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## 7

# SHUTTTLING MORE THAN GOODS: COLLECTIVE SUPPORT AMONG TURKISH- BULGARIAN SHUTTLE TRADERS

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## ABSTRACT

Given that the European Union is a free trade, market-oriented economic zone that should, theoretically, eliminate market distortions that fuel the informal economy, why are we seeing continued participation in the informal economy, specifically, the shuttle trade between Bulgaria and Turkey? Many scholars frequently cite price distortions, market gaps, lucrative exchange rates, and economic survival as prominent reasons, however, these explanations do not suffice in explaining why the shuttle trade thrives 25 years after the communist collapse in Bulgaria. Through the use of meta-linguistic analysis of the interviews and analysis of the individuals that I interviewed, I argue that, in addition to being a viable method of income supplementation, the shuttle trade also serves as a platform for social support and identity reconciliation for Turkish-Bulgarian participants. Collective nostalgia about the communist past and similar post-communist experiences and a strong sense of interpersonal trust serve to integrate shuttle traders, who invest in social capital via the shuttle trade.

## KEYWORDS:

Shuttle Trade, Turkish-Bulgarian, informal economic activities, social capital

## INTRODUCTION

Scholars have shown that the shuttle trade is a phenomenon that emerges when there is a market gap and when there are significant price distortions in a relatively small region, such as the borderland between Bulgaria and Turkey. Shuttle traders take advantage of lucrative exchange rates between bordering countries and often pose as tourists in order to cross borders and sell easily transportable goods from their own suitcase<sup>1</sup> without paying customs' tariffs. Viewed as a prominent coping and survival mechanism in post-war periods or post-economic collapse, the shuttle trade has been a pervasive form of small-scale economic activity in countries affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist system that once dominated Eastern Europe. Shuttle trade can take many forms: I will focus on shuttle trade via organized bus tours, however, it can also be done by car, by boat and even by donkey or elephant, depending on the region and its resources. The period following the November 10, 1989 collapse of Todor Zhivkov's communist regime was marked by rapid socio-economic change. The transitional period has challenged expectations of the future as well as identity. Persistently high rates of unemployment, a notoriously corrupt political system, the prevalence of organized crime, and a weak social security system have led to extreme pessimism and the decline in political trust by the public.

In light of its problematic conditions, Bulgaria's accession into the European Union in 2007 renewed hope, as it was expected that EU membership would help *expedite* the transition process and thus improve living standards for people. Indeed, EU membership is based on the premise of a single, free-market economic zone that should, theoretically, eliminate market distortions that allow for the prevalence of informal economic activities, such as the shuttle trade (Asenova & McKinnon, 2007). As of 2013, the shadow economy<sup>2</sup> made up an astounding 31.2% of Bulgaria's GDP, making it the largest in all of Europe (Schneider, 2013). This is in comparison with a 2003, pre-EU accession figure in which it was reported that the shadow economy made up 20% of Bulgaria's GDP (Asenova & McKinnon, 2007). These numbers show us that the size of the shadow economy has grown significantly in the post-accession period, which indicates that integration into the European Union has undoubtedly failed to suppress informal economic activity. The question, then, remains: Why have we seen continued and even increased participation in informal economic activities?

As a socioeconomically disadvantaged population, minority groups such as the Turkish-Bulgarian population are one dimension of the blossoming informal economy for which very little research exists. According to the CIA World Fact Book, around 8% of Bulgaria's total population is of Turkish descent (CIA.gov, 2014). In some regions, however, the percentage is much higher—in Haskovo, where I conducted fieldwork, around 12.5% of the population is of Turkish descent (Преброяване, 2011). In Kardzhali, nearly 50 kilometers from Haskovo and from where the bus tour originates from, 66% of the population is Turkish—the highest concentration in the entire country (CIA.gov, 2014).

The Turkish minority is well positioned to conduct cross-border trade because of their knowledge of both Turkish and Bulgarian, which helps facilitate transactions at the markets where shuttle-traded goods are often sold. Although it will not be the focus of

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<sup>1</sup> "Suitcase trade" is synonymous for shuttle trade

<sup>2</sup> The shuttle trade is part of the shadow economy

this paper, I want to highlight the lucrative monetary incentive to participate in the shuttle trade. A 700ml bottle of rakia (a strong kind of brandy in Bulgaria and Turkey) bought on the Bulgarian side of the border costs about 7 Bulgarian leva but in Turkey, shuttle traders can sell it for 25 Turkish lira, thus they make a profit of 10 leva on *one* bottle.<sup>3</sup> Most of the traders transport up to 10 bottles per trip, which results in a profit of 100 Bulgarian leva just from Rakia. In comparison, the minimum monthly wage in Bulgaria is 340 leva (Sutherland, 2014), whereas the minimum monthly pension is 150 leva (Novinite, 2013). I argue that the Turkish-Bulgarians involved in the shuttle trade are doing far better financially and socially than others who are in similar positions (unemployed or pensioners). My argument will not focus on economic motivations, however, as numerous scholars have already argued and established this. Instead, I argue that in pursuit of financial incentives, Turkish-Bulgarian shuttle traders establish close-knit, informal networks that enable them to participate in a platform for social support and identity reconciliation within a hierarchically oriented structure that fosters the accumulation of social capital. The collective nature of the shuttle trade constructs occupational-based identity similar to that of the socialist era and thus creates a sense of belonging, which is why it has been able to thrive long past the immediate transitional period.

In Section One, I review the main theoretical frameworks surrounding the shuttle trade through an examination of literature on the emergence of the shuttle trade, the marginalization and migration patterns of the Turkish minority, and the socio-psychological impact of the communist legacy. Section Two will consist of the data analysis, which will include the data set up and the three parts of my argument derived from the data. These three parts include the prevalence of trust and nostalgia among the shuttle traders, under the umbrella of social capital. The culminating *social hierarchy of organized shuttle trade* model will explain the interplay between these elements of social capital and its role as a meta-organizing device fostering the *accumulation* of social capital. Lastly, I present the lessons derived from this study and implications for policymakers.

## SECTION I: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review seeks to assess the ways in which other scholars have examined the shuttle-trade phenomenon and justify their inclusion in this review. Scholarly explanations for the post-communist emergence of the shuttle trade in Eastern Europe will be discussed first. Academics who have examined illicit cross-border trade during the transition period emphasize the importance of economic motivations, more specifically, high rates of unemployment, low pensions, and the disintegration of the welfare state, as the main driving forces behind involvement in the shuttle trade. These explanations provide us with sufficient quantifiable data but lack a deeper understanding of why the shuttle trade has continued to flourish past the immediate transitional period.

The second part of this literature review will examine scholars' contributions on the impact of ethnic marginalization and post-1989 open-border policies, which stimulated mass migration out of Bulgaria and into Turkey. This will help us establish the premise that the shuttle trade exists, in part, as a result of the ethnic minority experience of Turkish-

<sup>3</sup> "The exchange rate on August 25, 2014: 1 TRY = .68 BGN, thus 25 TRY = 17 BGN. This amounts to a profit of about 10 BGN per bottle of rakia. This is approximately 143% profit per bottle."

Bulgarians. The third part will examine the socio-psychological impact of the legacy of communism, which includes the decline in trust of formal political and economic institutions as well as the concept of nostalgia in post-transition societies. In addition, we will examine the notion of social capital and how scholars have applied the term in their own analyses of informal economic activities in order to establish its role in the integration of shuttle traders.

