Introduction

'We Are Like Broken Glass'

'Once we were unified; now we are like broken glass', workers at the Mladost glassworks in Sofia would often repeat while pointing to the shards of broken glass scattered about the shop floor. This image encapsulates the intense fragmentation of workers in Bulgaria over the past three decades and points to the newly formed hierarchies that have been established through the division of labour into a wide range of work categories, most prominently those of regular and casual work, which are intertwined with inequalities of gender, ethnicity and age. A disparate spectrum of benefits, different degrees of precarity and often conflicting interests have played a major role in this newly formed fragmentation based on post-Fordist managerial techniques.

Mladost was formed out of small pre-socialist glass workshops in Sofia, which were unified and nationalized in 1953. It became one of the basic providers of glass products during socialist times in Bulgaria. After a long period of economic hardship, which started gradually in the late 1980s, it was privatized in 1997 during a period of intense privatization projects and factory closures around the country. Workers and managers who continued working in Mladost after privatization spent their entire working lives in the company and participated in a plethora of managerial, production and technological transformations that occurred along with larger economic and political shifts.

For 15 years, starting in 1982 at the age of 31, Nadia tailored employee uniforms in Mladost.[1] She had previously studied, after high school, at a year-long tailoring school and worked for a couple of years as a tailoress in a clothing firm. Before joining Mladost, she spent three years working at a circus as a cashier and as an assistant, along with her partner. Although she enjoyed travelling with the circus across the country, she decided to get a more stable job in Mladost when her first child was born. She was laid off during the period of Mladost's privatization in 1997 when her section closed down and the production and repair of uniforms was outsourced,

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Figure 0.1. Nadia in her sewing room. © Dimitra Kofti

like many other sectors unrelated to the factory's core production of glass. She returned to the plant after two years of unemployment as an 'external worker' on a casual contract, first packing beer and beverage bottles for a couple of years and later cleaning the shop floor. Nadia was the only one of the five original tailors to be re-employed on the premises. She managed to re-acquire one of the old sewing machines and took over an empty room in the plant, which she decorated with plants and personal items. In her room, she informally continued her previous job of patching uniforms and other clothes for her colleagues during her breaks or at weekends. She would often say, 'I am still a tailoress; I never actually became a cleaning lady only'. Her 'actual' colleagues 'are not here', she would also say, referring to those who had been laid off and had never returned to the factory. She finally received a pension in 2018 after working as a tailor in the company for 15 years and as a cleaning lady on a casual contract for another 19 years. Nadia continued to work for another two years on a casual contract, a usual practice for low income pensioners. Broken glass was a metaphor for the workers' period of upheavals that included processes of fragmentation in relation to past and present conditions at work, the changing trajectories of people's working lives, newly formed divisions and a future of uncertainty.

This book tells a story of the flexibilization of production, precaritization of work, shifting managerial practices and the ways in which people with different employment statuses live and work together. The ethnography

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looks at how a variety of global and local forces, temporal and spatial regimes and workers' divisions meet at the rapidly moving conveyor belt of a glass factory and analyses how gender, age and employment status inequalities are intertwined and reproduced both at the production site and back home. It is based on my long-term study of the everyday post-socialist politics of labour in the wider context of flexible and financial capitalism at a time of intense socio-economic transformations in Bulgaria, when two successive and entangled hegemonic teleologies – socialism, then its successor, capitalism – and successive economic crises shaped the experience of work in various ways. The ethnography is mostly based on fieldwork in Mladost Glassworks,[2] with a focus on the restructuring of work and production after privatization and on the ways these transformations intertwine with the workers' lives. The new era in the factory was followed by a dramatically intensified course of neoliberal downsizing, labour outsourcing and a focus on core production. My account of the shop floor is complemented by a broad ethnographic scope extending to kinship and intimate ties within and outside the plant, the new conditions of precarious work, new discourses of individuality and flexibility that interact with pre-existing ones in respect of collective productivity, the alternative ways in which workers use abandoned factory buildings, perceptions of the past, changing temporalities and meanings of time and the experience of ongoing 'crises'.[3]

The presence of 'the market' on the shop floor has been rendered permanent and menacing. Practices of flexible management, consultants' discourses, changes in technology and the omnipresence of the clients' and stockholders' control over production intertwine with the everyday politics of labour. This book engages with these circumstances while grasping the relationships in production along the conveyor belt. It further discusses issues of transformation and memory, as well as the temporalities of production in relation to continuities and discontinuities, from Fordism to post-Fordism, and from socialism to postsocialism. Mladost employees make sense of radical upheavals in daily discussions about continuity and change; for them, 'the past' is constantly present. Along with daily complaints about 'the changes', visions of 'no change' encapsulate a perception of everlasting oppression and enduring structural power bridging socialism and capitalism, as well as Fordism and post-Fordism.

Discussions about intense changes often began with the phrase 'everything has changed'/'nothing is as it used to be'.[4] However, employees would also comment on things by saying that 'everything is the same'/ 'always the same',[5] underlining enduring structures of power and employees' sense of powerlessness.[6] Far from being contradictory, these phrases pointed to a diversity of conjunctural and intersecting structures (Sahlins 1985). I view

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them as aspects of people's 'historicity', of 'the manner in which persons operating under the constraints of social ideologies make sense of the past while anticipating the future' (Hirsch and Stewart 2005: 262). 'Everything is the same' and 'everything has changed' situationally coexist, revealing the paradox of transformation. This sense of ongoing continuity and change is at the heart of the ethnographic exploration in this study.

My fieldwork began just over a decade after Mladost's privatization. One of the main themes of daily conversation, both in the administrative offices and on the shop floor, was the ongoing process of the changing relationships at work, particularly those that took place after privatization in 1997. From a state company, Mladost became part of the global market with significant changes in its production practices and organizational structure. This process included the restructuring and flexibilization of production and labour, which was followed by ongoing redundancies and changing managerial practices and discourses. Transformations in management and in the organization of work followed the larger shifts that took place in postsocialist countries, where the dominant ideologies of economy and labour had been in a process of intense change since the early 1990s. Since the summer of 2008, a new 'crisis' was added to the main topics of daily preoccupation, as the international banking crisis brought memories of previous 'crises' in Bulgaria and further changes on the shop floor. Given that the plant was now owned by a Greek company, the repercussions of the 'Greek crisis' were also gradually felt on the shop floor.

During my follow-up fieldwork in Bulgaria in 2013–2015, I expanded my research to include the experience of deindustrialization, transformations of work and production, and changing urban and rural relations in Pernik, an industrial town close to Sofia. I then began research among Pernik's steel, mining and garment workers, while I continued to visit Mladost in Sofia, as well as meeting with Mladost workers who lived in Pernik. The recent and still ongoing period of 'crisis' had been crystalized for workers as one that included more redundancies, salary cuts and further indebtedness. Moreover, political mobilization to campaign for better or 'decent' standards of living and against high energy prices and 'corruption' (Kofti 2018a) took place in 2013 and 2014 in Bulgaria (Ivancheva 2013; Tsoneva 2013; Dinev 2016), resulting in the fall of two governments in two subsequent years.

During this new turbulent period in the mid-2010s, another crucial global aspect of work became more apparent in workplaces in Sofia and Pernik. The workplace was somewhere that not only produced products for the market and (re)produced ideologies of work, it was also a place that prepared and produced itself as a potential product. Mladost not only had to produce glass, but it also had to appear to do so in ways that would

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attract the stock market or potential buyers of the plant, if needed. The ethnography looks at how this double aim of the company – to produce products as well as promote itself as a product – influenced the everyday politics of work and production and, most importantly, workers' daily lives. The importance of financialization and the repercussions of the market in the everyday politics of production, as well as the constant threat of the workplace being sold, affected workers' lives in multiple ways to which the ethnography draws attention. Mladost was indeed eventually sold to another transnational company in 2017, a plan that was not explicitly communicated to the workforce during the previous years, though this possibility played a crucial role in disciplining workers and hung in the air throughout the previous decade, preparing the workers for further changes and uncertainties. This new condition proved previous workers' fears of ownership being changed once more, with further restructuring and lay-offs prophetic. Nadia mentioned that she was relieved to receive her pension finally, as she experienced this new period as one of intensified stress.

After the 1980s, intense changes in production and in the organisation of labour in Bulgaria and the postsocialist world more generally were part of a larger shift within capitalism towards the 'global factory' (Blim 1992). This was characterized by investments over national borders, the mobility of people and capital, new communication technologies and the significant rise of multinational corporations. This global shift in the capitalist economy has been described variously as 'disorganized capitalism' (Offe 1985; Lash and Urry 1987), 'flexible specialization' (Piore and Sabel 1984), 'flexible accumulation' (Harvey 1989), globalization and flexible capitalism. Moreover, financialization, or the impact of financial markets over production spaces, households and daily lives gradually grew to become a global economic trend from the 1990s. Mladost's transformation occurred in this context of the parallel processes of the flexibilization and financialization of capitalism. A particularity of these processes in the postsocialist context is that such transformations were intense and dramatic, coming as they did after the collapse of the socialist regimes. They were accompanied by strong economic crises and the dispossession of previously stable jobs and state-provided services related to work. These conditions resulted, inter alia, in new forms of poverty (Pine and Bridger 1998a; Humphrey and Mandel 2002; Kaneff and Pine 2011).

