, are involved in recycling materials from abandoned buildings and structures that are no longer in use. The demolition of any sort of public—or private structure—immediately becomes seen as a potential source of income.⁵⁸

One day I was visiting Veronika, a fifteen-year-old Romani girl in the town of Pernik, who said she wanted to learn English after school. The second of six children and the daughter of a mother that scavenged through trash and sometimes cleaned entrances to public buildings for her welfare payment and a father who was addicted to sniffing glue, Veronika had to babysit her

⁵⁷ Wall-E, the animated film, was inspired by baled waste in Bulgaria.

⁵⁸ This is another kind of instantaneous conversion.

siblings after school. Her older sister was already married and had her own children. I met Veronika on Pernik's Kukeri festival day, when residents from the town and from around the country came in costume; often men came in drag, and marched through the town.⁵⁹ Veronika and her sister had made a deal with the local pizzeria that they would get 5 lev (2.5 Euro) for the day if they emptied the trash can into the dumpster in the back at hourly intervals. For the only pizzeria in town, this was busiest day of the year and they weren't used to so much work and had a garbage can that was too small to accommodate the amount of business they would do over the course of twenty-four hours. I was eating pizza by myself and said hello to Veronika and her sister who collected my trash as I finished eating. I asked them what they were doing and slowly they became intrigued by my accent and the fact I was alone and asked if I wanted to hang out and look at the costumes together.

We walked around the festival and they used my camera to capture the costumes and themselves, in classic "selfie" format, and at the end of the day asked if I could come back next week to teach them English. From then on I tried to visit them weekly and began to get to know their family, and after intensive screening by their mother, became somewhat of a Tuesday afternoon babysitter for the girls, ranging from 15 years to 2 years old. With my own haphazard research schedule and their living without a phone and no way to coordinate my visits, I'd just have to take the train to Pernik, walk up to the Romani neighborhood where they lived and ask around for Veronika, who was usually either at home or herself scavenging through a garbage bin.

One Tuesday in May, I arrived and searched for Veronika. She was nowhere to be found but I saw her little sister playing with a jump rope outside of their house, showing me very little

⁵⁹ See Creed regarding ethnic and racial relationships to Kukeri – can set the scene more ethnographically here to show juxtapositions of Bulgarians parading as "Gypsies" and actual Roma children collecting garbage

interest. Ignoring me except for one-word answers, Valia explained that Veronika was probably up the road with “everyone.” I walked up the road, past their neighborhood and saw a group of men and women I recognized from the neighborhood with various kinds of tools and poles of concrete with metal rods sticking out. Sweating despite the cool air, nearly all of the adults of the neighborhood, including Veronika’s mother, were trying to break the concrete to extract the iron rods. Veronika stood on watching, trying to help, while her mother and cousins yelled at her for being so annoying. Veronika, despite being fifteen, was very small and while she did a good job jumping in and out of garbage bins on the street to scavenge items to use or resell, was not helpful in this large-scale demolition effort.

Veronika’s mother looking relieved for someone to entertain Veronika, called me over to excitedly show me what she was doing and even more excitedly ask me to take Veronika for pizza or whatever we did on Tuesdays. I asked her what she was doing and she just replied, “working.” Veronika wanted to watch, along with her sisters, as the rest of her family and extended family took a variety of tools, including sledgehammers, axes, hammers, and rocks, to break apart the old concrete and extra the metal inside. It was clear that the typical begging, scavenging, cleaning that the neighborhood members usually involved themselves in on a daily basis were halted to make time for this demolition. They explained, as they worked, that an old building was getting torn down for some new construction and they happened to witness it mid-way through. The iron inside, when extracted from the concrete, could generate enough income to make taking the day “off” worthwhile.

DECONSTRUCTION OR CONSTRUCTION?

It was typical throughout my research to hear about or see people around a construction site, hauling raw materials away. Many construction sites were often guarded. For example, my

friend's father (Nadka's husband) worked as a security guard for a new Jehovah's Witness church being constructed in *Levanka*. Although it's not clear whether people would steal raw materials from an in-construction church, it was clear that the look of a building "in-construction" or "in ruin" are remarkably similar.⁶⁰

Buildings in process can go in two directions, toward deconstruction or toward construction, and in Bulgaria it is often very difficult to discern between the two. The reasons for this are primarily economic but also related to changing building regulations, especially near natural preservation sites and the Black Sea. Sites, previously uninhabited or declared to be part of nature preservation efforts changed in 2012 to allow for more large-scale construction. However, what this meant was that foreign and local investors often quickly started building only to be interrupted mid-construction by economic crisis, which affected most of Bulgaria a few years later than it had impact on the rest of the Europe (see Holleran 2015, Hirt 2006). The material consequence of this is that the black sea coast is strewn with half-built buildings, that are somewhere between the state of being built and being in processes of ruination. While, for all intents and purposes, these buildings are abandoned, they are often still in precarious states of ownership and the repurposing of them, for living or for scrapping, are moralized and even criminalized.^{61 62 63}

SCAVENGERS AS POLLUTERS

⁶⁰ See Akhil Gupta on similar cases in India - "Ruins of the Future" (2014)

⁶¹ See work on illegal settlements in Bulgaria (Ivancheva 2015) and the repurposing of abandoned space by squatters as a comparison (Vasudevan 2014, Walker 2013).

⁶² In a meeting of the Sofia Municipality I attended, they had on their agenda "what to do with the *katuni tsigani*." The term "*katuni tsigani*" refers to a group of Roma (or Gypsies) who are living in makeshift housing, either in tents, horse carts, or abandoned structures. The municipal councilors at this meeting on the Environmental Taskforce, weren't sure what they could do with this population of Roma living near a river that were a "public eyesore" and debated programs for how to deal with them.

⁶³ See Oushakine (2007) on "remont."

Throughout my research I was often surprised by the approach of many environmental activists and policy makers to Romani structures of informal collection. Often, environmental sustainability and minority integration were at odds. While Romani labor accounted for the large percentage of packaging that Bulgaria recovered, enough to meet its increasing EU-mandated quantities, many so-called environmentalists deemed Roma “polluters,” focusing not on the ultimate outcome of labor but the “messiness” of their process. Often referring to the common Bulgarian colloquialism about work that is done haphazardly and messily, “Gypsy work” [*tsiganska rabota*], concern over processes of scavenging deemed it “Gypsy work.”⁶⁴

In an interview with a municipal council member focusing on waste management and environmental issues, he explained that the informal scavengers “are not allowed to ... it is not OK that they search in the trash-bins and in this way they spill the garbage around. They pollute the surrounding around the trash bins. Well, when they collect it at home and deposit it, then it is OK.” He went on to explain that in the richer areas of Sofia you often see rich women, often mentally ill, who own properties and hoard at home but go through garbage as they “want to make their shopping out of collecting garbage.” Although deeming these women mentally ill, he explains that there are also “normal people” who go through trash bins “and they are Gypsies and they are poor... what are they doing to do?” Comparing the two populations he explains, “The mentally ill, yes they don’t need to collect paper in their apartments but these poor Gypsies...I don’t know.”

He got silent for a moment. “Well, much of the stuff is stolen...they focus on metals...to steal.” He explains that there is not typically metal in trash bins so “they collect metal from yards of the houses.” The problem with scrap metal collection sites he explained is that “now

⁶⁴ This term also comes up among sweepers as a way to discuss how *not* to work.

there can be collection points everywhere and they can go and take apart your fence...and this is stealing...for example, if they notice nobody lives there and there is a metal fence...they steal it and take it to the collection point. We should not encourage these people and not help them make a living through crime. This is not normal. You see, even at the flea market where they [Gypsies] sell things, if you ask them where they got them from they get scared.” I asked him how to remedy this situation. He explained that it’s a difficult situation because the Roma who collect garbage are, in fact, helping Bulgaria meet its recycling targets. “We do all these things because the European Commission tells us that we have to accomplish 48.34% for recycling.” He explains that the target is for 2020 and the packaging waste can come from “all sources” [including the collection points where scavenged metal is sold]. “But these collection points that buy waste, they won’t disappear. This is our [problem] because [around them] there are a lot of illnesses. There is dirt and they are next to kindergartens, to restaurants...they can't exist in such places, because they produce contamination, diseases...They have to be restricted. Let them exist, but in other places.”

CONCLUSIONS

Metal is of particular importance in this chapter because it is tied to emerging ambiguities of postsocialist life. First, metal itself was once a material of high value as part of heavy state socialist industry and thus tied to public ownership and related ideologies of state development. In a Europeanizing framework, metal is approached as something of the past, which can be scavenged for private gain. Any scrap metal collected will not be returning to build Bulgarian industry but will be exported abroad, where heavy industry still exists. In this political-economic shift metal materials, like the ambiguously public-private frameworks in which they exist, are unclear as to whether they are ruined or not. Ruination is not always clear.

Ruination is as much related to waste, leftovers, lingerings as it is to time and change over time. Certain people—namely the Roma—get blamed as part of the discourse of who “dismantles” the state, infrastructurally and politically. When processes of ruination, of infrastructure and the political system, are blamed on the people most visible, then perhaps the controversial European Union language denoting the Romani minority as “vulnerable” might actually be accurate. Larger mafia structures, which affect much of Bulgaria are not being targeted. It is not the *buyers*—of votes, of scrap metal—that are criminalized but not the sellers.⁶⁵ Those who are targeted are the people who are trying to make generate an income. In doing this what is criminalized is a certain kind of poverty-induced labor –it’s recuperative, it’s functional, and it’s sometimes the only way to make a living.

It is important to note that what is getting dismantled is not just “European-ness,” but promise itself. For many Roma, promises once came in the shape of European Unionization and then manifested through encounters like those we looked at – the death of the NGO sector, their inability to find jobs, the interactions between local politicians and those living in segregated neighborhoods. See that progress isn’t getting dismantled.

What is getting dismantled is promise. Promise comes in co-existing temporalities. Progress in many ways is a deictic note on a spectrum of linear time. It is, by definition, always of the future. The train tracks for example, were part of the “promise” of the industrialization of the socialist state. Voting was part of the promise of transition to democratic elections post-1989. Clean streets, minority integration, a specific kind of vehicular, atomized urbanity are part of the promise of a Europeanizing nation. And, in all of this coexisting temporal frameworks of

⁶⁵ This is common to many realms of racialized petty thievery, from drugs, prostitution, among other things in a variety of places where poverty becomes criminalized (see Hinton 2016).

progress, Roma are blamed despite the fact, they are the labor upon which this infrastructural version of Europeanization depends.

They are the ones who keep EU streets clean in Bulgaria. They are criminalized for “stealing recyclable materials,” but their labor now accounts for the quotas Bulgaria needs to remain, un-sanctioned in the European Union. Despite the European-status of their labor, trash becomes an index of Romani bodies, as material “evidence,” of their true discardability. And, unlike the materials they work with and historical lingerings they work in, they are not recuperated, reconfigured or recycled. While facilitating a very important part of environmental Europeanization, the Roma are not seen as “real” European citizens. They work with trash, they collect trash, and they are, in effect, trash. The elections in which they vote are also deemed “trash,” as Roma are blamed for the ruin of democratic promises.

The European utopian vision implies the promise of transformation—of urban infrastructures, of environment, of regulations. Despite a changing system, in which Roma are, by default, responsible for meeting quotas, they remain relatively static in their social position. Their role in the changing material and political structures in which they are immersed hinder the potential of dismantling the association between Roma and waste. Instead, these connections only become more tightly entangled. What does, however, get dismantled is the promise of what could have been.

These dismantlings, of infrastructure and promise of European democracy, are blamed on the same population that enables Bulgaria’s EU status. Those who are targeted as “ruining” the potential for a European Bulgaria are those same people trying, day by day, just to get by. In doing this what is targeted is not only a “dirty” labor but also various and interconnected forms of transformation and recuperation. Recuperation for the failures of this “new” European

recycling. Recuperation for the failures of European minority integration. Recuperation for the failure of democratic elections. And with this, Roma are force to find yet another means to get by, which they always do.

AFTER WORD, via Katia

Soon before I left Sofia, I was conducting my last phase of research, prompting informal interviews by trash bins on the street, at the sites of informal collection. One Romani woman, Katia, approached me as she was making her rounds collecting waste. She explained that she had recently returned from Germany, where she had also been collecting waste for a living. For her, Bulgaria actually wasn't all bad. Between the public outcries and new waste laws, she actually found a sense of freedom. Luckily for her, policy and practice often don't overlap. In the gap between remains possibility, for even those who are working outside of mainstream social structures. This gap, however, I could argue enables income generation in the short-term but hinder social mobility on a more structural level.

While laws targeting Roma scavengers and Roma vote sellers raise public awareness of their "Gypsy" criminal neighbors, these laws have questionable effects, mostly because Bulgarian material infrastructures often don't change. Which structures do you have in mind here, and over which time periods? Old structures remain.

Katia explained that in Germany she had been taken in by the police. She had been going through trash there, waiting for someone to unlock the garbage bins because they are so structurally secure that they cannot be opened unless unlocked. She had to wait for a moment when she might be able to scavenge, but got tired and she sat down to eat. "Because we could not sit on the street... no, I haven't done anything wrong. But there you have no right to sit on the street, but here I can sit and I eat. Here is Bulgaria."

CHAPTER 4: POLITICIANS ARE THE MOST RECYCLED THINGS IN THIS COUNTRY

The title of this chapter comes from a common refrain in Bulgaria alluding to the fact that the same politicians keep changing political affiliation as they run for office in a country fueled by populist politics. Recent political history in Bulgaria is founded upon a humorous recycling of political figures. Boiko Borisov, who was Prime Minister during most of my fieldwork and still is in 2016, was formerly the bodyguard of communist leader Todor Zhivkov during the 1980s. Simeon Borisov Saxe-Coburg-Gotha reigned as Simeon II, the child Tsar (King) of Bulgaria from 1943-1946 before he was forced into exile and moved to Spain. He returned back in 1996, as Bulgaria's hope for the most "untainted" politician they could find, and became Prime Minister in 2001.⁶⁶

In this chapter, I bring together the diverse landscape of political protest in Bulgaria between 2010 and 2013 with visits to landfills throughout Bulgaria during the same period. I focus on reincarnations of political forms of protest, politicians themselves, and the lingering remnants of socialist-era landfilling practices and the garbage those landfills contain. Through these links, I explore what kinds of transformations take place in the gaps between socialism and Europeanization, as people reconcile the disappointment of the present, the needs of the future, and material-politics remnants of a past that stubbornly (or thankfully) just won't go away. Despite Bulgarian protesters wanting to dispose of all political parties as though they were trash, in the hope that Europeanization could entail starting from scratch, others still long for the days

⁶⁶ Tsar Simeon's appeal, for many, was that he hadn't been part of the Bulgarian political structure for most of his life and therefore became a bastion of hope of a new kind of postsocialist politics. However, his "reign" as Prime Minister is often discussed now as a disappointment.

of communism (“Toshovo time”) when, in their view, there wasn’t so much garbage.

PROTEST ERA

The era of protest in Bulgaria served as a backdrop for the duration of my research, from 2011 through 2013. Protests ran the gamut from anti-Gypsization protests in 2011 to protests against the government, against foreign electricity companies, and then against the government all over again. In June 2011, the European Commission organized a high-level conference in Sofia, Bulgaria entitled "The Contribution of EU Funds for Roma Integration." In preparation for the conference I spent time with a group of English-speaking, educated Roma who were deeply critical of European Union accession consequences for Roma in Bulgaria. Most had taken part in Soros-initiated Roma education programs and had been well prepared for working in the NGO sector. However, they were not adequately prepared for what European Union accession would actually bring. By 2011, most of these Roma were unemployed and, like the majority of educated Bulgarians, looking for ways to find work abroad. I was spending time with a friend, a Romani activist with a Master’s degree, as she prepared to move abroad. She made sure we packed her “fortune telling” outfit, in case she couldn’t find work teaching or working a service sector tourism job. A non-Romani friend of mine, lamenting the fact it took her so long to decide to leave Bulgaria, reiterated something another friend had mentioned in passing one evening over dinner, “everyone who is capable goes abroad. All that’s left here are old villagers, some Gypsies, and the trash [of society].”⁶⁷

As the 2011 conference approached, a group of well-educated Romani activists (recently registered as a legal non-profit civil organization) planned to stage a protest. The NGO sector had basically died by that point, with many key leaders actually passing away during 2011. As

⁶⁷ See this same notion in Chapter Two as well.

funding dissipated, more than one Romani NGO leader actually died from stress-induced health ailments “The death of the sector” thus became a commonly used phrase that was both metaphorical and literal.. My close friend and NGO leader in *Levanka* died suddenly in September 2011 from a stress-induced stroke at the age of forty-two. Another famous Romani activist died during the same period from a heart attack not long after being taken in and questioned for “misuse” of funds, which proved unsubstantiated.

This group of Romani activists had decided that the best way to protest a conference about EU funding of Roma programs was to call for the cessation of European funds for Roma programs altogether. The group explained that large amounts of funding were allegedly entering the country for Roma initiatives. However, nearly none of the money ever reached local Romani communities. As a result, EU funding actually had adverse effects: when Bulgarians believe that there is a large influx of European Union funding entering Bulgaria to help Romani people and when they see that the situation of Roma hasn't improved (coupled with their own hardships), anti-Roma sentiment skyrockets. Many Bulgarians see Romani poverty as the fault of Roma themselves, questioning why they should be so “privileged” as to receive European funding while at the same time Bulgarian pensioners don't receive such benefits. From what I witnessed, both non-Romani and Romani pensioners alike are suffering in the era of Europeanization because their incomes (and pensions) barely cover the cost of living. However, one marked difference is that while young Roma have trouble finding work, Bulgarian young people have an easier time. Additionally, the misuse of European funds, at a national level, effectively catalyzes public sentiment around the notion of “Gypsies” who steal or squander European money. With this in mind, the activists' “radical” approach, as they called it, was to tell Europe to stop the

funding. That way, they explained to me, they can prove that this funding never benefited the Roma anyway.⁶⁸

The night before the conference, we designed banners that we would hold up during the conference, T-shirts we would wear, and prepared for media questions we might receive.⁶⁹ The next day we arrived at the Sheraton Hotel in the morning, ready to protest. What nobody expected was that conference-goers would be greeted at the entrance by a cardboard cut-out of an earring-laden pregnant Romani woman, holding a baby and standing in rubber shower-shoes in a dark puddle. The text on the poster reads, “European Social Fund Investments in Your Future.”

⁶⁸ “Stop Funding Roma Exclusion” functioned also as a rejection of the current-day Romani NGO sector under the premise that those who received funding within this framework were inauthentic and blindly dependent, writing projects in order to comply with whatever was in fashion in terms of donor expectation.

⁶⁹ Protest organizers, old friends of mine, asked me to participate, explaining that my position as an American lent legitimacy to their protest and I agreed. The rest of the protesters were a mix of 30-something-year-old Romani activists, many of whom who had been the recipients of the first George Soros Open Society Institute educational fellowships.



Image 8: Welcome poster at Romani conference entitled “The Contribution of EU Funds for Roma Integration.” Photo by the author.

Then, as participants entered the conference room, they were handed a conference bag, which was a silver vinyl messenger-style bag. Inside were pamphlets, notebooks, reports, and, in a bright yellow pouch, a folded-up neon yellow vest with reflector tape across the back. It was the exact same style vest all sweepers and garbage workers in Sofia were mandated to wear by municipal law, in order to be visible on the road. Upon seeing the vests, our group of protesters began laughing in disbelief at the irony. This European Union conference dedicated to Roma inclusion distributed cleaning vests with “Making a Difference in Life” written on the back, in English, beside a small image of the European Union flag and the subtitle “European Social Fund” across the back.



Image 9: Vest distributed in conference welcome bag. Photo by author.



Image 10: Sweepers in partial uniform. Photo by author.

This kind of material misfiring was not specific to this conference. While with Peter on his campaign trail in the Romani neighborhood of Vabrava (see chapter 2), his local campaign supervisor decided to distribute lighters to the residents without realizing we were near Varna where Plamen Goranov had set himself on fire only months earlier. One woman called out,

joking, “Is this a hint that we should set ourselves on fire? Is that how they want to win the election?”

Despite the commonplace material misfirings that often happen in institutional political settings, the vests at the June 2011 conference were interpreted not as a “mistake” but as an intentional message. The audience was comprised of politicians, NGO leaders, and the group of Romani activists wearing homemade T-shirts emblazoned, in the colors of the European Union flag, the words “Europe, Stop Funding Roma Exclusion.”



Image 11: Romani protesters at the conference. Photo by the author.

Already deeply frustrated with the ways in which funding for Roma had been wasted, misused and redistributed “into pockets and other issues,” the group of activists took the vests as adding further insult to a deep injury. One activist, Simon, took the vest out of his gift bag and called out to some acquaintances passing through the aisle toward the stage where the conference would soon begin. The vests surfaced longstanding tensions in the NGO sector, between those who protested the funding and those who accepted and made projects from it. We stood in a group talking about the vests. Simon shook his head, “European Union, come on European Union.” Mihail, another Romani activists, called out to a colleague while holding up the vest, “Are you from *chistota* [the cleaning company]?”

Simon was asked to give an interview to a Romani journalist, Mitko, about his experience at the conference for a national radio program. He approached the situation with a sense of humor about the absurdity of the day thus far, before the conference had even begun. Aside from interpreting the vest as one of waste management, Simon also saw it as a material manifestation of Romani exclusion.

Simon: During the conference, the bags, which were distributed to people, contain reflective vests with a sign on their back "Making a Difference in Life." It is from the conference organizers, the Bulgarian government and European Commission, which means...making our life different with reflective vests, which are in the bags. We also have reflective bracelets. I think that the point is that when the lights go down [people] can see clearly who are the Roma and who are Bulgarians in the room. I think that it is the point, so it is start another mode of exclusion. That's it...We want them to stop making fun of us. They mock us for 20 years. We want them to stop. We want to stop being excuses for somebody...I want to suggest that you ask other people why they do not put on their vests. Everyone has one in their bag. What are they ashamed of?

Soon, the conference began and the vests remained mostly tucked away in participants' bags. First, Laszlo Andor, the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion of the European Commission, began speaking. We took the stage as he spoke, blocking the view of a range of local and international politicians sitting in reserved seats in the first few rows.



Image 12: A still from TV footage of the protest with the caption, "The Roma- Eurointegration and Europrotest." Photo screen grab taken by the author from bnt.bg

At the same time, the men stood in the back of the room with the Bulgarian sign, “Don’t Fuck with 12,000,000 Roma.”



Image 13: Protest sign held here for the camera, post-protest, by one of the female protesters and a male protester. Photo by the author.

After Andor’s speech, we reconvened at our seats and Simon distributed red cards and plastic whistles he had prepared in advance. At a soccer game when a player commits a particularly egregious offense, the referee blows a whistle and holds up a red card to signal that the player will be expelled from the game. Similarly, we held up red cards and blew our whistles in protest of Interior Minister and appointed chairman of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Affairs, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, when he took the stage. Tsvetanov was a controversial figure since many Romani activists had learned that he, as chairman, had misused a great deal of funding intended for Romani projects.⁷⁰ Romani activists explained that the Council was able to redistribute funding intended for Roma to other “vulnerable” groups using a loophole

⁷⁰ This is taken from extensive conversation with a variety of Romani NGO leaders and activists and corroborated by journalists and others with whom I spoke.

from the Bulgarian constitution, a relic of Bulgaria's socialist-era total assimilation policy. Since funding could not be tied specifically to particular ethnic groups, funding was reallocated from Roma issues to other groups, with the language of the constitution as justification⁷¹

Additionally, Tsvetanov had told *24 Chasa*, the Bulgarian daily newspaper, in the wake of France's expulsion of Romanian and Bulgarian Roma in September 2010, that he had to make a "very serious analysis of the problems with Roma because their environments are an incubator for generating crime." He went on to discuss an upcoming conference in Brussels, where he planned to "have a conversation with European Commissioner for Social Affairs, Laszlo Andor, to demand money for Roma integration to be given to the state, not the foundations. In the last 20 years various non-governmental organizations have received a lot of money, but nothing has been done. Now we see that there are Roma bosses who live in some splendid palaces and the slums for the majority of Roma get bigger."⁷² When confronted by an international audience, in Brussels, about his comments, Tsvetanov explained, "It's just a statement of a fact, it's not a stigmatization."

With this as the political background for his conference address, many conference participants were primed to be offended. Tsvetanov began his speech:

⁷¹The Bulgarian constitution of 1991 states in Article 1 (emphasis mine): (1) Political activity in the Republic of Bulgaria shall be founded on the principle of political pluralism. (2) No political party or ideology shall be proclaimed or affirmed as a party or ideology of the State. (3) All parties shall facilitate the formation and expression of the citizens' political will. The procedure applying to the formation and dissolution of political parties and the conditions pertaining to their activity shall be established by law. (4) *There shall be no political parties on ethnic, racial or religious lines, nor parties which seek the violent seizure of state power.* Article 44 follows, which declares: (1) All citizens shall be free to associate. (2) *The organization/s activity shall not be contrary to the country's sovereignty and national integrity, or the unity of the nation, nor shall it incite racial, national, ethnic or religious enmity or an encroachment on the rights and freedoms of citizens; no organization shall establish clandestine or paramilitary structures or shall seek to attain its aims through violence.* (3) The law shall establish which organizations shall be subject to registration, the procedure for their termination, and their relationships with the State. There shall be no political parties on ethnic, racial or religious lines, nor parties, which seek the violent seizure of state power.

⁷² This was quoted in a national Bulgarian newspaper and re-posted and refuted by various international organizations, including the Open Society Institute.

I want to say some words about this, the reason for which we have gathered here today, which is about the future and what has been happening for the last 20 years. Bulgaria started a change, which was absolutely wanted from everyone...The Bulgarian economy had a lot of difficulties and a lot of things were done “in deals.” When we joined the European Union, the EU gave us the most priceless thing- free movement of the citizens in the European Union. Of course that led to serious migration problems...

Suddenly, someone from the audience called out: “Mister Tsvetanov, you are giving an example on the topic of Romani criminality.” Many different voices in the audience begin to call out.

Then someone in the audience screams out, clearly, “We are not criminals.” At this point the group of activists begin blowing whistles and holding up their red cards.



Image 14: A still from TV footage of protesters raising red cards. Photo screen grab taken by the author from bnt.bg

Audience: "We are not criminals!" “We are not criminals!”

Simon: That's what you deserve, this is exactly what you deserve.

Tsvetanov: Okay, this is your opinion. This is your choice.

Simon: Yes.

Tsvetanov: Because I think today, that on this forum we have gathered...

Simon [approaching the stage]: You saw what...vests... give me the vest. You saw what vests did the organization give us? Is this your integration? I am giving it to you as a present...

Tsvetanov: Thank you.

Simon: Look, if you want you can wear it. This is a vest, which the organizers of this conference put in each bag and the message to us is clear. If this is the integration of the Roma, then good.

Tsvetanov: I have no say in the organization and of the materials, which have been made for the conference today. I am just invited...

Audience member: This is your attitude to us.

Tsvetanov: Thank you. I think that such an attitude is not the best but this has to be tolerated. Because when we speak about the problems, which we have today, we have to name the problems and the truth with the real names. Because if we save ourselves behind our words, we conceal the reality...this won't lead to anything good. That's why I think that better models have to be given and good practices, which have succeeded [elsewhere] can be transferred to relevant Romani groups. I repeat again, education is first priority, then second is health care. Third priority is the way and form of life...

Although all conference participants received welcome bags—Roma and non-Roma—Simon takes up the vest as a marker of Romani difference and exclusion. First, the vest is a form of exclusion for sweepers who have no other labor opportunities. However, within the conference space, the vest functions as an ironic reminder of what Romani life outside of the Sheraton conference hall actually looks like. The position in which Roma are most visible is cleaning city streets. Tsvetanov replies with political diplomacy as he tries to, as quickly as possible, separate himself from the scene that is playing out.

After the protest, the group organizers realized that without an international audience, the protest would be done in vain since most Bulgarians wouldn't pay attention. They decided, therefore, to release a statement in English that they would post to the international online Romani forums and hope to get reposted in English-press newspapers. In this statement they asked: "Where are the 70 million Euro that Brussels gave the Bulgarian government for 'Roma

Integration' during the PHARE pre-accession period from 1999-2007? Where are the millions of Euro in structural funds that the Bulgarian government continues to receive for 'social inclusion'?" Questioning the role of expensive conferences, they proposed that instead of funding Roma projects "the large amount of funds spent on such conferences could be put to much better use for solving concrete and dire problems" at the municipal level. This includes "improving infrastructure in the largest Roma neighborhood in Sofia where over 50,000 inhabitants live without running water, sewage, or public transport."⁷³ Despite the fact that this protest was overwhelmingly (and actively) ignored, it planted the seeds of a new, short-term Romani political movement that culminated in an association of Romani election monitors the following fall for the 2011 elections.

By the fall of 2011, a new wave of protests were breaking out, this time in response to the death of 19-year-old Angel Petrov in late September in the quiet village of Katunitsa. As I mentioned in chapter two, a relative of Kiril Rashkov, the infamous crime boss, stood accused of killing Petrov. However, at the time Bulgarian media and politics gearing up for 2011 elections focused on the fact that Rashkov also happened to be Roma. Rashkov had been convicted of financial crimes in the 1990s and later went on to found a Roma political party in 1998. After the murder, local residents in Katunitsa began a series of anti-Rashkov protests that soon evolved into anti-Roma protests. Prime Minister Borisov visited Katunitsa, declaring the killing "criminal" (and not ethnic). However, within days, large-scale anti-Gypsy demonstrations began

⁷³ In this statement they make clear their demands: 1. That the European Court of Auditors conduct a thorough audit of spending by the Bulgarian government for "Roma integration" to date and make recommendations to the Bulgarian government based on these results. 2. That the European Commission stop funding the "Roma Inclusion" Operational Programmes for Bulgaria, until: - Completion of the audit and announcement of its results, with specific recommendations for changes in government policy.
- Achievement of successful results from the previously adopted strategic documents.
- Demonstration of political will to include Roma in processes of decision making.
Signed, Participants of the Protest 21/06/2011

in over twenty cities throughout Bulgaria. Police were stationed outside Romani neighborhoods to prevent any potential conflict. Inside Romani neighborhoods, residents who were scared for their lives took up whatever tools they had (mostly clubs and axes) for protection. My friends in *Levanka* explained that most families who had children in schools outside of the neighborhood kept their children home and nearly nobody left the neighborhood for days. During this period, as protesters chant through Sofia and other cities, “Gypsies to Soap,” and “Turks Under the Knife,” the leader of the far-right political party Ataka used the political climate to espouse his beliefs on instating the death penalty and dismantling “Gypsy ghettos.”⁷⁴ Free t-shirts were distributed to villagers who traveled on paid buses to Sofia to support the far-right Ataka’s anti-Gypsy campaign as well as to local homeless Sofia residents. For months after the 2011 protests had ceased, I would often see homeless people in Sofia, sleeping on park benches or passed-out in trams, wearing distributed t-shirts, with the words “I Don’t Want to Live in a Gypsy State” on their fronts.



Image 15: A man sleeping on a bench inside a metro station wearing the Ataka-sponsored shirt with text that reads “I don’t want to live in a Gypsy state.” Photo by the author.

⁷⁴ See Resnick 2011 (<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/3783-using-ethnic-tensions-for-political-games-and-gains-antiroma-protests-in-bulgaria>).

This wave of protests focused on variety of issues but highlighted the “Gypsy” role in Bulgaria’s failing progress as part of a European system. These protests drew on demographic fears and far-right rhetoric that warned about the “Gypsization” of Bulgaria and Europe more broadly. It should be noted these protests ran alongside, although not directly in conversation with, far right protests in Europe and left-wing responses throughout the region (i.e. Greece, Hungary). I attended one demonstration that was widely posted on Facebook with Simon. He had the idea that we would go together but I would speak in Bulgarian and he, wearing a blue and yellow “EU” embroidered hat, would ask questions in English. His assumption, which proved correct, was that these young neo-Nazi teenagers would never think he was Roma if he spoke English. Counting on defying their expectations, Simon thought that this would be a good social experiment.

Simon and I walked towards the protest, which was held on a Sunday at noon at the monument of Tsar Osvobitel (“King, the Liberator”).⁷⁵ We reached the gathering spot to find a group of about thirty protesters (and about ten reporters) standing awkwardly at the base of the monument, holding shoddily made signs and unsure of what to do.

Simon started by asking why they were there. One young-looking teenage boy answered:

We want the freedom of the Gypsies to be regulated. Now, they don’t have rights-they just have freedom. We want them to pay their bills, to be more responsible when looking after their children. Instead they are just leaving them [on the street] to beg. And there are many villages in Bulgaria where the Gypsies are troubling Bulgarians, robbing people in broad daylight. Everyday something happens about this in the news. For example, [we hear] “Gypsies beat up a police man, or they are stealing old peoples’ pensions”...the governments are closing their eyes to these things because of the pressures for “human rights” but our rights as Bulgarians are actually being destroyed and we are against that.

⁷⁵ The monument was dedicated to Tsar Alexander II, credited with liberating Bulgaria from the “Turkish Yoke” during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78.

Simon asked another one of the protesters holding a sign why he was there. He explained, “The Gypsies.” He went on to explain, “The problem is that our friends, the young people here, are leaving Bulgaria to live normal life - because it is not fair here, it is not fair. They [Gypsies] are violent, they steal things, they make problems.” Simon interrupted, “But can I ask you something? I think you have problem with your government...because the Gypsies are minority in your country right?”

Protester: The Bulgarians are minority...

Simon: The Bulgarians are minority?

P: They will be soon.

S [pointing to the parliament]: Are there Gypsies in this building?

P: Yes. There are one or two political parties for Gypsies.

S: Ah they have Gypsies in the parliament. But the majority here are not Gypsies here... is the president Gypsy?

P: No, he will never be.

S: Is the Prime Minister a Gypsy?

P: No.

S: So it is these people here who make the policy, Bulgarians?

P: Yes the Bulgarians make the policy but uh...

S: But why don't you protest against the people making the policies in this country?

P: We protest the government and the Gypsies...

S: So the protest is against the government and the Gypsies together?

P: Something like that.

S: Ok, because both of them don't keep the law. So the government is like the Gypsies?

P: Because that the government doesn't abide by the laws, the Gypsies and other Bulgarians don't obey the laws either, but the Gypsies are the majority of the people that don't obey the law so they're the bigger part.

The protesting teen thought for a minute: “No they don't have much power but we don't have much power either and what we want to show is that we don't agree with the things that are happening in our country.” The conflation of Gypsies and state structures was something common in everyday Bulgarian conversation and in media accounts.⁷⁶ International emphases on Roma migration to Western Europe, a focus on “Gypsy criminality,” and local demographic concerns have resulted in the common refrain, echoed in anti-Roma protests that Bulgarians don't want to live in a “Gypsy country.”

However, this notion of a “Gypsy country” is based upon more than demographic fears; it is tied to economic regimes of international funding. Many of my academic Bulgarian interlocutors, upon hearing about my research, nodded in exasperation, “Yes, we know, you're here as part of the Americanization of the Gypsy problem.” There was a common understanding that Roma were receiving the “victim” treatment by foreign entities who didn't understand the “real” problems in Bulgaria. “Gypsy privilege” came up in conversation often, especially in relation to the stereotype that Roma rode for free on public transportation while Bulgarians had to pay. Trolleys, buses, and trams in Sofia used a system of an electronic monthly pass or a pay-by-ride option that used paper tickets. The subway system, however, used an electronic ticket machine. To legally ride a bus, trolley, or tram, one has to buy a paper ticket from a nearby kiosk or from the driver and then punch the ticket in one of the machines on the vehicle. Each day the hole-punch machines have a different configuration in order to ensure that yesterday's ticket can't be reused. Ticket checks are done manually. From time to time, at seemingly

⁷⁶ The conflation of Roma and the state is something that others have written about at length. See Guy (2001) and Sigona and Trehan (2009).

random times, a ticket checker comes on board and moves through the vehicle to check and tear all punched tickets. Anyone without a valid ticket is charged a fee on the spot and/or thrown off the vehicle. In my experience of daily riding the public transportation, I saw both Bulgarians and Roma get fined and thrown off public trams for riding without a ticket. I was also fined and thrown off more than once. However, there was a strong common misconception in Bulgaria that a ticket-inspector would never kick a Roma person off. One friend told me that it was because the ticket checkers were “too afraid” of what would happen if they angered some Gypsies or because “Gypsies get special treatment.”

By May 2012, protests arose again, this time in response to a referendum on Belene, the former site of the Belene Prison and communist labor camp and the future site for Bulgaria’s second nuclear power plant.⁷⁷⁷⁸ In January 2013, protests began again, this time centering on high electricity and hot water bills. These protests escalated from the city of Blagoevgrad to the rest of the country and by February 17, 2013 nearly 100,000 protesters took part in protests against high utility bills. Protesters called for the expulsion of three foreign-owned companies that controlled the electricity market, namely from the Czech Republic and Austria. Controversy over electricity costs raged as protestors declared that nearly half of their bills were “extraneous fees.” Electricity company officials responded by explaining that this overhead fee was higher in Bulgaria than in the rest of Europe due to local issues of theft and unpaid bills.

⁷⁷ Kozloduy was the only existing power plant in Bulgaria at the time of research.

⁷⁸ The Belene plant had been in construction but halted, indefinitely, after the changes in 1989. More recently, Belene’s energy production was intended to compensate for Kozloduy’s Reactors 3 and 4, which had to be shutdown in late 2006 in time for EU access. Strongly supported by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), Belene was under contract for construction with Russian state corporation Atomstroyexport since 2006, making the plant the first Russian-built plant in the EU. However, Borisov and the GERB government strongly opposed Belene and so the BSP initiated a large-scale protest. A referendum was finally held in January 2013, and although it passed the participant numbers were too low to make it viable and the project was suspended in February.

Observing these protests, many of Sofia's Romani inhabitants expressed a sense of frustrated validation: they had been contesting high electricity bills for years, but to no avail. When Romani residents complained about high bills, electricity company officials either blamed the problematic bills on the "illegal" positioning of Romani houses vis-à-vis shared electricity meters or claimed that the Roma raising concerns were "misreading" their bills. With electricity finally part of public debate, longstanding infrastructural issues in Romani neighborhoods—although never addressed as such—finally got some airtime. One protesting friend told me, "most countries have their mafia, but in Bulgaria, the mafia have their country." Protests continued against Borisov's austerity measures from the EU and IMF along with high heating bills.

PROTEST ERA CONTINUED

"I am sick of this fucking life!" 26-year-old Trayan Marechov exclaimed before lighting himself on fire. The next day, on February 20th, 2013, photographer, environmentalist, and activist demonstrator, Plamen Goranov, set himself on fire in front of a municipal building in his hometown of Varna, Bulgaria. Goranov had been protesting against TIM, a well known Varna-based holding company and, according to local knowledge and US embassy reports leaked by WikiLeaks, an organized crime hub. Goranov immediately became a symbolic figure for his contemporaries in Bulgaria who saw his death as an echo of Jan Palach's self immolation in 1969, which was key to the Prague Spring. In response to protests, the mayor of Varna resigned days later. Soon thereafter, in response to a wave of protests throughout the country, Boiko Borisov, the prime minister of Bulgaria, resigned as well.

2013 was a year of protest and change. Daily protests calling for the resignation (*ostavka*) of the existing government took place throughout Bulgaria and involved participants that

included university students, taxi drivers, pensioners, and state employees. Protests focused on government corruption, the high cost of electricity, falling pension wages and increasing bread prices. The protests of 2013 were not singular but rather part of larger processes of Bulgarian vocalization of grievances that began on a very different tenor in 2011.