The culmination of this literature review will allow me to set the stage for my own data analysis of Turkish-Bulgarian smugglers' interconnectedness, which is marked by mutual trust and common nostalgic experiences, which serve as currencies of social capital (the methods of which I will discuss further in my methodology section). This approach will also allow me to explain the sustainability of the shuttle trade, 25 years after the collapse of the Communist regime. While the scholars we will examine provide us with important contextual information in regard to the *emergence* of the shuttle trade, none of these scholars have re-examined Eastern European shuttle trade as a modern-day phenomenon, thus their arguments fall short in explaining the *sustainability* of the shuttle trade; a scholarly gap that my own analysis will seek to explicate.

## **PART I: THE EMERGENCE OF THE SHUTTLE TRADE**

This section will examine the literature that pertains to the emergence of the shuttle trade as a response to the economic hardships and open-border policies in Bulgaria after the collapse of the socialist regime. Because I will look into the *people* that constitute the shuttle trade rather than the *process*, I gain an additional level of post-transitional behavioral understanding that diverges from literature that examines the shuttle trade on a macro-level.

An economic perspective underlies much recent scholarship on the emergence of the Eastern European shuttle trade, which emphasizes the imminent post-1989 period as one of biological survival in which people were forced to fend for themselves and/or sought to supplement their income and thus turned towards the informal sector (Mitropolitski, 2012). However, because the current project examines the shuttle trade as a *modern-day* phenomenon, the framework is not pragmatic; still, as we will see, the interpretive position is paradigmatic for much research on the trade.

Irina Mukhina points to biological survival as a primary initial motivator for the involvement of *chelnoki*<sup>4</sup> in the shuttle trade with Turkey. In her book, *Women and the Birth of Russian Capitalism*, Mukhina traces the roots of the *chelnoki* to better understand their role during the capitalist transformation in Russia. Mukhina focuses on the economic motivations and gains for *individual* women shuttle traders and thus overlooks the importance of the *group effort* behind the shuttle trades and argues that “the shuttle trade was shaped by the particularistic, material and mundane individual goals of those who participated” (Mukhina, 2014). This analysis posits that those involved in the shuttle trade are one-dimensional and greedy individuals rather than a group of complex and multifaceted people traumatized by the experience of abrupt social, political, and economic change.

Scholars Friederike Welter and David Smallbone further reinforce the economic perspective in their examination of the institutional embeddedness of entrepreneurial behavior. They posit that participation in the shuttle trade is temporary and is more akin to

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<sup>4</sup> Russian women traders

a stepping-stone activity towards the accumulation of financial capital, after which people eventually seek to start their own businesses (Welter & Smallbone, 2010). Their argument, like Mukhina's, overlooks the non-financial motivations behind shuttle-trade participation because they ignore the cultural legacy of communism with regard to work ethic as a form of identity. Both sets of scholars implicitly acknowledge the important role of interpersonal relations and trust, which weakens the argument that shuttle traders are solely driven by mundane, individual monetary goals.

Other scholars, like Byung-Yeon Kim, diverge from the biological-survival argument but still address the issue from an economic perspective. Kim argues that participation in the informal economy is driven by the exploitation of opportunities rather than by poverty. He casts doubt on findings of studies that attempt to associate informal economic participation with demographic characteristics while at the same time, his own studies find that retired people and the unemployed are most likely to be active participants in informal economic activities (Kim, 2005). This indicates that we *should* take into account demographic characteristics because we can subjugate analysis based on social, cultural, and historical factors that may contribute to IEA participation.

Another body of literature, which often overlaps with economic explanations of the emergence of the shuttle trade, focuses on the role played by post-1989 open-border policies, which facilitated the surge in trader tourism. Many scholars have agreed that the shuttle trade prior to 1989 was relatively small in scale and limited, mainly due to the inability of foreign travel by communist nationals. Yulian Konstantinov argues that access to the much-coveted passport made possible the massive scale of the shuttle trade (Konstantinov, 1996).

Konstantinov describes the shuttle trade as a culmination of new, open-border policies and the older social atmosphere and ethos of the previous order as a type of “mass-traveling” (Konstantinov, 1996). He considers cross-border travel for informal economic activities as parallel to the movement from socialism to capitalism and argues that the trader-tourism industry is a consequence of the strategies employed by the powerful transition figures, who he describes as merely revamped former Communist Party members, thus they invoke a nostalgic reawakening of the stability and order of the previous regime (Konstantinov, 1996).

Marie-Laure Djelic argues that the recurrent cross-border interactions give rise to a shared sense of identity and belonging within the group (Djelic, 2010). Her analysis of the complex relationships between producers, shopkeepers, and shuttle traders in Laleli delves deeper into the *social* components of the shuttle trade but she does not specify whether the sense of belonging among the shuttle traders contributes to their willingness to participate. Xheneti, Smallbone and Welter pick up where Djelic leaves off in their assessment; they note that involvement in informal activities can be for monetary gain or for moral reasons and mutual support. However, they don't address *what* moral reasons or *why* mutual support is necessary. This is where my research will attempt to intervene. Through an examination of a specific socio-spatial context of marginalized Turkish-Bulgarian shuttle traders, I will advance an alternative explanation: namely, that the shuttle trade serves as a platform for collective social support.

## PART II: MIGRATION AND MARGINALIZATION

Through the examination of literature on migration and marginalization of minority communities, we can contextualize issues of identity and belonging, which are key components of shuttle-trade participation. A central issue that informs identity-formation processes is the specific experience of the Turkish-Bulgarian minority who engage in the shuttle trade. As such, this literature can help us uncover the underlying, non-financial motivations behind Turkish-Bulgarian participation in group-oriented informal economic activities. Scholars who have examined the migration patterns of the ethnic Turkish minority in Bulgaria during the transition period generally divide it into two phases. The initial wave of 1989 migrants are commonly referred to as “political migrants” because they came largely in response to the Bulgarian Communist Party’s forced name-change campaign<sup>5</sup> and ultimate denial of the existence of Turks in Bulgaria, among other discriminatory measures. Their warm reception in Turkey and the abandonment of their Bulgarian roots ultimately led to their successful integration into Turkish society. As Ayse Parla points out, however, the subsequent waves of Turkish-Bulgarians, known as “economic migrants” did not receive the same social reception and legal and economic benefits received by those in the initial exodus. Instead, they found themselves attached to their Bulgarian homeland and thus were never able to successfully integrate (Parla, 2007). We will focus on this second set of migrants because they faced similar identity and inclusion issues that Turkish-Bulgarian shuttle traders face.

Leo Chavez’s work on identity and belonging among migrants from Mexico and South American countries shows that, for some immigrants, the transition phase begins with crossing the border but never really comes to a close—the migrants are unable to become settlers who feel part of their new society and thus return home (Chavez, 1991). This argument can be applied to why integration was so difficult for Turkish-Bulgarians in Turkey: they severely overestimated their acceptance by Turkish society, which brings up important considerations in regard to minority-identity struggles.

In *The Importance of Being Ethnic*, Sue Davis and Steven O. Sabol’s examine the notion of identity of the Russian minority in Kazakhstan after the fall of the Soviet Union. They argue that transitional periods stimulate self-fashioning notions of identity and produce fluid notions that have historical, political, social and economic dimensions. They determine that language is the central component of ethnicity and identity and is thus a major rallying point for ethnic mobilization (Davis & Sabol, 1998). This argument is important for our purposes because knowledge of the Turkish language not only facilitates cross-border transactions but also serves to bring people together to converse in a language with which they associate identity and belonging.

