

**The Coca-Cola Kashkaval network:
Belonging and business in the post-socialist Balkans**

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The Coca-Cola Kashkaval network: Belonging and business in the post-socialist Balkans¹

This paper is based on the ethnographic study of *Krasiotes*, a bourgeois Greek population that migrated from the Bulgarian Black Sea coast into Greek Macedonia in 1926. A minority of this population preferred to remain in Bulgaria. The post-WWII situation in the Balkans prevented regular communication between the two sections of the once united community. Things changed dramatically following the 1989 political changes and the freedom of the movement of goods and persons between Greece and Bulgaria affected the *Krasiotes* populations living in the two countries. The *Krasiotes* of Greece and Bulgaria established cross-national trade networks. After a decade (1990 – 2000) of successful business and under the influence of closer links between Bulgaria and the EU, most of the *Krasiotes* businesspeople in Bulgaria have become incorporated into the post-socialist transnational elites. Such developments challenged kinship relationships, community symbols and identities both in Bulgaria and Greece. This analysis highlights the limitations of the “deep freeze theory” approaches (G. Kennan, R. Kaplan, Z. Brzezinski) concerning the development of post-socialist societies and markets. Furthermore, it contributes to an understanding of the multiple power relations emerging in the context of transnational post-socialist Balkans.

The winter of 1991 - 1992 was a time of significant political changes in the Balkans. As a result of these changes, the former socialist Balkan states (Albania, Bulgaria, Rumania)² experienced a sudden opening of their borders. For the first time since WWII the citizens of these countries were completely free to travel abroad without any direct official or indirect unofficial restrictions. The same applied to citizens of "the West"³ who were for the first time during the last forty years able to enter these countries almost without restrictions. It is true that this freedom of movement did not last for long for the citizens of former socialist countries. However, it is justified to say that today it is far easier to travel between these countries and the EU states than it was in pre-1991.

With the exception of refugees from former Yugoslavia seeking asylum in other countries and the illegal migration of people coming from SE Europe, little research has been carried out on the result that this freedom of contact has had on Balkan societies. In the majority of cases, the reports of the international press and the views of certain politicians tend to confirm what Verdery calls the "deep freeze theory",⁴ alternatively known as "the heavy lid theory". Briefly speaking, this popular model of explanation claims that from the moment socialist regimes collapsed, previously existing socio-economic relationships and structures were taken "out of the deep freeze" and were free to develop. This is a model used not only to explain the rise of nationalist movements in the area, but also to justify phenomena such as the recent significant presence of Italian companies in Tirana and the

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² The case of former Yugoslavia is different. Yugoslavia had always been a country with, more or less, open borders.

³ The term "West" in this paper is used according to the meaning given to it in the Balkans. It refers to those who have been the most important Others for the people of the former socialist countries of the Balkans. In other words, it is used for the European countries with no experience of socialism regimes (Pearson 1983: 6, Wolff 1994, Todorova 1994 and 1997). In that sense, countries like Austria, Greece and Finland belong to "the West".

⁴ K. Verdery is using the term deep freeze theory in her work (Verdery 1993: 182) and Pearson is also using similar expressions (Pearson 1995: 76).

strong presence of Greek companies in Sofia. The work of A. Brzezinski (1998), G. Kennan (1993) and R. Kaplan (1994) can be classified as supporting such an explanatory model.

As pointed out by Pearson, this model is totally ahistorical (Pearson 1995: 76). In my opinion, it is more than ahistorical, it is of a metaphysical nature. What such an explanation presupposes is the possibility of a break in history which amounts to a gap that lasted forty-five years. According to such claims, during this forty-five years period Balkan societies somehow managed to remain unchanged so that when socialism collapsed, they returned to the situation that existed before WWII. The discourse of the deep freeze theory is based on a mentality similar to the one of Balkanism in Todorova's terms (Todorova 1997). Balkanism and deep freeze theory formulate symbolically powerful constructions ("The Balkans") with supposedly eternal characteristics not influenced by historical changes. Furthermore, both are the product of scholars which "valorise Eastern Europe as foreign and distanced from the rest of the world" (Kurti 1996: 13) and especially from the West. Finally, both approaches establish political and ethnic correctness as a precondition for scholars working in the area (Kurti 1996: 15).