Finally, the GERB ("Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria") government resigned and Borisov officially stepped down from power on February 20, 2013 after critique not only about the electricity bills but also corruption and government-related cigarette smuggling rings. From the perspective of the city sidewalks, where I was working at the time, the most noticeable change was that the contraband cigarette selling had stopped. What I had witnessed as a daily phenomenon in the park halted, almost immediately.

An interim government was appointed and parliamentary elections were then scheduled for May 12, 2013. Since GERB didn't possess a plurality, Plamen Oresharski was given the mandate to form a cabinet for the BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party).⁷⁹ Before he could even form a cabinet, protests ensued. Then, hours after becoming Prime Minister in a Parliamentary vote on June 2, protests resumed. When Oresharski appointed Deyan Peevski as head of anti-corruption unit DANS, State Agency for National Security, thousands took the streets in mid-June chanting "resignation [*ostavka*]," "mafia," and anti-socialist party sentiment, "red trash" [*cherveni bolkuci*]. Peevski, who headed one of the largest communication companies in Bulgaria (owning most of the television and print media outlets) and whose mother was the head of the state lottery, resigned after the first day of mass protests.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Oresharski to be Deputy Minister of Finance for the United Democratic Forces (1997-2001), then in 2005 became Finance Minister for Prime Minister Stanishev with the Bulgarian Socialist Party.

⁸⁰ New York Times coverage of the protests quoted Haralan Alexandrov, an anthropologist at New Bulgarian University, explaining the aversion to Peevski as security chief since he "represents a very old and well-established

Peevski catalyzed a wide range of Bulgarian protest sentiment. From my participation in the protests, I photographed the following slogans:

- National Revolution. Now and Beyond
- Against the cancellation of the full prohibition for smoking. Health is right.
- Why vote for the lesser evil?
- You can't buy Facebook, and you are angry about it, right?
- I am not paid either! I hate you for free
- Fighting against lawlessness and injustice
- All Bulgarians unite! To be positive! It's about time!
- Attention! Mushrooms!
- Worthy nation – worthy life!
- I am waiting for you to get tired
- Bulgaria doesn't love me, I'm a cool dude
- I am here to stay
- Freedom or USSR
- Bulgarians, for how long will I endure? Their arrogance feeds of your apathy
- It is time to go from DEMOcracy to the full version

By June 2013 the slogans had diverging themes (as you can see above) but the chants of “red trash” persisted. This constant chanting discursively and performatively links Bulgaria's failings to the socialist-aligned party. By July 2013, protesters blockaded parliament, lit garbage bins on fire, and demanded a resignation of the entire government. As a consequence of the July protests, the entire Oresharski cabinet did eventually resign. Throughout this period, the hashtag

image from the collection subconscious: the evil capitalist” who physique resembled “the exploiter capitalist” of Communist-era cartoons.

#ДАНСwithme became a key means through which actions were organized via Facebook.

#ДАНСwithme is a play on words, since it is read aloud as “dancewithme” but DANS (“dance”) is also the name of the State Agency for National Security.

Protesters during the summer 2013 linked protests with the “false” democratic transition of 1989. One newspaper reported on a banner that read, “Your time is up! 24 years of false transition is enough.” Frustrations over the failure of the promise of progress, mass migrations from Bulgaria, and corrupt government leadership resulted in protests that didn’t have a singular focus and which became seen as the logical conclusion of a “failed” democratic transition. One meme and graffiti symbol I saw throughout Sofia in 2013 was an image of a garbage can into which all of the existing political parties were being thrown (Ataka, Bulgarian Socialist Party, GERB, Movement for Rights and Freedom).

KEEP CLEAN



#ДАНСwithme

Image 16: Meme from Facebook.com

Here, the image of the garbage can becomes central to the articulation of EU-era frustrations with Bulgarian government. I was often told in response to wanting to study “waste” and “recycling,” that both could best be seen in Parliament because “that’s where the trash is.” After all, “politicians are the most recycled things in this country.” In this framework, recycling takes

on negative connotations. The recycling of politicians is not a desired transformative process. Rather, protesters want a fresh start and to get rid of the political parties as they are with the hope they might disappear.

In asking a journalist friend what he thought of the “red trash,” chants he explained that it is indicative only of a past, from which the Bulgarian Socialist Party can’t extricate itself. He explained that the chanting also reveals peoples’ understanding that “from these people or this government nothing good will come.” As much as it is about the recycling of the past in present-day political struggle, it is also a commentary on the expected potential of the future, which is failure. Newspaper articles from the protests heavily commented on the use of “red trash” in the protests, noting that the term has become one of resistance even twenty-three years after Zhivkov. Linking the chants of “red trash,” to older anti-communist protests, another reporter asked, “Has time stopped or is it going backwards?”

As “red trash” becomes the terms of protest engagement, it becomes clear that perhaps what are being recycled are not just politicians themselves but reactionary political protest ideologies as well. For many protesters the instinct to draw on something that happened more than two decades prior, before many of them were not yet born, seems commonsensical. The chants of “red trash,” although seemingly directed at the Bulgarian Socialist Party, a recycled version of the Bulgarian Communist Party, came to stand in for frustration with all Bulgarian political parties. Almost all were recycled in some form or another. After all, Boiko Borisov was Zhivkov’s bodyguard. They saw the past as very much embedded in present political strife. However, despite the chants of “red trash” in the center of Sofia, not all Bulgarians envisage the communist past through the same lens. Roma were not the only ones who kept alive a strong nostalgia for their role as laborers in the creation and maintenance of a socialist state. In fact,

many others involved in the diminishing sector of manual labor longed for the life that Bulgarian state socialism could afford.

ZHIVKOV ALIVE AT THE LANDFILL

When I visited various waste management facilities and factories I saw photographs of Todor Zhivkov on the walls. On my first visit to the garage of the own waste firm with which I worked as a street sweeper, I saw a large picture of Todor Zhivkov next to an EU-mandated “no smoking” sign on the wall behind where mechanics repaired the garbage trucks and secretaries puffed on slims. I saw the same image of Zhivkov at multiple landfills I visited as well. At one landfill for construction waste, I was able to photograph Zhivkov’s image on a metal trailer that stood at the entrance to the landfill. An older man sat, reading a newspaper, guarding the place. Working times (from 7:30am until 7:30pm) were hand-painted on the outside of the trailer right beside a photograph of Todor Zhivkov.



Image 17: Security guard at a landfill with the image of communist leader Todor Zhivkov hanging nearby. Photo by the author.

I toured the landfill as part of a trip around Bulgaria where I visited about twenty landfills. Visiting these landfills, many of which had been already decommissioned according to European policy, made clear the ways in which the past would not die. Transformation and recultivation of landfills was a major component of European Union waste management policy in Bulgaria, but in spite of funding and programming for the decommissioning of old socialist-era and under-regulated landfills, they still persisted. And, despite regulations that secured landfills and prohibited the presence of non-registered people, at nearly half of the landfills I visited Romani people were working on or near them. None of this is documented in European and national reports.



Image 18: Workers at a landfill in central Bulgaria. Photo by the author.

Despite progress on paper, gaps between socialist labor needs and European progress take shape in the spaces between policy and action. The Romani laborers I met at these landfills had lived in nearby villages doing agricultural labor until the collective farms collapsed and they had to find new forms of income generation. They explained to me that they were not independent contractors at the landfill but were collecting for a firm, which in turn, uses the recycled materials to help meet European Union targets.



Image 19: Nylon bags into which landfill workers collect recyclable materials. Photo by the author.

The separation of human from waste is deeply embedded in European waste policy. Humans should not be at landfills, should not be collecting items for resale, and by no means should be waiting for dump trucks to dump their goods. However, the massive amount of recyclables collected at landfills helps Bulgaria to meet its European targets. Although it is quite dangerous to spend the day near moving garbage trucks, the people working there explained that they are careful not to be hit by a moving garbage truck. They told me that in the region where they lived this, along with a stone quarry that only functioned intermittently, were the only options they had for work. They had to act quickly at the landfill, they elaborated, in order to fill up the nylon bags, for which they got paid upon collection.

This image is probably not striking to most because the image of landfill workers is so common. This kind of labor takes place in Latin America, but in a very different political framework. Millar writes about the precarity of landfill waste labor in Brazil, explaining that in the Global South, “precarious work has arguably always been a part of the experience of laboring

poor” (2014). What Millar remarks on is important for understanding the Bulgarian situation, which although the history was different from other places like the United States or Japan, labor like that pictured here in Bulgaria was not part of the recent past. Rather, it emerges from a very particular postsocialist/Europeanizing moment in which the structures of the past remain, but this time with new poor populations and new (recycling) standards to meet. These Romani villagers never worked in a dump before, they explained. Their work involved in agriculture and lived “normal” lives. However, with villages in Bulgaria becoming increasingly abandoned and agriculture moving elsewhere, these Roma found work in one of the only nearby places they could afford to get to and live near –an old landfill. What gives them work opportunities are European Union recycling quota needs and what allows them to perform the labor are gaps between European Union policy and local implementation.

These gaps provide spaces for others to make a living as well. At a landfill on the outskirts of Sofia, the landfill owners told me that they don’t have people coming to collect things, since they manage mostly construction waste (which is a lot of concrete and gravel). But, they do open their property to nearby villagers to come and buy firewood or furniture if any arrives.



Image 20: Discarded but functional chairs being sold at a landfill. Photo by the author.

Other kinds of landfill-human relations take shape in this gap between European regulations and longstanding village practice. Between the landfill and the village, which was on the outskirts of Sofia, was a large manmade lake. On the dreary May day that I visited, there were a few people fishing in it.



Image 21: Industrial lake outside of construction debris landfill.



Image 22: Accumulated debris by industrial lake outside of landfill.

And, as I walked around the lake to photograph the landfill from the other side of the lake, I saw two men herding goats.



Image 23: Goat herders grazing outside of an urban landfill.

I asked them if they had concerns grazing their animals by the landfill. They explained to me, “When strong winds blow, you have no idea what it is here! Junk! You have no idea.” I asked who cleans when this happens. They explained, “Nobody. The wind cleans. It then goes to the cemeteries. Everything goes here in the cemetery. No nets- they were all stolen. They stole the net here from the cemetery. Who stole it, I do not know! Gypsies or, Bulgarians! I do not know such things.” They told me that the landfill smells, “And it just builds up. And junk, and junk, and horror. Drugs from hospitals ... Everything is here.” When you walk up, they told me, you see everything, even dead animals. One of the shepherds turned to me and said that they are trying to move the goats away from the landfill to the green meadows closer to the town in order to avoid the “poisons” from the landfill. His friend explained, “Boiko Borisov got us so good with this garbage. Pensions he will not increase, but garbage he can bring us.” He was sixty-eight years old and a retired army commander. He was proudly in the army at the age of forty-five during “Toshovo time” (the time of Todor Zhivkov). They began joking with me about Barack

Obama, explaining that they wouldn't want him in their country but that if they were me, they'd stay in America. "Boiko Borisov, if he changes, then we will get rid of this waste." His friend intervened, "No, this [garbage] is still from before. Before Boiko..."

Section II: Sustainabilities

CHAPTER 5: THE RACIALIZATION OF WASTE LABOR

All that rubbish I shoveled into the dustbin on the cart, and when that was filled to the brim the captain and I got hold of it and together we tipped it out onto the pavement, where the wind, which was stiffening all the time, scattered the rubbish about again, but it didn't really matter: rubbish is indestructible anyway.

-Ivan Klima, *Love and Garbage*

WHEN “WHITE GYPSIES” SWEEP

“Those are some pretty white *mangalkite*, man, right?” a high-school aged boy asked his friend loud enough for me to overhear. Using the term “mangal,” he looks at my colleague and I sweeping and wonders aloud why such “white *mangalki*” are doing this labor. I had been sweeping with Vika that day, one of the two non-Romani Bulgarians on the team. Simona was the only other “Bulgarian” on the job.

Simona was considered “the crazy” of the group, as she had severe cognitive problems, clear to all, but most notable to the rest of the sweepers, she refused to urinate outdoors as the rest of the team did and instead wore diapers to work. She was a forty-year-old “orphan” and lived in *Izgrey*, the Sofia region where we swept. Quickly triggered to anger, the sweepers regarded her as an amusement; they’d run after her trying to hit her from behind to see if her diaper was wet or dry. Simona, at first happy for the attention, joked back with them until she’d get so mad she would spit or stomp or throw her ID card, saying she’d never speak to them again. Then the next morning they’d greet her, “Simono!! Soooo, how many Gypsies did you fuck last night?” to which Simona would give them the finger, spit, and walk away. The women

explained that the bosses would never fire Simona because they worried “she’d die alone in diapers without this job.” Without explicitly saying it, the women knew that they had many more avenues for economic and social survival than a single mentally ill Bulgarian with no family. Without the help of a strong welfare state, Simona’s future was dependent on the good will—and blind eye—of her bosses.

Nearly all of the sweepers came from one Romani neighborhood right outside the ring road that circled Sofia, called *Vasilotka*. A few of the other sweepers came from the other, farther-away, Romani neighborhood, *Levanka*. There was a hierarchy at the workplace, since the women in *Vasilotka* were nearly all related, either through birth or marriage, with a clear social structure among them that transcended from home to the streets where they swept. They traveled to and from work together, attended church, weddings, baptisms, and 40th birthday jubilees together. Many had relatives also in *Levanka*, especially sisters or daughters who married into families there. The rest of the Romani workers lived in public housing in *Izgrevev* after being relocated by the municipality when their Romani neighborhood (*mahala*) was razed to make room for the big-box *IKA* supermarket. Nadia, who lived in *Levanka*, the only devout Jehovah’s Witnesses on the team, “felt pity for crazy Simona.” She told me stories of visiting Simona’s apartment on payday when the rest of the workers from *Vasilotka* went home to change out of their uniforms and waited until they could line-up at the garage (company headquarters) to get paid. She told me, “You know, Simona has a clean house!,” suggesting she wasn’t as bad as the rest of our colleagues made her out to be. She found the other sweepers aggressive, explaining that they were “dirty” and shameful with their cursing and raunchy sex jokes. Nadia thought Simona was a “poor soul” without a family but with a clean house – a person in need of care.

As a Jehovah's Witness who cared for her grandson after his mother (her daughter) left him for a heroin addiction and a series of men she traveled between in order to pay for the addiction, Nadia sought out social outsiders to take care of. She also financially supported an alcoholic and elderly husband with her small pension and sweepers' salary. Despite the two sources of income, she rarely had funds to pay for electricity at home and didn't own an alarm clock. She was always half-asleep at work, and once explained to me that she would wake up hourly in order to check the time by lighting a match to illuminate the face of an old watch in the dark. Since she wasn't connected to the women of *Vasilotka* and was one of the oldest on the team, she knew she was the easiest to fire and constantly feared that she wouldn't make it to work on time.

Vika, by contrast, wasn't the source of anyone's pity. She came from *Bankia*, one of the richest suburban-like towns outside of Sofia. Formerly a communist-era administrative office secretary and then a hairdresser in the 1990s, she had college-educated children who worked in the court building in Sofia and a husband she was separated from living in the United States. The other workers constantly questioned why Vika would sweep, often coming to the conclusion that she loved stray dogs so much she must be doing it to get closer to them. Vika had few friends on the team, tended to keep to herself or loudly lament the fact that the others spoke Romani and left her out. I was often assigned by the immediate bosses, Kali and Mari, who supervised us on foot, to sweep with [the only "normal Bulgarian"] Vika, who talked incessantly and stopped anywhere there was a stray dog to feed or from whose coat there were ticks in need of being picked. As we swept in October 2012, Vika recounted her experiences on the job:

Vika: Rich people throw away their stuff; they change their furniture, and the poor ones can't afford it.

Elana: Yes.

V: But they [the Gypsies] live in 2 rooms, just on the ground. But when you go in their furniture is white, their shelves...I'm not sure how much you understand what I'm telling you. I'm saying that they [their houses] are furnished, made up nicely. That's not a life essential.

E: Yes.

V: You need a house though, it's light in the house, and it's true, clean though not everywhere. But when it rains everything gets flooded inside and gets moist. You get sick when you go in there...other than that it's all white, there's the [fancy] bedroom but downstairs it's just moisture.

E: How do you know? Have you been there?

V: I know, I see. I've gone. It's clean otherwise. They clean. Not all of them though, like with Bulgarians. They furnish their homes nicely, even more than me. So I say, "Ok, what are you paying? Do you pay electricity? Do you pay water or not? Do you pay rent?" "50 leva," [one woman told me]. I'm saying "I understand," but when we [Bulgarians] have money we put it away for the education of our children.

It was as she told me this, and as I was writing it down, that we heard ourselves being referred to as "*mangalki*." I had only been sweeping for a few weeks and already was surprised by the kind of misrecognition that happened while I worked. Typically, I was never assumed to be a Romani woman, but in uniform, on the street, Roma and non-Romani passersby alike constantly approached me, asking who I was and assuming I was newly married into a Romani family in the area.

I started to feel my face flush in anger as I heard the teenagers talking. I had already witnessed my colleagues ignore verbal taunts and run from objects thrown at them from apartment windows, but Vika interrupted, proudly, "We aren't *mangalki*. She's an American and speaks better English than you, and I am Bulgarian, from *Bankia*." As the interaction continued, we became louder and the boys quickly turned silent. A police officer came over to investigate the commotion, asked me a bit about America, and then sent the boys back to school. Vika and I discussed the matter, talking about how these children should be thanking us, the laborers who clean *their* streets instead of calling names and dropping trash on the ground. "Yes.

That's what they say. I tell them, you shouldn't throw [trash] like that. If someone comes to your apartment and throws out like that ...two bags of trash, how are you going to react? ”

Vika, in distancing herself from the “*mangalki*” and showing off her contrasting “whiteness” and upper-class residency status, also locates herself as *of* the street, likening the workplace to her home. Despite varied (and higher-status) employment during her earlier life, Vika worked as a sweeper for long enough for it to at once feel like home while in other ways remaining foreign, as one of the very few non-Romani speaking workers in Sofia.

Phenotypically, it was difficult to tell who on the team was “white” and who was “Gypsy” or “black,” as the sweepers often referred to themselves. In Eastern Europe, and in Bulgaria especially, there is a wide range of phenotypes, including non-Romani Bulgarians with very dark complexions and many Roma, including my colleagues, who were blond, fair, and blue-eyed.⁸¹

The boys’ assumption that workers shouldn’t be “white” and, in any case, must be “*mangalki*” is indicative of larger assumptions about the world of street sweeping. These assumptions have more to do with how bodies become raced through what is *on* or *near* a body, than the color of one’s skin.⁸² A worker with broom and uniform signaled a Roma ethnic identity as much as any sort of phenotypic cues. To be a sweeper was to be Roma. However, there was also a scale of “blackness” and “whiteness.” The boys’ misinterpretation corresponded with views of other Bulgarians and Roma alike, who thought that if someone was “white” enough to pass as Bulgarian, even if she was Roma, she shouldn’t be sweeping on the street. Street work

⁸¹ Alaina Lemon importantly notes “a ‘black’ complexion marks ‘race’ in Russia in the sense that it externally marks biologically essentialized identities. What complicates matters for racial purists is that color cannot always serve as a criteria of boundaries crucial to them: not all Roma, for instance, are actually very dark” (2005, 34). In Bulgaria, similarly to in Russia, other terms are often used as proxies for race, including “ethnicity” “nationality” (Lemon 2005, 34).

⁸² See Lemon (1995, 1998, 2000) on the racialization of Roma in terms of both bodies and material proximities.

was reserved for those dark enough (or socially abandoned enough) to not be able to do anything else.

This conflation of street sweeping, blackness, and Romani identity became apparent before I even started working. As I began what felt like a never-ending quest to work as a street sweeper, I attended an international waste management conference at a large convention center in Sofia. I saw representatives from one of the largest waste firms in Sofia, one of the only companies not part of the conglomerate that owned the firm where I ultimately worked. When I approached their booth and asked if I could be hired or volunteer as a sweeper for their company as part of my research, they laughed, calling over the entire team of colleagues to look at me. “You’re not black enough. You’re white!” the company representative announced to me as his coworkers asked me, laughing, where the candid camera was hidden.

After this setback, I decided that perhaps the best way to gain employment was to obtain an actual work visa. Since I was a Fulbright-Hays grantee, I went directly to the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission and requested they write a letter on my behalf in order to obtain what is called a “student visa.” In order to accept my request, the commission had to convene and vote. After the closed-door meeting, I was at a Fulbright-sponsored cocktail party where members of the board sought me out and said that the meeting about my request was “quite a debate.” A leader at the commission came over to me and explained, matter-of-factly, that it might not be safe “working with *those* people,” because “you never know what *they* might do.” This sentiment echoed throughout many of my social interactions in Bulgaria, as most high-class Bulgarians fear Roma in deeply embodied ways. Even as the office staff of the cleaning firm, *chistota* [generic word for cleaning firm, literally meaning cleanliness or purity], laughed and wondered how I would like “my colleagues,” our direct bosses also worried about me. While the office

secretaries found it humorous that an American would choose to work as a sweeper with a bunch of Gypsies, on the streets, it became clear that it wasn't my American status people found funny but my white skin. Even a Gypsy as white as me wouldn't sweep the street, my colleagues explained, "she'd at least work at the mall, you know, where there are toilets, indoors."

Even more as my time at the job continued, my colleagues would remark on my whiteness. In the first few months, they would explain that even in the sun I would never become black like them. I could turn red, but I wouldn't become black. It often seemed like a metaphorical statement more than a commentary on my ability to tan. At other times, especially when I was away for a while, they would remark on my skin color. I went home for a few weeks for Christmas and I remember returning back to work in January to be greeted with a barrage of compliments of how white I turned during my three weeks in America.

I was never expected to be Roma anywhere except while wearing a uniform, cleaning the street. The uniform, bright-colored with reflector tape, served as much as a regulation-mandated part of the workday (not wearing the uniform could result in a 20 *lev* dock in pay), as it functioned as an index of ethnic-racial identification as Roma. This is an instance of racialization through labor, where bodies are racialized in specific ways depending on how, where, and with what they labor. In line with Joseph Hankins work about Buraku labor in Japan, in which the heading "Discrimination Based on Work and Descent" functions in international frameworks as a means of attaining recognition and "this new category uses the identifier of occupation as its defining characteristic" (2014, 234). In Bulgaria, there is no such attempt at international recognition by means of labor. Rather, Roma have achieved international recognition firstly by forming transnational associations, based in part on linguistic similarity and India as a distant, but legitimating, homeland. Alaina Lemon writes about the relationship between certain kinds of

labor and the racialization of Romani bodies in Russia, especially in terms of the marketplace (2000, see, in particular, pages 59-60).

Just as I was raced as “Roma,” while doing manual waste labor, I often had the inverse experience with English-speaking Romani friends when we would go out for dinner. The first time I was in Bulgaria I remember going out to dinner with Simon, a then-colleague and now close Romani friend of mine of very dark complexion but who was always stylishly dressed and with whom I spoke English. On our first outing as an NGO office, in 2003, we went to one of Sofia’s pizzeria restaurants across the street from our office. The pizzeria was set in a lush garden, with waitress service and an extensive menu with a nice cocktail list and fancy desserts like Tiramisu and Italian éclairs. We sat down and before I had a chance to notice, Simon called the waitress over and asked, in Bulgarian, if he could exchange the English-language menu she gave him for a Bulgarian-language menu. She blushed and rushed over with a new menu. He explained that whenever he spoke English with foreigners at nice restaurants in Sofia, they would assume that he was the foreigner and always bring him the menu in English and his guest the Bulgarian menu. This is similar to Lemon’s writing about the way in which only some Roma in Russia, passing so as to be racialized in a particularly “white” way, could spend dollars in hard currency stores without reproach (1998).

This racial misrecognition in restaurants continued throughout my long-term fieldwork. In various restaurants in Sofia, especially when I would be with Romani friends speaking a mix of Bulgarian and English, they would bring me and whoever was light-skinned a Bulgarian menu and the darker-skinned Romani patrons the menu in English. The assumption was that if someone was dark skinned, well-dressed and there was English being spoken at the table, that person *could* not be Roma and *must* instead be a dark-skinned foreigner. While dark-skinned

foreigners I knew received stares in Bulgaria it was more rare for them to face overt discrimination or be the target of a racist hate crime. However, during the time I was in Sofia some Indian tourists were attacked by a group of young skinheads outside of a restaurant in downtown Sofia. My Romani friends at the time explained that this was an accidental hatecrime because the skinheads assumed that the Indians were Roma.

THE ERADICATION OF “RACE” IN BULGARIA

This chapter focuses on the racialization that happens in the realm of waste management in Bulgaria. “Race,” in Bulgaria, as in many postsocialist countries, is believed to be absent.⁸³⁸⁴ Race is considered to be something from America or even Western Europe. More than one academic, aside from nearly all non-Romani Bulgarian friends, claimed that I was imposing American social categorization onto a very different situation. According to many of my interlocutors (except Roma themselves) “race” wasn’t a salient category in Bulgaria. “Culture” and “ethnicity” were deemed to be a much more accurate ways of discussing social categorization. For the most part, the term race was never used in my research by (white) Bulgarians. This distinction alone was complicated, as “Bulgarian” is clearly a marker of nationality, but throughout research both non-Romani and Romani Bulgarians referred to non-Romani, white Bulgarians as “Bulgarians.”

Terminologies of social categorization become even more complex in light of Bulgaria’s distinctive socialist history. Bulgaria, during the initial decades of state socialism, adopted a nationalities political regime similar to that of the Soviet Union, in which ethnic difference was

⁸³ See debate on race in *Slavic Review*, Weitz, Hirsch, Lemon (2002).

⁸⁴ Although it didn’t make it into this version of the dissertation, I explore “waste” and race through the lens of metaphor, thinking through the metaphors of slavery and substance. See Buck-Morss (1990), Kopytoff (1986), Feeley-Harnik (1982, 1999), Carsten

museum-ized, materialized, and folklor-ized for popular consumption and elevation.⁸⁵ This included Romani cultural museums, theater groups, and research centers.

However, in the 1970s and 1980s Zhivkov tightened the reigns on the nation and changed the state's policy on ethnic minorities. Until the 1970's Gypsies were called "minorities" in official documents, but in 1974 "they disappeared from all statistic data" and "euphemisms were usually used, such as 'Bulgarian citizens of Gypsy origin' and the word minority was considered to be politically wrong" (Marushiakova and Popov 1997:40). Descriptions in local newspapers shifted from talking about Gypsies directly to calling them "swarthy citizens" and "children who cannot speak Bulgarian" (40).⁸⁶

This includes also the period of the Bulgarian Revival, when, between 1984 and 1989, members of the Turkish minority, which comprised about 10% of the population, were forced to "Bulgarianize," through changing their names, or be exiled to Turkey. Bulgaria adopted a total assimilation policy, in which ethnicity, race, religion, or any other sort of social distinction was erased from all parts of social, political, and public life. Effectively, Bulgarian minorities ceased to exist. Everyone was only Bulgarian.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ See Lemon (2000) and Will Guy's edited volume (2001).

⁸⁶ Socialist policy towards Roma varied from country to country based on differing relationships with the USSR and different instatements of national minority policies. Bulgaria, in many ways was closest to the USSR. Yugoslavian Roma faired differently and were able to migrate westward due to Tito's more open borders (Marushiakova and Popov 2001, 35). However, certain policies stemmed directly from Soviet Marxist doctrine and USSR legislation, including the 1956 decree banning nomadism that was repeated in the late 50s in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Poland (46). Assimilationist policies were adopted throughout the Peoples' Republics at the end of the 1950s and 60s organized by the notion that "Gypsies are a 'social and not an ethnic' layer who needed to be drawn into the proletariat" (Stewart 2001, 71-72). Despite what secondary sources say about the role of social categorization in late socialism, the archival documents I've been reading lately do show a particular attention paid to Roma, especially when discussing social integration, criminality, and housing.

⁸⁷ After WWII, following the communist takeover of 1944, Roma temporarily became part of a Soviet model, in which they were considered an ethnic community within Bulgaria with equal rights and their own ethnic "national" identity (Marushiakova and Popov 1997:34-5). In this period, Gypsies were thought of as a nationality and a Gypsy intelligentsia was organized with help from the communist leadership. According to Marushiakova and Popov, "through the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and the Fatherland Front committees Gypsy intelligentsia was actively included in the problems of the Gypsy population" (35). Romani leader, Shakir Pashov became involved in Romani campaigns and this time headed the *All-Gypsies' Organization against fascism and racism and for the*

However, in the current context, “race” has proved a useful tool for highlighting difference in Bulgaria, especially by linking up with systems of discrimination in a global context.⁸⁸ While most of my sweeping colleagues didn’t use the term “race” to discuss themselves, they did commonly refer to “racism,” to discuss the kind of workplace discrimination and everyday prejudice they faced. More commonly, “blackness,” became the most useful lens through which to discuss difference and social hierarchy.⁸⁹

Since state socialist archives did not keep track of race or ethnicity, the history of street sweeping in Bulgaria is difficult to look into in terms of a racialized history. Combining oral histories with archival data from the national archives, however, shows that Sofia’s street sweeping was, during socialism, a job occupied by both Roma and a few non-Romani villagers who had recently moved to Sofia. Predominantly a historically “Gypsy” job, the major difference between state socialist street cleaning and “European” street sweeping is one of economics, technology, and type and amount of waste. In oral history interviews I was constantly told about how clean Sofia used to be, the water trucks that cleaned the streets at night, and the near invisibility of sweepers.

Promotion of the Cultural Development of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria, which was created in March 1945 (35). After WWII, in 1946, the newspaper *Romano Essi* was created (the creator’s name was not given) and in 1947 the Gypsy theatre *Roma* was founded in Sofia (35). However these Gypsy initiatives changed significantly in the 1950s as newspapers were shut down and when reopened only printed in Bulgarian instead of Romanes. “This marked the end of the Gypsy organizations and the shift to a new policy towards the Gypsies which aimed at ethnic and cultural effacement—the final goal being their complete assimilation into the ‘Bulgarian socialist nation’” (Marushiakova and Popov 1997:35). Muslim Gypsies were forcibly renamed with Bulgarian names, replacing their Turkish-Arabic ones and nomadic Gypsies were settled and forced to undertake permanent jobs, in the hopes of turning them into full-fledged socialist citizens. Communist leaders were worried that the Gypsy population might join the large Turkish, Muslim minority (estimates of Muslims are about 13%-27% for most of the socialist period, although a percentage of Muslims were also Roma, see Eminov 1997) and “make it too big and dangerous” (37), especially since many Roma were identifying as Turks as their own Romani identity was being institutionally effaced for the sake of assimilation (37). “There was also a strong fear of Western influence among Gypsies which could undermine the roots of the socialist regime” (37). Communist officials tried to create a small group of Gypsy intelligentsia “through some unofficial privileges” to study in mainstream schools, with the goal “to create loyal supporters and instruments for communist ideology among Gypsies” (39).

⁸⁸ See Resnick (2009)

⁸⁹ See Lemon (1995, 1998, 2000) on Roma and blackness

In an interview with Nadia, she explained, “Do you know how much better it was? You sweep in the morning and you are free to go...by 10 or 11. The children [were] still sleeping when I [got] home.” She explained that she worked in the same region but during that time there were many more Romani workers, from both *Vasilotka* and *Levanka*. When I asked her if Bulgarians (non-Roma) swept as well and she told me that there was one Bulgarian she remembers, who she bossed around and got to do whatever she forgot. Although nobody in my interviews mentioned the changing composition of waste, they focused a great deal on the “cleanliness” of the street, which they linked to fewer cars and the machines that would do most of the work with water each night as opposed to 2013 when washing happened, at most, twice per year. And, while the same Romani demographic conducted waste labor, during socialism streets were washed at least weekly, street sweepers earned an income that surpassed the accountant of the company.⁹⁰ Therefore, while labor, even in a time of “total assimilation,” was segregated, it was racialized differently because the labor resulted in an income that was a respectable wage.

INSTABILITY OF “BLACK” LABOR

I worked on team of between thirty-five and forty-two workers, which constantly shifted in makeup. Numbers went down in the winter, since sweeping duties became shoveling and salting duties, which required fewer workers. Summer also required fewer working bodies, while autumn, with masses of falling leaves, and spring, with inches of dirty salt lining the street curbs, required more labor. Most of the team were women, save for some husbands and sons and brothers who were forced to begrudgingly sweep with the women until they could find a place on the back of a garbage truck. All workers, except for two, were Roma.

⁹⁰ See National Archives Fond 1659

Aside from Vika and Simona, most of the sweepers worked multiple jobs, both to supplement their meager incomes and in case they got fired. After sweeping they might rest for an hour or two and then set up a table and sell defrosted sweet corn kernels in paper cups, topped with chili sauce or canned grated cheese, which was the fad among children in their neighborhood (*mahala*) those days. Others might hook up a pan and make crepes to sell in their front yards. On Sundays nearly all of the women would sell items found in the trash during the workday at the Bitaka (flea) market in Sofia, which, although prohibited by the bosses, was key to their economic livelihood. This compensatory labor made the otherwise minimum sweeping wage somewhat livable, especially when combined with food items and other things found in dumpster bins while on the job. Additionally, their husbands, with fewer job prospects, would often scavenge through bins while they worked, and together on Sundays they would pay the 1 *lev* (.50 Euro) to set up a blanket at *Bitaka* and sell what they could.

Other women, known throughout the workforce, sold contraband cigarettes. These women often cycled through the *chistota* workplace depending on when they could find a cigarette supply and when they last got caught. One mother-daughter team, Zara and Lilia, had been selling contraband cigarettes in the park outside the barracks for years, until recently when the police started to crack down on cigarette sellers. For years the police saw what was going on and turned a blind eye for some cash. However, one day, suddenly, they started arresting all of the sellers. When I asked, Lilia chalked it up to Boiko Borisov (the then prime minister) fearing competition from other contraband sellers that would compete with his own stake in the cigarette market. This meant Lilia and Zara ended up arrested and unable to sell for months. Other women, quicker to catch onto changes in police initiatives, figured out ways to sell cigarettes without being associated with them in case of a raid.

They would sit in the park, appearing to hang out with friends, as they waited for potential customers to approach. They'd ask the customers if they want men's or women's cigarettes, and then, while one person kept watch and talked with the client, another would find the place where they stashed that kind of cigarette, usually under piles of leaves or under rocks. Cigarette packets were spread throughout the park like Easter eggs before the morning hunt. There were just one or two packets in various locations, so that in case of a police raid the cigarettes wouldn't be attached to any seller and they would be very difficult to find. Most of these cigarette sellers sold to non-Romani Bulgarians in the park, because in their own neighborhoods the cigarette market was already saturated. When sellers were caught, as Lilia and Zara were, they immediately moved into working as sweepers, ostensibly temporarily, while they waited for the political mood to change.

While sweeping, they still maintained their clientele, if possible, because all of the sweepers knew that they could be fired at any moment. Since different numbers of workers were needed in different seasons, before the labor cuts, the bosses would explain that they would be watching the workers closely. Any lateness, mistake, or laziness would result in being fired. Workers knew that the oldest would typically be fired first, as would be the workers without outstanding loans to their bosses. As I discuss in the next chapter, workers ensured job security by taking out loans from their immediate bosses who themselves worked part-time at high-interest loan companies (with names like QuickCredit, Money2Day, etc.). Sweepers would sometimes take out loans specifically from one of the credit companies the bosses worked for since they knew that they wouldn't get fired with money still owed. About one third of the workers had some sort of loans linked to their bosses, but some sweepers couldn't receive loans

due to outstanding debt or because they didn't have the necessary identifications or work histories for the minimal credit checks.

Firings were inevitable and public, ensuring a constant sense of insecurity among a large portion of the workers. During firing season, the bosses would tell the workers how the firings would happen. During the winter I worked, firings began once per week and then culminated in someone being fired every day for a week, as the first snow neared closer and closer. On the days when firings would happen, workers would meet at the barracks to store their instruments and then stand in a circle around their bosses who would make the announcement, casually and quietly, by saying the name of who was fired and "you'll drop off your uniform tomorrow." Usually the fired worker would laugh nervously, make a joke for the public audience, and say something along the lines of "Ehhh, I need a vacation anyway." Often they did have other things to do, but often were already in the planning stages of finding a position with a similar waste company (there are many), perhaps a bit closer to home.

MAKING LOGIC, CONSTRUCTING ORDER

Chistota, meaning "purity" or "cleanliness," once the generic name for the state-socialist cleaning company, is now the term for the municipal cleaning sector in Bulgaria. *Chistota* is responsible for street sweeping, garbage collection in big metal street bins, collection at small garbage pails on sidewalks near bus and tram stops, and the transportation of that collected waste, in trucks, to the local landfill. Responsibilities also change according to the weather. In the spring and summer months, there is a truck with a sweeping attachment that can do preliminary cleaning on major streets. This is an important help to sweepers who often wait for the sweeping truck to pass before they begin their work, as it cleans the majority of heavy dust and debris from the part where the street meets the sidewalk. However, the truck must stop its

rounds in late fall when the streets are covered with leaves and winter snow. The machinery would fail from the density of debris in its path, and so on one sad day each autumn sweeping becomes manual labor. During this period, sweepers are responsible for cleaning leaves from the curbs of city streets and sidewalks.

The work of *chistota* is often organized around metaphors of everyday domestic labor. The wet heavy leaves, sweepers call “spinach.” Sometimes there is so much “spinach” and it is so heavy that the only way to move it is by using ones work boot and collecting it with both broom and boot and pushing it into trash bags or found cardboard boxes. Workers often joke that although they don’t have money to buy spinach to cook at home, they can always just take it from the street to make some nasty spinach and rice.⁹¹

In winter months, sweepers are responsible for cleaning snow and ice from bus and tram stops, and, together with trucks, for salting sidewalks. The trucks plow the streets and then often pass afterwards with someone sitting in the back, in a pile of salt, using a shovel to throw the salt on sidewalks, which sweepers supplement with hand-hauled bags of salt. In winter months, the sweepers bring their brooms home to store in case they need them, but instead are equipped with new tools for the job – a red metal shovel and an ice pick on a stick. In spring months, sweepers return their shovel and pick and begin to sweep up leftover salt from the street edges and begin to weed sidewalks with their hands. Stray weeds and plants coming up through the sidewalk and on the barrier next to the road must be picked from the root. Throughout the year, workers must make sure to sweep-up all cigarette butts, dirt from the curb, and handpick garbage items from

⁹¹ This is part of an article in preparation entitled “Running Water in the Land of Spitting Dragons: The Animated Logics of Haphazard Infrastructure.” In the article I link up the animation of leaves with the way Romani neighborhood residents animate haphazard water infrastructures in their neighborhoods as a means of finding humor and agency in their daily lives.

streets and sidewalks. If there are dead animals or birds, sweepers must dispose of them as well. All garbage collected is disposed of in the company's large metal street bins.

These metal bins are placed into grooves in the sidewalk and are also on wheels to allow for movement when necessary. They are lifted by trucks that hook onto the sides and assisted by the two men hanging on the back of the truck. The bins are typically metal but have more recently been constructed from a hard kind of black plastic, since metal was being stolen and sold as scrap. However, plastic bins, while less expensive to produce, have the tendency to catch on fire when Sofia citizens dispose of burning waste in them. Much of Sofia is still not on a public heating grid and so when citizens using coal or wood burning stoves need to dispose of the embers, they often do so in these public trash bins and can ignite a fire. These large bins are placed at intervals on every street, usually with two or three of them together, side by side, at each location.



Image 24: Mixed waste urban dumpsters in Sofia.

When people get rid of their trash, they tie it up in a small plastic bag each morning or every other day and drop it in one of these bins on their way to work or the market. Waste is not monitored per household or per person, as these bins are open to the public. (And, the waste tax

is based upon square meters of apartment or home, not waste usage). Everyone, except local businesses, which are supposed to dispose of waste through separate contracts, is permitted to throw their waste in any city bin.