Konstantinov, Kressel and Thuen add to the literature on marginalization through their focus on the prevalence of the Bulgarian Roma minority engagement in what they refer to as “petty trade” in the post-transition period. However, they also bring up an important concept when they argue that the Roma’s participation in the shuttle trade reflects their adaptability to new and fluid politico-economic circumstances that correspond to

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<sup>5</sup> This was part of the assimilation policies of the Zhivkov regime and began in 1984 when Turks were forced to change their ethnic names to Bulgarian ones. Large-scale protests and international condemnation followed these policies and significantly altered Bulgaria’s relationship with Turkey.

pre-established divisions of class and ethnicity. By fluid politico-economic circumstances, they not only refer to the communism-to-capitalism transition but also to the opening up of Bulgaria's borders, which allowed the Roma to engage in more large-scale petty trade.

In *Remembering Across the Border*, Parla examines the cultural differences between Turkish-Bulgarians who live and work in Turkey and ethnic Turks and attributes these differences to the Communist legacy of the concept of work as an essential component of one's identity, dignity, and gender equality. Parla found that most of the post-1989 migrants who came for economic rather than political reasons had more difficulty integrating into Turkish society because they longed for the Communist regime in Bulgaria. She argues that this is because they felt that they had identities as workers of the socialist state. This sense of identity ultimately disintegrated after the fall of communism (Parla, 2009).

As for the motivations behind the second wave of post-1989 migrants, Parla and Davis and Sabol and Stefanova are all in agreement that the economic instability, which followed the Communist collapse, hit ethnic Turks harder than the rest of the population because most were employed in sectors that were dependent upon state support. The dramatic decline in the price of state-purchased crops proved devastating for many Turks employed in agriculture, while the destruction and/or privatization of state-owned enterprises in industries such as textile production, where many Turkish women worked, left them unemployed and in search of new income sources (Stefanova, n.d).

The socio-cultural differences, despite ethnic similarities, between Turkic Turks and Bulgarian Turks is relevant to our argument because they imply that there is not a sense of acceptance or belonging for Bulgarian Turks in both Bulgaria *and* Turkey (Parla, 2007). This insight helps contextualize part of our argument that the shuttle trade, while not addressed by any of these scholars as it relates to marginalization or migration, serves as a way to integrate minorities who find themselves at odds with—yet take economic advantage of—the social culture and language of *both* countries.

In *Crossborder Dynamics at the Southeastern Periphery of the European Union*, Boyka Stefanova takes an ethno-cultural perspective on migration and argues that due to the Turkish minority's solidarity and inter-communal cooperation, we should expect to see them develop regional loyalties and participate in a public sphere outside of the national state, which leads to the politicization of majority-minority relations in Bulgaria (Stefanova, n.d). I am much more interested in Stefanova's insight into the Turkish minority's inter-communal relations than in their subsequent politicization, thus I would like to take this argument one step further and suggest that ethno-cultural cooperation can also lead to organized participation in *informal* economic activities, such as the shuttle trade. Even if the economy miraculously improved, would the shuttle traders cease to traffic? I want to suggest that economic prosperity may not be a panacea for the identity and trust issues that the Turkish minority faces. One need only look at the historic example of the economic prosperity of the Communist period, which did little to alleviate the underlying factors that led to minority marginalization, as was revealed toward the end of the regime. There are underlying factors, which are as of yet unexamined by scholars and which may help explain both the emergence as well as the sustenance of the Bulgarian shuttle trade.



None of the scholars that we have looked at have addressed the impact that ethnic migration patterns, in particular, the opening up of Bulgaria's borders after the fall of Communism, has had on the stimulation of participation in the shuttle trade, specifically among Turkish-Bulgarians

### **PART III: THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE COMMUNIST LEGACY**

The socio-psychological impact of the collapse of Communism and the subsequent transition period has been the topic of discussion and debate among many scholars, including economists, anthropologists, and sociologists. To explain the impact with regard to the emergence and sustainability of the shuttle trade, keeping in mind that trade primarily engages the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, this section focuses on several factors that contribute to informal economic participation, namely the decline in institutional trust, the role of post-communist nostalgia, and ultimately, the expansion of social capital and interpersonal trust as the basis of informality.

Plamena Pehlivanova argues that the decline of trust in post-communist societies and specifically, the decline of trust in government institutions and formal organizations, have been in accord with the decline in social and political participation in Bulgaria. What she and other scholars have observed is in direct contrast to the Tocquevillian model, which states that democratic systems increase political participation. In order to explain this contrast, she cites Hirschman, who argues that in order for trust to be developed in society, the positive performance of political and civil institutions must not only exist but also be measurable by individuals (Pehlivanova, 2009). The implications of pervasive distrust in Bulgarian society are particularly significant to marginalized communities who have historically suffered under such institutions.

Until recently, the decline in institutional trust had been discussed as a post-Communist phenomenon, however Richard Rose argues that communist regimes actually *encouraged* distrust of public institutions, while at the same time, they encouraged trust in *social networks* and *personal relations* as ways for people to deal with their problems (Wallace, Bedzir & Chmouliar, 1997). Endre Sik's analysis—that network capital was more highly developed in communist societies than in capitalist ones because of the lack of transparency in these regimes—assumes a similar premise (Wallace, Bedzir & Chmouliar, 1997). These insights into the decline of formal trust help explain the prevalence of *nostalgia* across post-communist societies because they reflect present social, economic, and political hardships that further exacerbate widespread institutional distrust.

Velikonja and Parla have identified nostalgia as an important component of the transitional and post-transitional period in Eastern European societies. Velikonja identifies four strategies that societies use to deal with transition including: anti-nostalgia, amnesia, historical revisionism, and nostalgia. He focuses on the concept of nostalgia as more of a reflection of the *present* than the past. He, like Parla, rejects the hard-line view that post-communist societies continue to be tainted by Marxist ideals and conspire to bring back socialism. Instead, he explains this nostalgia as a result of the reality of the disappointment of capitalist principles. Velikonja refers to socioeconomic difficulties and hardships, which include the diminishment of the welfare state, high rates of unemployment, and massive inflation, when he argues that there is a collective utopian wish to *transcend* the current period in hope of a better society.

Mitropolitski's analysis implies that Bulgaria's accession into the European Union also delineated nostalgic tendencies because of the perception that the EU was an incarnation of the party state: a paternalistic authority that, much like the Communist Party, would provide a comprehensive protocol of steps necessary to achieve stability (Mitropolitski, 2012). However, this was not the case because the EU exists on a supranational level, thus those who still clung to communist ideas because of their positive experiences, were left disappointed (Mitropolitski, 2012). This suggests that the Communist legacy continues to play an important role in the perception and trust of institutions like the EU because it evokes a sense of nostalgic need for affirmation, guidance and identity.

In her narrative analysis of Turkish-Bulgarians who migrated to Turkey in the second wave of post-1989 migrations, Parla discusses the struggles of identity and belonging for Turkish-Bulgarians within the nostalgia framework. The migrants that she interviewed expressed positive experiences in Communist Bulgaria, mainly because of their possession of stable employment—a strong form of identity. Other scholars who have sought to explain the shuttle-trade phenomenon—in their discussions of the process of smuggling goods via bus—have also referenced distinct nostalgic chatter among shuttle traders (Konstantinov, 1996). These scholars, however, overlook the presence of nostalgic discourse in the shuttle-trade experience. I focus on nostalgic discourse because I argue that it serves as a currency of social capital and has contributed to the emergence and sustenance of informal social networks outside of formal institutions in order to integrate like-minded people and thus allows for collective, economic action in the form of shuttle trade (Egbert, 2006).