My aim is to argue against simplistic and ahistorical explanations such as the above-mentioned models. In my opinion, the situation is far more complex and perplexing and involves a reevaluation and reconstruction of past relationships by those involved in the present. In order to ethnographically illustrate my argument I will refer to the case of the Krasioties population living in Greece and Bulgaria. Thus, this paper will hopefully contribute towards fulfilling one of the tasks of postsocialist ethnography as suggested by Hann, Humphrey and Verdery: to point out the self-representations emerging after the collapse of socialism on both sides of the border dividing former socialist and capitalist societies (Hann, Humphrey and Verdery, 2002: 21). My data are based on fieldwork conducted in Greek Macedonia and in the Bulgarian Black Sea coast in 1991 - 1992 and in 1996.⁵ Since 1996 I have been following further developments from Greece.

The Krasioties population of Greece and Bulgaria⁶

Rila is a town on the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria. Until the beginning of the twentieth century Rila was predominantly a Greek town, called Krasia, with a total population of more than 4,000 people. More than 2/3 of its population were Greeks who called themselves Krasioties Greeks, the rest of the population being Turks and Bulgarians. Until 1926 a great number of Greeks lived in southern Bulgaria (sometime known as *Anatoliki Romilia*, Eastern Rumelia) and in the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, from Sozopol to the south to Burgas to the north. Precise numbers cannot be provided due to the flexibility and ambiguity of national identification in the southern Balkans.⁷ Furthermore, the majority of data regarding the distribution of populations in the area during that period are not considered to be reliable (Pearson 1983). Estimations of the number of Greeks who lived in what was Eastern Rumelia vary from 40,000 to 150,000 people. According to the official Bulgarian statistics, the 1920 census showed the presence of 42,074 Greeks in Bulgaria (Mancev 1992: 33). The Krasioties were included in this number. The Greeks of Rila (Krasia) were engaged in trade, fishery and wine production.

As a result of the re-arrangement of borders between the Balkan states following the Balkan Wars, some populations found themselves living in a foreign national state. The Balkan Wars were followed by massive exchanges of populations between the Balkan states. Population transfer seemed to many despairing politicians during that period to be the most definitive, or the most drastic, solution to the abiding minority problem (Pearson 1983: 139). Various treaties were signed to control all these

⁵ My first visit to Rila as a tourist took place in 1979. The 1996 fieldwork was conducted in co-operation with Eleftheria Deltso and Aigli Brouskou.

⁶ The words "Rila", "Nea Krasia" and "Krasioties" are pseudonyms. However, the population I refer to does use a specific name to define its identity.

⁷ The question of national mobility, flexibility and ambiguity of national identification in the southern Balkans attracted the attention of both anthropologists and historians working on the region (Agelopoulos 1995, Gounaris 1995, Vermeulen 1984, Danforth 1995, Karakasidou 1997, Vereni 2001, Cowan 2001).

population exchanges. Based on the agreements of the Treaty of Neuilly signed in 1919, a total number of 46,000 Greeks came from the northern part of Bulgaria to Greek Macedonia, and 92,000 Bulgarians (i.e. Macedonians with Bulgarian national affiliations) moved from Greek Macedonia to Bulgaria.

The exchange of populations between Greece and Bulgaria was never completed. This was due to the nature of the treaty which made clear that the departure of the "minority" population was not compulsory. In any case, it was not possible for such an exchange of population to be completed for the very simple reason that there were no clear and absolute criteria to define who was Greek and who was Bulgarian. Groups of people who defined themselves as Greeks at that time remained inside Bulgaria; the same happened with the Macedonian supporters of the Bulgarian Exarchate⁸ in western Greek Macedonia. In the immediate post-WWII decades, the Bulgarian Greeks and the Macedonians of Greece were gradually assimilated or forced to migrate, usually outside Europe.