Eastern Europe provided the conditions for low-cost production for western European markets (Smith 2003) and attracted capital fleeing deindustrializing Western countries. This meant that factories in the post-socialist countries often did not follow the path of closure as in Western deindustrialized countries, but were sold to foreign investors and continued

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to operate under shifting conditions. In the case of Mladost, the company was bought by the Greek company Arethusa. Historically, both Mladost and Arethusa participated in state economies, the former in a socialist economy, the latter in a capitalist one. Both companies became parts of a common group of transnational capitalist enterprises on the margins of Europe producing low-cost glass for the European market. These transformations of work and production on the geographical periphery of Europe are at the centre of my anthropological investigation.

New flexible forms of production and outsourcing in the context of flexible and financial capitalism generate new global and local hierarchies and inequalities that are geographically extended in comparison to previous ones. While Mladost's transformations are situated in the context of global capitalism, local aspects are integral to these processes. Socialism and its legacy continued to be important in Mladost, even during the third decade after its collapse in Bulgaria. It was important not only as a memory of the past: socialism was often blamed for a variety of problems that occurred under the market economy. Another commonly held reason for the difficulties in production was the character of 'Bulgarian' and 'Greek' or 'Balkan' culture, associated with 'corruption' and 'wildness' and reproducing discourses of 'balkanism' (Todorova 1997). Managers would blame the socialist past and 'Bulgarianness' rather than neoliberal axioms for the difficulties Mladost faced. In the following sections, I look at anthropological approaches to postsocialism and explore the extent to which this framework of analysis may still be useful in an understanding of everyday politics of labour in Bulgaria three decades after the collapse of socialism. Yet, the ethnography of this Bulgarian industrial setting may inform broader issues in the anthropology of work and labour as it looks at how its production site is spatially and geographically interconnected with global processes and politics of labour and production. It also explores how global interconnections become tangible at the production site and how tensions between the impersonal conditions brought about by corporations and personal lives (Hart and Hann 2011) and the new advocacies of the market interact with the shop floor of a postsocialist factory. The 'we are broken glass' metaphor of the working class as broken points to intense transformations among Mladost workers and newly formed divisions and underlines fragmentation as a shared condition among workers with different employment statuses, as expressed by many. The ethnography pays attention to conditions and senses of fragmentation, which I approach as complex processes rather than as an accomplished class formation (Carbonella and Kasmir 2014: 5) and points to the processual character of class (E.P. Thompson 1963). Although scholarly attention to class has been relatively neglected in the period of post-Fordism (Kalb 2015),

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Figure 0.2. Train view from Pernik to Sofia, a daily commute to Mladost. © Nicola Zambelli

anthropological studies have underlined the importance of exploring relations and understandings of class in the context of dispossession (Kasmir and Carbonella, 2008), intense fragmentation of the workforce (Narotzky and Smith 2006; Mollona 2009b; Carbonella and Kasmir 2014; Parry 2018; Parry 2020), new relations of privatization and ongoing transformations of global relations (Zhang 2010; Neveling and Steur 2018; Vetta 2018; Weiss 2019). By looking at different sites of workers' action and everyday life in relation to broader politics of labour, the ethnography pays attention to multiple connections between various forms of waged, unwaged, regular, casual and unpaid work and ways those are interconnected with peoples' divisions and alliances (Kasmir and Carbonella 2014: 6). It begins on the shop floor, and from there, extends to the company's management, to employees' households and lives outside work, and to everyday life in derelict industrial buildings.

Mladost's Global Conveyor Belt

Mladost, like other postsocialist privatized factories (Dunn 2004; Müller 2007; Vodopivec 2010; Rajković 2018; Trevisani 2018; Kesküla 2018), did not move geographically in the context of deindustrialization, but was

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significantly transformed through its reorientation to the global dimension. I argue that this situation enables one to take an ethnographic view of dislocation processes as they occur in one place, which I describe as local dislocation. Furthermore, it allows us to grasp the interconnections between shifting moral and political economies and ways in which those intertwine with workers' lives. The ethnography looks at how diverse global and local forces converge at Mladost's production line and attends to intense mobilities and immobilities, as well as the visible and invisible forms of work and transformations occurring in one place.

Since the 1980s, the new conditions of the world economy and labour market have resulted in new spatial connections and dislocations of people, capital and industries. Large industries in the industrial north have followed the path of redundancy and/or moved their premises to countries abroad. The disintegration of production units and the transfer of capital have some characteristics in common. Outsourcing, subcontracting and downsizing, or what Piore and Sabel (1984) have described as a 'second industrial divide', have led to the displacement of production and people. These new characteristics have triggered numerous anthropological discussions about the locus of culture and social relationships in a changing world. Geographical changes certainly brought new socio-cultural formations, as many have argued (e.g. Appadurai 1996; Ferguson 2006). One important shift is the changing relations of spaces and dislocations as a result of the movement of migrant workers and capital.

Deleuze and Guattari (1983) described workers' detachment from the means of production, often accompanied by a loss of control over space, as deterritorialization. One example is the privatization of land ('enclosures') in eighteenth-century England that excluded peasants from the land. They also used the term to describe flows of finance and the ways in which power is deterritorialized through financing and then reterritorialized through the central banks (ibid.: 258). In their analysis, deterritorialization and continuous reterritorialization are aspects intrinsic to capitalism, which 'is continually reterritorializing with one hand what it was deterritorializing with the other' (ibid.: 259). The ideas of space dispersion and deterritorialisation have been widely used in anthropology to describe phenomena related to post-Fordist economic restructuring and to neoliberalism (Saskia Sassen 1991; Low 1996; Ong 2006). The global space is thus perceived in terms of flows of capital, people, goods, services and ideas. This body of literature has underlined the importance of the detachment of space from local places, but in underlining this aspect of the global economy, it has often overlooked new territorializations of capital (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003).[7]

While many analyses of global deterritorialization have focused on ideas of a world without borders, research related to work settings has

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suggested that the idea of mobility introduces new global inequalities and that borders are dynamic but still define strong global inequalities that take place locally (Rothstein and Blim 1992; Burawoy et al. 2000; Narotzky and Smith 2006; Smart and Smart 2006). The process of deindustrialization, relocation and reindustrialization in other parts of the world, although intensified in recent decades, has been both a practice and a subsequent threat for workers' communities since the early twentieth century.[8]

The authors of a volume on the anthropology of industrial work (Mollona et al. 2009) have emphasized the importance of an ethnographic understanding of global inequalities and how they are manifested both on the shop floor and in workers' communities. Mollona argues that much of the literature on the 'New Economy' has neglected old class stratifications and inequalities while focusing on multi-sited ethnographies of 'fast capitalism'. Instead, Mollona concentrates 'on the slow, monotonous grind of making a livelihood for the majority of people stuck "on the dark side" of globalization' (Mollona 2009a, xv). Furthermore, he advocates an anthropology that will 'look at the spatial and temporal interconnections between the visible, stable and 'respectable' labour at the core and the precarious, invisible, and degrading labour at the margins' (ibid.: xxi). In accordance with this literature, which places the emphasis on the articulations of political and moral economies, I focus on the relationships between visible and invisible work in attempting to make sense of the global dynamics and mobilities that meet around the conveyor belt of a single factory. The rest of this section focuses on how to make sense of global interconnections in Mladost and how its circumstances may add to comparative anthropological discussions of work.

The privatization process in Mladost is part of an intense geographical reordering that occurred after the collapse of socialism. One characteristic, which is important for understanding postsocialist production within this global restructuring, is that postsocialist factories often followed the path of a process I describe as a local dislocation. While capital movements in the post-Fordist context have often been associated with the dispersal of local production into smaller units of production elsewhere, in the case of postsocialist factories like Mladost, large-scale industries have become parts of foreign companies. Large industrial units that were once run in the interests of their national economies changed their geographical orientation, while their place, production, machinery, expertise, and more importantly, people, remained the same, although the latter were significantly less numerous after redundancies.