Social capital<sup>6</sup> in the context of this study refers to social networks that lead to *monetary* gains in informal economic activities, such as the shuttle trade. I reject Fukuyama's argument (Fukuyama, 2000) that notions of trust, networks, and civil society, while associated with social capital, do not *constitute* social capital, in favor of Mark Granovetter's assessment that economic behavior must be considered within the "embeddedness" of social relations and networks: social capital, which, in turn, generates necessary trust in economic life (Granovetter, 1985).

Claire Wallace, Vasil Bedzir, and Oksana Chmouliar explain social capital as a mechanism for the mitigation of risk in an ever-changing environment and the shuttle trade as a substitute for formally regulated import and export arrangements as a result of the disconnect between socialist legislation that was no longer applicable and new market legislation not yet implemented. The authors go on to identify three main sources of social capital, which includes ethnic groups and family and social networks (Wallace, Bedzir & Chmouliar, 1997). As argued by Portes and Sensenbrenner, the more discrimination an ethnic group suffers, the more likely they are to resort to their own community for assistance.

Portes and Sensenbrenner identify different *types* of social capital. Of particular interest for our purposes is *bounded social capital*, which focuses on situational circumstances, such as a population that has faced common adversities, and thus leads to the emergence of group-oriented behavior. Indeed, this study can be applied to the argument that the transitional

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<sup>6</sup> We will not use Bourdieu's definition of social capital, which refers to monetary investment in order to enable higher social standing.

experience of the Turkish-Bulgarian shuttle traders, as reflected in nostalgic discourse, serves as a *bounding* or otherwise *integrating* factor in the collective economic action that is the shuttle trade (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993).

Sik's contribution to the literature is his understanding of the mutually reinforcing factors of increased informality and thus the increased role of particularistic trust and network capital in society, especially when they are embedded in ethnically and/or spatially defined segregated subcultures. He points out the actors' common interests, such as invisibility to authorities, the sharing of secrets, hidden investments, and codes can be identified through things like etiquette, vocabulary, body language and communication patterns (Sik, 2012).

## SECTION TWO: DATA ANALYSIS

### PART I: DATA SET UP:

This section identifies the data that I will subject to analysis. My data derives from participant observations of, as well as semi-structured interviews<sup>7</sup> with, shuttle traders during two separate trips via organized bus tour: the first one was on August 25, 2014 and the second one was on August 30, 2014.

The company that operated the bus tour to Edirne was based in Kardzhali, Bulgaria, but most of the passengers on the bus were from Haskovo, the second stop on its journey to Edirne. The individuals that I had the opportunity to interview were comprised of Turkish-Bulgarian men and women, all of whom were from Haskovo or had significant ties to Haskovo. The individuals ranged in age from 25 to 80, though most of the information I will present in this study is from interviewees who were in the mid-to-older age range. This is because this demographic has had the most experience in the Communist, as well as the post-Communist state. On the first journey to Edirne, excluding my two companions and myself, there were 10 individuals onboard the bus. On the way back to Haskovo there were 29 people on a much larger bus. On the second trip to Edirne, there were about 20 individuals. On the way back to Haskovo, during the second trip, there were 16 people. In total, I conducted roughly 20 in-depth interviews and will present evidence from these interviews in my analysis.

The data generated by these interviews is both linguistic and meta-linguistic. I will identify linguistic and rhetorical patterns in the discourse of the interviews that relate to the integrative function of nostalgia as a theme of discussion that encourages social cohesion.

My data consists of dialogue excerpts as well as recorded observations of unconscious narrative, such as body language. Although the data is complementary, it is important to make a distinction between conversations that I *participated* in from those that I *observed* between shuttle traders. My analysis of the data will take the form of linguistic analysis, which is substantiated by my intimate knowledge of Bulgarian language, culture and society.

In order to convey the different perspectives within the shuttle-trading community, I will utilize thematic "panels"<sup>8</sup> to emphasize data that is relevant to my argument. Some of these panels will portray a single account surrounding a topic, while other times the panel

<sup>7</sup> The UW International Review Board (IRB) cleared this research.

<sup>8</sup> The panel format was inspired by Renata Lemos' thesis *Tapping into Culture: Examining a Post-Conflict Micro-finance Approach in Huambo, Angola* (2007). Lamos credits her panel approach to Liisa Malkki's book *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (1995).

will illustrate several different opinions or experiences about the same topic. This approach will help facilitate the comprehension of the views of the shuttle traders, followed by an analysis of how those views are evident of the broader concepts of trust and nostalgia. My data will first seek to establish the prevalence of interpersonal trust between the shuttle traders, and will be followed by an analysis of the role that Socialist nostalgia plays in further reinforcing trust and integration. The interplay between these two elements of social capital will cumulate into what I will refer to as the *social hierarchy of organized shuttle trade*.

## PART II: TRUST

An analysis of the interactions between the shuttle traders and the bus driver as well as the tour guide is necessary in order to establish the prevalence of high levels of interpersonal trust. On the bus toward Edirne, the shuttle traders were all seated two to a seat, however, when they spoke with one another, they shifted their bodies to face each other in such a way that they congregated with the rest of the shuttle traders. They spoke Turkish with each other, indicating their high level of comfort with each other, considering their often marginalized role in Bulgarian society. They resembled a group of old friends who had gathered to chat, which indicates a group-wide sense of belonging and acceptance, which helps facilitate the building of trust.

Amongst themselves, the shuttle traders discussed personal topics: They talked about their children, their medical conditions, and their financial struggles, which are conversations that are usually reserved for close friends and family. They gave each other advice not just on business-related issues but also more personal topics, such as which doctor to see when one woman complained about constant headaches and high blood pressure. This type of dialogue suggests that they are extremely comfortable in each other's company, so much so that they can share their personal struggles and offer each other medical and familial advice.

As we approached the border, there was talk amongst the women that the border agents were separating the women to check them for hidden goods.<sup>9</sup> The bus driver, Deniz, remained calm and went around to each of the women to reassure them that "*vschiko naret*" (everything is okay). His self-composure and paternal-like demeanor towards the shuttle traders shows concern and suggests that he cares for them. At the border, he defended an elderly man who was trying to transport more than the allowed amount of rakia. The man was visibly distraught and eventually, the border agent let him pass. This pattern of protecting the shuttle traders demonstrates the bus driver's sense of responsibility and ownership, which indicates that there is a relationship that goes beyond simple business transactions.

My opportunity to interview the shuttle traders came as we all sat on the side of the road in the blistering heat a few blocks from the center of Edirne. We waited for the bus to come pick us up so that we could return home. The shuttle traders looked up as Halil introduced me, and he offered me one of the plastic chairs that some of the traders had bought earlier. It was important for the shuttle traders to ask *me* questions so that I could earn their trust, though admittedly this was easier to do once I had earned the trust of the

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<sup>9</sup> By "checking them" I am referring to the common practice of hiding goods under your clothes, which women are particularly good at because they can wear loose clothing without appearing too suspicious. Thus, the rumor referred to the customs agents asking women to removal articles of clothing.

bus driver and tour guide. Ayse, a dark-haired and burly woman in her late 50s told me that she had been shuttling goods “a long time” without specifying how long; however, as our conversation progressed, she admitted that she had been buying and selling goods across the border since 1989.<sup>10</sup> Her relationship with Halil is particularly interesting because it reflects the overall tone and atmosphere within the shuttle-trading group. Panel 1 recounts some of the back-and-forth banter between Ayse and Halil when I asked her if companionship was important to her.