Some Krasiotēs families had already been living in Greece since 1903, but the final decision to move to Greece was taken sometime during the spring of 1925. As was the case with the Kostilides community of Greeks from Bulgaria studied by Danforth, the pressure applied by the Bulgarian authorities to leave Bulgaria could no longer be resisted (Danforth 1989: 134). It should be noted that the Krasiotēs were allowed to sell their land and houses before leaving Bulgaria.

In actuality, the Krasiotēs community was divided in 1925. Almost 70 - 75% of Krasiotēs decided to leave their homeland. Some families preferred to stay in Rila. According to the Treaty of Neuilly, the nuclear family was officially recognised as the migration unit but the right to migrate was recognised for every person who was older than eighteen years old. Therefore, it happened that some brothers and sisters were separated because one preferred to remain in Rila while the other migrated to Greece. During my visit in Rila in the summer of 1992 I had the chance to talk with some members of the Krasiotēs community and discuss the reasons for their choice. Briefly speaking, those who preferred to remain in Rila justify their decision on the basis of existing kinship ties with non-Greek families, their political affiliations and/or because of various personal reasons.

Three hundred and sixty families (i.e. households) arrived in Greece, with 288 of them settling in a village in central Greek Macedonia. The process of establishing the community in its new settlement was similar to the one reported in the relevant bibliography (Eddy 1931, Pentzopoulos 1962). This village was later named Nea Krasia (new Krasia). Although the majority of the population of the village was composed of Krasiotēs, a number of other populations were also settled there. These were Pontic Greeks who arrived during the twenties in the village as refugees from Caucasus, Thrakiotēs Greeks who came almost at the same time as refugees from the European part of Turkey, Sarakatsans and Macedonians of Greek national consciousness ("*Graikomani*") who use to live in the area. Soon after their establishment in Greece, the Krasiotēs attempted to revive their tradition of wine production and the result was that after WWII, Nea Krasia became one of the most rapidly developing and wealthy villages of central Greek Macedonia. The present day population of the village is about 4.000 persons.

As already explained, a number of families from Krasiotēs preferred to stay in their Bulgarian homelands rather than to move to Greece during the twenties. Relationships between the Krasiotēs of Rila and the Krasiotēs of Nea Krasia were sustained through the use of various strategies. During the period 1926 – 1939, relations were based on written correspondence, but actual visits were rare due to financial difficulties. Reading the letters of those relatives who remained in Rila was something of a ritual. From 1940 to the late fifties relations were almost non-existent due to WWII, the Greek Civil War (1946 – 1949) and the Cold War. From the early sixties, visits developed gradually. Exchange of visits between brothers, sisters and first cousins were usually celebrated with great joy.⁹

⁸ The Bulgarian Exarchate was the first national Bulgarian institution established in the late nineteenth century. It started as a separate Orthodox Church but soon developed into a national movement.

⁹ A similar phenomenon was the case of the Kostilides that Danforth studied. The Kostilides regularly visited their homeland in Bulgaria (Danforth 1989: 149-150).

The Krasiotos who preferred to stay in Rila (about 100 families) were gradually influenced by an assimilation process initiated by the Bulgarian state authorities. The elderly still speak Greek. Those aged between 45 and 50 years old are, even today, more or less able to understand Greek, but they cannot speak it fluently. Until very recently the youth were ignorant of the Greek language.

During 1991, as a result of the political changes in Bulgaria, the relationships between the Krasiotos of Rila and the Krasiotos of Nea Krasia intensified and visits became more frequent than ever before. Brothers and sisters who separated in 1926 had reached their mid-eighties in 1991. Their children (first cousins) were usually in their fifties. The most crucial point in this revival of the relationships between the Krasiotos of Rila and the Krasiotos of Nea Krasia was the so called food supplies mission, as the villagers call it.