Mladost followed a re-ordering of its industrial space which reflects a larger shift in its production. Privatization was followed by a reduction in the range of products, thus leading to the abandonment of a large amount

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of industrial space, a topic I return to in Chapter 5. Moreover, it became an outsourcer: its entire production came under the full inspective view of, and became absolutely dependent on, its clients. Then, a new control system was introduced: its clients began controlling the production lines electronically and in real time. This new kind of supervision and surveillance, linking it to its clients via an electronic system, brought about another level of dislocation. This particular dislocation was enabled by new technologies in ways that call on us to analyse how electronic communication in real time has impacted the working lives of people in diverse ways, a condition that is still relatively undertheorized (Eriksen, 2014: 4). Mladost was still at the same place, yet in a state of dislocation. Thereafter, some previously crucial features of this place where the industry had formerly been installed played a minor role. For instance, the highest level of management was now the owner living abroad, while inspection of production was taken over, to some extent, by the clients via the real-time electronic system of control at Mladost's production line to which they had access. Mladost, in its turn, made attempts to reduce costs and to introduce practices recommended by distant consultants, by outsourcing parts of its production to minor outsourcers. Mladost is already a smaller company than its clients (mostly drinks producers), and in its turn, it has had recourse to even smaller outsourcers, thus contributing to the phenomena of dislocation at high levels of intensity, where the pressures on the smaller company below inevitably become accentuated. This new rearrangement is complicated by the fact that these minor outsourcers operate inside the Mladost factory under modes of casual employment. Workers who once worked together were now divided between those working for Mladost and those who worked 'outside' the company, but with minor outsourcers working within Mladost's premises.

The geographical vicinity of this type of outsourced production has certain prominent features: as it involves the workers' physical presence, it is significantly different from distant outsourcing and offshoring. For example, the computer operators in India, as described by Huws (2003), work for remote companies in the US, and while the salary of a computer operator in Bangalore is much smaller than that of a computer operator in the States, it may nevertheless be much larger than the salary one can earn working for the Indian state. This adds new dimensions to global and local inequalities. In the case studied here, the physical presence of the casual workers whom the smaller company employ on the main production site generates interactions within the production space between those who are paid at different rates and under different terms of employment. In geographically distant dislocated production, as in the comparison between the US and India, the outsourcer's worker, who is low or minimally paid,

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makes a living from her wage in the socio-economic context of where she lives and works. In Mladost, the outsourcer's worker who is located in close proximity to the main employer makes a living from her wage in the same economic context as the main employer's workers do. The proximity between the casual workers in Mladost and the main employer's regular employees generates direct dynamic relations and practices of competition and/or solidarity between the two groups of workers. The particularity of this case rests on the fact that it involves former colleagues, relatives, friends and members of the same household who are in the opposite group, thus tending to fragment social relations. I view this as a case of a locally based dislocation of production and of social relationships. Privatized postsocialist factories offer strong examples of such local dislocations and the ethnography in this book takes a close look at the dynamics of work practices and social relations within this context.

The distinction just described is first and foremost one between casual and regular work, a growing distinction that appears in various forms, it has been discussed in various places worldwide and is not a 'new' characteristic of production (e.g. Gill 1999; Parry 2013, 2020; Spyridakis 2013; Trevisani 2018; Kofti 2018b; Vetta 2020; Strümpell 2023;). Yet, in Mladost, this was a newly introduced condition as there were only regular employment contracts up until the period of its privatization, similar to other socialist countries, where full regular employment policies were implemented in most workplaces (Rajković 2022). In Mladost, the articulations of casual and regular work divisions share many similarities with practices of geographically distant production that often occur through outsourcing. Yet, there is a substantial condition that Mladost workers experience on an everyday basis, which shapes their worlds both at work and at home. Mladost has a Fordist-type production line: a conveyor belt connects and synchronizes the Hot and Cold Ends of the process. It is also run using post-Fordist practices of labour organization with diverse types of employment and levels of outsourcing. The lines between Fordist and post-Fordist production are blurred on the shop floor: workers bound together around the conveyor belt who, once employed by the same company, are now employed by different companies, yet synchronize their bodily movements around the same speedy machines. This has resulted in clashes of interests, as well as practices of cooperation.

Furthermore, the postsocialist experience is of great ethnographic interest here because an ethnography of it can add a new perspective to the broad analytical framework of industrial modernity. Employees, especially older ones, have lived during various phases of two distinct, yet interconnected, political systems of industrial modernity. They often make various comparisons between them, as well as between different epochs within

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these periods, as discussed further in Chapter 1. In doing so, they make insightful criticisms of both. Their views, rather than being nostalgic for the previous era or mystified in their understanding of the current one, are often highly critical, cynical and ironic. The experience of socialism and capitalism is also lived out as an experience of discrepancies between teleological discourses of future prosperity and the actual conditions of industrial modernity. The time that has elapsed and the accumulated transformations now open up increased possibilities for irony, an irony that provides diverse perspectives of the world, while it captures ambiguities and contradictions (Fernandez and Taylor Huber 2001). The ethnography of this book attempts to grasp visions of flexible capitalism through the lenses of those who have also lived during socialism and experienced a wide range of transformations and crises. Outsourcing and different types of employment and remuneration create new, fragmented worlds, though they work on the same site, often live in the same households, and more generally, have lived under the same economic and political regimes. This is a condition that underlines the importance of looking at the processes of localized disembedding and re-embedding social relations in a compressed and interconnected world (Eriksen 2014). Their experiences of flexible capitalism is of a spatiotemporal unity that has been painfully fissured by the workings of the same managerial technologies as those practiced in geographically distant global dislocations.

While these changes have been intense, there are also continuities with past practices that call for a careful view of 'new' and 'old' practices at the work setting and in workers lives, as Victoria Goddard has underlined (Goddard 2017: 3). Similarly, critical views on the concept of precarity and the 'precariat' (Standing 2011) have pointed out that much of the discussion on the post-Fordist casualization of work has accentuated similarities in relation to precarious work and lost sight of historical and geographical variations (Breman 2013). This line of critique has also underlined that views of precarity, as a new phenomenon, run the risk of reproducing ethnocentric ideas, given that precarious work has been the norm for several parts of the world, long before the post-Fordist period (Munck 2013; Millar 2014; Matos 2019), and that Fordism should be seen as a parenthesis to this norm for some places of the Global North (Neilson and Rossiter 2008) and for some types of visible labour. Yet, the twentieth-century politics of work included struggles over workers' rights and employment stability, and as Rajković describes, it included both 'subordination and relative emancipation from previous forms of exploitation' (2021: 158). In understanding shifting conditions at work and historical processes towards new forms of casual labour, the ethnography attempts to view global interconnections without losing site of Mladost's sociohistorical context and complex transformations.

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'Communism' as a Keyword of the Capitalist Era

The communist past was present in many ways in Mladost. When I first met Ms Nikolova, the 44-year-old Human Resources manager in Mladost glassworks, she explained to me that an important part of her work was to shift people's mentalities away from previous 'old' and 'communist' work practices. She gave examples of conspicuously overstaffed posts in the plant and emphasized how redundancies were aimed at more 'reasonable' job allocations in the plant. She advised me not to focus my research on the views of those who had been laid off, or on those workers who complained about current conditions as they were 'merely' being 'nostalgic'. When I started working at the end of the production line, I became aware of the intensity of the work and the speed of the machines, which often reminded me of Charlie Chaplin's 1936 film *Modern Times*. Workers often remembered how the factory was, indeed, overstaffed during socialist times, and how the pace of the machine allowed moments of relaxation. By contrast, they would also mention that, under the new conditions, the line was understaffed in relation to the pace of the machines. Nevertheless, their complaints were often described by the management as 'nostalgia for communism'. Greek shop floor managers would say that Bulgarian workers were not productive because they were 'nostalgic' and 'lazy because of communism', and that they needed 'deep training' to get used to the new conditions of production. Such images of continuity from the socialist past legitimated neoliberal practices in the new work settings. Moreover, the concept of nostalgia often contributed to static images of people's views and of the socialist past (Todorova 2010).[9]

I view 'communism' as a 'keyword' (Williams 1985 [1976]) of the neoliberal transformations of the postsocialist era. As Raymond Williams pointed out, during periods of intense transformation, the meanings of words and the rhythms and tones of utterances may change slowly or more rapidly; that is, words and concepts referring to values and ideas may have various and sometimes contradictory meanings. While social change is not linguistic change, language use is an important register of change (ibid.: 17). In the third decade after the end of the socialist regime in Bulgaria, 'communism' remained a keyword for political ideas and ideological vocabularies that legitimize practices against its continuity.

An ongoing discussion among scholars who work on postsocialist settings is whether postsocialism is still a useful framework of analysis (Hann 2006a; Dunn and Verdery 2011; Thelen 2011; Chelcea and Druta 2016; Kojanic 2020, Tocheva 2020). The end of the socialist regimes in eastern Europe attracted the attention of anthropologists who have conducted research on a wide range of topics related to the experience of the

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collapse of the socialist regimes. Similarities in people's responses to the transformation from planned economies and Marxist–Leninist ideologies to free-market economies and new dominant discourses of neoliberal capitalism informed a body of literature which also took into account diversities in their histories and cultures (Pine and Bridger 1998a). Furthermore, anthropologists have criticized the dominant discourses of the 'transition' (Hann 1995; Verdery 1996), often expressed by economists and political scientists, which assumed a teleological transition to capitalism. Such discourses accompanied shock therapy economic policies, most notably in Poland, and reforms involving the intervention of the IMF and the World Bank. It has been pointed out that such transition discourses assume the existence of a point of departure and a point of arrival, which leaves little space for dynamic analyses of people's responses and of their survival and coping strategies in collapsing economies (Pine and Bridger 1998a: 5). While anthropologists considered socialism and postsocialism useful as broad analytical frames, they also insisted that peoples' life experiences cannot be so neatly dissected to conform to such categories (Kaneff 2004: 3). In exploring the direct confrontation between market mechanisms and people's lives, moralities and daily practices (Humphrey and Mandel 2002), anthropological studies conducted in ex-socialist countries have not merely documented practice on the ground; they have also criticized and refined larger analytical frames.