*Panel 1*

*She's too busy making money.*

*Don't listen to him, Halilcho is joking.*

The continuous playful dialogue between the two indicates a very close relationship that comes after a lot of experience with someone and thus indicates a high level of amenity, which we can interpret as a strong indicator of mutual trust and understanding. Ayse also repeatedly referred to Halil as “Halilcho”—the “cho” suffix is frequently used in nicknames and usually implies that an older person is addressing a younger man. Often, mothers or aunts refer to their sons or nephews in this way, which suggests an almost familial relationship between Halil and Ayse, even though they are not related.

In addition to the use of nicknames, when the shuttle traders spoke in Bulgarian, they did so in what is often referred to as “*selski*” or “village talk” because ethnic Bulgarians and Turkish-Bulgarians who live in farming villages primarily use it. Panel 2 recounts some of the phrases that the shuttle traders used during our conversations.

*Panel 2*

*300 zora jivyat. (300 pains alive)*

*Hayvanisa vschiki [polititsi]. (They [politicians] are animals)*

Although the phrase has no direct English translation, we can examine the linguistic relevance of the first example of village talk to reinforce the argument that there is a prevailing ambience of interpersonal trust amongst the group. Many words and phrases in village talk are either Turkish or a hybrid of Turkish and Bulgarian. Oftentimes, as in the first phrase, the root of the word is Turkish, followed by a gender suffix to make it sound more Bulgarian because the Turkish language is gender neutral. The “300” refers to a typical monthly salary in Bulgaria while “zor” is a Turkish word for “struggle” or “difficult,” thus the phrase implies that it is almost impossible to live on a typical wage nowadays. In the second phrase, “hayvan” is Turkish for “animal” and often used as an insult, but the “i” is a Bulgarian plural suffix, followed by the Bulgarian “sa” which is a short form of “they are,” referring to Bulgarian politicians. This kind of talk is often looked down upon in city envi-

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<sup>10</sup> The year that the Communist regime collapsed in Bulgaria.

ronments because it is a linguistic marker of uneducated villagers. More often than not, the phrases and words used are grammatically incorrect in both Turkish and Bulgarian and it can be difficult for someone from a non-village environment to understand what is meant. With this in mind, the prevalence of this colloquial speech is a very strong indication that the shuttle traders are very comfortable in each other's company because they speak and understand each other in a way that few outside of their circle would understand, which further reinforces the sense of belonging and thus trust within the group.

In panel 3, Melis, a tall and thin Turkish woman in her early 50s, who was very open and did not hold back emotion, discusses what it means for her to be involved in the shuttle trade.

### *Panel 3*

*For someone like me who is unemployed, I hate the idea of staying at home without anything to do because I would be extremely depressed.*

*I wouldn't be able to sell my goods if it weren't for these people and this kind of organization.*

*Zaedno sme vsichki – virzani. (We are all together—linked together)*

She, like many of the others, worked in a textile factory until the Communist regime collapsed, after which she proceeded to work a variety of odd side jobs until she eventually began to shuttle trade, which she has done for the past two years. She lives in the same neighborhood that Halil, Ayse, and Fatma do, which suggests that this community may go even beyond the immediate shuttle-trading experience. The *mahalla*, a Turkish word meaning “neighborhood” adopted into the Bulgarian language, is an incredibly important social component of daily life in Bulgaria. It is not uncommon for people to be closer to their neighbors than their own family members in Bulgaria. This sense of a close-knit community among the shuttle traders was apparent when I asked whether she liked being surrounded by people who were in a similar position as her. For all intents and purposes, she considers the shuttle trade her occupation not only because it provides her with a livable income but also the opportunity to socialize with like-minded people. Melis explained that this was the way that “things were done in the old days” therefore implying that the Socialist work-life balance structure is particularly important to her and the other shuttle traders. Melis expressed a high level of trust and satisfaction with her fellow shuttle traders: She admitted that it was too difficult to shuttle trade without intimate knowledge of the border agents and attributed the bus driver and tour guide's many years of experience as facilitators with the overall success and sustainability of the trade and trust amongst the group.

The close relationship between two of the women in their early 60s, Ayse and Fatma, was apparent even before I interviewed them. I assumed that they were best friends because they always sat at each other's side and constantly whispered into each other's ears. They even carried the same handbag! When I asked Fatma how long she had been involved in the shuttle trade, like Ayse, she also said “a long time” without specifying the time period and frequently used “zor” to describe her situation. This similar style of speaking, com-

monly known as “language style matching” is an indication of a relatively fulfilling and long-standing relationship (NBC News, 2010). I asked Fatma about the group of people that she crosses the border with regularly and she explained that there were other groups who do the same but that this was “*moyata groopa*” (my group). This pattern of possessiveness and ownership was also prevalent in my exchanges with the bus driver and tour guide. We can argue that this possessive intimacy is prevalent at every level of the social hierarchy and further suggests that the shuttle traders’ investment in social capital is built on interpersonal trust, which derives not only from working together but also sharing their lives together, thus cultivating an intimate *identity-based* trust.

Panel 4 reflects the importance of identity or otherwise root-based trust within the shuttle trading community, which I found to be critical to my ability to interact with the shuttle traders on a deeper level.

*Panel 4*

*I will tell you everything but only if you are from Haskovo*

*[I think] I recognize you and your friend but I am not sure from where*

*Are you from Haskovo?*

After a brief discussion with the bus driver, Deniz, the tour guide, Halil, was curious to hear my questions, though his comment about Haskovo suggests that he operates on an identity or otherwise root-based trust mechanism. This is a particularly important concept because the other shuttle traders repeatedly asked me where I was from and where I lived. Halil’s recognition of my friend and I gave me the unexpected advantage of credibility because there seems to be an inclination to trust people who come from a similar background, if not a similar ethnicity. When we told him that we were all from Haskovo, he seemed to relax a bit and even showed us his more laid back and playful side when he asked if my friend and I were “secret agents looking to incriminate us?” His usage of “us” rather than “me” reflects the intertwined network that exists within the shuttle-trading community and reiterates notions of ownership and connectedness. Even though he was joking around, his subconscious word choice to use “we” is important because it shows that he wasn’t just worried about the possibility of incriminating *himself* but the *group* as a whole. This instance of protective language toward the shuttle traders is similar to the tone and language that the bus driver used at the border crossing.

Panel 5 recounts my first conversation with Deniz, when he asked us to transport some rakia across the border.

*Panel 5*

*Are you planning on buying anything from the mini mart?*

*If I give each of you a bottle of rakia, will you transport it for me?*



*If they take it, they take it*

I agreed to help Deniz because this was my opportunity to earn his trust. If I hoped to get the chance to speak to the shuttle traders and the tour guide, I would first have to earn the trust of the bus driver, a reflection of the social hierarchy of organized shuttle trading, a concept that I alluded to earlier and one that I will explain later. My instinct to help him comes from an important concept in Bulgarian culture of helping those who ask—the phrase “*priyatel v nujda se poznavava*” (a friend in need is recognized), implies that one recognizes a true friend when they come to one’s aid; thus, the surest way to befriend and earn someone’s trust is to help them when they ask.