Chistota, although comprised of slew of privately owned companies, many of which are owned by the same umbrella firm despite anti-monopoly laws put into place in the early 2000s, has direct ties to the once state-owned, socialist cleaning company. Transition-era legislation called for the privatization of all state owned companies, including the state-owned *Chistota*. A privatizing contract between the Sofia metropolitan privatization agency and ‘Chistota - Privat’ concluded on February 24, 1999 and resulted in 75% of the shares of ‘Chistota’ being sold to private firms. The remaining 25% remained municipally owned. Over the course of the next ten years, the cleaning companies were reprimanded for failing to comply with Bulgaria’s law against monopolization and at the time of research the cleaning sector faced political critique since one major conglomerate company owned many of the regional cleaning firms.

Many of the women have worked for *chistota* in the same region for over thirty years and have over twenty uniforms, as they continued their same work despite changing company names and uniform colors. Many experienced transition, from the state socialist firm, to the municipal one, to a variety of private companies, some of which were owned by the same bosses. The firm has changed hands nearly every other year since 2004. Each time the company changes, or is bought by a larger umbrella firm, the uniforms change as well. The sweepers often wear old uniforms to work, while they are washing and drying the current one, and it usually passes as being satisfactory for the job. When I joined the team, uniforms were red for the first time in years, and in the words of my colleagues, “See, we are communists again now.” One colleague, Gidanka, explained that the uniforms were red to match the national football team that

was owned by the “big boss” of our company. Despite the fact that paydays were never regular and could be as much as two weeks late, Gidanka rationalized it. “When they win, the boss is happy and we get paid. It’s all linked. We’re all in red.”

Despite being a private firm, the company I worked for receives funding and orders via a municipal contract. This means that municipal inspectors must check the work of the firm. In the case of *Izgreva*, both the company bosses and the municipal inspectors work out of the same small municipal office in the center of town. When something goes wrong, for example, when cigarette butts haven’t been picked up, a side street has gone unswept, or someone forgets to wear their reflective vest, Kali and Mari explain that the municipal inspector will fine the company and therefore the worker will be fined as well.

EQUIPMENT

One autumn day, the first of my sweeping, I stood, waiting for my assignment, with Anka, the youngest and only unmarried member of the team who was trying to find me gloves. She worried about me and wanted me to have something to cover my hands, while the older sweepers explained that I’d just do what they do and they don’t have any gloves. “Her hands will be fine!” they explained. Anka, I think, saw me as an alternate version of herself, both of us young and unmarried. Anka would often go to clubs and party until 4 or 5 in the morning before coming to work, so some days her mascara was still visible and she’d show me glittery spandex outfits she had on underneath her workers’ uniform. That day, the sweepers weren’t sure who I’d be working with until the bosses finally decided that I would work with Anka.

Anka: Oh gosh, I can’t believe it.

Elana: I don’t know why.

Anka: This is like Big Brother and maybe you have some

mission?⁹²

Nadia (overhearing): [in Romani] She's not a Bulgarian boss.

Elana: I'm just waiting.

Nadia: What are you waiting for?

Elana: Just waiting, and you?

Nadia: We are waiting to be let in [to the barracks to get the brooms and dustbins].

Anka: I don't believe my eyes.

Bai Traiko: Believe it, like I told you, if you remember, that she will come to work in the fall.

Anka: Boss, this is like some mission.

Hristina : Are we on Big Brother?

Maria: Now, here is a white cat [looking at me].

Nadia: We are all black cats [here].

Hristina : Black, but loyal.

Bai Traiko: Oh, come on, we are all Bulgarians. What does your ID say?

Maria: Bulgarian, I guess...
[Transcribed from fieldnotes]

Anka finds it hard to believe that a “white” American would be working them on the street and this becomes the impetus for a larger analysis of citizenship, racialization, and belonging. Throughout my time in Bulgaria, I encountered a variety of discourses about passports. One friend told me that he Gypsies should have their ethnicity marked in their passports because otherwise when they go abroad, they become the face of Bulgaria.⁹³ I also read this as Bai Traiko's disavowal of Roma experiences difference and articulation of their

⁹² This refers to the reality TV show, which was very popular in Bulgaria.

⁹³ This derives first from fieldnotes in 2003.

racialization. This tension—between the disavowal of the presence of Romani racism in Bulgaria and the desire for Roma to be marked as difference when traveling abroad—was prevalent in both everyday discourse and media accounts.⁹⁴ While the sweepers see racial difference and comment on it, through the figure of a cat, Bai Traiko relies on state-mandated definitions of citizenship as a means of quelling any sense of unrest.⁹⁵ Racialization in this framework is disregarded and made light of by falling back on the standardization of passport regulations without giving credence to the way in which having a “white” person sweeping catalyzes otherwise naturalized experiences of racialization. Since there was rarely anyone working with my colleagues who might put into question the naturalness their position as sweepers, my presence, served to initiate many discussions of race, labor, and hierarchy.⁹⁶

We began the afternoon labor. We moved through the outdoor vegetable market, sweeping the street around the vendors’ feet as they sold tomatoes and greeted us jovially. We moved quickly down the street and the other women yell “*Haide!*” “Come on!” We rushed through the busy streets until we reached a side street where it was calmer and we could talk. We swept until we were able to rest at noon. Careful not to sit on the ground, which is not good for fertility, we placed brooms across the concrete and sat on the reeds, slightly suspended above the cold sidewalk.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ While this focus on passports became important in conversations I had in 2003, in the pre-accession period, in anticipation of “free” travel through Europe, it resurfaced in 2010 in light of the deportations of Roma from France and the Roma immigration “crisis.”

⁹⁵ Perhaps relevant in this moment is the fact that Bai Traiko used to be a head in the communist-era immigration and passport sector.

⁹⁶ The only time I witnessed a non-Roma begin working with the team, she worked for one day only and left the following day. My colleagues reasoned that while Simona was crazy and Vika loved dogs enough to work for *chistota*, but other Bulgarians couldn’t do the labor because it was too difficult.

⁹⁷ This is not a practice particular to Roma. It is a common concern throughout East Europe and post-Soviet states. During a Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian language course I took, this “superstition,” as the teacher explained it, became fodder for a series of jokes in our end-of-class staged play.

We were all curious. I asked about their families, their children. They explained that they all take evening courses at the local elementary school, where their children attend, in *Vasilotka* and receive a small income from that, as part of an EU-funded project. We kept walking until we took another a break and looked at photos on each other's phones. Then, Maria called out to the group, in Romani, "Come on sing!" She explained, "We need to laugh a little...work, work a little laugh." Maria explained to me that we would be getting new brooms on Friday and that theirs were already old. They write on them to tell them apart, when they are new. She scratched into my broom with a rock to make the letter "E" and tried to carve my initials into my metal dustbin.

Each sweeper works with a box-like metal dustpan on a pole (*faraj*) and a broom (*metla*). The brooms are supposed to be replaced each month, and new brooms are a coveted possession. There's never warning of when the new brooms will arrive but when they do workers stand in line in the morning, as Mari and Kali read off their names, check attendance and offer them to pick a new broom. Most sweepers prefer brooms that are wide and large and not too soft but also not too hard, so they try them out before settling on one that would work well for the month. The brooms harden up with time though, as dirt wedges between the reeds and stiffens the broom. Often jealousy ensues as those called first get the better pick of the brooms because good tools make the job more manageable, especially during leaf season. Immediately upon getting a new broom, the sweepers gather whatever writing utensils they can find and ask the more literate workers to write their names. Pens and markers can suffice, but throughout the day the sweepers often search in trash bins for something more permanent, like house paint or nail polish, with which to write their names.

They make sure to mark both the handle down by the broom end and the top, in case someone else takes their broom and breaks the top off. Some women carve their names into the wood of the broom or file off the top to make a unique shape. Dustbins have all been scratched into with names and painted over, again and again. Sometimes there are brooms with names written over names. This happens either when someone is fired or hasn't shown up for work in a while and their instruments become common property until someone claims them. Otherwise, sweepers can get brooms stolen or lost and often claim the brooms of others and re-mark them. The price of a lost broom is relatively inexpensive (about 20 leva, or 10 euro) but losing a dustbin or shovel can cost up to 100 leva (or 50 euro), which is about one-third of a month's salary.

After being sick for over a week the winter after I started working, I came back to work and found both my dustbin and broom were gone. After complaining loudly to my closest friends at work, who then complained loudly in Romani to the rest of the team, my broom "magically" appeared the next day and we spent the morning talking about who could have taken it. It felt like both a personal offense and an indicator of my ongoing outsider status. While often received as being part of the team, in moments like this the workers assumed that the head boss, Bai Traiko, would give me a new broom without charging me and so my tools were always up for grabs.

Whenever I would complain about my broom, which I did often, blaming my tools for my difficulty sweeping, my colleagues would tell me to go to Traiko and ask him for a new broom. I'd often ask them why they wouldn't go and do the same, since they complained about their instruments often, which were often so worn down by the end of the month that they were

raggedy sticks of straw. On more than one occasion they would tell me, “it’s different for you. You wear the different uniform,” since I started in an orange uniform when theirs were red.

As we finished our afternoon labor Anka asked, “How are you, colleague?” to which I replied “I’m Ok, I guess.” According to Maria, I did “alright” for the first day but she told the other women, in Romani, “Look at her hands.” My hands were already red and beginning to blister. She instructed me on how to walk back by placing the handle of the broom through the top handle of the dustbin and then carry them together, swung over my shoulder, as not to bang into people on the bus back to the barracks. As we return to the barracks, they asked what time I’d be working tomorrow. I explain that I’d arrive at 11am. Bai Traiko told me to meet at the *IKA*. “No problem, I’ll get there.” “With the metro,” Maria adds. “With the metro,” I confirmed. Then, Nadia pulled on the Velcro on my reflector vest and instructed me to take it off, “because there will be women on the ride home.” She brushed my hair down and we parted ways.

At the time I didn’t understand what taking the metro meant or how Maria even noticed I had arrived via metro that morning. I soon, however, realized that taking the metro was not what workers did. Nearly all workers used tram and buses since the system of manual ticket punching meant that it was up to the controller to ticket them, whereas on the metro every passenger needed a ticket to enter. The metro was a space reserved for those who could afford a ticket, which meant that most people on it usually weren’t manual laborers in uniform. I often wondered why I was stared at on the metro but on the tram or bus I seemed to blend in. Public transport was divided between those where humans did the ticket controlling and those modes that were automated; humans could sometimes be swayed in the favor of poor workers whereas machines could not.

QUESTIONS OF HUMANIZATION

On my first week of the job I worked primarily with the youngest workers. But, on that Friday, sweeping groups joined for the last few blocks of work, before the rain came. Often we'd be sweeping little by little, looking down, sometime talking, only to look up and see another group approaching us from another direction. Always a happy surprise, we'd sweep faster and faster so that we could meet in the middle and join as a larger group to sit down for a bit and smoke a cigarette or eat any leftover lunch food.

On this Friday we had been sweeping in a collegial quiet until we saw another group, comprised of three sisters ("the sisters," as they were called by the rest of their colleagues) from *Vasilotka* and a mother-daughter team, Ani and Sneja, who lived in a rented room near downtown Sofia. They were from a nearby village and the daughter, Ani, had married someone in *Vasilotka*, a cousin of the sisters, but he was an alcoholic and so she moved between his home and her mother's rented room. The mother, Sneja, wore a headscarf, which marked her as somewhat old-fashioned and a villager. They also arrived everyday with plastic bags, in which they kept food brought from home, metal shovels, and short-handled brooms (the kind you might use to sweep the area in front of a fireplace).

Although shy at first, they liked to ask me questions, especially about why I wore what I did, why I was constantly "naked" (under-dressed), and if I had a boyfriend or a husband and where my mother was and how she lived while I was so far away. Ani would always tell me I should have a man already because I was white, not "fat and black" like her. I started asking why they carried shovels and brooms in a bag instead of stashing their equipment in the barracks like the rest of the workers. They are outsiders, Hristina explained, and "these women from *Vasilotka* steal" so if someone steals their metal dustbin (*faraj*) they would be docked 100 leva or

more from their salary. So, they preferred to leave their equipment, in storage, at home and use their own materials that were easier to transport on the tram.

On that first Friday of work, we had some time to spare before we had to be back to meet the bosses and drop-off our equipment, and we sat on a stoop to rest. Ani and Sneja took out a plastic bag with a half-loaf of bread and some olives. They began speaking quickly in Romani to the women with whom I had been sweeping, asking about me. Then, Sneja held out the food and made a gesture with her hand that I should eat. I said I wasn't hungry. She looked at me, slightly hurt. She made the same motion with her hand. I nodded and ripped off a piece of bread and took an olive, making a ball of it in my hand as I had seen my colleagues do that week. Ani looked and laughed, hitting her mother and drawing the attention of the other women. Ani asked, "You're eating our food. But just tell me, honestly, is this disgusting to you? Are we disgusting?" Sneja looked-on, quietly, as I ate the bread she offered and she ate beside me. I swallowed and told Ani that of course I wasn't disgusted, why would I be? Ani looked down, "Well we are Gypsies." Her mother interjected, "But we are human, right Elanke?" I nodded enthusiastically and explained that yeah, we are humans. Ani walked beside me all the way to the barracks, smiling and asking me "So really, you think we are all just human?"

Eating together often provoked these kinds of reactions. Traditionally in Bulgaria, commensality is an important part of social affiliation and familial recognition. It is common among Bulgarians and Romani, alike, to drink coffee with acquaintances but save eating together as a family affair. This is especially true in Romani neighborhoods where primary utensils are people's hands or broken pieces of fresh bread, and so sharing of one main dish is reserved for

intimate kin relations.⁹⁸ My friends at work would often explain the intimacy of our friendship to family members and new colleagues by citing the fact that “we eat together,” “she drinks water from the bottle with us,” and “she jokes with us.” Commensality restrictions also have a very practical basis –for people without much money, the sharing of food was also a means of sharing wealth and needed to be restricted to intimate relations.

This issue of shared bodily fluids arose in the filming of TV news program with my colleague, Lenka, that February, about five months after I started sweeping. Lenka was a matriarch in *Vasilotka* and a “boss” on the team. Lenka’s house was central to the wellbeing of her relatives, many of whom relied on her for electricity that they would tap into during the winter, TV to watch at her home, and even food during hard times. Lenka had helped to connect her sisters, her son’s wife, and some cousins to the boss of the workplace so they could get hired. Lenka was also, as she self-proclaimed, “totally crazy.” She was emotional, took “pills” (anti-anxiety medication), and had “breakdowns” from time to time. She also was very close to Mari, one of the bosses because she took high-interest loans from her. And, not only did she take loans for herself, but she brought friends, family, and colleagues to Mari to take loans, and so Lenka usually was placed in the best positions. When they needed someone to sweep in front of the Prime Minister’s office, Lenka went. If Lenka was late for work, it was overlooked whereas others, less boisterous and less connected, were threatened with being fired or fined for lateness or a job not completed. When the seasonal firings happen, just before snowfall, most feared for their jobs. But, Lenka was always all right. (Also, nobody would dare take Lenka’s broom or dustbin from the barracks.)

⁹⁸ Also see examples of various kinds of institutional segregation efforts in the U.S. and elsewhere, the sharing of drinking fountains, swimming pools, and other places where bodily substances could be shared have become hotbeds for debate.

Lenka scared most people because she controlled a lot in the neighborhood, had sons who were married to many of the other sweepers' relatives, and was very good at smiling when she needed to, speaking up for herself, and making her position known. Her husband, a former company employee, worked by scavenging metals and other recyclable objects in the center of Sofia. On more than one occasion I saw him with his pushcart collecting from waste bins in the nicest parts of downtown Sofia. He didn't own a horse-cart, which would be more prestigious, but he had family members who did and sometimes rented it out to him. When I was invited to a wedding in *Vasilotka*, it was Lenka who invited me. When we were interviewed by the Friday night news to showcase the "American who left her luxurious life in New York to sweep the streets of Sofia," and the journalist asked the sweepers if they "eat with the American," Lenka proudly and defiantly chimed in, on-screen, that "there have been times we drank from one bottle." With the imperviousness to talk to reporters, on-screen, Lenka had an attitude rare among my colleagues. Often willing to fade into the background, especially in public or controversial settings, most of my colleagues had a sense of fear that kept them from ever talking back. For weeks after the footage aired, Lenka was proud and repeated her line, "There have been times we drank from one bottle, right Elanko?!"

THE PAST IN PRESENT LABOR

We often met in the morning outside of the big-box *IKA* supermarket, with its bright yellow signage atop cherry red metal roof, pictures of yellow and red plastic shopping-bags, floating pineapples, strawberries, and flying crackers framing the entrance. In the expansive parking lot in front, round directional signs, like those found throughout Europe, indicate the flow of traffic. To the left of *IKA* there is a brand new Kentucky Fried Chicken, complete with drive-thru and picnic bench outdoor seating. To the right of *IKA* is the metro station where

sweepers buy single cigarettes, salty sunflower seeds, and 30-cent espressos in plastic cups from the socialist-era kiosk in the underpass. When we gather midday outside the *IKA*, a sea of red (the current color of our uniforms), we make sure to find a place to sit on the curb where we wouldn't be in anyone's way.

The *IKA* is one of many place-names in our local worker's vocabulary, quickly learned by those new to the area. Street names are not nearly as important as the nicknames for places where we meet or work—"the *IKA*," where we meet, "the barracks," where we store our equipment, "the bread factory," where we meet on some afternoons, "the drunks," the area we sweep where a group of alcoholics sleep on benches, "the apple trees," the area we sweep with the best apples for eating, and "the Gypsies," the area we sweep around the public housing block inhabited solely by Romani families (many of whom are relatives of the workers).

The *IKA* is the main lunchtime meeting point on the days when we divide up after sweeping the large boulevards [*nariadite*, a term usually used in military contexts to mean "work detail"] to sweep the smaller streets [*prekite*] for the afternoon. While the *IKA* is central to the geographical layout of the day, as a place we meet, go to the public bathroom, buy loaves of bread and refrigerated hotdogs for lunch, it is also the former site of *Deyanova Mahala* where many of the workers lived and from where they were evicted in April 2001. *Deyanova Mahala* had been a 40-year-old Romani neighborhood on the parcel of land that *IKA* bought. Municipal authorities evicted 240 Romani people, and while *IKA* compensated some landowners, others without valid legal deeds to the land were only provided with temporary housing in decaying communist-era train cars donated by the Ministry of Defense.

While Regulations for the Enforcement of the Municipal Property Act considers individuals "who have lived in non-inhabitable premises such as shacks, cellars, attics, etc. for

not less than one year" as the second category most in need of social housing, the situation became complicated since many of the 240 evicted people were not eligible for municipal housing. This was due to the fact that most did not have legal address registrations in Sofia and hadn't spent at least five years in Sofia as required by the Municipal Property Act 74. This ambiguous status resulted in their being forcibly removed from their homes and provided "temporary" train car housing, on the ironically named *Boulevard Europa*, in which over thirty families lived for nearly eleven years. While a few of the inhabitants from these train cars worked for sweeping companies, *chistota*, most had family-owned horse carts and worked as informal recyclers and waste scavengers. Others moved in with friends and family and others moved into a falling-down communist bloc serving as public housing Area 5, where *chistota* also cleans and has nicknamed as "*the Gypsies*."

Having to meet at the supermarket on the land where they once lived seemed, in the abstract, rather painful. However, in conversation most sweepers remember their evictions as an ancient history and accepted this as their fate. It became part of a larger trajectory of daily life of this class of urban, Bulgarian Roma where bad things are expected to happen and humor provides one of the best ways to get by. My colleagues used their knowledge of the urban landscape as a way to make the day less boring and a bit more pleasant, knowing where the trees with the best apples grew or which cafes would allow them to use the bathroom and provide some social interaction. This transition from home to supermarket to workplace was part of a longer, larger life history in which landscapes once intimate become foreign and then intimate again, as a group of Europe's "most nomadically known" peoples cannot escape the stasis into which they were born.

This was not the first time I noticed waste workers using knowledge of the past in order to assist their current situation. Many informal recyclers, or scavengers, would often reference their particular in-depth knowledge of raw materials from their experience working in state-run socialist factories. Understanding metals, extraction processes, concrete, and plastic production, for years lying dormant in the minds of the postsocialist unemployed, were activated again when the same materials they once used in processes of production became the foundation of their work of reuse, recycling, and repurposing. Although the direction of the labor process might be different, the material intimacies remain useful and productive.⁹⁹

THE BULGARIAN BOSSES

The main boss of our team, Bai Traiko, was the key to my position. “Bai” is a colloquialism of the vocative for “uncle,” but used usually in reference to an elder, respected man. I met Bai Traiko one day in August with the representative of a large non-profit foundation in Sofia. A friend of a friend, Nikolina, worked there and upon hearing about my enduring struggles to find employment as an unpaid street sweeper (and probably getting tired of my barrage of emails), invited me to accompany her to meet the local *chistota* boss. The company had applied for foundation funding to support buying new shoes for their workers, knowing that the foundation might be able to provide assistance since nearly all workers were Romani and the foundation has funding for Roma initiatives.

Bai Traiko was the kind of man that has a long past and a lot of secrets. One the day I met him with Nikolina, he picked us up outside of the *IKA* in a late 90s forest green Nissan jeep. Nikolina, wearing her business formalwear, hoisted up her pencil skirt and jumped in the car after folding over the front seat so I could squeeze into the back. They began making small talk,

⁹⁹ See chapter on informal recycling.

interspersed with commentary on the urban landscape and the workers as we drove. Bai Traiko explained:

The municipality gives us the task of cleaning and tells us how many decares [the measurement of land used in waste management plans] they want us to clean and they pay for it. From that point on is our task to calculate the kind of funds we will need to do it and how many people. From those funds we also calculate the salaries of the workers. This is work you don't really need an education for. The people that work this [job] are usually with the lowest possible degree of education or without any education at all. Some of them can't even read or write. But that aside, we are dealing fine with all for now. Only sometimes it's hard because when you tell some of them the name of the street, they don't know where to go because they can't read the names of the streets. You can't even show a map. This is a kind of very low intellectual level. This is why everyday before starting the work someone has to show some of the workers where they have to go and what exactly they have to do. You shouldn't expect them to know all the time what they have to do on their own. This is why they need to be controlled all the time, where they go and what they do. Many of our workers are from *Vasilotka* or *Fidalka* neighborhoods. Our workers are mainly Gypsies because of their low education status and such. As you know many other work positions need people on them to have higher education degrees. What they are doing here is very easy - you just get a broom and you have to sweep the streets [fieldnotes from 9.2012].

The workers too became part of the scenery. As they notice the jeep they waved and at different points Bai Traiko stopped the car and rolled down to the window to joke with them. At another point he stopped and one of the sweepers asked when they are getting paid. He quietly answered that he didn't know.

We continued to drive, observing the sweepers doing their work, as Traiko narrated the landscape. In the car, as we drove through the city streets that Traiko was in charge of, he reiterated that the workers were “difficult” [*trudni*] because they often didn't know where the streets were. He noted that Bulgarians work with his company as well, pointing out Vika “who talks a bit.” We drove around to see the sweepers in action and then stopped to convene with all of them and ask questions to the group. They joked about their work and purposefully explained that their “bosses are good.” Traiko helped divide them into their second shifts and explained that each sweeper is allotted 6 decares to sweep per day and there was an expectation that the

team would collect 50 tons of waste daily. In the mornings the sweepers spend their efforts on the large boulevards where public transport travels. Then they move to the smaller streets and finally to the areas between the panel housing blocks, in order of priority. I asked the workers where they preferred to work. They quickly explained that the small streets in the afternoon were best since in the mornings they were alone.

As we drove in the car, Traiko got a call that he needed to check the streets in the Romani neighborhood of *Vasilotka*, where most of the sweepers actually lived. *Vasilotka*, now in the area of *Izgrevev*, used to be a separate village until 1971 when it became part of the capital city. It is famously divided into two parts. The section closest to Sofia's "Ring Road" which circles the city is the "Gypsy" part, while a bit further in is a square, which is the non-Roma, Bulgarian area. There are separate schools for each area, although the cleaning company sweeps all roads located within city limits.

There were three new women cleaning there to prepare for a street washing that evening. Bai Traiko explained that they were new in the company and "I have assigned them today here, because there is no chance for them to get lost." Each street gets washed twice a year, once in the summer and once in the winter, which, he noted is much worse than communism when city streets were washed often, as much as every evening. Traiko drove us past the Romani neighborhood into the adjacent well-off Bulgarian section of *Vasilotka* and remarked on the contrasting beauty linked to "different cultures." As we drove back, past the train cars where those from *Deyanova Mahala* were relocated, Traiko explained the story I knew well:

Truth to be told, for me the current policy towards the Gypsy citizens is very wrong. Everyone is complaining they are not working and doing anything useful for the society but the fault is in the policy towards them – they [policies] made them lazy with all the social funds and support. There is so much work that needs to be done around Bulgaria - vast fields that need to be taken care of and such. But no, they ran from the work in the countryside and they came here in the big city to live their lives, dependent on social

funds and support... [pointing out the window] Now, these are the caravans themselves. Just an ugly sight on the entrance of Sofia...those 20 maybe 30 caravans on the road to *Bankia*. In this neighborhood even the police are scared to go. And those buildings [pointing down the street] were a different kind of institutions once upon a time, related to agriculture and agricultural policy. Now they are the places where plastic waste is being [sorted] and packed [into bales].

Bai Traiko explained to me that the scavenging of raw materials that he witnesses throughout *Izgreve* happened even during communist times, when he used to work for the court system:

I have to tell you that even during the socialist period in Bulgaria some materials which you can recycle from waste were very good business, but there were many civil trials for those materials. Because reusing some waste materials is a good premise for some people to steal shaft covers, rails, all sorts of things from the factories. Such crimes [contributed to] millions [that] were lost. [Now], all this business is controlled by some gangsters that want to feed themselves. I am talking about the metal resources and plastic resources from waste business.

Bai Traiko's sentiment is echoed in current-day policies on metal recycling, which require anyone selling scrap metal to present proof of ID and a bank account number, so as to deter those stealing metal from train tracks and other public structures from selling it as scrap (see chapter on Scrap Metal).

Bai Traiko had certain kinds of pride in his city, his country, and a unique relationship to his position. He took his job seriously. Narrating the streets of *Izgreve*, he announced, "Here is where Sofia sleeps," explaining that it would be "the second largest city in Bulgaria" if measured by population size alone. The work of *chistota* was important for him, since, "if we don't clean, they can't travel." Bai Traiko meant that unless we, the city cleaners, swept and salted public transportation stops, those Bulgarians commuting in and out of *Izgreve* for work couldn't travel.

Working in *Izgreve* can be difficult. According to the municipal contract, Bai Traiko was supposed to employ 60 workers this year. However, they only have 44 at the moment because the municipality cut its funding. Besides the disparity between contracts and practice, which Bai Traiko insists I should study, *Izgreve* itself is a hard place to work:

Here is this area in *Izgreva* [where] there are people from all around the country because buying a flat here is cheap and renting one is also cheap. There is something else as well - the atmosphere around here is different because all those people from the countryside or small towns that have come here have a different kind of ethics and comprehension of things. When you live in a small town all the people know each other, but when you come here in the jungle no one knows you. You become anonymous. You become no one. And that's when the wildest sides of someone start to appear. I see this tendency with becoming anonymous in the big city ever since the time I was a detective. Thanks to this in the big cities there is always a higher rate of crimes. And there is a new reason for crimes in the small towns - the lack of work.

The importance of cleaning in front of kindergartens and schools was not lost on him, as these were significant locations that need to be cleaned and especially, in winter, needed cleaning in order to provide pedestrian access. However, like a capitalist extension of the old communist adage, “we pretend to work and they pretend to pay us,” Bai Traiko explained that “we work as much as they pay us,” which often results in the same outcome given the shortages and delays with municipal funding.

Bai Traiko provided details of the system, which he knew by heart. In *Izgreva* there are 1,270 metal bins, or *Meva*, as they are called by their brand name. It costs 5 leva per day to lift and empty each bin and the municipal inspector checks this to make sure it happens. If it is determined that this obligation hasn't been fulfilled, the company has an additional twelve hours to complete the task. Each truck has a GPS system so that both the company managers and the local authorities can trace where waste has been collected, who picked it up (or forgot to), and where it is deposited. A secondary electronic system measures how much the truck weighs before and after it dumps its waste at the local landfill to calculate the exact amount of waste and dumped collected each day.

Sasho, a 20-something college graduate and the son of a prominent ecologist working at Sofia's landfill is in charge of collaborating with the municipal inspector's office and monitoring the trucks with the GPS system. He shares the electronic system with the municipality so they

can monitor the progress of waste collection via truck. This is the first full year of using the electronic system and this upcoming winter, Bai Traiko explained, would be the second winter using it. It measures the time and place when bins were lifted but doesn't account for the weight of waste lifted from each site. On each truck there are three workers and one driver. Nikolina told me, and Bai Traiko corroborated, that nearly all waste workers, except bosses and truck drivers, are Romani and all drivers, except one famous female driver, are men. The female driver was infamous for hitting her colleagues when they didn't complete their jobs accurately and got "amazing" results. Two men work to help lift the bins into the truck and the other works with a broom to ensure the area around the bin is clean. Once a truck is nearing capacity, it drives to Sofia landfill to dispose of the waste.

Sofia's landfill has its own complicated history as its capacity keeps growing despite its temporarily, and politically, being deemed full every few of years. Using the electronic weighing system, which is linked to the database of the municipal inspector's office, the municipality pays directly to landfill for the waste that its subcontracting companies deposit there. However, although the Sofia landfill is a separate entity, it is owned in part by the municipality itself. When waste arrives at the landfill it is dumped in heaps on the ground before being moved with machinery onto a conveyor belt where Romani women manually recover waste for recycling. This is the beginning of a new phase in the life cycle of garbage.

After this initial meeting with Bai Traiko, I called him a few weeks later and asked to work with him, for free. Unlike the joking and laughter I faced many other times when I approached potential employers, Bai Traiko understood my research and agreed to let me work twenty-four hours per week with a contract, so that I was insured in case of injury and would receive monthly paychecks along with the rest of the team. Bai Traiko took me, on my first day,

to the garage where payday happened and where the administrators worked. Bai Traiko introduced me to the administrators who smirked about my job, wishing me luck with my “colleagues” and excitedly asking, in shock, why an American would want to sweep Bulgarian streets with a “bunch of Gypsies.”

After this initial meeting where I also signed my paperwork, Bai Traiko, drove around to survey the workers and show me the lay of the land, listening alternatively to news radio or Russian music as we traversed city streets. We drove through the regions that the company cleaned, narrating the path, from the 6th to the 4th to the 10th to the 8th areas. The women smiled at him, waved, and asked when they would be getting paid and when the new brooms, which they receive each month, would arrive. He explained that they sweep the boulevards [termed “work details” or *nariadite*] in pairs first because the boulevards are the “face of *Izgrev*,” from 6:30am until 11am. Then they are assigned in smaller groups to sweep the small streets or alleys [*prekite*]. The start and end times change, depending on season and weather. In snowy conditions, workers must be at their *nariada* before 5:30am in order to clean snow from the bus and tram stops in time for the morning commuters. On these days, they often end work at 1:30pm. There are no formalized phone calls or announcements to know when to start work. Most workers live in one neighborhood, meet in the mornings, and look at the sky and the news to assess the snow situation. If they are unsure or have to call in sick, they have cell phone numbers for the on-foot supervisors who work under Bai Traiko, Kali and Mari, and they report to them.

As we passed the workers, Bai Traiko explained that it had been harder last year, especially during autumn when the leaves were falling. We passed an older lady, he described by name as Lakunka, who called out to him with a huge, toothless grin. “When she started a few

years ago,” Bai Traiko recounted, laughing, “Lakunka was new to the job, heard the younger women always talking about eating pizza for lunch. She was not used to eating pizza and went to the place where her colleagues often ate and instead of ordering ‘one pizza’ she requested ‘one *pichka*,’ or ‘one pussy, please.’” This kind of misuses of Bulgarian phrases and terms was common fodder for comedy, both on TV and in everyday joke telling.¹⁰⁰ Although Bulgaria doesn’t have the romantic “Gypsy” imaginary that is present in Russia or Spain, one of the most common kinds of familiarities with Roma in Bulgaria is through humor.¹⁰¹ This kind of mis-speaking has become fodder for a variety of comic shows in Bulgaria, but when Bai Traiko told me this story he seemed to at once be reinscribing the caricature of the “funny Gypsy” so common portrayed on TV but also a sense of endearment, which I was often surprised to find in Bai Traiko’s stories.

Bai Traiko’s relationship to the workplace was a mix of boredom relief, surveillance and strong affection. Bai Traiko always saw what was going on. Often, as the women warned me, he’d park around the corner from where they swept so that he could look up every so often from his crossword puzzle to make sure they were working. He’d never yell or get angry or tell them that he had seen them breaking during working hours. Instead, later, Kali or Mari would reprimand them in loud voices, threatening to dock pay or fire them. Bai Traiko seemed to love the sweepers, especially since they seemed to respect him so much. My colleagues had a reverence reserved for Bai Traiko, who they saw literally as an older uncle figure, whereas Kali and Mari were always yelling and seen as untrustworthy and fickle.

¹⁰⁰ Once while visiting friends at their café in *Levanka*, their neighbor came in for a coffee, laughing as she ordered. She worked as a sweeper for a company cleaning an area near a railroad and she had stopped on her break at a café. She was having problems with anxiety and so asked for a coffee “*bez kokain*” although she had intended to ask for it not “without cocaine,” but without caffeine (*bez kofein*). This kind of humor spanned local discussions, TV media, and derogatory jokes.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Lemon (2000), Gay y Blasco (1999)

Although Maria and Kali were responsible for the discipline of the workers, they sometimes also related to the sweepers through an affect of camaraderie. One day in early spring, Kali called the group together at the lunch break:

Kali: Come on, you should hide, somewhere in the shade.

Maria: Under some trees maybe will be better.

Kali: Yes, exactly.

Maria: But what happens if they catch us?

Kali: Well I am telling you, that you can hide somewhere and come out at 14:45. You can't explain to anyone that you have already done your work, but if someone has the intention of blaming you, he can always say, "Here it is not clean enough" and then go on to prove that you are wrong...I can make you sweep the dirt on many streets everyday, but you are people, you are not animals. Even when you work with animals, after the whole day you leave the poor animal in the shade to relax...

Maria: I mean, yeah, ok!

Kali: We will try to cover each other and work in harmony, but if we don't cover each other and start arguing...the most important thing is to be on good terms with each other. Because, if we are not on good terms, work will not be able to proceed either. I don't really know what cars the supervisors are using and coming with to check on us with anyway.

Kali and Mari often seemed like school teachers trying to herd their students while at other times aligned with the workers against "them," whether it be higher-up firm bosses or the municipal inspector's office. Bai Traiko knew each sweeper by name and told stories about them like funny family members. He never got too close, but his presence was felt everywhere.

MATERIALS OF RESISTANCE

Many of the women I worked with were mothers, grandmothers, and the sole income earners for large extended families. More than one colleague would come to work with bruises from fights at home. Others were dealing with sick children, some of whom were also involved in tragic accidents. One colleague, Lora, arrived at work one morning and couldn't stop shaking. Her son had been hospitalized the night before because he was climbing on a pole to connect some wires to her family's home to get electricity. There wasn't enough money at home to pay the electricity bill and her son offered to help them by connecting the electrical line directly to

their home. However, he fell from the pole and was electrocuted by the cord. He burned his hand badly but luckily survived both the electrocution and the fall. She needed to come to work that same day, albeit still shaking, so that she wouldn't be fired. Lora explained that he had emergency surgery once he went to the hospital but she was worried because he couldn't even keep his arm open afterwards and she wasn't sure what to do.

Others were dealing with adult children at home who themselves had fallen into bad situations. For example, Lenka's sister, provided for her four children but the eldest had begun to fight in the neighborhood. One night when I was sleeping at her house, we awoke to screaming outside and she ran in her pajamas and slippers to get in the middle of two boys, one of whom had a gun, drunkenly fighting about a loan gone wrong. She worried constantly, like many of my colleagues, about how to provide on such a meager income, how to deal with her husband's drinking, what to do if her daughter got pregnant or her son got married, since in Romani custom the mother of the son must provide a home to her new daughter-in-law and family. This custom is not a solely Romani one; in many traditional non-Romani Bulgarian villages it is expected that a son's mother make prepare an adjoining home (or a room in her home) for her son and new daughter-in-law and their future family.

Other women had pleasant home lives with big families and close extended family support. One 20-year-old colleague always talked on the phone and often brought her husband and child to payday, explaining that her husband was her best friend and life was good at home although money was a problem. Her face lit up every time she talked about him. She loved her husband but often worried about keeping her family well-fed, her home clean, and her kids in school. The space of the street, the workplace, provided the space for new kinds of freedom not typically afforded to women at home inside the Romani neighborhoods where they lived because

of the obligations they had to their husbands, children, and extended family members.¹⁰² Despite the physical difficulties of manual labor, many of the women found the workplace relaxing, since the repetitive motion of sweeping sometimes functioned as a way to “sooth nerves” and being outdoors afforded a space where they didn’t have to take care of anyone else.

There were no needy children, unemployed husbands, or demanding mother-in-laws. They could work freely, smoke openly, take breaks when they wanted, and only worry about feeding themselves. The workplace was often full of laughter, as women seemed to release a pressure valve as they arrived in the pitch-black early dawn to drink sweet coffee in plastic cups and smoke cigarettes while they waited for the bosses to arrive. I always rushed to be there at 6:30am, and would be surprised to nearly everyday find my colleagues already there. They arrived at work early, as much as an hour or hour and a half before the bosses arrived, claiming “they didn’t want to be late” but also enjoying that time together as a group of women without having to report to anyone.

This sense of empowerment, a function of time out of the home in the female space of the street, sometimes shifted into active resistance. Many times, while sweeping, I’d see my colleagues throw their waste on the ground, despite the fact that their work was to pick up this same kind of waste. Often they knew that they would be on the same streets tomorrow and have to pick it up and other times they would actually pick it up before the day was over. Nonetheless throwing waste afforded a means of both freedom and resistance. One time, I was with Silvia and

¹⁰² This lack of freedom stemmed more from the requirements of financial and emotional investment at home than anything else. Since most workers didn’t have the economic means for going out without husbands and children, the workplace provided a space in which the women could focus solely on themselves and the labor at hand. However, the workers, annually, collected money to celebrate the socialist holiday of International Women’s Day on March 8th together. For this yearly tradition, nearly all of the Romani sweepers gathered money immediately after the New Year to reserve a table at one of the only Romani nightclubs in Sofia. In preparation for the celebration my colleagues would buy a new outfit, maybe new jewelry, and chip-in for bottles of fruity alcohol, which they anticipated to get drunk on, since it might be the one time per year they had the time to drink. From New Year’s through St. George’s Day in May, workers talked about the fun of March 8th celebrations, in preparation and then in recounting what happened.

Dona waiting for the day to end since we had finished our work detail about an hour before we had to meet at the barracks. On days like this, which happened often, we had to find a hiding place to escape the watchful eyes of Bai Traiko in his jeep or Kali and Mari on foot. We were sitting behind an apartment building on some picnic benches and drinking apple-flavored soda. A woman and her son approached us and yelled at us to “make sure we don’t leave our trash.” Silvia made a face when the woman turned around and Dona started throwing our empty bottles on the ground, as a protest statement. Other times we would be sweeping and people would call out from their windows for us to be quiet. One time a woman threw a bucket of water out of her window, trying to hit us. In these circumstances, without much recourse, throwing waste was one of the only modes of resistance open to us. The throwing also functioned as a kind of capitalist participation in Sofia’s urban landscape, much in the way many other Sofia residents saw the freedom to discard as a benefit of postsocialist capitalism.