Anthropological research conducted during socialism revealed a variety of socialisms and a variety of responses to them (Hann 1980; Humphrey 1983; Kligman 1988; Pine 1993; Stewart 1993). This heterogeneity was not transformed into the economic homogeneity that neoliberal reformers envisioned and that celebrators of neoliberalism viewed as the only possible historical development.[10] Moreover, neoliberal rhetoric often saw the individuals participating in the 'transition' as being driven by rational choice alone. Scholars more concerned with the actual developments engaged with the social embeddedness of the economy and focused on the complex ways in which individuals took decisions and acted in relation to continuities and discontinuities with the socialist past (Hann 2005: 555).

One then wonders what constitutes the unity of postsocialism, given the diversity of socialisms and the heterogeneity of responses to the postsocialist era. A body of studies conducted in the 1990s suggested that people in ex-socialist countries had to confront similar neoliberal policies and often employed the same strategies (Kideckel 1995; Burawoy and Verdery 1999b; Pine and Bridger 1998b), which were not 'economically rational' but were shaped in relationship to a diversity of cultural meanings (Pine and Bridger 1998b: 11). What seemed to be common in many of the ethnographies was the time horizon of action: 'Because the postsocialist

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moment means constant change in the parameters of action, actors tend to strategize within time horizons that are short' (Burawoy and Verdery 1999a: 2). Creed observed this in Bulgaria in the 1990s: 'As the transition proceeded, it moved from being a temporary inconvenience on the road to capitalism to a seemingly permanent discomfort' (Creed 1999: 224). Uncertainty became a central topic in early postsocialist studies, a concept that grew to be of great use in contemporary anthropology, as economic crises and recessions have had a gradually greater impact worldwide. The focus of postsocialist studies on the concept of uncertainty since the early 1990s might inform broader anthropological discussions today. This is particularly relevant for discussions regarding employment and precarity (e.g. Procoli 2004; Standing 2011; Parry 2013; Prentice 2020) that are creating conditions of uncertainty and insecurity for a growing number of employees.

The experience of loss connected with the gradual demise of the welfare state, the flexibilization of labour and movements of capital did not occur only in eastern Europe but they are phenomena that are characteristic of a new era of capitalism and globalization (Piore and Sabel 1984; Harvey 1989, 2005). In the European context, the experiences of these changes transcend East/West boundaries. Taking into account the tremendous upheavals in the East allows one to understand better the modalities of this process as an interaction between the East and West of Europe. Several comparative studies have tackled this issue. For instance, a collection edited by Procoli (2004) scrutinizes the effects of these economic processes on workers' survival strategies, whereas Kaneff and Pine (2011) focus on the links between poverty and migration out of eastern Europe. Similarly wide patterns have emerged from the two collections. For example, the mobility of people and capital has followed complementary logics and directions. While companies moved to eastern Europe to reduce production costs, migrants from eastern Europe moved westwards. The latter often worked informally in childcare and care of the elderly for West European families, fulfilling the needs created by the shrinking of the welfare state in western Europe, while they worked to fulfil their own families' needs, impacted by the demise of the welfare state in their own countries back home (Anderson 2000; Deneva 2012; Fedyuk 2015). In Mladost, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 6, workers often see themselves as those who did not migrate. As in Manolova's (2018) ethnography of migration from Bulgaria to the UK, migration provided an imaginary of a better life elsewhere and a topic that opened up discussions about the current difficulties of life in Bulgaria. Migration among Mladost's workers was mostly presented as a potential option they had not finally chosen, or not yet. Therefore, although not homogenized, postsocialist societies often shared similar features from

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their past, as well as common experiences of loss, fragmentation and geographical reordering after the 1990s. Analyses of postsocialist contexts also illuminate processes and intertwinements with other contexts, such as the complexities of coping with a shrinking welfare state and the associated issue of 'care', increasingly defined as a problem within both western and eastern households in Europe.

Some characteristics of labour and production were common to most postsocialist labour settings. First, employment under socialism was a right embedded in the notion of citizenship (Stenning et al. 2011: 81). Secure employment also provided workers with a variety of services. Under socialism, the factory work environment was typically organized as a 'total social institution' (Humphrey 1995), providing access to housing, childcare and health care, as well as holidays. Workers' annual and daily schedules were, to a great extent, shaped by factory-related activities that took place both within and outside the work place.[11] Official discourses on labour were associated with images of the 'model' worker as a protagonist in the collective task of 'building socialism'. According to the dominant discourses, labour was the main activity granting one social status as a full member of society (Stewart 1993), with the workers being defined workers for society (Müller 2004). During the period of postsocialism, the unemployment that followed the closing down of enterprises and staff redundancies resulted in the previous status of the employee being lost, along with the attached services. Mladost followed a similar path. More importantly, the experience of this history of loss was important to the factory's daily life and to the formation of new relationships among employees during the period of my fieldwork, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Moreover, the work settings in the postsocialist world shared similar experiences of the end of a totalizing ideology of socialist modernization. This was accompanied by teleological discourses of industrial modernity that pointed to the prosperity that production would bring. This was a common official discourse in the socialist countries that can be found in Mladost's historical archives during the period of socialism, as also discussed in Chapter 1. However, this also had its variations in different countries and different periods of socialism. For example, Boym has argued for Russia that the hegemonic socialist ideology was based on future discourses in which there was no space for nostalgia for a past capitalism. After the first years of the October Revolution, nostalgia for the past was condemned as a 'counterrevolutionary provocation' (Boym 2002: 59). Further research has demonstrated that the history of discourses of the future under socialism in Russia has changed over the course of the years and that discourses on the present became stronger towards the period of late socialism (Yurchak 2006). Research in Bulgaria has demonstrated that

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a variety of past discourses were also dominant during socialism (Kaneff 2004; Scarboro 2010). Despite the differences and variations, all studies seem to agree that the socialist states based their ideologies on temporal evolutionary discourses with a particular focus on industrial modernity.

The end of the hegemonic discourses of socialist teleologies enabled new teleologies of postsocialist capitalist prosperity to be produced. New managerial discourses in work settings often emphasized that the socialist politics of production had failed and that new discourses, which often accentuated their distinction from the earlier ones, had to be put forward (Dunn 2004; Müller 2004; Vodopivec 2010). Based on her research with textile workers in Slovenia, Vodopivec argued that, although postsocialist transformations were presented as new modernizing plans, many people have experienced them as a step backwards (2010: 167). My research in Bulgarian industrial settings suggests that similar discourses of capitalist teleology were employed by new managements and partly resonate with the above ethnographic studies. Moreover, in private discussions, Mladost managers often remarked that these were the dominant discourses they had to use as part of their job, revealing their conscious performativity. The experiences of successive 'crises' since the 1980s generated a general mistrust of the hegemonic teleologies of both socialist and capitalist modernity in Mladost.

Another characteristic attributed to postsocialist enterprises – as Verdery (1996) has argued, based on Kornai (1980) – is that the earlier socialist economies were based on economies of shortage. As a consequence, raw materials were often lacking in factories, resulting in periods of idleness followed by periods of very intense work in order to meet the plan (Creed 1998; Dunn 2004; Vodopivec 2012). Dunn (2004) has argued that this resulted in workers adopting a flexible approach to work and that the transformation to a more flexible form of production was, accordingly, not so abrupt in postsocialist settings. Nevertheless, this was not the case in Mladost, where, during both socialism and capitalism, the sand and chemicals needed to make glass were always made available and production was always intense and relatively smooth. Here, I am not claiming that there was an abrupt change to 'flexible' production, but that there were variations in relation to shortages in socialist factories. In Chapter 4, I explore ways in which 'flexibility' and 'individual responsibility' as new managerial discourses and practices were responded to both by managers and on the shop floor, and how they interacted with notions of 'collective production'.

