SAVING FOOD IN BULGARIA: PRACTICING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Home-based food preservation in Bulgaria is widespread and these foods link material, biological and cultural survival, formal and informal economies, social networks, cultivated and wild-harvested foods. As such, they demonstrate how ordinary people engaging in mundane social practices, like saving food for the winter, are creating resilience and meaning in their lives in the context of broader economic and political forces, which lay largely beyond their control. These practices are intimately connected with the socialist past in Bulgaria and have continued to be adaptive in the post-socialist context. Their continual re-enactment and reproduction challenge unilinear conceptualizations of development in a globally integrated market economy. This dissertation was based on multi-sited ethnographic research conducted in Bulgaria and remotely between June 2018-October 2021. Cellars in Bulgaria revealed a constellation of practices that entangle binaries often conceptualized as oppositional, for example: formal and informal economies, traditions and innovations, cultivated and wild plants and animals, local and global influences and ingredients, industrial and agroecological production. These common Bulgarian food preservation practices evidenced a politics emerging from the everyday in both implicit and explicit forms and are a useful complement to scholarship related to Alternative Food Networks and food sovereignty. The prevalence of these practices creates a large, diffuse community of people practicing "quiet" food sovereignty through the consistent re-enactment of their everyday foodways, such as saving food for winter. Preserve makers in Bulgaria demonstrate the power of practicing food sovereignty in everyday life.

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This dissertation is dedicated to Casey, Samuel, and Jack Foltz.

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CHAPTER 1

FORAGED ETHNOGRAPHY: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF LOOKING AROUND

"What do you do when your world starts to fall apart? I go for a walk, and if I'm really lucky, I find mushrooms."

(Tsing 2015, 1)

"Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen."

(Tafoya 1995, 12 as cited in Wilson 2008, 6)

Falling Apart

I sat cross-legged in a squashy chair typing on my laptop late at night December 29 of 2020. Working in the light of a cheap Ikea lamp in the bedroom, my husband and I had converted into a home office, I glanced out the window onto our quiet street. A few neighbors still had their Christmas lights twinkling, but mostly it was just darkness. Our two boys were asleep in their new bunk bed, the one we bought to make this room into an office space since we were all working and studying from home. As I sat there, trying to keep up my writing practice, I reflected on the year.

In 2020 my research world fell apart due to COVID-19. What looked like a delay in March had turned into a complete halt by December, with no clear end in sight. I had completed two exploratory research trips to my Bulgarian field sites in 2018 and 2019 in addition to my 2 years as a Peace Corps Volunteer there from 2006-2008. I did all of this research, the 65 interviews, participant observation, photographs, and hundreds of pages of field notes, in order to narrow my focus and craft my dissertation prospectus. And now that proposed research was on hold. I was stuck at home.

In the time between homeschooling my children and stocking up on toilet paper, I allowed myself the freedom to read anything that I wanted. This undisciplined reading led me far and near, and back to some familiar ground. I re-opened *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibilities of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. In those pages Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing encouraged me to cultivate my "arts of noticing" (2015, 17-25). Living, as I was, in the ruins of my research plans I was newly sympathetic to her call to question "progress." While reading that late December night a sentence from that book hit me like a bolt of lightning: "Instead, agnostic about where we are going, we might look for what has been ignored because it never fit the timeline of progress" (2015, 21).

I wondered to myself, what I might find if I approached my own research through this lens and stopped pursuing the progression of my carefully planned and articulated research. What had I ignored that was living beneath the duff of papers and books in my office? Newly attuned, I noticed that all around me in my notes and photos, my correspondence and marginalia that there were indeed signs of life. Not what I intended when I set out, but nonetheless emergent and fertile.

Foraging

Inspired by Tsing, this dissertation is my attempt at combining both foraged and cultivated ethnography. In my dissertation prospectus I focused too narrowly on preserved foods. I had ignored the way that these foodways practices articulate with everyday life more broadly and how to contextualize them historically. I had inadvertently dismissed the "stories between the stories" from my initial participant observation and interviews. As de Certeau might criticize, I cut my study too closely from the cloth of everyday life (1988, xi). My own conceptualization of progress in terms of my degree constrained my thinking about my initial, more exploratory research.

Descriptions and examinations of everyday life were what I had originally conceptualized as the debris that remained from my initial research after I had extracted the useful elements. Foraging through that material allowed me to consider how I could redeem that which I had discounted as useless from the trash heap of progress. Tsing and Tafoya (quoted above) have helped me to refuse this narrow definition and the linearity of progress in favor of noticing and attending to

more contingent emergences. In other words, to more deeply listen and look around, rather than ahead.

I have therefore foraged the research from my two initial trips back to Bulgaria in 2018 and 2019 for scenes, interviews and themes, listening to the stories within the stories, and in so doing realized the centrality of everyday life as a framing for my work, shifting it from the background to the foreground. Engaging with theories of everyday life, particularly as articulated by Highmore (2002), and de Certeau (1984), provide me with analytical tools to examine the poetic and political potential of home-based food preservation practices. In this way I put theories of everyday life, social practices (including their dynamics), and broader concerns about well-being, resilience, and food sovereignty in conversation.

The following questions guided this foraging through my fieldnotes, interviews, photos, and social media collected during 2018 and 2019: Why are home-based food preservation practices, which don't fit the timeline of progress, common in Bulgaria specifically and in Eastern Europe more broadly? How have experiences of precarity, particularly in relation to state socialism and post-socialist marketization, shaped practices for procuring and saving food in Bulgaria? How can examining the everyday social practices of food preservation in contemporary Bulgaria inform global food sovereignty and alternative food system discourse, theory, and practice?

Surprising connections became visible to me as I approached my initial research material with new eyes and found a richer and more varied exploration than my more narrowly envisioned project focusing only on jarred foods. What emerged was a series of vignettes of people using food for self-preservation, in both historical and contemporary contexts, where state and market dominated food systems had not been sufficient in terms of quantity, quality, or variety and yet were integrally connected to domestic practices: retirees in Plovdiv selling home-grown or foraged food in gray markets to supplement their state pensions, a family gathering to distill their own brandy in their village home, villagers practicing permaculture and herbalism in the heart of the Balkan mountains, and new transplants together with homeland pilgrims meeting at a food festival to sample tastes the village in Kurtovo Konare.

This shift in my perspective informed my final stretch of in-person research in Bulgaria from May-October of 2021. Rather than narrowing my focus to food preservation practices alone, I continued to notice and document the way that these practices resonated in family life, annual

rhythms, and personal histories. So, while the practices related to home-preserved food still act as a key and are the bulk of the material that I present and analyze in this dissertation, I have broadened the scope to include insights from interviews and fieldnotes that stray from that topic directly to address everyday life more broadly. All of these scenes, voices (including my own), and materials are gathered here. They are an assemblage of components that I hope, when considered as a whole, supersede the sum of their parts and reflect the effervescence of everyday foodways practices in contemporary Bulgaria and their potential for expanding food sovereignty discourse and practice far beyond those borders.

Description and analysis of more typical, "cultivated" observations and interviews, those that I intentionally sought out and gathered, meet together with insights that were foraged from my initial research here in this dissertation. In this way I myself became a *bricoleur*, making use of the materials at hand and repurposing them in unintended ways (Levi-Strauss 1996, 17-18).[1] Consider each chapter as a jar, on the one hand self-contained and yet also part of the broader collection of the cellar. Each component is ripe with possibility for being dis and re-assembled to serve emerging contemporary needs, crucial in resilient and meaningful living in precarious times amidst the ruins of yesterday's vision of progress.

Organization, Translation, and Illustration

In this dissertation I endeavor to challenge notions of linear progress in form as well as analysis. In addition, because I used grounded theory influenced methods, I did not follow the typical progression of research, analysis, and writing. Therefore, this dissertation is not linear in order, either chronologically or by the typical organization of dissertations.

I have intentionally arranged it to highlight the process through which I conducted my research, generated theory, and found how stories emerged from within stories. This first chapter represents the mid-point of the research and writing process. The second chapter explains how and why I chose to put home-preserved foods at the center of my research. In Chapter Three, I delve into my personal history in Bulgaria to explain my positionality and the theory and methods I used to conduct the research for this dissertation. The literature review that I

[1] See also the analysis of *bricolage* as activity and *bricoleur* as agent that complicates the dichotomy between the engineer and the *bricoleur* (Noyes 2016, 141; Johnson 2012, 355-372).

conducted in response to the initial themes generated by exploratory research is in Chapter Four. Chapter Five examines recent historical influences that impact home-based food preservation in contemporary Bulgaria. Building from that historical context, Chapter Six foregrounds how cellars are related to contemporary life for "normal people" who feel that they live in a country that is "not normal." Chapters Seven through Nine highlight preserve making as part of the annual rhythms of everyday domestic life. In Chapter Ten I examine how, in one village, preserve makers recruited food preservation practices into heritage as part of more public political and economic activities. I put home-based food preservation practices in conversation with food sovereignty literature in Chapter Eleven, ending at the beginning with reflections on the entire experience.

Each chapter contains an epigraph, in most cases highlighting Bulgarian voices, authors, and artists. I translated some writings otherwise available only in Bulgarian to expand the audience for contemporary Bulgarian writers and academics. Throughout the dissertation I have included many Bulgarian words, particularly culinary terms, that I transliterated using the Bulgarian Streamlined Transliteration System (Ivanov 2014, 109-118). This is the official transliteration system of the Bulgarian government, adopted in 2009. In many cases these words don't have simple or direct English equivalents. I also found that trying to translate certain words into English imposed classification categories that weren't true to their usage in Bulgarian. Each time I use a Bulgarian word I include the transliteration in the text. The first time the word is used, I follow the transliterated word with an English translation in brackets and a footnote including the transliteration, the original Cyrillic and a more thorough explanation of the term.

Throughout the dissertation I have included photographs to illustrate various processes, products, and places referenced in the text. They are present to make the textual explanations clearer to non-Bulgarian audiences and foreground the visual aesthetic value and artistry of home-preserved foods. Unless otherwise noted, I was the photographer.

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CHAPTER 2

SAVING FOOD IN BULGARIA

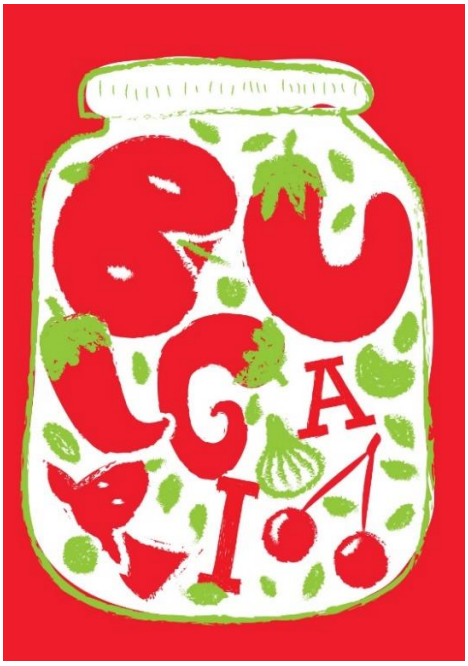

Figure 2.1. *Untitled poster.* Dana Tileva. Reproduced with permission from the artist.

"I actually don't remember where this idea came from, the jar. I was just thinking, what do all Bulgarians do? What is Bulgaria? And that's where it came from, we put everything in jars."

(Dana Tileva. Interview with author. September 1, 2018)

In June 2018, after a 10-year hiatus, I was back in Bulgaria taking an intensive language course in Sofia. My language teacher, Stefka, sent me home with newspapers and magazines to read each day, and we discussed them the following day during my lesson. This is how I found myself flipping through a small, glossy art and culture magazine on a sunny afternoon in my Sofia apartment. A tiny, one-inch square thumbnail at the bottom of a page caught my eye. There was an image of a canning jar, situated in a field of solid red, with a jumble of fruits, vegetables, animals and the word Bulgaria floating around inside. Bulgaria in a jar.

The image accompanied an interview with the artist Dana Tileva, a university student living in Sofia. The interview covered her student days at the language high school in Pazardjik and her newest passion, calligraphy, which she was pursuing for her master's degree. But it was Dana's

image captivated me. It used recognizable colors, the same as the Bulgarian flag: red, white, and green. It carried the familiar shape of socialist era canning jars, a common sight in most homes that I had visited over the years. She had captured a symbol elusive in its familiarity, so commonplace that it could go unnoticed, unremarkable, like so much of shared everyday life (Noyes 2016, 149). And yet it was immediately recognizable to me as a symbol connected to food saving practices that are intricately interwoven with personal and national identity, history and contemporary life. There it was, an image central to my dissertation topic, saving food and preservation as practices of everyday life in contemporary Bulgaria.

To test my initial reaction, I showed the image to my language teacher the next day. "This is a key!" Stefka told me, the Bulgarian word similar in meaning to the term in English. A key can be used to solve a code or riddle or allow access to something that is otherwise locked and inaccessible. She described the image as opening up something essential. With her memories and thoughts unlocked, she started to tell me her stories (Hymes 1981).

While Stefka no longer made jarred foods, she shared memories of home preserved foods from her own life and admitted to keeping a large collection of empty jars from her mother in her basement. She said that putting up food for the winter was "instinctual" for Bulgarians. So, while she doesn't preserve food in jars, she and her husband, in a similar kind of spirit, still roast a few peppers and put them in the freezer for the winter. She actually prefers industrially produced jarred foods for their taste and texture, though she and her husband buy homemade jars from roadside stands from time to time when they are travelling in rural areas.

In contrast, Stefka explained that her cousin in Plovdiv continues to make jars and maintains substantial knowledge of the agricultural calendar and recipes for preserved foods, despite her high income and social status. Stefka relies on this cousin to tell her the best time to get certain produce at the market. Although she lives in Sofia where there is fresh produce of all sorts available year-round, Stefka still appreciates the tastiness of Bulgarian produce when it is in peak season; her cousin verifies which are the best things to buy at particular times.

Towards the end of our conversation, she leaned in to tell me, "Food wasn't the only thing people stored in jars." She explained that when people lost confidence in financial institutions,

they would make their own "*burkan*[1] [jar] bank" filled with their cash savings in lieu of depositing the money in a bank. Clearly the image, and the topics it opened up, resonated with Stefka. To my great delight the experience was not isolated; in jars and home-preserved foods, I held a key to many doors.

Two months later I had the pleasure of meeting with the artist Dana Tileva to conduct my own interview. It was late September, and sun was streaming through the changing leaves with a slight orange tint. We met for in an artsy coffee shop near the Doctor's Garden in central Sofia. English was the most common language buzzing around in the whitewashed brick interior and the primary language for our interview. Coffee there cost more than the daily pension of many retired Bulgarians.

I learned from Dana that she'd created the "Bulgaria in a Jar" poster while studying abroad in Poland on an Erasmus exchange.[2] As a fine art student, her final project was supposed to capture Bulgaria in a single image. Interestingly, she wrote the word "Bulgaria" in Latin rather than Cyrillic letters. This was surprising to me since the Cyrillic alphabet is significant as a marker of national identity and point of pride for many Bulgarians. When I asked her about this, she said it was because it was for a foreign audience who wouldn't understand Cyrillic. Her initial audience were non-Bulgarians:

> When an Erasmus student goes there, in this course especially, they always have this task to make a poster about your country. So, this is where it started. It was really hard for me because I started with other ideas. It was really hard for me to like put *all* of Bulgaria in one poster. I had trouble really synthesizing what Bulgaria is. So, I started with some trivial things like *shevitsa*[3] [traditional embroidery], something like this. But, I don't know, it didn't really speak. I actually don't remember where this idea came from, the jar. I was just thinking, 'What do all Bulgarians do? What is Bulgaria?' And that's where it came from, we put everything in jars.

Her insights were important in pointing me to activity, shared practices, what Bulgarians "do" in addition to the jarred foods themselves. Jars are the product of "what people do," the end result

[1] *Burkan* (буркан) is the word for a glass jar used for preserving food, in English commonly referred to as a canning jar. More details on the types of jars used in contemporary food preservation are in Chapter 4.
[2] The Erasmus program funds and coordinates student exchanges within the EU. For more details on the history of the program see: ec-European Commission - History of the ERASMUS Programme (archive.org)
[3] *Shevitsa* (шевица) is traditional Bulgarian embroidery. For more examples including patterns see Velichkova-Yamami 2018.

of bringing together the elements of social practice including materials, competences and meanings. I have used the image of the Bulgaria in a jar, which portrays the product of preserved food and recruits it into a symbolic representation of national identity, as a key. And that key opened my understanding of the way home-based food preservation functions as a dynamic social practice deeply entangled in everyday Bulgarian life.

Dana shared that her earliest memory of jarred food:

> When I was little, I thought it was a special kind of tomatoes but it's actually just green [unripe] tomatoes. And I think it's weird because nobody likes this, and I don't like it now but as a child you like weird stuff. My grandmother used to always make it for me and until this day she will say, 'oh I am making you green tomatoes because I know you like them so much.' But grandma I don't really like them anymore!

Figure 2.2. Photograph of green tomato pickles at Kurtovo Konare Fest. September 8, 2018.

They were more like *turshiya*[4]. I love turshiya. Yeah, there are other stories for example with turshiya I like to pick out the cauliflower. In my [immediate] family we don't actually do this much, we don't put stuff in jars. I don't know, usually my grandma does it or older people in the village. But my grandma makes a lot of jams and *lyutenitsa*[5]. Actually, because she lives in the city, and she can't raise vegetables, she always makes me go to Kaufland or some big chain and buy tomato puree, which I don't think is the same. Because like you have to get the tomatoes from your garden and you have put them in.

Figure 2.3. Photograph of Tsar's Turshiya made by Tatyana Tsankova. September 14, 2019.

[4] *Turshiya (*туршия) – is a generic term for pickled vegetables in a vinegar and salt-based brine sometimes with the addition of crushed aspirin as a preservative agent. The term is not applied to pickled cucumbers (which have their own name of *kiseli krastavitsi* (кисели краставици) or sour cucumbers). Often made from harder vegetables like cauliflower and carrots mixed with peppers, this particular mix of vegetables being called "King's Turshia" or "Tsar's Turshia". The term can be applied to pickled green tomatoes with onions or spices, again the similarity is that it is a vegetable in a salty vinegar brine.

[5] *Lyutenitsa* (Лютеница) is a thick pepper and tomato relish seasoned with salt, sugar, vinegar, and spices. There are many variations in terms of cooking style, how finely ground the products are, and which seasonings are used. Some common additions to the basic recipe are oil (sunflower or olive), garlic, parsley, eggplant, carrot, and cumin. There is a wide variety of commercially produced *lyutenitsa* in food shops and supermarkets throughout Bulgaria. See Chapter 9 for more details.

In her description, Dana identified the ideal type of preserved food maker: elderly, female, rural. She noticed the inconsistency between her imagined ideal of a rural person who uses garden produce to make home-preserved foods and her actual experience of buying globally sourced, industrial foods from an international supermarket chain and bringing them to her grandmother (who lives in the city) to make preserves. She admitted to disliking some of these home-preserved foods but noted that she ate them because her grandmother made them for her. Thus, she herself fits into this community of practice as a consumer of home-preserved foods and a shopper for raw ingredients. Her grandmother made these preserves, which Dana could substitute with industrially produced alternatives. Although she filled the jars with industrial/globally sourced ingredients, in doing so, she created something homemade, something that Dana associated with home, family, and her country writ large (Saltzman 2015, 390-391).

When I asked her if there was anything that she missed from Bulgaria when she was studying in Poland, she liberally sprinkled Bulgarian words in her reply:

> The food! I was missing yogurt, *kiselo mlyako*[6], I was missing *lyutenitsa*. Like I remember I came back and the first thing that I ate was a *filika sus lyutenitsa* [7] and cheese. White cheese. Ah, I missed this so much. Actually, I never eat that here, but I missed it so much when I was there.

For Dana, food and the language around food symbolized home. The food-based image she created represented both, truly a key symbol (Ortner 1973). It was something she noticed because she was away from home and homemade foods.

Dana's art focused my attention on jarred foods and their continual significance and prevalence in Bulgaria as contemporary social practices that link the past, present, and future. Focusing on this practice has opened many literal and figurative doors for me to cellars, cupboards, kitchens, gardens, and memories. Food preservation practices are connected to cities and capitals through production, as Dana described, as is the circulation of preserved food and alcohol. But these

[6] *Kiselo mlyako* (кисело мляко): Yogurt has a long history in Bulgaria. For more details on how Bulgaria became known in the west as the homeland of yogurt and a taste of home within Bulgaria see Stoilova 2015, 14-35. For an examination of the industrialization process on Bulgarian yogurt see Stoilova 2013, 73-92.

[7] *Filika sus lyutenitsa* (филика със лютеница): a slice of bread with *lyutenitsa*

practices are often rooted in villages and small towns where people garden, forage, and gather from orchards.

While I did some work in cities, I often travelled to places that contrasted starkly with the boho Sofian coffee shop where Dana and I met for the interview that fall day. English, if spoken at all, was rare, as was meeting outside of someone's home, office, or outdoor kitchen. I was often in the company of women and men at least a decade (if not two or three) my senior. And almost everything I ate or drank was homemade. And yet Dana's poster, and the social practices that it pointed towards, resonated wherever I went. Saving food for winter and making preserves seemed to be a safe and familiar topic that people felt comfortable talking about and proud to teach me. And yet they were also tied to deeply personal and sometimes painful experiences. They referenced intensely private spaces like cellars, where guests are not usually invited, and they also stood in often silent critique of political and economic systems that had failed to keep their promises of a brighter future.

Persistence of Food Saving Practices

While fermenting, drying, and jarring food for personal and familial consumption are marginal practices in most Western countries, they are relatively common practices in post-socialist countries. Many Bulgarians actively self-provision a portion of their annual food supply through gardening, foraging and home-based food preservation and storage. According to a Bulgaria media report, based on a survey conducted in September 2019, more than 70% of Bulgarian respondents made or consumed homemade preserves (news.bg 2019).

My research illuminates why it makes sense to a large proportion of people in Bulgaria to continue home-based food preservation practices despite multiple political, technological and economic shifts. Those practices were not expected to persist in such a significant way either during state socialism or after its demise. In the early 2000s, economists were baffled by the ongoing popularity of these small-scale, subsistence oriented foodways practices in Eastern Europe, which were often characterized as backward, problematic, or barriers to development (Kostov and Lingard 2002, 90; Alber and Kohler 2008, 113-127; see also Murton, Davington, and Dokis 2016). European Union integration, with its consequent freer flowing capital, goods and people, was also expected to diminish these practices. In other words, these practices generally do not fit the timeline of "progress" as envisioned by socialist state party leaders, as

conceptualized by economists in the early years of after the end of state socialism, or within the current context as a modern European nation. And yet today, many people in Bulgaria continue to perform these practices, which continue to re-generate and in sometime surprising ways.

Throughout the following chapters I will engage these questions: Why have these practices, which were expected to disappear rapidly with entry into global capitalist economies, persisted? How have they changed? What can we learn about the dynamics of social change and stability by examining home-based food preservation in contemporary Bulgaria? How might approaching preservation through theories of social practice preserve agricultural biodiversity and traditional knowledge (including agroecological and culinary knowledge)? How might focusing on social practices, rather than social movements, supplement existing food sovereignty discourse and practice? What do these practices have to contribute to our understanding of socially and environmentally beneficial, resilient foodways that are not the result of an explicit social movement or ethical consumerism? What are the important lessons that can be learned from living in and through long-term precarity for our current precarious times?

Saving Food

The June 2019 issue of *Gastronomica* was dedicated to the topic of "Saving Food." In the introductory article, the editorial team ruminated on the many challenges, meanings and angles from which to approach this topic (Weiler, Elton, and Johnston eds. 2019, 1-5). Saving food in terms of trying to win the "race against rot," as Amy Trubeck called it, relates closely to the ordinary practices of drying, pickling, and jarring foods for the winter that I observed (Weiler, Elton, and Johnston eds.2019, 1). Chapters Seven and Eight of this dissertation will examine saving food in this context. The term "saving food" can also be flipped to think about "food that saves" in terms of health or basic food security, as I explore in Chapter Nine. Beyond biological survival, "food that saves" is also related to how preserved foods save tastes, memories, and identities or play a role in rituals. This will be illustrated in Chapters Seven and Ten. Finally, there is the theme of saving food from homogenization, industrialization, and corporatization. To explore this theme, I will focus on the explicit food based social movement termed Slow Food and contrast it with the more "quiet" implicit food sovereignty evidenced in cellars. These food preservation practices reduce precarity experienced by people who live at the political and economic margins of the dominant global food systems.

Because foodways practices are deeply entwined in everyday life, this dissertation also follows threads of connected and interwoven practices far beyond the kitchen, garden, forest and mountains. This broader fabric is essential to understand the ongoing performance of small-scale and informal food cultivation and preservation. By contextualizing the intimate details of specific food preservation practices and the carriers of those practices within the fabric of everyday life, the widespread ability, desire, and in some cases necessity, to continue preserving food becomes clearer—as do the various meanings that are associated with the production of these foods.

In summary, this dissertation explores contemporary home-based food preservation practices within the context of broader everyday life in Bulgaria. I provide historical context for these practices and offer description and analysis of the materials used, competences required, and meanings that these foods have for the people who make them and consume them. I analyze the implicit and covert politics of these food saving practices as they are being (re)produced in families and social networks and the overt politicization and heritagization of these practices in certifications, food festivals, and culinary tourism. Finally, I examine the transformational potential of everyday "quiet" food sovereignty practices through the preservation and re-creation of alternative food networks and suggest policies that can support these practices.

I draw from diverse literatures related to practice theory, particularly those related to the dynamics of social change (Bourdieu 1997; Ortner 1984; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina and Von Savingy 2001; Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012), supplemented by theories of everyday life (de Certeau 1984; Highmore 2002), and assemblage theories (Tsing 2017; De Landa 2006). Using these as an analytic base, I explore how these practices of everyday life might enrich food sovereignty practices and contribute to theories of social change in the pursuit of more hopeful food futures.

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CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH PRACTICE: POSITIONALITY, THEORY, AND METHODS

"The paradox of the Peace Corps development model then is that while joining the Peace Corps can support the creation of neoliberal subjectivities (intrinsic motivations to volunteer), the Peace Corps experience itself supports the creation of critical global citizens (volunteers who value mutual learning and equality)."

(Dimitrova 2006, 307)

Figure 3.1. Photograph of the author, and Grandmother Lily in Simitli, Bulgaria. Taken by Borko Davkov, August 10, 2006.

Peace Corps Paradox, Positionality, and the Journey to Bulgarian Foodways

The story of this research is necessarily entwined with my own story. The personal, professional, political, theoretical, and empirical observations involved are inextricably interwoven. For this reason, I will give an extended explanation and analysis of my history of working and living in Bulgaria and my eventual path to pursing this dissertation before describing my current positionality and research methods.

The research I conducted for this dissertation has its roots in my living and working in Bulgaria as a Peace Corps volunteer from 2006-08. In the picture above, Baba Lily and Baba Tonka (who is just out of view of the camera), our homestay hosts, welcome my husband and me with ceremonial bread served with honey and salt.

This initial introduction to Bulgaria as a Peace Corps Volunteer had a significant impact on me personally and also on how I engaged in what became my dissertation research. In reflecting on my experience as a volunteer I can see now that this was the beginning of my uncomfortable relationship with discourse and practices of "progress" and "development."

The United States Peace Corps, as a federal program, was founded in the 1961 and was deeply intertwined with Cold War politics and multi-faceted efforts to reify U.S. power and dominance in relation to communist nations. This was particularly significant during a time when former colonies were gaining independence; the U.S. wanted to secure allies and allegiances.[12] The program began working in Eastern Europe soon after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, with the first volunteers arriving in Bulgaria in 1991. As Svetla Dimitrova put it, "Peace Corps' entry in Eastern Europe was justified on the grounds that it could assist with the large-scale goals of building democracies and market economies as well as in support of the U.S.'s foreign policy in the region and therefore utilized Peace Corps as a tool for development as Westernization, a form of cultural and economic imperialism" (Dimitrova 2016, 86). In other words, in countries such as Bulgaria, the program was closely tied to unilinear ideals of modernization and neoliberal capitalist development in the shadow of Cold War politics. Peace Corps Volunteers in Russia and Eastern Europe were participating in a broader project of citizen diplomacy which embodied both implicit and explicit assumptions of who is developed, who is developing.

Despite the intentions and political underpinnings of the program, how it played out in actual human encounters was variable. In her dissertation examining the Peace Corps Bulgaria program as a case study, Svetla Dimitrova identified both neoliberal and

[1] For more details on the origins and history of the Peace Corps program in general see:
Geidel, Molly. 2015. Peace Corps Fantasies: How Development Shaped the Global Sixties. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Rice, Gerard T. The Bold Experiment, JFK's Peace Corps. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1985.
Meisler, Stanley. 2011. When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and Its First Fifty Years. Boston: Beacon Press.

[2] For a specific retrospective on Peace Corps Bulgaria see: Dimitrova, Svetla Stoeva, 2016. Neoliberalism and International Development Volunteering in a Post-Socialist Context: The Contradictory Utopia of Peace Corps Bulgaria (1991-2013), Dissertation, University of Michigan, Department of Sociology.

counter-neoliberal development practices and outcomes within the program. One of the outcomes which she analyzed was the impact on the subjectivity of the American volunteers. She noted that one unintended outcome of the program was more self-reflectivity on the part of volunteers, an increased likelihood that they would critique neoliberal values, and beyond that the concept of development itself. As Dimitrova put it, "The paradox of the Peace Corps development model then is that while joining the Peace Corps can support the creation of neoliberal subjectivities (intrinsic motivations to volunteer), the Peace Corps experience itself supports the creation of critical global citizens (volunteers who value mutual learning and equality)" (2016, 307). She argued that both volunteers and local partners engaged in counter-neoliberal "…development as collective learning" even while some elements of the programming, practices and rhetoric continued to remain staunchly neoliberal (Dimitrova 2016, 332).

My own story very closely mirrors Dimitrova's analysis of the paradox of Peace Corps and the impact that being a volunteer had on my own thinking and values. The micro-encounters of everyday life cracked open my own assumptions about time, hospitality, economy, and progress. I also received specific training as part of my Peace Corps service that deeply influenced my choice to take a locally identified, asset-based approach to this research. This has led me on a 15-year path to better understand precarity and resilience and the potential opportunities to live a meaningful life in the ruins of modernist and capitalist projects.

During my two years of Peace Corps service, I started thinking about food justice and food systems. I began reading popular books that came out at the time: Animal Vegetable Miracle, Omnivore's Dilemma, and Coming Home to Eat (Kingsolver 2008; Pollan 2007; Nabhan 2002). My everyday Bulgarian food life at the time was quite a contrast to both my everyday American food life and the North American food systems that were the focus of those books. Everyday practices like growing a little food, buying from small (and sometimes informal) producers, foraging, relying on friends and family networks for gifts and hospitality, saving seeds, preserving food, and cooking were common in Bulgaria, especially in villages but also in towns and cities.

I took these impressions with me as I returned to my own home in the Southern Willamette Valley and pursued my M.A. research there with food producers growing for local and regional markets. The context was fundamentally different, and while I continued to be personally invested in researching and practicing civic agriculture, agroecological production, and re-creating more robust regionalized food systems, I also became increasingly disillusioned with the inequitable, and unjust outcomes of even the most progressive agricultural alternatives. Because access to good and desirable foods, produced with care for people and the environment, was necessarily entangled with racial and economic justice I pursued applied social justice work as an equity and human rights analyst and then a community development analyst for the city of Eugene. I also ran a cooperative community garden from 2011 until 2017.

In the course of this applied, embedded work in my community I realized that there were theoretical questions that I wanted to examine, things I suspected were operating below the surface. I wanted to make those more visible so that I could more effectively engage in social and environmental justice work. And so, I returned to the university, with the unwavering help of Dr. Carol Silverman, and to everyday Bulgarian foodways.

Initial Dissertation Research

In this context, I conducted exploratory pre-dissertation research in Bulgaria from June-September of 2018 and September of 2019. I relied heavily on language and cultural competence that I gained during my Peace Corps Service as well as social networks and relationships. With these things in place, I could take an inductive, grounded theory inspired approach even within the confines of timelines that would typically preclude such methods. Shank (2002) describes grounded theory as a "fully exploratory approach" which Glaser argues allows the researcher to be "uncontaminated" by prior theory (1998). As I explained in Chapter 1, I combined the strengths of a grounded approach, which include open-mindedness, willingness to pursue seemingly unrelated topics, and gaining the emic perspective without my own theoretical agendas, with initial readings on foodways, post-socialism, and Balkan history (as suggested by Miller and Deutsch, 2009).

In summer of 2018 I engaged in participant observation of contemporary Bulgarian foodways and everyday life in addition to conducting unstructured interviews. To comply with ethical standards of human subjects research, prior to engaging in this research, I submitted my research and data management plan to the University of Oregon's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which reviewed it and granted it exempt status. I initially began recruiting participants through social contacts and existing relationships from my Peace Corps service and spiraled out using the snowball method in addition to opportunistic data collection based on chance encounters and introductions. During September of 2019, I conducted cellar inventories (which I will describe in Chapter 7), and semi-structured interviews with preserve makers. I wrote extensive fieldnotes, recorded interviews, took many photographs, and collected a small archive of printed materials related to food and agriculture. Several grants funded this initial work including the American Councils Combined Research and Language Training Fellowship, the University of Oregon "Special Opps" Travel and Research Award, the University of Oregon Food Studies Graduate Research Award, and the Juda Memorial Award for Nutritional Anthropology. It resulted in 64 interviews and several hundred pages of fieldnotes. Upon my return to the U.S. I began systematically analyzing my fieldnotes and interviews using descriptive coding (Saldaña 2013, 102) in MaxQDA software. After this initial round of coding, I used the constant comparison method to systematically engage with my coded data, write memos, and develop themes that I consolidated into my dissertation prospectus, which focused on jars and home-based food preservation (Glaser, 1998).