Other times resistance came in the form of betraying culturally appropriate norms for mothers and grandmothers. While at home certain kinds of decorum were expected, at the workplace everything changed. I was sitting on a curb outside of a store in the central market with Dona, as we often did, waiting for the time to pass so we could leave our equipment at the barracks, when she asked me if the pot-bellied man in the tight pink T-shirt walking by was my type. I joked, “Sure, I’ll take anything at this point. I’m basically a grandmother already.” She laughed and called to him, “Hey, you! This American chick over here, she wants to do something dirty with you!” I turned red and started to run while the rest of my colleagues held me back, cackling.

When I visited Dona at home a few weeks later, her children and grandchildren were there, along with her handicapped husband, lying on the couch. When I walked in to the

perfectly arranged small and tidy home, complete with doilies under all of her glass figurines and a freshly scrubbed pastel rug on the ground, Dona sat me down at a stool at her kitchen table, put down a big pot of noodle-meatball soup (*manja*), laid out a placemat, napkin, soup and bowl for me, cutting a piece of bread and repeatedly asking if she could fill up my bowl. She explained that her daughter could run across the street and get me a soft drink or Nescafe 3-in-1 if I wanted. She sat on the couch where her husband was half-asleep, watching me eat. After daily interrogations about my sex life, the role of oral sex in my everyday existence, suspicions about why I seemed so “nervous,” it was strange to see Dona acting like a motherly homemaker. I realized, after more visits, that this was her “normal” life at home. It was only at the workplace that she had the freedom to ask me to teach her how to say obscenities in English and scream it at her colleagues in the middle of a public park.

Another time in the spring we were returning to the barracks after a long day, and as we hoisted our instruments onto the bus, as we often did, the ticket controller, who circulated between busses making sure everyone had a ticket that they punched with the manual hole-punchers, told us we weren’t allowed on without tickets (which workers never had). Frustrated by our long wait for the next bus, which didn’t have a controller on it, Hristina *Debelata* (“the fat one”) climbed onto the bus and began loudly explaining what she thought I wanted in a man. In boisterous Bulgarian, she asked whether or not I wanted “some chocolate.” “The American, our American, likes herself some chocolate, if you know what I mean.” The bus got quiet and she continued, “Some smooth, dark chocolate is what she wants, right Elanke? You like it dark don’t you?” I looked back, uncomfortable and laughing in embarrassment. “Or maybe some milk chocolate, what is it today our American?” As we left the bus a few stops later, all of us

laughing, we were silenced immediately when we saw the bosses, waiting to check to make sure we didn't leave our work detail early, which, of course, we had.

CHAPTER 6: EVERYTHING HAS A BEGINNING, AN END, AND A DEBT

Women stand in an industrial yard on the outskirts of Sofia, waiting for a slow moving middle-aged guard to unlock the metal fence. One woman holds a decorated tissue box collecting money for a colleague having an operation. A dyed-blond woman sells contraband cigarettes with sun-bleached labels. Usually she has My Way, Gitan, Raquel, but since the new government has come into power, there is only My Way for sale.

It is payday for the street sweepers of Sofia. Nearly all of them are Romani, but there are no statistics for this, because Bulgaria, preserving certain romanticised relics of its socialist total assimilation policy, rarely gathers data based on ethnicity (let alone race, which officially “does not exist”). That said, according to my ethnographic data and interviews with municipal officers, waste company representatives, Bulgarian citizens, and sweepers themselves, street sweeping is undoubtedly a “Gypsy job.” In fact, while working at an NGO in *Levanka*, I asked the chairman, who lived in the neighborhood most of his life and ran the NGO for over a decade, what the work options were for most Roma in the *mahala*. He explained that 90% of *Levanka* was, on paper, unemployed, and the 10% who had contract-type labor worked for *chistota*. Although he was prone to a bit of exaggeration I think the sentiment was clear and accurate: most Romani workers from Romani neighborhoods, getting salaries, work for a cleaning company.

The same cars wait in the parking lot every month, their drivers pacing with car radios blaring, impatient: men in sunglasses, young well-dressed couples in old Renaults, middle aged women weighted down in gold jewellery. After we get our envelopes and walk toward the street to catch the bus home, the cars get bigger and the lines of waiting women, longer. Finally,

farthest from the gate wait the bosses, the company's labor inspectors, pacing by the red lawn chairs at the café across the street. The sweepers repay their debts all the way to the café, where they finally collapse into the temporary solace of accounts paid and a hot, melting plastic cup of sweet Nescafe.

The sweepers wait every month to be paid and when pay is late, they rely on a hierarchized system of financial borrowing, from official banks to credit agencies to pawn shops and Bulgarian loan traders. Once those loan avenues are exhausted, they must enter the most expensive means of debt—borrowing from local money brokers inside the Romani neighborhoods where they live. Although the sweepers often don't have the same access to informal loans from family and friends that their Bulgarian counterparts would, their work enables greater access to high interest loan dealers, from firms targeting street sweepers to illegal money brokers that know where to find their clientele.

Sweepers wait for salaries that are paid on an irregular monthly cycle. Knowing they are unskilled and easily replaceable in a country with a high unemployment rate, they wait, unsure of when they'll be paid and knowing they have limited options. When their electricity is cut off or they are threatened by crediting agencies, they resort to taking any loans they can find, often with extremely high interest rates. Two weeks of late pay can result in years of debt. Once, after waiting for an extremely delayed salary to come, nearly every sweeper was already broke before even leaving the company's headquarters on payday, as money brokers waited for them outside the garage to collect salaries, with interest, as repayment for their debts. Anticipation, hope, and frustration culminate in payday, when sweepers receive different, and seemingly haphazard, amounts each month. One colleague explains, 'It's payday and everyone cries, either from joy or sadness, when they look in their envelope. Usually it's tears of pain and disappointment'.

DEBT AND SENSES OF TIME

This chapter explores the relationship between salaries, loans, and debt as a means of tracing how temporality and temporariness is experienced and reframed through local logics of financial accumulation and debt-based temporality. These systems of debt are deeply entrenched in the workplace of the sweepers and contribute directly to the stasis of their social position in Bulgarian life. It is nearly impossible for Roma to move any sort of social ladder—for change to happen—when debt makes it so that economic advancement is never possible. This chapter also draws on the role of women pawning items as part of a social phenomenon that, along with the female space of the workplace, serves as a source of both dependency and “freedom” from the constraints of domestic expectations. This sense of “freedom” is linked to the kind of capitalist-based freedom to discard I mentioned earlier, in that new relations to a marketplace become linked with freedom, even when economic self sufficiency is enabled by sweeping and pawning.¹⁰³

Income generation in the realm of street sweeping is a cyclical experience of accumulation and loss, revealing stark realities about both the temporariness of satisfaction, the

¹⁰³ These everyday experiences of time are also connected to other senses of historical time. As socialist labor structures intermingle with new capitalist business ventures and conglomerates (i.e. the waste company CEO owning the soccer team), workers experience time in non-linear ways. Historical changes, like that of communism to capitalism, are often expected within a Western assumption of teleological progress to be politically seismic. However, in many cases, especially for Romani waste workers, these big-picture political changes have been experienced, phenomenologically, as relatively minor.¹⁰³ For many Roma, even those not working in the waste sector, Europeanization was not experienced as a teleological endpoint but as a phase that could end, much in the way socialism did. For example, while working at the NGO in *Levanka* where I first began fieldwork in 2010, one woman came up, visibly upset after receiving a visit from some unnamed local authorities who claimed that they had the rights to her land.¹⁰³ She explained that they told her she wasn't the legal owner of the land. She showed us a document that was over thirty years old, explaining that she had rights to the house, but without any mention of the land that the house was on. Nearly in tears, she explained that she was just waiting for communism to come back so she wouldn't have these problems. It should be noted that according to oral histories and archival records, many now “Romani neighborhoods” were once much more ethnically mixed (especially *Levanka*). Cleaning days, in not labor settings, have also persisted. *Subbotnik*” was the Saturday cleaning day, which also became part of the social discourse in reference to Bulgaria’s new annual campaign (sponsored by the TV channel bTV) to “Clean Bulgaria in One Day.”

precarity of economic stability, and the disappointment felt in this temporariness.¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵

Pawning might be the most readily accessible example of practice-based non-teleological sense of time and the felt experience of (financial) temporariness.¹⁰⁶ Pawning is a major source of financial flexibility, especially for Romani women who have often received gold as gifts that they then are able to pawn. Pawning enables a kind of financial gain that is temporary and based upon the premise that income will come, in a sum large enough to buy back the pawned item with interest.

Pawning is a worldwide phenomenon and takes shape in different sets of socio-economic circumstances.¹⁰⁷ Pawnshops in Bulgaria are highly racialized spaces. Most sellers and buyers are Roma. However, pawnshop owners are often non-Romani Bulgaria, except inside of Romani neighborhoods, where about half are Roma. Like the labor of street sweeping, the mapping of racial hierarchies onto Romani bodies also happens through specific kinds of market interaction.¹⁰⁸ These kinds of market interactions include street vending, as Lemon discusses her account of localized associations of Roma with certain spaces, at open-air flea markets, but also pawnshops. Many pawnshops targeted Romani communities specifically, selling the kinds of jewelry that are in style in local Romani neighborhoods.

Addo and Besnier discuss the Tongan approach to pawning, which has resonances with

¹⁰⁴ See Marx's *Capital* and Benjamin on homogenous, secular time of history (1982). Also see Lampland on measurements of time and labor in wage units (1995).

¹⁰⁵ Chakrabarty writes about narratives that "don't look to the state/citizen bind as the ultimate construction of sociality," which "will never enjoy the privilege of providing the metanarratives or teleologies (assuming that there cannot be a narrative without at least an implicit teleology) of our histories" (2000, 37). He explains that "this is partly because these narratives often themselves bespeak an antihistorical consciousness, that is, they entail subject positions and configurations of memory that challenge and undermine the subject that speaks in the name of history" (37).

¹⁰⁶ See Humphrey and Mandel's anthology on money and morality (2002).

¹⁰⁷ Cf. pawning with gift exchange in Mauss, Malinowski, Weiner

¹⁰⁸ See Lemon on the relationship between Roma and public space and the way in which "Gypsies are racialized through being mapped onto particular such settings" so that "racial hierarchies in turn come to seem natural because they are anchored to specific, familiar places" (2000, 58).

the function of pawning I witnessed in Romani neighborhoods. They explain, “Becoming a pawnbroker in Tonga presupposes substantial material, social, and cultural capital. But it also presupposes a certain imperviousness to potentially shame-inducing allegations of seeking to make money from poorer people’s customary obligations (2008, 41).” In Tongan society, pawning “restructures social relations: the gift recipient is replaced by the pawnbroker, the giver becomes customer, and expertise in assessing the quality of valuables shifts from women to men, and from being an assessment of people’s socio-cultural capital to being an assessment of the monetary value of objects” (41).¹⁰⁹ In Romani society, pawning also functions as a kind of replacement, but for two older forms of income security, the traditional Romani lending societies and communist-era kinds of social welfare.¹¹⁰

In Bulgarian Romani society pawnbrokers are not experienced as “exacerbate[ing] patterns of material inequality,” but rather as a source of economic freedom for those people without the ability to obtain bank loans. When I asked my colleagues about these pawnbrokers, expecting a to hear words of frustrating or exasperation about the people they paid nearly their entire salary to, but almost each and every time my colleagues explained that without these people they would never get by. Inequality was so omnipresent and normalized in everyday that pawnbrokers did not seem to bear the burden of this structural issue but were instead seen as a necessary part of existence.

Moving for a bit to one of the most interesting accounts of pawning I’ve read, I refer to Marx’s reliance on pawnshops. In 1852, Marx pawned his overcoat to purchase paper necessary

¹⁰⁹ Pawning in Bulgaria, however, functions in a way that is contrary to social implications of pawnshops in Tongan society. Whereas in the Tongan case, pawnbrokers face social alienation in that becoming a pawnbroker is tied to an “imperviousness to potentially shame-inducing allegations of seeking to make money from poorer people’s customary obligations” (41).

¹¹⁰ Friends told me of women’s loan societies of which they were a part during socialism, so that if someone didn’t have money to pass for food “everyone” could contribute. Ilona Tomova writes about the *londzha*, a traditional form of Romani loaning, akin to a mutual aid society. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGLDEVLEARN/Resources/IlonaTomova.pdf>.

for writing.¹¹¹ Marx himself wrote in 1853, “so many of our absolute essentials ha[ve] found their way to the pawnbroker’s and the family ha[s] grown so shabby, that for the past ten days there hasn’t been a sou in the house.”¹¹² The Marxes had to pawn items, and borrow from Engels, in order to move to a new home (191). Marx writes about the cycle of pawning. He often needed to pawn items in the winter, redeem them in the spring, and then again would have to pawn them in June. The next January, Marx writes, they had to pawn the children’s clothing and the children were thus unable to attend school (191). In 1858 Marx wrote Engels explaining that he cannot even work because of his “domestic miseries.” At the time he was paying a tallyman, who supplied his own clothing on credit, which had to be paid back in instalments. Not far from the loan brokers that my Romani colleagues had to borrow from in order to handle late paydays and accumulated debt, “the poorer you were, the more expensive it was to live” (192).

The coat of Marx in Stallybrass’s account was not just a piece of clothing but was constantly transformed into possibility and restriction. When the coat was pawned, Marx had enough money to buy paper. However, without his coat Marx was “not fit to be seen” in the Reading Room of the British Museum where he wrote.¹¹³ The coat provided access at certain times while hindering freedom at other times. The temporariness of how a subject forms in relation to both the having of the object and the pawning it has the power, as it did for Marx, to create a sense of anxiety, of dependency. Although many Roma see pawning as a welcome means of quick cash, especially in the moments when they have no other means for loan-taking or income generation and have a bill to pay, at other times they experienced their debt as

¹¹¹ See Stallybrass, citing Draper (1998)

¹¹² Marx 1983 [1852-55], 385, cited in Stallybrass, 191 (1998)

¹¹³ See Draper (1985, 61)

prohibiting. For them, high-interest loans served a similar function as pawning, enabling them to live but forcing them into cycles of debt from which they could not extricate themselves.

I OWE YOU ONE

When I began my sweeping gig, I began with surveillance. I surveyed the other workers as I knew I was also being observed. Bai Traiko, the mid-level boss, who played a critical role in my getting hired, agreed to let me work for the firm. But, before signing a contract, I had to shadow him in the car on his rounds, as he checked to make sure the workers were doing their jobs. Sometimes, in the afternoons, he'd show me how the streets were divided, looking at his clipboard and plan as he'd also call out the names of the women who would be working on the team with me. The women, dressed in bright red uniforms and yellow reflective vests, broom and dust pans in hand, would wave back, either asking him how he was feeling after a period of sick-leave or questioning when they would be paid. What struck me during those ten days driving around in the managerial vehicle was the constant questioning, "When do we get our salaries?"

Most of my colleagues were mothers and wives and sometimes grandmothers. They were often the sole stable wage earners for their entire extended family. For the most part, their husbands, sons, and grandsons were either unemployed or marginally employed as day laborers. Nearly all of the men and women whom I encountered over the age of 40 remember socialism as the time when they were steadily employed in either the cleaning sector (women) or as factory laborers (men). During these "normal" days of socialism, they had bread on the table; ate meat daily, and even annual vacations to the Black Sea.¹¹⁴

Then, in the aftermath of socialism's collapse, men became quickly employed in the fast-money construction projects in Sofia and the seaside, until economic boom turned into

¹¹⁴ See Fehérváry (2009, 2013) for socialist and postsocialist notions of "normal."

disappointment, signaled now by monstrosities of half-built buildings dotting the Bulgarian black sea coast and Sofia outskirts.¹¹⁵ During this period of the early 1990s women could work by selling imported goods, cleaning in new high-rise buildings, or even sweep on street, but with “better” salaries. However, in the wake—and subsequent disappointment—of EU accession, women have taken over as heads of household and are often the only family members with health insurance, albeit making less than 400 leva (200 euro) per month as street cleaners in Sofia.

Although contracted, this work is always insecure. Both the wages paid, as well as the work contract itself, are in reality highly volatile, as the workforce undergoes hirings and firings on a weekly basis and payday is never routine. It quickly became clear once I started working with my colleagues that there was no sense of financial security. There was no set payday, and so as each month came to a close, there were whispers each morning, “When are we getting paid?” “Did you hear that we aren’t getting paid till after 5th?” “What am I going to do with my creditor?” After a few days of whispers, they would quickly escalate to panic – “What if we don’t get paid and they turn off my electricity?” “How can I buy Christmas presents for my kids without a salary?” On these days, most women were silent when we met with the bosses in the morning but quickly went into heated, angry discussions once in the company of other workers, out of the earshot of the Bulgarian bosses.

One day in the middle of March 2013, having not received a paycheck due on the first of month, we convened after morning attendance check-in for coffees and sweetened tea in a nearby café. My colleagues explained that they wouldn’t protest or strike because they needed their jobs. They were well aware that they were both replaceable and disposable—for every one

¹¹⁵ See Holleran (2015) and sociologists of postsocialism.

of them with a job, they knew five women who wanted their position. It was during this period that the one middle-aged colleague explained, “We are Roma [*Romi*], this is how our lives are.” Her sister, mocked her, pretending not to hear clearly what she said, “We are ‘*robi*,’ she’s right. Playing on the one-syllable difference between “*Romi*” (meaning Roma, plural) and “*robi*” (meaning slaves, plural), the women make commensurable their ethnic identity as Roma and their social position, especially in relation to their work, as “slaves.”

Of course, these women weren’t actually slaves, but knew that to protest, strike, or even complain to their bosses would mean risking their job and putting their entire family in economic danger. Without their labor, their families wouldn’t be able to get by. Most lived in self-made homes out of found construction materials, mixing bricks, mortar and pieces of plastic for insulation, and knew they wouldn’t be homeless, but feared the economic circumstances that unemployment could throw them into. They were not just afraid of not being able to pay for electric bills or putting food on the table (which could be remedied by linking up to an uncle’s electricity outlets or eating in the kitchen of another family matriarch), but more so about what would happen to their accumulated debt. They knew that if they missed a payment their high-interest loan debt would increase so rapidly that they would never be able to pay it back. None of the women with whom I worked had “defaulted” on a loan.¹¹⁶

Most of the women I worked with lived off of a variety of high-interest legal and informal loans, which made payday one of mixed emotion. When their electricity was going to be cut off or they were threatened by crediting agencies, they often resorted to taking any loans accessible to them, often with extremely high interest rates. Therefore, two weeks of late pay

¹¹⁶ I need to conduct follow-up research regarding declaring bankruptcy in Bulgaria and to confirm that loans in Bulgaria are passed on from generation to generation. I was told that any kind of formal loan in Bulgaria is passed on from generation to generation and so it is nearly impossible to “escape” a loan, even in death.

could result in years of debt. Those who are able, start by taking out loans from official regulated banks. Opening up a bank account is easy for workers with a salary (or even without) but as I learned, soon open up the possibilities of massive amounts of fee accumulation and debt.

One day at work there was buzz that a credit agency was offering 3,000 leva loans but in order to apply you needed a few things: an ID card, proof of steady employment, and a bank account. Immediately my colleagues called their husbands at home to bring them the necessary documents. I also agreed to apply. One friend of mine, Zara, explained that I would need a debit card in order to access the funds. I told Zara that I already had an open Bulgarian bank account but didn't have a debit card. "Don't worry, we can open one, easy," she explained as she led me to the nearest bank on the corner. We walked in with our work uniform jackets tied around our waists and sat down with a clerk. Zara explained what I needed to see the bank clerk, who took my Bulgarian ID card. Zara proceeded to explain to me how the debit card system worked, along with some funny stories about her life. I began to laugh, loudly and as we started to joke, she told me "Elana, shhhhh, we are in public" in order to compel my loud voice into a whisper. It was clear that she was both well-versed in the processes of banking, as she was also concerned about being too loud and "uncivilized," a common stereotype about Roma workers, especially in indoor Bulgarian spaces.

We opened up a bank account that cost five leva and a monthly fee, both of which I would be able to pay at a later date since I had no cash with me. After being denied a credit from the agency, I quickly forgot about the bank account I had opened that day. It wasn't until I was leaving Bulgaria, nearly 6 months later, that I remembered the account I had opened that day and went to the bank to find that my five leva account opening fee accumulated to over 30 leva. Although not nearly as precarious of a financial situation as my colleagues' I saw how debt

accumulated so easily.

For my colleagues, loan taking happened in a pyramid-like structure. Bank loans were the most preferable, as they had the lowest interest rates. However, once debt was incurred in an official banking institution, one would have to seek other means to repay those debts. My colleagues often would find crediting companies that targeted street sweepers and other low-income wage earners, for high-interest credits that they used to pay daily bills (and to repay outstanding debts). Companies like EasyCredit, MaxCredit, among many others offer high-interest, large lump-sum loans to workers who would pay nearly 25% of their monthly earnings each month, and after three years (the full term of the loan) would end up paying nearly 1000 leva extra on a 3000 leva loan.

Finally, if they would default on these high-interest loans, they would resort to informal loans from friends, neighborhoods businesses, and colleagues and from known loan sellers inside of Romani neighborhoods and in pawnshops in the center of Sofia. These loan brokers worked on a system of collateral, like pawnshops, but also on high-interest promises and kin-based systems of threat. They would take money from both Romani and non-Romani loan brokers in Romani neighborhoods who made a great deal of money from the interest of loans given out to poor people who knew that if they could not pay back the loans they would be barred from taking future loans and threatened until they were able to return the funds. Whenever I asked my colleagues about what the repercussions for not paying back a loan were, they would just tell me they always paid back their loans.

PAYDAY AND THE DISAPPEARING PAYCHECK

The precariousness of financial accumulation for street sweepers was frustrating. On payday time moved slowly, and time needed to be passed as quickly as possible. Often the best

way to “pass the day” was talking about sex. Dona explained that she had a lot of sex and loved to watch porn, joking about being an old lady. “That's why I'm late every morning. He's 5 years older than me, he's 70, I am 65.” I joked back, asking if she wanted more children at this stage in life. “Two is enough.” I want a lot, I told her, maybe six or seven kids. Dona shook her head at my stupidity, “When? Come on, get started, you don't have time when you're 29.” Silvia, who had been sitting quietly and laughing as she listened, interjected, “I had the little one when I was 28, the one that's 6, the fourth one.” Jesus, an eighteen-year-old distant relative of the women, who was listening in while he swept with us as he waited for a position on a truck, teased me. “Why six or seven? You wouldn't even be able to count them.” Dona would joke about seeing sex on television, trying to provoke laughter with her callousness and direct sex talk.

“You know a lot,” I remark. Silvia nods, “Oh she knows a lot.” Dona smiles, “Old whore. Honestly, I'm not lying.” Silvia teases Dona, “She puts the cable on, and says I want sex, she doesn't want kids.” Dona, nodding, replies, “I want sex, but with translation, with Bulgarian translation...you can't find it with Bulgarian translations anywhere.” It was clear that Silvia and Dona were using me as fodder for a sex conversation that was supposed to shock anyone in earshot and me as well. It was the kind of conversation Dona often provoked, especially, Silvia later told me, on days when she was really sad. It was an escape from the stresses and worries about her husband and family. None of it was true, Silvia, wanted me to know, but this kind of talk was just better than crying.

Silvia went on to explain that she only liked to talk about sex with Dona because it made them happy. Dona's husband, Silvia explained, was an invalid. He spent his days at home, on the couch, sick with a degenerative disease. Silvia explained that Dona was depressed because life was so hard for her and that since Dona's life was so hard at home, it was important they

laughed on the job. Silvia didn't trust many people, as she was from the other neighborhood and seen only as a "visitor" since she married into the neighborhood from where most of the other sweepers came. Dona also trusted very few people, but they met on the job about five years prior and became confidants, like family.

I saw that while Dona liked to talk about herself as sex-crazed while on the job, when at home, she cared for her sick husband, cooked for her children and grand children, and performed the expected domesticity of a Romani home. On the streets, she explained, she was free. And, then, quickly she changed the subject, "My hands are itching, tomorrow there will be money. Tomorrow money, and then here and there loans (*borchove*) and then again, nothing." Payday involved treats bought for oneself before the loans were repaid and families were fed and so I asked what they would buy. Dona said she wanted a biscuit cake and Jesus said he'd get a caramel cream. Silvia shook her head, explaining that on the 27th, she owed an "installment." "I have an oven with installments that I have to pay every month." She was paying 62 leva (30 euro) per month for the oven and would be paying monthly for a year until it was purchased in full. Silvia went into a nearby shop where they sold soup for 1 lev and came back with a lentil soup to share, since it was payday and nobody had any money for food. Jesus declined her offer to share and Dona also refused. "Thanks, I am eating sweets now and will have sex at home."

That day we did go and get paid and sure enough, before we even left loans were repaid, to all of the collectors on-site. As Silvia had explained she took out loans from Marko, a man who primarily served Romani street sweepers. He was half Bulgarian and half Romani, owning a pawnshop in downtown Sofia but very close to all of the sweepers in the neighborhood. He was able to collect from the sweepers every payday in the parking lot outside the garage, since he knew when payday was and where to go. This ensured that the sweepers would actually pay

him. Unlike bank loans, these loans came without a credit check. The interest rate was higher than a bank loan, but Silvia explained that it wasn't so bad. She took out a 3-month loan of 300 leva and had to pay back 160 leva each month, accumulating to an interest of 180 leva.

Silvia explained that even with the loan, they couldn't afford electricity and was borrowing electricity from her husband's uncle, just to watch TV. She had sent her children with bags of clothing for her mother to wash in *Levanka*, not far down the ring road from where she now lived with her husband and his family. Knowing that Mari, the boss, gave loans through a legal but very high-interest credit company, I asked why she didn't take a loan. Silvia explained that she took a loan a while ago for her husband's sister who needed money to travel abroad but still hadn't paid back the loan. Because of this, Silvia was ineligible for any more legal loans. According to Silvia, Mari's loans were actually worse than the loans she could take informally. Silvia explained, "I don't want to borrow any money from Mari because when you work with her, the percent of interest she asks for is very large. For example, if you borrow 400 leva, you have to return 800." Instead, she preferred to work odd jobs on her off days. "I will start a second job and we will deal with it somehow. It's summer now and things will be easier. I mean the problem is not that's he's [her husband] without work but that we have so much electricity to pay! We will go today to the place where we pay our bills, to ask if we can gradually start giving the money, so they can start our electricity again."

A few days after payday Silvia and I talked about the disappointment of payday. "You see, we need to laugh." "Needing to laugh," was a common metapragmatic acknowledgment of our conversations, as though to make sure we were all on the same page as we focused our conversational energies on laughter, especially in hard times. Dona had once explained to me that when she was alone, without Silvia to keep her company, she would sweep and cry to get the

feelings out. Despite the fact that Dona joked almost constantly, there were a few quiet days when Dona looked sad and it was clear to everyone on the team that things at home were rough and the best thing to do was to try and get her to laugh. Silvia explained that payday was emotionally complicated because the joy of money almost immediately transformed into worry and disappointment and loans needed to be paid before even walking outside of the garage. First loans were paid to the husband of one of the sweepers. Then, the loans to pay became more and more substantial as the sweepers walked out to the café across the street.

PAWNING AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

While the female space of the workplace allowed for the humor that would never be considered “proper” at home, most of my colleagues not only culled social freedom but also financial empowerment from the work place. Most of my colleagues were married with children and often with grandchildren, but often the only wage earner in their immediate and sometimes even extended family (save for those mother-daughter relationships on the team). Many men had worked in construction during the housing boom in Europe in the late 1990s. However, since the economic crisis that hit Bulgaria in the late 2000s, many high-rise apartment buildings have been halted mid-construction and many construction projects in neighboring Greece have also been halted, which began to limit opportunities for Romani men. Most of the men are even less educated than their wives, due to economic necessitation of their labor at a young age, at which point they left school.¹¹⁷

As the sole income earners for their entire household, my colleagues often served to negotiate between loan brokers, family members, husbands asking for money, and children in need of clothing, toys, and school supplies. Since I often worked with Silvia, I often listened to

¹¹⁷ If a man is able to graduate from the 8th grade, as is required to obtain a driver’s license, he often becomes a taxi driver in an industry in which male Roma are disproportionately represented.

her phone conversations. Mid-month she'd be worried since the electricity had been shut off, and in winter months, they didn't have money at home. When I would offer to loan her money, Silvia would refuse since she didn't want to depend on anyone else's help and was going to manage somehow. I eventually convinced her to let me loan her 90 leva (45 euro) to pay the base payment to get her electricity turned back on. She promised to pay me back as soon as payday came around, a few weeks later. I never asked her for the money on payday and my usual payday travel companion avoided me. It was clear that Silvia didn't have the money to pay me back and was too embarrassed to talk with me about it. Our relationship changed significantly after I loaned her the money, until a few months later when we both assumed I forgot about the money.

Silvia was constantly determined to be self-sufficient, as were most of my colleagues. Besides the job itself, certain material items like cell phones but more commonly gold jewelry served as a means of stability and self-sufficiency. Most of my colleagues kept books where they tracked pawned items, amounts owed, dates owed, to ensure that their items wouldn't be sold off. Since, traditionally, gold jewelry is given for weddings, from husbands and fathers and brothers, most Romani women "store" their wealth on them. According Margarita, a close Romani friend who I lived with part-time, men and kids were always trying to take money, and so worn gold jewelry was the safest way to ensure that nothing got stolen. The wealth of a family was often displayed by the amount of gold worn by the woman of the household. One of Margarita's neighbors, who I also ran into in the yard on payday, wore a thick gold bracelet, that I was told indicated that she was rich, powerful, *and* a pawnbroker (she also happened to make famously delicious large pots of intestine soup, *chorba*, for local weddings). Women are thus able to wear their wealth in ways that enable a marginal amount of financial control. However,

social emphases on gold jewelry allows for the potential for financial liquidity at any time since there is a steady and powerful international market for gold.

Pawning was incredibly common in Romani neighborhoods and among almost all segments of Romani society. Most of the stores leading into any Romani neighborhood, which I was told were once cafes, restaurants, and minimarkets, are now pawn shops with signs like “Europe Mart,” in which the “E” is the sign of the *Euro*.¹¹⁸ Often, when someone needed money, they would take an item to the pawnbroker and receive cash, having to pay a percentage each week or every ten days to make sure the broker didn’t sell off the item. Then, once the item’s owner had enough money to buy it back, she would. This was not just an act of faith, that income would come, but a complicated exercise in record keeping. Being a day late with a payment could mean that an item would be sold off immediately, especially since the pawnshops were often open twenty-four hours/day. Silvia, on phone with her father who was clearly worried about her financial situations, explained, “I’ll see, I’ll pawn it, pawn it-get it back, pawn it-get it back, so that I don’t have to ask you. Or else I’ll sell it.”

Many Romani women would also take gold to the pawnshops, asking them to test it to see if it was real, before figuring out what to do with the jewelry. Even inside Romani neighborhoods, many pawnbrokers were of Bulgarian origin. Setting up shop inside a Romani neighborhood ensured business, both because it is so common for even very poor Roma residents to have inherited gold to pawn. Additionally, at first counterintuitive for me, most Roma prefer

¹¹⁸ In a few interviews I was told that during socialism there were no such thing as high-interest loans because everyone had a job and could take out loans from the state saving’s bank, often with another person providing a guarantee. I’m not sure the status of pawnshops in Bulgaria during socialism but I know pawnshops did exist in some Eastern Europe countries in the 1970s (see Tamas Dombos and Lena Pellandini-Simanyi, in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger, eds.

to deal in business with non-Romani people.¹¹⁹ One of my friends who worked as a cleaner for the inside of an old communist panel apartment building traveled from the Romani neighborhood where she lived to downtown Sofia in order to get a loan for her jewelry, since she trusted the shops more outside of the neighborhood. This was echoed even when hiring people to conduct renovations on a house. Almost always, a Turkish man or a “good” Bulgarian living in or near the neighborhood was seen as a more trustworthy worker. Only those who couldn’t afford Bulgarians or Turks would actually deal with Roma. Despite my asking, I never receiving a clear answer on what this was the case. However, it seemed that the familiarity of having local Romani workers, with whom there was most likely some extended family or friend connection, would hinder professionalism (and not far from the logics embedded in the common English aphorism to not “mix business with pleasure”).

CONCLUSIONS

“Waste is really just a kind of temporary loan.” This sentence comes from my field notes written on April 23, 2013. I wrote this during a day at work in April. I remember thinking that like the loans my colleagues managed almost daily, waste itself was a similar type of temporary accrual. The fact that this note comes not from any kind of labor but specifically waste labor is important. Laura Bear writes about necropolitics: “The ethics that frame responses of decline and death that are inherent to capitalism and inevitable to everyday life.” She explains, “the act of labour is then an attempt to assert the creativity of human work against the forces of decline” (2012, 185). Drawing on Veblen’s discussion of workmanship, Bear looks at various approaches

¹¹⁹ What I witnessed was very different from what Michael Stewart (1997) writes about in terms of Roma business with non-Roma. He explains that the focus of many Roma he knew was “to get the goods of the *gazos* at a rate that appeared to benefit the Rom” (20). Citing the “Gypsies” as the ultimate *bricoleurs* unfairly ethnically categorizes activities of both waste scavenging and business models that if used by differently categorized (white) people would be called “good business.” It also overlooks the second economy practices that most people, not only Roma, were involved in.

to waste labor in term of “generative force,” marking a difference between waste labor as harboring generative potential vs. “releasing fluid potential of capital that essentially inheres in objects” (200). This is an important distinction in thinking of the relationship of income generation, loan taking, and debt among waste laborers. In the realm of street sweeping, waste labor is at once denigrated as it also constitutive of a large waste-based financial infrastructure in which objects move in and out of financial liquidity, based upon the economic renderings and salaries of the waste workplace.

In this chapter we’ve seen a kind of material-monetary mirroring. Sweepers work to collect the dirt of the day, knowing tomorrow they will have to do it again. No matter how hard they work today, tomorrow there will be more waste. Similarly, debt accumulates daily, almost despite of any payments made. There’s just never enough money to end the financial state of limbo. However, most of the women, while frustrated at the end of the month, don’t feel like financial victims. Rather, the empowerment of having access to money, in whatever ways they can is important for their sense of self and connection to the capitalist framework in which they exist. I think this is why their relationships with their loan brokers are surprisingly (for me) not antagonistic. Despite the fact temporary accretions of capital are subsequently lost to pay off previous debt, these debt relations—even those that might otherwise be called ‘entrapment’—ensure a continuity of work, which is important for more than just financial reasons. In common discourse in Bulgaria, and sadly, too much academic and journalistic accounts of Roma, they are represented as working outside of “the system” and benefiting from the majority society by means of trickery. They are also often linked with informal market places or “illegal” markets. As sweepers, these Roma women are laborers, embodying the kind of role for which so many older Roma are nostalgic. In large part many Roma are nostalgic for socialism because it was a

time when they were producers *in* the system, and that stability was comforting, productive, and empowering.

Pawning and high-interest loans enable workers to be part of the new capitalist system; despite the fact the waste labor sector remains so deeply connected to its socialist labor past. Similar to the felt experience of large-scale historical time, small-scale, repetitive financial transactions are cyclical in nature, as each month seems to reinvent itself part of the same cycle of debt accumulation, payment, and debt payback, alongside the emotional highs and lows that accompany this financial cycling. As I show in the next chapter, the sweepers cannot, by definition, exit the cycle in the same way material objects can and must.

CHAPTER 7: INFORMAL RECYCLING

In this chapter I explore the ways in which informal recyclers reclaim objects from public trash bins on the streets of Sofia. I trace the physical paths that they take along with the mental processing and memories that shape their current experiences. It should be noted that it is very common, especially in Romani neighborhoods, to conceive of socialism as something that has temporarily been halted but will make its return, coming back as quickly as it got replaced by this “short-term” capitalist period. Using two case studies, I show gendered aspects of collecting and the kinds of sociality—with others on the street and with the materials themselves- produced by this informal labor. I highlight the fact that the time between finding a discarded object and turning it into cash is not only a product of work-time but also dependent on historical, large-scale changes in value, political regimes, social categorisation and racial, ethnic hierarchization.

VETKA

The first time I met Vetka, I was leaving on a trash-collecting trip with a group of men on an urban horse-cart from the largest Romani neighborhood in Sofia. Vetka saw me, having heard about the trash-loving Amerikanka, and screamed from the ground, “Why aren’t you coming with *me*?” I shouted back, “Wait for me- I’ll come next week!”

The following week I met Vetka for a coffee in the café of my host family and she led me on her route, out of the neighborhood, onto a public bus, until we reached one of the richer neighborhoods in Sofia. We passed a few of the black plastic waste containers but there was

nothing inside. Apparently we started before anyone had deposited anything after the late-night garbage pick-up. It seems we were just on time.

Vetka scavenges through dumpsters in one of Sofia's richest neighborhoods, strewn with cheap buildings charging high prices for shiny and quickly made apartments. The landscape of Vetka's daily work consists of the recently rich and their things. Among the Greek seafood shop, the Finnish chair showroom and the Chinese medical day spa, there are municipal dumpsters through which Vetka explains "much of our people [*narod*]" go every day.

We move quickly from dumpster to dumpster, weaving down major roads where Vetka holds my hand to cross the street. I realise my inexperience as I become excited by a florescent light fixture in its original box and nearly jump headfirst into the dumpster to grab it. I hand it to Vetka who is thoroughly unimpressed by a bunch of broken glass. Vetka hoists a heavy-duty plastic tote bag over her shoulder to collect clothing, metal for resale, glass bottles to recycle, perfume bottles to sell at the market. We circle the same six square blocks. At each interval new things appear in the garbage and we conduct a brief inventory of objects already collected.

Vetka asks, "And what will we do with this?" "Who will buy it?" We pass the shop where she deposits bottles and buys individual cigarettes with the change. Then, 15 minutes later we pass it again. And again. I see only bins, not fully aware of the path we take, but Vetka knows the way after following the same route for five years. Better to be out collecting, she explains, because "no one is going to give you money for sitting at home."



Image 25: Vetka Choosing What to Take. Photo by author.

UNCLE PETKO

I met Uncle Petko through a friend of a friend living in one of Sofia's poorer Romani neighborhoods. Petko went with a cart to collect while his wife stayed home taking care of their one-room home and cooking his lunch. We began collecting in one of Sofia's poorer neighborhoods and unlike Vetka who collected objects for resell, Petko sought only cans and paper to be sold at local collection points (*punktove*).



Image 26: Petko's cart. Photo by author.

Echoing instantaneous waste conversions I explained earlier, he joked when I asked him when he started collecting trash. “Trash?!” he exclaimed. “Where is the trash? Here it’s just money.” Cans were 35 stotinki (20 cents) a kilogram and paper was 8 (5 cents). Petko was the boss and I followed him with the cart, divided into two parts, one for paper, one for aluminum cans. We walked along his path, stopping at the designated benches for a cigarette break, at the grocery store for a beer—and finally at the recycling center where he sold his collected objects to the plump Bulgarian woman he told me he had loved (from afar) for years.

I follow Uncle Petko with the cart, divided into sections, one for paper, another for cans. We walk along, stopping at specific sites, outside the apartment building where he once lived with his family, near the school where his sons graduated, at the park where he feeds the pigeons he’s named, until we reach the collection point where he can sell recyclable objects. After five hours, Uncle Petko collects nine kilograms of paper, three kilograms of aluminum, and a broken

copper-plated kitchen pot. He sells it all for 2.80 *Leva* [about 1.5 Euro]. After buying a few coffees, nearly nothing remains and I'm left asking: why do this anyway?

THE ETHNICIZED, RACIALIZED FUTURE-PRESENT

European Union accession creates a relationship between futurism and a haunted present that is, in Bulgaria, highly ethnicized (Guyer 2007, 2012). Promises of European accession included higher wages, a better standard of living, European “normality.”¹²⁰ But, according to my fieldwork data and echoed in migration reports, those who would benefit from this potential so-called European normality, the rich, leave.¹²¹ Europeanization means exodus. For those who remain, prices of food, heating, and electricity increase but wages remain the same, especially if reliant on government contracts. During privatisation of the 90s and in the wake of EU-incentivised neoliberal reform, the safety net upon which people learned to rely has developed gaping holes.