While global changes to labour and production provide the wider framework of this ethnography, the importance of the socialist past is also taken into account, not only because many of these postsocialist

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characteristics are found in Mladost, but also, and maybe more importantly, because the socialist past was still relevant in daily life in Mladost. As Caroline Humphrey has argued: 'If "actually existing socialism" comes to be relegated into a largely forgotten past of yellowing newsprint, then it will be time to lay the category "postsocialist" finally to rest' (Humphrey 2001: 15). The relevance of the socialist past was important as employees drew constant comparisons with different epochs of both the socialist and postsocialist pasts. However, my ethnography does not make use of past in order to reconstruct its actual reality. As I discuss in Chapter 1, it mainly focuses instead on peoples' daily comparisons with representations of past conditions of labour in Mladost, which I view as ways to comment on the present ones without explicitly addressing them. Furthermore, I view the socialist past as one of the multiple temporalities found in Mladost and approach the representations of time as processual, similar to what Pine has described for postsocialist Poland: 'More than a world moving forwards or even a world turned upside down, we seem to have before us a world moving sideways and backwards, simultaneously and often skewed' (2001: 98).

While socialism is an aspect of industrial modernity, its consequent postsocialist experiences are one of decline for workers' lives that contradicted earlier aspirations to this modernity. As such, early postsocialist phenomena are comparable to other, similar phenomena of economic decline in circumstances of modernity, such as Ferguson's ethnography (2009) of Zambia focusing on experiences of the abrupt economic decline in the 1980s. Therefore, while I take into account the particularities of the postsocialist context, I also look at work emphasizing that socialism and capitalism have shared many similarities (Brown 2001; Buck-Morss 2002). Susan Buck-Morss has argued that socialism and capitalism share a common utopian 'dreamworld' based on similar future aspirations. In industry, both socialism and capitalism shared shop floor practices of calculated body movements based on scientific Taylorism. Burawoy's (1985) comparisons between socialist and capitalist factories also highlighted the similarities and differences of the factory work, as discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore, while I position this study in a postsocialist framework, I see it primarily as a study of complex transformations of work with continuities and discontinuities between Fordism and post-Fordism.

Anthropological Approaches to Work in Eastern Europe

While industrialization and industrial work have been of great importance throughout the twentieth century in eastern Europe, studies by both local

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and foreign ethnographers have mostly focused on economic life in rural areas. Research on collectivization, decollectivization and changing land property relations have been among the most influential (Humphrey 1983; Hann 1993; Kideckel 1993; Lampland 1995; Creed 1998). Moreover, earlier studies conducted in the first half of the twentieth century in eastern Europe, the Balkans and Russia have greatly contributed to shaping core theories of agricultural production and peasant societies. Chayanov's theories of the peasant economy (1986), based on research in Russia in the 1920s, have influenced economic anthropology in general. On a far more modest scale, Sanders' (1949) research on rural Bulgaria in the 1940s had an impact beyond the boundaries of regional academic discussions. However, there has not been an equal interest in industrial labour in this part of the world, even though industrial developments have been among the structuring forces in these societies for more than a century. Rural life itself can only be understood in relation to these industrial developments, as demonstrated by Gerald Creed (1998) for late-socialist rural Bulgaria. Kaneff has also discussed the permeability of the boundaries between rural and industrial life in Bulgaria during socialism and their changing relationships during postsocialism by focusing on household production practices, community projects and kinship networks (Kaneff 2002). Here, I take industry as a focal point, but I attempt to do so without losing sight of practices such as the domestic agriculture of industrial workers in order to shed light on connections with industrial labour.

As research on the history of anthropology in Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia indicates, ethnographic work during socialism was mainly influenced by folklore studies that focused on traditions and were largely based on nationalist discourses (Mihăilescu, Iliev and Naumović 2008). In Bulgaria, research in industrial settings was conducted by Bulgarian sociologists during the period of socialism and was mostly based on quantitative methods. The topic of industrial labour is also absent from western ethnographies. While one reason for this could be the difficulty in gaining access to industrial settings, there is a general absence of urban studies, not only industrial ones. This focus, mostly on rural settings by both local and foreign ethnographers, continued during the early period of postsocialism. The reasons for this particular focus require research on the history of the discipline, which goes beyond the scope of this book. However, it is important to mention that, while the Balkans and eastern Europe have attracted a variety of other topics, such as nationalism and ethnicity, religion and gender,[12] urban life and industrial work attracted less interest up until the early period of postsocialism.

Studies on postsocialist workplace settings in Poland (Dunn 2004; Trappman 2013), East Germany (Müller 2007), Hungary (Czeglédy 1999),

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Croatia (Bonfiglioli 2020), and Serbia (Rajković 2017) have focused, inter alia, on the privatization of local companies that had been bought by foreign ones. Nina Vodopivec studied a Slovenian textile plant in which there were similar issues related to processes of privatization that followed a different pattern of shareholding among workers and managers (Vodopivec 2010). A shared characteristic of all these studies, including this one on Mladost, is that they focus on the ways in which new managerial discourses or new ideas about labour interact with other ideas about work that derive mainly from the socialist past.

Two studies of the early postsocialist period have focused on the mining industry in Russia (Ashwin 1999) and on mining and the chemical industry in Romania (Kideckel 2008). Ashwin's study sets itself the difficult task of explaining the lack of a phenomenon, namely workers' resistance to capitalist reforms through unionism. She argues that the unions remained weak during the larger political processes in the 1990s and that workers relied mainly on networks of solidarity based on their households. This ethnography, as well as Kideckel's, stress the loss experienced by workers who had enjoyed privileged positions under socialism. Kideckel points to the worker's significant loss of job security and health services and documents in detail their daily difficulties as a result of the reforms. Apart from the material consequences of these transformations, the loss included one of belonging to the workplace. More recent ethnographies of work in Eastern Europe suggest that although those experiences of intense transformations and loss were, to a large extent, still relevant, opened up their focus on a variety of topics, including work ethics and value (Rajković 2018; Ana 2022), gender and masculinity (Morris 2018), populism (Bujalka and Ferencová 2017), migration and employment dependencies (Meszmann and Fedyuk 2019) and ethnicity and kinship at work (Kesküla 2014).

Dunn's (2004) detailed analysis of how ideas of personhood are being transformed, based on flexibility, niche marketing, quality control and new ideas about consumption, has opened up a discussion on flexibility. She described the new management's attempts to transform 'rigid' production into 'flexible' production and documented workers' responses and resistance to this. Her analysis nonetheless avoids the power/resistance dichotomy. She describes workers as 'trapped between socialism (which most people remember as difficult and degrading) and the new structures of capital (which are radically disempowering for most non-managerial employees)' (ibid.: 160). Furthermore, Dunn's analysis is critical of neoliberal ideas of 'choosing' individuals within the free economy. Rather, she analyses the ways in which this new ideology of 'freedom of choice' is actually one that offers its subjects only constrained choices. These choices

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are nonetheless found in consumption and production practices, as well as in larger macro-economic structures.

Like the Polish workers in Dunn's ethnography, workers in Mladost demonstrated that they were neither merely nostalgic for the socialist past, nor content with their current situation. Rather, as I shall discuss throughout this book, they focused more on the continuities of constraints in both periods and underlined continuities of power from the socialist past. However, my ethnography differs from Dunn's in that it pays more attention to the process of production. Ideas about individualism and collectivities will be viewed in relation to discourses on labour, as well as shop floor practices. The division between casual and regular workers, a result of the restructuring that has accompanied managerial ideas about flexibility, will be my main focus. This division is a process that began after privatization in Mladost and is, I argue, crucial to an understanding of today's politics of production and workers' lives within the new regime of labour. Building on Dunn's work, I argue that, although a focus on neoliberal governmentality adds to our understanding of postsocialist transformations of work, these can be even more comprehensively grasped in relation to the production process and the division of labour.

While Dunn (2004) conducts an analysis that takes into account the continuities and discontinuities in relation to the socialist past, Müller (2004, 2007) shows an image of a more direct confrontation between eastern and western managerial practices in three companies she studied in East Germany that also involve a more abrupt shift from socialist to multinational ideas and practices (Müller 2004: 169). Based on research conducted from the late 1980s until the mid-1990s, a period of intense change, Müller describes the new Western management as having a 'civilizing mission' (2007) to fulfil in the east and describes workers' responses to and confrontations with the new managerial discourses. Her ethnography is one of the very few accounts of these processes during the early 1990s. Narratives from Mladost seem to agree more with Dunn's analysis rather than with Müller's account of a 'radical break'. This may differ not only due to the geographical difference, but also to the elapse of time. Changes might have been felt more abruptly in the 1990s, but usually they are in a constant relationship with continuities, as Müller's later work on the continuities of power suggests (2007).

Epochal change and their related dis/continuities was a central topic of daily discussion in Mladost. This included practices of work, management and production and, most importantly, relations of power. There were different types of 'old' and 'new' power, as well as various types of 'old' and 'new' employees that were situationally viewed as indicators of continuity of different and changing forms of power, as I discuss in Chapters 1 and 6.