As I mentioned in the first chapter, disruptions to in-person field research due to COVID-19 left me with unexpected time to review the results from the exploratory data that I had collected and to consider more carefully existing theories relevant to the themes. This has resulted in an empirically based, inductive approach to theme generation, similar to grounded theory, layered with an additional deductive approach to analyzing existing theories related to these themes. This is similar to what Goldkuhl and Cronholm call "multi-grounded theory" (2010).

How to Know What Practices to Study? How to Keep Constellations of Practices in View?

My eventual turn to practice theories also influenced my methods in the final phase of data collection, which I conducted from May-October of 2021. David Nicolini proposed the following methodological approaches to studying social practices, which mesh nicely with de Certeau's call to maintain the integrity of everyday life in social research, "…zooming in on the accomplishments of practice, zooming out to discern their relationships in space and time…produce diffracting machinations that enrich our understanding through thick textual renditions of mundane practices" (Nicolini 2017, 26). This zooming in and then zooming out made sense in terms of embedding myself in the minutiae of food preservation practices as they are enacted and then zooming back out to illuminate historical context and/or notice connections to other practices. I also appreciate Nicolini's assertion that conducting empirical practice-based studies can be challenging in that, "… for the researcher the question is which practices am I observing? What should I observe? What are the practices that are circulating in and through this scene of action? Which are relevant? The problem for the empirical researcher is thus different (and possibly opposite) from that of a theoretician. She needs to find out relevant practices before she can study them" (2017, 28). The value of the inductive approach to generating themes, therefore, proves valuable in practice-oriented research methods as elaborated by Nicolini because it provides the researcher with the opportunity to select and focus on practices that are "significant" from the emic perspective. The exploratory, inductive approach, shared by Grounded Theory, allowed me to learn enough to know what I wanted to look at in a particular environment where multiple practices are knotted and unfolding in their performances. The material object of the jar (*burkan*) had become a potent and meaningful symbol that "spoke" to many people across urban/rural and ages divides. Asking about jars encouraged people in turn to speak, which was a clue that it was an element of a significant social practice and a way to enter into other interlinked practices of "saving food" writ large.

After my relatively unstructured and open-ended exploratory research, I narrowed my focus to jarred and preserved foods, which seemed to elicit stories. I visited cellars,

where preservers collect and display jars (both empty and full) collect, and then sought out opportunities to witness or participate in the practices of home-based food preservation; I also conducted interviews about these practices. Revisiting earlier data allowed me to describe interlinked practices that are connected to and radiate out from home-based food preservation, in Nicolini's terms "zooming out." These include foraging or growing food, procuring "good" food through shopping and relationship skills, informally exchanging foods (market and non-market), transferring skills, offering hospitality as well as feasting and celebration practices that rely on these foods, health adjacent food, and healing foods.

Throughout 2020 I continued to engage remotely with people in Bulgaria through social media and email correspondence in addition to routinely reading and collecting news available online from both Bulgarian and English language news outlets. I modified my research plan to include collection of social media posts and electronic communication. I submitted these modifications to the IRB and was approved to continue under my exempt status. I created a digital archive of the materials I collected during 2020 and 2021.

Finally, from May until October of 2021, I returned to Bulgaria to continue in-person participant observation and interviews funded by a Fulbright Research Award. This research included participating in gardening, shopping, cooking, making preserves, and also engaging in everyday conversations with the people I met about their food preservation practices and memories. I also attended food festivals, joined in family meals, and visited business owners promoting Bulgarian food production and tourism.

Through this process I integrated my observations about everyday food saving practices in contemporary Bulgaria with theories of everyday life and social practice theory particularly as they relate to the dynamics of social change and recent literature by Eastern European food scholars about quiet food sovereignty. I thus use home-based food and alcohol preservation practices, and the multiplicity of other social practices entangled with them, to examine food security, food sovereignty, and resilience from an angle and place that defies linear conceptualizations of progress. This includes progress framed in modernist, neoliberal, and social activism terms.

"Learning With" and the Practical Realities of Empathetic and Reciprocal Research Methods

My re-entry to Bulgaria in 2018 was marked by a different positionality from my Peace Corps days, but there was some similarity in terms of power asymmetries. As a researcher I was no longer embedded in an organization and for the first time was explicitly asking people to share their knowledge and expertise with me. I didn't have a clear way to "give back" to the people I was working with and was also gathering data for a project that would disproportionately benefit me in terms of my future career prospects. While I was an American, western outsider, my language skills confused people about my identity. In casual encounters, it might be a few minutes before the fact that I was an *American* anthropologist studying Bulgarian food preservation practices would come up. I was generally greeted with a confused look and the question, "What are you doing here?" This happened particularly when it became clear that I was neither an ethnic Bulgarian, nor married to a Bulgarian, nor living in Bulgaria full-time. So, I could blend in sometimes but exercised the privileges of an outsider, asking questions that might otherwise seem odd, pushing the boundaries of acceptable guest/host relations by asking to work alongside people in kitchen and cooking tasks, breaking gender norms by participating in typically male dominated activities, or asking people to reflect on otherwise mundane activities.

The reality is that, regardless of my official position, I have always benefitted more from Bulgarians than they have benefitted from me. In an attempt to mitigate some of this asymmetry, my goal has been to "learn with" my Bulgarian partners as opposed to engage in a "study of" them or their practices (Ingold 2017). I agree with Wilson's conceptualization of combining knowledge that is produced across difference (learning with) with recycling existing knowledge (learning from) (2007). In this way I have endeavored to engage in anthropology as "[…] a generous, open-ended, comparative and yet critical inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of human life in the one world we all inhabit" (Ingold 2017, 22). To this definition I would add the word humble; I do not position myself as an expert or make claims to universality. Rather, I humbly present myself as a co-learner in a process that hopefully generates knowledge that is useful, in a

way that is deeply respectful. The fieldwork practices I describe below are part of how I conceptualize this work as "learning with" rather than making a "study of" in addition to how I understand my role as both a receiver and a giver within the context of research.

"You can use anything I say … but I don't want to be recorded"

Throughout my fieldwork I found that many people were uncomfortable with being audio or video recorded. According to ethical standards I always identified myself as an anthropologist and an American when engaging with people. I obtained their permission to have a conversation and described how I planned to use it. For more casual interviews in public places like markets or on public transportation I obtained verbal consent before proceeding with further discussion. Often people were eager to share their stories with me and happy to talk. However, I found that the moment I asked if I could record the conversation, many people became visibly uncomfortable. For example, a shopkeeper named Angel in Plovdiv told me, "You can use anything I say. You can write about it. You can use my name. But I don't want to be recorded."

This significantly influenced the way I collected interviews and amplified the importance of my fieldnotes. I usually took notes with paper and pencil and jotted down key quotes verbatim when speaking with people. This did not seem to cause discomfort. Then I typed out notes from the conversation as quickly as possible so that it was fresh in my memory. In circumstances where my computer was not available, or I couldn't write my notes for a more extended period of time, I recorded myself carefully describing the conversation in as much detail as possible. Sometimes I did this while ducking out of a dinner party for a few minutes, walking around in a market, or taking a long train ride back to my apartment. This means that for more unstructured interviews, usually conducted in public, I have virtually no recordings or transcribed interviews. They are summarized conversations with key verbatim quotes. With a few exceptions, these interviews were conducted in Bulgarian. I, however, wrote all my fieldnotes in English. So, they are my translations of the conversations with key quotes written down in Bulgarian that I then translated into English.

In the case of the more structured, formal interviews, usually conducted in private spaces, people were sometimes comfortable with me recording the interview. Some people

asked that I use the recording to compile my notes summarizing the conversation (not produce a verbatim transcript) and then delete the audio file, and I have complied with those wishes.

I also always asked about taking photographs, whether they contained identifiable images or not. This seems to cause less discomfort than audio or video recording. I abided by people's wishes if they asked me to crop out certain elements (like a disorganized corner of the cellar or a less-than-perfect hair day). My goal was to be in communication and relationship with people, to ensure that they felt seen and heard and to respect any boundaries that they wanted to have with me. It also means there are many details that I intentionally didn't collect to abide by these standards.

Participant observation, with a focus on participation in practices, provided an ideal method for "learning with" in multiple ways. Through participating in shopping expeditions, I learned multi-sensory ways to identify and evaluate high quality, safe, and tasty food in the absence of things like "best by" labelling or uniformly enforced hygiene standards. By actually cooking preserves, I gained embodied skills in adjusting temperature, seasoning, measuring, and evaluating "done-ness" without the use of quantifying instruments other than my senses and body. I built upon a foundation of home-cooking skills, which I gained through formal and informal training in the U.S., that provided context and enable me to participate more fully in home-preserve making in Bulgaria.

"For me it's so interesting. I've never met a real, live American before!"

Part of "learning with" rather than "making a study of" Bulgarian preserve makers and their practices was being mutually engaged in conversations and answering questions. This included sharing about my own life and personal history. These conversations, mutual and two-way, opened up possibilities for us to communicate and influence one another, to learn with each other about what it means to live our everyday lives and to meet across various differences. The work was an interaction rather than an extractive collection or a one-way interview. I answered people's questions and curiosities about me, let them photograph me, or let them be photographed with me. To maintain this commitment to two-way communication and conversation in the ethnography, I have

included myself, my own thoughts and comparative experiences in my own most familiar culture in the text.

"Thank you for your attention."

This is something that people, usually older women that I spoke with, told me more than once at the end of our conversations. Often my attention was really the only thing I had to give people. There is an admitted imbalance in the benefits for me as a researcher in the conversation compared to those who are speaking with me. But I believe that there is something edifying for all of us when we see and notice each other. I could see the change on people's faces and the pride they felt in having something to offer: a story, a sun-ripened tomato, knowledge, experience in a craft.

"People usually just listen to respond, not to really hear."

Some interviewees described feeling forgotten or unimportant in their everyday lives. I made every effort to acknowledge and respect the people who so generously shared their lives, food, and practices with me by deeply listening, respecting their wishes, honoring their stories and engaging in reciprocal relationships within the context of my work to the extent possible. I agree with Tuhiwai Smith that "To be able to share, to have something worth sharing gives dignity to the giver. To accept a gift and to reciprocate gives dignity to the receiver. To create something new through the process of sharing is to recreate the old, to reconnect relationships and to recreate our humanness" (1999, 105).

Research Locations

While I conducted interviews in many places throughout Bulgaria including the large cities of Sofia and Plovdiv, in this dissertation I will focus on research conducted in the small town of Simitli and the villages of Mladen, Yavor, and Kurtovo Konare. Multiple locations allowed me to illustrate varying habitation patterns and trace the paths of preserved foods outward from the sites of production. These four rural locations are situated in three of Bulgaria's six agricultural regions. Among other data collected, observations and interviews in these sites provided the most insight into home-based food

preservation practices and allowed me to highlight similarities and divergences in contemporary practices.

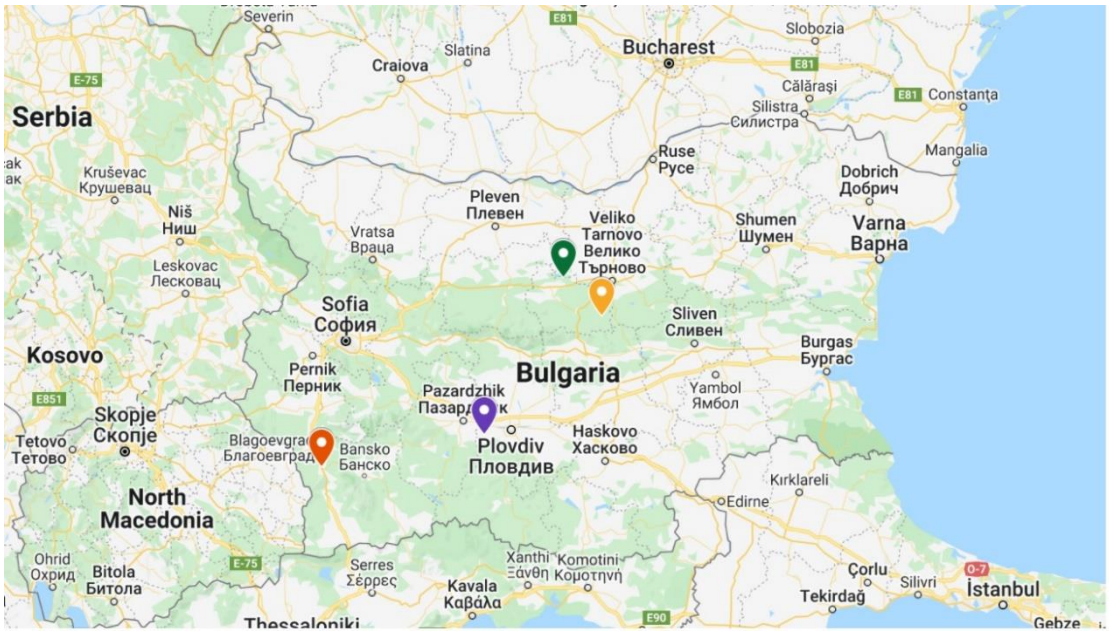

Figure 3.2. Map of Bulgaria with sites pinned (Simitli:Red; Kurtovo Konare:Purple; Mladen:Green; Yavor:Orange) (Map data ©2022 Geobasis-DE/BKG ©2009, Google).

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CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW

> *"What is needed instead is to move away from a unidirectional development path portraying the development in the European East as simply delayed adoption of Western innovations. Instead, it is necessary to acknowledge the diversity of configurations and the real, even if unintended, sustainability and hidden resilience of the mélange of East European formal and informal food systems."*
>
> (Jehlička et al. 2020, 287)

There are a wide variety of approaches to the study of food, all of them useful for contributing to our understanding of this biological necessity that is almost infinitely diverse in form, function, and meaning (Albala 2013; Belasco 2008; Counihan and Van Esterik 2013; Miller and Deutsche 2009; Boisevert and Heldke 2016). While some see the diversity in approaches, theoretical orientations, and methods as a weakness, I argue that it provides an opportunity to work across disciplinary boundaries and makes space for collaborative work. The challenge for a student of food studies is to decide where to locate oneself within a vast and divergent field. My goal was to ground my work, including the theoretical orientation and analytical lens, in exploratory ethnographic observations and work from regional scholars. This literature review will briefly summarize the insights I gained through the grounding process and then suggest practice theory, complemented by insights from folklorists' approach to the study of food (foodways), as a way to "learn with" East Europeans about the everyday practices of home-based food preservation. I will conclude by proposing that contemporary food preservation is a way that Bulgarians are practicing "quiet" food sovereignty.

Grounding in Ethnographic Fieldwork and Regional Scholarship

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I was motivated to return to Bulgaria to conduct formalized research because of my suspicion that contemporary foodways there held important and underappreciated insights for Western scholars, like myself. I engaged in exploratory research to generate themes. I took seriously Stefka's comment that the symbol of the jar was a key and centered subsequent research on jars and home-based food preservation. I also attended to Dana's insight that jars were significant as a symbol of nationality because they were the

outcome of what "all Bulgarians do." Her comment articulates a sense of group identity coming from an ongoing, mundane, widespread practice—in folkloristic terms, the everyday practices that reproduce and sustain group identity. Her image of the jar was powerful as a symbol and a key because domestic food preservation was so common in Bulgaria; she chose it for its common-ness.

Contemporary Food Studies in Russia and Eastern Europe

Recent literature written by scholars of contemporary Russian and Eastern European foodways resonated with my first phase of research. While these scholars are from a variety of disciplines, work in different countries, and focus on different elements of food, they share several notable features with my initial observations. Most significantly, many of them describe and analyze the persistence of food self-provisioning and informal foodways practices after the end of state socialism (Kostov and Lingard 2002; Visser et al. 2015; Jehlička et al. 2020; Jehlička et al. 2013; Mincyte 2014; Aistara 2015; Caldwell 2004; Caldwell, Dunn and Nestle 2009). Their analysis of why these practices persist varies. Some conclude that these practices are primarily a response to poverty and caused by a delayed integration into global free markets (Alber and Kohler 2008; Kostov and Lingard 2002) while others explicitly contest this analysis and a linear conceptualization of development more broadly (Jehlička et al. 2013). While some have taken a close look at the integration of industrialized and capitalized food during and after state-socialism (Dunn 2004; Jung 2009; Shkodorova 2021), others have highlighted the many foodways practices that operate(d) at the margins of formalized state and market systems (Creed 1998; Mincyte 2009; Mincyte 2014; Aistara 2015; Caldwell 2004; Smollet 1984; Tocheva 2015).

A common theme is the mélange of food procurement and livelihood strategies that defy an oppositional characterization of small and large-scale agriculture, formal, informal and natural economies, or local and global foods (Creed 2004; Jehlička et al. 2020; Visser et al. 2015; Monova 2015; Caldwell 2004; Mincyte 2014; Stancheva 2019). These scholars describe food self-provisioning, agro-ecological production, saving seeds, foraging, home-based food preservation and informal markets as common, everyday practices in Eastern Europe (in contrast to Western Europe and North America) even while they also can be deeply entangled with industrial, corporate foods and seeds (McMichael 2004, 2; Jehlička et al. 2020; Monova 2015).

“Alternative” Food Networks and Food Sovereignty

On the other hand, Western European and North American food scholarship frequently categorizes food self-provisioning and preservation practices as “alternative.” This makes sense in the Western European and North American context where these are relatively uncommon practices and occur at the margins of a highly capitalized, industrialized, globally networked food system, which McMichael describes as the “corporate food regime” (2005). The creation of “Alternative Food Networks” (AFNs) or activism to promote “Food Sovereignty” are ways to resist and contest the ubiquity of the “corporate food regime” by expanding food production and acquisition capacity outside of industrialized, corporate agriculture (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011; Wittman, Desmarais and Wiebe 2010; Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012). As Wilson puts it,

> AFNs are ideas and actions that in some way subvert or contest industrial capitalist foodways, such as urban farming, Community Supported Agriculture, agroecology, fair trade and so on, while continuing to work within its interstices. Similarly, food sovereignty emerged as a concept in activist circles (and only later in academia and policy) to describe the project of carving out separate or at least partially autonomous spaces for the production, exchange and consumption of food” (Wilson 2017, 1).

In Russia and Eastern Europe these “alternative” practices are much more common (Alber and Kohler 2008; Shkodorova 2021; Grivins 2016; Jehlička and Daněk 2017; Acheson 2007). This leads scholars such as Jehlička et al. (2020) to contest the use of terms like “Alternative Food Networks” since it frames industrialized, capitalized, globalized foodways as the norm and alternatives in an oppositional relationship with that norm. In Russian and Eastern Europe, they argue, these “alternatives” are actually the mainstream and are not necessarily oppositional to, but rather interconnected with, industrialized, capitalized, global foods. As Sovová and Veen point out, these practices that are more common in Russian and Eastern Europe have not typically been theorized through “[…] concepts of empowerment such as food sovereignty, local economic development or community food security” but rather as underdevelopment that will be subsumed when food systems are more fully absorbed into the market economy (2020, 3).

Another point of diversion from Alternative Food Network scholarship that Jehlička and colleagues illuminate is that, in Eastern Europe, these food self-provisioning and preservation practices were not usually tied to a social movement and people did not identify them as a form of ethical consumerism. Rather, they argue, these practices in Russia and Eastern Europe are manifestations of "quiet" sustainability and food sovereignty. This is unique because much of food sovereignty scholarship is deeply entangled in theories of social movements. The paradox, therefore, is that in Russia and Eastern Europe there is evidence of food systems and practices that closely align with the goals of food sovereignty in outcome and the maintenance of robust "Alternative Food Networks" but do not include a public "movement" or an ethical consumerism goal or motivation.

My observations mirror these findings. Self-provisioning and food preservation, as those I interviewed noted, were not primarily a way to cope with poverty, and they were not associated with a social movement (with one exception that I will examine in Chapter 10). It was clear that for many people the ongoing production of preserved food simply seemed like an ordinary thing to do. It was a relatively mundane, routinized activity intermingled with a wide range of food provisioning practices including the purchase of globally sourced, industrially produced foods. As such, Bulgarian domestic food provisioning and preservation practices neither fit well within the western alternative food systems literature, nor within the food sovereignty literature, nor within western trained sociologists' or economists' explanations of the persistence and pervasiveness of these practices in ex-socialist states.

Thus, I needed to find a way to explore the explicit, expressive meanings of these foods (related to their production and consumption) within a broader analytical framework that could also accommodate the mundane and routine without foregone conclusions about the motivations of these activities. I decided to do so by conceptualizing meaning as a component of materially mediated, historically and environmentally situated, social practices, which constitute the fabric of everyday life (Long 2004; Neuman 2019; Warde 2016; Shove Pantzar and Watson 2012; Highmore 2002). This approach allowed me to integrate the strengths of foodways scholarship, developed in the discipline of folklore, with multi-disciplinary scholarship contributing to practice theory and theories of everyday life. Using these as an analytic allowed me gain insights that contribute to the growing literature describing diverse or "multiple" food

sovereignties (Wilson 2017; Kurtz 2015). I will now briefly describe some key features of practice theory, how I propose it can be enriched by insights from foodways, and finally how "Thinking Food Like an East European" is necessary to understand home-based food preservation practices in Bulgaria as "quiet" food sovereignty.

Practice Theory and Foodways: Approaches to the Study of Food Preservation

I argue that the folkloristic approach to studying foodways, including careful attention to performance and meaning, is a useful complement to social practice theories generally and more specifically a robust elemental approach to examining social practices as articulated by Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012). I will examine each of these in turn in the following two sub-sections. While I value both approaches, I am centering practice theory following Neuman's argument for a theoretical shift from an emphasis on what food issues "communicate" towards "[…]what food issues constitute and how they are constituted" (2019, 79).

Practice Theory

"Practice theory" is less a unified and coherent theory than an evolving body of literature from diverse disciplines arguing that "practice" is central to understanding and explaining social life, including the dynamics of social stability and change. Sherry Ortner coined the term "practice theory" and proposed practice as a "key symbol of theoretical orientation" for the field of anthropology in her influential article "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties" (1984). She was among the first in anthropology to identify the potential of practice theory to understand the social via the work of Pierre Bourdieu. While not developing a theory or method of practice per se, she did narrate elements of a practice orientation that provided some threads of continuity between disparate theoretical approaches in the field of anthropology at the time.

While the promise of a more unified theoretical approach in the field of anthropology did not materialize, academics across a variety of disciplines have further elaborated practice theory in the intervening years. For example, in his introduction to "The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory," Theodore Schatzki outlines many diverse disciplinary contributions and developments such as philosophy (Wittgenstein, Dreyfus, and Taylor), cultural theory (Foucault and Lyotard), sociology (Giddens, Bourdieu), and science and technology studies (Latour, Pickering, Rouse) (2001, 1). As Schatzki put it, "[…] practice approaches thereby oppose numerous current and

recent paths of thinking, including intellectualism, representationalism, individualism (e.g., rational choice theory, methodological individualism, network analysis), structuralism, structure-functionalism, systems theory, semiotics, and many strains of humanism and poststructuralism" (2001, 2).

While the diversity of contributions is challenging to synthesize, most practice theorists utilize a similar baseline definition of practice as, "[…] embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding" (Schatzki 2001, 2). Using this definition as a starting point, in the rest of the chapter I will further elaborate how practice theories have reconceptualized many dualisms that Ortner identified as deeply rooted in Western thought (Ortner 1984, 134). Those include: agency/structure, mind/body, materialism/idealism, domination/cooperation, emics/etics, subjective/objective, and nature/culture. Rather than casting binaries as oppositional, practice theorists conceptualize them as relational and co-constitutive. For example, in terms of agency and structure, Ortner reflected, "It [practice] restored the actor to the social process without losing sight of the larger structures that constrain (but also enable) social action" (2006, 1). With "structuration," sociologist Anthony Giddens conceptualized practice oriented, recursively constituted agents and structures. Giddens argued, "The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time" (Giddens 1984, 2). This framing refutes the privileging of either agency or structure in terms of the social, moving simultaneously away from Durkheimian notions of structure and society *and* away from thinking of society as composed of autonomous individual agents acting in their own interest. This is a foundational principle in contemporary practice theories: that agency and structure are co-constitutive.

I am conceptualizing food preservation in Bulgarian households as social practices that materially coalesce in the cellar. Food preservation practices are intrinsically linked to other social practices relating to many aspects of everyday life such as shopping, gardening, gathering, cooking, and eating. Social practices are intentional, though often routinized, activities which consists of interconnected elements such as "[…] embodiment, physical objects, inner emotions, competences of how to do things, and motivations to do them" (Neuman 2019, 83). Practice theory literature often makes the distinction between practices as entities and practices as

performance, arguing that, "It is through performance, through the immediacy of doing, that the 'pattern' provided by the practice-as-an entity is filled out and reproduced" (Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012, 7). There are obvious advantages to incorporating insights from performance theory to frame and analyze the performative and communicative aspects of social practices that I will address is the following section.

Practices are performed by "carriers" of the practices, and when they are performed, they are '[…] the routine accomplishment of what people take to be 'normal' ways of life' (Shove 2003, 117). Though I use the term carriers, please note that practitioners are not merely repositories of skills or replicators but active agents and reflexive subjects in the creation and re-creation of practices (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 58). This is compatible to how folklorists might describe the embodied performance of tradition by "tradition bearers." Accordingly, social practices are performed 'on the basis of what members learn from others, and are capable of being done well or badly, correctly or incorrectly' (Barnes 2001, 27). While individuals are carriers of practices, what distinguishes personal idiosyncrasy or habit from social practice is that social practices are shared by a group of people. This means that practices are recognizable, and mutually referential. They are "collective possessions and accomplishments sustained through interaction and mutual adjustment among people" (Schatzki 2001, 6; see also Barnes 2001). This is compatible with Lave and Wenger's concept of a community of practice though as I will explore in Chapter 7, those communities need not be co-located spatially or temporally to be mutually referential (1991). Practices are also "intrinsically connected to and interwoven with objects" and non-human entities (Shove Pantzar and Watson 2012, 14).

In simplified terms, social practices are composed of three interconnected elements: materials, competences, and meanings. These three elements integrate via enactment and emerge, persist, shift, or disappear "[…] when connections between elements of these three types are made, sustained or broken" (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012, 14). They are constituted through particular performances but are also entities that exist as long as they are re-produced by a broader community of practice, amongst whom these food preservation practices are recognizable and the competences of others in the community can be judged. Finally, the careers of practices emerge and persist in historical and geographic context. Therefore, I will describe these three basic elements of the social practices related to preserving food. Additionally, I will

provide historical context for the social practices of home-based food preservation. Even though elements are contingently assembled in the present, they are directly influenced by recent and more distant pasts in particular places. Materials are not the only legacy inherited from the past. Embodied competences are also passed down (sometimes passively) and are sometimes latent (only to be re-activated at some later time). This is consistent with how Lave and Wenger describe legitimate peripheral learning within a community of practice (1991). Meanings can also be more or less consistently reproduced. The change in the availability or symbolism of materials or competencies can shift the meaning, as can the broader context of opportunity which can be dictate by who does or does not have the chance to engage in a particular practice or alternative practice to it, and why. I will more fully elaborate this historical context related to home-based food preservation practices in Chapter 5. Beyond what motivates and facilitates the continued (re)production of the practice of home-based food preservation, I will also describe and analyze various meanings of the performance of these practices in terms of production and consumption.

Foodways, Performance, and Meaning

Social practice theory has many points of similarity with theoretical contributions from folklore, particularly foodways scholarship. Brunvand defines folklore as, "… the unrecorded traditions of a people; it includes both the form and content of these traditions and their style or technique of communication from person to person. Folklore is the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of culture. It encompasses all knowledge, understandings, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs transmitted in traditional forms by word of mouth or by customary examples" (Brunvand 1986, 4). Though there are many other definitions of folklore they share an emphasis on the informal culture of a group, aesthetics, and communication.

Foodways as a concept emerged among American folklorists such as Don Yoder and Charles Camp and built upon previous (more limited) work on folk cookery (Yoder 1972; Camp 1989). Lucy Long refined the concept and defined it as "The total system of practices and concepts surrounding food and eating" (Long 2015, 14). Further, she articulated a three-component model for approaching foodways consisting of: products, practices, and performance (Long 2015, 14). Individual ingredients, recipes, dishes and meals can be the focus of study as can any/all of the practices involved in food such as production, procurement, preparation,

preservation, consumption and disposal. The performative aspect of the foodways framework also includes a critical approach to aesthetics, symbolism and identity.

I view performance and practice as sharing concerns that have the potential for mutual engagement (Bronner 2012, 23). I argue that theories of practice can be enriched by insights from performance theory, particularly in terms of considering how meanings are encoded and communicated in addition to how they change based on the identity and relationship between the performer, audience, and context. To this end I will use insights from American folklorists, especially as synthesized by Lucy Long, that supplement the elemental approach described above, particularly the element of meaning (Long 2015; Bauman 1975, 1992; Abrahams 1977, 2005). Where appropriate, I also draw on event analysis, which is compatible with "zooming in" on activity as proposed by Nicolini, supplemented by "zooming out" (Bauman 1986; Nicolini 2017). By nesting performance within a broader theory of practice I hope to avoid too narrowly focusing on the "communicative functions" of the practices of home-based food preservation (Neuman 2019, 79).

As Bronner identified, both practice and performance have been keywords in folklore in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, with American Folklorists tending toward performance orientation and European ethnologists adhering more closely to practice (2012, 23). Both frameworks focus on process, activity and becoming rather than static product. Within American folklore this shift began with the "performance turn" of the 1970s. This "turn" shifted the critical site of analysis within folklore from objects to activity or what Richard Bauman frames as the performance "event" (1972, xi). The dramaturgical metaphor of performer, audience, setting and stage are used to help illuminate meanings in a particular scene of action (Goffman 1972, 120-150). The meanings of an event are processual and contextual, determined by the performer and audience interaction in a particular place and time (Bauman 1972, xi). Home-preserved foods through this lens then, have communicative functions operating across multiple registers from the functional, to the metaphorical or symbolic, to the artistic expressive (Bauman 1992, Abrahams 1977, Ben Amos 1972).

Similar to theories of practice, performance theories also offer opportunities to examine power in a nuanced way. I refute the characterization of practice as purely habitual, non-aesthetic, non-communicative and hegemonically imposed activity, while I agree that many practices are often

performed without much reflection and can be found in the everyday (Kapchan 2003, 131). For example, people may intentionally conform to some normative expectations for doings and sayings, even while reformulating the meanings of those practices. Yurchak (who I will draw on in the Chapter 6) demonstrates how publicly performing certain ritualized authoritative discourses can be both liberating and constraining and what the performance signifies can be variable and complex. Sometimes practicing conformity in performance can create maneuvering room; sometimes it can signify allegiance to authoritative regimes. Refusing to perform can also be resistance, as can actual or feigned ignorance of performance expectations (Yurchak 2005).

I understand performance as a way to enrich our understanding of practices and acknowledge that the reverse may also be true. While my analysis focuses on how people self-consciously perform via foodways, I also examine the relatively unconscious practices of everyday life, what Noyes refers to as the "surround" (2016, 143).

Seamless Whole – Versus Contingently Assembled Components

The elemental approach elaborated by Shove and colleagues extends how practice theorists since the 90s have conceptualized practices as contingently assembled components rather than seamless wholes. Schatzki points to the work of Deleuze and Guattari and notes, "In any event, apparatuses and assemblages embrace not just heterogeneous objects, but metaphysically disparate entities: objects, things done (actions), things said (statements), and abstract entities (propositions and incorporeal transformations)" (2002, 23). I will add my own understanding of how these theories are important to practice theory through my reading of Manuel DeLanda and Anna Tsing, who also build upon the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

DeLanda describes assemblages as contingently arranged components which, when brought into relationship with one another, become more than the sum of their parts (Delanda 2006, 20). Or, as Anna Tsing artfully puts it, "gatherings that become happenings" (Tsing 2015,23). Not all gatherings become happenings, not all components, when put together, become assemblages. When the relationships between the elements of practices are activated and brought together in the greater context of a field of opportunity by practitioners they are (re)produced. Their faithful reproduction is not guaranteed or even possible, but there is a tendency for these practices to be variations on a theme: containing many of the same elements over time even while individual elements within the practice or the community of practice itself may shift and change. This is

compatible with folklorist Barre Toelken's "twin laws" of dynamism and conservatism (1996). There are elements of traditions that stay the same and are conserved while there are also dynamic elements that change with each performance for a variety of reasons.

Linearity and Progression Versus Contingency and Becoming

Thinking about the social with an organismic model, a bounded and seamless whole, implicitly also involves notions of linear progression. Theories of assemblage challenge this linearity by highlighting that the convergence of elements in a practice are not inherent or inevitable but contingent. In addition, the various elements can be dis and re-assembled and still maintain their integrity. In other words, they are components, not fragments. This is significant because there is no inherent development or devolution in the emergence or convergence of elements into practices or in their dissolution, only a series of becomings with almost limitless potential re-combinations. There is also nothing automatic about practices; they must be enacted by human beings motivated or inspired to do so (Barnes 2001, 29). This is critical in developing ideas about stability and change within practice theory, particularly built on the observation that while social change does occur, and sometimes rapidly, often there is a consistency in the enactment of practices and their reproduction.

Another important insight, alluded to by Giddens and more fully developed by Schatzki, is that the social should not be assumed to be either a stable and coordinated whole as Durkheim thought of it, or as a chaotic, conflict-oriented conglomeration of individuals in competition. "Social orders are thus the arrangements of people, artifacts, organisms, and things through and amid which social life transpires, in which these entities relate, occupy positions, and possess meanings" (Schatzki 2002, 22). According to Schatzki, in addition to shifting our thinking about societies or economies as "seamless wholes" he also challenges casting them as stable and orderly. Yet, he highlights contingency rather than conflict or chaos and multiplicity rather than dichotomy. This is consistent with the general trend within practice theories to not conceptualize dualities as oppositional, but rather as interrelated. So, even while there is constant potential flux in any of the elements, and practitioners are constantly responding to a multiplicity of variations, the materials and competences available to them are likely to have some durability. This durability, however, does not preclude creativity, improvisation and variation. I will address this in Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

The contingency of these arrangements makes adequate room for understanding social change and the orderly arranging and rearranging for explaining the frequently observable relative stability or reproduction of practices over time. This is compatible with De Landa's idea that assemblage is the contingent arrangement of components that can be disassembled and rearranged. It is also similar to folklorist Barbara Babcock's idea of recombination in ritual (Babcock 1984). The advantage of the elemental approach to practices in conceptualizing change is that it clearly integrates material elements, embodied competences and meaning. The elemental approach also articulates the relationships between the elements, and how they interact with one another within the assemblage. The gathering of elements becomes a happening in the moment of their integration in the particular performance of a social practice. The elemental model proposed by Shove, Pantzar and Watson is clearly resonant with Schatzki's argument that "[…] social orders are established in practices, themselves organized open sets of *doings* and *sayings*" (2002, 23). It also articulates with the idea of emergent performance in folklore.