Jobs have become scarce for unskilled laborers, especially those who once worked for state-owned companies, and loan taking has become not only a financial necessity but also a means of compensating for irregular pay cycles. Those who lived, in their own terms, ‘normally’ during socialism—Vetka as a cleaner in Bulgaria’s socialist import-export headquarters or Petko as a public bus driver—now rely on the waste of others, as they themselves become considered social trash. The potential progress of Europeanization actually was inverted for the Romani minority, most of whom long for the old days of socialist ‘normality’ and remain in Bulgaria, to much of the country’s regret.

Vetka and Petko sort through waste bins looking for materials to be turned into money. The moment of monetary transformation is often simultaneous with finding the object, as its

¹²⁰ See Fehérváry (2002, 2009, 2013) and Galbraith (2003)

¹²¹ See reports by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012)

financial potential is immediately imagined.¹²² This potential for conversion is predicated upon vast disparities of wealth and changes of context. Objects discarded by ‘rich Bulgarians’ become the material basis for income for the poor Romani collectors who either sell items at a recycling point or at the flea market to Bulgarians who rebuy ‘their own trash’.

The vectors of time and material transformation meld with each other. Time, for Vetka and Petko, is the basis of their labor as it also exists for them with ambiguous directionality, moving between the trash objects with a past, their own life histories, and both their—and their objects’—potential to be transformed into usefulness.

Trash, as described in this section, is significant in its relationship to other types of metaphorical and physical waste; that is, the connections between collecting “waste,” “wasting” time, and social ruin are foundational to the common social stigma surrounding waste collectors in Bulgaria, but also the impetus for collecting in the first place. As we see in Uncle Petko’s movement through his workday, time is simultaneously experienced as a past that lingers in the landscape and as the current reality of his everyday labour. This is the embodied, material temporality of long-awaited, but never realised, change: it is the heart of the new kind of temporality.

AGENCY OF POVERTY

The picture of the 1990s “transition” period in East Europe has been often portrayed in media, in public debate, in EU programing outreach materials, by an old retired person, in drab, brown clothing with a nylon plaid bag in hand, bent over a municipal garbage bin digging for

¹²² Uncle Petko in effect exemplifies with this statement the Marxist definition of a commodity, as something produced with what it can be exchanged for in mind. However, this “production” is actually reclamation and so we begin to see how the simple definition of a commodity must be complicated within both discussions of materiality and in the contemporary capitalist framework.

trash.¹²³ This image was often used as a sign of the failed system, the shame of the elderly going through waste in order to survive because they happened to live through a financial, economic and social transition from the socialist state to a capitalist society where socialist pensions wouldn't even cover the winter heating bills.

Since the late 1990s the image of the “trash-picker” in East Europe has changed. Throughout Bulgaria, when the Roma population is portrayed—in TV, newspapers, magazines—they are depicted going through trash, with a horse-cart waiting nearby. Often they show pictures of entire Romani families, barefoot kids, unwashed hair, not going to school but picking waste instead. Whereas the image of the pensioner collecting trash was a sign of the failed socialist state and subsequent failure of the new so-called capitalist transition, the portrayal of Roma waste collection is used to signal the inherent failure of an ethnic group to support themselves by “normal, honest” means (as Bulgarian media often reports). The image of waste scavenging, along with the waste itself that is scavenged, changes over time to reflect not only changing modes of economic progress and consumption but also changing perspectives on history, responsibility, and temporal “progress.”¹²⁴

This section addresses the transformative potential of ruin-as-process and ruins-as-objects by focusing on material “waste” things, people’s life trajectories, and the related emotional positioning demanded of those interacting with garbage on a daily basis. As this chapter addresses waste objects scavenged amongst (or, perhaps saved from) ruin, it is inherently also

¹²³ There are many examples of this image.

¹²⁴ Bulgaria, in particular, is at an interesting crossroads, in terms of its place within Europe. A British commentator at this past year’s Europe-wide International Waste and Recycling Conference to be “somewhere between the developed and developing world” claimed waste management in Bulgaria. What he meant was that in many developing regions, in Latin America and South Asia for example, a large percentage of recycling is performed by the “informal sector,” the people who go around and collect waste from both municipal bins and from the landfills themselves and then sell it for a profit as a means of making a living. Bulgaria lies somewhere between “developed Europe” (i.e. France, Germany, Great Britain) and “developing India” in regard to the role of the informal sector in the overall picture of waste management. Bulgaria is at an interesting crossroads, in terms of its place within Europe.

about time. Ruin might be seen both a process and result of change over time, and this chapter explores informal waste collection in terms of temporality, taking time not as linear or spatial but as both looping and building, addressing time's potential to itself be "recycled" and re-used. In this framework material objects found in Sofia city dumpsters are both the result of temporal accretion but are also themselves a catalyst for understanding time's ability to pass, create, waste, and die, in other words, to structure life processes. Waste objects do not merely point to time's passing but themselves help to "pass the time," as both dumpster objects and time itself are reused and reshaped in people's attempts to making a living.

At first glance, the issues of time discussed in this section seem remarkably similar to some of the works Nancy Munn explicates in her 1992 review article where she discusses "time typifications and images of repetition and growth" as well as "temporalizations of past time" in which she alludes to well-known Apache and Aboriginal practices of experiences of past time in present action (1992:101 and 112-113). Vetka's dumpster circling and Uncle Petko's emphasis on "slowwwly" was a building or looping of past time within the present. Temporalities run side by side, the garbage serving as a trigger for memory and temporal progress (i.e. passing the time) and regression (looping back over and over again, both literally and metaphorically). However, in these recollections of "the old days" innovation happens: ruin becomes also potentiality and possibility- the hope that waste can lead to riches, that time can be worthy, and that perhaps "transition" was worth it. In going through waste, a systematic temporality forms: the objects are at the end of their life cycle but through their collection and possibly recycling and reuse their collectors also gain the potential to become again useful.

TIME'S PASSING

The objects in Sofia's municipal dumpsters, like the waste in many urban bins around the globe, are a story of change over time. Especially for people who have gone through dumpsters for years, they notice the transforming landscapes, changing waste products and amounts, and create new stories about the imagined owners of their found objects. Debatable, however, is the prevalence of scavenging practice during socialism. Many claim that it did happen but not so much out of necessity but out of a sense of the "common good." Others remembered Romani men circling central Sofia with horsecarts singing a song asking for material or other valuable recyclable materials. Most people agree that only with capitalism did a *visible*, garbage-collecting poor emerge.

The dumpsters contain the story of the neighborhood, of changing consumption and discard practices, of a developing socio-economic landscape, but they also serve to catalyze the life stories of the collectors. My trip with Petko was as much as lesson in collecting trash as it was a physical manifestation of his life history. We started at his home in the Romani neighborhood in Sofia, where I woke him up with a coffee and cigarette before setting out for our 7:30am journey. We passed a few city dumpsters, an acquaintance he introduced me to, and soon I was wheeling the cart and he was directing me on where to push it and what to look for in the bins. We passed the evangelical church he attends when he began telling me about his former life as a taxi driver. After communism ended he drove a taxi for many years but in 2005 business got bad and he sold the taxi and began collecting garbage. We walked past some grey apartments blocks in the still low-income but "Bulgarian part" of the area where he used to live in an apartment he bought for 9,000 leva in 1979. It was socialism and 9,000 was a lot back then, he explained, but it was worth it: they had indoor water and separate rooms and Bulgarian

neighbors. “It was a good life.” He was a municipal bus driver during that time, and woke up at 3am every day to get to work at 5am with his own private car.

But, he sold his apartment in 1999 for about 27,000 leva in order to build houses for his sons’ families, as is expected in most Roma communities. And now Petko lives in a 1-room space in the Roma neighborhood with his wife in an area where houses are tilted because they can’t be built with solid foundations on eroding land, and the municipality refuses to provide adequate canal infrastructure because the neighborhood is considered “illegal.”

Petko continued our tour, stopping to smoke a cigarette outside the school his sons attended. We walked, exchanging greetings with his many friends, and the pigeons he proudly feeds daily with bread collected along his route. Going through dumpsters, I’d find clothing and shoes and ask if he wanted them. He’d laugh and exclaim: “No! My wife would KILL me!” Petko liked to tell this fact, in what seemed like a means of distancing the work on the street from a kind of normative domesticity at home. I never met Petko’s wife for long enough to ask. For Petko, the collecting of trash was made of history, but not the history of the objects he went through, which were mostly cans and bottles to be recycled, but the passing of his own life history and the decline of his economic status. The path he took to collect trash was both the catalyst for the recalling his own history as it was also the result of a series of life changes and choices that led to his having to do a daily trash collecting routine.

Unlike Petko, who only found objects he was certain he could recycle for cash, Vetka collected primarily objects from the trash for resell later either in the Romani neighborhood or at Sofia’s large weekend flea market. She was as much trash collector as she was also her own market-research base, deeply aware of what clients would want, knowing that only French perfume bottles have a market; nobody would buy American ones. Vetka went through the trash

with an eye for what could be sold, often remarking on her analysis of the people who must have discarded the items. She saw the expensive boxes of spoiled chocolate truffles, the thick-glassed bottles of foreign whiskey, and the uneaten watermelons. They were symbols of changing times for Vetka, when people have such excess they eat 3 slices of an entire watermelon and throw out the rest.¹²⁵

However, it was complicated for Vetka, and her moral disgust at these rich Bulgarians “who only know how to sit in front of a screen and watch TV or be on the computer.” It was from these “crazy Bulgarians who don’t know how to socialize like normal people” that she made her own livelihood and daily work routine. Vetka’s claim to new kinds of sociality ran strong among many waste workers I knew, who, without access to internet or steady cell phone services, relied on—and valorized—“hanging out.”¹²⁶

Her luck was based on the rich throwing out what they no longer wanted and her knowing there were people in the Roma neighborhood ready to pay money for these used objects. Both Petko and Vetka told me stories of friends who got rich, finding a gold watch in the trash or thousands of Euro hidden in the toe of a shoe. However, when I asked if they ever got lucky, they told me that it never happened like that. Sometimes they’d find a barely opened bottle of alcohol or large quantities of clothing or pots and pans but they never “found gold” although the dream of it did seem to serve a role in their daily labors.

Vetka’s own history was secondary to the futures of the objects she collected. However, when prompted she would talk about her life, when she worked for the trade office of the Bulgarian state, where she had daily encounters with state officials and trade ministers. She cleaned hallways and offices, in proud proximity to people everyone else only read about in the

¹²⁵ According to Vetka, this kind of consumption (and waste) would never happen “before” and still, for her, would not happen now.

¹²⁶ Transformation of sociality becomes part of moral frameworks also connected to infrastructural access.

news. After the collapse of the communist system she was a widower, without a job, having to live off only 100 leva from her widow's pension. But, the recent economic crisis affected her. Gone were the days of hope, of finding thousands of American dollars stuck in the bottoms of forgotten shoes or finding grams of gold in the trash. She was lucky if she found an iron pot to use in her kitchen or some plastic bracelets to sell to teenage girls in the neighborhood.

After more than five hours of collecting with Uncle Petko, he collected 9 kilos of paper, 3 kilos of aluminum cans, a broken copper-plated kitchen pot and sold it all at the recycling center in return for 2.80 leva. The first time I went with Vetka she collected a pot, some copper cable, iron worth 35 stotinki, an old purse, and a few pairs of used pants, probably making about 2 or 3 leva in all from 6 hours of work. From time to time they made a few more leva but after purchasing a coffee or two it amounted to nearly nothing.

PASSING THE TIME

Vetka moved quickly from dumpster to dumpster in rhythmic cycles. She was aggressive to get things, and once when she ran into another family who got to a dumpster full of someone's moving leftovers before her she sent me to get her a beer so she could fight with them over the goods without my watching. But afterwards I'd see Vetka selling on the streets of the Roma neighborhood, asking her how much she made and the answer was always the same "no one is buying, no one has any money, everyone is hungryyy" as she took her hand and demonstratively sliced it across her own empty stomach. Then, Vetka would try to give me a gift, a bracelet, a necklace, usually the nicest thing she had for sale. For Vetka not only the collecting but the selling was social in nature, often leading to more time spent than financial income gained.

Uncle Petko collected differently. He had mastered the art of conversation—and pigeon feeding. I tried to move along and focus on the trash but in 5-minute intervals was constantly

reminded to go “slowly”—in Bulgarian, Romani and Greek. We made one large loop, always stopping to feed the birds and drink a beer or coffee in one of his favorite places. “*Po-leka*” (slowly, in Bulgarian), he chanted like a mantra. The most important part of Petko’s lesson on collecting was to go slowly, never to rush because what else was there to do? Sit at home, wait for his small pension, and get yelled at by his wife?

“Nothing? Elana!!! You need to look. You can’t just see the surface and say ‘ohhhh nothing!’ You really need to look inside,” Vetka explained to me, as we walked. She stood aside while directing me what to do, my teacher, as I held the wooden stick and prodded around. “You know what to do, Amerikanka!!!!” I had forgotten that I was supposed to poke the black trash bags to let out the air and then turn them upside down to pour them out. But we needed to be careful, Vetka explained, not to get the trash around the bin because that wouldn’t be “civilized” (*vuzpitan*) of us. We upturned bags into the trash and metal bins. Vetka always knew before I did whether what was inside. She insisted we look deep into the bins because “you never know what’s in there from just the top.”¹

When Vetka and Petko go through the urban dumpsters they do not just explore the substance of the bins, but as Vetka explains, they go deep within, past the surface to see what’s “really” inside—but in doing so also imagine what the object could potentially, in the future, be exchanged for.¹²⁷ As Vetka and Petko (and I) dig deeper into the trash, the question remains:

¹²⁷ Daniel Miller explains that embedded in the heart of Western philosophy is a “pervasive ideology of what may be called ‘depth ontology’ whereby we tend to assume that everything that is important for our sense of being lies in some deep interior and must be long-lasting and solid, as against the dangers of things we regard as ephemeral, shallow, or lacking in content” (71). Alaina Lemon’s discussion of the proscenium in her work on Romani performance is especially useful to expand this notion; she claims that certain cultural ideologies lead to the common understanding of surfaces as “ontologically different from ‘depths’ (see Clark 1995)” (2000:23). While Miller describes “surfaces” as connected to a vapid kind of superficiality, Lemon explains that surfaces also become tied to a certain type of knowledge in which the surface is believed to be both visible and intrinsically connected to the underlying substance (2000). Thus this “depth ontology” goes beyond Miller’s idea of what is constituted as

What “sticks” to them as they emerge? The hope is that what emerges is an object for resale (either for recycling or as a “used” but saleable object item). But what also emerges is a something more complicatedly not easy to shirk off.¹²⁸¹²⁹

TIME, RECYCLED

A study of waste collection in Sofia demonstrates that waste collection entails more than trash objects, class statuses, and changing political trajectories. It is also a study of time itself. Time in this setting does not pass smoothly but like the social substance described above, is thick, gooey, and people get stuck in it, turning around and around only to be released wondering what has happened. As Vetka moved quickly from dumpster to dumpster, we got stuck between the repetitious “goings” (“we’ll get dizzy,” she explained) and the memories of the paths we traced as we circle back to the present, at the same time moving back and forth

important vs. superficial but also links up to processes and practices of racialization through discourses of substance and “essence” (Lemon 2000; 2002).

¹²⁸ This will be explored in much more detail in subsequent chapters. For example, through certain metaphorical relations, namely metonymical ones, the material of certain substances come to the fore, pushing past the object’s function or symbolism especially in relation to specific types of materials. Substances, in their material forms and as connected often metonymically to “kinds,” “types” or “wholes,” exist within systems of power and regimes of value. Substance and the connections connoted by substances—from blood, to milk, to earth—change depending on the systems of power in which they exist (Feeley-Harnik:1999, 2001, 2004; Strathern 1996). If the substances that Vetka and Petko touched everyday were located within a different social, political, and economic hierarchy perhaps their work roles wouldn’t have the substantive effect that they do. But, Vetka and Petko live in 2013 in Bulgaria where the substance of their work both pervades their everyday lives but also enables them to make a living—as everyone in their neighborhoods know where to buy inexpensive, used goods.

¹²⁹ Here, it is also important to think of visibility, visibility, and power. “Seeing” has been used as a metaphorical concept in a great deal of historical and social science literature, although hasn’t been addressed to the same extent from a cross-cultural perspective. Using this notion of “seeing” in conjunction with literature on power, including Foucault’s work on both panopticism and capillary power, the Comaroffs claim that power operates not at a level of consciousness but somewhere else, and in that way power takes hold and becomes naturalized. Power is often found in what it silences and what it inhibits, under the threshold of awareness, in the realm of “partial recognition.”¹²⁹ They claim that “in a quite literal sense, hegemony is habit forming” (23). Thinking of these relationships, between power and consciousness, opens up the question of how visibility relates to awareness and embodiment. Does making something visible entail also raising it to the level of awareness? What are the social and bodily consequences of doing so?

between ideas of trash collection as the sad work of the poor and what Petko called “a nice stroll.”

Time took shape while collecting trash, moving not as the background to the collecting process but itself constructed by the objects we found, just as time itself also seemed to make more and more objects appear with each “round.” As people move along the spaces of the street, time is measured in repetition, recursive in its action. Informal collectors measure how long they’ve worked by how many times they’ve circled the same bins, finishing once it seems like in their loop nothing new is turning up.

Historian, Leora Auslander explains, “even the objects used in everyday, repetitive, embodied activities, such as eating or grooming (to say nothing of ritual objects), are not simply functional; they are always also modes of communication, or memory cues, or expressions of the psyche, or extensions of the body...” (2005:1016). Similarly, the dumpsters are used in repetitive embodied activities and in close proximity to the body, and its repetitions: they become part of the body, through touch, through smell, and narrative memory. They also provoke new conceptions of aging, usefulness, and axes of progress.

Objects discarded by “rich Bulgarians” become the material basis for income for the poor Romani collectors who either sell items at a recycling point or at the flea market to Bulgarians who rebuy “their own trash.” This potential for conversion is predicated upon vast disparities of wealth and change of context. The vectors of time and material transformation meld with each other. Time, for Vetka and Petko, is part of their labor as it also exists for them with ambiguous directionality, moving between the trash objects with a past, their own life histories, and both their—and their objects’—potential to be transformed into usefulness.

Something unique is happening in the collecting of these objects that is not just about the changes in objects over time, or the passing of time through the collection and reselling of objects, but rather lies in the kind of sociality that is at stake. Both Petko and Vetka used their time out of the house for collecting objects in a way that structured their social existence, as their social positioning also forced them to collect. Their time collecting was viewed by Bulgarians they knew and Romani neighbors and friends in their neighborhoods as a “waste” and by connection, my time with them was also considered wasted. Constantly I was asked when I would start working and when I would stop being so lazy—and this would often come as I was coming back from 6 hours of early morning collecting.

Sociality extended from the space of the dumpsters on the streets where Vetka’s daughter, who also collected, would meet up with her at unannounced but regular intervals, often to have a cigarette and interact with acquaintances along the way, or where Petko always stopped to drink beer with the same people and feed the pigeons while he rested. Both Vetka and Petko insisted that they were poor and therefore going through trash, which was true but for them it was also social and a way out of the neighborhood—at least for a time. However, at the same time it was their work that actually ensured their low social status—they were neighbors and friends to many but considered “drunks” and “lice-ridden” by these same people, who desperately tried to prevent me from going with them.¹³⁰

ALTERITY, MATERIALITY, HUMOR

¹³⁰ LOOKING DEEP: This analysis of social life, through the nexus of substance, sociality, and time might actually help explain what trash collectors do every day and how they make meaning of their lives. To explore this, vis-à-vis trash collection, we can turn to an exploration of “depth ontology” both theoretically and ethnographically because one of the major issues of waste collection is the ability to “see in,” both into the literal space of the bin and into the future of what the object could be *potentially* exchanged for (like money) (see Lemon, Miller, work on substance).

Scavenging didn't only happen according to individuals' daily schedules, but also as a means of economic compensation while sweeping for a municipal (minimum wage) salary. Since a sweeper's salary was so low, and although scavenging through bins while on the job was prohibited, my colleagues often sought out trash bins and covertly collected, stored, and took items home to resell in their off hours.

As I explained earlier, workers swept Monday through Saturday, getting paid for five days, since Saturdays were, in Bulgarian socialist tradition, "for the state." Salaries were paid, in theory, once per month but always on a different date. Salary amounts were also seemingly haphazard, ranging from 150 to 200 *Euro* per/month, cash. Most sweepers were illiterate and the sole insured income earner in their household and, as I mentioned earlier, too fearful to contest late or reduced pay. Instead, they supplemented their income the way they knew how, without causing a fuss. That meant scavenging through trash bins.

Because it was forbidden by company policy, sweepers found inconspicuous ways to collect trash from bins, by hiding goods in abandoned building structures, asking local newspaper vendors to watch their bags of goods until the end of the day, or giving them to me (since they assumed, correctly, that I would be less likely to get fired). Then, they would either use the goods or, more commonly, wash, fix, and resell them, either in the Romani neighborhoods where they lived or at *Bitaka*, the longest running flea market in Sofia. It was the hot spot to find coveted Western jeans and cassette tapes in the early 1990s but has since become known as a Gypsy, "junk," market. Almost the entire sweeping team gathered on Sundays, their only day off, at *Bitaka*.

While sweeping, workers would empty their dustbins into the company's public street dumpsters. It was nearly impossible when dumping garbage into these trash containers not to

look inside the open lids. Often, when a sweeper would see something of value she would use the end of her broom to lift it out of the garbage, shake it off, and hold it up to see if it would be worth recovering. Other times a sweeper might ask a friend to hold her legs while she leans over the bin, headfirst, to recover whatever was to be found. Sweepers always surveyed the bins with the knowledge that if there were one or two pieces of clothing visible from the top, there was much more beneath the surface. While this was done out of economic necessity, it was also a way to pass the time. It usually evolved into competition over who could find the best things-- or outright laughter.

It is a warm day in October and we are sweeping. Raya, one on the team of sweepers, who prefers action to talking, runs ahead, stopping at the municipal waste bin to see what is inside. On this warm day, we sweep in a team of five, Hristina, Raya, Jesus, Dona, and I. It is before the autumn leaves start falling. It is that point in the afternoon, after the 12PM lunch break, when we need to fill the time until we reconvene and attendance is taken so that we can be “released” to go home. There are still two hours left in the workday and only about a block to sweep, so we know we could move slowly and should move slowly, in case an inspector comes to check on us. We always need to appear as though we are working.

While Jesus, Hristina, Dona, and I walk and talk, Raya runs ahead to see what is in the large bin. We are right outside the new big-box *IKA* Supermarket and those dumpsters sometimes contain nearly new food and other surprises we could use. As Raya runs ahead, we remark on the apples dangling above the sidewalk and yell to Raya to grab them. “What am I, your pet squirrel?” she retorts and runs ahead to literally dive, head-first, into a dumpster, from

which she emerges holding a bundle of blond hair wrapped in tissue paper and a white leather bag.

Hristina asks, “Raya, what on earth have you brought us?” I intervene, “You know, People are really buying these.” To which Hristina hesitates, “Yes, yes I know. But I don’t know what kind these are. I’m scared. Can you recognize them? I don’t know who they belong to or where they are from. Throw them away!” But then, Hristina, eyeing the white bag, picks it up. “Look what I found.” I remark that is real leather, to which Hristina exclaims, “And it’s a nice one, on top of that...Do you know how much money you can make from that? You just need to know where.”

As we consider the purse and the potential market for it, Dona grabs the silky blond hair from the ground, where Raya threw it after Hristina yelled at her, and quietly puts it on her head, attaching it to the elastic band holding her own sun-bleached, dyed-red hair. She continues sweeping with the found ponytail swaying, exaggeratedly, side to side as she moves. Raya laughs and throws the bag at Dona who takes the white purse and places it on her arm, daintily, as though going to a ladies’ lunch and continues to sweep. Hristina, Jesus and I laugh as Dona prances, exaggeratedly impersonating the imagined owner of the found goods: a blond woman who would flitter around the street, wearing a white leather bag and swinging her blond ponytail to and fro on a Tuesday morning.

Garbage is a strange category of stuff. It’s been hard to discuss garbage as more than an abstract (and arbitrary) category of objects (or matter) out of place. We are well aware that as objects move from one context to another, they acquire, lose, and change in value. We have studied the circulation of things, from objects of trade with utilitarian value to tools that get taken

out of circulation as inalienable objects, especially items of elite or foreign origin that are taken up by people lower down on the social totem poll. But what happens here is different. Here, I try to move from discussions of objects as sources of value to focus on objects as a catalyst for different kinds of humor.

As Dona swings her acquired blond ponytail side-to-side, white leather bag in hand, she continues sweeping the street. This juxtaposition is humorous. In this performance, Dona embodies a physical intimacy with an imagined Bulgarian archetype that makes everyone laugh. As Dona frolics down the street, daintily carrying her purse and bobbing her head to and fro, broom and dustbin still in hand, the team roars in laughter. Dona is performing the middle-class female archetype of a *kifla* (literally, a sweet crescent-shaped baked good typically eaten for breakfast, but used colloquially to denote an “airhead,” or materialistic girl), who is distinctively Bulgarian and blond (and implicitly “white” and definitely not Roma). Dona sweeps in her bright red sweeping uniform while embodying the *kifla* role. The items she finds become props in her attempt at an always imperfect, asymptotic impersonation.

However, these items are not just street, stage props. They are trash items and this fact cannot be lost upon us. I argue that trash items are a special sort of semiotic index. Waste is an index of life that has already been lived. To recover waste is, in a way, a resurrection. Here, Dona resurrects or reanimates, from the trash, a Bulgarian figure that is ubiquitous but with whom she rarely has intimate personal contact. Dona, like most of the sweepers I worked with, lives in a segregated Romani area off of the ring road that encircles Sofia. She was born in the neighborhood, went to school there, married there, and raised her children there. Dona developed many acquaintances from work who were non-Roma—the security guard in the parking lot where she stored her broom, the shop keeper at the café where she bought coffee in the

mornings, the loan brokers she owed money to—but she lacked Bulgarian friends with whom she would ever have bodily or emotional intimacy.

Garbage is an index of bodies and time's passing. As Joshua Reno writes, waste might be better understood as signs of life, if we were to begin by looking at animal scat instead of “dirt”. Through its spatial categorization—into dumpsters, strewn onto sidewalks, collected by trucks--waste indexes histories of other sorts of categorization, presuppositions, and entailments. When something gets categorized as trash, usually through its placement in receptacles designated for such objects, we can assume where it will go—to be burned, compressed, melted, remade, or landfilled. Or, more commonly, we just don't think of it at all.

We might actually have what I'm calling here a *semiotic refusal* when it comes to certain classes of things, like garbage. That is to say, we actively avoid thinking of where they came from or where they will go. At the same time, these object-signs, are often seen through ideologically regimented structures as signs of something—whether it be Gypsiness, socialism, corruption, or “orientalness.” Bulgarians commonly don't think of the class of items categorized as garbage as indexical of the human lives that resulted in its discard and the aftermath of where it will go. They may refuse to see waste as a consequence of human life and time's passage. At the same time, however, they often normalized ideological associations between material waste and categories of “backwardness” or “otherness.”¹³¹ And it is through this process that garbage acquires *semiotic force*, by means of this kind of [conceptual] *refusal*.

Anthropological debates have questioned the differences between the fetishized Maussian gift and those otherwise deemed “more abstract” object-signs like money or maps. But, I

¹³¹ It is important to think of waste both as a distinct category of stuff, but also to link it up with other kinds of materiality. See especially Fehervary (2013) on the relationship of people to state socialist materialities in terms of dignity. It would be important to think about this relationship in conversation with changing (socialist, postsocialist, EU-era) relationships people have to waste.

wonder, what about the object that is rejected, the class of things nobody wants? It's not a question of alienable vs. inalienable objects but rather a struggle for avoidance. When nobody wants to embody the stink or think about its past, who is going to touch the garbage? The invisibility of waste comes not from its inability to be seen but rather from the desire to avoid it. That is, unless you have to confront it in order to make a living.¹³²

When you work as a street sweeper in Sofia, touching trash becomes part and parcel of everyday existence. There is no space for avoidance. When there is pigeon killed on the road or littered dirty diapers, the sweepers have to deal with it. Other times, on lucky days as I have already described, there are things left in trash bins that the sweepers can collect. To reanimate the imagined former owners of waste objects becomes a source of humor.¹³³ However, in reaction to Dona's impersonations, I think my colleagues and I were laughing for different reasons. As William Beeman explains, "the basis for most humor is the setting up of a surprise or series of surprises for an audience." Whereas the common framing of jokes is as a subversion of traditional categories, Susan Seizer shows how in India many jokes serve as "agents of conformity" in contexts where "nothing is disrupted." In the case of Roma using trash objects on their bodies to reanimate an imagined archetypical kind of affluent Bulgarian femininity, the trash serves as both an agent of surprise (via material juxtaposition) while at the same time reifying social categories.

I return to the idea that garbage has a kind of semiotic force in common refusals to see it as a causal index (and instead focus on its ideological regimentation). That is, non-Roma, non waste-working Bulgarians, essentially avoid the afterlife of consumption, while the Romani

¹³² See Kristeva (1982) on abjection (The abject is "something that disgusts you, for example, see something rotting and you want to vomit – it is an extremely strong feeling that is at once somatic and symbolic, which is above all a revolt against an external menace from which one wants to distance oneself, but of which one has the impression that it may menace us from the inside")

¹³³ Also see Kristeva on abjection in relation to laughter in anthology on disgust, edited by Eiland and Golb (2003).

workers who have to deal with the items of discard focus on the imagined former lives of the things they handle and must deal with the afterlives of those objects.¹³⁴ These waste workers use trash to provoke humor, knowing that they must make do. And to some effect, know they can't get out of the social and labor positions in which they are embedded.

Once, during a workday, I sat with my colleagues on a bench outside of a socialist era apartment building, drinking juice and eating packages of pretzel sticks, effectively hiding from our bosses while we waited for the workday to pass. Upon sitting down, a resident yelled at us for occupying the public space. This was common. Usually people yelled at sweepers for sitting on "their" benches but sometimes it even became physical as residents poured water on us from apartment buildings or threatened us with their dogs. Knowing that if they spoke back, my colleagues could be fired, they remained silent. But, afterwards threw their juice bottles and pretzel bags on the ground. Littering became the only form of resistance to which they had access. And as they did this, they laughed.

Just as people often don't want to see the causal and historical relations indexed by trash, thereby refusing a particular kind of semiosis, they also don't see the laborers who handle waste *as* human. Instead, waste workers, seen as social "trash," are also decontextualized and isolated from the larger processes and structures in which they are embedded and which they themselves catalyze. The material proximity to waste necessitates the workers' awareness of the objects, which in turn lays out a variety of possibilities of what to do with those objects.

While those who are not waste workers can attempt to avoid (material and human) trash-as a causal index, those who are forced to handle this material waste cannot.¹³⁵ When ignorance

¹³⁴ However, it should be noted that this case might be altered if I were working in the Bulgarian countryside. Since my field site is Sofia, Bulgaria I encounter a racialized differential that might be different in a less urban space. See Jung (2007), (2014) for comparison.

¹³⁵ See WEB DuBois on double consciousness

is not an option, and without a socialized prescription of what to do with the semiotic entailments of garbage, sweepers invent ways of dealing with proximities to waste. One way is through an embodied kind of humor. It is a particular kind of humor of resistance. Of performance. Of *temporary* dislodgings of the status quo. There are a range of possibilities as human relationships to waste are in many ways undetermined. What remains regimented through, is the fact that some humans touch trash while others never have to. And for those who can't avoid it, object-centered humor may sometimes be the most readily accessible mode of social critique.

CHAPTER 8: FROM WASTE TO ENERGY AND BACK AGAIN

Besides the 54 known chemical elements, there is, in the nature of things, only one agent, and this is called Kraft [energy/ work/ force]. It can appear, under various circumstances, as motion, chemical affinity, cohesion, electricity, light, heat, and magnetism; and from any one of these types of phenomena can be transformed into any of the others.

-Karl Friedrich Mohr, “On the Nature of Heat/Warmth” (1837)

Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house?

-James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

CONVEYOR BELT CHANGE

The sound is not quite deafening but definitely irritating and anxiety producing as I stand beside the conveyor belt at one of Sofia’s largest waste sorting facilities. It was difficult to gain access to the site, but I was invited by two Sofia municipal councilors working on environmental issues, who have a long-term relationship with the owner of the sorting facility.



Image 27: Photo of waste conveyor belt: to the left in the glassed-in area is the material for refuse-derived fuel (RDF) and right before that are items that the workers either brought with

them or found while on the job. Alongside the conveyor belt, on the right, are the holes into which workers throw materials to be recycled in separate waste streams. Photo by author.

The firm that owns the sorting facility, or installation as it is called, also owns one of the two prominent recycling organizations in Sofia.

On the line, uniformed Romani women, wearing facemasks and gloves, sort through garbage that is brought by trucks, both owned by the packaging recovery organization and municipal garbage companies. These trucks bring predominantly mixed waste to the site where it is dumped before being lifted up to the indoor conveyor belt.



Image 28: Waste at a manual sorting installation site before sorting begins. Photo by author.



Image 29: Waste at a manual sorting installation site before sorting begins. Photo by author.

I start this chapter with a description of the conveyor belt of a recycling plant, which I analyze as both an integral part of waste management but also as a manifestation of a particular kind of temporalized labor.¹³⁶ Items pass along the conveyor belt quickly, loudly, and to stop for a minute means not fulfilling one's job requirements. The belt won't stop. It seems as though the belt is never-ending but it is actually looping, although it is difficult to tell because the looping is beyond the scope of view.

Focusing attention on this conveyor belt might help us to better think about waste management transitions, from a state socialist framework to a capitalist one. While capitalist-era, post-EU-accession regulations mandate certain kinds of recycling, as though they are new, the truth is that, out of view, the so-called belt is looping. As I show in this chapter, communist recycling was, in many ways, much more efficient than anything currently being implemented. To quote a common Bulgarian aphorism: "Although everyone wants to, you don't need to invent

¹³⁶ See Lampland (1995).

hot water.”¹³⁷ That is to say, EU-mandated environmental sustainability initiatives in many ways reinvent recycling as new, despite the fact there has been a long history of successful socialist recycling programs in Bulgaria.

RECYCLING, RECYCLED

Most Sofia residents don't recycle in the way the European Union hoped that they would.¹³⁸ The reasons for this are complex and dependent on age, class, and living location. Those Sofia residents who lived as adults under state socialism often have nostalgic memories of recycling as part of the socialist system. During oral history interviews, I was often told about the time someone had a sick classmate who needed to buy something special and her classmates joined together to recycle paper or plastic as part of a classroom campaign to raise funds. Other people I interviewed rejected European models of colored-bin separate collection, based on the fact that it was too similar to the socialist project and therefore not “modern” enough, despite being part of European Union environmental sustainability mandates. Seeing separate bin collection as “too continuous” with state socialism, many urban Bulgarians prefer to throw their waste into the municipal mixed waste bins, because they can and because it's just easier. One group of friends, upon hearing my project, told me that they thought about recycling for a while but had noticed that the separate collection bins actually moved. They told me the story of one “crazy eco friend” who actually drove his garbage to recycling bins because the ones near his home had been removed suddenly. Most people did not care enough to do anything close to this. Bins were often moving because the firms that own them would have changing municipal requirements and would seemingly overnight have to move the colored bins to different parts of the city. For many, being able to not recycle is tied to democratic notions of freedom and

¹³⁷ This is similar to the American idea of “reinventing the wheel.”

¹³⁸ It is very difficult to find statistics on this but ethnographic data confirms this as true.

capitalistic kinds of consumption (and discard). This link between freedom and waste is not just felt by those who lived both state socialism and Europeanization processes but is also a product of ideological and economic forces. Waste, in most capitalistic societies, is a marker of economic development.

According to Zsuzsa Gille, although “industrial ecology and the project of ecological modernization may be seen as revolutionary approaches in the West, a strikingly similar social experiment was initiated in state socialist countries half a century ago” (2000, 204). Although the state socialist project did not have the same “green” ideology that today’s movements do, the effects were similar. Recycling became a large part of the state socialist economy throughout the Eastern European satellites. Bulgaria’s state socialist recycling entity was the aptly named *Phoenix Resource*, which privatized in the late 1990s. The 1991 Phoenix Resource annual bulletin compares recycling incurred during the special “week[s] for gathering and buying of scrap all over the country” in 1989 and 1990. “During the week held in 1989, 20,248 tons of scrap were sold/bought, including 7,839 tons of paper, whereas in 1990 for the same period with 50% raise of supply of exchange goods - caps, sanitary paper, fiction books, and others- only 8,790 tons of scrap were sold/bought, including 3,240 tons of paper.” Despite more goods on the market, fewer materials were collected after 1989. The report continues:

Proceeding from the situation in the country and its economic partners, we render an account for the influence of the economic crisis, the political struggle and the strong political polarization of the population, which could not possibly have been without an effect on the activity of the firm. Also it is not insignificant that raw materials and materials for production were missing, in addition to the collapse of the market.

Socialism clearly had developed recycling expertise and practices that were not sustainable in what Gille calls the “throwaway economy” of capitalism. These socialist-era recycling programs could not endure capitalistic change. Capitalist-era recycling was not

industry driven but primarily consumption driven. Gille explains that although not framed in terms of environmental protection the socialist period “had progressive elements that have been dismantled and forced into oblivion after the collapse of socialism” (204). Calling this period of state socialism the metallic period (1948-74), she explains that waste was almost singularly identified with metal scrap and this connection, when taken to its logical conclusion, resulted in “a cult of waste that hailed all garbage and by-products as ‘free’ materials to be mobilized for the fulfillment of the plan” (9).¹³⁹ While the European Union struggles to “uncouple its waste generation from economic growth,” state socialism was able to do so, focusing always on a culture of both production and reuse/recycling. After 1989, “production-based waste politics gave way to a politics of distribution in which the only legitimate subject of public discourse is the treatment, dumping and incineration of wastes” (Gille, 2000, 205). As I have shown in the last few chapters on informal recycling, the socialist mindset of “there’s no such thing as waste” lingers. It is based on a notion of both potential and instantaneous conversion of waste into something, which is not waste (i.e. money, resources, potential itself).

Gille focuses on the fact that in a post-EU context “waste production—that is, how much and what kind of wastes can be produced—is excluded from public discourse” so, in effect, the most that “democracy can achieve is to regulate what to do with the wastes already produced” (2007, 210). Comparatively, state socialism focused on preventive measures (210). I saw this echoed in discussions with waste management consultants from Western Europe who worked in Bulgaria.

¹³⁹ From the metallic regime came the period of “inefficiency” during which policy focused on reduction instead of reuse and waste dumping was legalized. Then by 1985, according to Gille’s account of Hungary, the regime became “chemical” as which by-products were treated as toxic. It wasn’t until 1989 that “throwaway” culture developed (2007, 9).

In a meeting with Ryan, a Swedish waste management consultant in Sofia, he explained that waste is used, in many European indexes, as a marker for democratic, capitalistic, development. Waste has become so preternaturally tied to progress that even statistical markers have come to link production with discard. For example, according to an unpublished draft document of the 2012 National Waste Strategy for Bulgaria, one of the documented trends summarized and explained statistical data generated for the levels of municipal, construction, industrial and hazardous waste: “The quantity of the municipal waste generated will grow as a result of the expected economic growth, the increase of incomes and of consumption by the private households.” In this framework, having more garbage is actually appealing as a material manifestation of advancement.