Upon examination of my *own* thoughts regarding the incident, I realized that I did not feel as though I had done any harm by helping out Deniz. The older companion I was with, interestingly enough, felt more guilt than I did, though she eventually conceded that Deniz, and the rest of the shuttle traders, had “every right” to do this, “when one considers the situation in Bulgaria.” I spent several weeks in Bulgaria prior to my trip to Edirne and spoke with many ethnic Bulgarians as well as Turkish-Bulgarians about the political and economic situation in Bulgaria.<sup>11</sup> The overwhelming majority of the people were highly distrustful of the government—they referred to politicians as “*mafijoti*” (mafia) and “*prestupnitsi*” (criminals), thus, by the time I boarded the bus to Edirne, I was conditioned to understand the commonly-held belief that Bulgaria’s political elite were crooks and that any under-the-table or informal economic efforts to earn money were an embodiment of the mechanisms that politicians use to steal money from the general public and gain power. There seemed to be a general consensus that if you were on the bus, you were either a shuttle trader or, at the very least, expected to help in the effort. This is partially due to the social norm of recognizing your friends as the people who help you, which further demonstrates the tight-knit circle surrounding the shuttle trade. These people would rather trust a stranger who did not have ties to the government than a government official or a formal institution. Among scholars, there seems to be a general consensus that the decrease in the trust of formal institutions is what has contributed to the increased trust and investment in social capital in the form of close-knit and informal networks (Wallace, Bedzir & Chmouliar, 1997). We can therefore argue that the shuttle trade embodies this societal shift in trust.

The bus driver’s demeanor toward us following the rakia incident was quite friendly and casual. He complained about how tired he felt and explained that he had driven wedding guests until 4 a.m. the previous night. He talked about his children, who were studying abroad, and generally spoke with us as if he were talking to old friends. I used the opportunity to interject about my interest in the shuttle trade, which is known as the “*kufarna turgovia*” in Bulgarian. He raised his eyebrows in a smile and lifted his shoulders in a shrug to imply that “yeah, let’s talk about it,” which indicated that he felt comfortable enough around us to discuss his involvement in illicit activities. Panel 6 recounts Deniz’s experience in the shuttle trade.

<sup>11</sup> The timing was particularly interesting because my stay in Bulgaria was about a month before the country’s elections so political talk was extremely prominent.



*Panel 6*

*It's been almost 4 years now since I've been driving this route.*

*I drive the same grandmas across the border every day.*

*If their salary and/or pensions were decent, they wouldn't do this. They need to eat, after all.  
Nali e ponedelnik (isn't it Monday?)*

*Sometimes, we wait at the border for 5 or 6 hours*

*[Referring to the border agents] Znam gi, razbirase (I know them, of course)*

*Border agents are like the lottery*

As he described their economic motivations for participating in the shuttle trade, he did so using a defensive tone. He pretended to be disinterested in the activities of the “grandmas” but the fact that he brought up the notion of survival, as it associates with the shuttle traders, indicates that there is a deeper, more empathetically driven connection between him and the shuttle traders, which he had already demonstrated at the border crossing when he reassured them of their safety and dignity. Of course, his profits are directly tied into the success of the shuttle traders. If the shuttle traders didn’t ride his bus and make a profit, he would not be able to effectively smuggle goods by himself. His defense of them is a clear indication of his interconnectedness *with* them. By virtue of his involvement in the shuttle-trade business, he has forged more pathos-oriented and intimate connections, which not only facilitate his transactions but also construct a platform from which to engage in discussions about societal, cultural, political, and economic issues. Thus, we can argue that the shuttle trade serves as a form of social support and identity reconciliation, in addition to income supplementation for participants.

Deniz’s tendency to speak in a surely-you-know manner suggests that, because people who understand his linguistic style and underlying meaning constantly surround him, he subconsciously assumed that we are familiar with the system when I inquired about his shuttle-trading experience. This type of tone of speech further reiterates the argument that shuttle traders operate within a very tight knit community. When he realized that we don’t understand the significance of it being a Monday, he explained that border agents are more lenient at the beginning of the week. There are a relatively constant number of customs agents who work at the border on any given day and as a bus driver who travels across the border almost every day, Deniz has been able to cultivate an important relationship with them, which is highly valued amongst the other shuttle traders because they trust that, for the most part, they will be able to cross the border without any problems.

The discussion surrounding trust as it relates to social capital in the shuttle trade would be incomplete without a thorough analysis of the prevailing Socialist nostalgia among the shuttle traders. Nostalgia is a less studied component of social capital but I will argue that it is through nostalgia that shuttle traders are able to connect with each other on a tier that enables them to build trust on a level beyond organizational and structural trust.

### PART III: NOSTALGIA

In order to establish the prevalence of Socialist-era nostalgia among the shuttle traders, I will cite my conversations with the shuttle traders and employ linguistic analysis. I will then reconcile my findings with those of scholars who have done similar research on post Socialist nostalgia to argue that nostalgia serves an important integrative function that facilitates the building of trust and ultimately, reconciliation of the loss of social welfare and employment experienced in the post-Communist transitional period. Panel 7 illustrates three different accounts of the transitional experience.

#### *Panel 7*

*My parents both worked at a factory near Haskovo, until [they<sup>12</sup>] destroyed it. They've been living in Çorlu ever since. There is no work for them in Bulgaria.*

*I was a good worker at the [textile] factory. There was no need to shuttle trade when Zhivkov was in power—he gave us work. We lived well.*

*In the old days...we could afford to support our family but now we can't afford to support ourselves. Everyone, especially youth, looks for jobs outside of Bulgaria...there aren't any jobs for youth, where are pensioners going to work?*

Considering Halil's relatively young age (28), he was too young to be directly affected by the 1989 transition; however, unlike most peers his own age, he experiences nostalgia for the Communist past. This bout of nostalgia can be attributed to his parents, who, as he explained, were devastated when the factory that they worked at in Haskovo was dismantled, effectively leading them to leave Bulgaria for Turkey during the initial exodus.<sup>13</sup> The positive recollection of Communism and negative recollection of the transition, ingrained in him by his parents, continues to prevail, both as a *result* of his participation in the shuttle trade and as a *factor* that drives him to participate. He did not mention whether or not his parents faced persecution, a consideration that many scholars argue played a significant role in the exodus of the Turkish minority after the borders opened in 1989 (Parla, 2007). His silence on the matter suggests that he considers the dismantlement of state enterprises following the collapse of the Socialist state as more important in his parents' decision to leave the country than the discrimination and marginalization that they may have faced. This reticence<sup>14</sup> regarding the name-change campaign and other discriminatory measures in the 1980s was evident among *all* of the traders who remained mum on the topic. Most of the shuttle traders, like Halil's parents, worked in factories during the Socialist period—it is

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<sup>13</sup> An estimated 300,000 Turkish-Bulgarians left the country in the initial wave of migration following the collapse of the Communist regime and subsequent open-border policies.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to point out that the shuttle traders may not have felt comfortable discussing marginalization issues with me because I am not Turkish. Thus, it could very well be a topic that is discussed amongst the group—which would further my argument that Turkish-Bulgarian involvement in the shuttle trade reflects a platform from which individuals can discuss their past and present grievances.

not a coincidence that the tour guide is involved in a similar occupation with people who can sympathize with his bouts of nostalgia. The loss of his parents' jobs was a significant event in his life, which explains why he feels connected to the shuttle traders, who also experienced a similar loss in employment and work identity. This like-minded nostalgia is what binds him to the other shuttle traders on a level beyond ethnic identity or financial incentives. Nostalgia can thus serve as a *currency* of social capital to further integrate the shuttle traders and establish a deeper level of trust, which allows for the exchange of ideas, hopes, and grievances.