Social Practices and Everyday Life

One critique of practice theoretical studies is that some of them have an overly microscopic focus on particular practices without contextualization. This can mask power dynamics and the field of opportunity within which particular practices are operating. It is important to contextualize particular practices within the broader nexus of interconnected practices (Schatzki 2001, 2). Theories of Everyday Life foreground this broader tapestry of day-to-day living, making it a useful complement to practice theories. Additionally, both of these bodies of theory emphasize the relatively mundane and unreflective nature of everyday practices, contesting overly mentalist and rational actor-oriented approaches.

One of the challenges of focusing too minutely on the particularities of one social practice is that it is abstracted from the densely woven web of other social practices of which it is simply one node. Studying everyday life, writ large, has the opposite challenge. How can one possibly conduct a systematic study of such a complex and interconnected composition? There have been multiple attempts, methods and manifestations of such efforts over time. In Everyday Life and Cultural Theory, Ben Highmore's highlights the history and outcomes of such efforts (2002). Highmore notes the interconnectivity of the mundane and the extraordinary in everyday life, and through time the various ways of understanding the relationship between the two. For example,

surrealist art highlights the marvelous or surprising and exceptional in the everyday while mass observation, through capturing massive quantities of the mundane through thousands of journal entries kept over long periods of time in the UK, attempted to create a science of the everyday. These efforts rarely achieved more than an "impressionistic" or "montage" representation or understanding of the everyday.

The value of these efforts for my work is in noticing both the extraordinary and the mundane coexist in everyday life, the polyvocality of experiences of everyday life, and the almost impossible complexity of interconnections between people, things, etc. in the everyday. Theories of everyday life also foreground the "non-conscious" (Highmore 2002, 73) or what I would call the unreflective nature of the everyday. The relatively "non-conscious" notions of the everyday are compatible with how Schatzki describes mundane though not strictly automatic or habitualized social practices. The things that in his words simply "make sense to people to do" in such a way that careful rational planning and self-conscious execution aren't necessary. These practices are likely to be replicated without too much thought even though their continued existence as social practices require the active re-enactment by practitioners. It's so routine that it can be ignored by most of us or engaged in with relatively little reflection, but it's so complicated when we try to bring it into focus it is essentially impossible. This also articulates well with folklore's emphasis on "vernacular' culture; note Dan Ben-Amos' definition of folklore as artistic communication in small groups (1971).

It is very difficult to construct a whole from the parts and it is very hard to understand the workings of the parts when focusing on the whole. To bridge these challenges, I am centering one social practice while attempting to leave some of the fabric of everyday life to which it is connected intact and through this to more fully elaborate the diversity of politics revealed by home-preserved foods.

Assemblage theories are helpful in conceptualizing practices as contingently assembled components that when brought together by carriers become more than the sum of their parts and yet which may be dis and re-assembled in almost infinite permutations and along non-linear trajectories. This leads me away from conceptualizing food systems as relatively stable and seamless wholes moving inevitably towards or away from corporate controlled, techno-

industrialization, but rather as patchy conglomerations with fuzzy boundaries and constantly shifting and emerging incorporations and dissolutions.

There is an observable stability in practices while at the same time they evidence creativity, improvisation, and integration of change. There is no inevitable or predetermined linearity to how these practices will unfold in their enactment but rather a constant though contingent (re)generation. In other words, neither stasis nor development but preservation through re-generation of variations on a theme. Neither is there an inevitable trajectory of decline. Rather, elements of practice may be abandoned, reconfigured, remain latent and potentially be recruited in the future to other practices, or might disappear with more or less obvious traces. This responds to Jehlička and colleagues' critique of the linear conceptualization of development and concomitant devaluation of food practices that don't fit this timeline of progress and the opportunity to incorporate new insights and novel approaches to food sovereignty discourse and practice.

"Thinking Food Like an East European"

The following section highlights how "Thinking Food Like an East European" can enrich scholarship related to the preservation and development of food sovereignty.

In their article "Thinking Food Like an East European," Petr Jehlička, Miķelis Grīviņšc, Oane Visser, and Bálint Balázs argue that Eastern European agro-food systems, "…harbour important, yet often overlooked, opportunities for innovation, creativity and imagination for scholarly efforts to rethink the agro-food system" (2020, 286). This reframes the constellation of practices common in East European food systems as resilient and adaptive innovations rather than "relics." "What is needed instead is to move away from a unidirectional development path portraying the development in the European East as simply delayed adoption of Western innovations. Instead, it is necessary to acknowledge the diversity of configurations and the real, even if unintended, sustainability and hidden resilience of the mélange of East European formal and informal food systems" (2020, 287). This article highlights the complex and interlocking elements of Eastern European food systems, that defy an antagonistic characterization between industrial and small scale agriculture, and highlight the multiple non-commodified ways people obtain and share food including the significance of foraged foods.

They contend that Western based food scholarship has been conducted in a context that presumes a universal, highly commodified, and segmented food system and therefore it, "[…] prioritized alternatives to the food system and its transformations based on ethical consumerism, food commodification, certification and marketisation. Alternative approaches are largely reminiscent of what Elizabeth Shove (2010) calls the ABC policy model" (2020, 289). The ABC model of social change is based on deliberative, self-conscious action and is described by Shove in this way, "Social change is thought to depend upon values and attitudes (the A), which are believed to drive the kinds of behaviour (the B) that individuals choose (the C) to adopt" (Shove 2010, 1274). While they acknowledge that there is evidence in Eastern Europe of alternative food system development based on the "ABC model," they highlight that the region also, "[…] harbours 'implicit', 'quiet' alternatives that do not result from intentional, individualised behaviours motivated by environmental and social responsibility" (2020, 289).

In conclusion, to better understand the dynamics of home-based food provisioning and preservation practices in contemporary Bulgaria, I turned my attention to practice theory, which can be complemented by insights from approaches to studying foodways developed in the field of folklore. Social practice theories provided a way for me to keep what people "do" at the center of my attention and a useful analytical framework to examine the dynamics and stability of home-based food production and preservation in contemporary Bulgaria. Rather than approaching preserved foods as objects, symbols, or products I conceptualize them as practices that are an assemblage of contingently arranged elements. These elements are brought together when carriers perform those practices. These performances and the elements of practices occur within the broader constellation of practices that compose everyday life in a particular time and place. The everyday being composed of both the mundane and extraordinary, the things that simply make sense to people to do and the more explicitly reflective actions.

My research includes examples of these implicit and quiet alternatives and also how these practices are recruited into more overtly, public, political activity. Jehlička and colleagues' call to move away from unilinear concepts of development resonated with the insight I gained from Anna Tsing (which I discussed in Chapter 1) to look around for what has been missed because it didn't fit the timeline of progress. Instead, I focus on what is emerging tomore expansively examine stability and change. Elizabeth Shove's subsequent work in collaboration with Mika

Pantzar and Matt Watson further elaborates an alternative approach to understanding the dynamics of social change through insights gained from practice theory (2012). These authors provide the foundations for my analysis of home-based food preservation as a nexus of social practices entwined in the fabric of everyday life and to examine the implicit and explicit politics of these practices.

Social practice theories allow me to avoid a linear conceptualization of food systems development and reconceptualize food systems as contingently arranged practices, oriented in space and time. These practices have some stability, but they are also constantly shifting. I seek to broaden understandings of food systems to elaborate the "quiet" politics evident in jars and cellars and how these practices are recruited into more visible and public politics.

These insights are important when thinking about interventions to change or preserve food-related social practices in support of more hopeful, meaningful, and resilient futures.

> Every present is potentially the site of something new. In sum, the appeal of the practice-based approach lies in its capacity to describe important features of the world we inhabit as something that is routinely made and re-made in practice, using tools, discourse and our bodies. From this perspective, the social world appears as a vast array or assemblage of performances made durable by being inscribed in skilled human bodies and minds, objects and texts and knotted together in such a way that the results of one performance become the resource for another (Nicolini 2020, 20).

The practice approach doesn't privilege the rational individual actor or assume the ubiquity or desirability of highly regulated, capitalized, industrialized food "orders." Rather, practice theory provides analytical tools that respond to critique from scholars in Russia and Eastern Europe in terms of alternative food network and food sovereignty scholarship from the west. These tools lead me to ask different sorts of questions, such as, are there ways to intervene at the elemental level of practices to preserve or rebuild resilient food systems? Are there ways to intervene in the broader field of opportunity within which practices are enacted? Are there ways to safely "make space" for "irregular orders" like informal economies rather than seek to bring them into formalized markets?

Finally, practice theory allows me to work at the relational intersections of many previously constructed dichotomies such as: nature/culture, material/mental, agency/structure, oppression/resistance, formal/informal economies, stability/change. It allows me to illustrate and analyze the materials, competences and meanings associated with home-based food preservation practices and explore further the dynamics of social practices, including both stability and dynamism. Practice based understandings of stability and change provide a window into the "quiet" politics of home-based food preservation that are associated neither with public social movements nor politics, nor individualized forms of ethical consumerism in Bulgaria today.

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CHAPTER 5

POSTS, GHOSTS, AND INHERITANCES: PRESERVATION PRACTICES AND SOCIALISM IN THE PRESENT TENSE

"A ghost roams the cellars ... Between old compote, baby food jars with moldy plum jam, History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union with hard covers, Handbook for the Party Agitator - with a soft cover, an anniversary copy of the magazine "Woman Today", the frame and handlebars of a "Balkan" brand bicycle, a tin of Bulgarian brined cheese that is full of old beans, a green bottle of "Vero" dish soap, an old electric stove brand "Beam" with a broken heating element, a little box of dried out oil paints, a patched car tire from a "Moskvich" car, a battery, a pyrographed wooden box full of badges, three little "Champion of Labor" flags also decorated with badges from top to bottom, an old plastic drum for making sauerkraut, a gas can, a small child's Chavdar cap without the lion, 30 washed out plastic bags that once held fresh milk, a small bust of Lenin with a broken nose ... The ghost of socialism."

(Genova and Gospodinov, 2006, 7, author's translation)

"Where did you get these jars?" I asked while pointing to the empty jars in the cupboard. "They are from my mother, from a long time ago. They are one liter. All I need to do is buy new caps."

(Tatyana Tsankova. Interview in with author. September 18, 2021)

Figure 5.1. Photograph of preserves and empty jars in the cellar of Tatyana Tsankova. September 14, 2019.

Persistence of Home-based Food Preservation and Provisioning

As already mentioned, large scale surveys show food self-provisioning and preservation are much more widespread in Russia and Eastern European countries, which share histories of state-socialism, than in Western Europe or North America (Alber and Kohler, 2008; Jehlička, Kostelecký, and Smith 2013; Rose and Tihomirov 1993). I do not agree, however, with scholars who characterize the ongoing prevalence of food self-provisioning as primarily a "coping strategy of the poor" caused by delayed and imperfect integration into "traditional" western free-market economies (Alber and Kohler, 2008). Their model frames these practices as backward or inefficient holdovers, in contrast to a fully marketized, industrialized, globally networked food system as the desirable and inevitable norm. Or, put in terms of the quotes above, the ghosts of socialism haunt contemporary foodways. From this linear perspective of "progress," food self-provisioning and preservation should disappear once ex-socialist nations "catch up."

In contrast, I argue that state socialism continues to shape contemporary Bulgarian food preservation through elements of social practice: materials, competences, and meanings. The following chapters focus particularly on the durability of materials and competences from which people draw, including taste memories that people carry. The meanings of these foods have always been varied and overlapping and have shifted over time as broader political and economic circumstances have changed. So, while the materials and competences have remained more stable, the meanings of home preserved food that people described to me are variable and have become more volatile.

The realities of everyday life during state-socialism contributed to the maintenance, and perhaps expansion, of a large community of practitioners competent and motivated to preserve food and equipped many households with the durable tools to do so. Some of my interviewees, like Stefka from Chapter Two, also describe the state-socialist experience as creating "instincts" to save up and preserve food, even though contemporary circumstances may not seem to warrant it. This leaves me to deal with the thorny issues of how to think about the past and how to situate the present, when post-socialism as a term and concept raises more questions than answers.

I struggle, along with many other scholars of Russia and Eastern Europe, with the term and idea of post-socialism. Chari and Verdery argue that post-socialism began as a temporal designation, with geographical implications, for what came after the collapse of state socialism in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe (2008, 10). As time went on, they assert that post-socialism came to signify a critical stance, questioning socialist pasts and visions of the future as well as critiquing transitology, "[…] the science of how to most effectively engineer the transition towards democracy and a market economy" that included unfolding neoliberalism, and assumptions of linear economic and political development (Müller 2019). They link post-socialism to post-colonialism in that these literatures evolved in the direct aftermath of periods of abrupt political change followed by long-term grappling with and reflection upon what those changes meant and continue to mean in their actual ongoing unfolding (11). The "post" in these terms is deceiving in that there is continuity with socialism and colonialism that defies the designation of "after," even while there were clearly radical collapses and unexpected changes in trajectories.

In my experience working in kitchens and courtyards, perusing cellars, taking an evening stroll through the village square, or checking the mailbox in my apartment, I was surrounded by the materiality of socialism in the present tense. Whether it is large scale infrastructure like greenhouses, hospitals, or post offices, everyday kitchen tools like cheese graters or appliances like refrigerators, seeds and grape varieties, or small personal garden plots operating at the fringes of formerly nationalized industrial agriculture, everyday life is lived among, beside, and upon socialism. The socialist period not only suffuses material/physical realities but also suffuses the present with the carryover dreams of a modern, industrial future. I understand the characterization of this as living with ghosts, as the authors I quoted at the beginning of the chapter articulated. They describe a cellar that is haunted by ghosts lingering in the abandoned, lifeless, useless items of the cellar. The spirit of the past is indeed haunting the present, an apt way to describe the memories and feelings that linger in places like abandoned villages, factories, or cellars.

But the cellars I visited are hard to reconcile with this description of haunting because ghosts are static echoes of the past—they neither change nor interact with the living even if the living must

cope with their presence. Instead, examining the elements of social practice as *inheritances*[1] of state socialism helps me to conceptualize them not as static ghosts, leaden objects, or residual mentalities of the past, but as contemporary components of the contingently assembled present as it is becoming. There are some projects to memorialize socialist era objects, to bring them into the assemblage of public, collective remembrance.[2] [3] While these are useful and necessary projects, my interest is to account for how people routinely bring the materials, competences and meanings of socialism into *living* everyday practices. In other words, how these components shift and change as practitioners recycle them into novel assemblages that bring together elements in the practices of food preservation.

Home Preserved Food: Socialist Continuities

Home preserved foods create a bridge in the present between the past and the future. They play a significant role in everyday household strategies for making do, pursuing meaningful lives in contemporary Bulgaria, and coping with uncertain futures; they are also tied to experiences of living under state socialism and the years immediately following the end of state socialism. Citizens in socialist countries like Bulgaria developed complex and multifaceted strategies to negotiate economies of shortage, secure basic material needs, and pursue something more than mere survival (Verdery, 1996; Creed, 1998; Drakulic, 1993; Bren & Neuberger, 2012). Gaining access to food, not only for nutritional needs, but also for celebrating, offering hospitality, supporting health, performing personal, local and/or national identity, and satisfying personal and familial desires and aesthetics required elaborate strategies, networks, and skills. These strategies included the creation and maintenance of extensive social networks, theft of time and materials from workplaces (state run institutions), and a robust second economy for everyday goods like food and clothing (Verdery, 1996; Creed, 1998; Ledeneva, 1998).

[1] I do not mean to insinuate that inheritances are necessarily positive. They can be good or bad or both. But they are received and continually transformed by their current carriers.
[2] For example: https://redflatsofia.com/
[3] Rachelle Saltzman similarly deals with identity and collective memory in her analysis of memorialization of the 1926 General Strike in Great Brittain (2012).

In terms of food production, the government, in the early years of state socialism, nationalized and consolidated formerly private agricultural land to form large "cooperative" farms.[4] This marked a major shift for socialist nations like Bulgaria from a primarily peasant based agricultural system to an extensive, mechanized, industrial form of agriculture. The state also nationalized and industrialized food processing which brought it into the webs of the centrally planned economy and Fordist production logic (Jung 2009).

The centrally planned economy was not the only economy operating in everyday lives, and the state project to create citizens reliant on the paternalistic state for wellbeing was incomplete (Gal and Kligman 2000). For example, even as the state consolidated and nationalized most agricultural land in Bulgaria, many families tended small personal garden plots, kept livestock or poultry, or cultivated their own grape vines. These activities were especially common in small towns and rural areas. Gerald Creed documented the intricacies and interconnectedness of these small scale, self-provisioning activities with the consolidated, state-run farms in the Bulgarian village of Zamfirovo in his book *Domesticating Revolution* (1998). He describes how workers practiced petty theft of time and materials from the state-run agricultural enterprises to nurture domestic food production. He notes how some pilfered forage to feed sheep kept at home for personal use while others carefully tended household grapevines instead of state-run vineyards that, as a result, became overgrown with weeds.

Rapid urbanization marked the socialist period in Bulgaria, as working-aged people moved into urban centers to work in emerging industries (Creed, 1998; Verdery, 1996; Karastoyanov and Tumnev 1981). Yet home preserved foods continued to connect the rural and urban in several ways. For example, city dwellers still used family village connections or vegetable markets to obtain raw ingredients. In some instances, food produced and preserved in rural areas circulated far beyond their rural origins and traveled along networks of extended social relations in what Smollett referred to as the "economy of jars" (1989). Jars, in particular, were convenient because of their relative portability. Unlike foods preserved for consumption on site in a household (e.g., whole heads of cabbage in 50-gallon barrels), foods preserved in jars were portable and portioned in manageable sizes. People could pack filled jars in crates and move

[4] For Bulgarian examples see Creed 1998 and Cellarius 2004, for Macedonian examples see Monova, 2015, for Polish example see Dunn 2004, for Hungarian example see Lampland 1995.

them between rural and urban locations by sending them with friends or family who lived far away. Many people shared memories of their "student days" attending university away from home. They described trains full of students hauling heavy crates, stuffed with jars of homemade and preserved foods, to the university after weekends or breaks. At the end of the semester, students hauled home the same crates filled with empty jars, ready to be refilled. People also brought their "rural" food preservation practices with them to urban centers like Sofia, with raw ingredients procured directly through family or other connections or purchased in markets and canned in city spaces appropriated for the tasks (Shkodorova 2021Shkodorova 2021, 209-225).

Thus, while home-based food preservation was dwindling rapidly in Western Europe by the mid-twentieth century, "such an evolution was not observed in Bulgaria…. Canning of fruits and vegetable flourished or even expanded" (Shkodorova 2021, 210). Shkodorova emphasizes that "…canning was not seen as a luxurious choice at the time, it was a matter of necessity. Love of good food was an optional part of the motivation; the essential one was need" (Shkodorova 2021, 210). The state fell short of its goal of consistently providing a wide variety of foods through large-scale, industrial production and therefore individuals and families used their own creativity and hard work to fill in the gap.

The most basic everyday staples were heavily subsidized, and people expected inexpensive food as a basic right under the model of the paternalistic state. "Communist states felt compelled to supply their populations with basic foodstuffs at almost giveway prices both on principle and as a legitimizing strategy" (Bren and Neuberger 2009, 165). As Ina, a pensioner I interviewed who was selling tomatoes in a Plovdiv market, put it, "We always had bread and yogurt." She didn't worry about bare sustenance; in fact she emphasized this lack of worry about basic food later in the interview. She ironically compared her current circumstances as relatively unchanged; she still only had "bread and yogurt" since her financial means constrained her consumption. But she stressed that during socialism there was a supply problem; there was very little variety or choice—the options were limited to the absolute basics. Shkodorova concurs and noted, "Bulgarian Communism did not produce life-threatening hunger, which considering the experience of other socialist states, should be appreciated. But the scarcity of choice during the

winter and the boredom of commercially available food determined lifestyle of this period" (2019, 210).

Though food was cheap, shortages, long lines at shops, and unpredictable supplies of many foodstuffs were part of daily life. As another interviewee, Dilyana, who grew up in small town during socialism, described to me, "There were foods like cured meats that were really very good in terms of taste and quality. But you never knew when they would be available," People who lived through the socialist period frequently recalled bare shelves and long lines. While hunger was not a word that I heard during my interviews, monotony, unpredictability, scarcity, and questionable quality, taste or texture were frequent complaints about the food available to purchase (Jung 2009; Shkodorova 2021).

In this context of shortage and unpredictability due to the failures of the state, home-based food preservation was uniquely and rather awkwardly positioned. On one hand, the state denigrated rural habits and lifestyles from the village as backward, and public rhetoric made unfavorable comparisons between domestic practices like cooking and canning and industrially and scientifically produced foods. Yet those home-based foods and their production practices were essential to domestic food supplies. The reality was that these domestic practices were necessary. Had the state's ideal of food and agricultural modernization and industrialization triumphed, it would have eliminated the home-based foods necessary for survival. One way to cope with this conundrum was for the state to officially sanction these practices. "There are records of employers being encouraged to allow their employees days off during the home canning campaign, and courses organized by the labor unions to improve the material culture of the people taught that 'home canning makes savings to the people's economy by making use of fruits and vegetables during the harvest season, without which they would be wasted and lost to the economy'" (Shkodorova 2021, 211). Similarly, Dilyana recalled a socialist era propaganda sign from her childhood that read, "Every jar of compote is a fist in the face of capitalism." Therefore, in official rhetoric and practices, the state linked domestic practices such as home-based food preservation with being good socialist citizens, preventing waste, and taking part in the good fight against the ills of capitalism. The state thus officially sanctioned preservation as an activity of a good socialist citizen; this was ironic, considering the reason people needed to

self-provision was precisely because the socialist modernist ideal of industrialized food production failed to meet people's needs.

Alexi Yurchak's analysis of authoritative discourse in the late U.S.S.R. provide insights into this phenomenon (2005, 37). He argues that while reproducing forms of authoritative discourse and public political activity were crucial, the constative meanings of these practices were not necessarily linked to the forms. In this case, making jars was a practical necessity for Bulgarians that occurred in relatively public spaces. Appropriating these activities into authoritative discourse, like the propaganda sign described by Dilyana, sanctioned home-preserving as a way to be a good socialist. This made the performance of these activities in public unproblematic, even though the need for such activities was evidence of the systemic failure of the socialist state. Ironically, these types of informal domestic livelihood practices created opportunities for people to make-do within the state structure while hollowing out the totality of its control over their lives and implicitly demonstrating the shortcomings of the state.

Practically speaking, these foods diminished reliance on the state to provide basic sustenance and gave people some modicum of control over their foodways. These practices illuminate the shortcomings of the state to reliably provide desirable, diverse, and necessary foods; in my interviews, people were quite blunt about these shortcomings. No one I spoke with described their home-canning efforts during state socialism in terms of being "good socialist citizens" even while fully acknowledging that the state framed the practices this way. Rather, they more closely resembled "tactical" arts of making do, as described by de Certeau, which did not confront the state publicly or explicitly, but which undermined its totalizing control and offered an opportunity for self-preservation at a personal or household level that was widely practiced (1984, 36-40).

In summary, this historical path of food industrialization in Bulgaria meant that home-based food preservation and food self-provisioning continued without interruption, while these practices were largely severed in many countries in Western Europe during the same period. A hybrid system in which there was a de facto symbiosis between large, industrial food production and small-scale domestic production, including food preservation, kept food self-provisioning and preservation practices alive and well. Because the centralized state system was unable to consistently and reliably deliver the variety, quantity, or quality of food required by its citizens, individuals and families found alternative means to supply themselves in addition to purchases

from shops. Several post-socialist foodways studies (Caldwell 2004, 2009; Jung 2009, 2010, 2016, 2019; Dunn 2004, 2010) reveal that while post-1989 entry into neoliberal global economies created a rupture with the centrally planned economy of the past, many of the everyday food related strategies, practices, and networks developed by Bulgarians and other socialist citizens continue to the present day (Caldwell, 2004; Dunn, 2008). As Caldwell stresses, everyday practices of making do, "[…] make up a system of habituated values and dispositions that are more constant and continuous than the analytical and temporal categories of the "Soviet" and "post-Soviet" suggest" (2004, 39).

Bulgarian citizens during state socialism developed complex and multifaceted strategies to negotiate economies of shortage, secure basic material needs, and pursue something more than just utilitarian survival. Gaining access to food, not only for nutritional needs, but also for celebrating;, offering hospitality; supporting health; performing personal, local and/or national identity; and satisfying personal and familial desires and aesthetics required elaborate strategies, networks, and skills. These included maintaining a private garden plot or vineyard for consumption or sale on the black market (Bulgaria: Creed 1998; Romania: Verdery 1996), purchasing goods not available in stores on the black market (GDR: Pence, 2009), crossing borders (legally or illegally) to purchase things not available in country (Ghodsee 2011; Drakulic 1992), and the creation of extensive social networks within which to exchange various goods or secure access to goods in stores via privileged information, including when products were available. This system created a large community of practitioners with extensive repertoires of competences related to food self-provisioning and preservation, a durable material legacy, embodied taste memories, and a widespread mentality to hedge against uncertainties by saving food. These were all components with latent potential to be recruited into novel assemblages when necessary.

Ongoing Entanglements Rather than Posts or Ghosts

Using practice as the focus of investigation, particularly by breaking it down into the streamlined "elements" of materials, competences and meanings, allows me to avoid many of the pitfalls of post-socialist scholarship that Muller identifies in his article "Goodbye Postsocialism!" (2019). By describing and analyzing contemporary social practices I do not impose an arbitrary or all-encompassing historical reference point of "before" and "after" socialism. As Muller argued,

"Socialism is no longer the prime reference point for people in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, but rather one among many, including neoliberalism, nationalism, consumption, Europeanisation and globalization" (539). While I agree that socialism may not be the "prime reference point," it is still significant, and the inheritances of socialism suffuse most aspects of everyday life. This makes that period, and the materials, competences and meanings related to it, important for contextualizing contemporary food saving practices. So, food preservation practices, as they are (re)produced in Bulgaria, embody inheritances of state socialism even as these inheritances are continuously reevaluated, renegotiated, and reconfigured. Moreover, these practices are incorporating constantly shifting materials, competences, and meanings from various time periods, political regimes, economies, and geographic sources. Therefore, by focusing on contemporary practices as they are being (re)generated, I will demonstrate Muller's larger point: socialism, neoliberalism, nationalism, consumption, Europeanization, and globalization are all entangled and visible in cellar and the food preservation practices that fill it as I will examine in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

Atanasoski and Vora highlight one final inheritance of living through state socialism, including its collapse, in their article "Postsocialist Politics and the Ends of Revolution" (2017). They argue that grappling with the messy aftermath of the end of state socialisms offers insights into the practices and politics of social change that are non-oppositional, and that may often be illegible, especially to Western observers. Specifically, they identify a politics that doesn't aim to culminate in or need to wait for revolution. As subsequent chapters will address, this is a helpful contribution to the emerging conceptualization of a multiplicity of food sovereignties (Wilson 2017, Jehlička et al. 2020). It reinforces Chari and Verdery's call to consider post-socialism, like post-colonialism, as a theoretical frame that is "non-progressive," troubles linearity, and makes space to reimagine "a politics worth doing" (Atanasoski and Vora 2017, 147). I believe all of the inheritances detailed in this chapter expand the possibilities of seeing through the posts and ghosts to identify, imagine, and expand everyday food sovereignties in the present and future.

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CHAPTER 6

FROM SIDEWALKS TO CELLARS: "NORMAL PEOPLE" LIVING IN AN ABNORMAL STATE

"We just want to be normal. Not backward, not communist, not in transition, just to live like they do in normal countries."

(Bulgarian villager, quoted in Creed 1998, 1)

"It is more expensive to build one kilometer of road in Bulgaria than anywhere else in Europe."

(Momchil, interview with author, July 7, 2018)

The first quote in the epigraph is from the introduction to Gerald Creed's *Domesticating Revolution (1998, 1).*[1] It's part of a conversation that he had during dinner with friends in 1994. This quote expresses a longing for illusive normality, implying Bulgaria has never been "normal." The sequence of descriptors marking Bulgaria's abnormality in the words of this un- named villager are historically linear, from its time as part of the Ottoman Empire when it was "backward," as a satellite of the U.S.S.R. when it was "communist," and finally as an emerging capitalist democracy when it was "in transition." This ongoing experience of "otherness" is something expressed by Bulgarians in everyday conversations. It is also something analyzed by scholars as a historical construction of a negatively stereotyped and essentialized Balkan trait. Two paradigms that examine the conceptualization and domination of the east by the west are "Orientalism" and "Balkanism" (Said 1978; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Todorova 2009). Said argued that the "orient" was constructed in the eyes of the west as inferior, irrational, and primitive in contrast to the "occident," which was developed, rational, and civilized. The orient in his framework was an imagined and essentialized place with peoples frozen in time, who could not "develop," a situation that reinforced and justified colonial and imperial projects (Said 1977, 201). As Bakić-Hayden notes, the borders of the orient have changed over time, but "…the concept of 'Orient' as 'other' has remained more or

[1] Many thanks to Sarah Craycraft for reading early drafts of this chapter and reminding me of the reference to "normal people" in Creed and Yurchak.

less unchanged" (1995, 917). Bakic-Hayden argues that there are gradations of "Orients" marking that which is more "East" as more "other." These varying degrees of otherness can be found *within* various boundaries, which she calls "nesting orientalism." For example, as a Balkan country long ruled by the Ottoman empire, Bulgaria is coded as "other" even within Eastern Europe. Todorova, alternatively, put forward the concept of "Balkanism" as distinct from orientalism to describe the stereotypical and reductive "otherness" conferred on the Balkan peninsula by outsiders and even by Balkan nstives (Todorova 2009, 3). She argues the distinction is essential because of the geographical and historical divergences of the Balkans from Said's orient. The Balkans are geographically contiguous with Europe, concrete rather than imaginary, mostly Christian despite long Ottoman occupation and they have not shared the colonial past of Said's orient.

> As in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the "European" and the "West" has been constructed. With the reemergence of East and orientalism as independent semantic values, the Balkans are left in Europe's thrall, anticivilization, alter ego, the dark side within.
> (Todorova 2009, 189)

The common thread in all these conceptualizations is the construction of an essentialized, static "other," set against a Western European ideal standard that constitutes normality. Normality, as the first quote in the epigraph describes, refers to this imagined West, with no history of Eastern influences such as the Islamic Ottoman Empire, state socialism, or the messy process of the latter's dissolution.

Bulgaria joined the European Union (EU) in 2007, drawing it into the contiguous geographical and political boundaries of contemporary Europe. Conceptually, however, Bulgaria is still marked by "otherness" as compared to the West; furthermore, groups whose members are Muslims, ethnically Turkish, or Roma within Bulgaria are more associated with "Eastern" otherness because of ethnicity, religion, or behavior. Bulgarians continue to compare their country through its position in EU rankings. I observed this in everyday conversations, conventional Bulgarian media, and social media. Bulgaria consistently ranks last in quality-of-life indicators such as life expectancy, pension rates, GDP, happiness, and

measures of a healthy democracy such as freedom of the press. Conversely, it is at the top of the list in negative indicators such as corruption, depopulation, infant mortality, cost of healthcare, and wealth inequality. During COVID-19 Bulgaria was frequently cited as the European country with the lowest vaccination rates and the highest mortalities per capita.

This chapter presents an analysis of everyday speech, of media that use the term "normal" as a descriptor of people and nations, and how these speech acts relate to contemporary food preservation practices. I noticed the word "normal" partly because the direct translation is a bit jarring in English. People in interviews or casual conversations referred to themselves as "normal people." They often juxtaposed their own identity as a "normal person" with their evaluation of Bulgaria as a country that was "abnormal." Even when interviewees didn't use these specific terms, I detected these underlying sentiments in many conversations and tried to understand how people defined "normal" and its boundaries. I also tried to better comprehend the meaning and definition of what they perceived as a "normal" country. What were they comparing Bulgaria to and what were the points of deviation?

Sidewalks, Subways, and Roads

Going back through my notes, I noticed the juxtaposition of massive new infrastructure projects, like the shiny new subway system in Sofia, with crumbling sidewalks and pot-holed roads. The other stark contrast was in wealth inequality shown in vehicles emblematic of the drastically different standards of living coexisting in contemporary Bulgaria. I saw brand new cars, such as a Bentley, Lamborghini, or Mercedes, speeding around a fifty-year-old Lada, thirty-year-old Ford Fiesta, or even a horse-drawn cart. The recent book *Taking Stock of Shock* also takes note of these discrepancies; the authors show that depending on one's vantage point, the past thirty years since the end of state socialism have been either an incredible success or a colossal failure (Ghodsee and Orenstein 2021). Since the early nineties, GDP has risen significantly and recovered the losses experienced during the early "transition." During the same period, inequality has also risen dramatically, and the real standard of living for many people has never fully recovered. I was not in Bulgaria during the early years of "transition" from state socialism but rather was present the years directly before and after European Union accession (2006-2008). Bulgarians' hopes for the future during that time were pinned on the promise of greater integration with Western Europe. I left in 2008;

my return 10 years later was a disorienting combination of change and familiarity. The following two sets of fieldnote excerpts captured my impressions immediately after arriving back in Bulgaria after this absence. My thoughts upon arrival, June 19, 2018:

> I arrived at my apartment in Sofia last night around midnight. There is an immaculate new subway system and, though the lines are limited, there is a line directly from the airport to Vasil Levski Stadium which is a few blocks away from my apartment. As I walked from the metro station, I noticed the sidewalks, which are paved with cement tiles in varying states of disrepair and grouted with coarse sand. There had been a heavy rainstorm with lighting and thunder earlier in the evening. The cracked and missing tiles were filled with water and sand so my shoes, pants, and the wheels of my suitcases were coated and very gritty by the time I got to the apartment.