While many Bulgarian waste officials reaffirmed this new ideological linkage between waste and progress, Bulgarian friends of mine reveled in the shift from reusable glass containers, like those used during socialism, to prepackaged containers, citing the lack of hygiene concerns with the use of the latter. I interviewed a retired chemist from an early, 70s-era plastics factory in Bulgaria, who recounted to me how much “healthier” it became when items were separately packaged and the packaging could then be discarded. While the joys of plastic and associations with progress could explain consumer choices to buy prepackaged items, it doesn’t explain why people would still discard recyclable items in mixed waste containers.¹⁴⁰

SENSES OF FUTILITY

¹⁴⁰ Here I need to address both interviews and archival research on links between hygiene, also citing the ways in which bodily fluids were thought of during socialism when, for example, people shared the same glass at the classic Soviet-style soda machine. For an image:

<https://www.good.is/articles/share-these-suds-the-low-waste-soviet-soda-machine>

This kind of sharing was not just a phenomenon in Eastern Europe but in the West, during the same time, as well.

The reason why most Sofia citizens throw away their waste without separating it is actually tied to affective sensibilities of futility.¹⁴¹ Nearly every friend of mine had a story, either first or second hand, about seeing garbage trucks collect waste from the metal mixed waste bins together with packaging recycling from the colored bins. “Why should I recycle when the firms don’t?” was a constant refrain I heard. People strongly believed that what wasn’t visible *must* be corrupt.¹⁴²¹⁴³ That is, if people could not see where their trash was going, it must be going all to the same place. The assumption was that the firms were making money any way they can, even if it meant going against European law. It was just assumed that this was what happened in Bulgaria. To quote Julia, from the Ministry of the Environment and Water, “and that is us, Bulgaria.”

I locate this assumption in both historical and affective frameworks in which a deep “sense of futility” has developed. We can look to Katherine Verdery’s description of the “etatization” of time in communist Romania, or the “ways in which the Romanian state seized time from the purposes many Romanians wanted to pursue” (82). She gives a great example of a

¹⁴¹ See Greenberg (2014) on politics of disappointment as a comparison for the politics/senses of futility.

¹⁴² For a useful genealogy of transparency and social/moral/metaphoric uses of the term and concept see Comaroff and Comaroff’s afterword in *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order* (2003).

¹⁴³ Linking invisibility and corruption can be traced to longstanding questions of political action in Bulgaria that have been reinforced more recently by EU legislation based on the linking of democracy, freedom, and transparency. For example, see Treaty of Lisbon: Treaty of Lisbon (2007), Article 15:

1. In order to promote good governance and ensure the participation of civil society, the Union's institutions, bodies, offices and agencies shall conduct their work as openly as possible.
2. The European Parliament shall meet in public, as shall the Council when considering and voting on a draft legislative act.
3. Any citizen of the Union, and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State, shall have a right of access to documents of the Union's institutions, bodies, offices and agencies, whatever their medium, subject to the principles and the conditions to be defined in accordance with this paragraph.

General principles and limits on grounds of public or private interest governing this right of access to documents shall be determined by the European Parliament and the Council, by means of regulations, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure.

Each institution, body, office or agency shall ensure that its proceedings are transparent and shall elaborate in its own Rules of Procedure specific provisions regarding access to its documents, in accordance with the regulations referred to in the second subparagraph.

correspondence in an urban newspaper in which a reader asks why tickets are no longer being sold in advance for long-distance bus trips out of Iasi. The reply states, “As the Bus Company director informs us, new dispositions from the Ministry of Transport stipulate that tickets should not be sold in advance, for this reason the bus ticket bureau has gone out of service” (86).

Verdery explains how the ticket-seller’s friends probably would have been able to buy tickets in advance, but despite informal modes of access, the state had no interest in providing a justification for their policy changes. In doing so, this destroys peoples’ “capacity for alternative uses of time” as it also ruins “all possibility for lower-level initiative and planning” (86). While temporal regulations typically create expectancy, “socialism’s arrhythmia” kept people off balance, “instituting uncertainty as the rule” (89).¹⁴⁴

In Verdery’s analysis I see resonances with my work in regard to the affect sensibilities of alienation from the state, especially in the realms of planning and organization. If people embody a deep understanding that the state does what it wants without equitable regard for its citizens, citizens feel a lingering sense of disempowerment. In Bulgaria this affective sensibility is now framed within new European-era disappointments in Bulgaria’s inability (or refusal) to confirm with European standards. From these feelings of state-citizen relations emerges a sense of futility.¹⁴⁵ Why recycle if nobody else will? And, why recycle, if the government won’t?¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ See Bourdieu (1977) and Zerubavel (1985, 2003)

¹⁴⁵ Here, it might useful to think about what I’m calling a “mafia-zation” of the government, in which attributes typically linked to mafia or organized structures are projected onto the state as a whole (see Chavance 2008, Schneider and Schneider 2005)

¹⁴⁶ I write elsewhere on the way this sense of futility becomes embodied in Romani neighborhood residents dealing with haphazard water infrastructure (Resnick 2016, unpublished ms). In that piece more explicitly, but also present here, I make the claim that futility can be its own politics outside of the traditional, mandated form of politics so often accepted. Many Bulgarians, but especially Roma, have given up on the promise that politics, in its most mainstream forms, can do anything. The only times they see changes are before elections, when streets might be quickly paved or speed bumps might be half installed. They don’t expect change and so have come to realize themselves as Bulgarian citizens through a sense of politicized futility. Stuart Kirsch and Peter Benson, drawing on Zizek writing about capitalist-induced cynicism, highlight the American term “whatever” as encapsulating this sense of frustration. In line with Kirsch and Benson, remarking on this sense of resignation as being part of the disappointment of the promises of the future, I address this sense of futility as itself a political claim to the future.

GARBAGE CRISES, POLITICAL LEVERAGING, MORE FUTILITY

The widely held belief that Sofia’s recycling and garbage “all go to one place” has been a theme of daily life for most residents since the end of socialism. Over the courses of the 2000s, garbage in Sofia became a political tool, especially around political campaign times. In 2009, during one of my fieldwork trips to Bulgaria, I was living in Sofia during one of the major waste “crises.” The then-mayor of Sofia, Boiko Borisov, was running for prime minister. Despite post-1989 municipal waste management privatization and the anti-monopolization proceedings of the early 2000s, most of Sofia’s waste management firms were owned by an umbrella company that also happened to be politically affiliated with the opposition, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). In the months leading up to the 2009 parliamentary elections, the Bulgarian Socialists instigated a cessation of all municipal waste collection contracts. The waste firms had to immediately stop functioning. This led to massive amounts of waste being littered onto the streets of central Sofia.

(This is especially poignant within a framework deeply imbued with the promise of European progress). Given this affective relationship to the state, Bulgarians embrace an affective sense of structural limitation, figure out ways to keep on living their lives. This entails self-sufficiency and an avoidance of media and political structures. Remaining, in effect, under the radar enables the most potential for infrastructural and social maintenance, and an ability to use ingenuity to get by. Morten Axel Pedersen’s work proves useful for thinking through this. He writes about a man in Mongolia, showing his friends one of supposedly two Cadillacs in Mongolia. Since he had used some of the car parts as collateral for a loan, the car was undriveable. However, he would often invite friends to come and socialize, clean the car, dust it, and wash it down. Rather than turning to the hopelessness that one might expect, Pedersen explains that “their repeated experiences of failure—of lucky days turning sour, of loans to trustworthy people that are never repaid—does not make them reach what at first glance is the only logical conclusion, namely, that there is nothing they can do about this state of affairs (short of bringing about radical political change). Far from accepting that the best they can aim for is to muddle pragmatically through the hardships of the so-called transition from state socialism to market capitalism or to indulge fatalistically in passive daydreaming of a better life, my friends continue to act as if tomorrow will be a better day by stubbornly making new debts and entering into new trading adventures” (2012, 137).



Image 30: Waste crisis on the streets of Sofia, 2009. Photo by author.

Although papers and plastics were just obstacles to city walking, there were places in the city where biological waste, like food remains and produce (often illegally dumped in municipal bins by supermarkets), attracted stray dogs and smelled terribly during the summer months. Friends told me that this sort of “crisis,” as it was termed in Bulgarian news and everyday conversation, had become routine and a regular part of political campaigns. That summer the BSP was hoping to blame the “stink of the city” on the mayor and candidate for Prime Minister, Boiko Borisov. The intention was to literally “contaminate” Borisov’s reputation. The premise was that if the mayor couldn’t keep Sofia clean, he wouldn’t be able to help Bulgaria as its leader. Despite these attempts to cast Borisov in a negative light, he did win the elections and became prime minister of Bulgaria in 2009.

These reoccurring garbage “crises” not only put into question what the term “crisis” means when it is such a regular part of politics but also reinforced Sofia residents’ skepticism that waste was actually being recycled.¹⁴⁷ During these garbage crises, citizens felt the power of the waste companies in structuring urban space, waste collection, and pedestrian movement. As

¹⁴⁷ See Roitman (2012) on crisis.

is often the case with many kinds of otherwise “invisible” labor, only once it ceases to exist does it get noticed.¹⁴⁸ Memories of these ongoing “crises” often became part of conversations about why residents don’t recycle. The futility of separate collection was omnipresent, both in everyday life and during these electoral periods of extreme waste visibility in urban centers.

PACKAGING RECOVERY NEEDS FREE LABOR

“Mostly, we want to hire people that are *free*,” Deyan, the head of a recycling organization in a small town in Northwestern Bulgaria, told me. “[We want] people that [from the start] can’t do anything in this work environment but are open to us training them, people that have the will to work but don’t have specific qualifications, people that can work...this job is not the most desirable. It’s not the best job. There is smell of waste...and yes that’s why we want people ready to work, happy for work, and then we can train them our way.” I asked him what he meant by “free.” “Free-minded,” he explained. It means that they don’t have any strange thoughts in their heads. For example, [I want them to think] “I want to be a driver” but for something uncertain. “We want people not for a specific job,” he explained. “We want people for sorting. We have drivers, but mostly we want people who can do several things, so we don’t really want highly qualified people.”

Despite working in the poorest region in Northwestern Bulgaria, an area with a large Romani population, Deyan never used ethnic or racial terms to talk about his workers. Rather than talk about “Gypsy laborers,” he focused on the potential of unskilled workers to do a diversity of things without an agenda of their own. Deyan was first and foremost a businessman and preferred to talk about the financial ramifications of recycling. He always seemed to have the entire cycle of waste processing in mind, as he’d move quickly from scrap collection to recycling

¹⁴⁸ See Nagle (2013) on waste collection in New York City.

plants where items would be recycled throughout Bulgaria. He explained that in Bulgaria there were a few major facilities for the recycling of paper but the major plastic recycler in Sofia had problems. Sometimes it worked, but sometimes it didn't. "He [the owner] is not good with paying salaries but there is an installation [i.e., factory] there..."

Echoing the linkage between waste and progress I found in official documents, Deyan explained, that one of the major problems was that Sofia wasn't enough of a "consumer society" to meet its recycling targets. The informal collectors (scavengers, *kloshari*), he told me, performed a great deal of the labor necessary for companies and subcontracting firms, like his own, to meet the European targets agreed upon by the Bulgarian Ministry of the Environment and Water. Since his firm was a franchised subcontractor of a large Sofia-based PRO, he had to meet certain financial targets in order to stay in business. Besides relying on informal waste collectors, he also had to import recyclables from neighboring countries like Greece in order to fulfill quotas.

Discussions of constraints and freedoms comes up often when dealing with waste, both in terms of freedom to take part in democratic "throwaway" culture but also in terms of new labor regimes.¹⁴⁹ I draw on Noelle Mole's work in Italy, in which she discusses how the Italian state began "implementing neoliberal labor policies to render the market more flexible and casualized (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004; Vercelli and Fiordonni 2003)" (189). According to Mole, long-term contract jobs in Italy have more recently been replaced with short-term and temporary positions. While Mole refers to Italy as being known as the "backward" economy of Europe, because of its "lag" in rehauling its protectionist labor market," I have to ask what Bulgaria would be in relation to Italy (2008, 192). That is to say, Bulgaria was forced, at least on paper, to shift from a

¹⁴⁹ I'm not sure of the exact term to use to reference this kind of "free" and flexible labor, but as a placeholder, I use the term "post-Fordist." Also see Lampland (1995), Muehlebach (2013).

highly industrialized socialist economy to a deindustrialized period of economic privatization and so-called capitalist development. What this meant in practice was that labor, especially heavy industry and manual labor, transformed relatively quickly from being well paying, contracted and valued work to being defined by instability and flexibility—or “freedom.”¹⁵⁰

The need for waste management labor, however, remains relatively constant unlike that for construction work or taxicab driving, for the simple reason that there is always garbage and in steadily increasing quantities (albeit with different qualitative composition). Unlike Bulgarian building projects in the 1990s, which relied on foreign investment that often defaulted mid-construction, waste remains a stable source from which to make an income. “Free laborers,” however, are what most waste and recycling companies call for. While I was working as a street sweeper I was amazed by how flexible our labor was, both because our work was subject to the elements of nature (like snow, dust storms, rain) and because we served as a small labor force for a large landscape with changing metropolitan and seasonal needs. One day we would be sweeping leaves off the edge of the street curbs, but the following week we could be shoveling snow, salting sidewalks, weeding the cracks between the concrete sidewalk slabs, or even picking up cigarette butts, by hand, from the grassy areas outside the new metro station elevator in time for the Mayor’s inauguration of a handicap accessible subway entrance. Men would also cycle between sweeping, the backs of trucks, and cleaning out city sewers. It all depended on the needs of the bosses—and the ever-changing environment—that day.

Those people working for recycling organizations often fulfilled similarly “free” roles. Soon after, Deyan explained what he meant by needing “free” laborers. He meant they needed people who could do many things, which included working on the sorting conveyor belt, helping

¹⁵⁰ See Bulgarian National Archives FOND 1659

to bale the garbage collected at the end of the conveyor sorting process, but also disassembling large items brought to Ivan's recycling point by local informal recyclers. Part of this freedom also entailed the ability to not be disgusted by the objects at hand. Workers couldn't reject waste outright as "dirty work."

Soon after our interview, I walked outside on the sub-zero afternoon and saw one of Deyan's employees, a middle age Romani man. He was standing with an axe and a refrigerator, hacking the plastic off of the refrigerator to access the metal underneath, which could be recycled as scrap metal. Deyan explained that he needed to work outside because the chemicals in the old refrigerator were toxic.

ECONOMICS OF WASTE

Here I want to analyze the temporality of conversion, of waste into something else.¹⁵¹ "It's not garbage, it's money," I was often told by one elderly man, Uncle Petko (*Chicho Petko*) with whom I went through trash bins to look for items to resell. The process of financial conversion was remarkably similar for Petko as it was for many recycling company employees who saw garbage as an economic resource, even while still in a garbage bin. I found that the moment of material-money conversion took place along different nodes on a temporal spectrum depending on who was interacting with trash and in what locale.

For recyclers, both informal scavengers seeking raw materials and those working at large recycling firms, conversion of waste to resource happened at the moment of collection in a bin. For some of the other informal collectors, primarily women who looked not for raw materials to recycle but items to refurbish and sell, the moment of conversion was part of a longer process of market assessment. "What is this?" "Who would buy this?" were common questions asked when

¹⁵¹ Here, I need to think through how it is that waste—or any commodity—can be converted into other forms and how liberal, post-Fordist, neoliberal regimes change the ways in which this happens and the temporal frames in which this occurs.

going through the municipal garbage bins in order to assess the market potential of collecting certain items. Since many informal recyclers, especially those women collecting items for resale, traveled on foot with large IKEA or similar nylon bags, they had to constantly assess which items were worth carrying for resale based upon which items would generate the most income.¹⁵²

Financial conversions of waste occurred differently for waste management company officials who were paid by firms to collect industrial, hazardous, and other kinds of waste. For them, payment was based upon a rubric, not based upon amount collected. Private recyclers, often buying collected items from the European-mandated packaging recycling organizations would find it cost effective to buy the raw materials and transport them, in trucks, to other countries either inside the European Union (i.e. Greece, Romania) or outside of the EU (Serbia, Turkey) depending on the international market rate and the level of taxes, which differed day to day. For them, the moment of financial conversion was directly related to both the international market and European and national taxation structures.

One important group for whom waste conversion into revenue was important related not to the recycling I've discussed but to those working for municipal structure, namely Sofia municipality. Here, comes a new form of transformation that is at once physical and financial: that of refuse derived fuel.

FROM WASTE TO MONEY TO AIR POLLUTION? WASTE-TO-ENERGY

RDF, or refuse-derived fuel, is one of the most controversial modes of waste management in Bulgaria. During the course of my fieldwork, Sofia was in the midst of finalizing a decade-long plan for a municipal recycling installation. Started under the Sofia mayor

¹⁵² During socialist times, from the oral history interviews I made, people didn't collect objects for resale but did travel collecting raw materials that were sold. There were Romani men who sang calling out from the street for different kinds of waste that residents would bring down to his cart.

Sofianski in 2000, the capital city struggled to settle on an environmentally feasible, European-approved, and financially affordable system.

The story begins with the Suhodol landfill in Sofia. A longstanding legacy of state socialism since 1984, the Suhodol landfill, located between semi-rural “white” Bulgarian communities and two large Romani neighborhoods, was the only place into which Sofia deposited its waste until 2005. Beginning in 2001, residents near the landfill began protesting. Protests were made visible almost immediately on the streets of downtown Sofia and this is how they gained traction. Since there were no other places to dump waste, when a protester blocked the entrance to Suhodol, trucks couldn’t pass and would stop collecting waste. This resulted in waste accumulating on the streets of Sofia, which made protests a public concern from their start.

Despite Mayor Sofianski’s assurance that Suhodol would close by 2004 under European guidelines, Suhodol remained open well into 2005. This resulted in the first major Suhodol “waste crisis” in which garbage piled up throughout the city for a week. In reaction to the NIMBY-style protests (“Not In My Backyard”), Sofia Municipal Council announced that Suhodol should close down. However, Suhodol wouldn’t shut down. Protesters became more vigilant and the waste crises in Sofia became frequent. In July 2005, the deputy mayor of Sofia had to enlist police forces to remove protesters so that waste trucks could enter the landfill.

Despite the Bulgarian president’s visit to the protest site, local residents kept protesting although they began permitting trucks to dump waste. However, by late 2005, the Sofia Municipal Council determined that citizens needed to stop the protest. By December 2005, Sofia Municipal Council released a decision (Dec1/2005) closing the landfill. The Council’s solution, albeit temporary, was that Sofia’s waste would be shredded, stored in plastic bales. The bales were first stored in three locations on the industrial outskirts of Sofia, where large communist

factories once stood.¹⁵³ However, these sites were not large enough to contain the waste of the whole capital city and soon waste began to be shipped to be stored in the old coalmines of Chukurovo, despite local protests there.¹⁵⁴

In 2006 the temporary baling and shipping of waste was deemed “not a long-term solution” and the then-mayor of Sofia and future prime minister of Bulgaria, Boiko Borisov, again reopened Suhodol. He was met with fierce protest. As a second temporary solution, Sofia municipality decided to start shipping the bales of garbage to various sites throughout the country (Plovdiv, Silistra, Karlovo) that were willing to accept the bales for a hefty fee of 28.5 million Euro.¹⁵⁵ Some of these sites were on the other side of the country, more than 250km away, and the cost of transport and storage put Sofia municipality into financial crisis. At this time, in 2006, the European Investment Bank conducted an assessment of Bulgaria’s waste management situation, in time for the proposed European accession in 2007. The European Investment Bank made a financial recommendation to Bulgaria: stop baling and shipping waste and, instead, reopen Suhodol as a temporary solution.

This “temporary” solution has remained the practice in Sofia ever since. Suhodol seems to be the most magical landfill of increasing capacity. This landfill that was supposed to be full in 2004 remained only functioning landfill for Sofia’s waste when I left Bulgaria in 2013.

Before leaving, however, I visited the site of the new waste management installation, which was currently in the process of being built. I noticed something change over the course of my research. The waste debate shifted from NIMBY-style protests against proximity to waste

¹⁵³ These factories were very important to residents of Sofia’s Romani neighborhoods, since many Roma used to work their (ie. Metallurgy plant, a soda bottling factory, a shoe factory).

¹⁵⁴ It is important to note that “mining waste” is an important source of waste in many national and European indices of waste, especially in countries like Bulgaria where there are large number of active and inactive mines. I plan to address this in future work.

¹⁵⁵ See decision SCC 786/23.10.2006

management and the sensory assaults of landfill sites (to vision and smell) to a concern over what couldn't be sensed. The new concerns focused on something less visible than a landfill. New protests focused on what couldn't be readily seen, heard, or smelled. It centered on air pollution and the potential harms of a "closed system."

FEARS OF A CLOSED SYSTEM

Environmental activists and municipal leaders alike were concerned with one particular part of the new Sofia waste management installation plan: refuse-derived fuel. The new system would include a mechanical sorting facility, in which, typical of Bulgarian labor practice, unskilled manual laborers would sort recyclable items recovered in domestic mixed waste bins by hand on a conveyor belt (like the one that begins this chapter). This would take place until the necessary funds were acquired for the high-tech sorting machinery that most Bulgarian facilities cannot afford. Unskilled, often Romani labor, even in an EU context still proves more financially "responsible."

Along the conveyor belt workers remove items one by one, depositing each kind of item in a different colored shoot. Paper gets dropped into the paper shoot, to be collected underneath the conveyor belt level into a container where items are then collected to be pressed, stored, and finally shipped and sold as raw material for energy generation. Each worker collects items to put into the shoots she stands by, leaving the next waste stream for her colleagues to deposit into her respective waste shoot. At the end the conveyor belt of the remaining waste is collected and here is where the next stage of conversion happens.

Items collected at the end are often a mix of wet items that can't be sorted manually because they've been materially corrupted. This includes biological and food waste, which, if composted at an earlier stage in its discard would be able to be reused. However, at the end of

the conveyor belt, it has little value. This “waste of waste” collection also includes lightweight plastics and nylon bags, which are the fodder for energy in refuse derived fuel incineration systems (RDF). RDF, for many environmentalists and Green Party politicians in Bulgaria with whom I talked, was a dirty word. This was both because it involved incineration which environmentalists linked, with a knee-jerk reaction, to air pollution, and because it was part of a *closed system* that they claimed would deincentivize recycling.

Sofia municipality wanted to link energy derived from low-quality waste at its waste management installation to its public heating network (*toplofikacia*). This would mean that any RDF would be channeled into the heating grid of Sofia’s public infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and public housing. Over the course of my fieldwork, Bulgaria suffered from energy crises as they were forced in 2007 to shutdown two of the reactors at the Soviet-technology Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant, which until that point supplied Bulgaria with nearly half of its energy. This left them with a real need for sustainable (and locally-sourced) energy.

One day when I was meeting with workers at a national environmental NGO I often frequented in downtown Sofia, I asked them their take on refuse derived fuel (RDF). They explained that RDF equals incineration and incineration equals air pollution. However, in discussions with Western European environmental consultants working in Bulgaria, they often told me that this link was not so clear-cut from a technological perspective. Citing Copenhagen as a prime example of where an incinerator sits right in the city center without any cause for protest or potential for harm, they explained that incineration was not dangerous as a practice. Nonetheless, they admitted, Bulgarian anti-burn activists did have a point because “it was after all Bulgaria.”

One consultant explained to me that you couldn't trust that Bulgarians will build things up to regulation code. Despite both European and local safety approvals, he went on, it was very common for politicians to embezzle European funds meant for designing environmentally sustainable and safe infrastructures. In place of these infrastructures, which look great on paper, politicians instead build shoddily made structures in their place and "pocket" the difference. What this meant was that while EU officials could assume that incinerators in Western Europe were safely built and maintained according to international code, they could also assume the very same sort of technology in a country like Bulgaria to be unsafe, corruptible, and inevitably already "corrupted."

In an interview with Ilko, a Green Party representative, over beers, he explained to me the problems with RDF. "You shouldn't solve a problem by creating new problem." "Fair point," I conceded. "RDF is actually providing problems because of the burning process, the incineration. And, because of poor control over the incineration process, the control on the chimney or the control of the depositing of the... what is this *shlaka* [slag]. When everything is burning, there is something dirty, dark. It is very concentrated waste and heavily toxic... So this is two exit points of burning... Still this stuff is very... I mean, in Vienna they are producing this stuff, about 10 grams of dioxins. 10 grams could kill Sofia." I asked why they could have this much toxicity in Vienna without problems but it would "kill Sofia." He explained, "Well the, they put... they have a special landfill, built in a special style that should not have leakages, etc." He continued, "That's the first point. The second point is the whole cycle of this burning. It needs a lot of waste and RD fuel, which means this competes with recycling, reuse and other stories that are much more friendly." He explained the de-incentivization process by which RDF functions since it

needs so much refuse in order to produce fuel, the municipality could easily use recyclable materials to burn if it became more cost effective to burn them than to recycle them.

“This slag” that Ilko discusses is part of a common saying, in both Bulgarian and English: “Garbage in, Garbage Out.” The idea was that if you burn “low quality” garbage, the heat that comes from it is also low quality and not efficient. Before the municipality’s idea to link their waste management installation with the heating grid, the only place where RDF was allowed to be used was for low quality industry, that of the cement industry.

The reason it is “garbage in, garbage out” stems from problems in the sorting process I discussed earlier. As waste moves down the conveyor belt, it ends up in a pile of burnable waste and wet, sticky, biowaste. The waste is firstly prepared for mixed composting, passing the waste along mesh screens so the wet, small particles of bio waste move through the screen and fall out. Then the remaining, larger pieces of waste are dried with hot air. Then, the dry waste is manually sorted again to remove any non-burnable particles (such as PVC materials which cannot be burned). The remaining waste is separated with rolling drums with screens of different sizes so that small, undersized waste particles fall through the holes. Then, the waste moves into an air separation device, which I often saw prominently displayed at a variety of landfills I visited. Fans are used to separate materials based on density: dense items fall, light items like plastic bags move upwards. The heavy fraction is not used but the light fraction moves on to be shredded in order to reduce its size. Finally, electro-magnets are used to remove metals from the waste. Once the separation, by size and density, takes place, the RDF is either formed into bricks, pellets or fluff, which are baled together and sold as fuel.



Image 31: Since at the time of research, RDF was only used in one cement plant in Bulgaria, in-process RDF materials were often stored outdoors like this, above. Photo by author.

A closed system evokes fear specifically within a Europeanizing framework. This fear derives in part from the rhetoric of Europeanization in which the recent past is tied to closedness, corruption and secrecy while Europeanness is connoted through the aesthetics of transparency. In nearly all European Union accession documents, deriving from the Treaty of Lisbon, political and economic transparency is posited as a requisite for European democracy. In waste management and environmental policy, this idea of transparency often becomes materialized through glassed-in waste management office buildings and in discourses and policy on how waste and energy are to be managed.¹⁵⁶ Within a European framework, transparency in the political realm is also tied to democratic freedoms. I argue that peoples' affective orientations

¹⁵⁶ In European Union Brief 51 “Environment and Energy: Challenges of Enlargement,” there is even a table in Annex 2 on “Energy Challenges” there is a table that summarizes “state of approximation of EU energy legislation and the nuclear power capacity in CEEC as presented in the Regular Reports from the Commission on Progress towards Accession by each of the candidate countries.” In this table one of the boxes to be checked off is labeled “transparency.”

transformed over time to reveal themselves in a postsocialist, European order as a kind of futility-induced fear of closed systems.

CLOSEDNESS, VISCOSITY, TRANSPARENCY

In discussing “fears of a closed system” and its relationship to feelings of futility, it is important to analyze the ideologies of transparency and viscosity (or murkiness) that they manifest. Most Sofia residents, like most readers of this text, haven’t watched exactly where their waste goes. They see only what remains visible on the street, typically during moments of failure.¹⁵⁷ I argue that in the realm of waste management in Bulgaria, there is a fallacy of “transparency,” rooted in ideologies of visibility that presumes that “if you can see it, then it is true.” In European financial and policy regulation, there is a strong leaning towards “transparency,” with the often implicit (and sometimes explicit) understanding that transparency is inherently tied to honesty, freedom, and European-ness.¹⁵⁸ By logical conclusion this also means that nothing good happens in those realms of what you can’t see. Waste falls mostly into this second category, as most waste processing is not visible to the urban public except during times of “crises.”

Kregg Hetherington explains that as part of post cold war discourses about censorship, “transparency was supposed to redistribute political agency to individual citizens, creating democratic participants who could rise from under the yoke of communist and dictatorial regimes” (2012, 242). He adds the access to information was supposed to empower market actors “to make more optimal choices” (242). Transparency, in this view, becomes linked to

¹⁵⁷ See Paul Manning’s (2015) Semiotic Review article on Peirce and reverie. Also see Schutz on the woodcutter and understandings of consciousness.

¹⁵⁸ See Treaty of Lisbon for the importance and moralization of transparency in the EU, also see Comaroff and Comaroff on genealogy of transparency (2003).

individual freedom, which is opposed, especially in postsocialist contexts, to communism.¹⁵⁹

Often in my research, I was seen by non-Romani Bulgarians (“ethnic Bulgarians”) as a means of transparency, as though I could provide insight to where they couldn’t see. In my case, this included providing insights into Romani neighborhood life, a site where most Bulgarians never entered, and the “backstage” of waste management.¹⁶⁰ Although I wasn’t planning to do expose-style research on where Sofia’s waste went, I was intrigued about the persistent questioning I received about whether “it all goes to one place.” As much as I tried to avoid answering the question, I couldn’t help myself from trying to find out the answers.

During my visits to various waste “installations,” as they are called, I observed and asked questions about the relation of domestic mixed waste collection from metal street bins and colored-bin recycling. When I visited the sorting installation in Sofia, I saw trucks from both municipal waste companies and colored-bin packaging recovery organizations dumping waste in the same concrete yard. Despite common understandings that waste trucks picked up metal bins and plastic bins at the same time, I learned that this was impossible. According to my research, trucks picked up plastic colored bins with special attachments designed to lift the plastic bins. Metal bins were picked up by either different trucks or the same trucks with different attachments designed for the metal bins. However, the trucks designed for separate bin collection often did collect the contents of differently colored bins into one truck. The rationale behind this, I was told by packaging recovery organization employees and municipal councilors, was to make collection cheaper. This effectively turns colored-bin recycling into single stream recycling since the collected items would be later hand sorted at a waste installation site.

¹⁵⁹ See Verdery (1996) and Foucault (1980) on communism, freedom, and power.

¹⁶⁰ See Goffman (1972) on staging.

Recycling company CEOs, local politicians, and environmental activists generally agreed on the fact that mixing separate recycling streams wasn't as problematic as mixing domestic and recycling waste streams. This is because the largest hindrance to recycling was the contamination of packaging waste with biological waste products and moisture. While sorting plastic from metal from cardboard wasn't problematic, sorting cardboard and plastic from "wet waste," or mixed domestic waste, which usually contained food items, was incredibly difficult. Low quality sticky, wet waste couldn't be recovered.

During the interim EU accession period for waste management compliance, which lasted from 2006 and was still in place in 2013, waste was collected separately from mixed waste and colored bins, but brought together to the same sorting facility. There, it was uploaded in batches to a conveyor belt where Romani women sorted it by hand. According to the recycling company CEO, manual labor was still cheaper in Bulgaria than buying Western European, infrared waste sorting technologies. The minimum wage in Bulgaria, at the time my research ended, was still less than 200 euro/month and Roma working in these sorting facilities made about that, which was much more affordable than the up-front expense of infrared technologies for waste separation.

OTHER KINDS OF "REFUSE DERIVED FUEL"

Despite RDF being used in municipal processing for the heating grid, refuse derived fuel has also been studied as a more "homegrown" phenomena. Often, in poor villages and Romani neighborhoods in Bulgaria, residents are not linked to the *toplofikacia* grid, which is available in public housing and only in apartment buildings and residence in the downtown of Sofia. For those living on the outskirts, heat often comes in the form of electric (air conditioner devices), space heaters, or wood-burning and coal-burning stoves. Most Romani families living in Romani

neighborhoods used aluminum stoves for both household heat and cooking needs, moving the entire family into one room where it is located for the winter months.

If a family had enough money in the fall months, they might invest in a few trucks of wood or coal. However, nearly nobody I knew bought cured wood. Most either went into nearby forests to cut down trees or paid horse-carters (*karutzari*), the same ones who used the horse carts for waste collection, to collect wood for them. This “illegal” logging is what heats most Romani neighborhoods and many non-Romani rural villages as well, as wood is used as a locally accessible and communal resource.¹⁶¹ However, for those too poor to buy wood from a *karutzari* and without the bodily means to cut down his/her own wood, garbage can become a source of fuel. It was very common to see tire fires. These are small fires made inside rubber tires both to conduct heat and to burn away the rubber to release the metal interior, which can then be sold as scrap metal.

Once when I was visiting Nadka’s house in *Levanka*, I arrived in the middle of a discussion where the family and their neighbors were shaking their heads in shame. Apparently, Vetka, with whom I often collected and about whom I wrote in the previous chapter, had burned some beautiful wooden furniture she had collected. She had found the wood, gotten someone with a horse-cart to pick it up for her and had been attempting to sell it in the neighborhood. She would sell her wares door to door, bringing with her any small goods she found, having in mind what would fit which member of the family and keeping in mind each family’s needs. After a day of selling when nobody wanted to buy the furniture, Vetka returned home to a cold room. She had no money for coal or wood to use in her stove and instead went onto the street with an axe, breaking apart the furniture so she could burn it to heat her home.

¹⁶¹ See Eran Livni on logging in Bulgaria - also see environmental studies work on deforestation as comparison.

It is with this story that I end a chapter on waste to energy conversion. Vetka converts her own energy, of collecting waste, into waste, which then becomes again heat energy. However, at the same time, local environmental activists cite Romani neighborhoods as being significant sources of air pollution. Activists focus on the burning of coal in badly insulated stoves and open tire fires as major sources of Sofia's urban air pollution.¹⁶² In effect, Roma, faced without options for how to heat their homes, of how to make waste into energy, are themselves stigmatized for polluting the Bulgarian air. Their energy pollutes and, in effect, they are seen as pollutants.¹⁶³

Late into my research an acquaintance gave me an unpublished draft of the National Waste Strategy from March 2012, which laid out a program of public engagement to promote environmentally sustainable waste management. It included information on issuing a set of textual materials on waste management, a summary of the national waste management plan, important legislation on waste management, a brochure for the public on waste contamination, reports on the implementation of the National Waste Management Programme, and "Let's Clean Bulgaria" fliers. It advised that materials should be disseminated to all municipal and regional administrations throughout the country. Beneath this text, it calls for a competition for the "most economical project for cleaning areas polluted with wastes." It specifies that these programs should be carried out by municipalities, non-governmental organizations, schools, and areas with "predominant Gypsy populations." There's nothing that needs to be cleaned more than a Romani neighborhood.

¹⁶² Mostly young men burn rubber tires to make heat and to melt the rubber for easier metal extraction (which can then be sold).

¹⁶³ It must also be noted that it is not just Bulgarian air that is at risk of being polluted. National borders don't apply to air zones. Contamination that happens in water or through earth can be contained in certain ways that air pollution cannot, and this is something important to think through especially in terms of incineration in the European Union. Also see Zee and Choy (2015), Choy (2011), and recent work by Jessica Catellino and Bridget Guarasci on air.

Section III: Substitutions and Inner Transformation

CHAPTER 9: PRODUCING RESPONSIBILITY AND EUROPEAN HABITS

This lunge at moral fastidiousness was something she'd noticed a lot in people around here. They were not good people. They were not kind. But they recycled their newspapers!

-Lorrie Moore, *Birds of America*

In thinking about how change happens, it is important to look both at what changes and what stays the same. I use the example of European-mandated packaging recycling programs rooted in what is termed an “extended producer responsibility” model. I use this notion of “responsibility” as a key term with which to access larger questions of the relationship of habituation and morality to waste practices. I return to what I’ve already discussed regarding how socialist relations to trash are being reinvented as “new” and European and, through that framework, moralized. This moralization is exclusionary, as certain people’s relations with waste mark them as more European than others and from that extends a full range of social, hierarchical categorization.¹⁶⁴ While some people are seen as being part of the European future, others are seen as hindrances to progress. I take this image, of a recycling contained to be emblematic of the problem at hand:

¹⁶⁴ See Povinelli (2002) on metamorphosis of ethical feelings and relations to international kinds of recognition and legitimation, also see Mahmood on habituation and morality (2005), Keane (2011) on ethics, Robbins on suffering and ethics (2014).



Image 32: Yellow recycling bin. Photo by author.

Here, we see a yellow recycling bin intended for plastic and metal. Bins like these used to have open tops, like these:



Image 33: Blue recycling bin. Photo by author.

Various officials from the recycling companies that own the bins told me that the reason for the hole was to “prevent scavengers from taking items.” This bin is indicative of the ways in which Europeanization is believed to happen, through linking the materialities of lived space with the

development of certain kinds of personhood. It is important to understand European practices of self-making and society building with Marxist-Leninist projects in which people were cultivated (and literally built) vis-à-vis material objects and labor projects (Fehervary 2013).

PACKAGING RECOVERY, PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY IN BULGARIA

Colored-bin, separate collection recycling in Bulgaria is based upon a European model that has proven successful in most of Western Europe called “extended producer responsibility.” PROs in Bulgaria, producer responsibility organizations, commonly called “packaging recovery organizations” or “packaging recycling organizations,” are part of an international, European program for packaging recovery. Based on European legislation that started in the 1980s, they focus on the harmonization of packaging recycling across all EU member states.¹⁶⁵ Bulgaria joined the system early in order to prepare for accession.¹⁶⁶ Directive 94/62/EC was the grounding for future regulations on packaging waste, including increasing quotas for amounts of packaging waste to be recovered each year.¹⁶⁷ These regulations on recovery quotas align with EU policy on landfill taxation. As quotas increase for packaging recovery, taxes also increase for landfilled waste, as a means to offer financial incentive for not dumping waste at the landfill.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ See Directive 85/339/EEC, 1994 Directive 94/62/EC

¹⁶⁶ Directive 94/62/EC

¹⁶⁷ This was done by subtracting amounts registered to the Ministry of the Environment and Water of final package recycling from initial (“trade secret”) quantities of products being put on the market, which was registered with the Ministry.

¹⁶⁸ The 1994 directive was updated in 2004 in order to clarify the definition of “packaging” and to increase targets for recovery and recycling of packaging waste. Then, the directive was revised again in order to allocate “transitional periods” for new member states to meet recovery and recycling targets. Further clarifications were made in 2013 and most recently, in 2015, the directive was updated to explicitly discuss “plastic carrier bags,” which were not specified in the original directive. The April 2015 amendment explains: The current consumption levels of plastic carrier bags result in high levels of littering and an inefficient use of resources, and are expected to increase if no action is taken. Littering of plastic carrier bags results in environmental pollution and aggravates the widespread problem of litter in water bodies, threatening aquatic eco-systems worldwide. The directive moves directly into the material qualities of the bags and how those “lightweight” qualities significant impact environmental standards on pollution: Plastic carrier bags with a wall thickness below 50 microns (‘lightweight plastic carrier bags’), which represent the vast majority of the total number of plastic carrier bags consumed in the

Once directives are harmonized through the Ministry of the Environment and Water, they become part of the National Waste Management Plan. In Bulgaria, the National Waste Management Act of 2012 explains in Section II, Article II, what is meant, in practical terms, by “extended producer responsibility.” It states that “the requirements for products which, after use, generate wide spread waste and how to order their separate collection, reuse, recycling and/or utilization, including the separate collection, reuse, recycling and/or utilization should be determined with regulations of the Council of Ministers.” Extended producer responsibility in this framework is designed “to encourage re-use, [waste] prevention, recycling and other utilization of waste.” It includes separate collection (“acceptance of returned products and the waste that remains”) as well as “activities and obligations to provide information to the public the extent to which the product can be re-usable and recyclable.”