The food supplies mission

During the 1990 - 1991 winter, Bulgaria faced a significant lack of essential supplies. The centrally organised distribution system was collapsing, but free market networks were not developed enough to cope with demand, especially in the urban centres.¹⁰ The Greek Orthodox Church and local authorities organised an appeal to collect food, medicine and clothes and donate them to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Bulgarian local authorities. The whole process was given a lot of publicity by the Greek media. The Krasiotos of Nea Krasia were particularly anxious about the situation of their kin in Rila.

I was told that one day in one of the Krasiotos coffee shops, an elderly Krasiotos came up with the idea of the food supplies mission. That basically meant the collection of food supplies in order to donate them to the Krasiotos families of Rila. The idea was discussed at the local administration council of Nea Krasia and a committee was founded to supervise the collection of donations. Negotiations took place between the local authorities of Nea Krasia, the Greek Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Bulgarian Consulate of Thessaloniki, the local authorities of Rila and the Greek Consulate of Plovdiv. Everyone was very positive towards this idea and soon special permits were awarded and specific arrangements were made in order to allow the food supplies mission to proceed. Meanwhile, the committee in Nea Krasia publicised the matter outside the village and asked some companies where many Krasiotos worked, based in Thessaloniki, to contribute with cash or goods. It was a tremendous attempt bearing in mind the standards in the village, which had a successful outcome. In about four weeks, 17 tons of food supplies (mainly flour, sugar, salt, rice, coffee, pasta, canned food, biscuits, chocolates and pickles) were collected. In addition to that, medical supplies worth the equivalent of € 1,300 were collected (1991 prices). Members of the committee created about 400 parcels. The organising committee tried to ensure that all parcels contained more or less the same goods. The medical supplies were packed separately and prepared for the local hospital in Rila. The day when the parcels were finally loaded into a lorry was described to me as "one of the most important days in the village's history". The two village priests were there and many villagers contributed to the loading. The local authorities had also arranged the whole process to be filmed.

A lorry and two vans transferred the goods to Rila. The committee and representatives from the local administration council undertook the task of completing the food supplies mission. In Rila, the committee personally supervised the distribution of parcels so that every family received one, irrespective of their national background. The local authorities of Rila honoured them and talks were held between the representatives of the Nea Krasia local administration council and the mayor's council of Rila.

Revived relationships and postsocialist markets

¹⁰ See Popov and Todorova 1997.

The food supplies mission signified a turning point in the relations between the Krasiotos of Nea Krasia and the Krasiotos of Rila. Existing relations were further intensified. The new patterns took three forms: working in Nea Krasia as illegal workers, business co-operation, and tourism. The first type of relationship was the least common one. Particularly during the summer months, some Krasiotos from Rila came to Nea Krasia, stayed with their relatives and worked at the same time. They did semi-skilled jobs such as painting houses or repairing cars. They were paid almost 75% of the wage that a Greek worker was paid for the same job. It must be pointed out that during that period different segments of the population of Bulgaria followed different survival strategies (Konstantinov 1998: 731).¹¹ Seasonal migration was obviously the most easily available survival strategy for the descendants of the Krasiotos families of Rila. Unfortunately for them, the labour market of Nea Krasia was limited as the Albanian illegal migrants were a cheaper working force always available to the villagers. During the summer of 1991 – 1992, I was able to find less than 20 such cases of Rila Krasiotos working in Nea Krasia.