The juxtaposition between the new subway system and the sidewalks directly adjacent to it attuned me to sidewalks in general and noticing where they were, or were not, carefully maintained. Nine days later, on June 28, 2018, I recorded the following:

> You can tell a lot about everyday life here, and how it varies for politically or economically powerful people, by looking at sidewalk pavers. On the side streets, like the one I live on, where everyday Sofians take their walks, shop or hop the bus to work, the sidewalks are paved with six-sided cement tiles about 10 inches at the widest point. Sometimes they are about one foot square, but more often they are hexagonal. They are cracked in places and when it rains the uneven ones hide little puddles of water underneath that splashes up into your shoes as you unsuspectingly walk over them.
>
> They are put in place and then grouted with a coarse sand, which coats your shoes with a gritty dust when its dry and a chalky slime when it rains.
>
> Then there are the sidewalks in the center, adjacent to official buildings. These are places where the streets are paved with immaculately maintained arcs of cobblestone or yellow bricks. Examples are next to the parliament, the national institutions of culture, the court. These sidewalks are paved with perfect, tightly fitting cement tiles and are meticulously cared for. No sandy sludge to besmirch the shiny leather shoes that tread these sidewalks. This is also true on the toney pedestrian boulevards, for

those who are important because of their purchasing power. These are paved with rectangular bricks, different colors to create a pleasing and flat walking surface. These streets are also perfectly flat, no cracked bricks, no holes full of rainwater and cigarette butts.

Vitosha Boulevard is one such place. It is a wide pedestrian boulevard with terminal views of St. Nedelya's church to the north and Vitosha mountain to the south. On this rainy day Vitosha is hidden by misty clouds but the green rotunda of St. Nedelya rises above the stone church and is clearly in view. With my back to this rotunda and the lions guarding the Bulgarian national court I walk down Vitosha towards the National Palace of Culture. On the first corner of the pedestrian way is McDonalds, the golden arches setting the international tone of this first half of the pedestrian walkway. Many tourist groups come through Vitosha Boulevard and the first few blocks are full of shops catering to tourists. English is visible on almost all the signs, advertisements, and menus. This is relatively unusual even a block or two away. In fact, the closer I walk toward the National Palace of Culture, in other words away from the center, the less English I see.

The prices on Vitosha are higher as well. A cappuccino that might be 2 leva a few blocks away or 80 stotinki from an automatic machine is 4 or 5 leva here. There are tables on the street outside, stylish verandahs with flowers where people can see and be seen.

There are international brands on this street like McDonalds, H & M and United Colors of Benneton. You can buy Ray Ban sunglasses and expensive European makeup and perfume.

Figure 6.1. Photograph of Vitosha Boulevard. July 18, 2018.

Figure 6.2. Photograph of sidewalk two blocks away from the National Palace of Culture in Sofia. June 20, 2018.

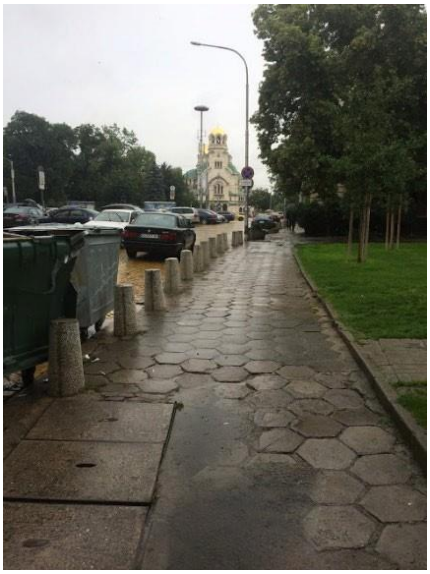

Figure 6.3. Photograph of mostly submerged hexagonal sidewalk pavers in Sofia. June 28, 2018.

In 2021 I shared these observations from my fieldnotes with colleagues who lived in Sofia to get their impressions. "Oh yes! You develop a sixth sense to avoid the secret puddles under cracked tiles!" one of them remarked. They seemed to agree that this type of low-level inconvenience was something that most people bore without too much thought, but it was an aggravating daily reminder that Bulgaria was not a "normal" country, or that "normal" people were not the ones the government or markets were functioning to serve. "Normal" people may incidentally enjoy the well paved sidewalks or new subway system, but their daily lives would take them far beyond their boundaries. Travelers or foreign dignitaries would likely see only the most central and well-maintained areas. However, the grinding inequality of everyday life is immediately apparent to all via a short bus ride out from the center or via a short walk just a few hundred meters from many subway stations

On the Road with Momchil

I recorded the following conversation with a transport driver and entrepreneur in July of 2018. While he didn't frequently use the word "normal" in our conversation, he gave many illustrations that shed light on how people defined this category. This conversation was both emblematic and unique. Momchil reflected his own personal interactions with the EU, his perceptions of other Bulgarian's interactions with the EU (based on news stories popular at the time), and delimited categories of people (Muslims, ethnic Turks, corrupt politicians and business people) as outsiders within Bulgaria. Other conversations I recorded often would have one of these elements, but not all three. He was also unusual in that starting at a young age he had travelled extensively outside of Bulgaria. He used this fact to demonstrate his authority when making observations, because he had perspective about life in Western Europe. This unstructured interaction, together with my own observations about mundane daily interactions with infrastructure help to illustrate lived experiences and perceptions of the relationships between everyday people to the Bulgarian state and the supra-state entity of the European Union. These relationships are critical to understanding the context of domestic food preservation practices, which I will introduce at the end of this chapter.

We met Momchil when my family and I moved from Sofia to Plovdiv in 2018. We found his transport company online and hired him to pick us up in a van and take us door to door. After he loaded up our bulky bags, we piled into his van, and I sat up front in the passenger seat.

We started driving and conversed in Bulgarian interspersed from time to time with English. He could hear that I had an accent, Macedonian he guessed. "No," I told him, "American." His follow up questions were typical, "What are you doing here, and why do you speak Bulgarian?" So, I answered in the usual way, I explained that many years ago my husband and I served as Peace Corps Volunteers and lived in Gabrovo for 2 years; that's when we learned Bulgarian. I continued to explain that we were back in Bulgaria as a family now because I was doing research to complete a PhD in anthropology. My main interests were agriculture and traditional food.

Momchil was eager to make conversation. He mentioned that his father was a "diplomat who worked for the party." Because of this Momchil lived and traveled abroad including London and Croatia. He noted that it was unusual to travel so much in Western Europe during the days of state socialism, but that it gave him perspective on life outside Bulgaria. In his own opinion, this made his perspectives on the current state of affairs valuable to a researcher like me. He described the different neighborhoods we were passing, particularly the expensive areas like Dragalevtsi, near Mount Vitosha. He contrasted these neighborhoods and the wealthy people who lived there with himself and his own neighborhood. He lived in a neighborhood closer to the airport, which was affordable for his family of three and a little quieter than the center of Sofia.

We left the outer suburbs of Sofia behind and began to pass through rolling hills with mountains far off in the distance. The yellow sunflowers were beginning to bow their heads to the summer heat, and there were freshly mown hayfields with huge circular bales. This large-scale, mechanized production reminded Momchil about his family's recent experience with agricultural land. He explained that his family owned some agricultural land and that they rented it out one year to someone who wanted to farm it. This man planted sunflower seeds and took care of them just long enough to germinate and be inspected by a government official—and thus qualify for the EU subsidy. Then the man took the subsidy and abandoned the field, leaving it to rot. Momchil commented that this was the big problem with EU agricultural subsidies; they don't provide incentive to people to actually work the land and end up rewarding those who work the system for easy money. He perceived this would be more difficult to do in other EU countries.

Traffic was steady on the main highway, but it was not terribly crowded. As we drove, he pointed out all the German and Austrian license plates that we were passing. For the most part, they were driving only in the left lane, not pulling over into the right lane to let faster cars pass. This annoyed Momchil, and he angrily remarked that these were all the Turkish people heading back to Turkey from Western Europe for the Muslim holidays. He went on to say that they pass as quickly as they can through Bulgaria. Momchil said that "in the past" Bulgarians would rob and beat these travelers and so now they take precautions like driving only in daylight and in caravans of multiple vehicles. The trouble is, he said, that once they get so close to the Turkish border they tend to press on, even if they have been driving for many hours. Momchil attributes many crashes on this road to Turkish people who fall asleep at the wheel. I heard this same story from another Sofian as well.[2]

Though he didn't use slurs, Momchil repeated a story that Bulgarians told me more than once, about the dangers of Turkish drivers in Bulgaria. Though distancing himself and contemporary Bulgarians from responsibility, he acknowledged that "in the past" there was serious violence directed at Turkish people, even just driving *through* Bulgaria. He marked them as outsiders both as ethnically Turkish and Muslim, since they were driving back to Turkey to celebrate Ramadan. He categorized these outsiders as dangerous people who caused car crashes and didn't abide by driving norms. Derogatory language, negative stories, stereotypes, and categorization as outsiders were common features of many conversations, particularly those concerning people who were ethnically Roma or Turkish (regardless of nationality) and foreigners in general. Though when I pressed people on the last category of "foreigners," pointing out that I was a foreigner, they would routinely say "yeah, but you speak Bulgarian."

I turned our conversation back to agriculture. At this point Momchil told me about the killing of goats and sheep in the Strandzha region. That summer, this story circulated widely in the Bulgarian media, from print, television, and radio to social media. A very communicable disease was found in a herd in that region, and the EU threatened to cut off dairy exports from Bulgaria as a whole if the Bulgarian government didn't take aggressive action to prevent the spread of the disease. Bulgarian media reported that those who owned these herds had to

[2] This story may be a widely circulating urban legend (Brunvand 1981).

submit samples for testing. The major crisis, however, was that herd owners were forced to decide whether or not to euthanize their herd and take monetary compensation for the culled animals before the test results were returned. There were reports of people being threatened by government officials: if they didn't kill the animals right away, they wouldn't receive any compensation if the test results came back positive for disease. A petition decrying the strategy, complete with signatures from Bulgarian veterinarians, circulated on social media.

Momchil wasn't confident that there was actually any disease and expressed his sympathies for the people who cared for the animals. "I think it will actually kill the people," he said, referring to the close relationship of the villagers and the animals, in addition to the shock of the villagers possibly losing their livelihood. Momchil also recited the popular rumor that the government was intentionally trying to depopulate the area so that it would have a place to put 150,000 refugees that it had agreed to take from Germany in return for EU payment. Killing the animals would devastate the livelihood and force people out of the area, he concluded. This popular opinion portrayed the Bulgarian government as uncaring towards its own people, further evidence that Bulgaria was "abnormal".

Momchil then told me another account of what he saw as EU folly related to agriculture; Bulgarian and international media also widely covered it.[3] This was the story of a man who had a cow (maybe more) and lived near the Serbian border. "One day the cow got lost, and it turns out that the cow crossed the Serbian border. Apparently, there is some video footage of the cow crossing and the border guards doing nothing to stop her. She was also pregnant at the time."

This meant that the owner had a double loss because the cow and baby had left the EU and couldn't come back to Bulgaria. Momchil wasn't sure if the animal was still in quarantine or had to be killed because of EU rules. At this point in the conversation, Momchil shared his conviction about widespread stealing from infrastructural funds that flow from the EU. He

[3] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bulgaria-eu-cow/penka-the-bulgarian-cow-escapes-death-sentence-after- international-outcry-idUSKBN1J71LQ

https://www.capital.bg/biznes/2018/06/08/3191166_kravata_penka_koiato_razbuni_es/

https://www.dnes.bg/stranata/2018/05/31/kravata-penka-izbiaga-v-syrbiia-vyrna-se-no-ia-chaka-smyrt.378014

said, “It is more expensive to build one kilometer of road in Bulgaria than anywhere else in Europe.” He attributed this to stealing from road projects by corrupt government officials and colluding business people. This specific phrase, about the cost per kilometer of road, was repeated to me by Bulgarian friends and colleagues many times in Sofia, Plovdiv and Simitli throughout the summer of 2018. Momchil went on to say that although the roads were terribly expensive to build, they are really poor quality. This was because in addition to stealing funds directly, government officials and project managers also skimmed materials to line their pockets even more. Over time, he said, the new roads became bumpy and cracked. As evidence he pointed to the road that we were driving on. He concluded that everyone expects a little stealing from road projects, “maybe 10-15%,” but he thought that they were stealing almost all of the money. All that was left when the projects were complete were a few super wealthy people and a bunch of crumbling roads.

Momchil was adamant that joining the EU was not a good thing for Bulgaria. He described how entering the EU came with regulations, like the hygiene rules that required massive culling of animals or threatened the life of a cow and by extension the livelihood of her owner.

Alternatively, he perceived that EU benefits didn’t flow to “normal” Bulgarians, farmers who work the land, people who keep animals, and small business owners like himself who relied on good roads. Rather, the people who benefitted from EU project money were fake farmers who scammed the subsidy system, corrupt government officials, and corrupt large business owners.

Crumbling Roads and EU Dreams

A common refrain was that people expected government officials to steal from projects. In fact, one friend told me that he really liked his local mayor because “He only takes [steals] with a small spoon.” The problem, then, is not modest personal benefit from skimmed funds. Rather, the problem was the startling inequality caused by raiding funds that should benefit the public but instead enrich only a few. Ina, a pensioner in Plovdiv who sold me tomatoes in a market, called this current state of affairs in Bulgaria “lying democracy.” She said she hated living in a country that ran on thievery and the mafia--big politicians and businessmen who took everything and did nothing for the country or the “normal” people like herself. I asked

her if she had any hope for Bulgaria, and she said flatly, "no. "Take for example this road," she said as she pointed to the torn-up road in front of the market. "They say this will cost five million Euro to renovate. They will spend one million doing some work on it and steal the rest." People I interviewed would often speak in terms of "acceptable" percentages of theft and contrast it with what they perceived to be the actual, much higher percentage. Their evidence: shoddy roads that use insufficient and low-quality materials and a kind of shocking income inequality that manifests in super luxury cars traveling those roads side by side with horse carts. The road looks complete, the EU funding sign is erected, the pictures and documents are in order. But within weeks potholes make the road almost impassable.

This belief has bearing on the dozens of other infrastructure projects, particularly the repaving of town squares, parks, and pedestrian boulevards that I observed in every region that I visited during the research for this dissertation. These are projects that politicians can point to as successes. Moreover, people who don't leave the centers of cities might have the impression that the situation in Bulgaria is changing rapidly. But within a few streets of those projects nothing much has changed since 2006, except that 15 years has gone by and the hopes of a brighter European future are crumbling, like the roads.

For the most part, my Bulgarian interviewees viewed themselves as "normal people." They distinguished themselves from many other groups such as ethnic Roma, Turks, or refugees who are defined as lower class according to ethnicity, religion, nationality, and language. My interviewees were not Muslim. They were also born in Bulgaria and therefore not immigrants. They spoke Bulgarian as their "mother tongue." They also distinguished themselves from ethnic Bulgarians who have benefitted from corruption in the past 30 years since the end of state socialism, and especially since European Union integration. This demarcates "normal people" from those who are powerful within the apparatus of the state, such as high-level bureaucrats and elected leaders. "Normal people" perceive that those running the state are disproportionately benefitting from their position within the state. Through skimming public funds, they are able to achieve a level of wealth that is otherwise unattainable in Bulgaria. However, "normal people" cannot have a purely antagonistic relationship to the state because they rely on state provided benefits such as infrastructure, pensions, and healthcare. In addition, while "normal people" also benefit from the neoliberal market, it is not at anywhere

near the same scale of large business owners and oligarchs. Those who benefit disproportionately from the neoliberal regime, which is entangled with state corruption, fall outside the boundaries of "normal people."

An additional element of the way "normal" people defined themselves is resonant with Alexi Yurchak's analysis from late Soviet Russia-- they are neither colluding opportunists nor "dissidents." "Normal" people do not actively benefit from state power by opportunistically working their way up within the state system. However, neither do they consider themselves to be activists, directly contesting and resisting the state in their daily lives.[4] They are in the middle, just trying to make-do the best they can by carefully evaluating their options and adapting in an ever-shifting political and economic landscape.

Infrastructure projects reveal the interface between "normal" people and the Bulgarian state, particularly as it is articulating with the EU as a supra-state entity. People interact with it every day while driving on roads, walking on sidewalks, commuting to work, strolling through parks. Infrastructure is directly linked with capital projects funded by many pre-accessional and post-accession European Union funds. Because of this, many people associate it with corruption. It is readily visible evidence of the failures and dissatisfaction with these systems, evidence that "normal" people live in an abnormal state measured against expectations of European Union standards and rankings.

The subsequent three chapters describe home-based food preservation practices among people who do not consider themselves to be activists. They do not frame their food preservation practices as part of a social movement, a critique of the state, or a form of ethical consumerism. Their practices contrast with those of people who do self-describe as "activists" such as those who have organized a Slow Food presidium in Kurtovo Konare (Chapter 10). It is the practices of "normal people" that I think align most closely with "quiet food sovereignty."

[4] Yurchak defined activists as those who were actively supporting and climbing the ladder within the Soviet system and dissidents as those actively resisting the system, which he contrasted with "normal people" who reproduced authoritative discourses and rituals of the Soviet system performatively but did not imbue them with constative meaning.

The Cellar as Response of Normal People Living in an Abnormal State

Domestic food preservation practices are in part reflective of how "normal" people navigate an "abnormal" state. Home-preserved foods hedge against uncertainty, stretch limited incomes, and provide alternatives to chemically laden and otherwise suspect industrially produced foods, all features of living in an abnormal state. But they are not only reactive. They are also a way to create a sanctuary of normality, emanating from the cellar. They are a place of full aesthetic pleasures and artistry, personal tastes and memories, health and healing, care and relationships. Those practices are not only oppositional or subversive, but they are also creative. They form an important part of everyday life for normal people in contemporary Bulgaria, illustrated in the newspaper article and photograph in Figure 6.4.

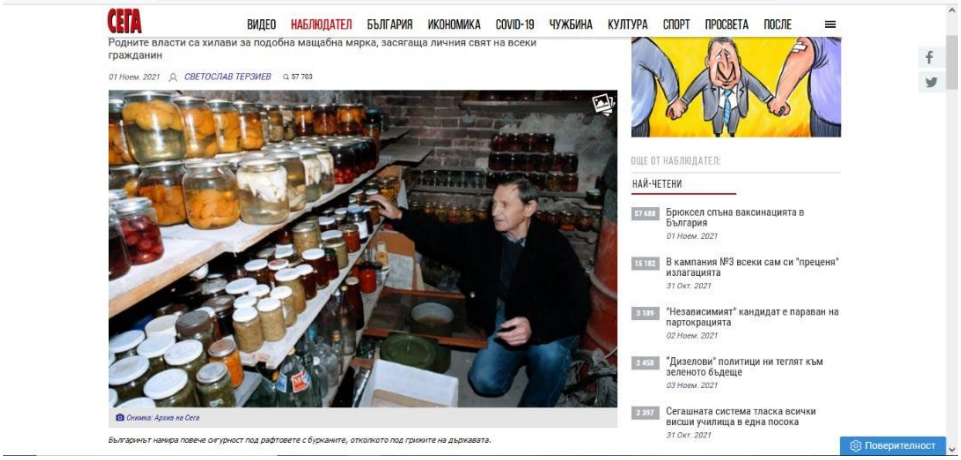

Figure 6.4. Newspaper article featuring a photograph of a cellar filled with jars carrying the caption, "The Bulgarian finds more security under shelves filled with the jars than under the care of the state" (Sega, November 1, 2021).

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CHAPTER 7

INTO THE CELLAR: WINTER FOODS AND THE "RACE AGAINST ROT"

"We have a a little of everything, scattered here and there, so it's easier to live and more joyful."

(Vasi Dafkova. Interview with the Author. September 12, 2019)

The Bulgarian cellar is a part of life as it is lived in the present with reference to both future and past. It is a resource for living well within constraints, both in terms of cyclical and predictable fluctuations in food availability (e.g., winter) and unpredictable shifts such as the end of state socialism and the failed promises of the European Union. Cellars are a consolidation point for the contingently assembled practices of home-based food preservation.

During the course of my research, I visited cellars in Simitli, Mladen, Armenite, Yavor, and Kurtovo Konare. The women who kept those cellars greeted my request with varying levels of surprise and in some cases discomfort. I had not anticipated this reaction; to me touring a cellar didn't seem very different from working together in the kitchen or staying in someone's home. Their responses revealed that the cellar was a very private space, a zone free from the expectations that other people would view or judge it. Or, in Goffman's terms, a "backstage" area that my presence thrust to front stage with the introduction of an audience.

The conversations that emerged in my initial requests to tour cellars also demonstrated that women felt very self-conscious about their cellars. They did not want to be judged as failing to keep their cellars the way they *should* be in terms of organization or cleanliness. In addition to their internal sense of how their cellars were supposed to look, I think their discomfort was heightened because they knew that I was visiting other cellars, and they were reticent to be compared. In other words, not only was I as an audience member breaking the frontstage-backstage boundary, but I could also be a critic. In one particularly painful example, a woman, who agreed to give me a tour of her cellar because her son asked her, kept saying "what misery" as she walked me through the jars on her shelf. She shared that she had not been able to fill her cellar to the extent she usually did because she had spent most of the year caring for her aging

and dying parents. Despite this, she still had kept a small garden and put-up tomatoes, lyutenitsa, and pickled cucumbers. She had also jarred pork because a friend had slaughtered a pig and shared the meat. As the initial shock of having a stranger in her cellar wore off, she shared many recipes with me, took jars off the shelf to display their contents, and told me stories about her own history of making preserves as well as where the jars themselves came from. We ended the afternoon in the shade of an old walnut tree, eating sweets and talking. Even so, the introduction of an outsider (particularly a foreigner and a researcher) who might compare or evaluate her based on her cellar was distressing; ultimately, I felt it was an unkind thing for me to ask. This was not work I personally felt good about doing.

For this reason, I stopped asking women if I could visit their cellars and instead only toured them when people spontaneously offered. The families whom I had known the longest and with whom I was already integrated were the ones who most often extended this invitation. Although quantitative cellar surveys generated useful ethnobotanical data and revealed links between food preservation practices and biodiversity preservation, I collected very limited data of this kind. I have a limited number of cellar surveys from several villages and one small town. I can make limited comparisons and also give a general idea of the variety of foods in cellars, methods used, and materials, competences, and meanings associated with home preserved foods.

As I have discussed in previous chapters, Bulgarians practice food saving at multiple scales and across multiple temporalities. In this section I focus on the living social practices of saving food in terms of "the race against rot" (Trubeck 2019, 1 in Weiler, Elton and Johnston, eds.) or of extending the edibility of food, particularly for the winter). Of course, the short-term extension of food life also occurs through refrigeration and fermentation; I don't address this systematically because short-term food saving was not at the center of my attention, and I collected data on it only incidentally. This chapter describes and analyzes longer-term food preservation for the winter that can be achieved through freezing, drying, fermenting, pickling, sterilizing, cellar-storage, and distilling.

Foods preserved for use in the winter comprise a general category of foods called *zimnina* (зимнина) in Bulgarian, literally "winter foods." This term does not denote the method of preservation, though it is distinct from food preserved in the form of alcohol. Dried herbs used for tea, medicine or seasonings are also excluded from the category of zimnina. Fermented

cabbage, pickled cauliflower and sterilized jarred peaches are part of the category of zimnina, but grape brandy and dried chamomile tea are not.

Food preservation practices consolidate materially in the cellar and reveal the diversity of techniques and products that preserve makers use and the variety of finished products that they then integrate into everyday culinary life. In this chapter I describe the materials, competences, and meanings associated with saving food for the winter as evidenced in cellars. Chapters 8 and 10 examine specific instances of making preserves.

Into the Cellar with Vasi in Simitli, Bulgaria

When I greeted Vasi she was just coming from meeting some teachers at the elementary school and was wearing a well-tailored dress with an abstract design in muted greens, golds, and tans. Formal white shoes with a low heel complemented her dress. We walked down the block to her house, which sits over the small-machine shop that she and her husband own. Walking down the sidewalk to her gate, she greeted many of the children buying breakfast at the corner bakery. She explained that she knows so many children because she teaches a Sunday school at the Orthodox church across the street and she volunteers at the primary school, though she is officially a retired teacher.

I first met Vasi in August of 2006 when her son and daughter-in law were a host family for us as Peace Corps Volunteers. She has included us in many family events and gatherings over the years, from picking grapes in the family vineyard to Sunday dinners as well as her and her husband's 25th wedding anniversary celebration. We shared a lot of common interests, and she is a natural teacher, so I have often benefited from her patient explanations and instructions about everyday living in Simitli. She knew from our conversations about my dissertation research that I had a specific interest in cellars, so she offered to give me a tour of hers. This was a generous invitation into a space that guests are not typically allowed. My blurred relationship somewhere between guest and family seemed to make this less awkward.

Even though it was a hot September day, the air was cool as we descended the stairs into the stone and cement basement. She flipped on a bare light bulb and opened an old wooden door to reveal a well-organized cellar. In the deepest, coolest part were wooden wine barrels, thick plastic barrels for cabbage fermenting (which happens later in the fall), and a square plastic jug

with a spigot containing the last remains of a slightly fermented lingonberry drink. “This is good for the kidneys,” she told me as she handed me a small glass of the tart, slightly fizzy drink. “In general, the mountains have them [lingonberries]. But if we don’t go to gather them ourselves then we buy them in the market from someone who did gather them [themselves].” There were also hanging bunches of dried herbs that she uses for tea and seasoning food.

Along the walls there were several custom-built wooden shelves that extended from the floor almost up to the low ceiling. Fabric was hanging in front of each shelf to keep dust off the jars stored there. She pulled up the green, flower-patterned fabric from the first shelf to reveal rows of jewel-colored jars and bottles. She narrated the contents of each one. She knew by sight what was in each jar. The first shelf was full of compote: raspberry, strawberry (both cultivated and wild), pear, peach, apricot, sour cherry, sweet cherry, cornelian cherry, and plum (both yellow and blue).

Figure 7.1. Photograph of preserved fruit in Vasi’s cellar. September 12, 2019.

She picked up a small jar with something deep golden colored inside and described how to make it, as she did with many of the jars. “This is cornelian cherry and apple *marmalad*. First you clean the cornelian cherries, and after that you add peeled and sliced apples and cook them until they are soft. Then you grind them [in a food mill] and return them to the pot to cook until it becomes thick. You know it is ready, this is the way my grandmother taught me, when it becomes dark and is very thick.”

Figure 7.2. Photograph of preserved cucumbers, lyutenitsa, and ketchup in Vasi's cellar. September 12, 2019.

We continued our tour through the jars, which were organized by type of fruit; then we moved on to the vegetables. These were stored just outside the cellar, in the garage on shelves along the wall. There were sliced cucumber pickles, tomatoes in salt water, marinated cherry tomatoes with spicy peppers, mixed vegetables (*gyuvech*, гювеч*)*, marinated eggplant, marinated summer squash, a seasoned tomato and pepper puree that she uses as a soup starter (*podpravka*, подправка), lyutenitsa, and tomato juice. She also had a few small bottles of ketchup because her grandkids, like many Bulgarians, like to eat it on pizza. Most of the lyutenitsa was in small, threaded glass jars with screw-on caps that she said were recycled baby food jars. The tomato juice and ketchup were in recycled Queen's brand juice bottles.

There were almost no empty jars because it was late summer. The filled jars were of different sizes and shapes, and some of them were recycled, industrially produced food jars. But most of them were the squat jars with rounded shoulders, common from socialist times, sealed with round metal lids that must be crimped over the mouth of the jar with a hand-tool. Vasi explained that her mother bought many of the jars fifty years ago, when Vasi was just a small child. Vasi told me that she bought new jars from time to time when older jars break.

As we looked through the jars in the garage, she commented that her daughter tended to buy fresh "plastic" imported fruits and vegetables all winter long. Many people describe these imports as "plastic" or "wooden" because, although they look nice, they don't have any smell or taste. Vasi found this fresh produce to be inferior in taste, more expensive, and not as healthy. On this last point she said that fruits and vegetables are most nutritious at their peak season. In her view, this made preserved food harvested at its peak more healthful that fresh food purchased out of season. Most of the produce that Vasi preserved came from her garden, supplemented by a

few things she gathered from the forest or mountains such as blueberries, strawberries, and herbs. She bought sugar, salt, and oil for making preserves from either a local store or a larger chain supermarket in a nearby city. She preferred Greek olive oil, which she bought in bulk. She also supplemented her garden output with produce from the weekly outdoor market.

“Is this really that useful to you?” she asked with a smirk as I began more carefully inventorying the jars. She immediately answered her own question, “I guess it can show how one family feeds itself.” Then she reminded me, “This isn’t all the jars I made!” There were more jars in the pantries of both her son and daughter, who live in their own houses. “How many do you think you made in all this year?” I asked. “More or less 400,” she replied, not including any alcohol. She gave about 100 jars to each of her children and kept the rest in her cellar. “It’s a little bit like living in a village house, you know? We have a a little of everything, scattered here and there, but it’s easier to live and more joyful.”

Cellar Contents

Vasi’s cellar, like many of the cellars and pantries I visited, revealed several methods of food preservation. Sterilized, jarred foods preserved through water-bath canning dominated the vast majority of the cellars, which were stocked with jars stored on shelves or in crates. There was also a large volume of wine and brandy, which were stored in various containers including barrels, glass jugs, recycled whiskey bottles, or reused plastic mineral water bottles. While my timing during the summer was not ideal to capture it, fermentation in large plastic barrels was also a common reported practice in winter, particularly for cabbage. Those full barrels were usually stored in the cellar, but they were empty during the summer. There were also pickled, jarred vegetables. In terms of dried foods, there were fruits, herbs, beans and peppers. In one cellar I found a plastic bucket with brined pork fat. Many people also used cellars as a cool storage place for potatoes, apples, onions, and winter squash, which kept well for nearly fresh use during the winter. Some people also had freezers to preserve food, though this was less common. Figure 7.3 below illustrates in graph form the vast array of foods found in cellars and their preservation methods.

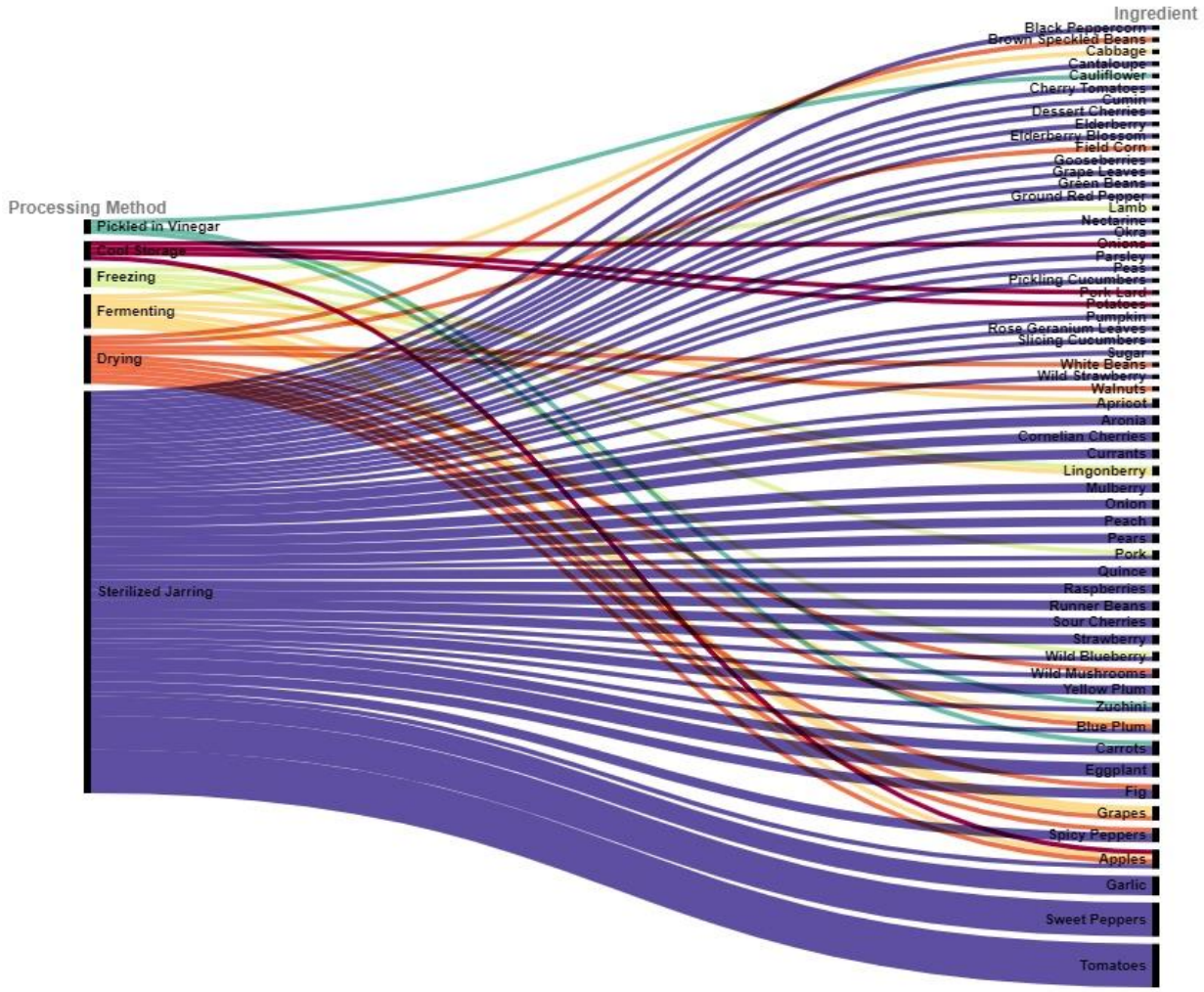

Figure 7.3. Chart of preserved foods by processing method, observed during cellar surveys from 2018-2021.