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The categories of 'old' and 'new' were further complicated by the category of 'communist', which was attributed to those who used previous important positions in order to get positions of power in the present. Nadia was an 'old' worker who used to underline her oldness and her belonging to the group of tailors, a profession that did not formally exist in Mladost under the new regime. She made use of her oldness when she occasionally passed the doors of the administrative building in order to spend her break with people with office jobs, whom she knew from the past, rather than with the cleaners. Nevertheless, for her colleagues, her current position was not an indicator of an obscure acquisition of 'old' forms of power, as was the case with other employees in higher positions. Müller's study of three East German companies provides an ethnography of how those who were in power during socialism reproduced their power in the 1990s, while workers remained in the lowest positions in both periods; she also provides detailed examples of how communist managers became company owners (Müller 2007: 109). Similarly, in Bulgaria in the 1990s, former communist managers often became involved in buying companies, and there were also cases when a director of a state company was simultaneously the president of a private company, which was an extension of the state company (Konstantinov 2000: 140). Such phenomena occurred during the transformations of the 1990s towards a market economy, and they have inspired a wide range of literature dealing with 'corruption' and 'informal networks' in eastern Europe (e.g. Ledeneva 1998; Chavdarova 2001b; Henig and Macovicky 2016).

Discussions of informal networks and 'corruption' related to privatization are at the centre of Bulgarian maritime workers' narratives in the late 2000s (Kremakova 2012). A general lack of trust in the economy and in relations of power is indeed pervasive, and my research in Mladost resonates with this observation. Workers largely talked about continuities of power and the role of personal connections (*vrazki*) in economic and political relationships. Ragaru's (2003) ethnography of the practice of exchanging favours in order to achieve day-to-day services (*uslugi*) convincingly demonstrates that these were continuities from the socialist past. As a result, politics is perceived as a 'distant and corrupt universe where petty party interests took precedence over the common good' (ibid.: 208–9). By looking at how ideas of continuity in relation to power and to obscure ways of its acquisition were prominent in Mladost's daily talk, the ethnography in this book does not aim to provide a historical account of the continuation and discontinuation of power; nevertheless, it underlines the importance of this daily preoccupation with 'old' and 'new' power and with widespread ideas about the continuation of 'communist' power to the implementation of neoliberal practices of production and to the growing fragmentation among the workers.

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A wide range of sociological studies in Bulgaria have focused on several aspects of the intense postsocialist transformations and have suggested continuities in informal networks after the collapse of socialism (e.g. Dimitrov 2004; Tchalakov et al. 2008), a 'common truth' discussed by many people in Bulgaria, including people in Mladost. Mutual accusations of informal practices were very common, as I discuss in the last chapter. I do not merely view this as a 'survival' of the socialist past; instead, I go back to Smith's (1999) suggestion that often our insistence on continuities with the past might have, in fact, interpreted aspects of the current political and economic regimes as mere remnants of a previous one, thus preventing stronger critiques of current economic and political conditions. For instance, several contributions to the volume on *The State Against Reforms* (Dimitrov 2004), a collection of studies on the intense postsocialist transformations, assert that continuities with the socialist past are important reasons for the market economy 'reforms' not having been 'properly' implemented in Bulgaria.[13] This emphasis on continuities often includes an underlying assumption that the market economy would otherwise operate differently. Tania Chavdarova, a sociologist specialising on informal networks, suggested in the early 2000s that 'corruption as a practice and a model for public relations threatens not just the market reforms and the growth of the Bulgarian economy but might also turn out to be a factor that seriously threatens the possibility of the successful establishment of a democratic legal order' (Chavdarova 2001a: 14). Market 'reform' appears to be a rather independent process that does not include the informal economy and is transparent. Here, I do not assert that there is no 'corruption' in Bulgaria, or in any other economy, or that there are no informal networks ensuring the reproduction of politico-economic clientelism at all levels or that the economy of favours is not widespread,[14] nor do I imply that there are no continuities of power between past and present. However, the focus on informal economy often seems to attribute the general economic decline of the early period of postsocialism in Bulgaria, and by extension, an incomplete success of democratic forces, to the obstacles created by such practices. Otherwise, such views assume, the reforms would have almost naturally led to a thriving economy, an approach to informal economic relationships which seems to essentialize 'socialism', 'the past' and 'market reforms'.

Recent anthropological and sociological studies of work in Bulgaria provide analyses that move away from essential views of socialism and capitalism to look at ethnicity and the power relations developed among Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian employees in outsourcing service companies in Bulgaria (Hristova 2014), the current precarious working conditions in call centers (Kirov and Mircheva 2009), changing notions and employment

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strategies among young workers (Neykova 2017) and among families (Tocheva 2015; Petrova 2017) and work and citizenship inequality (Nedeva 2014), offering dynamic views of contemporary work in relation to the mobility of companies and people. An anthropological view of Mladost's shop floor also suggests that older and newer ideas and practices of work are intertwined in various ways: workers use discourse categories to express complex perceptions of 'old' and 'new' power; managers who are aware of widespread suspicions about power relationships emphasize their distance from illegitimate means of the acquisition of power; and people who feel they have no power to accuse others of gaining 'communist' power. My study suggests that, along with the continuity of informal relationships of power and/or 'favours', there is a continuity of suspicions of such connections, suspicions that mobilize relationships, everyday life in the workplace and politics of labour and contribute to the legitimation of neoliberal managerial practices. Therefore, I consider such phenomena neither as paradoxical nor as local peculiarities that tight modelling should seek to expel from an aesthetically purified analytical framework, but as fully constitutive to what the global market economy, supported by elective democracy as its usual partner in this widely cited dyad, can actually enable.

Research Context

The research for this book is primarily based on fieldwork in Sofia since 2007 and in Pernik since 2013. However, it also draws from my first study in Bulgaria in 2003, which focused on the history of political refugees from the Greek civil war (1946–1949) in Bulgaria. I then lived with Greek refugees and their families in Druzba, a working-class district in Sofia where refugees were allocated apartments in neighbouring apartment blocks. Through their life stories and community archives, I became aware of the importance of people's working lives. Many of their narratives focused on their factory work and their social lives, which were strongly connected to work-related events. Moreover, their stories revealed the importance of political positions, personal connections and family background for employment status during socialist times and their continuing importance during postsocialist times. Mladost seemed a suitable place in which to explore transformations of labour, as it had a long history dating back to the pre-socialist period in the 1930s, later growing into a mass production company during socialist times before belonging to those postsocialist privatized industries with high levels of profit that implemented new managerial and production techniques and participated in global economic trends.

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While fieldwork took place in several settings that were connected with employees' lives, it began in Mladost. In researching globally connected phenomena, the ethnography focuses on a single site in order to open up a view to the complex convergences and dynamics that meet there. As Candea suggested, a bounded site can be a partial 'window to complexity' (Candea 2007) rather than a site that may offer holistic explanations. My focus on wokplace ethnography takes its inspiration from previous studies of the experience of labour by primarily scrutinizing the process of production (Beynon 1975; Haraszti 1977; Burawoy 1985; R. Harris 1987; Ong 1987; Ngai 2005; De Neve 2006; Mollona 2009b). Workers' experiences, formed during long hours spent standing around machines, are central to an anthropological understanding of the connections between macroeconomic processes and daily life. As De Neve argues: 'a particular organization of work generates relations of authority, friendship and conflict in production, which turn the more hidden and exploitative relations of production between employers and workers into embodied experiences on the shop floor' (2006: 135). Moreover, workplace ethnography may also help us revisit dominant 'rational' ideas about the economy and their implementation. Here, I am researching ideas about flexibility, individuality and competition as the management gives expression to them and as they are practiced on the production site. Managers argue that competition among workers raises productivity, a principle they implement through a system of unequal payment to different workers. However, in practice, the implementation of pay inequality, allegedly to increase 'productivity', misses its objective. Instead, in Mladost, work in the spirit of 'collectivity' and more equal pay are more likely to lead to improvements in production, as managers and engineers themselves would also indicate. Focusing on the work setting and its interconnections provides a means of questioning such commonsensical 'rationalities' of global capitalism with research discussants directly.

Getting access to the factory to do research and to temporarily occupy a position as an employee was a challenging task. Factories are spaces placed under specific security and safety regulations, and it requires permission from the management to enter their premises. After several attempts, I managed to get an appointment with the director, Mr Ioannidis, during which I explained that I would like to have long-term access within the factory and, ideally, some kind of work experience. I also explained that in accordance with the ethics of anthropological practice, any personal data I collected would be treated as confidential and that their use would not affect the lives of the people involved. As such, I made it clear that, in the event I would be allowed to do research, I would not convey any information I gathered between different individuals in the factory. Therefore, I

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would not provide any information about the plant's management to the shop floor, nor vice versa, nor share any information among any of those involved during my research. Maintaining this discretion was one of the most difficult challenges of my fieldwork, as both workers and managers would sometimes ask what I knew about different groups of people in different positions.