The exchange of visits became so frequent that during the period from August 1991 to September 1992 there was an average of one coach every month going up and down between Nea Krasia and Rila. A really interesting case is that of the travel agency owned by one Krasiotos inhabitant from Rila. He organised trips between Nea Krasia and Rila. The increasing demand led him to organise his own travel agency. His advanced knowledge of the customs bureaucracy allowed him to hire a coach. For more than a year he organised monthly trips between Greece and Bulgaria. His customers were Krasiotos from Rila visiting their kin in Nea Krasia. At the same time, he was transferring Krasiotos from Nea Krasia to Rila to visit their kin and stay for holidays. During the summer of 1992, the football team of Nea Krasia organised a trip to Rila. The team players, their families, and everyone else who wanted to participate were expected to pay 29,000 Drc (the equivalent of € 90) for transportation and seven days B&B accommodation in one of the most luxurious hotels of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Two large coaches of Krasiotos villagers travelled with the football team. Later during that summer, one more trip was organised, this time with three coaches all together. Similar trips were also organised during the 1993, 1994 and 1995 summers but from different travel agencies. Following 1995, the number of summer trips started decreasing.

The most common type of relationships were those of the business cooperations. They gradually flourished, beginning in a few months after the food supplies mission. This case is certainly not an exemption in the postsocialist Eastern European context. Petty trade networks between former socialist and western European societies have been developing since the early nineties. However, there is a limited number of relevant studies. In the case of Greece, Voutira (1991) and Michalopoulou et.al. (1998) briefly discuss some aspects of this phenomenon in their analysis of migration and development. Among the most well documented studies of petty trade transnational networks conducted by sociologists and anthropologists,¹² it is worth mentioning Hann and Hann's (1992) analysis of Turkish-Russian border trading, Kostantinov's studies on Roma trade tourism in the southern Balkans and specially Bulgaria (1991, 1998), Kennedy and Gianoplus (1994) as well as Sword's (1999) project examining tourist petty trade in Poland, Sik's paper (1997) on informal foreign traders in Hungary and Zhurzhenko's (2004) study of trade the in Ukrainian-Russian border.¹³

In the case of Rila and Nea Krasia, business cooperation was always formed between people who claimed to be relatives. In the majority of cases these people claimed to be cousins and called one another as such ("*xadelfia*"). The Greek party provided a small capital for the business to start (200,000 Drc, the equivalent of € 600 at 1992 prices).¹⁴ The Bulgarian cousin used his private car¹⁵ or

¹¹ For example, the Muslim populations of Bulgaria intensified farming while the Roma turned their attention to trade.

¹² Economists focusing on small business entrepreneurship have also examined aspects of the relationship between petty trade and transnational networks. See for example Aidis and van Praag 2004, Smallbone and Welter 2001.

¹³ See Morawska 1999, Böröcz 2000, Humphrey 2001 and Ledeneva 1998 for a critical overview of postsocialist economic habitus.

¹⁴ Konstantinov (1998: 731) argues that the initial capital required in order to establish a petty trade network between Istanbul and Bulgaria in the mid nineties, was about 400 DM. In 1995 prices, this amount is about the same with the 200,000

a small van to transfer in Bulgaria goods that were difficult to be found in the market at that time (mainly Coca Cola cans, candies, women's tights, condoms and brandy). After two or three such trips the Bulgarian cousin was able to pay back his Greek cousin, usually in DM. On their way from Bulgaria to Greece, the Bulgarian cousins loaded their vehicles with anything that was possible to sell in Greece. It is rather doubtful that this transportation of goods was legally conducted. During the 1992 – 1995 period the most successful trade network between Rila and Nea Krasia was in the hands of a forty-five year old Bulgarian from Rila who specialised in transferring Kashkaval cheese¹⁶ from Bulgaria to Greece and Coca-Cola from Greece to Bulgaria.

Soon business expanded to other kind of activities such as mixed tourist enterprises in Rila (cafes, bars, etc.) and the clothes trade. I recall the case of a middle aged Bulgarian of Krasiototes origin living in Rila, who specialised in trading prophylactics. He owned a large shop inside Rila where all the cupboards were full of Greek produced prophylactics. In just two years, he controlled the prophylactics trade in all the Bulgarian Black Sea resorts and used to call himself “the emperor of prophylactics” (“*capota tsar*”).