In most cellars there was very little, if any, labeling. This indicates not only the common knowledge that the women held of their preserves but also the implicit knowledge that family members had. The women who gave me tours would narrate what was in each jar and identify it by site or by location in the collection. Sometimes there were preserves that were very close in appearance to others; they would inspect them more carefully or that they would open and taste to verify the contents. In one cellar a woman had small slips of paper labelling and dating what each row of jars contained. Her cellar was rather unusual in that it was the only one that had significant carry-over from one year to the next. The jars in other cellars were consumed pretty thoroughly each year. Women washed and returned empty bottles and jars to the shelves or crates, ready to refill in the future.

Materials

Social practice theory emphasizes the inextricable and co-constitutive nature of material "things" in the social. Shove, Pantzar and Watson point out that "[…] many practices depend on supplies of consumables as well as on more durable objects, tools, and infrastructures" (2012, 47). This is obvious in the case of preserved foods, which rely on seasonably available perishables as well as more durable supplies like jars, tools like stoves, and infrastructure like gardens, kitchens, and cellars.

The materials connected to the preserved foods in the Bulgarian cellar are two-fold: those that are physically present in the cellar, and those that are used in the production process. The material continuity between the present day and state socialism is significant and, I argue, one of the stabilizing factors for the ongoing re-production of these practices. Many of those canning tools are heirlooms that represent generations of family and cultural heritage.

Jars

Glass jars are critical in ongoing food preservation practices. While it is sometimes necessary for people to buy new glass jars, many people I interviewed inherited large collections of glass jars from older female relatives. "You have to *always* make sure to return the empty jars," a high school teacher named Daniela coached me during an interview. She continued, "If someone gives you a plate or food, for example, it is a nice tradition to send it back full of food. But you shouldn't worry about sending back empty jars." She concluded, "Of course people buy new jars from time to time because they get broken or misplaced. But people really do save their jars, and it is *very* important to return them." The jars that I saw most often in cellars had either single piece, crimp-on metal lids or screw-on metal lids (see Figures 7.4, 7.5, and 7.6).

Figure 7.4. Photograph of lids in international supermarket chain in Gabrovo. July of 2021.

These metal lids were widely available; during the spring and summer months, people could purchase them in almost every outdoor market, shop, and supermarket.

Figure 7.5. Photograph of lids in regional supermarket in Simitli. September of 2019.

Figure 7.6. Photograph of lids in The Women's Market in Sofia. in July of 2018.

Figure 7.7. Photograph of lids at the open-air market in Elin Pelin. September of 2021.

The crimp-on lids can be tricky to seal safely. Women or their husbands must press them down over the mouth of the jar firmly enough to completely form the metal around the mouth of the glass jar and make a tight seal. I was warned repeatedly that if you press down too hard you can easily break the jar and badly cut your hands. One family I made preserves with had crafted a special wooden box for holding the jars during the crimping process. Even with this additional safety feature, I was not allowed to try it. Only the father of the household handled this delicate task because he was the most experienced, as pictured below in Figure 7.8.

Figure 7.8. Photograph of sealing jars with a lid crimper. August 12, 2006.

There were also jars from industrially made products such as lyutenitsa, beans, tomatoes, and juice. These re-used jars are evidence of a hybrid approach to food provisioning that makes use of purchased, industrially produced food in addition to home-produced and preserved foods (Figures 7.9 and 7.10).

Figure 7.9. Photograph of preserves in re-used industrially produced jars. September 12, 2019.

Figure 7.10. Photograph of gyuvech in re-used industrially produced jar. September 23, 2021.

The third common category of jar were recycled baby food jars, either from industrially produced baby food or from state-run "milk kitchens" that provide free food to families of infants and toddlers. These milk kitchens have operated continuously since the time of the state socialist regime. One woman who showed me around her cellar picked up a small jar of lyutenitsa with a gold, threaded cap. She said she liked to use that size of jar because her family could eat up the whole contents in one meal and wouldn't need to worry about any of it going bad before finishing the jar. "These are actually the baby food jars from when my son was a little," she told me. She

Figure 7.11. Photograph of lyutenitsa in re-used baby food jars from a socialist-era "milk kitchen". September 13, 2019.

had been saving and reusing those jars for over 30 years (Figure 7.11). More recent recycled baby food jars can be seen below (Figure 7.12); they are the smallest jars with green and blue lids, and they contained raspberry jam.

Figure 7.12. Photograph of reused Gerber brand baby food jars with green and blue caps. September 18, 2021.

Stockpiles of empty jars were a common sight in many homes, as illustrated by Figures 7.13. Even though jars are not always in continuous use, glass is durable and is therefore a flexible resource that can be put to use whenever necessary or desirable. Some people stockpiled old jars even when they neither preserve foods nor have any future intention of doing so. Women expressed feelings of emotional attachments to the jars along with difficulty throwing out something that was in good condition and potentially useful.

Figure 7.13. Photograph of jars stored for future use. September 13, 2019.

Other Processing Equipment

Additional materials that were durable and therefore carried over from year to year include multiple sizes of kettles for cooking and water-bath canning, food grinders, metal and wooden spoons, metal foam skimmers, and wooden paddles for stirring. Metal graters and sieves were also common as were metal screens for drying fruit and herbs. There were also larger pieces of equipment, often stored in the cellar when not in use, such as machines for extracting honey and crushing grapes as well as stills for distilling brandy.

These types of equipment were widely available to purchase new. I saw them in small town shops, weekly open-air markets in villages, or markets like the “Ruski Pazar” in the large city of Plovdiv. This led me to assume that new buyers did exist. However, most people whom I interviewed primarily relied on implements that they had either inherited or acquired many years ago.

Figure 7.14. Photograph of neatly arranged cooking equipment in the village kitchen of Tatyana Tsankova. September 18, 2021.

Cooking Equipment

I observed a wide variety of methods and equipment for cooking preserves and heating water baths for sealing jars. Some people had moved wood stoves outdoors to cook preserves. Every home I visited also had an electric stovetop, though these were most often used for everyday cooking or smaller batches of preserves like making jam. In many courtyards or yards there were fire pits built from brick or concrete blocks. Wood fires could be used, for example, to heat large pots to make lyutenitsa, to heat stills during the rakiya making process, or to boil water to seal and sterilize jarred preserves. An alternative to these wood fire pits were metal gas ring burners.

Figure 7.15. Photograph of wood-burning fire pit. August 12, 2006.

Figure 7.16. Photograph of lyutenitsa cooking over gas burner. August 17, 2018.

Roasting peppers was a very common activity, and there were many different tools used for this job. In many homes there was a small electric pepper roasting appliance called a *chushkopek* (чушкопек) illustrated in figure 7.17. These cylindrical roasters could accommodate between one and three peppers at a time. I also saw people roasting peppers on sheet metal, with either a flame underneath or with a blow torch from above, on gas barbecues (see Figure 7.18), and on thin metal trays placed on electric stove burners.

Figure 7.17. Photograph of an old chushkopek. September 13, 2019.

Figure 7.18. Photograph of peppers and garlic roasting on a gas barbecue. September 15, 2021.

Freezing

One cellar that I visited had a large chest freezer filled with frozen meat (the daughter of the woman who was showing me her cellar worked for a butcher and often gave her mother meat), and roasted peppers. Some people had larger freezers that were not currently in operation. When I asked why, their owners said that they used freezers more during socialist times when availability of things like meat was so erratic it was essential to stock-pile. One university student who I met in Sofia said that her father was a hunter, and their family had a large freezer filled with game. Many people kept food in multiple places, which means that even if they didn't have a freezer in their village cellar, they might have one somewhere else. For example, Tatyana and Andree who garden, forage, and preserve food in the village of Mladen had a larger freezer in their city apartment but not in their village home. Yet others had no large freezer space at all, save for the very small compartments in their modest-sized refrigerators. In these small freezers, I saw meat, roasted peppers, berries, ice cream, frozen blanched potatoes for making French fries, and, very occasionally, fish. Meat and roasted peppers were the most common frozen items.

Although most people had some freezer space in their refrigerators, and a few had larger chest freezers, shelf-stable food preservation methods were more common and significant. Some people even had freezers available that they left empty and unplugged. When I asked why, they told me that electricity can be expensive and unreliable. Though electrical outages weren't frequent, they did occur, and frozen food would spoil if the electricity didn't get turned back on fast enough. This was a particular concern in more remote villages. Even occasional electrical outages caused major losses of food. One woman whose cellar I visited lived in a rather remote village with about 10 permanent residents. She told me that her neighbors called her one day in a panic because the electricity had gone out, and they had a large freezer filled with meat, cheese, and vegetables. They were giving away as much food as possible before it went bad. She mused that those experiences reinforced her commitment to shelf-stable food preservation. She had never purchased a large freezer because even infrequent electrical outages would be disruptive to her resilience and food security.

Ingredients

Families acquired the ingredients themselves from multiple sources, methods, and economies. Families grew some foods in gardens or foraged them (Figure 7.20). Families purchased other ingredients like oil or spices like ground red pepper or cumin, sugar, and salt from corner-stores or supermarkets; their origin was sometimes global. Some people also bought vegetables from open-air markets, supermarkets, and large-scale vegetable producers (Figure 7.19). Informal or grey markets were also a source of fruits, vegetables, herbs, milk, or meat. On occasion, preserve-makers acquired some ingredients as gifts from people in their social networks.

Figure 7.19. Photograph of peppers and melons at an open-air market in Plovdiv. July 21, 2018)

Competences

Figure 7.20. Photograph of garden, orchard, and beehives of the Tsankovi Family in Mladen. June 25, 2021.

As discussed in the literature review, Shove, Pantzar, and Watson collapse know-how, background knowledge, understanding, practical consciousness, and deliberately cultivated skill into the category of competence (2012, 23). Competence is the embodied ability to perform a practice by "carriers" of those practices, who compose a "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991, 98). Jeff Coulter defines these carriers as communities of people who are capable

of performing a practice and bear a "patterned action orientation" (Coulter 2001, 31-32). While individuals are carriers of practices, what distinguishes personal idiosyncrasy or habit from social practice is that a group of people share social practices. This means that practices are recognizable, and mutually referential. They are "collective possessions and accomplishments sustained through interaction and mutual adjustment among people" (Schatzki 2001, 6; see also Barnes 2001, 17). This is compatible with how folklorists describe "tradition bearers" within a group, particularly if that group is defined by connection through collective acts (Noyes 2003, 29).

Barry Barnes illustrates practices as collective with the example of cavalry riders, riding in formation. The social practice of riding in formation shows how practices are more than a sum of individual actors, similarly equipped, carrying out embodied and habituated actions. They are coordinated with one another and attuned to their immediate surroundings so that adjustments in individual behavior are made to support the collective practice. In other words, "What is required to understand practice of this kind is not individuals oriented primarily by their own habits (ie. individuals), nor it is individuals oriented by the same collective object (ie. group identity); rather it is human beings oriented to *each other*…they are interdependent social agents, linked by a profound mutual susceptibility, who constantly modify their habituated individual responses as they interact with others, in order to sustain a shared practice" (2001, 24). I would add that experimentation, which I will examine more in Chapter 9, is a way that practitioners are self-referential and yet increasing their competences. Barnes highlights that social practices are "…the accomplishments of competent members of collectives," with these collectives defined by their enactment of practices rather than the other way around.

Riding in a cavalry formation, is an effective example to illustrate practices achieved in the open, with co-located practitioners, easily identifiable as a group through their common sets of skills and materials, unified goals and mutual adjustments to one another and their environment in the pursuit of those goals. What about practices that are performed in relative isolation from other practitioners? Barnes' reply is that practices are learned from other people and that, "…learning continues after the initial acquisition of 'competent member' status" (2001, 25). Practices shift and change, but in relation to a broader community of competent practitioners who reference one another even if virtually. He brings in the example of acupuncturists to illustrate a non-collocated

community that is still mutually referential in this way. Part of being a competent practitioner is the ability to judge a performance, even one's own, according to some kind of standard(s) outside of oneself. Barnes describes practices, therefore, as being both "mutually intelligible" to other practitioners in other words recognizable as that practice, and "mutually susceptible" to being judged as a competent performance vs. one that is defective (2001, 26). Therefore, practitioners need not be co-located to engage in a social practice and be part of a community of practice. In fact, practitioners can not only be separated in space, they can also be separated by time and still be referential. Folklorists might conceptualize these competent practitioners as "tradition bearers" who have a repertoire of competences, some in active use and others that are latent (Goldstein 1971, 63). Another complementary approach is to conceptualize the "social location of culture" as a network or community of practitioners, and that "Community is made real in performance[…]" (Noyes 2003, 26).

Practitioners themselves are not the only ones who judge competence. Shove, Pantzar, and Watson distinguish having the ability to judge a competent performance as an observer or consumer, from knowing how to actually perform a practice. They frame "…shared understandings of a good or appropriate performance" (2012, 23) as a type of competence as well. This is resonant with Bauman's observation that, "Performance involves on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience […]" (1974, 293). The audience may be internal (ie. the practitioner themselves) or external (those who consume the preserves, anthropologists conducting research, etc.). Embodied taste memories of competent performance can give people the ability to judge a competent performance, whether their own or someone else's. Some novice food preservers continued to experiment with their practice until they were satisfied that it matched the taste of what their grandmother made, for example. The performance is subject to evaluation by the audience for, "[…] the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display of competence" (Bauman 1974, 293). This expands competence as framed by Shove and colleagues from ability to perform or judge performance to the expressive potential of the performance as well. Understanding the communicative aspects of the practice requires analysis of the negotiation between the performer and the audience and will be addressed more fully in the following section discussing meaning.

While people can and do learn through doing in everyday life, often without any particular awareness of the process, there are some skills that require deliberate effort and training to acquire and perfect (Shove Pantzar and Watson 2012, 48). Learning to do can be passed on face to face or it can "travel" between practices through novel application or across time and space. To do so they argue that this knowledge must be "[…] 'abstracted' from a local situation before it can travel, and that it needs to be 'reversed' when it arrives in some new destination" (2012, 48).

In the context of food preservation this abstracted knowledge can often be found in formal cookbooks or private recipe collections. They represent "…pools of knowledge that have been variously certified, legitimated and prepared for travel" (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012, 49). The abstracted knowledge alone is not enough to transmit competence. It must be received by a potential practitioner capable of receiving or "decoding" the knowledge. "This suggests know-how can only travel – by means of abstraction and reversal – to sites in which practitioners are already prepared to receive it because of prior, first-hand, practice-based experience" (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012, 49). I think that this knowledge can travel and be iteratively de-coded through experimentation, however, and that perhaps the previous quote is a bit of an overstatement. Some preserve makers described their trial and error method of cooking, particularly when they were trying to reproduce someone else's recipe or making something themselves for the first time.

So, while materials physically travel, competence travels through, "[…] processes include[ing] those of abstraction, reversal, lateral migration and cross-practice creep" (Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012, 52). Additionally, know-how can be stored in abstraction, unlike materials. "[…] elements of knowledge can be contained for a time in virtual and actual reservoirs, depots and memories, persisting in this form between and beyond moments of practical enactment" (Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012, 52). This know-how can be stored in bodies and minds, and body-minds can judge competence as well.

Standardization in a practice allows for the ready and widespread diffusion of encoded expertise to be diffused and de-coded. For example, by standardizing specifications or creating regulations a practice can go from being craft-based and reproducible only in highly specified local contexts to being generalizable to a broader community of practitioners who simply replicate the

standardized form. While this kind of standardization is typical in industrial production and relies on precision instrumentation for things like measurement, it was not typical in the preserve making that I observed. People making preserves relied more heavily on embodied experience and sensing than tools like thermometers or precise measuring implements. A common refrain was that it was important to make things "to taste" and adjust recipes to your own (or your family's) liking. In practice this was done through careful observation of texture, color, and frequent tasting.

For example, a practitioner follows a recipe (encoded knowledge) to make a batch of lyutenitsa determining success based on their embodied competence of taste memory because they had tasted a "successful" batch in the past and could adapt the current performance to match the past success. This requires modification and adjustment to compensate for minor variations in produce, humidity, etc. But this is a feature of competence. As it "travels" through time and space it can be adapted. The capacity to decode the recipe is based on previous experience; the necessary underlying knowledge is a foundation but is not directly related to the current practice/performance. Gaining this background knowledge may happen through face-to-face transmission by directly observing or making jars with an experienced practitioner, through watching videos of experienced practitioners, and/or through experimentation. A common theme in interviews, especially amongst younger or more novice food preservers, was their description of experimentation. Some would even go so far as to say that "no one" taught them how to make jars; they just tried it and experimented until they were satisfied by the result. In these cases, they usually relied on encoded knowledge in the form of recipes or advice from books or internet sites. They distinguished this knowledge from face to face, collaborative learning through doing.

Those I interviewed most often cited gaining food preservation competences from older generations; mothers, grandmothers or mothers-in-law taught them about food preservation, and older male relatives passed down skills related to making alcohol. Some people also used encoded knowledge from formally published recipe books, familial recipe collections, or recipes shared orally from people with experience in making a particular preserve. Interestingly, some people supplemented or expanded their repertoire through watching videos from other home-preservers on internet sites such as YouTube. For example, two women whom I interviewed

converted their existing knowledge of how to make fermented cabbage into making Korean style *kimchee;* they used internet videos and purchased fish sauce in a nearby large town.

There are a wide range of competences involved in making preserves. For example, the capability of cooking the preserves, properly sealing them, and safely canning them in a water bath. Fermented foods and alcohol require a host of skills in cultivating desired and safe communities of microorganisms in addition to skills related to distillation and aging. Since many ingredients are home-grown, competence in growing and harvesting cultivated fruits and vegetables are required. In addition, a wide variety of gathering skills are utilized by preserve makers including knowledge of where and when to look, plant identification, and proper harvesting and processing techniques. Some of my interviewees purchased all or a portion of the ingredients for preserve making. This involved being a competent shopper, knowing when and where to look for certain ingredients, how to judge their quality, and how to secure a good price. Relationships often played a large role in how people described securing high quality and safe ingredients as did the practitioners' reliance on their own embodied sense memories of taste, color, and texture.

Meanings

Collapsing emotion, affect, motivation, communicative function, and performance into the broad category "meaning" is perhaps the most drastic of the simplifying moves that Shove, Pantzar, and Watson make in their elemental approach to practices. Foodways scholarship has a great deal to offer in examining the meanings of home-preserved foods. Here I will summarize the meanings of home-preserved foods and the motivations to make them, as interviewees articulated, in relation to the foodways literature. In the chapters that follow I will revisit meaning in more detail via the words and practices of specific home-based food preservers.

The meanings of home-preserved foods and they motivations to make them vary and, in many cases, overlap. As I mentioned in the literature review, home-based food provisioning and preservation practices have been characterized by some researchers as a "…coping strategy for making ends meet" in the context of "poor" "post-communist" countries (Alber and Kohler 2008, 114). Survey-based studies conducted in Czech Republic repudiate these claims, in that the poorest people were not the ones engaging in the most food self-provisioning (Jehlička Kostelesky and Smith 2008). My research supports this observation,

Danille Christensen's analysis of home canners in the Southern U.S. in her article "Simply Necessity? Agency and Aesthetics in Southern Home Canning" is particularly relevant to the results from my research (2015). Like me, she centered the practices and voices of home-canners to refute the characterization of rural, southern home-preservation practices as driven by "necessity." She makes the key point that, "…reducing past, rural domestic practice to duty or deprivation alone ignores the agency and aesthetic sophistication of people already marginalized by gender, region, race and other contributors of socioeconomic status" (2015, 18). This is highly relevant for Bulgaria as well. People with whom I worked rarely focused on the economic utility of their home-preservation practices and often spoke against negative socioeconomic stereotypes by making statements like, "We are cultured people" and home-based food preservation was done "not because of poverty."

While practitioners of home-based food preservation identified food security benefits, the meanings they attributed to these practices and the foods they generated went far beyond nutritional utility or economic necessity. The following are nine themes that I identified during cellar surveys and interviews, each accompanied by an illustrative quote. Most people identified several meanings throughout the course of our conversations.

Food Security - "I have to eat, don't I?"

In some cases, meager pensions created real financial challenges for preserve makers who I spoke with. One woman joked about "famous Bulgarian pensions," the lowest in Europe, and detailed the contrasting high costs of things like electricity and prescription medication. While making preserves was not without cost, it was a way to convert time and labor into nutrition. When preserve makers gained the bulk of the ingredients through self-provisioning by gardening or foraging the costs were lower, substituted by substantial investments of time. Even people like Stefka, who were more financially secure, expressed a desire or "instinct" to keep a supply of home-preserved food on hand. This food gave a sense of security against the unknown. In all cases, preserves were more than survival food.

Tradition - "Because our grandmothers and mothers did this"

A majority of preserve makers indicated that preserving food was a way to keep alive traditions that were passed down to them from previous generations. During cellar tours, like the one with

Vasi, women frequently related stories about their grandmothers, mothers or mothers-in-law. When Vasi picked up the jar of marmalad, she recited the recipe to me, noting that it was the way her grandmother taught her how to make it. When I spoke to her son Borko, he mused that Bulgarians would always make jars, regardless of financial need or availability of industrially produced foods, because "these are our traditions."

Health - "Rakiya is important first of all for health."

There were many items in cellars that people identified as serving a particular health related function. These included foods to treat particular ailments, like cornelian cherries for digestive problems or the fermented lingonberry drink for kidney function. I was given many remedies for curing sickness that involved *rakiya*[1], either ingested or used topically. There were also foods that people described as having a general health supporting effect, like preserved garlic and spicy peppers. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 9.

Memory - "One taste and I was transported to my grandmother's garden when I was a little girl."

Preserved foods carried many taste associated memories, most often linked with childhood and grandparents.[2] When I told people I was interested in preserved foods, they often launched into descriptions of their favorite preserved food and memories associated with it. Some people, who didn't make their own preserves, would specially request these items from their older relatives. Taste memories were also used as a metric of success for novice preserve makers. When trying to make a new preserve they would judge it as successful when it tasted "as I remember." In cases where people didn't have anyone they knew who made preserves, interviewees sometimes sought them out in food festivals like the Kurtovo Konare Fest. I also spoke with Bulgarians raising children abroad who wanted their children to taste home-grown and preserved foods. They expressed the desire to create prospective memories linking those tastes with Bulgaria (Sutton 2001, 19; Jones and Long 2017).

[1] Rakiya (ракия): strong brandy distilled from fermented fruit, often grape, plum or apricot.

[2] For a detailed examination of these intergenerational relationships and childhood memories of grandparents and village life see *Reinventing the Village: Generations, Heritage, and Revitalization in Contemporary Bulgaria* by Sarah Craycraft, 2022. For a closer examination of culinary tourism amongst young professional Bulgarians seeking tastes of the village see *Rural Voices at the Margins: Place and Power in Emerging Heritage Narratives of Bulgarian Food Tourism* by Danielle Jaques, 2022. For an early analysis of memory and foodways, see Michael Owen Jones' and Lucy Long's edited collection, 2017. Comfort Food: Meaning and Memory. Univ. of Mississppi Press.

Safety- "I could spend all my money on Bio[3] certified food and still not be certain that it is really without chemicals and clean. I don't think that these [industrial] jars are fake (*mente*), but I think that they are lower quality than other places in Europe and definitely lower quality than homemade."

Concerns over the quality of industrially produced foods was also a common theme, and many preserve makers expressed that they did not trust in certifications or hygiene standards of foods produced in Bulgaria. This extended to international brands sold within Bulgaria as well. There were media stories detailing the double standards for some name-brand products that were sold within Bulgaria compared to other places within the E.U. Neither the Bulgarian government system of inspections nor the E.U. were trusted entities when it came to the health and safety standards of industrially produced foods (Jung 2014; Jung 2019). In some cases, even if the general quality wasn't suspect, people detailed concerns about chemicals and additives allowed in industrially produced foods. People often complained about preservatives in industrially produced jars.

Figure 7.21. Photograph of peach compote with scented geranium leaves. September 15, 2021.

Aesthetics - "When you preserve them this way, they stay crunchy and tasty."

There are multi-faceted aesthetic values associated with home preserved foods such as taste, texture, visual appeal of how the foods are arranged inside jars, and how the jars are displayed on a shelf. Many people complained that industrially produced jars were sterilized for a very long

[3] This is the equivalent term for organic certification in Bulgaria

time, which made the contents mushy. Other people didn't like how sweet or salty industrially produced preserved foods were. In some cases foods were sliced a particular way for visual appeal when arranged in the jar or garnishes like scented geranium leaves were added to jars for both aroma and visual appeal (Figure 7.21). Nadezhda, the preserve maker that I feature in Chapter 9, reflected in her own book about the beauty of the jewel-colored jars lining the shelves of her larder. One pensioner who lived on a very limited income still purchased vanilla extract to put in her peach preserves because she loved the taste and smell. These personal touches sometimes added time or expense to the preserve making process but resulted in products that demonstrated the personal and familial tastes of the preserve makers, their cultural aesthetic. Those extra steps and ingredients were also a way for preserve makers to demonstrate their creativity and artistry to those who consumed the jars or to whom they gave jars. In rare cases when preserved foods were displayed to people outside of the preserve maker's social network, like informal markets, food festivals, or cellar surveys with American anthropologists, preserve makers were eager to discuss their process in detail, give samples, or hold up the products to demonstrate their fine results.

Wellbeing - "It's easier to live and more joyful."

While this theme in some ways is linked to aesthetic pleasures, there was something broader about how making preserved foods fit into many preserve makers conceptualization of living a good life that seemed distinct to me. Again, this marked preserve making as a choice and not as a necessity born of want. In fact, I think preserve makers made these comments to me to speak against preserve makers' perceptions that I might mistakenly attribute the practices to poverty.

Preventing Waste – "We have this strong feeling that nothing should be wasted, that everything is a blessing, and everything should be preserved, and everything should be eaten until it is finished."

Those who produced food themselves or received gifts of food from others frequently listed waste prevention as a reason to make preserved foods. Those engaged in the discourse surrounding waste prevention did not associate it with rhetoric related to environmental sustainability such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions or carbon footprint. While shelf-stable foods also reduce the need for refrigeration, no one cited this benefit in relation to environmental goals. In other words, the preserved foods evidence "quiet sustainability," or positive

environmental outcomes not driven by environmental goals or meanings (Smith and Jehlička 2013, 148).

Creating Connections –

> Gifts – "I have enough to give to my neighbor, to the doctor, you know whoever!"
>
> Care for Relatives – "My granddaughter lives in Sofia, and when she calls me I say, 'tell me what you desire, and I will make it for you.'"
>
> Working Together – "My family and the family of my husband we gather all together and we roast peppers and peel them for winter…and we are laughing, and we are telling different stories, and we are doing this all day. It's like a family gathering."

There are many ways that the practice of preserve making creates connections among people. As other scholars have noted, preserved foods circulate in and create social networks (Smollett 1989). They can be given away as gifts to maintain ongoing relationships and are a way that people can demonstrate care for their family by customizing preserves to their tastes or needs. This could take the form of making raspberry jam specifically for a grandchild or sending adult children large quantities of a variety of preserves for their everyday use. Preserve makers often expressed pride in having something good to give their friends and relatives, things that couldn't be bought in a store. People often served me preserved foods and alcohol at everyday family meals and special occasions such as holidays or birthday parties. In addition, the process of making preserved foods can be a reason for families, friends, and neighbors to gather and share in the work. Though again these are practical efforts to share the burden of a labor and time intensive job, they are also social events mixing pleasure with the business at hand. This is resonant with how Neustadt's described a New England clambake (1988). Many younger, working-aged people told me how much they enjoyed going to their familial villages to help with putting up food for winter, even if they don't want to live in the village full-time.

There are undoubtedly more meanings and motivations associated with the practices of home-based food preservation than I have addressed. Preserve makers demonstrated that home-preserved foods were multi-faceted, a blend of practicality, pleasure and creativity. While they served them everyday in routine meals, home-preserved foods were also served to elevate a celebration. People perceived them as safe, aesthetically pleasing, and full of care. These features

were not guaranteed in industrially produced foods, regardless of cost. And though these foods had nutritional utility and were a way to stretch resources, they were not a practice primarily motivated by poverty.

Time and Space

It is important to consider time and space in terms of how practices shape them and are shaped by them. Space and time deserve further attention as the contextual "field of opportunity" within which these preservation practices occur (Shove Pantzar and Watson 2012, 128). During state socialism, retirement ages were low, especially for women, which meant the state provided a relatively large portion of the population with their very base level of subsistence; this freed up time for other pursuits such as the care and maintenance of the family. This time was critical to families because many everyday tasks, like standing in lines, making foods and preserves, tending gardens, or caring for children, were very time consuming. Retired people did not give up a basic minimal income and could use their time to engage in these activities. Grandmothers, and, to a lesser extent, grandfathers were frequently associated by my interviewees with tastes of home and are appropriated even by commercial food brands as the bearers of food traditions and taste. For example, Danone, an international food brand, manufactures a line of "*Na Baba*" or "Grandmother's" yogurts, labeled with a picture of a grey-haired, woman with eyeglasses. Many of my interviewees remembered their grandmothers as the ones they cooked with, especially during summer school breaks when their parents were working. Retired people during state socialism had limited options for leisure activities, especially those related to consumption. In addition, travel restrictions limited their mobility. All of these factors contributed to the existence of a large population with free time and a narrow array of activities competing for that time.

After the end of state socialism, pensions were notoriously low, and while retirement ages slowly crept up, they are still relatively low (61 for women and 64 for men). Today, while meager pensions create financial challenges, even this minimal income enables retirees to have free time time for childcare, gardening, and food preservation. While there are a wider variety of leisure pursuits available, limited incomes remain a constraint for some in terms of travel, entertainment, and consumption. One of my interviewees put it this way, "I don't calculate the time or effort that I put into things that I make myself." She perceived no opportunity cost for her time and didn't think of her time as a scarce resource. She also didn't calculate her efforts as a cost. In this

way it makes perfect sense to spend days making a few jars of wild-strawberry jam, for instance, even when an industrially produced alternative costs only a couple of *leva.*[4]

Practices of home-based food preservation are deeply enmeshed with calendrical rituals and the agricultural calendar, which creates a seasonal rhythm of life. The annual cycle of work revolves around the seasonal availability of various ingredients and their ripening and harvesting times. This highlights relationships between preservation and adjacent practices such as gardening and foraging. Shove, Pantzar and Watson distinguish, "[…] between *bundles of* practices, loose-knit patterns based on co-location and co-existence, and *complexes*, representing stickier and more integrated arrangements including co-dependent forms of sequence and synchronization" (2012, 17). Jarring is a *complex* of food gathering and acquisition, cooking, fermentation, storage, and finally use. Natural seasonal cycles largely dictate these activities, which also rely significantly on weather, and on one another in a particular sequence. So, while these are social, human driven practices, they are also dictated by natural cycles that significantly pattern people's daily lives and annual schedules of activity. For example, when I asked Tatyana when she and Andree would move back into town after being in the village for the summer she said, "When we have finished distilling the rakiya." When I asked Andree when he would distill the rakiya he said, "14 days after I put the mash in the barrels." The mash would go in the barrels as soon as the plums were ripe. While there are some timings that people have control over, there are other natural cycles and non-human biological processes (like ripening and fermentation) that largely dictate when and how people will do certain things. In some cases, this will preclude an activity in a particular year. For example, in one family an elderly relative was ill one summer, so their daughter couldn't get to her garden and canning work on time. That year she grew very little in her garden and made very few preserves. The following year, however, she continued the practice more extensively in timing with the agriculture seasons.

In the case of crops like tomatoes, peppers, plums or cherries, there is a relatively short window for harvest, and they rot quickly if not preserved in some way. This creates a cycle of work that groups often undertake. The abundant harvest and time sensitive work related to it, provide a time specific reason to gather. Many younger adults living, studying or working in larger cities travel out to villages to work seasonally with their families. Younger school-aged children also

[4] The l*ev* (plural leva) is what Bulgarian currency is called. One lev is comprised of 100 stotinki.

often spend time the village during the summer because of the availability of grandparent care during school breaks. Spending break time with their grandparents results in children's exposure to gardening and food preservation activities (even if they may not always be willing or interested participants). It's something many young adults told me that they look forward to, even though none of them want to or can afford to live in the village full time due to extremely limited employment opportunities. These seasonal gatherings are significant because they temporarily populate villages and small towns which are often, and especially during the winter, depopulated. Work parties fill up cellars in villages and pantries in cities, and they generate valuable memories of time spent together.

In terms of space, the vast majority of my interviewees had access to land for growing food. Many had much more land than they could tend. Declining birth rates have meant less partitioning of land due to inheritance. And out-migration means that even if multiple children do inherit land, fewer of them are in Bulgaria to make use of it. When people do not live in their familial village houses, they sometimes keep the garden and yard, traveling back and forth to their residences in larger towns and cities. In addition, there are many accessible public lands for foraging mushrooms, berries, and herbs. Overall, this creates a rather unique set of circumstances in Bulgaria where time and space for food self-provisioning and preservation are ample, increasing the "field of opportunity" for those practices.

Continuity and Change

Shove, Pantzar, and Watson articulate that, "[…] stabilization is not an inevitable result of an increasing density of interdependent arrangements, rather practices are provisionally stabilized when constitutive elements are consistently and persistently integrated through repeatedly similar performances" (2012, 13). This process helps to explain why practices such as home-based food preservation have continued to be durable despite interactions with multiple political and economic systems changes that were expected to push them into decline. The elements of food preservation practices were consistently available, the field of opportunity remained intact, and most importantly the elements were persistently integrated through repeated performance by competent carriers.

While there is continuity from year to year, there is also innovation, experimentation, modification, and improvisation. Each time someone enacts a practice represents an opportunity

to transmit competences to others, who can incorporate these embodied skills into their own repertoire. There are utilitarian outcomes of these practices like diversifying winter diets, saving or creating functional foods to preserve or restore health, preventing food waste, and reducing the need to purchase food. The activities related to making preserved food and alcohol and the end products often blur the lines between work and leisure, function and artistry. The next three chapters will focus on scenes of action, when the elements of practices are integrated in performance. They will provide a more detailed picture of contemporary food preservation practices that fill cellars throughout Bulgaria and demonstrate both continuity and change.