STEALING GARBAGE

In an interview with the packaging recovery CEO, Ivan, he elucidated an implicit theory of transformation that actually ran counter to European Union logics of waste reduction and, ironically, actually aligned more with an early socialist waste ideology in which waste is not seen as something to be reduced but as a resource. Instead of talking about “resources,” however, Ivan focuses on criminality. By referring to “scavengers” as criminals, stealing the garbage from his company’s colored bins, he implicitly converts (and revalues) waste in those bins into a

Union, are less frequently reused than thicker plastic carrier bags. Consequently, lightweight plastic carrier bags become waste more quickly and are more prone to littering due to their lightweight.

The directive suggests a focus on using biodegradable and compostable bags, as well as on taxing their usage.

resource. In doing so he articulates a mode of capitalist transformation in which there is no temporal lag between material and its conversion into money.¹⁶⁹

Each producer of a packaged good that goes on the market is responsible for that item's packaging, from the moment it enters the country until it is collected, sorted, and sent to a factory for recycling. Since most firms become shareholders in packaging recovery organizations (PROs), the PRO framework is incredibly important to understanding recycling in Europe. PRO Europe, one international PRO group founded in 1995, functions as “an umbrella organization for European packaging and packaging waste recovery” and uses “Green Dot” labeling as “the financing symbol for the organization of recovery, sorting and recycling of sale packaging.”¹⁷⁰ For a company to enter a PRO as a “shareholder” costs depend upon a variety of factors. These factors include the system of waste management that preceded the PRO framework, national recycling quotas, “effects of derogations,” the system of collection (curbside vs. “bring”), country-specific labor costs, and the costs of enforcement. Since producing companies enter the PROs as shareholders, the more companies that enter, the more financial costs that are shared between them. What this amounts to in practice is a consolidation of the “paks,” as they are commonly called in Bulgaria (since all of the names of the PROs end in the letters “pak” to denote packaging). Smaller PROs either fail or are subsumed by larger PROs that have contracts with large companies, so that the larger firms can bear more of the costs for the smaller companies, which enter with much small.

It is easiest to understand the PRO system by starting with the example of a beverage company, which I call “Snazzle.” Snazzle produces drinks and packages them in glass

¹⁶⁹ This was echoed in my discussions with informal recyclable collectors as well. However, this is not particular to the Bulgarian context. Josh Reno witnessed similar cognitive transformations from waste to money (2016).

¹⁷⁰ It should be noted that only one of the two major PROs in Sofia is part of this organization.

containers, plastic containers, and cans. However, due to the low price of plastic recovery and import fees, Snazzle focuses on plastic containers. They now produce plastic containers with reduced weight, knowing that they are responsible for its recovery (in tons): Snazzle, because of European producer responsibility legislation, must account for the recovery and recycling of all of the glass bottles, plastic bottles, and cans in which it sells its beverage. And so, Snazzle has a few options:

- 1) Snazzle can do its own recovery, finding ways to obtain as much as the discarded packaging from items put on the market and then shipping these materials to recycling plants. They must report numbers, to be verified, annually to the Bulgarian Ministry of the Environment and Water. Quotas are set by the European Commission but must be adhered to with extensive documentation from the Ministry of the Environment and Water.
- 2) Snazzle can contract to a PRO, or packaging recovery organization, which is responsible for promoting awareness of separate collection, collecting the packaging, sending it to a verified recycling company, and submitting all documentation to the Ministry of the Environment and Water. In this case, Snazzle is deemed a “shareholder” in the PRO and only the PRO knows how many items Snazzle is putting on the market/per year, as this is typically a trade secret.

Most producers choose the second option since they don't have the infrastructure or funding to work on its own system of packaging recovery. It is often much easier and more cost effective to become a shareholder of an already-established PRO.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ See history of PROs in Maria Velkova's dissertation (2003).

The PRO makes a profit based upon the amount of recyclables they collect in their bins and the price at which they can sell them as raw materials to recycling factories, either in Bulgaria or abroad.¹⁷² The PROs must be licensed by the Ministry of the Environment and Water, who makes sure all legislation is “harmonized” with that of the European Union and all reporting is done directly to the Ministry, who also can sanction the PRO if quotas aren’t met or there are any breaches in the contract. These PROs are also mandated to conduct public outreach campaigns.

Ivan explained that 49% of the market shares in his organization were owned by a large beverage producer. Since his organization was responsible for the packaging recovery of these items throughout the country, he subcontracted out to small firms to install, collect, and sort the waste (like Deyan’s subcontracted PRO collection site that I discussed earlier). These companies also own or subcontract out to manual sorting facilities, where humans (typically Romani women) work in 12-hour shifts sorting waste that comes in from the colored separate container vessels and with the speed of the moving conveyor belt, takes items from different categories (plastic, metal, glass) drops them down a shoot to a bin below. This manual sorting is necessary because the colored bins often contain mixed waste.

The colored containers, despite having labels and being laid out at intervals along city streets mandated by municipal structures, are often used as mixed waste receptacles. As I mentioned earlier, many urban residents of Sofia explained that there was no point to separating their waste because the waste “all went to the same place.”¹⁷³ Others, namely PRO workers, believed that the waste was mixed up by the scavengers who haphazardly sorted through bins

¹⁷² Decisions to sell recyclables in Bulgaria or ship them depended month to month on international prices. Selling abroad (usually to Romania or Turkey) still enabled PROs to meet their Ministry-mandated reporting requirement as part of their “extended producer responsibility.”

¹⁷³ See earlier section on “futility.”

and ruined any semblance of organization. Others, including ministry and municipal officials, saw the problem as one of inadequate education of citizens and citizens' biases against separate collection as anti-modern, "communist" vestige. Lastly, others, namely European consultants, explained that the bins weren't placed at accurate intervals and so, from the start, weren't conducive to separation.

According to Ivan, the most difficult part of separate collection is "to actually persuade the people to throw the different kind of waste into the right container" and "the second most difficult part is stopping the scavengers from doing what they do.... I mean we have no way to stop them for now of stealing waste from the sorting containers and selling it for money....[at collection] points where they buy up the waste. I consider this the most difficult. Everything else can be done according to plan, but not this." I followed up, "So, I want to ask you about these scavengers, who actually collect waste on their own to..." but was immediately interrupted as he corrected me, "they are not collecting it; they are stealing it."

He explained that after the scavengers "steal" waste from the colored bins, they sell it at collection points that are ubiquitous throughout the country. He tried to explain the problem to me. "It means we are paying double. It's how things work at the moment, but this is not the way the system should be. The waste that goes into our containers becomes our property. So basically when they take the waste out of the containers they are stealing it, aren't they?" I began to ask more questions and he again interrupted, "The municipalities are responsible in the first place, because there are no sanctions for the scavengers and no one is stopping them. And second—those who have buy-up collection points are to be blamed because they are buying waste illegally and they are paying to the people that bring it to them on top of that. Because the scavengers obviously can't generate so much waste on their own. They are stealing it. That's it."

I explained that these collection points, according to my research, are legal and most are registered with local municipalities and national business registries. He responded, “They have registration for their activities and that is good. But tell me, how can they buy from scavengers without any fiscal notice or without the machine that gives you a receipt for buying something? They don't even ask scavengers where they got all that waste from.” I pushed a bit more, asking whether it would be illegal for me to take my own garbage to one of these points.

Ivan: You can but that depends on how many kilograms of it you can gather. How much can you really gather, 1Kg?

Elana: Well, yes...

I: Well that's it. Now imagine how those are selling 100kg everyday. Everyday!

E: You mean 100kg, per person?

I: Yes. That's what scavengers do. They steal and they sell it after...

E: In your view what's the best avenue for handling this?

I: Of course there must be a clear law. And there must be those who respect the law...we have already spoken with the Ministry [of the Environment and Water], of course so they can make some laws for those people, so they won't be able to do that anymore, to sell waste. The law should be organized so that all waste can be turned in for free...And yet again, in between all the laws there are still illegal buy up points where you get paid when you turn plastics, paper and such. And, the Ministry is not doing anything. They are saying this is social problem, not theirs. Scavengers are often homeless and without work, so for [these] people it is their way of making some profit actually, that's why no one is taking any measures against it.

E: What about a program...

I: But this is not our job, this is something that should be arranged by the Ministry that is dealing with social affairs. The government has no official position considering this case because it's very complicated and delicate.

Ivan went on to explain that about 35% of all waste collected by his firm is bought from these collection points [*punktove*]. Although 35% is still a significant amount, I heard Ivan quote

the percentage to be double in other more public forums. One PRO leader told me the amount was as high as 90%. This number is very difficult to track but NGOs have tried as well, also finding the percentage to be over 60%. Ivan explained that the percentage of re-bought waste used to be higher in cities but now it is about the same everywhere. These collection point managers approach his firm and offer the waste they have collected from the scavengers and “we buy it, because whether like it or not, we have to complete certain [EU-mandated] goals.” Ivan’s firm has been meeting its goals for the past nine years (i.e. from their inception in 2004) but only because of the waste that they rebuy from these collection points.

According to Ivan, buying from collection points where scavengers sell collected items has always been an issue but is increasingly more prominent. “It is because the prices of the materials the waste consists of are high. And the scavengers are only waiting to find a container to take everything from it.” In other words, due to rising prices on the international raw materials market, scavenging has become more lucrative. Additionally, he explained, “Five or six years ago scavengers were small number, now they are many. And, it's because what they are doing is an easy way to get money. It is very simple - you go and steal something, no one tells you anything against it, no one controls you, you go and sell it in the right places and you get your money.”

I pointed out what he mentioned before, that this is actually due, in large part, to the fact that many people don't throw their domestic waste in colored bin containers. He concurred and explained that although this is the case, “More people now are better informed about separate waste management and more people are sorting their waste. But,” he added, “When people are throwing the different kinds of waste into the right containers for that purpose and they see that scavengers are taking it away, they get very demotivated, don't you think so? It's like you are

working for the scavengers.” I asked if he thinks the lack of separation from the individual level is due to a kind of demotivation. He replied, “This is most certainly the case. But that [explanation] is valid only for those people of the population that actually sort their waste. There is always the kind of people that don't sort waste and they throw it away like that.”

I pressed Ivan to think about other ways of making the system more efficient, questioning the use of taxes as sanctions. In response, he explained that most people don't even understand their waste tax in the first place so making it higher wouldn't help. Despite this approach, in meetings of Sofia Municipality's taskforce for the environment that I attended, it became clear that there were certain politicians who focused on changing the tax structures in order to simulate a sanction, where people were taxed for the actual amount they discarded instead of based on the square meter size of their apartment (which was the current law). Although making people pay taxes based on the amount of non-recyclable waste they discarded made sense, opponents of this suggested that Bulgarians would be Bulgarian. They explained that “in typical Bulgarian fashion,” people would find “alternative” ways to dispose of their waste and not pay their taxes, citing the ways shops used waste bins permitted only for individual residents in order to avoid paying for their own waste collection.

Local CEOs of EU-mandated packaging recovery organizations, in focusing on Roma thievery” of the informal recyclers, or scavengers [*kloshari*], who collect from the colored bins, actually categorize trash much like the socialist state did. That is, they cite waste not as “waste” but as a resource. Conversion is instantaneous, as though the category of waste doesn't actually exist, even in temporary terms.¹⁷⁴

IF IT ALL GOES TO ONE PLACE, WHY SEPARATE? HABIT!

¹⁷⁴ The temporality of material conversions and the rate of conversion seem linked to different economic regimes.

When I asked Ivan why he didn't just focus on single-stream recycling since it was clear that mixing recycling streams wasn't problematic; he explained that the colored bins were a key materials in a process of habituation. Getting Bulgarians "used to recycling" in separately colored containers would, in the eyes of most recycling businessmen and local politicians, eventually lead to a culture of recycling. Ivan's sentiment was echoed in my interviews and discussions with Ministry officials, municipal representatives, and other recycling company employees when I asked why they spent so much time, money, and energy on promoting separate collection when they knew they would all be sorted by hand at an installation site. "Habit," was the answer I nearly always received. Although many Bulgarian citizens of a certain age had been brought up to recycle, the younger generation was the group most targeted by PRO campaigns.

Ivan he explained that more educational campaigns were necessary but thus far only his firm, not the municipality nor the ministry, was conducting them in public schools:

Look, this is a question of culture and education. People need a lot of time to learn something. And it is mainly because there are no sanctions for it. People learn way better then they are actually punished for not doing something right. For example, five years ago in Bulgaria no one was putting their seatbelts on while driving. But when strict sanctions were put on that, and when they caught you without a seat belt, you had to pay a lot of money. And after one year, for example, you start doing it because it has become a habit. At the moment if you throw your rubbish out of the window, no one will do anything to you, right? So why should you separate your waste? No one will do anything to you if you don't. And for me this is the most important thing. People should be well informed in the first place and it is our responsibility to teach them as well how to do it in the right way. But at the same time if there are no sanctions, those who don't have the morale to do it, will not. And it's hard, because we really do everything possible to keep people informed about all, but they are not obliged to do it.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ When I followed up to ask why he didn't think a deposit system could work, he explained: "That is a very complicated system that forces the population, since it is the very first one presented and has very little in common with the sorting waste system. The idea of separate waste management is based on sorting the waste is different types of containers. The deposit system is based in such way that when you are buying something in a bottle or in a plastic wrap and etc. you are actually paying extra money for the bottle/wrapping. You can get your all of your money back after returning the said objects back. It's considered more complicated system that requires bigger quantity of resources. And in the end the population will be paying more. Then who will actually work with that

For Ivan, campaigns were important, especially the annual campaigns that focused on the collection of specific items, like books or old refrigerators.¹⁷⁶ However, he was certain to always make clear that without sanctions for mixing waste and without a law against scavengers, “the system will not be as efficient as we want it [to be].”

Habit, for Ivan and for officials in the Ministry of the Environment and Water that I knew, was what needed to be developed in order to shift the recycling market. The notion among recycling and waste management company officials was that if Bulgarians were trained to develop new waste separation habits, colored bins would be used more like Western European ones. This would mean that Bulgarian citizens would dispose of their waste in colored bins, which would then be delivered to facilities for recycling. It would eliminate the role of scavengers in going through mix-waste bins and separating out recyclable goods, which are then sold to middle men and bought by European-mandated packaging recycling organizations to meet EU standards. Effectively, creating new “European” separate disposal habits among Bulgarian citizens would be much more cost effective for recycling companies.¹⁷⁷

In thinking about cultivating specific waste disposal and recycling habits, it is useful to think through anthropological understandings of habit and habitus. Peirce and Aristotle describe habits and habitus, respectively, as part of a process of self-formation, in which certain ways of being come from the world and move into the world. It is as though Ivan functions from a sense

system? It can mainly be used by all kinds of bigger and smaller shops and there is serious lack of organization. But here the question is not only about the shops/supermarkets. The question is also about the manufacturer of plastic/glass bottles and packing. Although many of the countries in which this system is functioning or have ever functioned are giving up on it because it is not efficient and in the same time requires a lot of resources.”

¹⁷⁶ This is also connected to the annual “Clean Bulgarian in One Day” campaigns that I studied.

¹⁷⁷ This notion of habit could be better understood if we refer to E. Valentine Daniel’s approach to Peircean “habits” and Bourdieu’s “habitus.” (1984, 25). For Peirce, habits are not “instinctual” if we think of instinctual to be in the realm of the “noninferential” or “natural” (1972:78, in Daniel, 25). Rather, for Peirce, habits are part of processes of generative signification, which are inevitably always mediated (and often triangulated). Daniel makes the point that habits are perfect examples of Peircean thirdness and moves into a discussion about the “signs of habit” that are always there but must be “shocked” into consciousness.

of habitus not far from the Aristotelian notion that habitus can be learned and becomes part of an ethical selfhood. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains, “moral virtue comes about as a result of habit.” He uses the example of state structure to explain the teaching of habit: “for legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator” (21).

Within an EU framework, how someone handles waste is becomes moralized within a framework of social categorization. We see resonances of the moral implications of waste discard in this ethnographic account of Bulgaria’s “European transformation,” as we also see in contexts of “dumpster-diving” and progressive green politics. Ivan makes an interesting shift in linking discard “habits” to something that is learned through sanctions, citing seatbelt wearing as a prime example of the way Bulgarians were disciplined into a new kind of habit. He asks the rhetorical question of why people would separate their waste instead of “throwing it out the window” if there is “no one to do anything to you.” With practice, it becomes a habit, but not without necessary information, learning, and punishment. Ivan uses the term “moral” to explain what causes people to separate: “But at the same time if there are no sanctions, those who don't have the morals to do it will not. And it's hard, because we really do everything possible to keep people informed about all [of it], but they are not obliged to do it.”

Ivan is part of an economic structure in which recycling equals income for his company. Public outreach is part of the mandate for a PRO, based in European legislation. What this means, in practice, is that most PROs go to local elementary schools, show a video about consumption, discard, and the afterlife of consumable objects to young school children. I accompanied one recycling PRO on this kind of outreach.

In this public outreach video, there is young, attractive, well-dressed Bulgarian woman who takes the audience on a journey from the household garbage container to the landfill, where there actually happen to be informal collectors working as part of the backdrop. After the children watch the video, they play a game where they answer questions related to the video. Then they play “recycling.” They are given balloons in the color of the separate bin containers (yellow, green, blue) and asked questions through which processes they have to sort themselves based on material.¹⁷⁸

TRANSFORMING HABIT

Children are often seen as a means to moral change. Whereas previous generations have been “tainted,” by the political systems in which they came of age, by the errors of the past, by lingering nostalgias and related interpretations of the present, children are often seen as the road to the future. Change happens in children, especially when that change is linked to ideologies of civility and morality. We see this discourse coming up again in the final section of the dissertation when I focus on the role of evangelicals helping people come to a childlike state in which they are pre-vocal and “born again.” This focus on children takes shape in international programs on human rights, ecological development, and in Bulgaria, is very deeply implicated in European funding priorities for Romani integration (which focus almost exclusively on Romani children.) This focus on children is often believed not only to be more effective but also easier to measure, which becomes incredibly significant for European funding structures.¹⁷⁹ Education

¹⁷⁸ Links can be made here between social categorization and garbage categorization.

¹⁷⁹ See work about numbers, measurements – see Lampland and Starr (2009).

and children's programs are part of a larger project of Europeanization, in which future-oriented programming is focused on the "next" generation.¹⁸⁰

I address habit here as a means of thinking about change. Until this point I have addressed how change happens, the ways in which transformation occurs, from socialism to postsocialism to Europeanization. This includes the ways in which plastic bottles are immediately converted into cash value in the framework of a capitalist recycling framework. However, we cannot ignore the other side of transformation: stasis. Agents of stasis include the material environment, which is too sturdy to fade away but there are also agents of stasis within the self.

In thinking of Mauss's understanding of habitus, from which Bourdieu draws, people acquire and learn the techniques of the body differently in different places and this is part of developmental processes; by the time people reach adolescence they learn the body techniques that will stay with them for their whole lives (80). Habitus, for Mauss, consists of the "physio-psycho-sociological assemblages" of actions that are "assembled by and for social authority" (85). Mauss elucidates series of body techniques, from walking to running to sleeping to "hygiene in the needs of nature" ("Here, I could list innumerable facts for you") (471). Using these techniques, he concludes, "We are everywhere faced with physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of actions." These actions are "more or less habitual and more or less ancient in the life of the individual and the history of society" (471). Habitus is social. Bourdieu explains that although habitus is somewhere below the threshold of awareness, there is a kind of forgetting of the history that produced it (79). With this in mind and in line with Mauss's descriptions, we must look at "techniques of handling waste" as part and parcel of habitus. And,

¹⁸⁰ I have a separate paper (in-progress) focused on European Union initiatives that target both Romani children and focus on Romani women's birth control, linking into larger populist-politic concerns about Bulgarian demographic issues.

in line with Aristotle, these techniques are a learned part an ethical framework. This involves social education and ideologies of progress in terms of both morality and the linked notion of Europeanization.

The spokesperson in the waste video narrates her surrounding to the young audience from the screen—trash collectors bent over and hauling recyclables behind her—explaining, “Trust me it stinks here.”



Image 34: Still from film, with watermark.

She is effectively narrating a moral claim about both proximities to waste and sensory experiences of garbage. It stinks. It is not for you children. You should recycle. The moral imperative to recycle is also couched a distance from the ends of waste, which we cannot see except on the screen. As Ivan explains that “sanctions” are needed, he also cites a common refrain, that only the morally upstanding separate the trash.¹⁸¹ Children are seen as the potential sources of new habits, which still *can* be cultivated.

¹⁸¹ This is also linked with socialist valorizing of similar kinds of waste practices although not through a language of morality, but communality, and a dedication to the state.

While the “morally upstanding” Bulgarian citizen who separates her waste and never comes into bodily contact with the landfill, is on one end of the spectrum, the Roma waste worker is on the other side. In between are those Bulgarians who either have too deep a sense of futility to recycle or those for whom progress means “freely” throwing things away “where they want to.” I’d often visit friends and ask where they kept their recycling. The common answer I received was, “It’s not worth it. It all goes to the same place.” I wasn’t often explicitly told that discard felt like freedom, but when I asked specifically about recycling, on more than one occasion someone from the older generation would explain that they didn’t have to “do that” anymore. The discourse of European progress presumes a backwardness of the past in which old habits have to be eradicated to make room for new, European moral ones. But, if we look closer at the history it becomes clear that the “habit” of recycling was once there, and perhaps it is “freedom” to discard that is actually what needs to be overcome.¹⁸²

¹⁸² This comes up especially in terms of freedom vs. anarchy. In one interview with a middle-aged Bulgarian language teacher told me: [Since joining the EU] They [“Gypsies”] want more and more money. For what? No skills. No education. Their arrogance came from the idea in EU and many organizations are defending their rights, helping them, giving them opportunities and they started to feel more powerful. During socialism it was another way. They were afraid, probably isolated. For example, I’m irritated by these horse-carts. It’s not supposed to be in a city! I’ve never seen it [anywhere else] but it became very popular with democracy- begging....in communism it was impossible. Police would take and beat them or I don’t know... They were afraid. It was the truth. It such a clean capital then, not such a big city. We knew our obligations. Now we are free to do whatever we want in all sectors. Drivers, policemen, pedestrians. Everyone is completely ‘free.’ Not freedom really, it’s anarchy.

CHAPTER 10: HE, WHO PROVIDES AND SUBSTITUTES

ESCAPING TO CHURCH

“Oh Elana, you have to come with us, Sunday, Ok?” It was a particularly raunchy day at work, and I had been sweeping the streets with Dona “hanjaliata” (Dona, “the horny one”). Like a child, or badly trained circus animal, I performed my new lexicon when I met up with the whole team of women after spending the afternoon alone, sweeping with Dona. Dona was easily bored by conversation that didn’t include sexual punning. “How’s your broom, Elana, hard enough for you today?” I often, sleepy at 5:30 in the morning when we convened, didn’t get the joke, which made the group of bystanding colleagues roar with laughter. The less I understood, the more humorously naïve they took me to be and only after a full day alone with Dona could I shoot back, asking them to their amusement and surprise, in Romani, if they were rushing home to “eat dick” since they must be starving after the long day of sweeping.

After leaving with the last word, nearly skipping to the tram station with satisfaction, I ran into a few of my older colleagues who lived in the “other” Romani neighborhood, the one where I had been spending most of my free time. They took me aside and explained that not all of them are as filthy-mouthed as “some other colleagues” and that I should really come see how *they* live, come eat in their homes, and more importantly, visit their churches. It was clear they wanted to shape my experience as much as Dona did. I explained that I had been attending a church for years in Sofia, when I had time on a Sunday morning and wanted to connect with friends. Looking relieved, they said I should continue to attend but also join them, hear their worship music, and meet their pastors who sing beautifully.

Pentecostal churches function, for many Roma, as both a sensory escape from the material world of waste labor and a space in which their sense of human potential is restored. While material transformation is part of the world of daily waste labor, it is in the realm of the spiritual that Roma experience the possibility of human transcendence, transformation, and metamorphosis.

Here, I come back to *habitus* for a moment to focus on spiritual transformation and the way it takes shape in the body. Mahmood lays the groundwork for this section as she explains why theologians might be keen to interpret *habitus* as involving learned ways of being that emphasize “human activity and deliberation rather than divine grace or will as determinants of moral conduct.” “Both vices and virtues in this understanding—insofar as they are considered products of human endeavor, rather than revelatory experience or natural temperament—are acquired through the repeated performance of actions that entail a particular virtue or vice, until all behavior comes to be regulated by the *habitus*” (136-37). Despite working in a different place and with a very different set of religious ideals and practices, Mahmood’s analysis is incredibly useful to think with.

I explore how the material-social world in which people live intersects with specific avenues of spirituality. This in turn affects how people relate to their labor, their material living conditions, the state, and each other. I witnessed throughout my research that despite structural and everyday racisms, post-Fordist labor systems in which certain bodies and sets of skills have less value than others, and a political environment in which former builders are now criminalized as “scrapers” and diminished as social “waste,” people are trying to make the best of their conditions.

For many, this means trying to find joy, escape, and a sense of effervescence however and wherever they can. I explore evangelical Christianity as an important social force among the people with whom I worked. For many, Christianity served as a source of potentiality. In the church, my friends would explain, “you are free.” Although not everyone I worked with and knew attended church on a weekly basis, they explained that there “should always been time for god” and that they wished they could go more. However, my activist friends saw the presence of evangelical Christianity in Romani neighborhoods much more alienating. They saw their own efforts, in political activism, as being replaced and uprooted by the church. With the growing popularity of the churches, NGOs no longer served as the site for collectivization

Some NGO activists actually criticized the church for the same reason many believers joined. That is, because Christian spirituality (they don’t call it religion) provided avenues towards new kinds of progress, hope, and forms of embodiment (or habitus) in which infrastructural lack is replaced with spiritual abundance, and dehumanization makes room for laughter. While the activists wished Romani neighborhood residents would turn to politics, it seemed that for churchgoers it was exactly this substitution that was so appealing.

In this process temporality itself is reconfigured. Thus far, I’ve been referring to felt experiences of time, expectations of progress, historical time, political shifts, but in these chapters, I draw on Christian senses of temporality as well. Evangelical churches even create temporal structure that substitutes and goes against the grain of many other societal—political, economic, Orthodox Christian—forces that focus on a revert back to the pre-communist “normal”. It is not a historical “cutting” that happens, which Verdery discusses as emblematic of

post-socialist reconstructions of history and to which many scholars refer, in the case of such religiosity, as a break with the past but they attempt to make a *break with the present*.¹⁸³

Instead, these Evangelical Churches create a sense of care, safety, and moral responsibility, which evokes those attributes of state socialism in ways that people are deeply familiar with—and often long for. Evangelical Christianity evokes romantic imaginings of a socialist past, the articulation of a tightly woven social net—in which the poor are cared for, ethnic groups unite, and belief in something larger than oneself is the fastest and most successful path to salvation. We see similar things happening among Muslim communities in Bulgaria in which continuities arise between “newly imported Islamic theologies and familiar, old communist ideologies” (Ghodsee 2010, 27). The all-encompassing energy of new religious movements evokes affective means of sociality and the kind of collective care that state socialism promised and provided. In this framework, Evangelical churches bring to life the good part of communism, as remembered through nostalgia, articulated within the framework of democratic freedom and the promises of European progress.

Like these older, more proper colleagues, even Dona “hanjaliata,” attended church when she could. Every Romani neighborhood in Bulgaria houses tens or hundreds of churches, mostly of the charismatic Pentecostal variety but also weaves Jehovah’s witnesses and other non-charismatic Protestant denominations into the landscape. As I began fieldwork in Sofia, on waste collection, I often found myself unsure of how to speak with people going through trash. I had become accustomed to meeting people through existing networks but from time to time I’d see someone collecting garbage on the street in a particularly interesting way. Once, while drinking a coffee at the downtown Starbucks I saw a man enter and go into the back room where

¹⁸³ See McGovern 2012, Guyer, Verdery.

he proceeded to haul out load upon load of cardboard boxes. I approached him and asked if I could help, to which he laughed. I was there, with my laptop, purse, and paper cup in hand feeling slightly embarrassed by our juxtapositions but trying to talk through the awkward encounter.

I explained my research to him and introduced myself. He was wary. Finally, I asked him where he was from and what church he went to. He smiled with a sense of relief. He explained that he went to Pastor Steven's church in Haji Dimitar, his sister's (Romani) neighborhood, since he was living with her while he worked and supported his family still in a village in northern Bulgaria. He told me that in his hometown he even played drums in the church band.

I had been to many churches by that point and asked him about the second-floor home church in Haji Dimitar I attended with friends a few years back, to which he animatedly described as being down the block from his cousin's house. Romani neighborhood geography often happened by way of church locations. If I wanted to get to know someone from work better, I soon realized that asking to accompany them to church was the best way. It was for many Romani women, a place they could go and meet with friends (or me) without having to worry about paying for anything or be hassled by family members or husbands. It was a space that also helped many women to feel empowered, as they became part of churches with members abroad who would visit from time to time or even Skype them from home and listen to worship music together.

At the beginning of fieldwork, Neli, who was formerly Misho's office cleaner, would often call me repeatedly in states of sheer panic and convince me to come over, at typically inopportune times. One time, when a friend was visiting, Neli called and said it was an

emergency and I needed to come over *immediately*. I put on rain boots, grabbed my umbrella and took the bus in a downpour to the edge of the Romani neighborhood where she lived and walked through the mud until I reached her home, sopping wet. “Mrs. Vagina” (as she called me), “You’re like a wet dog, we need to fix your hair. I have someone on Skype for you. He speaks your language. He is very sexy too.” She turned on her television screen to which her son had attached a laptop and on Skype there was a Dutch man affiliated with her church along with a distant Roma relative of hers visiting him. It was unclear how this would help me find a husband, but Neli was excited to have English-speaking foreigner friends she could introduce me to.

Nearly all of the Romani people I met, worked, or befriended who lived in Romani neighborhoods attended Pentecostal church services. As I circulated between churches with of my garbage-collecting and street-sweeping colleagues as a part of weekend socializing, I also attended one church more regularly that met in a multi-purpose building in the more upscale section of Sofia. Led by two Bulgarians who had been practicing Christians, covertly, under the radar of the communist regime only to later find themselves in the mess of competitive church activity that hit in the 1990s when Evangelical churches spread rapidly throughout Bulgaria, One Life had a unique demographic. The pastors were ethnic Bulgarian but closely affiliated with and funded by American donors associated with Universal Jubilation, a church founded and led by Victor, a Bulgarian-American former socialist rock star and Evie, his Californian wife. One Life was a local partner of many other, smaller Romani congregations that, over time, mostly dissolved and coalesced within Sofia to form the church I attended. It was about fifty-percent Romani and fifty-percent middle-class non-Romani Bulgarians.

Services, like many of the evangelical Pentecostal tradition, focuses on worship through music. In these churches, many congregants are themselves professional musicians and so they contribute to the congregations by singing or playing on the pulpit, often American Christian songs translated into Bulgarian and/or Romani. Romani Christian music has become so widespread that at the year Roma day celebrations on April 8th, held at the Bulgarian Palace of Culture, one of the major draws were famous Romani pastors singing Christian songs on stage beside scantily clad pop-folk superstars.

REPLACEMENTS

Churches like One Life try to replace old “Gypsy” music with worship music. Struggles often ensued about how to dance to the music, which incorporate traditional pop-folk and *kuchek* (commonly translated as belly-dancing) rhythms. Typically, Romani children learn how to dance at home from a young age, which involves shaking of the hips and the baring of the belly. This, along with other traditional Christian Romani celebrations, including the St. George’s day slaughtering of a white lamb and Easter egg dyeing, have been shunned by evangelical churches. These traditions, while connected to old Orthodox Christian rituals, are deeply embedded into Romani understandings of their own cultural heritage. Inside Romani neighborhoods on certain holidays, especially St. George’s day, the streets have been traditionally filled with celebrators and lamb blood. However, over the past ten years, Romani traditions have taken a sideline to evangelical ones that emphasize breaks with the past, in order to be reborn. That is, Bulgarian church pastors tend to introduce American holidays, like Thanksgiving, while working with congregants on breaking from their Romani traditions in order to create a more holy life. Ani and Kristian, two friends living in *Levanka*, explained to me that on holidays to which they are emotionally tied, like Orthodox Easter, they take the children to the mall and buy them

McDonalds. This prevents the children from becoming jealous of their non-Christian friends and also helps them to be less sad about not celebrating.¹⁸⁴

Evangelical churches enter into Romani neighborhoods and are constantly finding ways to demarcate what being reborn means in the everyday. Like Ani and Kristian's method of replacing Easter egg traditions with McDonalds, pastors also focus on substitution. Evangelical churches even create temporal structure that substitutes and goes against the grain of many other societal—political, economic, Orthodox Christian—forces that focus on a revert back to the pre-communist “normal.” They attempt to reconfigure a new set of subjectivities based in new sense of past, present, and future.¹⁸⁵

Evangelical Christianity in postsocialist spaces needs to be considered outside of the realm of evangelical Christianity, as many Americans think of it. While some Protestant missionaries proposed the separation of human subjects from material objects, in order to dematerialize the world enough for moral transformation, evangelical churches in Bulgaria actually work within a different framework: that of substitution.¹⁸⁶ Moral transformation depends on replacement, of the material for the immaterial, of hope for bread, of spiritual bliss for alcohol, of light of god for electricity, of the warmth of Jesus's love for heat.¹⁸⁷ And all in all, these things serve as substitutions for the time of glory that most participants remember—the utility-providing socialist state.

SPIRITUAL SUBSTITUTIONS FOR MATERIAL THINGS

¹⁸⁴ This has echoes in it of the Soviet appropriation of the Orthodox Christian calendar, shifting focus from Christmas to New Year, from the religiously associated Santa Claus to secular Diado Mraz (Grandfather Winter).

¹⁸⁵ See Guyer, McGovern, here on time.

¹⁸⁶ See Keane (2007) on Protestant relations to material things vs. human subjects

¹⁸⁷ Alaina raised an interesting point here that I still need to work through: Is it possible to see these substitutions as also distinguishing/separating material from immaterial?

It's not all metaphor--the material matters. Pastors try to fill hungry stomachs with the food that *is* Jesus. At certain moments the material and the metaphor intertwine (at soup kitchen feedings) but often the metaphor is actually materialized in belief. Replacing the paternalistic socialist state, evangelical churches focus on aiding what was lost when the system fell: public goods. And in doing so, they not only substitute the material resources congregants once had with immaterial ones they can provide but they also redirect people's hope for the socialist state. As I have already mentioned, many Roma people alive during socialism, as well as their children, talk about the socialist past as not a time when they were "supported" by the state, but when they could live a "normal," life. They could afford bread and meat and electricity and public transportation and most important, everyone could find work. During that time in the past, they had a future.

Evangelical Christians tap into this Romani nostalgia for a socialist past by making alignments between the resurrection of Jesus, the coming back of a socialist time when public utilities were accessible and the future was planned. Here we see that the evangelical churches constantly slip between the material and the "supernatural" because they are constantly mediating between religious doctrine, funding-based needs for congregation expansion, and certain ideas of what it means to transform.

Church pastors believe they are religiously purifying their Romani congregants through a process of substitution. Addictions are kicked and replaced. Lacking material goods--and the accompanying impetus to steal, cheat or fight--are substituted with the word of god. As pastors promote the substitution of the paternalistic care of the socialist state with the fatherly love of God, what they are really doing is substituting the present with a future in which hope hasn't died and people are cared for.

PRACTICES OF SUBSTITUTIVE REPLACEMENT

I first witnessed these practices of substitution with Pastor Mitko, leader of One Life church, the same place I met Kristian and Ani. However, I rarely saw them in Church. They laughed that I was in church more than they were. When I'd see them at church, they were deeply involved and Kristian would play on stage as Pastor Mitko and Maria preached and visiting pastors would take turns at the pulpit and all visitors were called up to say a few words each service. One Life met in a multi-purpose building in the high-end section of Sofia, near embassies and newly constructed luxury apartment buildings. Some services were small, only extended making it out, while others involved Romani congregants from neighborhoods throughout Sofia. Mitko often used metaphors in order to relate biblical verses to his audience.

Pastor Mitko and Maria were both Protestants during socialism. During a period when Evangelical churches were “underground,” sometimes literally, Romani neighborhoods served as ideal physical locations for gatherings, since even during that period they remained less policed than other areas (see Verdery, Lemon, work on policing of urban space).¹⁸⁸ It wasn't until 1990, Mitko explained, that a movement began. Evangelicals animatedly recounted marched down the streets of Sofia, finally able to embrace their spirituality in the public sphere.

It was winter of 2011 when I started attending church services regularly with One Life. There is a large population of people who once lived in *Deyanov Mahala*, a Romani neighborhood that was evacuated in order to build a large *IKA* Supermarket in 2001 [you will have already been introduced to Deyanov Mahala in the sweeping chapter]. Mitko and Maria had been working with this population for years and helped them to deal with their infrastructural difficulties and inadequate housing both by providing charity and spiritual

¹⁸⁸ Here I need to cite recorded interviews about the life histories of the pastors and Bulgarian-language work on the history of evangelical Christianity in Bulgaria and in Romani neighborhoods.

“abundance.” As a means of relating to the audience, which is comprised of range of competencies when it comes to reading and writing, Mitko pulls out props in order to get the service started. He has a loaf of bread, a bottle of water, a jar of honey and a headlamp. He puts the headlamp on his head, eliciting laughter. He explains that Jesus is light and lights the path so we don’t “fall into the holes.” The congregation laughs in recognition of the potholes in their neighborhoods and throughout Sofia. Jesus is warmth he explains, to warm us when we are cold and have no heat. God’s word he explains is like food. He holds up the loaf of bread and explains that God’s love is like the bread as he notes the word for bread in Bulgarian, Greece, Romani, and English. “The Bible is food and drink.” “Belief,” he explains “is the water of life that runs through him. We need the word of God. Water is the gift.” He declares, “when we are thirsty for water, we are thirsty for Jesus.” The congregation nods and giggles. Then Mitko goes on to play a YouTube video on the screen in the worship room.¹⁸⁹ People listen and watch, although the subtitles make it hard for everyone to understand. He proceeds to discuss the census. He explains that on the Bulgarian census there are different kinds of Christianity and it is important to put “Protestant.”

The census is problematic for many people in Bulgaria, afraid and cynical of state authority. However, for Roma populations, many of whom are illiterate, the census is even more daunting.¹⁹⁰ Mitko explained to me after services that there was a program on TV about official looking people paying Roma to sign documents they couldn’t read, which actually was a taking on of debt. After seeing this and word spreading, many Roma people, especially those who don’t read, worried about signing anything, especially a census. Pastor Mitko tries to allay their

¹⁸⁹ This was the video of Anthony Skinner:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_nRKt8cPO1k&playnext=1&list=PLA785F7B2600E18D2

¹⁹⁰ This illiteracy is among the younger generation. Nearly all Roma during state socialism were literate and more highly educated than most Roma today.

fears and the following week asks me and another American woman working for the church to go to the “boxcar” (*fargonite*) neighborhood where many of their illiterate congregants live on census day and help them to navigate the paperwork. When I go the following week, as I discussed earlier, I’m welcome as a part of the church with a warm reception and the children scream in mistaken excitement that they are getting apartments.