As time passed, the Bulgarian economy became more integrated in the world markets and thus petty trade networks and other kinds of small business cooperations involving persons from Rila and Nea Krasia gradually ceased to exist. The last of the petty trade networks, as far as I know, operated until the year 1999. The majority of small-scale business was replaced by well organised trade agreements between the two countries. Most of those initially involved in the petty trade networks were forced to change their occupation. The situation today confirms Sampson’s model of post-postsocialist elite configuration (Sampson 2002: 300).¹⁷ “Many of the initial group have left the scene, some pensioned off, others retreating into local business or failing in business” (ibid.). In the case of Rila, a small number of former petty traders became business brokers. Greek companies investing in Bulgaria or doing business with Bulgarian companies were in need of people who could speak both Bulgarian and Greek, people aware of both markets and who preferably held Bulgarian citizenship. Such companies recruited the most successful of the former petty traders and offered them competitively high salaries.¹⁸ The present day life style of these people resembles the habits of a special kind of postsocialist elite called “the cell and Mercedes people” or “*Akuli*” (sharks) in other parts of Bulgaria (Giordano and Kostova 2002: 87). During the last few years, these people left Rila and settled down in Burgas, Plovdiv and Sofia and disassociate themselves from the Greek cultural background of Rila. Their success, however, continues to rely on a “beat-the-system/bend-the-rules” (Morawska 1999: 360) mentality which was dominant in the petty trade networks.¹⁹

On another level, the results of this “revival” of relationships between the two parts of what used to be one community came rather quickly. The Krasiototes of Rila organised their own society and aimed at establishing a school of Greek language in Rila. The society was called “the Bulgarian - Greek friendship society” and during the summer of 1991 - 1992 the society opened a school of Greek language. Due to the lack of funds, the Krasiototes of Rila did not continue their courses. I was also informed that the Greek state authorities were resistant to such a development. Greek diplomats were afraid that the opening of schools of Greek language in Bulgaria would complicate the good relations

Drc. capital used by Krasiototes. Similarly, in their study of Albanian migrants living in Thessaloniki, Lamprianidis and Lymperaki (2001: 230), explain that Albanians engaged in the petty trade between Northern Greece and Southern Albania in the mid nineties, use to buy goods of about 200,000 Drc value.

¹⁵ The generic pronoun (“he/his”) is not accidental. All the “cousins” I came to know were men.

¹⁶ Kashkaval is a kind of mature, salty yellow cheese.

¹⁷ For a similar analysis of elite configuration in Russia during the last decade see Kryshtanovskaya and White 2005.

¹⁸ Creed explains the structural importance of networking in Bulgarian economy and argues that “networks remain essential for success in Bulgarian capitalism” (Creed 2002: 63). See Chevalier 2001, Creed 1998 and Kaneff 2002 for an ethnographic approach to market structures in Bulgaria. See Böröcz 2000, Higley and Lengyel 2001, Humphrey 2001, Ledeneva 1998, Morawska 1999, Mokrzycki 1996, Kryshtanovskaya and White 2005 for an overall analysis of business structures and elites in postsocialist Eastern Europe.

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that the Krasiototes network was not considered morally ambiguous as happened with other petty trade networks in Eastern Europe (see for example Konstantinov 1998, Sik 1997). This is due to the fact that Krasiototes Greeks had a long tradition as traders.

that existed between the two countries. Given international relations in the Balkans, the existence of such a minority school was considered by some diplomats I talked with as a possible threat.

The Krasiotes of Nea Krasia expressed clear interest in "helping their brothers" as they expressed it. They repeatedly asked me to mention in my work this "revival of Greek identity", as they called it, among the Krasiotes of Rila. To what extent this was a reality will be explained below.²⁰ According to one of the members of the committee which organised the food supplies mission "the relationships between the Krasiotes of the two countries will continue in the future, even when first cousins are dead". In general the revived relationships contributed to recalling and stressing the special identity of the Krasiotes population. How that was perceived in the village of Nea Krasia was not simple.