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CHAPTER 8

MAY IT BE SWEET TO YOU ALL WINTER LONG: SAVING FOOD FOR WINTER IN MLADEN

Figure 8.1. Unattributed meme circulated on Facebook in the Foreigners and Friends of Sofia group page August 2021.[1]

"Take about 10 kilograms tomatoes, you mill them, removing the skins and the seeds, and then you begin boiling the tomato juice until it becomes a thick puree. After this it will be almost as thick as the finished product. You have to roast 10 kilograms of peppers; you remove the skins and clean off all the seeds. After this you put them through a meat-grinder. In the same way, you take eggplants, 2 or 3 kilograms. Again you roast them, and peel them and grind them. If you want you can also add a little bit of carrots, grated. All of this you start to boil until it is a thick puree. You season it with salt, sugar, oil, some people put in black pepper to taste, and you boil it until it is thickened. May it be sweet to you all winter long!"

Nadedzha Petrova, Mladen, September 2019

[1] This meme refers to the television series "Game of Thrones;" the character Eddard Stark is modified to appear to be stirring a pot brimming with *lyutenitsa*, a very popular winter preserve in Bulgaria. In the series, "Winter is Coming" is the motto of the House of Stark who rules the far north. It is a warning to always be ready to fight, prepared, and vigilant. Making preserves for winter in Bulgaria resonates deeply with that idea, although this image humorously converts a call to arms into a call for domestic food preservation.

August and September are especially busy months in Bulgaria preserving food. A crush of garden, orchard, and forest products are ready for harvest during this time and preserve makers are in full swing. In this chapter I will describe detailed scenes of everyday life at the end of summer that are emblematic of routine practices carried out by many Bulgarian families. I will focus on one extended family whose members live and work in two cities just north of the Balkan Mountains. During the summer they spend a good deal of time in their familial village of Mladen. I visited Mladen several times over the years (in 2008, 2018, 2019, and 2021), most often in late summer. On those trips, I joined in multi-generational family gatherings, which included the oldest family member who was a full-time village resident. I spent time in gardens, nearby forests, and vineyards. While many of the foods from these sources were preserved in the village, they were also mobile, travelling in jars and bottles to urban cupboards.

Personal History and Connections to Mladen

During our Peace Corps service, Irina, the administrative assistant for the Vice Mayor of Culture worked in the office adjacent to the one my husband and I shared in the municipality of Gabrovo. She was patient with our Bulgarian, and she embodied Bulgarian hospitality. Over the course of our two years as office neighbors we became friends, drinking coffee on breaks and working together on projects. One of those projects was to make a self-guided audio tour of Gabrovo in both English and Bulgarian for the tourism office. Irina helped to connect us with her mother, Tatyana, who was then director of the House of Humor and Satire, a national museum located in Gabrovo. Over the course of two years our ties grew, a pleasant mix of work and friendship, as we would see each other at the office and socialize on weekends. Like many Bulgarians I met, Irina and her husband, Tihomir, as well as Tatyana and her husband, Andrei, had apartments in the city as well as several familial village homes. Therefore, their time was split between Gabrovo and weekend visits to their familial villages. They also enjoyed travelling during the summer, especially within Bulgaria with occasional trips to Turkish resorts.

I visited the village of Mladen for the first time in late summer 2008. That day is a treasured memory from our last few weeks of Peace Corps service. Irina and Tihomir drove my husband and I out to the village, about one hour northwest of Gabrovo. Irina's maternal grandfather had built a house there, and the family would often visit on the weekends. We toured the garden with Irina's mother, Tatyana. It was packed with all kinds of plants including currants, gooseberries,

tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, cucumbers, beans, pumpkins, many types of herbs and flowers, and grape vines. There was a small orchard with walnut and plum trees as well as a medlar (*Mespilus germanica)* and a mulberry tree. After touring the garden, Andrei guided us up the hill to the nearby forest of oak and hornbeam (*Carpinus)* trees, the ground carpeted with a thick duff of decomposing leaves. Under the shady canopy, he taught us how to hunt for bright yellow chanterelle mushrooms (*pachi krak*) and the harder to find boletus mushrooms. Andrei showed us how to harvest the mushrooms by carefully using a small knife to cut each stem close to the ground. When the mesh bag he was carrying was full of mushrooms, we returned to the house and enjoyed an enormous lunch that we cooked together. Though rather than cooking them immediately, Andrei saved the mushrooms to send home with us as a gift. Tihomir grilled the meat, we ladies sliced tomatoes and cucumbers for the salad, and Tatyana heated up stuffed cabbage leaves that she had stayed up late to make the night before. With all the food on the table, chairs crowded around, we toasted with Andrei's fiery grape rakiya and started in on our salad.

Over the years, through emails, cards and eventually Facebook, I kept in touch with Irina and her family. When I arrived back in Bulgaria to start research for this dissertation, they graciously hosted me and my family many times. I am filled with gratitude for all the knowledge and time they shared. But most of all, I treasure the friendships that have grown, even at a distance, over 15 years. We have gone from young married couples to families with children, watched our parents begin retirement, and gone through the ups and downs of life as we enter middle age.

The next two sections focus on my first trip back to Mladen in 2019 on a day that revolved around distilling plum rakiya, and then my last trip to Mladen before I left Bulgaria in September 2021. These scenes reflect this family's typical, late-summer life when relatives gathered, mixing leisure and work, putting up the harvest for winter.

Making Rakiya: September 14, 2019

It was a golden, early fall day when I emerged from Irina and Tihomir's car along with their daughter Zhuzhi. I hadn't been to their home in Mladen for 11 years, but as I pushed through the garden gate it was still very familiar. Irina's mom, Tatyana, welcomed me back to her family's village home with a hug and kisses. In 1923, her father, a physician, had built the house of stone, wood and plaster. The large, enclosed yard provided ample space for fruit trees, a line of

beehives underneath them, a substantial vegetable garden, flower beds, several long rows of grape vines, and two grassy enclosed areas separated by low rock walls.

Tatyana walked me around the yard, narrating as she showed me various plants and buildings and recalled her childhood days. She described their two cows, which had names like pets, and two oxen. Attached to the back of the house there was a corn crib and a hayloft, though these weren't really being used anymore since they no longer kept any animals. In the past, the crib would be filled with dried field corn harvested from the fields. Preparing the corn was a massive job that involved pulling the husks back from the ears, then tying them all together to hang and dry for winter and she said that they would accomplish this work by hosting a *tlaka* (traditional work party) of friends, neighbors, and family who also enjoyed a large meal when the work was done. Though it was certainly a practical job that needed to be done, many people shared fond memories with me (in person and on Facebook) of gatherings that included singing, talking, and eating together along with the work (Karastoyanov and Tumnev 1981, 115). The literature also describes a *sedenka* (plural *sedenki),* another type of party that also mixed work and play; young women would gather to do the practical work of embroidery or lace making and then come together with young men to listen to music and socialize (Forsyth 1996,63). According to two local historians, Mladen residents would sometimes hold *sedenki* outdoors around a giant bonfire or, during the cold winter months, indoors around the light of lanterns or lamps (Karastoyanov and Tumnev 1981, 115). Though my acquaintances generally described sedenki and tlaka as historic practices, work parties related to food preservation continued to be a common contemporary practice, organized around the agricultural calendar and provided a reason for the family to gather on that particular September day.

As Tatyana and I finished our tour of the yard she led me over to a grassy area fenced off by a low rock wall. There we found Irina's father, Andrei, uncle Stefan, and great uncle Petar deeply engrossed in their big project for the day, distilling plum rakiya. Tatyana's description of the work party to fill the corn crib reminded me of this scene in many ways. Making rakiya blended a good deal of leisure and socializing with the more labor-intensive tasks. It provided a time-sensitive occasion for multiple generations to gather in the village to ensure that the plums would be preserved and not go to waste.

Petar was Tatyana's paternal uncle; her cousin Stefan was his son. Stefan's wife was Nadezhda, whom everyone called Nadi for short. Nadi taught pre-school, and Stefan worked as an engineer in a food processing plant in the nearby town of Sevlievo. In the early 1990s, an Austrian firm in Greece employed Stefan for 6 years during the "hard times." This was a job of necessity since he couldn't find any work in Bulgaria. He would work three weeks on and one week off and recalled this period as terribly difficult since he had to be away from his young family. While working abroad, Stefan picked up some English, which he sprinkled throughout the conversation for my benefit. Though Stefan and Nadi lived and worked in Sevlievo, they usually visited Malden on the weekends to spend time with Petar and help with the gardening and preserve making. Petar was the only one of the extended family who lived full time in Mladen, a rather lonely existence since his wife had passed away a couple of years before.

Figure 8.2. Photograph of Petar sealing the kazan with dough. September 14, 2019)

The family gathered around the *kazan*, a large copper still. When it was open, the large bottom portion of the kazan resembled a giant cauldron, and the men filled it with fermented plum mash. The copper kazan was composed of three large pieces: the bottom piece, a slightly smaller top cap, and a pipe for the steam to travel through to the condenser. This meant that there were three seams where the metal pieces fit together. Petar demonstrated to me how he used flour and water to create a dough that he then deftly rolled in his hands to form a long rope. He took this dough rope and pressed it along the seams of the pieces of the kazan to stick them together (Figure 8.2)

Figure 8.3. Photograph of kazan over wood fire. September 14, 2019.

As the kazan heated up the dough cooked and hardened, creating an airtight seal. "It's a Bulgarian gasket!" Stefan joked. The large copper kazan was charred black on the outside from sitting on top of a roaring wood fire (Figure 8.3). Long branches fed the fire; the men periodically pushed them under the kazan as the wood burned down. This saved the step of chopping the wood. As the fire burned down, there was an accumulating pile of thick gray ashes and hot coals between the cement blocks that supported the kazan.

Figure 8.4. Photograph of fermenting plums in barrels. September 14, 2019.

This distillation process was not the first step for making the rakiya; that actually started a few weeks prior. The family picked and lightly smashed the plums and then put them into 50-gallon plastic vats to ferment for 14 days. Andrei took me down to see the vats of fermenting plums (Figure 8.4), which were stored in a stone cellar filled with a slightly sour yeasty smell. Thousands of fruit flies hovered low over the fruit. Interestingly, the flies were not pests. Rather, they were an essential part of the fermentation process. Andrei, who told me about the flies, also explained that sometimes he had to add sugar if the mash was not fermenting correctly, but otherwise it was just natural fermentation. After two weeks. the fermented plum mash was ready for distillation.

Though this was a male-dominated task, Nadi also took turns feeding the fire and monitoring the still. She joked about being a woman involved in rakiya making by feminizing the word for "rakiya master" and conferring the title on herself, which everyone chuckled about. Though clearly familiar with the process and involved in several of the tasks, the women would always defer to the men when I asked questions about making rakiya. The opposite was true when it came to questions about preserving food. Even though both men women participated, everyone acknowledged that the women were the experts in preserving food. These idealized and gendered divisions of labor, with men responsible for alcohol and women responsible for food, were also reflected in how consumers of the products described and remembered them. For example, people would refer to their grandmother's or their mother's lyutenitsa and jam and their grandfather's or their father's rakiya and wine.

The rakiya's distillation was finished when no more liquid came out of the condenser into the little bucket positioned underneath the spigot. Nadi monitored this and let everyone know when it stopped dripping. Then the men gathered again to rake the charcoal and ashes out from the firepit and let the kazan cool.

Figure 8.5. Photograph of kazan cooling. September 14, 2019.

This process took at least an hour. Once the kazan was cool enough to safely handle, the men broke the dough seams and removed the pipe and lid. The bottom part contained the remnants of the cooked-down plum sludge. Wearing heavy work-gloves, Stefan carefully scooped out the still steaming remnants with a bucket and threw it over the wall into the garden area. "This will work like a compost," he explained as he distributed it over the ground. The three men washed every part of the empty kazan and carefully scraped off the remaining bits of dough along the seams. They then re-filled the pot with another batch of fermented plum mash, sealed it with fresh dough, and started a new fire. As they went through this process, Nadi explained that the ashes and charcoal could be used for cooking. She said that in the past the ashes were used to make a hominy-like corn dish and that vegetables like peppers and eggplants could be tucked into the hot coals to roast and make into *kyopoolu.*[2]

Figure 8.6. Photograph of Petar washing the still. September 14, 2019.

There were moments of intense activity during the distillation process, but there were also long periods of down time while the group waited for the kazan to cool. Family stories emerged as everyone worked together; during those quiet moments, I asked questions about the processes. Family members had little side projects going on in their houses and gardens; they would toggle back and forth as needed. During the first long break, Andrei, Irina, and I walked away from the kazan and around the corner to the front of the house where there were long rows of grape vines. Andrei named each of the varieties growing including *Gumza*, and a deep purple variety that had an intense, fruity taste. These are "*Hamburski Misket"* Irina told me while deftly plucking the

[2] Kyopoolu (кьопоолу) is a thick, savory spread made from roasted eggplants and peppers seasoned with garlic, vinegar and salt.

good ones and spitting seeds onto the ground; “they are my favorite.” Andrei wore his typical mischievous grin as he picked up his metal clippers and began to snip off bunches of grapes. He carefully placed them in a recycled plastic bucket as he told me more about his life.

Figure 8.7. Photograph of Andrei harvesting grapes. September 14, 2019.

Figure 8.8. Photograph of Hamburski Misket grapes. September 14, 2019.

He was once an engineer who made and set up machines in textile factories. Although he travelled throughout Bulgaria to do this work, most of it was typically centered in Gabrovo. But the end of socialism marked the serious decline of textile manufacturing in Gabrovo and throughout the rest of the country. Gabrovo, once a major manufacturing center, he explained, had no working textile factories left. For Andrei, this wasn’t a serious personal loss since he was headed towards retirement, but he lamented the decline as an overall loss for Bulgaria and the region’s economy. Andrei was no fan of socialism and bragged that he was never a member of the socialist party, but he had been fully employed during that time. He was proud of his expertise as an engineer and Gabrovo’s one-time reputation as a hub for manufacturing high quality goods.

When I asked why he made rakiya, Andrei turned to face me with wide eyes, throwing up his hands and exclaimed with a laugh, "What am I supposed to do, throw away the plums?" They indeed had many plum trees in the yard; plums thrive in this region, which is famous for plum production. All the fruit ripens at roughly the same time, and while Tatyana also dried and jarred many of them, the sheer volume of plums easily outstripped the family's capacity to preserve them in those ways. Rakiya used hundreds of gallons of plums and conserved them as long-storing alcohol.

Figure 8.9. Photograph of "White Pepper" (*Byala Kapiya*) seeds. September 14, 2019.

Nadi fetched me from the grape vines to walk me across the street and show me around Petar's house and garden. She and Stefan came out on the weekends from Sevlievo. Petar lived in Mladen full time; he kept chickens and a garden. He also worked in his large wood workshop, which was full of materials and tools, including some machines that Petar had devised himself. Nadi proudly showed me the traditional short table and three-legged stools that Petar had recently completed. He also built a wooden veranda that overlooked the garden and covered a large table.

On the table were carefully labelled sheets of newspaper with seeds saved from peppers and tomatoes (Figures 8.10 and 8.11). Nadi said that some of the seeds they kept were handed down from their parents; they bought other seeds from the store. They also purchased some small starts from the market in the early spring, a fairly common practice amongst many gardeners who sourced their seeds and plant starts in numerous ways. In the early spring markets were expanded to accommodate many vendors who sold starts, and the gardening stores overflowed with commercial seeds. But many people also saved a small number of seeds from year to year and tended perennial plants from their parents or grandparents. Many people described experimenting with new varieties of vegetables from purchased seeds such as those for cherry

Figure 8.10. Photograph of "Red Heart Tomato" (*Rozovo Tsurtse Domat*) seeds. September 14, 2019.

tomatoes. When I asked why people saved seeds, I received a variety of answers. They valued some varieties for unique qualities like flavor, juiciness, or a form that made them superior to other varieties. Gardeners also valued early ripening varieties or those that promised a convenient harvesting schedule.

In the chicken coop there was a flock of mixed types of chickens and one beautiful, calm rooster who sported an iridescent green tail and orange feathers. There were black and white speckled chickens, white chickens, and copper-colored chickens. Nadi said that she didn't keep track of where they laid their eggs, so we hunted about in their enclosure until we discovered one, still warm to the touch, in a metal barrel. Nadi wanted to take pictures of me picking vegetables, so we went around the garden gathering eggplants, carrots, tomatoes and peppers. Next to the garden, Nadi's husband kept bees and had about 15 hives painted yellow and blue in the enclosed yard's orchard. He also had machinery for extracting the honey that she showed me on the way down to the cellar. Even this short tour revealed incredible diversity in the productive capacity of the family.

Figure 8.11. Photograph of jars serving as a memorial. September 14, 2019.

We then visited the cellar, although Nadi was a bit shy and asked that I only photograph the "good parts" and not the "chaos." On the floor were many boxes filled with jars of preserves including tomatoes, jams, fruit compote, and cucumber pickles. Those were the most recently made jars, the ones that they would eat that winter. The newly made jars were in boxes on the floor and empty jars were tucked here and there, ready to be re-washed and filled as needed. There were other jars neatly displayed on floor to ceiling wooden shelves that lined the length of the back wall (see Figure 8.12). These preserves were from Nadi's mother-in-law who had died a couple of years before; they represented a lasting tribute to her final seasons on earth. Nadi wouldn't use or throw away these jars; "I won't touch them," she told me seriously. Her mother-in-law was the one who taught

Nadi how to make preserves and Nadi spoke of her with great fondness. This vernacular memorial was a physical manifestation of what in most cases are more ethereal memories related to winter foods and loved ones who had passed away. It was a powerful experience to see and admire the work of someone who is still loved and remembered, whom I will never meet, but whose practices have been handed down in active form and whose jarred foods have been recruited into a new assemblage as a memorial.

Figure 8.12. Photograph of grilling meat. September 14, 2019.

While in the cellar I recorded Nadi's recipe for lyutenitsa, which she recited to me while holding a small ruby red jar of the most recent batch. I quoted her recipe at the beginning of this chapter. In addition to jarring foods, Nadi also made her own yogurt. She sourced the milk from a friend who kept a cow and sold a little milk informally. She showed me the small, lidded pot she was making it in. The milk must have been very rich because the yogurt had a thick layer of solid cream on top. It had a pleasant animal taste. Irina confided to me that she didn't really like homemade yogurt and at lunch she ate the store-bought kind instead. Yogurt was widely available and affordable in smalls shops and large supermarkets. Nadi also bought this industrially produced, commercial yogurt from time to time. But she preferred the taste and texture of homemade yogurt. However, these various ways of getting yogurt were not framed as oppositional. Nadi made strategic choices about when she opted for home-made versus commercial yogurt. Back at Tatyana and Andrei's house, Nadi filled up a low, cast-iron grill with hot coals from the rakiya fire. She sliced up thick pieces of homemade *slanina* (brined pork fat) and store bought *kyufte* (minced pork and beef patties seasoned with onion and cumin). She let me tend the grill (Figure 8.13) while we enjoyed the late afternoon sun turning the whitewashed walls of the house a creamy orange color. With the grilled meats in tow, we gathered around the inside table and ate a merry lunch. We started our meal with a cucumber and tomato salad from a large common dish in the center of the table, homemade yogurt and bread. As we ate our salad we toasted and drank some strong plum rakiya from the previous

year. Tatyana had also made peppers stuffed with rice and minced meat cooked in a yogurt sauce.

After feasting we all went back out in the yard to say our goodbyes. While I took one last look at the distillation process, Nadi asked me if we make rakiya in the U.S. I told her that my dad makes wine but that home-distilling hard liquor is illegal. At this everyone in the yard burst into laughter. Nadi replied, "Of course it is illegal to make it here too, but everybody does it."

Back in the apartment in Gabrovo, Irina showed me her cupboard full of jars (Figure 8.14). Her parents had given her some as had her husband's parents. Each time they returned from the village, they carried back a few more jars for their pantry. There were tomatoes, preserved pork, cornelian cherry compote, lyutenitsa and various kinds of jam including huckleberry and wild strawberry. She also had a few bottles of rakiya.

Figure 8.13. Photograph of jars in apartment pantry. September 14, 2019.

Drying Fruit and Visiting Cellars in Mladen: September 18, 2021

The road from Sevlievo was newly paved and snaked past the village of Krushevo before it entered Mladen. I took the first road to the right, a gravelly and partly paved affair, and followed it for about 500 meters before I saw Nadi, waving and pointing to a place to park my rental car.

I went through the familiar metal gate and called out, "Hello! I'm here!" as I came around the corner of the house to the flat patio at the bottom of the steps to the front door. There I found Andrei sitting on a very low chair, busy with the job of cleaning walnuts from their bright green husks. To his left he had a bucket of green walnuts that he had picked up off the ground after the wind had knocked them down the previous night. After slicing around the green husks to remove them from the walnut inside, he placed the green husk in another large bucket directly in front of him and then put the walnuts in a crate (see Figure 8.15).

"You should wear gloves," Irina scolded, since the husks stain skin a dark blackish-brown. "I hate gloves, hate them!" he insisted. There were a pair of gloves right next to him on the ground that he refused to use as he continued to slice open the husks, peel them off, and drop the walnuts into the crate. The mound of fresh, light tan walnuts in their shells grew taller as Andrei's thumbs grew increasingly black from the juice of the husks.

Figure 8.14. Photograph of Andrei husking walnuts. September 18, 2021.

He gave me the history of the walnut tree in the yard, from which he had collected these walnuts, "So that you can know the walnut tree." Like other food preservers, Andrei's relationship to his plants was intimate. During his time as a textile manufacturing engineer he travelled around the country installing and working on machines in factories. Once, he was in the city of Kazanlak and the area was "full of walnut trees." He brought back a cutting that a man gave him, and he planted it here in the yard. "After two years," he said, "it was as tall as I am." And now in 2021, after thirty years, it is a giant dominating the yard and giving almost more walnuts than he knew what to do with. He said he was very happy last year because he collected two very large buckets. He showed me that I could crack them in my palms with my bare hands. "They are absolutely fresh," he said when I commented on how delicious they were. He got up to show me where to put the husks and shells in the compost pile. Once he had husked the walnuts, Andrei would put them in a single layer in a pan or on newspapers out on the sunny terrace. They needed to "bake in the sun" for a while and get really dry to before they would be ready for storing.

I asked about his plum trees that year and if he had gathered any for making rakiya. He hopped up to show me the six giant barrels that he had fermenting. Together, we headed down into the cool stone basement beneath the house. The sharp, sour smell of fermenting fruit permeated the air. Those barrels "need to ferment 14 days before boiling for rakiya," he said. There were six large white and green 50-gallon barrels in the cellar, along with a couple of intermittently used large wooden barrels for aging wine. There was also an old wooden shelf with a clay pot that Tatyana later explained her grandmother used for making *katuk.*[3] On the way out, Andrei commented that the cellar was perfect for making fermented foods: "It is always between 14 and 20 degrees Celsius, all year," summer and winter, because "everything is rock."

Figure 8.15. Photograph of mashed plums fermenting in stone cellar. September 18, 2021.

Tatyana was kind enough to show me the collection of finished jars that she had made so far that year. She had arranged them in the first-floor rooms that used to belong to her grandmother. As we entered the rooms, she recounted the many memories connected to the space and various items. "Many years ago my grandmother lived here. Here she had the fireplace. Here she lived [during the winter] and only went upstairs to sleep. But during the summer she would sleep down here [too]. It is very cool. She would put the table outside, and there she had her sink. Without hot water, my God! And here she had her shelves where she would put her jars. And up here, she would hang up grapes." Tatyana described the process of hanging the grapes over rafters where they would dry nicely without molding and where mice couldn't reach them. By the new year, those grapes would have become raisins that would last until spring.

"Here, this is a water carrier," Tatyana explained as she pulled out a curved wooden carrying yoke. She took the wooden yoke outside to show me how it was used to carry water. She said people would carry water from the "end of the village" (and see Forsyth 1996, 59). She showed

[3] Katuk (катък): A thick, salty spread made from fresh milk inoculated with crushed sirene (white cheese) and left to ferment.

her granddaughter too, to which Zhuzhi distractedly answered "OK," while she continued to play with the puffy stray kitten she was trying to adopt. Tatyana continued with her story of the village fountains and explained that there used to be one at the end of the street, maybe 200-300 meters away.

> There used to be many fountains. The village had several from where people would carry water. The fountains would carry the name of the neighborhood where they were located. So, this fountain was called "Kozi Rozhka" because the people who lived in this part of the village were originally from the Kozi Rog village near Gabrovo, and our people relocated here, and so their fountain was called "Kozi Rozhka." The other fountain up in the village is called "Dumnishkata" because it is in the neighborhood called "Dumnishka" where the people who lived there were from the village near Gabrovo called Dumnitsa.

I asked why so many people relocated here to this village. She answered,

> Because in those particular Gabrovian villages there wasn't enough land for working in agriculture. The earth wasn't good… And here by comparison, especially the area towards Pavlikeni and beyond there was workable land that would feed them. They could grow grain and wheat, everything. The gardens had little streams that would come from the forest that people used to irrigate things. In those times they would have grown very different vegetables than the ones here in the garden. Tomatoes came very late to Bulgaria, in the 40's of the last century. In fact, my grandmother in the beginning would gather them green. They didn't know that you had to wait until they were red. And the green ones aren't that tasty to eat so they used them only to make turshia. So, they came very late. In those gardens they would sow peppers, watermelons, melons [*pupeshi*], all other kinds of vegetables of the more common kinds. But the tomato, the blue tomato [eggplant], later. They sowed a lot of pumpkins. They planted corn, the corn came earlier. And with the corn they would feed their animals. Or with millet, like for the chickens, my grandmother would feed them millet. Millet, rye those which now fewer people sow. Already now grains that are cultivated are not the old varieties [starite sortove]. And there it is. Once corn started to be sowed for the animals, things were very different. Sunflowers they came later [for making oil]. And before that people would just

> use lard. My grandmother only used lard. She had a jar, it was three liters, and she would buy oil in it that would last the whole summer…and she had a container of very nice lard. She would get it fresh, render it and put apples in it for their aroma…In terms of milk products, there was exceptional and healthy milk and *sirene* [white cheese], katuk.

I commented that I thought katuk was very tasty. "That katuk is not the same as my grandmother's katuk. I remember. The tastes you remember," she emphasized by pointing her index finger to her head. "There is a memory for taste, there is a memory for smell. My grandmother would make it in a clay jar [*delva*]. Do you know what a delva is? It is a vessel made of clay. On that shelf in the basement, like that one right there in the corner. Inside was yogurt and sirene that was put into it. Crushed into it. But you have to crush it into it [by hand]. Now the process is too fast." Katuk is commercially available in grocery stores, and I had eaten it in restaurants, but Tatyana did not think either was authentic. She emphasized that the product labeled katuk did not match her embodied taste memories. She was adamant that the process needed to be done by hand, the milk fermented slowly in a clay pot so that it would taste right and constitute "real" katuk.

As we began the tour of the year's jarred preserves, Tatyana reminded me that these represented only a portion of her work. Some jars were already in Gabrovo at her apartment and also in the pantry at Irina's, Tihomir's, and Zhuzhi's apartment. She opened the old wooden doors of her grandmother's bureau to show me lines of small jars containing tomatoes and "the sweet things" that she had made for the year.

Tatyana described the contents of the jars by sight; nothing was labeled. "Here we have tomatoes, cut and pureed. All the sweet things, figs, raspberries, apricots, quince." She picked up a jar to inspect it in the light, "Are these blackberries?" she asked herself. "No, sour cherries [*vishni*]," she decided. There was also wild strawberry jam and a mix of wild strawberries and raspberries. She told me that she didn't use pectin to thicken her jams but just cooked them down slowly with sugar. Some of the jars were recycled Gerber baby food jars that she had got from a friend who had recently saved them. She also had baby food jars from when her granddaughter Zhuzhi was little and they would get baby food from the "Milk Kitchen" in Gabrovo. These were slightly larger than the Gerber jars but also with a screw cap. Moving along the shelf I pointed to a jar, "What is this?" I asked, "syrup?" "It must be, yes," she said,

picking up the bottle and tipping it in the light to get a better look. "Well, maybe jelly from blackberry because it is very dark or maybe from sour cherries." Then she pointed out another row of jars, "Zhuzhi likes jam made only with raspberry, so I make that, too." Like many

Figure 8.16. Photograph of jars filled with preserved fruits. September 18, 2021.

preserve makers, Tatyana adjusted her preserve making to suit the tastes and desires of her family.

She moved to another bureau that was three-quarters full of clean, empty jars. The full jars in this cupboard included turshia for which Tatyana recited this recipe: "I made this turshia from *kambi* (a small, round kind of sweet pepper), carrots, *tselina* (celeriac), garlic, vinegar, salt, and sugar. I always put in a little sugar." There were also some small jars of preserved cherry tomatoes. She continued through this cupboard pointing out short, squat jars containing mixed vegetables including okra. I commented that I very rarely saw okra and asked if she grew it in her garden. "No," she said, "I bought it." She agreed that okra was becoming rarer. So, she

gave me the basic ingredient list, aside from the okra, "green beans, blue tomatoes or *patladjan* [eggplant], carrots, peppers, tomatoes." She used this jarred, stewed vegetable mix to make another dish called *gyuvech* in the winter. "Gyuvech is a dish that you make from sliced potatoes, and on top of the potatoes you put this," she said as she pointed to the jar she was holding in her hand. "You mix in the vegetables, and bake it, with a little oil and red pepper. You use a middle-sized pan about like this," she said holding up her hands to show about a 9 x 13-inch size. "For that size you use two jars. You add a little water, red pepper, and oil, and that's it. You can also add salt." These types of partially prepared foods were common in many cellars. They reduced kitchen work during the winter and provided a pop of color on the winter table. Often people remarked that these types of preserves were "a taste of summer in the winter."

Figure 8.17. Photograph of gyuvech in jars. September 18, 2021.

We went back into the cellar to continue the tour. "There are plums [*slivi*] but also yellow, wild plums [*djanki*]." There were quite a few of these trees in the yard. She had also jarred many cornelian cherries [*drenki*], but she explained that she had given all those jars to Tihomir and Irina, so she didn't have any herself in Mladen. I asked about the glass bottles. "They are from my mother, from a long time ago," she said, "But you can still find these to buy if you want. They are one liter. Then all you need to do is buy the new caps. These jars [over here] I remember from when I was a student." Moving on, she pulled out a small jar with a screw-top cap, "These are hot peppers for Andrei from last year." Inside the jar was a mix of small, green and red spicy peppers, mixed with whole garlic cloves, black peppercorns, parsley, and *tselina,* all floating in vinegar. Tatyana wrinkled her nose, explaining that she didn't like spicy things at all, but Andrei wanted her to make them for him. Tatyana went on, "I like [sweet] red pepper a lot. But spicy

peppers, no!" At this point Andrei chimed in that he ate the spicy peppers as a "treatment" to keep healthy. They grew a small bush of spicy peppers in a pot just for him for these purposes. This marked them as functional foods, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 9.

Figure 8.18. Photograph of Tatyana with pickled vegetables. September 18, 2021.

Tatyana remembered that she was warming up our lunch in the oven on the terrace so we went upstairs through the house and out to the terrace so that she could keep an eye on it. There she continued to show me some of her current food preservation projects. Irina and Tatyana arranged some chairs around the table for us to sit in while we talked. "Here, take this chair. It's the nicest place," Irina insisted. There were several large, round, metal pans sitting on the newspaper covered table. Two pans were filled with figs in various stages of drying. "These figs look like chestnuts," Irina commented; as they dried their color and shape were very different than when they were harvested from the tree. "These ones have already dried, and these ones are still drying," Tatyana responded, as she showed us how to flip them over (which she did a couple of times a day) and then pressed them down slightly in the center. Dried this way, they formed into little disks that she could then stack and arrange in a circle. When they were properly dried, she would put them either into nylon sacks or into the freezer. "These ones are almost ready," she said (see Figure 8.20).

As Andrei poured more freshly husked walnuts into a round metal pan with hammered details around the outside edge, Tatyana commented, "This was my grandmother's pan." She smoothed out the walnuts into an even layer to dry in the sun. On the terrace there were also a couple of plates of bean seeds of various colors and types and a large round pan of shiny, drying plums. Tatyana brought over the plums and explained to Irina and me that she cut them up, put them in a colander nested inside a bowl, and then poured hot sugar syrup over them. She let them soak for a few minutes before pulling the colander out of the bowl and letting the excess syrup drain. She said this wasn't to cook them; coating them in the sugary syrup would prevent mold and keep worms from ruining them. To validate her traditional technique, Tatyana recounted an extreme instance of successful preservation: "Uncle Petar down there, the father-in law of Nadi, when he was cleaning out his house he discovered in a cupboard, from my grandmother […] some sun-dried apples. But because they were made in this way, after years, maybe 20 years 30 years even, there were no worms or mold! And that's how I make them." Irina piped up "I wouldn't eat apples after 20 years!" Her mother retorted, "Oh they didn't eat them! The point is that they found them, and they were still preserved without any problems." When I asked how she was going to use the sun-dried plums, Tatyana responded, "Either for eating or for *oshaf* [a soup made from stewed, dried fruit] for Christmas eve. Christmas eve we will put these in that dish. You put the dried fruit in water on the stove to heat it through and boil it a little bit with a little sugar if the fruit isn't sweet." Those preserved plums had a specific use as part of the Christmas Eve table; while they could just be used for everyday eating, they were also a component of a special once-a-year holiday dish.

Tatyana checked the food in the oven and then said, "But come, are you hungry? Let's sit to eat! And then after you can go for a walk." We ate salad made from red onion, roasted red peppers, and tomatoes dressed with salt, oil and vinegar. We toasted with Andrei's grape rakia poured from an old Inverness whiskey bottle and drank Fanta on the side. There were also slices of sirene on the table and sliced bread, which Andrei said was in short supply at the village store. I ate a slice slathered in homemade kyoopolu (savory roasted eggplant spread). For the main dish we ate rice cooked with vegetables, forest mushrooms, chicken, and turkey meat. We all agreed that it was very tasty, and Tanya said it was because cooking the dish with bouillon from the bones of the turkey made it especially flavorful. For dessert we ate piles of grapes and figs from the garden.