After several discussions about my doing fieldwork, Mr Ioannidis suggested that I could be employed at the end of the production line, the Cold End, which, as he said, was a 'women's position', where women packed the final product. Nevertheless, he told me again that both he and Ms Nikolova, the human resources (HR) manager, were very sceptical about the usefulness of such a study. From the very first discussions with the management, I realized that I had to find ways of striking a balance between all the various people and groups involved and to try to gain the trust of both the workers and the administrative staff. Given that my access to the factory depended on the management's decision, I was careful to be discreet and make myself as invisible as possible.

On my first day as a worker-researcher or worker-fieldworker in Mladost, I was offered a worker's uniform and an office key by the Human Resources manager who offered me this space. This was already a novelty in the factory and revealing of my in-between position. A particularity of research in a factory requires that the ethnographer has official permission and is given a kind of allocated 'position'. Petar, the 36-year-old Cold End manager, was already aware that I would be working on his sector. Since I would only stay for a limited period, he would prefer not to give me a machine because this would cause problems in scheduling the shifts. Instead, after I had received some training from them, as all newcomers do, I would assist all the workers at the end of the four production lines. According to the regulations, for safety reasons, I was not allowed to stay at the premises after 5pm, so I would not be able to follow the normal shifts, which run 24/7 (morning, afternoon and night). He told me that the work was quick, dangerous and demanding, and that he did not see the point of me doing it, but he would allow me to do my research. My fieldwork was to a large extent shaped by the factory's regulations and my peculiar position in between the workers and managers, as well as in between an office and a uniform.

During my first days in Mladost, I was told by older workers that there was an existing precedent for research in Mladost, conducted during the socialist period; they recalled a historian from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAN) spending some months in the factory in 1981 in order to write a history of Mladost.[15] Research in work settings seemed to be a practice familiar to the older generations. My new position was a peculiarity in

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itself, since I did not follow the actual shifts but had my own seven-hour shift, from 9 to 4. Workers would have to change shifts at 2pm, and as a result I would meet two shifts a day. The office space was located at the production building, and I only used it to leave my personal things during worktime as I preferred to spend all the time at the area I was positioned, as well as hanging out at lunch and coffee breaks with employees. My first days were permeated with feelings of perplexity and loneliness on the shop floor, since I was working on the machines without belonging to a particular shift and without being part of any other department, as I had access to various spaces. I started working on the machines along with the women, who very soon started teaching me how to operate them. This teaching process became an important period of bonding which included not only the transmission of skills, but also helping each other and sharing thoughts about various topics during the repetitive machine work. As soon as I started learning the work, I was able to give the workers some rest or allow them to focus on another task with relative ease. I learned their job in detail, but I also learned how this job was taught to the younger workers by the older ones. The help I provided brought back memories of previous labour conditions. Female packing workers would tell me that the machine at which I was positioned used to have two workers before the redundancies. This actually made sense, given the extremely high production speed and the multiple tasks one had to perform at the machine. However, gaining the employees' trust would not be easy, since my research was connected to political topics, and on top of this, I came from the same country as the owners. It required an effort to demonstrate that I did not have any previous connections with any member of the management or the owners. After the company was sold again in 2017 to a Portuguese company, some of the most suspicious of my interlocutors eventually showed more trust in our communications.

Gradually, I also started to learn additional skills from the workers, skills that were related to their lives outside the factory, visiting their houses and accompanying them in activities such as gardening or preparing canned food. Prentice (2008), through her research of a garment factory in Trinidad, has emphasized the importance of learning workers' skills related to their activities both inside and outside the space of wage labour. Similarly, the experience of work outside the factory gave me a better understanding of daily working lives, of the permeability of the boundaries between home and work, and of household practices that were connected with shop floor practices. During the period I lived in and around Mladost, I met people with various positions both inside and outside their work space. The initial suspicions about my intentions had been dissipated to a large extent. I was lonely for a few weeks when I arrived, but I had made

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some good friends by the time I first left in 2009. During my last days, workers on a shift with whom I was particularly close invited me to their night shift; a shift I was not allowed to go on since I only had access until the afternoon. They organized a farewell party with food and non-alcoholic beverages, and we celebrated by the machines until the end of their shift early in the morning. Although the machines worked 24/7, the workers had developed several ways of celebrating special occasions alongside the machines during the night shifts.

After my first six months at the production site, I started conducting life story interviews. These included both women and men with both regular and casual positions on the production line, as well as cleaning personnel, engineers and managers from the sectors of production, administration, finance and human resources. A semi-constructed questionnaire encouraged narrators to tell me about important parts of their lives, beginning with their childhood, while it also left much space to take different directions. In doing this, I was aiming for an understanding of the topics that were important to my interlocutors (cf. Thompson 2000). The narratives included family and school memories, teenage years and secondary education, as well as important turning points in their lives, such as meeting their partners, having children, getting a new job and experiencing economic hardship. Most of the narrators emphasized their work experience, although I did not necessarily encourage this particular focus. One may think that this focus was the result of the interviewee's positionality in relation to the interviewer, since we first met at their work environment. Nevertheless, the particular focus on the experience of work was widespread among narrators from a wide range of backgrounds, and it constituted one of the most frequent self-representations in life stories in Bulgaria (cf. Koleva 2008: 42).

The collection of life stories provided me with important information about the interactions between life trajectories and larger socio-historical changes and resulted in interesting narrative forms that were based on various overlapping periodizations. The most repetitive were 'before' and 'after' 'socialism', 'democracy', 'privatization' or 'the Greeks', 'the crisis' of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the crisis in 1996 to 1997 and the most recent global economic crisis since 2009. Given that the company was Greek-owned, the 'Greek crisis' was also an additional source of insecurity from 2010. 'The crisis', and successive other 'crises', created narratives of the normalization of critical times and transcended binaries such as that between socialism and postsocialism.

Research in the Bulgarian State Archives provided a body of data on Mladost's history from the early 1960s until 1996. The available archive[16] indicates that financial and organizational data was systematically recorded

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until privatization. However, the available material is not complete or systematic because the majority of the factory's archives were kept on its premises, only a few copies being sent to the state archives. After privatization and the abandonment of factory spaces, the old archives remained in a room that was flooded in the early 2000s, and most of the material was damaged. The data that are still available provide sporadic but important quantitative information on the size of the workforce, salaries, the extent of production, financial data and yearly 'collective labour agreements'. There were interesting silences in the available written sources. Besides a few speeches praising workers' heroism in a general manner, mostly praising the engineers', and less often the economists' achievements, there were hardly any references to employees' experiences from 'below'; mostly, the reports contained analyses of the production process from 'above'. One may wonder whether this was the result of the lack of available material or a general failure actually to give voice to the workers' experiences. However, there was no indication that any such sources were available within the archival catalogues. Using the available material, one can nonetheless create a general image of production in past decades and on the larger ideological shifts and hegemonic discourses, as I shall discuss further in Chapter 1.

Silences and discrepancies between oral stories and archival material may also reveal the complex ways in which transformations were viewed and represented. As a consequence, I consider all my sources interestingly rich and elliptical. By combining them, I attempt to present an image of the factory, which provides an introduction to Mladost's general socio-historical context and to how transformations of the economy and production were perceived, renegotiated and experienced by employees. This will be the subject of further analysis in the following chapters.

Outline

The ethnography begins with historical accounts of Mladost (Chapter 1), which are important for understanding present-day relations at work and the politics of labour as well as the complex ways multiple temporalities are important in Mladost's daily life. Then, the story moves to the shop floor (Chapter 2) to discuss the interconnections between different types of employment, gender relations and the coercive presence of the clients and 'the market' throughout the production line. The ethnography follows the production of bottles on the conveyor belt. From the production line, it extends to life outside the factory and analyses kinship ties and household practices in order to understand employment status, age and gender

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inequalities back on the production lines and the interconnections between power relations both at work and at home (Chapter 3). The ethnography then goes back to the factory, but this time with a closer focus on managerial practices as presented from 'above' and as they are implemented on the shop floor (Chapter 4). It follows how the word 'flexibility' is used from the administration building and the human resources (HR) department to the production line, while it also explores the interconnections between the discourses and practices of flexible capitalism, as well as continuities and discontinuities in relation to the socialist past. The ethnography continues inside Mladost's spaces (Chapter 5) by focusing on the relationships between officially used and unused, dilapidating industrial buildings, the latter being used informally by both workers and the company. The analysis then moves to the interconnections between the visible and more official shop floor and the invisible spaces of production, as well as other, more hidden daily practices. Finally, the ethnography focuses on employees' discourses (Chapter 6) on 'what has changed' and 'what is the same' by exploring temporal connections and interpretations.

In the first chapter, I discuss Mladost's history since the 1950s based on oral testimonies I collected in the form of employees' life stories and on archival material at the 'Central State Archives' in Sofia. I then position this local history within Bulgaria's wider socio-historical context. I argue that, although socialism collapsed three decades ago, and that calls to abandon the term 'postsocialism' are understandable, employees' daily talk about 'the past' ensures that the experiences of socialism and, more importantly, of privatization in the 1990s, are still relevant.