The challenge of self-representation on both sides of the border

What is crucial to note is that those who most clearly stressed the significance of the "revived" relationship were members of families where both spouses were of Krasiotes background. As already mentioned, the Krasiotes population of Nea Krasia live in a village along with four other populations, which were originally culturally different from them. The Krasiotes created their own neighbourhood and relationships with the other populations of the village were for a long period socially controlled. The fact that the Krasiotes had their own neighbourhood did not just contribute to the preservation of a separate sense of belonging, but actively encouraged the strengthening of their existence as a defined population category. Certainly, this case is not a unique one. Similar phenomena are observed by other anthropologists working in Greek Macedonia²¹ as well as by anthropologists working on refugee populations in different parts of the world. For example, in her study of Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Malkki discovered that the concentration of refugees in separate settlements encouraged the development of a distinctive historical and political identity (Malkki 1990) .

The relationships of the Krasiotes and the other populations of the village went through various stages. As happened in other areas of Greek Macedonia, all these populations competed over the same local resources such as land, water, state provided funds and loans, and the control over the local authorities. (Ladas 1932, Salamone 1987, Lafazani 1991, Gounaris 1995, Karakasidou 1995). These populations gradually came into closer contact, established mixed marriages and assimilated with one another.²² Since the mid fifties intermarriages became more common. Since the late eighties the majority of couples existing in Nea Krasia have been composed of spouses coming from different population categories. This is not simply an important demographic change. Most important is that the development of marital exchanges is not perceived as having created a situation where the strongest population categories have assimilated the others (Agelopoulos 1997). One reason for this may be the fact that all the population categories of the village ceased to be endogamic (ibid.). A similar process of assimilation took place among Krasiotes of Rila to the extent that it was not possible in 1991 to find more than 20 families where both spouses had Krasiotes parents.

Paradoxically, even among the small number of families of Nea Krasia where both spouses were of Krasiotes background, some did not contribute to the food supplies mission. That was due to their political affiliations. Members of Krasiotes families who did not support the chairperson of the local administration council of Nea Krasia, did not contribute to the collection of food supplies. One Krasiotes who was in favour of the food mission told me: "it was a shame, they didn't give a single packet of rice because they wanted the chairperson to fail". On the other hand, members of Pontic or mixed families who politically supported the chairperson encouraged and contributed to the food supplies mission for "humanitarian reasons", as they claimed. The success of the food supplies mission provided the chairperson and his party members with an important symbolic capital exchangeable in the local political context. Finally, financial co-operation was often independent of feelings towards the revived relationships. A number of business cooperations were established among the Krasiotes of Rila and their kin in Nea Krasia who belonged to mixed families.

²⁰ For a detailed analysis see Agelopoulos, 1997.

²¹ See Brown 1997, Cowan 1990 and 1997, Danforth 1995, Drettas 1977, Lafazani 1991.

²² For a detailed analysis see Agelopoulos 1997.

If this is the present day situation, then who were those involved in the petty trade networks? Attempting to discover the "pure" Krasiotēs among them, i.e. persons having both parents of Krasiotēs origin, will lead into an ethnographic deadlock. An alternative understanding of modes of belonging in postsocialist societies is necessary. Konstantinov's remark that "one of the most striking features of transitional realities is the ambiguity of boundaries at multiple levels" (1998: 738) is particularly useful in explaining the situation. Existing identities and kinship relationships have been actively reconstructed since 1991 in order to fit the needs of those seeking to be involved in them. The politicisation of ethnicity and the stress on ethnic identity as a basis for political action in post-socialist Bulgaria,²³ as well as the financial advantages of doing business with Greece, were the main reasons for the attempted revival of Krasiotēs identity in Rila. These people in Rila did nothing more than to make use of whatever cultural mechanisms were available to them in order to articulate the organisation of their origin. This origin became important to them inside the context they lived. Many of the strategies they applied originate from the socialist shortage economy (Verdery 1993) which produced what it is often called *homo sovieticus*.