After lunch Tihomir, Irina, and I walked in the meadows above the village that overlook the Stamboliski reservoir. It was a beautiful scene with the sun breaking through the clouds and lighting up the hills and water below. After our walk, we went across the street to visit great-uncle Petar, and cousins Stefan and Nadi. Tatyana and Andrei also joined us. Nadi made some coffee for us in a long-handled coffee pot over a gas burner and carefully strained out the grounds as she poured it into little white porcelain cups decorated with painted flowers. She also mixed homemade fruit syrup with water to make a juice. "I don't know what kind it is, maybe elderberry, maybe currant, maybe sour cherry?" she said, as she surveyed the dark liquid. "It tastes like sour cherry to me; it's good!" I said. Tatyana brought out a homemade cake studded with plums, and Nadi brought out a chocolate and coconut rolled cake from the store. Our plates were overflowing with all the sweets. We had a lively, but friendly, conversation and debated about the idea of "freedom" and the Covid vaccine. They all discussed the news about the most recent vaccine mandates in Italy and the U.S.

Nadi offered to show me the jars she had made so far that summer. She had put up a lot of tomatoes, peppers and some sweet things like figs and peach jam (she gave me a jar as a gift). I commented that there weren't very many peaches that year. She agreed heartily and said, "Yes, I had to *buy* the peaches this year to make jam." I noticed the jars from her mother-in-law were still in place on the shelves. "I won't touch them" she repeated soberly. She went on to say it would be too painful for Petar after losing his wife to have her jars taken down, moved or cleaned out.

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I somehow managed to eat all my dessert and started to say my goodbyes. I was intentional about saying that I didn't know when I would be back. For the first time I didn't have a concrete plan to return. I wanted them to know how much they meant to me and how much I wished

them well. Particularly with the Delta variant of Covid raging and the extraordinarily high mortality rates in Bulgaria, I was very cognizant that, even if I did return, it was possible that everyone gathered at this table might not survive. I had such a hard time with this. I kept tearing up while saying goodbye to Irina and really couldn't express myself very well in words. I hoped that she would know from my tears how much I cared for her. Still crying, I climbed into the little red Ford Fiesta. As I started to drive down the road, I rolled down the window to bid my final farewells to Petar and Stefan. They were cutting up logs for firewood on the sidewalk in front of Petar's house. "I wish you health and wellness and every good thing!" I yelled, through my tears. "Until we meet again!" they replied, "Until we meet again!" I answered back.

Saving Food, Preserving Memories, and Living Traditions

While making preserves, people often shared memories linked to both positive aspects of socialist times such as a robust manufacturing economy, as well as the darker legacies, which for Tatyana's family included the killing of her grandfather and displacement of her grandmother, aunt and mother. During these conversations people would also often compare and contrast the necessity of making jars during socialist times with the contemporary situation. While in the past the problem was insufficient quality or quantity of industrially produced foods, today there were concerns over low wages and pensions, quality control, and/or aesthetics. Though the political and economic regimes were very different, some of the outcomes were the same: economic precarity, a strong desire to use domestic production as a hedge against uncertainty, as well as to seek pleasure and meaning outside of consumer-based pursuits.

Women like Tatyana and Nadi learned to make jars during socialism; however, because they were working and had small children their mothers and mothers in-law tended to make the bulk of the jars for the family. They carry on this tradition for their now working-aged children. The multi-generational gatherings to preserve food provided an opportunity for the younger generations to observe or participate in these practices, even if passively (Lave and Wenger 1991). Throughout all these visits Tatyana took the opportunity to explain various kinds of knowledge to her granddaughter or share family history associated with particular objects. Much to Tatyana's distress, her granddaughter was not nearly as interested in learning these things as I was.

Tatyana refuted the poverty discourse related to home-based food preservation and spoke against perceptions that they were "peasants." Instead, she described herself and her family as "cultured people." When asked why they made jars Tatyana, Nadi and Andrei each responded by saying things like it was "not because of poverty," but rather "because our mothers and grandmothers did this," for aesthetic reasons such as taste and texture, "to be healthy," and to prevent waste of homegrown foods.

Growing and preserving food was and is very labor intensive, and there were times when Tatyana would express frustration at being tied to the garden. But this work was also interspersed with more pleasurable activities like visiting and eating with neighbors and friends and spending time outside in the fresh air away from the grind of city life. Homemade foods were a point of pride; when I was treated to various forms of hospitality as a guest, food was central. This was demonstrated when people pointed out each dish on a table that was home-grown or homemade (*domashna,* домашна), and also by comments like, "you can't buy anything like this in a store."

But even these homemade and home-preserved foods were intertwined unabashedly with industrial (and sometimes global) food chains through the sugar and spices that went into jarred foods, as well as the coffee, sodas, boxed juices, and factory-made bread, all available for purchase at the village store. Home-based provisioning and preservation provided a significant amount of food as an alternative to the corporate industrial food regime, while not confronting it directly or seeking to remove all reliance on it. This frames home-based food preservation as a practice based in desire and self-determination, although within constrained choices.

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CHAPTER 9

FOOD THAT SAVES: EATING, HEALING, HERBS, AND RITUALS

*I'm becoming a big fan of winter foods. The satisfying feeling of preserving something you have grown, at a time when nature is too absorbed and encapsulated to give ... I have a gradually growing enthusiasm and a sense of security as I watch the wooden shelves in the storeroom * refilling with beautiful, glamorous glass jars and bottles filled with mixed, solid colors, rounded shapes, and different textures. In itself, quite an aesthetic experience. Only the metal caps have a more modern, cold look. But they are a practical necessity. Otherwise, oiled paper, wax and twine are much more beautiful and delicate to me, ...I think there are old recipes for paper caps, …. But for now, I'm thinking of using the practical convenience of the modern 😊. I wonder when and who invented the caps, how many nameless geniuses do we constantly lose track of ?*

** A well-insulated stone room, lean-to or free-standing shed, which in the Balkans is used as a cellar and basement, but above ground.*

(Maksimova, 2019, 13)

This morning I picked wild strawberries - as a friend says, they greatly humble the little red berries…you deeply bow and don't move from there for at least a few hours - and next I'll make jam. Now for … - squeezing and stirring elderberries, soaking strawberries, cleaning, washing bottles, jars and caps, and tonight- bottling and "jarring". Another chock-full day.

Wild strawberries are not only one of the most delicious jams ever but also a great remedy. One of my books here recommends them ardently for ... well, for more or less everything; from kidney stones and gallstones to hardening arteries and rheumatism, bronchitis and gastritis, constipation and poor eyesight. Everything is used - fruits and leaves, flowers and stems.

(Maksimova 2019, 29-30)

The importance of food for supporting and restoring health was a common theme that emerged in my fieldnotes as well as interview transcripts and social media posts. For example, while perusing the fruit and vegetable stalls at the Women's Market in Sofia, a friend of mine pointed to the foods she was instructed by her doctor to eat because of gallstones. In the late winter and early spring months, people made enthusiastic posts on Facebook about finding the first of the nettles, and more than one friend showed me how to cook them into soups and porridges. I was told "they are good for the organism" and that after winter nettles were particularly restorative. Preparers identified specific preserved foods and drinks for their particular medicinal benefits. For example, when I was touring Vassi's cellar, she told me that the fermented lingonberry drink was good for kidney function. And her son, Borko, stated that "Rakiya [brandy] and wine are the most important-- first for health, then for the soul and third to celebrate". I received many

recipes and remedies for how to use rakiya "for health". Many people touted homemade yogurt as beneficial for the digestive system.

Domestic foodways practices in Bulgaria, then, demonstrate how people conceptualize and connect foods beyond basic nutrition to health and healing. This includes using foods as prevention and treatment of specific ailments or to generally promote whole body health. Drawing on ethonobotanical research conducted in Italy with populations of ethnic Albanians, Quave and Pieroni characterized the relationship between food and medicine in their subject populations in this way: 1) plants that were used in a multifunctional way, with no overlap between categorizations of food and medicine, 2) plants consumed for general health benefits, termed "functional foods," and 3) foods eaten for a particular medical purpose, termed "medicinal foods" (2006, 108-110).

While functional and medicinal foods (and drinks) were a common topic of conversation, midsummer in 2021 was exemplary in illuminating various ways that eating, healing, and preservation are intertwined. I spent that week of the summer solstice celebrating *Enyovden* (St. John's Day) in two Central Balkan villages, including the very small village of Yavor, where I spent a couple of days with Nadezhda Maksimova.

I first heard about Nadezhda from my friend Kristiyan when we were catching up over beers in Sofia in May of 2021. He told me about her book, *Nine Cycles of Seasons*, which he described as part diary, part philosophy, part recipe book. "There are many recipes for making jars in it" he said. A few weeks later another friend who worked on village revitalization projects gave me her contact information and urged me to call her since he considered her an expert on home-based food preservation. When I did reach out, she graciously invited me to join a group of women who were gathering at her house in Yavor to learn about food, herbs and celebrate *Enyovden*. Enyovden (St. John's Day) is June 24th and traditionally celebrated in Bulgaria with various rituals related to the sun, water, and medicinal herbs. Between the festivities of the holiday and her duties as hostess, Nadezhda and I sat in her kitchen to record interviews. She described the links between preserving food and health in deep connection with the soil and the cyclical rhythm of the seasons.

Nadezhda earned income through her work as an herbalist. She gathered and processed herbs, made various herbal preparations for treating humans and animals, and also taught people about

herbalism and functional and medicinal foods. By the time I visited her, she had been living for thirteen years on her "homestead", as she called it, with her dogs, cats, bees, and plants. Nadezhda cultivated and preserved food extensively from her permaculture garden and orchards. She also foraged from forests and meadows. These activities were foundational to her livelihood strategies both for personal subsistence consumption and also generating income.

Getting to Yavor

Getting to Yavor was challenging. After a harrowing drive over the Balkan Mountains, negotiating several detours and torn up roads, I missed the last major turn. This meant that I ended up at the outer edge of the town of Tryavna, knowing that I needed to head back up into the hills. I turned the car around and pulled over to ask directions from two police officers parked on the side of the road at the city limits. When I asked how to get to Yavor, the younger officer shrugged his shoulders and put out his bottom lip indicating he had no idea. I was a bit surprised because I knew it was somewhere nearby, no more than a couple of miles away. The older policeman thought for a minute and then said "Oh yes! Go back up the hill. You will see a white memorial to some or another hero on the right-hand side. Turn right and follow that road. Then you will have to look for signs. It is probably on the left".

So, I drove back up the hill, past the monument to some hero, and down the road. Off to the left there was a single-track asphalt road. I looked carefully and found the sign attached to a big tree, surrounded by meadows on one side and potato fields on another, Yavor (see Figure 9.2).

Figure 9.1. Photograph of road leading to Yavor. June 22, 2021.

After parking my car in a pasture under a sour cherry tree, I introduced myself to Nadezhda. She in turn introduced me to the other women gathered for the *Enyovden* celebrations and herb

gathering lessons. The first two were friends, both named Maria.[1] They were middle aged, one tall with dark hair and glasses, the other shorter with blond hair and very faint freckles. They were both slender, wearing athletic pants, t-shirts, and running shoes. There was another woman, Teodora,[2] slightly older than the others with thick gray hair, cut in a blunt bob pulled back into a ponytail. She was wearing lightweight cargo pants and a brightly colored checked button-down shirt over a sporty tank top. As I entered the gate to the garden, I saw that Teodora had come up to the village on an electric assist bike with flower covered panniers. "It wasn't cheap" she admitted, "but I just love riding it". She was from Tryavna, but for many years she had spent most of her time living and working in the Netherlands.

The five of us sat down and Nadezhda offered us water in which she had steeped *devesil* (lovage leaves) and fresh-sliced lemon. It was very refreshing with a tart, slightly celery taste. Our final companion was Vyara,[3] who arrived shortly from Sofia after we had all sat down. She was tall and very slender in her stylish mid-length silk dress and hiking boots. Her dark eyes were ringed with long lashes and her wispy black hair was pulled back into a ponytail. She was driven to Yavor by a young, bearded chap who chose a seat well outside the circle of women to drink his tea before driving back to Sofia, leaving us six women together in the afternoon heat.

Nadezdha then served us a drink made from elderflower syrup that she had preserved herself. She told us that she had experimented with different proportions of sugar and water to make the syrup. She had discovered to effectively preserve the contents that at least 1 part sugar to 2 parts water was necessary. It was very sweet but pleasantly floral tasting. She narrated a similar recipe to us that she catalogued in her book *Nine Cycles of Seasons*, which I am including here.

> White Elderflower Syrup
>
> Soak 30 flowers in 3 liters of water and 3 packets of citric acid. Let it sit overnight or a maximum of 20 hours, squeeze and strain out the flowers. For every liter of liquid add 1 kilogram of sugar (I used a little less, about 600 grams), stir until it is dissolved, strain through a cheesecloth and bottle it cold.

[1] Names changed to protect identity
[2] Name changed to protect identity
[3] Name changed to protect identity

> This is the recipe from my grandfather, that my mother found in an old notebook… (2019, 29).

Nadezhda often referred to her processes of learning how to make preserves as "experimental" or discovered by "trial and error". As her recipe and the conversation above shows, she took some "encoded" knowledge from places like her family's recipe collections. Over the course of our two days together she also described looking for knowledge and techniques in various print books, internet sources, and also from Facebook groups dedicated to specific topics, like fermentation. She passed on the results of her various experiments to us in conversations as we ate and drank things she had made, as in the example above. In this case she had tried to take an old family recipe but find a way to minimize the amount of sugar in the recipe while still effectively preserving the syrup. She didn't believe that sugar was particularly healthy, but it was tasty and an effective preservative. This type of balance between things Nadezhda valorized (healthfulness or aesthetics for example) and utility was characteristic of many of her practices. Her quote in the epigraph provides another example, as she simultaneously extolled the aesthetic virtues of paper and twine caps for jars but admitted that she uses the "colder" "modern" metal caps because they were effective for preserving food.

On the topic of whole-body wellness, Nadezhda led a long conversation about microorganisms and the microbiome. She explained that she had recently hosted a group of people including experts on the "evolutionary diet". She told us that because of this visit, the connection between human evolution and bacteria was on the top of her mind. She described the various fermentation techniques that she used, for example including lactic acid fermentation to make preserve cabbage. She also makes kefir, apple cider vinegar, and sometimes kombucha (though she didn't have any growing at the moment). She told us that it was possible to make apple cider vinegar, for instance, from scratch but that it grows faster and more reliably from a "mother" or "*guba*", (we call this a symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast or "SCOBY" in the U.S.). According to Nadezhda, these more diverse fermentation practices yielded superior health benefits compared to using less diverse bacterial strains in fermentation. For example, she noted that the bacteria typically used in making yogurt were not very complex compared to kefir and left more undigested sugar in the milk.

When I asked for more details on the topic of food and health, Nadezhda responded,

> Well, the basic thing you should have in mind is that all food should be medicine and all medicine should be food. That's like the basis. Unfortunately, as with the microbiome and with the gardens the diversity is the key. And what is actually the big fault of our way of "developing" as humans is the destruction of this diversity…The simplification and the mass genocide in everything from antibiotics to pesticides to everything you can imagine.

Nadezhda's explanation highlighted the importance of complementary diversity, from the micro to the macro. She contested "development" as a false separation of things that actually are and should be integrated, for example food and medicine. Unlike the three models for food and medicine that Quave and Pieroni (2006, 109) posit, Nadezhda's characterize the overlap of the categories of food and medicine as total.

Nadezhda also described the inextricable interconnection of human well-being with non-human entities like plants and animals. She articulated a conceptualization of health based on the foundation of mutually beneficial interconnection between living organisms.

> So for me it's quite important to try to have different things in the garden as much as possible. Even if I don't eat them at the moment, even if I don't use them at the moment. They should be there for the other living creatures of the garden. Like I told you in the beginning [of the visit] this *lufant* [hyssop] I didn't plant so much for me. Because in the beginning I didn't know how the tea tasted or how healthy it is. I planted it mainly for my bees to have something to eat in the autumn when there is nothing. So, yeah, I don't know how to describe it…everything that is eatable is also for your health and everything that you use for your health should be with the idea of healthy digestion. That's because everything goes from there.

We sat in the yard for a long time, swatting mosquitos and talking, while drinking hyssop tea and snacking on fresh cherries. Nadezhda encouraged us to just throw the pits out into the yard, which caused obvious discomfort for most of the women. But this awkwardness at being asked to do something so unusual led to a lot of laughter and a shared sense of mischief. This broke the ice and made the conversations a little warmer, even though we were basically strangers. Through these conversations it became clear to me that the women were all looking for different things from this experience. Vyara spoke at length about how restorative it was to be out of

Sofia, closer to nature. She was raised only in the city, without village connections. She didn't have any familiarity with even very common garden plants or herbs. She didn't often cook. She was very eager to learn how to make herbal ointments and bought many jars of creams and salves from Nadezhda, along with her book, at the end of the visit. She spoke about the challenges of living in Sofia specifically and Bulgaria writ large. She described Sofia as a rather "inhumane" city. The two Marias came to learn about how to gather and use medicinal herbs. One of them had read a lot about the old *Enyovden* rituals though she had never participated in them. She had a very clear idea of how things "should" be done in terms of the timing and format of the rituals though she knew very little about herb identification, gathering or use. The other Maria said she was starting a small garden to help her in her quest for more healthy eating and gaining access to "clean" foods and took meticulous notes about all the herbs that Nadezhda mentioned in conversation or showed us throughout the visit. Teodora had been living for a long time outside Bulgaria. She came back for visits, but her parents were no longer alive, and she didn't have too many social contacts in Tryavna anymore. She often relayed childhood memories of using certain herbs and plants while cooking with her grandmother. She and Nadezhda would swap recipes and knowledge of local plants and remedies. She was also quite knowledgeable about jarring food and collecting herbs though she said she didn't do much jarring anymore. She said it was impractical to bring a bunch of jars with her to the Netherlands, and she didn't have a garden there producing food that needed to be preserved. She seemed to be looking for connections to her roots, and other Bulgarian women with whom to share her memories.

When the group learned that I was particularly interested in jars they shared their own stories and memories. For example, Teodora described the volume of jars she would make with her mother as a youth. "We'd make about 400 jars". To which one of the Marias replied "Really?! In one day?" Teodora clarified, "No, no, during the summer season. I can remember we made wild plums, peaches, apricots, pears, apples, blackberries…first we would gather and then we would cook them immediately because they couldn't wait, you have to make the compote the same day [as you pick the fruit]". Vyara piped up, "How nice to have these in the winter, maybe not 400 jars but…" Teodora continued, "We had a big cellar, and we had 4 long shelves. And each shelf could hold about 200 jars and there were different things". "And meat?" I asked. "Meat too! The whole pig was saved in the cellar. In jars. We looked after rabbits and put their meat in jars.

Green beans were also a classic. And cabbage, winter cabbage we made and we put in jars". In fact, Teodora had a large collection of jars from her mother that she pressed Nadezhda into taking, as pictured in Figure 9.3. She said that she was cleaning out her cellar and wanted to give the jars to someone who would use them. "It's glass" she said, "it is still good and useful. It is a shame to waste it".

Figure 9.2. Photograph of jars given by Teodora to Nadezhda. June 23, 2021.

Nadezhda cooked dinner for everyone. The menu included zucchini stuffed with spiced cous cous and chopped peppers, kefir with salt, garlic and dill, and a thinly shredded cabbage, carrot and beet salad dressed with salt and apple cider vinegar. There were also chanterelle mushrooms, which in Bulgarian are usually called "duck feet" (*pachi krak*), that were cooked with garlic. We ate heartily except for one of the Marias who didn't eat at all. She was on some kind of really strict diet. When Vyara reached for another helping of the tasty kefir sauce Nadezhda warned her, "Start out slowly! Until your gut adjusts it may cause you some stomach issues". We capped off the meal with an apple and chocolate cake decorated with cherries. It received rave reviews. The recipe for this dessert was also included in Nadezhda's book, and again highlighted her "experimental" approach to preparing healthy and delicious food.

> My favorite recipe from one of my dessert experiments – Cocoa Cake with Apples:
>
> Flour – 1 and 2/3 cup, sugar (brown) – 1 and 1/3 cup, baking soda – 1 teaspoon, baking powder – also, a little salt and vanilla, 5 big spoons of cocoa powder. Grate 3 or 4 apples and squeeze out the juice into a separate bowl. In this separate bowl put the apple juice

and 4 spoons of lemon juice and ¼ cup oil. Mix the dry and wet ingredients and bake. It is super easy, tasty and comparatively healthy sweet for unexpected guests and lazy afternoons (2019, 33).

Enyovden Traditions

As we licked our fingers clean from the sticky and delicious cake, the sun was getting lower on the horizon, and Nadezhda began to tell us about *Enyovden*. She explained that it was a very old holiday celebrating the solstice that was incorporated into newer Christian traditions as Enyovden (St. John's Day). The solstice is June 21, and Enyovden is June 24. She explained it was the start of the new cycle of the year when the days began to get shorter and shorter. As an herbalist, the solstice was a holiday with special significance for Nadezhda. She mentioned to me that she celebrated the actual solstice day privately and that she invited others to join her for Enyovden (observed three days later) to participate in traditions like the "silent water" ritual (see below), dawn herb gathering and also to learn about gathering and using herbs. According to Nadezhda, the old stories say that as the dawn breaks the morning of Enyovden it shines on the dew covering the meadows, imbuing the herbs with its fullest strength and maximizing their potency.

The Enyovden rituals were calendrical rites that synthesized Christian and pre-Christian solstice celebrations. Enyovden is periodic, cyclical, and predictable as Bell describes calendrical rites to be (1997, 162). According to Bell, the appropriation of one set of calendrical rites deeply engrained in a community for another set is an effective strategy of domination of the old by the new. Enyovden created a temporal link between the past and the present and a spatial link between people and the earth. With the exception of Nadezhda, we were all urban dwelling people journeying to a remote, rural location to connect with an old Bulgarian tradition.

On the solstice, Nadezhda explained, people celebrated the sun, water, and herbs. On the evening before solstice, at sunset, the sun had special power as it dipped into the water. So that evening we were all going to participate in a silent water ceremony. Nadezhda explained, "We will walk without talking and making as little human noise as possible to two old springs and carry the water back to a large copper vessel. Then we will let the water set out overnight so that the sun will set on it and rise on it again the tomorrow morning as we walk out to gather our herbs". She went on to explain, "Tonight we will pass a very old tree that was celebrated during ancient times and now has a stone cross marker as well. In the past people in the village would celebrate important events like weddings there under the tree. We will walk in a line and I will show you all where to go, making hand gestures to guide you".

Figure 9.3. Photograph of oak tree with stone cross marker. June 22, 2021.

Figure 9.4. Photograph of covered pot with water from silent water ritual and Enyovden bouquet. June 23, 2021.

Kitchen Conversation

After the silent water ritual, the two Marias and Teodora headed back into Tryavna to sleep for the night. Vyara entertained herself in the garden, petting the cats and dogs as the gathering darkness quietly enveloped her. Nadezhda and I went into her lighted kitchen to conduct a formal interview, which she asked to do in English.

Based on our phone conversation, she knew that my primary interest was in food self-provisioning and preservation, so she started the conversation in that vein. She showed me some of her jars and told me that she sourced the various materials she needed to preserve foods and

prepare herbal remedies in a wide variety of ways. This included reusing and recycling jars and bottles, shopping in secondhand stores, buying new items like small jars for salves and metal caps, making purchases from grocery stores, growing an extensive variety of plants, and foraging. She also engaged in various forms of trade with others. For example, she traded work mucking out one neighbor's barn in exchange for the manure to use in her garden, sometimes bought cheese or fresh milk from another neighbor, saved and swapped seeds with other seed savers from all over the country, and exchanged lessons in herbalism for cash payments or help with tasks like website design for her business. She began the interview by contrasting everyday foodways in England and Norway (where she had spent some time) with her knowledge and practices growing up in Bulgaria. She generalized this as an East/West difference, making a similar narrative arc about the persistence of home-canning in Bulgaria as Albena Shkodorova did in her book Communist Gourmet (2021). Nadezhda stated:

> My perspective on this, because I used to live in England and also in Norway, and what I realized was…that most of them don't have any idea of where their food comes from[...] And this is part of this fast industrialization that happened after the second world war. Which actually caught up with most of Europe. You know? The most developed countries in Europe were caught up in this so a lot of people disconnected from the ground. From the raising of the food, from the preserving of the food. They still have some traditions left, Norwegians with fish, they are very good at salting fish and things like that. In Italy they still preserve tomato sauces and things like that.
>
> But what you will observe is that [in] most of the countries that were the ex-socialist block the industrialization happened [in a] very fragmented [way]. You know they had the huge development of *fabriki* [factories] and so on but…it wasn't so much a social status it was more like labor status the industrialization. Though in the developed countries of Europe the industrialization brought also social status which kind of displaced the old knowledge of how to grow food, how to live sustainably only on your labor, to consume what you can only locally. This didn't happen so much for us in Bulgaria, but it is somewhat the same with Serbia, Macedonia, parts of Romania, parts of Poland as well.

Through this narration Nadezhda continued to describe an East/West dichotomy, characterizing people in the West as disconnected from the land and from the knowledge of agriculture and foodways from previous generations. While identifying parallel desires to industrialize in Eastern and Western Europe after World War II, she describes industrialization in the East as "fragmented". This means functionally, people couldn't rely on industrial production to meet their needs. Beyond this she argued that people in the East and West perceived industrial food differently, asserting that it carried higher social status in the West than the East. She compares Bulgaria with other ex-socialist countries where people kept up food self-provisioning practices, that she describes as part of living "sustainably". The knowledge, desire, and ability to continue foodways practices that were not fully industrialized was facilitated by the partial and fragmented entry of food into the industrialized model of production. She contrasts these practices to the West where the general food supply was more thoroughly industrialized, the "old knowledge" was lost, and where food self-provisioning therefore dwindled.

In the next part of our interview Nadezhda began to narrate her own history as it related to making preserved foods during state socialism. She characterized home-preserved foods during that time, especially in her family, as healthy, aesthetically appealing, and an economic necessity even though they had come from wealthy and urban backgrounds before socialism.

> So, we were very blessed that all my childhood and the beginning of my adulthood all of our grannies conserved food and grew food. Everybody had a small piece of land, even if they lived in the big cities. They still had in the [out]skirts of the city, they had small plots where they grew their fruits and vegetables, made their own rakiya, wine and things like that and everybody did, absolutely. When I was in the university, everybody in the dorms where we were living, we were going home every Friday and coming back every Monday with these big bags in the train. You can hear everybody chk, chk, chk…yeah, jars.
>
> So, in everybody's family, no exception, doesn't matter... Like me for example, my grandparents and my great-grandparents were all very urban people. During the king's times they were kind of aristocracy. …. So, we never have been…much of village people or producers of goods. We were another caste. And still, my grandmother was buying from her friends who had plots and she was making the conserves for the winter because

> they realized that this is not only the most economic way to have food all year round, but this was the most fresh way to have food all year round. So, this is very embedded in our culture even for city children like me.

At this point I asked a clarifying question about her use of the word "fresh", asking if she meant in terms of taste or quality or both. To that question she responded by first explaining her family's status.

> My family was very well educated. Even during communism. They were forbidden to go to university because they were considered enemies of the state, but they were still very well educated at home. All of them were speaking many languages reading forbidden literature and so on.

In this way Nadezhda described her family as "cultured" people, well-educated and keenly aware of and impacted by the shortcomings of socialism. This extended beyond their own experiences of repression, like not being allowed to attend university, to other flaws such as the low quality of industrially produced foods.

> So, for my family, in particular, it was always a matter of health, the quality perspective of the jars. Because my grandmother … she was saying that you go into the *fabriki (*factories) where they conserve food, [but] they don't take care of the fruit. Doesn't matter if it's a little bit yellow or going bad already. They just cut it and put it in the jars and the way they preserve the jars is through high temperature too much sugar or salt.

Here, Nadezhda highlighted the importance to her grandmother of producing healthy food that was made with care for the quality of the ingredients and preserved with a minimum amount of heat, sugar, and salt. Nadezhda didn't focus on the scarcity of industrially produced food during this period of state socialism, but rather the lack of quality and healthfulness. The quality was impacted by lack of care and healthfulness by the nature of industrialized food production itself, which necessitated the use of high heat, sugar, and salt to preserve things. So industrially produced foods weren't good enough for her grandmother. Instead, she would preserve foods in the way she thought was healthiest.

> She was very particular how she would preserve the tomatoes for example. She didn't like to make sauce like the Italians with a lot of frying a lot of onions a lot of sugar and

> salt and spice. What she liked to do was to take the whole tomato, fill the jar with whole tomatoes or cut in half and put a little bit of water and then boil it for a very short time. And then in the winter when you open that jar you have almost a fresh tomato. You know for salad, you can even cut it for salad.

Because her grandmother could follow her own recipe and minimally process the contents of the jar, including the amount of heat applied to sterilize the jars, she felt that she could produce healthy food for her family. Nadezhda focused on the health benefits and the aesthetic quality of texture that could be achieved through home-based food preservation practices. So industrially preserved foods were not an equivalent product.

She continued by characterizing home-based food preservation during state socialism, highlighting the multiple reasons people preserved food including economic necessity, tradition, and as a way to fully utilize self-provisioned foods and prevent waste.

> Most people preserved because it was economical, because it was part of their culture and the way they were raised and also because that was the best way to preserve their own products. Because as I told you most of the people had their own small plots and…you always grow more than you can eat. You know, nature is very generous. Even if we don't realize it. Even without these big machines and chemicals and shit that they use at the moment. Even with hand labor you can produce more than your family can eat in one season. So it was logical … not … to waste. Bulgarians are very particular about waste. We have all these superstitions and traditions that no crumb of bread should be wasted, this is like a huge crime. And I very often wonder where this comes from because our land here is very generous.

Even though Nadezhda considered nature and the land in Buglaria to be very generous, she characterized waste prevention (especially of food) as a Bulgarian ethic. For people who garden, then, domestic food preservation was economically necessary and the only way to keep from wasting the inevitable bounty of the harvest. This generosity of the land and being connected to the land were also key components of how Nadezhda characterized the resilience of Bulgarians to persevere despite many historical and contemporary crises.

> We were always through the history of time very blessed with our land here. It was always very productive… [yet] we have this strong feeling that nothing should be wasted, that everything is a blessing, and everything should be preserved and everything should be eaten until it is finished…
>
> But maybe because we were always very connected with the ground. We have this saying, 'a bowed head, a sword doesn't touch' which means you just stay low, keep silent, and everything will pass. Through all of this history, starting with the Thracians and the old Bulgarians and all these people coming and going after this. The Crusades, everything, the Turks even not discussing that, all these people coming to this land and staying for some period of time, mixing with the locals and leaving at some point. What kept most of the local population [going] was this: you stick to the ground. You just keep your ground…this will pass. You just keep to the ground, stick with the ground and they will go away. The ground is us, we are the ground, we keep low our heads and everything passes.
>
> A lot of people are wondering now, how we can sustain this corruption for so many years since we are in democracy. But I think it is because we have been really in this cross-roads of everything that has happened in history…We are very earthy people so I guess maybe this feeling that nothing should be wasted that all produce of the earth should be respected and kept comes maybe from there.

In these lengthy excerpts of our interview Nadezhda articulated many of the meanings associated with home-preserved food that I sketched in Chapter 7. She started off discussing how her family was very educated and "cultured". Because of this she believed her grandmother, in particular, was more enlightened about healthy food regardless of what the socialist state promoted at the time. This greatly influenced her grandmother's preservation practices during socialism, when home-preserving was an economic necessity and the quality of foods that were industrially produced were suspect. So, Nadezhda defined good food as coming directly from small-scale gardens, in each season, and healthy preserves as using minimal amounts of salt, sugar, oil, and heat. She also pointed out the texture, for example a more lightly processed tomato could be eaten "like a salad". In addition to economic necessity, she stated that people also made jars during socialism because of "tradition" and because it was "the way they were

raised". She also emphasized the importance of not wasting food, particularly for those with gardens because a surplus was inevitable. She generalized to a Bulgarian trait the moral imperative to not waste food, to make use of every last crumb. Jarring, in that context, prevented waste.

Finally, she highlighted the centrality of "sticking to the land" and "keeping your head down" for long term resilience. Preserving food at home, then, was a way to endure undesirable occupations, threats, corruption, political or economic subjugation over which people had no control. The solution wasn't to "fight", but to endure, to outlast. This is deeply reminiscent of the newspaper article that I discussed in Chapter 6, which pointed to the security Bulgarian people found in preserved foods which would allow them to carry on despite unpredictable crisis. Keeping a garden, knowing how to forage, knowing how to preserve food and use herbs all provide resilience and sustenance in the face of hardships. It is also resonant with the articulation of "quiet" sustainability and food sovereignty. Better to practice food sovereignty while "keeping your head down" than to "fight" against oppressive regimes.

Nedezhda and I continued our conversation by speaking in more detail about the variety of things that she is growing in her garden and orchard now and her general garden management practices. She told me that she had over 300 trees including walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, several varieties of plums, peaches, cherries, sour cherries, apples of several varieties, pears of many varieties, meddlars, figs, quince, and was experimenting with persimmons.

"So what do you do with all the fruit?" I asked. "Do you eat it, do you preserve it do you sell it, do you make rakiya?" She laughed as she responded,

> All of the above! It depends on the year because I told you I don't treat the trees and they are very dependent on the climate and the year. Sometimes we have a lot of birds sometimes we have a lot of slugs… But most of the years I have more than I can handle…like last year I had so many plums that I made dried plums, I made jam, I made *pastille*, I made whatever you can think of. I made rakiya of course, many barrels of raikya. And then I had a lot of people coming. I advertised on Facebook and people came and collected also barrels [of plums] for rakiya and there was still a lot left on the ground. You can see I have like 1000 new trees because they grow from the stones that have fallen. So I am going and replanting them. I take the trees out and go and plant

them in the forest because animals also need fruits and vegetables. That's what we do with the fruits.