As we dive back after the census documentation, Maria explains to me, “sometimes there is so much love and sometimes it’s hard [how they live] but given their situation you have to understand it.” Mitko expands, “It’s like blacks and white, they just need to realize that everyone is human. It’s been bad for generations now. The Roma are even angrier with the Bulgarians because of the promises that never worked out. And, the Bulgarians just see them as dirty and don’t realize why. Yes, “they are dirty. You can’t deny that but it has a reason.” Pastor Mitko and Mariana spend their lives working in very poor Romani neighborhoods. At the same time, they speak English and work as liaisons for visitors coming to Bulgaria to missionize and donate as well as for public officials who might not otherwise have a way of entry into what they call “very disappointed” Romani neighborhoods like the boxcars (*Fargonite*). Pastor Mitko and Maria focus on communities that have no other church presences. They work with the former *Deyanov Mahala* residences, many of whom have turned to drugs and alcohol in their cramped living quarters, as well as a place they nicknamed *Studenski Grad*, a squatter-like community of rural Roma living in makeshift homes in a field near the university section of Sofia. They visit on weekly bases, bringing food, music, clothing, and foreigners and maintain high levels of trust with community members.

They also work in a village, about an hour outside of Sofia called Ralitza, that has become a jewel in the crown of both One Life and their foreign donor churches. In Ralitza,

Mitko and Maria rely on Pastor Toshko to run church services, mediate between their donations and the community, fill them in on community events. Mitko and Maria even purchased a small house near the Romani settlement that they use to host visit foreigners and courses with Romani community members. Two Australians, who they introduced to Pastor Toshko and the community, have bought a house in the village as well. The village is easily accessible, relatively safe for foreigners, with a strong church presence and local Romani pastors that are able to draw the community together. Pastor Mitko and Maria go to Ralitzia nearly every week, and more often in the summer months as they prepare for busloads of foreigners to be guests for the annual “Gypsy Party” hosted in the fields outside of the church in conjunction with Universal Jubilation. Universal Jubilation, led by Bulgarian former rock musician Victor and his American wife Evie, come to Bulgaria with groups of foreign Christian missionary tourists each year (see subsequent chapter). When in Bulgaria, they take the tourists to Ralitzia for the ultimate Gypsy party. Foreigners are picked up from the bus by Romani men driving horse carts and are taken to the Romani settlement for the 3-day party during which time they pray, dance, eat and sleep in tents. Since Evie and Victor only come to Bulgaria with tourists two or three time a year, they need to maintain good relations with the community and Pastor Mitko and Maria serve as local partners.

Soon after meeting Mitko and talking about my work, he invited me to Ralitzia with them where they would celebrate Thanksgiving and serve food. On the way Pastor Mitko recounted a story to me of the time Pastor Toshko’s son came back to life. They learned about the boy’s illness and immediately drove to Ralitzia. Maria and another man from the church sat with the boy and realized he needed time alone and stop anyone else from entering the room:

[This] is normal if you see the Bible. One man Jair...his daughter dies. And when they enter [the room] Jesus asks everyone to leave. It's only the father, the mother and Him, no

one else because many of the others were crying and the Bible said that they disturb the faith, because sometime emotion overwhelms them...

After this she continued to pray in this condition the body becomes warm, and a secretion [from the child's nose] goes up and down, up and down. Maria says that she feels in one moment peace. And she stopped. That's it. She quit. She stopped praying, she got out. She said, "I don't know why he wasn't resurrected and God gave me the revelation that the whole issue is like this: 'I'm releasing this boy to go but he doesn't want to.'" And I remember there was one story with this pastor who prayed for 3 days for his brother and they had the same experience...in America, in Florida.

He didn't want to come back. So this child, he saw Jesus, he saw Heaven, and maybe he even saw the earth. And if he's got a choice to go back maybe he saw his own body. Because there's testimony from people who have been outside of their bodies. Maybe he saw his body and he said: "No, I don't want to go back, I want to stay here." And the next day I buried the child. They asked me to and so I did the ceremony. It was very sad. I don't know if you have seen the Gypsies in mourning. They're in a different place, a different time. This one [funeral] they made very big and the father is not a Christian – you see, he's superstitious. He felt very guilty because they understood the child is not dead because of God or the Devil but because of their responsibility.

Mitko continues to explain that in order to pay for the funeral he had to borrow money from a money broker in the Romani neighborhood. Everyone in the village tried to pitch in, from the local pastor to the mayor:

Everyone helped - even the mayor. He helped to feed the people because over 300 people attended the funeral. There was a lot of grilled chicken because the child always loved grilled chicken so they wanted it [at the funeral] because he didn't have it often, so they wanted to please him before they see him off. And because the child never slept on the bed they got him a mattress. They put the mattress in the coffin. And the final thing, which was the hardest thing, is that they bought a bicycle for the child. They were collecting money to buy a bicycle. Each guest gave one *leva* for the bicycle. It's a brand new one, all wrapped up. So the tomb is big like a car. So they put in the grilled chicken, they put the mattress, they put the bicycle.

Mitko explains that the one major loan broker in the Romani neighborhood provides loans for wedding, doctors appointments, and funerals. He actually sold the house the pastors use for visiting missionaries before they realized who he was. But, Pastor Mitko, explains, Roma like him "because when you go to the doctor and he give you a prescription and you don't have money what you gonna do? So they go and ask him for money and he pays. Usually it's like this:

for 100 *leva* it's 130 *leva* [repayment] after 30 days... And they love him because when they have debts he's always there to pay and they are slaves to him. They don't have a certificate [contract].”

Pastor Mitko, like many evangelicals working in Romani neighborhoods, focuses on hygiene and yet unlike many foreigners, has a more nuanced understanding of culture:

One thing is I don't wanna to force them. The need to make changes should come from inside the house because if you force them, then tomorrow they have trouble. They can go back to same condition. Because at the beginning, 30 years ago, I made this mistake of trying to change their culture. Like the toilet should be this way, this should be this way. And especially we want to make a toilet, which for us is normal, but they want hole [in the ground].

Because when the child died, with the burial, it was like a statement. I didn't want to the parents to feel guilty -that was not my aim but it is was their mistake that resulted in the child's death. Because this child, Toshko told me, sometimes did not eat for 2-3 days. And when he started to eat it was probably not the food that would be good for the stomach, you know, not soup or something like this and probably he ate only apples. This is why he became sick.

I pushed Pastor Mitko because I thought he had mentioned earlier that the child had Tuberculosis. No explained, leukemia was what finally killed him:

They say the blood is so damaged when he... the blood it'll instantly burn itself. It became like a liquid, no longer blood but alive. It's like vinegar. It [the disease] makes it sparkle inside. It's champagne.

I was surprised and pushed him. He responded:

Yes, bubbly. But this is why the night before we talk to him he looks like everything is Ok. I never thought this child would die. He sent me a message the same night on the phone especially for me "I love you"... When I came for the first time, he tried to get money from me and I told him I carry more than money. I told him that he was very rich. I think he got it then, that I'm talking about the voice of God.

I said to the whole community on the body's here, we just buried the body and I'm using the moment to speak about what happens to us when we die. Sooner, later everybody will die. So what happens, I'm talking about what the Bible teaches us but the reason why we die many times we don't understand and many times we try to blame God or the Devil but the reason of this child to be dead is not God or Devil... But I say it's not Devil, it's not God. It's the responsibility of family. I understand it's hard, it's five children, but we

believe in God. Let's believe that God will be able to take care for everything. Help us for all things that need to be done.

Pastor Mitko moves into a discussion that echoes earlier references to Roma burnings of “useful” things. He explains they the community never has any clothes because they burn them.

However, he understands the logic behind the burning. He reframes this so-called destruction of charity through local logics that he then ties into Old Testament accounts of burning:

They don't keep many things by the time summer comes. Because every year we bring clothes, a lot of clothes. And I ask where are these clothes? I ask myself, it's five years the same jacket I am using. What they do? They burn their clothes, and I'm always wondering why they're not taking care of them. And I think they don't take care of them because they don't have washing machines but actually not about that. In the summer times the clothes when you burn them they make a smoke. They [do this to] scare the snakes... There are small ones but you gotta understand which one is dangerous. [I had some in my yard]. So, I call Toshko and I ask them if they're gonna come back, what are they are gonna do. And he says "Don't worry, I'm gonna help you". When they came he ask me to give a clothes. He put them in water to make them a little bit wet. Then he starts a fire and the clothing begins to smoke. So the smell of these clothes, it's not the wood but clothes make snakes to get out. So this is why they don't have clothes.

Usually Christians should not be delivered these things, that they are people who are understanding the reasons why Christ went on the cross. He went brought all those curses because somewhere people are starting to impress together. Probably there is spiritual that do exist. Because if you go back, for example, the Old Testament they said if someone get this kind of disease, it says you need to burn all the clothes, all the beds to be burned. At that time if you have leprosy that is how to prevent it. At that time they don't have medications to protect one another - antibiotics, you know? So this is the way they do it...this is one of the way how they solve their... they making this way, they manufacture their own ways of doing it, they do it...

Mitko encapsulates his understanding of religion to culture:

I don't think we can change this culture for a day or two. I think this was Christian burial from Evangelical Protestant church as we represent it. Because usually most of the burial they've been done for the Gypsy was coming from Orthodox church and [the church] pays for the music band, they play all that sad music and the Orthodox priest is doing so many traditional things that people do... because they believe in purgatory.

We don't believe in this. We believe you're even in Hell and there's no purgatory. There is a realm of Heaven but the realm of Heaven is not somewhere you can be judged because judgment has already happened on earth. The Bible says the salvation is from earth and

you don't get salvation when you get to Heaven...when you believe what Jesus has done on the Cross and after the Cross.

Before the Cross was the law. Now Christ came because people had to live by the law. God gave them the law to show them what's wrong, what's right. But they think when they saw they realize how difficult it is for them to leave. Because the law reveals what's wrong, what's taught. So Jesus says "Ok, I see that you did not get it, you did not understand. So what I'm going to do: I'm going to get rid of the law, I mean, I will fulfill the law so I can help you to live no longer by the law but by the spirit."

As we continue driving, Pastor Mitko points out the short cut to the village and the largest factory in the area, a cement manufacturing plant. He explains that most people in the village were one employed here but in recent years they have reduced the number of manual laborers. After socialism, the Germans bought the plant and every year they lay people off because they invest more and more in equipment, machines that can do the work instead of humans. The villagers, in the summer work in the forest. They especially find mushrooms picking profitable, like many Romani villagers throughout Bulgaria, who sell to locals and Italians coming to Bulgaria for cheap mushrooms. They also pick things like herbs for tea, forest fruits, walnuts, and in past years cut trees for firewood. However, since joining the church, they have reduced logging since it has been deemed "stealing" by the pastors. Toshko told Pastor Mitko, "Maybe we can die hungry but we not gonna steal anymore" to which Pastor Mitko explained, "if you believe in God, you will not die hungry - he will take care for you." Pastor Mitko, as he does in many conversations, highlights visit by Evie and Victor to further explain his point. Evie came to the village a few years ago during the summer and said, "By the way, God is speaking to me to tell you something. He tells me the story about the widow that gave her last meal to the prophet, and God took care for her." There was a woman in village, Baba Anka, who heard this and Evie immediately knew that this was the person she was talking about. They went to her home and there were only two beds "and you hardly walk between them." Pastor

Mitko explains, that she lay down and took three pumpkins “one for me, one for Evie and one for Maria and said, “this is all that I have - I give to you. She grew our hearts.”

Pastor Mitko, as he tells stories about the church and the people they’ve helped, interweaves stories from the Bible and tales of Victor and Evie. Victor and Evie are always present, even when not physically there. Known as the “Joy Apostles,” Victor and Evie linger somewhere between pastor, celebrity, and godly apostle. Their work and presence are known to Romani communities throughout Bulgaria, who prepare annually for their “Party with the Gypsies” summer tour.¹⁹¹ Like parents in absentia, Victor and Evie are referenced, asked for help, and anticipated each year. When they do arrive expectations are high. Most of the time, local partners and congregants are enthralled by their presence as they create concert-quality performances in the center of Romani neighborhoods where poverty and boredom structure most days. Having Victor, Evie, and the foreigners visit makes them feel visible, important and provides both entertainment and a sense that they are cared for. Most Romani community members that Victor and Evie visit understand what to expect: the kids will get toys and temporary Jesus tattoos, the old ladies will be fed soup, and they will get to watch the Americans dance, sing, and photograph them. In most places they visit, there isn’t an expectation of sustainability or ongoing assistance. For the most part, the event is what draws everyone and because of everyone’s ability to play their part and enjoy the entertainment, the party goes on.

TRANSNATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

I met Rada through Neli, who was the cleaning person in Misho’s office and loved to introduce me to her foreign friends via Skype. She asked me if I wanted to help her sister with some translations since her sister’s husband was a pastor and they needed help with their church. After much internet debate about whether or not to charge them, I committed to being paid a

¹⁹¹ This mission trip is the basis of a separate article (Resnick n.d.)

reasonable hourly fee to serve as interpreter with some Norwegian church donors coming into town. Rada explains that they have a Bulgarian man working as a translator, hired by the Norwegians, but she thinks he is lying to them about what the Norwegians really want to be done with their church donations. My job, she explains is to translate what the Norwegians really want but at the same time not let the Bulgarian translator know that I understand English.

Neli and Rada had called me and arranged that I meet them at their mom's house in Levanka at 5:30pm on a Thursday evening. When I arrive at 5:45pm, Neli is there, in her pajamas, but Rada is nowhere to be found. We call Rada but her son answers her phone, explaining that he's working at a construction site at a nearby town and isn't sure how to get in touch with his mom. So, Neli and I wait at home, watching TV, having a mini English lesson and wait for Rada. Finally, at 6:45pm one of Rada's other sons, Alex, arrives to get me with his three friends, all sixteen and awkward about how to talk with me. They sort of ignore me. I, at 29 years old, am like an old lady for them and they try to act cool until we leave the main road. I ask them what they're up to and they explain their goals in life: "we try to make money, find girls, get a car" and explain that they are building the new mall in Sofia, working as day laborers for 20 leva/day but in actuality not getting paid by the boss.

They take me directly to the church where their dad is the preacher. It is across the main road from Neli's mom at *Vietnamskite*, or "the Vietnamese." *Vietnamskite* are a series of housing blocks originally built for Vietnamese guest workers in Bulgaria in 1984, then known as "Little Saigon."¹⁹² Since most of these Vietnamese workers left in 1991 this housing became ostensibly part of *Levanka* as it got repurposed by some of the poorest segments of Sofia's Romani population. They blocks are rented as cheap housing for about 20 euro/month and the

¹⁹² Cite 1990 NY Times article, data from the Bulgarian National Archives, and oral history with Mitko. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/08/01/world/evolution-in-europe-vietnamese-in-bulgaria-bitter-times.html>

insides are decrepit and unmaintained. Also inside these blocks are many evangelical churches. Since most Roma prefer to own their homes and not rent, there is a certain level of stigma with living in rented apartment housing. Although the common areas of these buildings are dilapidated, some internal apartments have been furnished nicely and are cozy to sit in. The pastor's apartment, while not large, had a maroon rug covering the floor and plush red and black sofas to sit on with lace curtains letting in as much light as possible. Ivan's church is housed in a converted *Vietnamskite* apartment, complete with a podium, pews, and folding chairs.



Image 35: Newspaper photos of *Vietnamskite*. Source: 24 Chasa.

The boys finally lead me up the unlit, crumbling cement stairs until we get to the an apartment, walk through the door and sit down in a row of folding chairs in what is a formal church. In *Levanka* there are a wide array of church structures. Some churches have signs outside, crosses on top and stand in clear view on a main road or path. Others are in the homes of congregants, ranging in space from the bottom floor of one of the richest hotel-like houses in the neighborhood, the owner of which everyone knows, with fear, by name to more modest

living rooms rented out from congregants for extra income. In *Levanka* there are gathering centers for Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, and charismatic Pentecostals from a variety of denominations. While Ivan's church is in an apartment, it's not technically a home church in the way others are, where people gather weekly in different peoples' living rooms and sing, play music, and pray together.

When we finally we get to the church, where people are already gathered and Rada, dressed up, her hair iron-straightened, wearing an ornate blouse, greets me with camera in hand as she takes photos of the scene. She introduces me to the Norwegian man in question and quickly prompts me to arrange an appointment to meet alone on Monday. However, before we come to a definitive place, the church worship begins. We stand in lines, led by Ivan at the front on a makeshift pulpit. A few of the men at the front of the room have Bibles and the young people and women throughout share with each other, while others don't read the bible at all, preferring to close their eyes and sing. I sit and listen and standing when everyone stands and sitting when they sit.

After the hour-long service, most people leave in groups and I wait with the Norwegians, Rada, and the Bulgarian-English translator who I soon learn are non-Roma, and ethnically Bulgarian. He's a part of the church but met Rada through another ethnic Bulgarian who was in contact with the Norwegians. However, that man was found to be stealing money from the church, Rada explained, and so he was thrown out. Unable to mask myself as a Bulgarian speaker, I admit my English speaking abilities and introduce myself to the translator at the Scandinavian guests while Rada looks on, smiling and not understanding. Soon after I follow Rada back to her apartment down the hall which consists of one living room and two bedrooms shared between herself, her husband, and three children who live at home, including

one son who has six children. Without room for a proper kitchen, then use their hallway as a makeshift one. There's running water indoors but they use the toilet as a squat, removing the seat cover.¹⁹³ They live on the same floor as the church, a few doors down an unlit broken apart internal building hallway with loud music coming from behind doors we pass by. Ivan explains that the people living across from the church pointedly play their music louder during worship times, on Wednesday evenings and Sundays. Rada interrupts him to explain that the neighbors had a baby and are celebrating; it isn't to bother the church. He rolls his eyes a bit and changes the subject.

They sit me down on their maroon couch and offer to buy me a coffee at the café downstairs. It's late and I decline. Rada recounts the story of an adopted Jewish uncle, found in a garbage bin on the edges of then-Jewish Levanka, during the second world war highlighting that perhaps it was my family and this why we've been brought together. She explains that the Jews are the chosen people and the Gypsies love the Jews most of all. Her husband, the pastor, listens to us, silently, until he moves closer to me to explain the situation.

Rada had been receiving a salary of 470 leva/month, as was typical wage in Bulgaria. However, after 5 years the salary stopped. They had stopped receiving funding from the church with which they were affiliated. They suggested that they had been told that the Norwegians wanted her to receive a salary for running the Sunday school but the Bulgarian intermediary is absorbing the funds they she is supposed to be receiving. They explain that this Bulgarian man is acting like a servant to the Norwegians, which probably means that they are funding him, and wants to decrease time spent with Rada and her husband, in order for them not to find out. "Nobody does it all for free," Rada explains to me.

¹⁹³ This is common not only to Roma but to many former Soviets and nearly all rural-living Bulgarians.

Ivan gives an example of what goes on. The Norwegians will tell them to buy 400 leva worth of food for the children. The Bulgarian middleman and Rada usually go shopping together and often spend less than 400 leva. If they spend, for example, 250 leva for food, the Bulgarian middleman (Tony) explains that he'll use the remaining 150 leva for something else for the school. However, when he gave his receipts to the Norwegians, he showed receipts for 400 leva. Rada and her husband are convinced that he spent the remaining 150 leva on groceries for his own family. "He's a thief," they explained.

They told me that they want me to discuss this issue directly with the Norwegians. Finally, after 10pm they drive me home in their car back to the center of Sofia. They explain that many people use the Roma to get money. They take pictures of poor Gypsies in order to solicit foreign support and then the money never reaches the communities pictured in those photographs. Eight years ago they worked with a famous Bulgarian interested in Romani issues who wanted to partner with them. They didn't want to partner with him. They liked their church and were happy to stay in Levanka. However, they talked to God about the partnership and He told them that a partnership was all right. So, they made a partnership to form a church in Levanka and one other in the Sofia sub-section of Lulin. After the church in Lulin had enough support, he told them that they can stay in Levanka and he'll take care of Lulin. It soon became clear, in their minds, that they were used to get money and build a new church with foreign donors. They dropped me off and told me to come at 4pm the next day.

The next day I arrived a little after 4pm to find Rada and the family dressed in pajamas and bathrobes. We sat watching TV while their son Alex showed off the tattoo he just got from a friend downstairs of a cross on his arm, with his sister's and

niece's names in it. The children are all getting ready. One daughter is sewing Alex's pants. Another daughter, pregnant with her first child after having two miscarriages, is carefully dying her hair in the sink for a wedding the next day. Then, Rada looks at me, "So 20 leva per a day, from today, right?" and I can tell the money situation between us is about to become strained. She explains, "we will have to collecting the money from the church collection but we'll find it for you." I suggest they ask the Norwegians to pay for my translation services and she looks at me, relieved, "Elana you are right." She changes her clothes from a conservative brown blouse to a grey tunic covered in sequins. Then, someone calls from downstairs. Our ride is here. "They made us wait, now they can wait for us. They are so cunning [*Mnogo sa hitri*]."

The Norwegians are speaking Norwegian between themselves, between the front and back seat of the car. The Bulgarian interpreter is driving the small sedan. Rada and her son are conferring in Romani. We drive to Zakarniva, a Romani neighborhood near a large cemetery. We step out of the car, cross a dirt path, and a well-dressed Romani pastor waits for us at the entrance small to a church attached to a small brick house. We sit down in rows of folding chairs and I sit behind the Norwegians so I can translate in their ears. Rada asks me to make sure they can pay me. I translate the question to the Norwegian man, "Rada wants to know if you can pay me for the translation because otherwise she has to pay from their church and they don't have the money." I tell him that it is 20 leva/hour for yesterday and today and then we can talk about going forward. And he tells me he is a pensioner and doesn't make money from this work but rather pays airfare and hotel out of his pocket. He says that he will confer with the Bulgarian intermediary but it should be OK for tonight.

The music begins almost immediately. The pastor stands in front at a pulpit and beside him a woman sings into a microphone as she walks back and forth across the stage. A young

man plays keyboard in the background to a music track, complete with a rock guitar and a drum track. People sing, mostly women and families, and babies cry as the music plays louder and the preacher's voice becomes stronger. The music becomes more emotional as sad-sounds ballads begin to play and the singer leads the congregants in song: "You are my god, Christ." At one point the Norwegians are asked to stand up before the congregation and she asks to pray for the people in the congregation who need help. They line up and one by one she touches them and prays for them, as I translate and touch them too. The service concludes with a brief sermon and song before Toni drives the Norwegians back to the Radisson in central Sofia.

It is a typical scene. There are often foreign, American or Western European, missionaries and church congregants coming to Bulgaria to visit Romani communities for which they garner support back home. However, these missionaries are not seen as a threat in any way. In a country with incredibly high unemployment and a Romani NGO sector, that in the wake of EU expansion, is taking its final breaths, churches serve the roles previously inhabited by the state and after that the NGO sector. With EU accession came a new hierarchy of support. Large-scale international donors like the United National Development Program and George Soros's Open Society Institute (OSI) reduced support little by little until 2007, when Bulgaria became part of Europe and therefore became eligible for European Union new funding opportunities and OSI funding was distributed elsewhere. Many Romani community organizations were unable to keep up with the more rigorous EU-mandated demands and reporting standards, which stood in contrast to the easily obtained funding flows in the pre-accession period. As a result many community needs, once filled by NGOs, are now being transposed onto church structures, which have become like community centers.

Many of these churches, like the NGOs that preceded them, relied primarily on Western European and American donors, like the Norwegians. As most Romani pastors, like Rada and her husband, understand what foreigners want when they come to Bulgaria, they have been well-versed in taking foreigners to the stereotypical sites and locales, “Gypsy enough,” to make good photos and authentic enough to show the need for international financial support. Like Victor and Evie’s party evangelism, for most people involved, it can be a win-win situation.

GIFTS FROM GOD (AND THE FOREIGNERS)

Ani and Kristian, of One Life, also often worked closely with foreign missionaries, visitors, and donors. They owned a house in *Levanka*, on a quiet side street, with running water and in-door toilet and a banner outside that declared that the home was a “gift from god.” Their relation to the church began in 2009 when Kristian went into a coma and understood who cared about it. Already in touch with Pastor Mitko and Maria, he realized that old friends didn’t come to the hospital although Mitko came almost every day to pray for him. He had worked as a musician since he was a teenager and fell in and out of communication with the pastors since 2009, partly because he works at pop-folk nightclubs with live music on Saturday nights, at clubs like Orient and Sin City, and often can’t make it to church in time on Sundays. He explained that the family used to be very poor, living in a single room “until God provided.” The family slept in their car while they built the house, to make sure nobody robbed anything while it was in construction.

Ani used to work as a street cleaner when Kristian couldn’t work but now stays at home and sometimes sells sandwiches from her front in the summer months. Ani spends most of her time cooking and cleaning and explains that she loves it. She suffers from depression and the cleaning helps, even when the pills don’t. She shows me her hands that are bleeding from

dryness. They crack because, despite owning a washing machine, she washes her two children's' clothing by hand to get it cleaner, whiter. She explains that sweeping, mopping, washing, gives her pleasure. I often heard this from many of my friends in Romani neighborhoods. Cleaning, like laughter, provided a necessary outlet from the anxieties of everyday life involving children, job insecurity, and loan threats.¹⁹⁴

Kristian liked to explain philosophies on life and once told me that in the Romani neighborhood, it's not good enough to succeed. It's only worth something if your neighborhood is poor. For him, like many other people I talked with, the church provided a way out of the "complexes" that people suffered. Another Romani friend who grew up in a similar Romani neighborhood explained, "There is nothing more Gypsy than having five people in the family, everyone sleeps in one room, but they need a huge house and a nice car." Building a house, big enough to house all of one's sons and their families ensured family success and succession. Kristian relied on Jesus for all of it.

When people live in a framework in which material things have more potential than people, the presence of godliness, spirituality, and sociality become increasingly more important. They help people cope with what they have, even if abundance is never material.

¹⁹⁴ Here I could get into a discussion about the relation of cleaning, waste labor to emotion, embodiments and catharsis of inner turmoil.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

I'm standing at the flea market, *Bitaka*, with my film collaborator, Bojina, trying to film the scene around us. We arrived late and managed to arrive only for the end of the market, which feels eerie. We walk around as sellers at the flea market. It was, about thirty years prior, the best place for finding western jeans and imported videos from Serbia. Now, Bulgarians refer to the market with a chuckle, knowing that it's one of the only places where one can find spare bicycle parts and carburetors for their old Volkswagens or Opels. They are also ashamed of what the place *must* look like to outsiders.¹⁹⁵ It is loud, chaotic at times, old-fashioned and known to be the site where a great deal of Sofia's Romani waste entrepreneurs make a living.

Since we arrived late, many of the sellers were packing up for the day, leaving the wares (that were once trash, now again trash) for children to scavenge. It really is the trash of the trash. One girl sees us filming and takes a used nail polish bottle off the ground and asks to paint Bojina's nails a sludgy silver. I see out of the corner of my eye the shape of a person familiar to me. I look over and Iva, one of my street-sweeping colleagues from work, is there next to me, selling with her husband.

I run over to them and am greeted by Iva's husband, Marko, about whom I have heard a lot. I see him and he immediately recognizes me from the times he's picked up Iva at work. Calling me "Joana," a common Bulgarianization of my name, he explains:

Joana!..I want you to keep working and to be honest. Even though in Bulgaria you will always find people to tell you 'this and that is not true,' you should learn from it... You

¹⁹⁵ This sense was conveyed to me through interviews and casual conversation.

have to manage alone...just listen to your heart. And I think you.... don't know really what people in Bulgaria are doing.

Marko, in a common refrain reminding me that I am not Bulgarian and can't know the people I work with inverts the subjects of a common refrain. Typically, Bulgarian friends told me that I shouldn't go to "Gypsy" neighborhoods because "I just didn't understand." One friend asked if I brought a gun with me to *Levanka*. When I told this to my friends living in *Levanka* they laughed, asking me if I brought my gun with me to "the center" (of Sofia). Marko warns me about Bulgarians:

If they can even take your skin off, they most certainly will. Do you know what people can do to you? Joana, do you know what was written in the contract? They will be happy when they see you...they will be happy in front of you like: 'Hello Joana, how are you, what are you doing?' But their looks are not sincere...they can't even look you straight in the eyes. And I want to tell you, Joana...You can't just come all the way from the United States to work here...actually they are taking advantage of you. It's the same with people from the minorities [Roma].¹⁹⁶

Relating me, the American, to Roma since we are both outsiders within a Bulgarian framework, Marko re-articulates the sense that I don't understand what Bulgarians are *really* like. However, what links me with him and his wife is that although he understands the culture enough not to trust Bulgarians, they still are "taking advantage" of both of us. We are both outsiders enough to be taken advantage of and be lied to.

Working at *Bitaka*, however, enables Marko some semblance of independent income generation. Going to *Bitaka* is regular labor for Marko who otherwise relies on his wife's income. Marko highlights how the only way to get ahead in a job like sweeping is to play by the rules of the Bulgarian bosses. Marko knows what it takes to get by. Knowing the rules of the workplace entails also not scavenging on the job; Marko explains that it is prohibited but unfair:

'I need that money.' I will tell [you] that without a second thought...It's not right for them to be making fun of the people in that way. Especially the poor ones! Look here Joana! It doesn't matter if you earn 10 or 20 *leva* more. Fuck it. And if they don't let Bulgarians

¹⁹⁶ This comes from audio and video recordings.

and Gypsies gather some trash from the trashcans, from where do they expect us to earn money?

When Marko says this, he seems to envision the trashcan as a public space, which can provide the potential for income. By prohibiting access to the trashcans, Marko makes the point that there aren't many other options for Roma. How can social transformation be possible when even the trash is regulated? Marko continued by extending the logic of his observation to larger economic phenomena of forged bank accounts, which was a common problem for my colleagues:

I suppose you know this main principle. But the principle...for the banks who must... I suppose you know all this. They are doing dirty dealings with money and some shabby things in your name, in Iva's name, in the name of every ordinary worker, who may go and find out that they owe money to the banks. It can turn out you owe a lot of money you don't know about. So, you should take better care of yourself Joana. I am telling you, you better leave this business, fuck it all, take care of your studies.

Marko, in his stream of consciousness, makes the connection between not letting people go through trashcans and "dirty dealings with money." These practices are all part of the same framework in which Roma are pushed down at any moment in which there might be potential for advancement. Then, Marko echoes another common refrain in Bulgaria about the recent waves of migration. He remarks on the "leftovers" of migration being "only Mafia." He explains:

You should go somewhere else. It's only mafia that is left in Bulgaria. You know how it is right? There are no people with true hearts here. Joana, I was raised in Greece, my child was raised in Greece...I will be honest with you. I don't like Bulgaria, this is why I want to leave this country. You should take care of yourself Joana. Really take care of yourself. I am rapping you know, I don't like the folk music here.

Elana: Rap something for me, please.

Marko [rapping]: *My boy, for Joana, I am I am with that face. Joana is working with Bulgarian face, she started with the broom, she's starting now, remember me somehow, your face is me now. You sweep but you don't know what you gonna take, before someone takes your money before you, you don't know when your money will end... Joana I really don't want to, don't want to tell you.*

Elana: That's good!

Marko: Yeah it's cool, right?...Jo, you can come visit us anytime you want!

Elana: Alright.

Marko: Right before a group of children passed and I gave it to them, this [stuff], because I don't need it anymore, what is left now. I am leaving it all. This is trash Joana. But you can also earn something from trash as well as from the truth.

“You can earn something from the trash as well as from the truth.” Marko makes the conclusion with which I end this ethnography. Trash is more than just an accumulation of no longer needed objects. Trash for Marko is like the so-called truth; it's the fodder and foundation for something else. For some, it might be the first step on the path to change.

As the European Union focuses on converting waste, transforming matter into something more useful, better, cleaner, the process is never all-encompassing.¹⁹⁷ Matter categorized as “waste” becomes something else. It can become cash or heat or EU quotas, which are themselves sometimes the goal. But like the humans sorting through landfills in central Sofia that are officially closed (or still in-use landfills in Sofia that have been supposedly filled to capacity since 2005), human intervention changes these trajectories. What EU standards never accounted for was the fact that perhaps, due to the informal on-site landfill scavenging labor of poor, Romani workers, landfills can actually shrink in size.

European Union programs never accounted for the fact that Romani poverty would enable Bulgaria to meet its packaging recycling quotas. EU policy never predicted—or allowed for—how European Union quotas could be met in locally creative ways. To do so would have been to end the utopian dream of a European Union and the dream of an idyllic Europe against which much of the rest of the world is comparison. Through its standards, Europe attempts to expand and yet maintain its integrity, without accounting for the presumptions of ethnonationalism, whiteness, and homogeneity upon which it is founded. To acknowledge who

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Latour on “purification”

and what already exists within Europe puts into question the potential for actual “harmonization.”

EU Harmonization, in practice, is much more dictatorial than it is euphemized to be. Harmonization is conformation, without attention to the fact that the circumstances of newly accessed countries are drastically different from Western European ones. The only potential for expanding Europe in the way it has been imagined is to do away with refugees, invest more money to keep Roma in their “home countries” (and out of Western Europe), and keep believing that transformation might one day erase the socialist past and the ever-present racism. The utopian European project is based upon an idea of freedom, of harmony, in which “vulnerable” Roma might exist, as long as they stay where they belong—in the garbage and out of Paris.

This ethnography is not only about Europe and not only about Roma. The last key player, which is getting a lot of attention lately, is the natural environment. Waste accumulation affects not just social structures, racial hierarchies, and entities like the European Union. Waste interacts with the natural world in ways that cannot be ignored, which in turn affect the people and places I’ve talked about.

Chakrabarty writes, “one could object, for instance, that all the anthropogenic factors contributing to global warming—the burning of fossil fuel, industrialization of animal stock, the clearing of tropical and other forests, and so on—are after all part of a larger story: the unfolding of capitalism in the West and the imperial or quasi-imperial domination by the West of the rest of the world” (2012, 216). He goes on to ask, “why should one include the poor of the world—whose carbon footprint is small anyway—by use of such all inclusive terms as species or mankind when the blame for the current crisis should be squarely laid at the door of the rich

nations in the first place and of the richer classes in the poorer ones?” (217).¹⁹⁸ We see this issue becoming important in relation to Roma communities where, due to lack of heating infrastructures, Roma burn low-quality items and emit toxic fumes that they then inhale. Rather than caring about the toxic dangers in Romani neighborhoods, Bulgarian environmental policy focuses on the ways in which this affects general Bulgarian/European ratings of air quality.¹⁹⁹²⁰⁰

It is often difficult to perceive of what is happening on the planet because the scale is so large.²⁰¹ Instead, it is often apprehended through various kinds of synecdoche, in which waste can often become a sign of climate change (i.e. islands of waste in the pacific ocean). While this focus on climate change is front and center in American politics and in anthropological analyses of the social-material world, these processes of environmental demise have been happening all along.

In one of the last program analyses of the communist-era recycling company’s activities, *Phoenix Resource* officials express concern with what is to become of Bulgaria’s waste management. Professor Nadezhda Davcheva-Iltcheva, “founder of engineering-ecology” in Bulgaria and one of the critical consultants for Bulgaria’s socialist recycling programs, provides her account of the situation:

Unlike the other living beings, the human, in his overall life activity uses up many natural resources, a great part of which ends up in the form of waste. In his interaction with nature constantly disrupts her equilibrium by, on one hand, using up her treasures, and on the other, polluting her. This is especially expressed in our highly developed civilization,

¹⁹⁸ Although he puts into question the way in which a focus on the anthropocene, through its scale, makes equivalent humans through the notion of “species,” he ultimately settles on the usefulness of the notion of species. He explains that in contrast to nuclear war, climate change is the “unintended consequence of human actions and shows, only through scientific analysis, the effects of our actions as a species” (221). (He also makes some points that ultimately are problematic, especially when he claims that “unlike in the crises of capitalism, there are no lifeboats here for the rich and the privileged”)

¹⁹⁹ I was also told that the medical waste incinerator in the early 2000s was too expensive to operate according to plan and so hospital officials would pay Roma horse-carters to take the waste back to their neighborhoods.

²⁰⁰ This is also a source of tension between Roma and environmentalists.

²⁰¹ The effects of climate change are, in many ways, related to Berlant’s notion of “slow death” (2007, 759).

characterized by large consumption capabilities and complete pollution of nature, with the emission of tremendous amounts of waste. This brought our society to a big ecological crisis.

Davcheva-Iltcheva arrives at where a great deal of anthropological scholarship has recently landed: the Anthropocene, a “socio-material theory of planetary change” (Liboiron 2015). The term proposes that the conditions for life on Earth are entering thresholds of radical, irreversible, and uncertain change, impacting the viability of all species, including humans, because of industrial externalities from excess carbon dioxide to persistent organic pollutants (Liboiron 2015, 103, citing Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000; Steffen et al., 2011; Stromberg, 2013).

Facing Bulgaria’s transition to a capitalist economy and related logic of environmentalism, Davcheva-Iltcheva warns readers about the role of humans in both “disrupting” the earth’s equilibrium and “polluting her.” As Liboiron explains, “in the Anthropocene, the ‘afterlives’ of industrially produced objects are the longest part of their lives” (2015, 103). I take Liboiron’s articulation of the Anthropocene to think through the “afterlives” of not just industrially produced objects but all kinds of waste objects (and even people seen as “waste”). In a country like Bulgaria where recyclable packaging and scrap metal is often exported abroad for reuse and most other waste is still being deposited at landfills, the afterlives of waste items are, in fact, the longest part of their lives. Even within landfills biodegradable objects don’t easily decompose and because of regulations that ensure all landfills are lined in plastic to prevent leaching into neighboring water outlets, any biodegraded items never return back to the earth.

While objects don’t perish, our own existence is continually facing the threat of what it would mean to perish. Perishing has many forms. Josh Reno writes about this threat on a species level, urging readers to take care “lest an appreciation for human impact become conflated with

an anthropocentric belief in the power and reach of human managerial control” (2015, 566). He explains, “waste, in all its variety and complexity, should serve as a reminder that we can never fully grasp the planetary processes to which we contribute, nor can we assume that they are easily managed” (566).

Although we may not be able to grasp the planetary processes to which we contribute, the human-material interactions on a day to day basis might be a bit easier to grasp and they are felt in deep and material ways. Europe provides both the limits of human progress and the openings for a small window of potential change. For many Roma who are seen as “trash” within a Europeanizing framework, often having to work in the Bulgarian waste management sector, the only way they see to transform their circumstances is to leave the country. They must migrate from Bulgaria or risk becoming further entrenched in ideologies and materialities of waste. The very same processes of Europeanization that have created the circumstances of waste in which Roma live are the same which provide a small, and somewhat temporary, window of opportunity for escape.

Nadka and her family took this opportunity. Frustrated with the Bulgarian political, economic, and social system in which they were immersed, they recently moved to Western Europe. Migration for them, in 2013, meant the potential for social transformation. They now live by the sea in a country they describe as “being full of all different colors of people.” Perhaps only by escaping the limits of Bulgaria can Europe present itself as potential for many Roma who otherwise are barred from upward mobility by the very European project that was supposed to integrate them.

Although waste itself, now, has the potential to be transformed into new kinds of use values, this too is temporary. In the world of waste, nothing ever does perish, except perhaps the world as we know it.

Unlike nature, whose life has reached perfection in its organization, by abiding by one of the main laws - the law of the cycling of substances, the human is too primitive. He indiscriminately benefits from nature's goods, taking from them the best, the riches, and throwing away the rest. Thus, he indiscriminately violates the cycle of nature. Is there another creature that violates so brutally the laws of nature? No, there is none. Such actions only he allows himself, the garland of nature's creation - his highness the human. And for that, of course, nature takes merciless revenge (Davcheva-Iltcheva, 1991).

We often think of what Chakrabarty reminds us of, that in the Anthropocene, “unlike in the crises of capitalism, there are no lifeboats here for the rich and the privileged” (Chakrabarty, 2009: 221). But, we cannot forget that some can pay for temporary lifeboats, for clean running water, for the luxury of not having to deal with their own waste. Others, like the majority of Roma in Bulgaria, are much closer to the materialities of decay. Within a European framework, Roma are increasingly seen as highly discardable and therefore they are those who must work the hardest not to perish.

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