The Nea Krasia Krasiotēs had different reasons to become involved in the petty trade network. In my opinion, financial advantage was the least important reason. Humanitarian feelings and romantic ideas influenced by Greek nationalism are also to be taken into account in order to understand the motives of the Nea Krasia Krasiotēs.²⁴ However, it was mainly due to their wish to keep a part of their identity that they co-operated with their Bulgarian "cousins". The need to sustain a notion of a Krasiotēs identity exists due to the extended amalgamation of the various population categories of Nea Krasia. In doing so, most of them stressed their Krasiotēs background and partly neglected the rest of the identities available to them. It must also be taken into account that local politics played an important role in this process. As already mentioned, the supporters of the chairperson of the local administration council actively supported closer relations between Nea Krasia and Rila.

It is important to note that this "revival" of relationships drastically changed the perceptions of the Nea Krasia Krasiotēs regarding who their "cousins" were in Rila. In the pre-1989 period the Krasiotēs in Nea Krasia thought of the Krasiotēs of Rila as "their other half". Their limited relationship made it easier for such a romantic approach to survive. Since the development of the business networks the Krasiotēs of Nea Krasia realised that the Rila Krasiotēs are Bulgarians wishing to make a better living in their country. These Bulgarians do not reject that part of their origins which connects them with the Krasiotēs Greeks. In our discussions many of them explained to me that they feel Bulgarian and Greek at the same time. However, certainly they are far from being the "pure Greek Krasiotēs" of the past. It is a historical irony that the "revival" of relationships between the Krasiotēs of Rila and the Krasiotēs of Nea Krasia proved that the Krasiotēs do not exist any more in the way they used to be before the exchange of populations in the twenties. The need to overcome this irony was the reason for the Nea Krasia Krasiotēs to encourage me to write "about the revival of the Krasiotēs identity".

Postsocialist encounters in the Balkans

L. Kurti pointed out that "the fashioning of Eastern Europe as an intellectual space is a curious blend of fact, fiction and political demagoguery" (Kurti 1996: 11). Part of this demagoguery is the claim that the roots of present day social developments, in the Balkans are to be sought primarily in social, cultural and ethnic relations of the distant past (Verdery 1993: 184). The anthropology of Eastern Europe has only recently escaped from this context (Hann 1994). We have, at least partly, to accept M. Todorova's comment that we have not been critical enough to approaches such as the "deep freeze theory" or the "Balkanisation" model.

²³ See Kertikov 1992: 17 – 19, Vassilev 2001, Stamatov 2000, Ragara 2001 for an analysis of national and ethnic reconstruction in postsocialist Bulgaria. For the case of the Greeks of Bulgaria see Valtchinova 1999.

²⁴ Many Nea Krasia Krasiotēs stressed for example that "Greeks in Bulgaria have been abandoned by the Greek state".

Two or three years after the 1990 changes in Bulgaria and the establishment of the free flow of goods and people between Greece and Bulgaria, it would have been possible to use the deep freeze theory in order to explain the revival of relationship between Rila and Nea Krasia. However, the situation during the last decade does not confirm the continued relevance of deep freeze theory: petty trade networks between “cousins” do not exist any more, the Greek language school and the Greek society in Rila closed down in 1994, seasonal workers from Rila disappeared after 1996 and even the tourist visits are decreasing. The most active of the former petty traders from Rila have been accommodated in the new postsocialist elites engaged in transnational business in the Balkans.

An understanding of present day social developments in the Balkans should obviously take into account the history of the region. However, it has also to take into serious consideration the re-evaluation and re-construction of the past relationships by those living in the present. The case of the Krasiotes population indicates that it is useful to understand the development or alleged revival of relationships as a complex and dynamic process. This understanding often requires a critical appraisal of our own methodological tools and analytical categories.

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