The shuttle traders' general fondness for the Communist period due to employment opportunities suggests that, under Communism, a work identity was stronger than an ethnic identity. In order to further contextualize these findings and highlight their significance, we return to Parla's research, which comes to the similar conclusion that "expressions of marginalization were almost invariably accompanied by reminiscences of the Communist ethos, wherein labor was held to constitute a fundamental facet of one's identity and dignity and gender equality reigned at the workplace and at the home" (Parla, 2009).

Panel 8 recounts an excerpt from Parla's work, *Remembering Across the Border: Postsocialist Nostalgia Among Turkish Immigrants from Bulgaria*, which expresses the paradoxical nature of such findings.

#### *Panel 8*

*Such positive recollections of Communism, often called 'nostalgia' in scholarly and popular discourses, have baffled many, including the more liberal-minded observers of the post-1989 developments in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. If, as in Hannah Arendt's view, the political system completely colonized the lifeworld under totalitarianism, how is it that the very victims of the system do not display pure joy at its demise? More specifically, how can Bulgaria's Turkish minority remember with fondness the regime that subjected them to various degrees of discrimination, culminating in the assimilationist measures of 1984-1989. Infamously called the 'rebirth campaign' the practices of repression directed against the Turkish minority at the time included bans on speaking Turkish in public, wearing what was considered traditional clothing and engaging in Muslim religious rituals and the forced change of all Turkish names to Bulgarian ones (Parla, 2009).*

Parla echoes other scholars who argue that nostalgia is not so much a reflection of the past as it is a strategy for the present. As she defines it, "this presentist focus has historicized nostalgia and has thus paved the ways for innovative analyses of nostalgia in post-Communist contexts as adaption strategies to cope with the difficulties wrought by the transition period" (Parla, 2009). I want to take this argument further and suggest that the very *act* of nostalgia can be a mechanism for integration: A group of like-minded individuals can form a circle where coping and identity reconciliation can occur through nostalgic reminiscences. The strong sense of social security and welfare under Communist rule was lost during the transition, thus, through the shuttle-trade occupation, shuttle traders participate in a platform for social support that seeks to create an identity derived from their common Communist and post-Communist experience. The shuttle traders feel that they are part of

something bigger—a sense of belonging that embodies the collective-work-oriented spirit of Communism.

An examination of the semantic overlaps behind nostalgic words and phrases is necessary to determine the extent to which nostalgia prevails among the group. Panel 9 recounts some of the phrases from the shuttle traders expressed in conversations about the past and present political and economic situation in Bulgaria.

*Panel 9*

*Bulgaria e nai hubavata darzava (Bulgaria is the best country)*

*Darzavata pri Zhivkov beshe v mnogo po dobro sustoyanie (The country under Zhivkov was much better)*

*Pravitelstvoto nac na zabravi (The government has forgotten us)*

*This is how the government works now: you have money; the law doesn't apply to you. I don't have money; the law applies to me.*

*Of course I prefer life in Bulgaria*

*[On moving between Turkey and Bulgaria] This would have never happened under Zhivkov*

*Spomnyamsi kogata pochivahme sus mesetsi (I remember when we vacationed for months)*

There is a clear discursive divide in the language used to distinguish between the country and the government. When the shuttle traders discussed the past, they spoke of the *darzava* (country); when they discussed the present, they referred to the *pravitelstvo* (government). This discursive divide can be attributed to the differentiation in their Communist experience, which assumes identity fragmentation. The rhetorical effect of this distinction suggests that in the past, the shuttle traders viewed the country and government as one entity. Today, however, the country is considered to be separate from the government. This temporally informed dissociation helps explain why nostalgic recollections are often triggered by political discussion. Simultaneously, the shuttle traders experience a longing for their homeland but a bitter distaste for what the ruling government has turned their homeland into in the post-Communist period. Other “triggers” included any mentions of modern societal critiques, employment, and objects like traditional food. Conversations that revolved around these topics instigated an emotional attachment to the *country* Bulgaria, which the shuttle traders associate with a positive and fulfilling Communist experience. Nostalgic narrative brings the shuttle traders closer to each other because it facilitates a sense of understanding and belonging through collective emotional attachment to the past. It is uncommon to hear phrases such as “*komunisticheskoto pravitelstvo*” (Communist government) or “*pravitelstvoto na Zhivkov*” ([Todor] Zhivkov’s government) versus more common terms such as “*segashnoto pravitelstvo*” (the current government) or “*pravitelstvoto na Borisov*”

(Borisov's<sup>15</sup> government). Fatma's usage of "*nac*" (us) in the plural indicates that she speaks on behalf of the entire shuttle-trading group, which reinforces the argument that there is a sense of ownership and belonging between the individuals.

We can also examine the significance of the Bulgarian word for memory, "*spomen*," which generally carries a positive connotation in Bulgarian dialogue, in order to further emphasize the role of nostalgia in the fostering of social capital through socio-psychological integration. One would use "*spomen*" to preclude discussion of fond memories of the past. After they discussed their present-day struggles and general satisfaction with their informal work, the shuttle traders would proceed with "*spomnyamski kogato...*" (I remember when...) and go into a story about a happier, more fulfilling life during the Socialist period. Often the topics of these nostalgic reminiscences would be about fulfilling work, lengthy vacations and well-spent family time. As Ayse recounted the joy of vacationing with her family, another woman interjected with her own story about having spent two months every summer on the Black Sea coast but hadn't so much as set foot near the Black Sea in the last 20 years. This pattern of the shuttle traders interjecting with their own stories when one of them reminisced about the past is particularly important because it demonstrates the integration of different minds and souls, strung together through the thread of Socialist nostalgia.

I want to suggest that the prevailing nostalgia among the shuttle traders may be in response to broader societal phenomenon of isolation, abandonment, generational fragmentation, and continued minority marginalization exacerbated by the post-Communist transition. The group collectively expressed feelings of isolation and abandonment in modern Bulgarian society—they each took turns to explain that many people "changed" after the transition. One woman cited a growing sense of greed among the younger population and exclusion from political and social events as factors impacting their feelings of isolation. A few of the shuttle traders interjected with personal stories about working on their parents' farms as children or on a *lager*<sup>16</sup> therefore earning money "the hard way" unlike the "*gotovani*" of the present day.<sup>17</sup> Through the exchange of nostalgia, shuttle traders reconcile their present-day grievances and forge a collective-identity network based on similar experiences and a desire to retain memories of the past.

Now that we have examined elements of trust and nostalgia in the shuttle trade, we will see how the *interplay* of these elements is reflected in the *social hierarchy of organized shuttle trade*, which acts as a meta-organizing device that fosters the accumulation of social capital.

#### **PART IV: THE SOCIAL HIERARCHY OF ORGANIZED SHUTTLE TRADE**

The interplay of nostalgia and trust, as they relate to social capital, culminates into what I coin the *social hierarchy of organized shuttle trade*. At the core of this notion is the concept of *organizational trust*, which Qianhong Fu explains in his analysis of the relationship between social capital and trust. He argues that "organizational trust is more than simply the personal

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<sup>15</sup> Boyko Borisov was Bulgaria's Prime Minister from 2009 until 2013, when he stepped down amid controversy. In the summer of 2014 when this fieldwork was conducted, Georgi Bliznashki served as interim Prime Minister (until Nov 2014, when Boyko Borisov became Prime Minister again).

<sup>16</sup> During the Communist period, school children would often be sent to local farms during the summer to help pick fruits and vegetables.