In the second chapter, I focus on the production process on the shop floor, where a new inequality is emerging from a newly formed division between regular and contract workers. This division is critical to understanding the new labour conditions. It is coupled with a consideration of the inequality between workers at the Hot End and those at the Cold End of the production line, as well as gender hierarchies. I have also taken inspiration from Haraszti's (1978) description of the shop floor and his call for closer attention to be paid to the machinery and object of production (Spittler 2009). Through an ethnography of the production line that follows the bottle's itinerary along the speedy conveyor belt, I introduce the various stages and describe the shop floor's positions, relations and inequalities. Workers who once had the same regular status now work with different labour statuses, employed either by Mladost as regular employees or by the outsourcer on casual, short-term contracts. In spite of these differences, however, they are all connected to the same machine and its speed and have to perform the same tasks in bodily synchronization, despite the significant differences in salaries and benefits. Regular workers

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gain power in relation to casual workers and underline their positions by assessing themselves as 'cleverer', as those who 'made it' after privatization. Global inequalities become tangible on the production line where Fordism and post-Fordism meet.

The third chapter follows employees outside Mladost, during their secondary labour activities and leisure, in search of the interconnections between the shop floor and other spheres of social life. My participation in household activities contributed to an understanding of the lowest positions in which workers 'consent' to inequality (Burawoy 1979) on the shop floor. Rather than exclusively attempting to understand relationships through the structure of production, I attempt to explain inequalities in gender and employment status in relation to kinship among employees and gender and family relations outside the factory. The latter relationships reveal connections between daily life outside the factory and relationships developed on the shop floor: casual workers and female low-paid workers at the Cold End often reverse their relations of power back home, where the latter are the household's main breadwinners. Employing a moral economy approach, I discuss how these kinship ties between members of the same household contribute to the factory's production.

The next chapter focuses on practices and discourses of flexibility at work and variations of individuality and collectivity in the workplace. It examines the new managerial discourses voiced by Mladost's higher management and follows their use from the director to the HR department to the middle manager, and finally, to the shop floor. Unlike existing literature on the region (Dunn 2004; Vodopivec 2010), such discourses do not reach the shop floor, where collectivity is necessary for the flow of production given the shortage of workers due to redundancy and the nature of glass production. Nevertheless, managerial techniques of making diverse payments, based on the rhetoric of flexibility, are practiced. By focusing on the production process and its relationship to the diversity of payments, I show ethnographically that these do not necessarily yield the desired productivity levels, which are based on the assumption of the 'naturality' of competition, but are often detrimental to production. However, they are productive in preparing the enterprise as a potential product in the market and are also effective in fragmenting the solidarity of workers and muting potential collective action. Furthermore, the analysis suggests the argument that neoliberal governmentality can be traced not merely in workers' subjectivities, but also in the production process and the division of labour.

Mladost's multiple spatio-temporalities as inscribed in spaces and buildings are discussed in the fifth chapter. Approximately 40% of the buildings are seemingly abandoned. I follow the 'secret' paths the workers take inside the ruined buildings. The workers create personal spaces and deploy

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informal economic activities, as well as maintaining an old exhibition, which I describe as an informal museum of past products. These industrial buildings are being reclaimed and re-used by their previous users, who perform old workers' identifications there. Accordingly, the chapter discusses literature on architecture, abandonment and postsocialism. The old buildings are not only experienced and described by workers as reminders of a previous era but are also constant reminders of imminent changes and staff lay-offs and of the threat and, often, inevitability of downward mobility. I describe this use of space as daily practices of resistance that enable employees to perform parallel temporalities and to cross the conventional divisions of time.

Employees compare the situational temporalizations of 'now' (*sega*) and 'in the old times'[17] (*edno vreme*) to make sense of these transformations. They repeat the seemingly contradictory phrases that 'everything is new' and 'everything is the same'. In Chapter 6, I analyse how, after successive 'crises', powerful representations of abrupt change ('everything is new') and of the lack of change ('nothing has changed') coexist. I address these temporalisations as vernacular expressions of the main turning points: the collapse of socialism, the Bulgarian financial crisis in 1996, the period of privatization since 1997, and the 'global economic crisis' that started in 2008. Keeping in mind the continuities and discontinuities of shop floor politics and managerial practices, I view these multiple temporalities as employees' criticisms of socialist and neoliberal power relationships. I also argue that workers largely view and experience these inequalities as produced by 'communist' structures of power, now being reproduced by their heirs, and that this shared vision of enduring power limits larger political claims and open criticism of current labour conditions.

Gerald Creed, who has conducted long-term research in Bulgaria since the 1990s, pointed out that Bulgarians described postsocialist transformations as 'the changes' (Creed 2011: 7), thus underlining the plurality of these processes. During my fieldwork in Bulgaria, workers would bitterly point out that 'the changes never stop'. This was a reference to the dynamic transformations of global capitalism, which were described by different people on different occasions as 'the changes', 'wild capitalism' or 'democracy', and sometimes as 'so-called democracy'. This observation was followed by comments that, despite their previous expectations and hopes, especially up until the early 2000s, they might not see any improvement to their lives under the new regime either. Rather, they expressed disappointment with both aspects of industrial modernity that they had experienced in their lives. The following joke, which was widespread in 2014 and 2015, was indicative of how, during the third decade after the collapse of the previous political regime, there was a similar sense of collapse, a sense of

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the unpredictability of the near future, coupled with the possibilities of the start of a new period: 'Chicago -20, feels like -40. Sofia 2015 feels like 1989'.

Notes

1. All names of people and companies are pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity.
2. It is mainly based on my nineteen months of fieldwork in Mladost (2007–2009) and on my follow-up fieldwork in Bulgaria in 2013–2015 as a member of the research group on Industry and Inequality in Eurasia at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. In 2013–2015, I began fieldwork in Pernik, a nearby industrial town where Mladost workers also lived, but I also continued to visit Mladost in Sofia.
3. The ethnography is written mostly in past tenses. However, it is also sometimes written in present tenses, in describing the present of the referred period or context. For example, the use of present continuous in Chapter 2, aims to describe the repetitive work around the machines. Therefore, the use of present tenses does not imply that things have not changed. Rather, the ethnography focuses on intense transformations and on changing temporalities.
4. Всичко се промени/нищо не е както преди (Vsichko se promeni/nishto ne e kakto predi).
5. Всичко е едно и също/все едно и също (Vsichko e edno i sushto/vse edno i sushto).
6. The combination of these phrases is similar to Alphonse Karr's often quoted epigram, 'The more things change the more they remain the same' (*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*). However, in Mladost, the two phrases do not go together so systematically, though they were situationally expressed on different occasions.
7. As Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga put it: 'Although capital has become more mobile and thus placeless to some extent, it has become more territorial in other places as a result of uneven development. Global flows bypass some poor residents without access to capital, entrapping them in disintegrating communities while entangling others' (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 26).
8. For example, June Nash argued that the US based company General Electric used the threat to relocate after the strong union strike in 1946. She analysed the company's global investment not only as a way to reduce labour costs but also as a means to control union action in the domestic plants (Nash 1989, 324).
9. Maria Todorova (2010: 2–3) further argues that media as well as academic representations of post-Communist nostalgia underline the 'uniqueness' of the phenomenon of nostalgia in the postsocialist world. Such discourses usually do not situate their examples in a wider comparative context of nostalgia with other parts of the world. Lack of comparison may result in essentialist analyses of phenomena taking place in the postsocialist world.
10. The end of existing socialism triggered Fukuyama's well-known theory (1992) of 'the end of history'. He proposed that the historical outcome of the end of the

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socialist regimes signified that human history had reached the final phase of its development, that of western liberal democracy.

11. For a historical approach to the workplace as an institution and the changing politics of work in late socialism in Yugoslavia, see Rajković (2022).
12. There is a variety of research on, for example, nationalism and ethnicity (Stewart 1993; Khazanov 1996; Tishkov 1996; Cowan 2000), religion (Duijzings 2000; Hann 2006b; Mahieu and Naumescu 2009) and gender (Pine 1993; Gal and Kligman 2000a, 2000b).
13. Moreover, a common argument from this period of scholarly work was that a 'Bulgarian', 'socialist' or even 'Ottoman' past is the reason for 'corruption' and for an ineffective market economy.
14. Rather, research in economic anthropology since the 1970s has suggested informality as integral part of every economy (Hart 1973; Hann and Hart 2011).
15. This historical research project resulted in a short history of Mladost (Anonymous 1982), which I discuss in Chapter 1.
16. The name of the archive, at the State Archives of Sofia, which belong to the Central Bulgarian State Archive, and the number of the archival fond have been anonymized throughout the text. Although this is not a usual practice for archival research among historians, I have kept the anonymity of the archive, in order to be consistent with the practices of anonymity followed with names of research participants and companies in the ethnography of this book. Therefore, references to the archive will appear as 'Mladost Archive', in State Archives, Sofia.
17. Едно време (edno vreme).

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