<sup>17</sup> slang for "lazy people"

trust that exists between individuals based on reputation and experience; it can be seen as deriving as well as at least partly from the roles, rules, and structured relations of the organization” (Fu, 2004, p. 3). We can take Fu’s analysis of organizational trust and apply it to illicit trade activities because the individuals who make up the shuttle-trading group are essentially part of a very structured and hierarchical organization.

At the top of the hierarchy are the bus driver(s),<sup>18</sup> who carry the most responsibility because they must ensure the safe transport of the shuttle traders and their goods, components that are foundational to the existence of the shuttle trade. The bus driver acts as the paternal overseer and does not often deal with trivial tasks such as the hiding of goods, though he does help out with minor tasks when necessary. The bus driver’s focus is to build a strong base of shuttle traders and a network of border agents with whom he can bargain. The driver uses his in-depth knowledge about the customs process to *guide* the shuttle traders.

Next down the hierarchy is the tour guide, who is responsible for the facilitation of the logistical aspects of the shuttle trade. This includes checking passports, helping the bus drivers bargain with the border agents, acting as a liaison between the bus drivers and the shuttle traders, organizing passengers and their goods, transporting goods, and other more customer-service-oriented activities such as handing out food and drinks to passengers on the bus. Other scholars who have studied the Eastern European shuttle trade often describe the tour guide as a younger woman fluent in cross-border languages with intimate knowledge about the customs process and familiarity with the border agents (Yukseker, 2004). These observations also hold true in this case, except that the tour guide was a young man, rather than a woman. Although most of the individuals who had long been involved in the shuttle trade knew all of the rules, they still left it up to the tour guide to take care of issues that arose at the border, which is indicative of the delicate structural balance of roles within the organization. On both trips, right before we reached the border, Halil would jump off of the bus to make sure that the bus had a good spot in line. He ran off into the distance and waved at nearby cars and border agents. “That boy never stops” and “he is so young but so hardworking,” the shuttle traders murmured to each other. Their admiration of him indicates a relationship based on reciprocal trust and respect, which are essential components to the network building that enables the protrusion of a strong social circle, which facilitates the accumulation of social capital.

The shuttle traders, who make up the largest part of organized shuttle trading, are at the bottom of the hierarchical triangle: They are the foundation of the trade upon which the employment and success of the bus drivers and tour guides are dependent. In addition, the drivers and guides could not flourish without the trust they are afforded by the traders. The shuttle traders are responsible for purchasing and selling goods at the town markets: Women often wear large elastic belts under their shirts where they hide bottles of rakia and/or bags of nuts on the trip toward Edirne. On the way back, they use those same elastic belts to hide cartons of cigarettes. The men use similar elastic bands around their legs and

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<sup>18</sup> On smaller buses there is usually one bus driver but on larger buses there are usually two drivers, though it is also common to have three drivers, depending on the length of the journey.

underneath their pants. In addition, there are hiding places on the bus designated by the driver and tour guide.

This hierarchy reflects the relationship between three distinctive types of trust: At the most basic level, there is *deterrence-based trust*, which can be described as knowledge of the rules of the game. In the case of organized shuttle trade, this is reflected in the roles and responsibilities at every level of the hierarchy. The relationships between the bus driver(s), the tour guide, and the shuttle traders are contingent upon their awareness of each of their responsibilities. They operate within their own spheres of influence as well as in each other's.

The next level of trust is referred to as *knowledge-based trust*, which presumes that individuals have enough experience with each other to know how they will act and react, given certain situations. This type of trust is built over time and is best reflected in the business and emotive relations between the shuttle traders. The bus driver reassuring the women at the border that they were not going to be checked is one example. In another instance, a woman repeatedly touched her waist, where she hid a few cartons of cigarettes and nervously asked those around her whether anything was noticeable. Melis pulled me to the side and explained that this lady "always gets like this," which was a strong indication that she and the others are very familiar with each other's behaviors and reactions, particularly in stressful situations, which the shuttle traders can often find themselves in.

The most intimate form of trust is *identity-based trust*, which is established when individuals know each other's hopes, dreams, ambitions, and fears and thus unlocks a higher level of productivity (Conley, 2012). Higher productivity enables the shuttle traders to reap larger monetary gains, thus they continue to participate in the shuttle trade and continue to construct a tightly-knit common identity. Their personal conversation topics, respect for one another, and friendly body language suggests that they are extremely comfortable in each other's company. The cultivation of this identity-based trust in organized shuttle trade is subconscious: It is in the process of seeking monetary gain that shuttle traders form this very intimate form of trust, which, in turn, helps them succeed in their business as well as improve their socio-psychological well being in the face of economic, social, and political turmoil that has defined their lives over the past 25 years.

This social hierarchy acts as a meta-organizing device that fosters the accumulation of social capital. Through participation in the shuttle trade, Turkish-Bulgarians are able to reconnect and reconcile with Communist-era social and occupational structures. The shuttle trade, as a collective and trust-oriented activity creates a sense of belonging and forges an identity based on their Communist past and post-Communist experience. Ultimately, the shuttle trade's role as a platform for social support and reconciliation is why it has been able to thrive long past the immediate transitional period.

### CONCLUSION

Although the shuttle trade initially arose in the aftermath of the collapse of the Communist regime in Bulgaria as a survival strategy for many unemployed or otherwise economically disadvantaged individuals and groups, its continuation into the present, outside the realm of formal political and social organizations, is due to its tightly encompassed structure, which relies on mutual trust, strong interpersonal relations, and a solid network of like-minded individuals. My research transcends the well-established economic arguments



that other scholars have used to explain the shuttle-trade phenomenon in the hope that this approach, rooted in the socio-psychological examination into the continued effects of the Communist transition period, will add to the existing literature on informal economic activities in Eastern Europe.

Through an anthropological and linguistic approach, based on interviews and interactions with shuttle traders, I was able to identify two important components of social capital in the shuttle trade: a high level of interpersonal trust and prevailing post-Socialist nostalgia, both of which help facilitate cross-border trade through their integrative functions. The interplay of these two components is reflected in the *social hierarchy of organized shuttle trading*, which acts as a meta-organizing device that *fosters* the accumulation of social capital, enabling shuttle traders to succeed socially and economically. Through collective participation in a group-oriented, socio-economic activity, like-minded Turkish-Bulgarians are able to reconcile with Communist-era social and occupational structures. The shuttle trade therefore constitutes a platform for social support, identity, and belonging for the Turkish-Bulgarian minority.

As long as there is a deep-seated mistrust of formal government and economic institutions and policymakers continue in their inability to address the socio-psychological needs of their population, such as a broader reconciliation with the social, political, and economic effects of the communist past and issues surrounding minority identity, the shuttle trade and other collective, group-oriented informal economic activities will continue to flourish. The culmination of my research reflects the need for policymakers to take into account broader societal implications of massive economic transition. Policies aimed at combating small-scale illicit trading activities must examine underlying social, cultural, and psychological factors, in addition to economic ones, that drive informal economic participation. The removal of Communist-era relics and monuments, as well as shunning of socialist discourse, in the hope of erasing the Communist legacy in Bulgaria, is contrary to what my research suggests should be done to combat the issue of illicit economic activities by groups strongly impacted by the transition and current capitalist-leaning system. Acknowledgment and recognition of the importance of the Communist legacy and the need for certain segments of the population to reconcile with Communist-era social structures and changing social dynamics, which undermine traditional familial and social relations, are important steps that Bulgarian policymakers and government officials can take in order to address shadow economic activities.

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