Using the example of the plums, Nadezhda reiterated the overwhelming abundance of what she could produce herself. Plums ripen all at once, and if it is a good year in terms of weather and competition from other animals, then she has a surplus. She listed several preservation methods including making preserved foods and alcohol. Still overwhelmed by the fruit, she invited other people to come and take as much fruit as they wanted to preserve as well. In the end, even with all that sharing and preserving, much of the fruit fell to the ground and sprouted. She planned to reciprocate this natural generosity by planting the seedlings in the forest for other creatures to sustain themselves. Reciprocity is an important concept that I will not systematically address. However, I will note that it relates to making preserves in multiple ways such as trading work or exchanging gifts of produce or meat. Here Nadezhda extends the concept to her more than human relationships within a localized ecosystem.

I then asked Nadezhda to help me think about her annual cycles of food preservation. The way I phrased the question was problematic because I asked how she begins her annual cycle. Instead, she highlighted the ongoing processes associated with *zimnina* (winter foods) by saying*, "*I don't know particularly what you mean, because it doesn't stop". She categorized her activities as a true circle, with no clear beginning or end. "It's a natural thing" she concluded. However, despite my imperfect question, she did try to outline a general schema of activities congruent with the calendar year. "It depends, because actually I start in January. Because then you have to plant the seeds for the year. And then I start collecting nettles, stinging nettles, which I cook because we all need the green in the winter. I dry them, I cook them, I freeze them, whatever."

Like many other people I interviewed, Nadezhda highlighted nettles as an important food for supporting health, particularly in response to winter. I was told by others that nettles were "good for the organism" and had a cleansing effect in "turning over blood cells" that was especially important after wintertime. This is identical to Quave and Pieroni's definition of "functional food" (2006, 108).

Nedezhda's initial answer to how her year was organized focused on plants that she gathered for medicine and functional food (like nettles). The time various medicinal plants and herbs are ready for harvest and processing dictate those. She then pivoted, "But if it's only for food …. the

zucchini are first, the cucumbers, then the tomatoes will come and then the fruits. Cherries and strawberries are early ones." Here she made an interesting distinction between her mental calendar of herbs and healing foods that she gathered and making food preserves from cultivated sources. For example, she used freshly picked nettles as a functional food and prepared them for immediate eating. She also dried and froze them but distinguished them from "food" like zuchinni and tomatoes. When she switched to thinking about preserved foods, all of the foods that she listed were cultivated. Foods like strawberries seem to belong in multiple categories. As she described in her book, highlighted in the epigraph, wild strawberries (sometimes also called mountain strawberries in Bulgarian) make delicious preserved foods and are also medicinal plants. In that case it is not only the fruit of the plant that is medicinal, but other parts as well including leaves, stalks, and flowers.

Nedezhda had extensive knowledge of the seasonality of wild and cultivated plants though she did not list them in linear order. Finally, she finished out the year, bringing it full circle. In this very brief description she identified drying, freezing, cellar storage for fresh eating, and jarring foods to preserve them.

> Well maybe there's this specific type of pears which are very late, like December, January; they can last very long. Also, I pick all my tomatoes in October because the first snow comes very early. But I pick them in baskets and put them inside and they are ripe until January. So, I have fresh tomatoes most of the time…Persimmon and *mushmuli* [medlars] they too are ripening slowly, gradually in January and February.

In terms of animals with that others might perceive as competing for food, Nadezhda did not frame them as pests, per se, or consider them as threatening to her ability to access enough food or the kinds of food she wanted. She mentioned both slug infestations of strawberries and birds eating cherries.

> I grow strawberries. Some years are not very good for the strawberries; some years are very good for the strawberries. As I told you it all depends on what we have at the moment, if it is rainy or if we have a lot of slugs so that we are in a race with the slugs for the strawberries. This year the whole village didn't have a single cherry because flocks of birds came and picked the trees [clean] in like one hour everything was gone before it was ripe. So, we are buying cherries this year. So, it's life, but it's yeah what I am saying

is you cannot die from hunger. I don't understand this concept of I will die hungry. It is impossible, literally impossible. You'd have to just lay in one place and do nothing to die from hunger!

The bounty that she could gather from the earth was foundational to Nadezhda's sense of food security, however it was also supplemented by purchases in formal markets for which she was unapologetic. When natural elements beyond her control, like rainy weather, slugs or birds, created shortages of certain things (like cherries) there were other things that could be substituted, including things that were purchased from people who were not experiencing the same micro-local challenges. She didn't say that she would go without cherries that year, but rather that she would substitute purchased cherries. The exact thing may not be available but there was no need to fear hunger or, put another way, food insecurity. There was also no need to go without cherries altogether if they couldn't be locally produced.

Vyara and I finally bunked down for the night in the spare room we were sharing. It was cozy with a low ceiling and two low beds covered in screens and newspapers of dried flowers and herbs. It had a tiny kitchen and miniature heating stove. Shelves of dried herbs in jars lined the wall. There were also many jars with herbs steeping in oil. Nadezhda mentioned that this method of extracting the healing properties of the plants was superior to making highly concentrated essential oils.

Figure 9.5. Photograph of herbs steeping in oil. June 22, 2021.

Figure 9.6. Photograph of herbs drying in spare room. June 22, 2021.

Gathering Herbs

I set my phone to wake me at 5:30 so we would have time to drink tea before heading up to the meadow above the village to gather herbs. I hardly slept because of the heat, a late-night thunderstorm, and the dogs barking. Bleary eyed, I threw on my jeans and shirt from the day before and hiked up my socks to protect my ankles from ticks. Vyara, Nadezhda, and I drank a little hyssop tea from the garden, and then we walked up the road to the meadow. Nadezhda told us that according to tradition we were supposed to gather 99 ½ herbs. I was also told 77 ½ by other people. She went on to say that according to the old stories, the last half herb actually belonged to the devil who kept it secret to deprive humans of immortality. By gathering all the rest, we could cure almost every sickness and get as close as possible to immortality. As the cliché Bulgarian phrase put it "*za vsyaka bolka, bilka*", meaning "for every ailment, there's an herb".

Even though the sun had just risen over the ridges of the mountains the day promised to be hot. It was not at all chilly, and the air felt damp. At the edge of the meadow, we met with the two Marias and Teodora who had driven their cars up from Tryavna and walked into the meadow (Figure 9.8).

Figure 9.7. Photograph of women walking to the meadow right after dawn. June 23,2021.

We walked together into the meadow and stood in the early morning light, the Balkan mountains stretching out along the horizon and the deep green, shrubby woods covering all the nearby hillsides. Nadezhda's thick, dark braid fell down her back and she drew a peach-colored shawl more tightly around her shoulders as she began to tell us the rules for gathering herbs. The first rule was to always use a knife or scissors to cut the plants, rather than pulling, which Vyara is photographed doing in Figure 9.8. The second rule was to never take more than 30% of any one thing. She emphasized, however, that there were times when we shouldn't gather any at all. For example, if we were unfamiliar with an area or if we noticed a plant that we hadn't seen much that day we should be more conservative because it would be possible that harvesting could harm the population. Because Nadezhda knew this area very well she knew that certain plants were abundant. She told us that we could freely take thyme (*mashterka*) and St. John's Wort (*zhult kantarion*) because it was plentiful. These plants were also easy to identify by sight, and many people I met throughout Bulgaria were familiar with them. In this group, all the women except for Vyara knew them already. The third rule was to only gather from "clean" places. There was vocal agreement from the women who had gathered herbs before, that herbs should not be gathered along busy roadways or train tracks because they would be contaminated from fumes and residues. The conversation on this point reminded me of the women selling informally in big city markets who would always make a point of telling me they that they gathered from a "clean" place.

Figure 9.8. Photograph of gathering herbs by cutting stems with a knife. June 23,2021.

We started collecting herbs in the meadow, we followed Nadezhda and gathered in a little semi-circle as she identified and named the plants she saw (see Figure 9.10). Nadezhda was very careful to only take one small specimen for the bouquet that we were making for Enyovden, pictured in Figure 9.11. Traditionally this bouquet is dried and kept throughout the year for its power to heal mysterious illnesses.

Figure 9.9. Photograph of Nadezhda identifying medicinal herbs. June 23, 2021.

Figure 9.10. Photograph of Enyovden bouquet with specimen of each medicinal herb. June 23, 2021.

She would snip a little sample and then hold it up and show us what it looked like, what it was called, what parts to use and what ailments it was good for. Nadezhda categorized the herbs as either medicinal or not medicinal. She split the medicinals into three categories: 1) those that are gentle and safe for everyday use or eating, 2) those that are stronger and should be used only for specific things in limited duration, and 3) those which are very powerful and can be poisonous except when expertly prepared for a very specific short-term use. Many flowers and grasses were classified as "not medicinal". Many of the plants that we gathered would be weeds in the U.S. In fact, I was familiar with many of the plants visually but had never been taught their uses

as food or medicine. We identified and collected 40 herbs by the time we left the meadow to walk down the road back toward the house.

We learned about the herbs through multiple senses. When one of the women encountered an herb she didn't know, she rubbed the leaves to smell them or sometimes taste the leaf to determine if it was bitter. Sometimes Nadezhda, or one of the other women who had knowledge, would note when a particular plant bloomed or where it can usually be found. In this way we learned to confirm the identity of the plant in the future by where it was growing, what it looked like, smelled like and possibly how it tasted. After the initial encounter with a new plant then they would ask how to use it, which parts and in what way. In terms of recognizing plants, naming was an interesting process. There was often more than one name and sometimes the women would know one name but not another or one variety of a plant (for example with a different color of blooms) but not another. Sometimes Nadezhda would go through a couple of common names and finally resort to the Latin name if people still didn't know that particular plant. Though Nadezhda had more extensive expertise, this was a conversational process, with everyone contributing what they knew, what they had heard, and asking clarifying questions.

The fields were buzzing with insects and the forest was alive with bird chatter by the time we left the meadow. We continued to gather herbs along the edge of the village road where we found strawberry leaves, yarrow, clover flowers, St. John's wort, wild rose and hawthorn. We had over 50 herbs when we made it back to the gate, kept gathering in Nadezhda's garden, and ended up gathering a total of 77 before Nadezhda, clearly tired, ended our search. She tied the bouquet into a bundle, dipped it in the water collected in the copper pot the day before, and sprinkled us each with the drops. She then poured each of us a glass of the water to drink and bottled up the rest of the water for us to take home.

One of the Marias very carefully cataloged each plant she had gathered in a notebook. When we got back to the house, she asked Nadezhda again what each thing was called. She wrote down the name and carefully wrapped the samples in the labeled paper with a few jotted down words about how to use it. She accumulated quite a large bag of wrapped up samples. Everyone else learned by repeating what they already knew and then filling in with new knowledge also shared verbally or by touching a plant, smelling, tasting, or discussing different parts to use or preparations. They did not create a written record or a physical catalog.

Back to the Garden

When blond Maria mentioned she was starting her own little garden, Nadezhda brought out a very large handbag that was filled with many plastic bags containing small handmade paper packets labelled with all sorts of garden vegetables and herbs. When Nadezhda first moved to Yavor, she said that she got some seeds from the local people because, "that's the best way to start". But that she had diversified her collection through exchange with seed savers from Bulgaria who were, "Devoted to preserving all specimens of seeds, all kinds. They have festivals, and I am very close to the main guy […] I get seeds from him. Especially the beans". She rummaged through the large bag picking out different sorts of seeds from beans to Swiss chard to give to Maria. Maria said she was excited to plant Swiss chard because she said she liked to make *surmi* (leaves stuffed with rice, vegetables, and sometimes meat)with Swiss chard leaves during the summer when cabbage leaves weren't as good.

Nadezhda spoke to us all about her gardening strategies. She didn't keep any animals, but she sometimes traded work with her neighbor in exchange for manure from his cows. She also composted kitchen and garden scraps. During the summer she cut the grass and laid it down over the ground so there wasn't any exposed soil. She said this was really important to help maintain moisture because she didn't water much. Water was unreliable anyway in the late summer because the springs that the village relied on usually went dry or nearly dry. The water pipes that carried the water from the springs were so damaged that a good deal leaked out and simply didn't make it to the houses at the end of summer.

Her strategies for soil health were intertwined with her water management practices. Most gardens that I visited were irrigated, and there was a large amount of exposed soil. Nadezhda's garden might look "messy" to people who are used to keeping all non-cultivated plants out of the garden or who perceived them as competing for water or nutrients. Nadezhda's approach took into account the cyclical, predictable water shortages each summer. She mitigated her need for water through other practices like mulching with grasses and complementary plantings that helped plants survive periods of drought. She also used her household gray water to spot irrigate during the driest times.

When I asked about soil fertility Nadezhda described multiple methods for keeping her soil in good health. She does not keep livestock, but her neighbors keep cows. Since they are elderly

and cleaning the barns of manure is difficult for them she helps them by cleaning out their barn and then collects it and composts it along with her kitchen scraps and garden materials.

Dinner Conversation and Pickled Zucchini

Later that evening, after seeing all the other women off and feeding the animals, Nadezhda and I settled into her kitchen again. She rolled a cigarette, and we heated up the vegetable soup that I brought to share for dinner. She also added some sirene and pickled zucchini that we pulled out of the almost empty larder. I had never seen zucchini preserves before. She had cut them in thin ribbons and then pickled them in apple cider vinegar, salt and spices before she sealed them in a water-bath canner. They were a couple years old, and she wasn't sure if they were still good. "We'll open them and see" was her response.

There's a knack to opening the jars with crimp-on lids. She turned it upside down and ran a knife along the edge of the underside of the lid to let in a little air and break the seal. The lid was tightly sealed and popped open, which she understood as the first indicator they were still good. Then she smelled the jar and tasted a little bit. She made a wrinkled-up face and I asked "no good huh?" She replied, "No it's good, it's just super sour! I think it is not bad, it didn't go bad. It's just so very sour". "You said this happened with one batch" I reminded her. Yes, she said, "With the first batch because they told me you put the zucchini in and then fill them with vinegar, but actually that is not true, it's super sour. Take a small piece please! Not too big!" They were tangy and reminded me of Indian chutney with turmeric, ginger and black peppercorn. Though it was very sour it was deliciously seasoned. "It has a nice taste" I assured her. "Yeah, behind the sour there's something you can eat".

I asked Nadezhda how she could tell if something was still good for eating and she outlined the process in this way.

> Oh, for sure when you open the thing […] it makes a "slurp" [sound]. That means that it was anaerobic…it's no development there. So, what you put in the beginning stayed. That's the main thing. And also, I try to eat most of the things in the limits of two years. You know, because after this a lot of things they still look OK, but it's just, I want to eat them in two years. I don't know, I learn things, energetically wise. No, I just think even if it is in the shadow, even if it is anaerobic, even if it's all these things it still kind of

> loses something in the ingredients. You know herbs you can preserve dried for two years and that's the maximum, for some of them it is only one year. So, I kind of stick with this for all foods as a general rule. I haven't really researched that, you know, I like to research things, but I haven't researched what happens in anaerobic things after two years.

I pointed out that in addition to listening for the sound that she also smelled everything and took a small taste before sharing with me or the other guests. "Well of course, smell! Yeah, of course, doesn't everybody do this? How else would you know if something is good?" I told her that many Americans rely on the "best by" dates printed on food packaging to know if their food was still good. She retorted, "I don't know, I cannot imagine eating something that doesn't smell good to me. Not only for eating, for everything, to put a cream or to wash with soap whatever that it doesn't correspond with my sense of smell first. I don't know how to do it any other way".

As we ate our dinner, I kept the recorder on and continued to ask Nadezhda about her preservation practices. I ran through the list, "So, you ferment some things, but you also make anaerobic jars that you boil in a water bath. So, I've noticed that most Bulgarians do not have big freezers; can you tell me about that?"

> Yeah, this is kind of a new thing. I was also planning, and I continue to plan, to buy one big freezer because I have only this small one and even for the meat for the animals it is not enough. But there are two main reasons that I don't buy it. It's not the money thing, you can save it up at some point. But then the [issue of] electricity. Here we don't have electricity all the time. In the winter it can go off. In the summer it can go off. And there can be fixing that goes for months. It's kind of unpredictable and I have observed these old people that live here. They kind of follow that trend of having freezers and stuffing them with meat and cheese and everything. And then very often they just call me you know, the electricity is gone and they have to eat fast everything that is in the freezer…and what is the point of all my work if I will be dependent on that. I prefer to sterilize and go from there.

Nadezhda had only the small freezer in her small refrigerator. All her other preserved food was shelf stable or fermenting at room temperature. The jars kept for up to two years. This gave her more flexibility and a sense of security.

"Sticking to the Land"

The rhythm of Nadezhda's life was largely dictated by seasonal cycles punctuated by celebrations such as the Enyovden holiday and the particularities of each year's weather and natural events. She marked linear time such as each year of her own life, the ages of her animals, and how long she had been living on her homestead. But time also turned back on itself each year, creating a predictable and repeatable cycle. Her preservation practices were also closely related to the seasonal ripening of foods, and every cycle was a new chance to repeat the old pattern or improvise upon an old theme. In this way these preservation practices were reborn cyclically even while responding to nuance and ever-changing circumstances.

She cultivated foods, extensively foraged, and bought food through formal and informal markets. She integrated many non-local ingredients into her preserved foods like turmeric, ginger and sugar. She preserved foods through drying, jarring, and fermentation, supplemented by a very small refrigerator/freezer. She sourced the durable materials she needed to preserve foods and prepare herbal remedies in a wide variety of ways including reusing and recycling jars, shopping in secondhand stores, and buying new items like small jars for salves and metal caps. She also engaged in various forms of trade, both formal an informal with her neighbors and through her website and Facebook connections.

Nadezhda said that when she tried to learn about herbs from older people it was very difficult because most of them didn't use the remedies anymore but relied on modern medicines such as antibiotics. She mostly gained competences related to food preservation through encoded knowledge like books, websites, and virtual learning within Facebook forums, all supplemented by childhood memories and experimentation. She trained her senses, made observations about outcomes, and adjusted her future practices based on iterative experience.

In terms of meanings associated with preserved foods, Nadezhda highlighted the importance of a close relationship with annual cycles dictated by the natural world. She conceptualized her connection with the land as foundational to her ability to "endure" various hardships. Her own

wellness was closely tied to the land through cultivating, foraging and preserving "healthy" foods, functional foods, and medicinal plants. These she grew, harvested, and preserved in a circular rhythm of seasons, dictated by the local weather patterns and animals. Preserving food allowed her to avoid wasting the bounty that the land provided her and made her feel food secure. Additionally, she appreciated the aesthetics of preserved foods from taste and texture to the beautiful arrangement of jars in her larder.

The experience of visiting Nadezhda in Yavor with the other women for Enyovden was reminiscent of observations made by Melissa Caldwell during fieldwork she conducted in the early 2000s in Russia. The chapter "The Forest Feeds Us" in her book *Not by Bread Alone* made many similar observations. For example, she noticed how self-provisioning food through cultivation and foraging diversified dependence and provided a realm of "organic exchange" that supplemented resources from the state and formal market (2004, 103). Much as Vyara explained that she was seeking refuge from the "inhuman" aspects of living in Sofia, Caldwell noticed that the countryside in Russia was both a physical and imagined refuge from city life (104). The final point of comparison was that food self-provisioning and preservation was not characterized as "resistance" to the state or the formal market but rather, "[…] practices of personal survival that creatively patched together multiple sets of resources" (111). As Nadezhda put it, she would be able to carry on by keeping her head down and "sticking to the land" while also drawing on resources from the state and various kinds of market exchange.

Nadezhda pursued wellbeing through diversification at multiple scales. She believed that health, from the soil to the human gut, was best achieved through mutually beneficial diversity of organisms. She also had a diverse livelihood strategy, integrating income from her work as an herbalist with many other types of exchange and self-provisioning alongside public benefits such as healthcare and pension savings. Her foodways practices demonstrated overlapping boundaries between categories such as food and medicine, preservation and innovation.

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CHAPTER 10

STIRRING THE POT IN KURTOVO KONARE: SAVING FOOD FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

I believe that cultural resources and biodiversity could become a local livelihood. On the one hand, there is tourist potential in the field of rural, eco, culinary and festival tourism. Such travel products should be based on the idea of experience tourism, but also on the understanding of sustainable tourism. On the other hand, local foods, animal breeds and plant varieties are an extraordinary resource. But those who know and experience their cultivation and production must be encouraged to practice and pass them on. This requires both local and national policies for development and bottom-up initiatives. The new processes of shortening the links between producer and consumer, preferably of handicraft and farm products, of increased consumer awareness of the food they consume also provides an opportunity to promote and demand of authentic products. I hope that the rise of food fairs and festivals in Bulgaria is a path towards the popularization and transmission of rich natural and culinary legacies that are visible in these new event forms.

(Stoilova 2021, 147)

The two main production modes for preserved foods are industrial and home-made.[1] Following this divide are the distribution channels of these foods. Industrially produced preserved foods are sold in formal markets (corner stores, supermarkets, enclosed renovated markets). In contrast, home-made preserved foods are typically distributed for consumption through familial and social networks and are usually exchanged without money. There is a third category of preserved foods that blur these categories. These are home-made preserved foods that are sold for cash in informal markets such as road-side stands, on the margins of outdoor markets, and (importantly for this chapter) food festivals.

The vast majority of people I encountered who made preserves did so as part of routine everyday life, embedding these practices in natural and familial rhythms. Put another way, these food preserving activities were self-evident traditions that were being continually reproduced by people willing and able to bring together the elements of the practices (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 49). The producers and the consumers of the jars were often one in the same, and when

[1] See also: Yuson Jung's "From Canned Food to Canny Consumers: Cultural Competence in the Age of Mechanical Production."

the jars circulated beyond their producers it was usually to family and friends in the form of gifts in what Smollett described as the "economy of jars" (Mauss 1990, 4; Smollett 1984, 125).

In this chapter I will describe preserve making practices connected with a food festival in the village of Kurtovo Konare. In that village some people recruited preserve making into efforts to "save" local biocultural heritage in part by selling these preserves to consumers at the three-day "Kurtovo Konare Fest". These preserve makers capitalized home-preserved foods and converted them into heritage, while simultaneously imbuing them with new political meanings.

I initially learned about Kurtovo Konare by searching for Bulgaria on the Slow Food movement's website, where it was listed as a community with an active convivium.[2] I was looking for a place to learn more about food-based social movements and it was a serendipitously perfect fit. In Kurtovo Konare I got the chance to meet self-proclaimed "activists" working towards the Slow Food goals of preserving food that was "good, clean and fair."[3] Slow Food supports a central role for pleasure and conviviality (Pietrykowsky 2004, 307). This was a good match for the pre-existing home-based food preservation practices in Bulgaria were recruited into the Slow Food platform. These foods became symbolically charged as the antithesis of corporate and government corruption and became rallying points for political activism within the village and beyond.

The local community cultural center (*chitalishte*)[4] staff were the impetus for Slow Food

[2] Slow Food is an international grassroots organization founded by Carlo Petrini in Italy in1989. It is comprised of autonomous national organizations in several countries and community level organized groups called convivium throughout the world. For more details see: www.slowfood.com/about-us and Andrews 2008.
[3] For details on Slow Food's ideology see Petrini, 2007.
[4] Though I am using the translation "community cultural center" the Bulgarian *chitalishte* (*chitalishta* plural) is more directly translated as a "reading room" and has no direct comparison within the American context. The chitalishte is a unique institution with an important history in the establishment of Bulgaria as a state and the revival period after the end of Ottoman rule; it also played a significant role in cultural life during state socialism. Though there have been many transformations since it began to emerge in the mid to late nineteenth century. "It is especially notable that, already at the earliest stage of its existence, the *chitalishte* was perceived as a stable cultural institution with a specific mission for preserving and developing the values of the local community. By defending and sustaining these values, the *chitalishte* succeeded in creating its authority and legitimacy (Iliev 2000). Gradually it almost entirely encompassed the social and cultural life of local communities and enabled them to sustain their contacts with other communities and with the world in general" (Santova and Nenova 2010, 26-27). In the early years *chitalishta* were completely independent from one another and the state, and operated at the community level. In 1927, they were formalized and became legally recognized by the state. During socialism the cultural centers were subsumed within the centralized state structure and became completely funded by the state (Santova and Nenova 2010, 28-29). This infused resources into the local *chitalishte* and also created a national network. The end

organizing and projects in the village, the most well-known of which was the Kurtovo Konare Fest: Festival of the Pepper, Tomato and Traditional Crafts and Food. The festival had been held annually since 2009 and included an extensive, multi-day program. There was an open-air market featuring vendors selling home-preserved foods, concerts, presentations by academics doing research on biocultural conservation with Slow Food ties, and the "Queen of *Lyutentitsa"*[5] competition to honor the best homemade lyutenitsa maker in the village. The festival was one of the many activities in the village connected with the Slow Food movement.[6] There was a network of people in Kurtovo Konare, organized by the chitalishte staff, who were intentionally making home-preserved foods and cultivating rare varieties of agricultural plants for the purpose of selling them at the annual food festival.

I made multiple visits to Kurtovo Konare during summer of 2018, September 2019, and the summer of 2021. During those trips I met with the festival organizers, their extended families and social network, and some of the producers who made preserves for sale at the festival. In August 2018, I was invited to join a group of women making lyutenitsa for the festival, which I will describe in detail below. I toured a cellar in September of 2019 and I was invited to participate in a summer cooking class for kids run by the chitalishte in July 2021. I attended the Kurtovo Konare Fest for the first time in September of 2018 and returned in 2021 to a pared down version (due to Covid restrictions).

I am deeply indebted to Elitsa Stoilova, whose recently published book *Food Festivals and Fairs: Valorization of Local Culinary Heritage*, extensively examines the emerging phenomenon of food festivals in Bulgaria generally and Kurtovo Konare Fest specifically. I travelled several times to Kurtovo Konare with Elitsa. I also greatly benefitted from many conversations and trips exploring Bulgarian culinary heritage and tourism both physically and theoretically. In her book she argues that culinary traditions are being used to develop localized, place-based identities and

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of state socialism marked the drastic decline of state resources, *Chitalishta* now essentially operate as non-governmental organizations with state funding provided for only a few key staff members. This is significant in the case of Kurtovo Konare, as it is in many villages, because project money from donor organizations and the European Union are essential to maintaining even basic programming and modest infrastructural upkeep within the community centers. For a more complete history of *chitalishta* in general see Santova and Nenova 2010, 25-24. For a brief review of the *Lyuben Karavelov 1897 chitalishte* in Kurtovo Konare see Stoilova 2021, 99-123.

[5] Lyutenitsa (лютеница) is a thick, savory, tomato and pepper chutney.

[6] In 2021 the *chitalishte* successfully won funding from the EU to create and support the activities of a Slow Food Presidium. For more information see: What does the Slow Food Presidium do? - Slow Food Presidia - Slow Food Foundation (fondazioneslowfood.com)

affiliations through a process that she terms "gastrolocalism." The way that Stoilova conceptualizes gastrolocalism has some links to the concept of terroir as described by Trubeck (2017) and Saltzman (2016). However, in the case of Kurtovo Konare, Stoilova focuses on the sociohistorical links to culinary heritage in that particular village, rather than the combination of ecological influences and cultural practices that terroir usually refers to. She demonstrates that localities with food festivals establish themselves as the authentic source of a particular culinary heritage through mythologized histories that link culinary traditions and ingredients with the place. In turn, the festivals "preserve" this authenticated heritage by promoting awareness through marketing, creating opportunities for producers to sell directly to consumers, and improving the local economy through tourism.

I had the chance to observe the "behind the scenes" activity of making homemade lyutenitsa for sale at the Kurtovo Konare Fest. This home-made preserve production was intended for display and sale at a public food festival and was connected to the political discourse and practices of "saving" endangered biocultural diversity. The materials and competences involved in making these heritagized and politicized preserves were remarkably similar to those I observed with others who made preserves for their own consumption, but the meanings were significantly different. In Kurtovo Konare there were many lines being blurred, such as formal and informal markets, private foodways and public politics, and preserving traditions through re-creating them as heritage. In this chapter I will only scratch the surface of this enormous topic which includes decades of work to preserve unique, place-based foods through designations and certifications such as the French A.O.C. (translated in English as Controlled Designation of Origin), the Italian D.O.P. (translated in English as Protected Designation of Origin) and the subsequent European Union wide system of Geographic Indicators. I offer one small contribution to the literature related to tradition, preservation, and commodification in foodways scholarship (Saltzman 2017; Ryland 1994; Lockwood and Lockwood 1991).

Location and Brief History

Kurtovo Konare is a village with a population of about 2,600 people located in the Thracian Plain about 20 kilometers southwest of the large city of Plovdiv. This region enjoys milder winters than the mountainous areas that surround it. Over time, the village itself has been relatively stable in population, which is unusual in recent years since many villages throughout

Bulgaria are rapidly depopulating (Stoilova 2021, 101). Its proximity to larger cities and ongoing manufacturing in the area (much of which is related to industrial food production) have helped to keep the population stable. Like many villages, its population swells during the summer school holidays when children come to visit and stay with their grandparents. Although there are still families with children who live full-time in the village, those children go to school in larger towns nearby. Many working age people commute to Plovdiv daily but live in the village. I also met several British ex-pats living in and around the village. All but one were retirees.

Even on my first visit to the village, I was told the often-repeated story that Kurtovo Konare was where the first kilogram of ground red pepper (paprika) in Bulgaria was produced. This story, along with the origin stories of the local varieties of peppers and tomatoes, is linked to the historical figure of Alexander Dimitrov. He lived from 1854-1928, and people in the village told me that he was the first to bring pepper seeds from Hungary and early (pink) tomato seeds from Istanbul back to Bulgaria. He brought these riches and an apparently keen interest in industrial manufacturing technologies back to his hometown, where he was a prominent community member. During his lifetime Kurtovo Konare was described by first-hand accounts as a prosperous and well-managed village with a good repuation for its agricultural production (Dichev as cited in Stoilova 2021, 105-106). As Stoilova points out, though "Grandfather Alexander" was a rather well-documented historical figure, the organizers of the Kurtovo Konare fest also strategically mythologized him in the creation of their food festival dedicated to peppers and tomatoes (2021, 113-114). Through his work, those global seeds and technologies became local, and the contemporary residents of Kurtovo Konare could claim the right to stewardship of his legacy.

In the center of the village stood the "*Lyueben Karavelov 1897"* chitalishte. The building dominated the town square and housed many important community spaces. Inside was a library for adults and one for children, a computer lab, a small kitchen, a meeting hall, and several multi-purpose rooms. There was a theater that had been unused for many years and had fallen into complete disrepair. Also attached to the building was a privately run café. There was a very small staff who ran the chitalishte under the leadership of Emilia Shusharova, the long-time

director. In addition to paid staff there is a robust network of community volunteers who contribute to the activities of the chitalishte.

Homemade for Sale – Making Lyutenitsa

Figure 10.1. Photograph of breakfast at lyutenitsa making work party. August 17, 2018.

I spent a long but pleasant day making lyutenitsa with Emilia and a group of friends and family that she had organized in August of 2018. We gathered in her aunt's courtyard, which had a large summer kitchen and dining area. When I arrived, the women offered me an elaborate breakfast upon arrival and encouraged me to enjoy the homemade cornelian cherry juice, yogurt, lyutentisa, and sandwiches (Figure 10.1). The three other women helping moved around the courtyard getting things ready. They were also guests, but the hostess treated me more formally. For example, the other women could get their own drinks from the refrigerator and help wash plates and set out food, while I could not. As with many other preserve-making gatherings, there was a healthy mix of socializing, eating, and drinking to break up the more arduous work. Even though this batch of lyutenitsa was for selling, the typical familial and friend network formed the core group of helpers, and the work party still centered around hospitality.

Making lyutenitsa is incredibly time consuming and labor intensive. While I was shown internet recipes for making small batches on a cookstove, on this August day I saw it made in a very large batch. Preparing lyutenitsa entailed hours of constant stirring over a steaming pot of bubbling puree. We were lucky that day was relatively cool. In the courtyard, grapevines and a persimmon tree shaded a patio where a large gas burner was on the ground. On top of the burner sat a huge, blackened metal pot brimming with a bright red slurry. Emilia told me that her aunt and a couple of her friends had chopped all the peppers the night before and used a neighbor's machine to peel and seed all the tomatoes. The women mixed the raw tomato puree and chopped peppers in the pot, and we were ready to begin the hours-long process of cooking down and seasoning them. The final step was to put the finished *lyutenitsa* in jars and sterilize them in a water bath.

While the other women fired up the gas burner and began stirring, Emilia and I walked down the street to visit the man who owned, and in fact had fabricated, the tomato processing machine. A pensioner, he processed tomatoes in his machine as a seasonal side business to supplement his income. Emilia explained that the small fee was a fair exchange for the significant labor savings. For people who produced hundreds of jars of *lyutenitsa* for the festival, the time savings from the machine were especially attractive even if it meant a small outlay of cash. When I was making *lyutenitsa* with other families, they would often skin the tomatoes by hand by blanching them in boiling water and then putting them in cold water to loosen the skins. Saving time in those contexts was less important than saving money. The man who owned the machine met us in his front courtyard and he enthusiastically agreed to show me the machine in action and tell me about his experience as a machinist in a nearby industrial food plant.[7]

He took a small knife in his work-worn hands and cut up a couple of tomatoes before tossing them into the hopper. It could be filled with about 5 gallons of tomatoes at a time. From the hopper the tomatoes went down into a small chute where they were pressed into puree that flowed out of a round spout at the bottom of the machine. The seeds and skins were pressed out another chute at the side of the machine and caught in a bucket. These leftovers he fed to his chickens.

Figure 10.2. Photograph of processing machine. August 17, 2018.

Figure 10.3. Photograph of machine making pureed tomato. August 17, 2018.

Figure 10.4. Photograph of leftover tomato seeds and skins. August 17, 2018.

[7] Folklorists such as Archie Green have documented how workers in the U.S. re-fashion skills, techniques, and leftover materials from their day jobs to create folk tools and art (2002). This is also an excellent example of the symbiotic relationship between large/industrial agriculture and small scale food production and processing.

While he demonstrated the machine, he explained to me the dangers of industrially made, store bought lyutenitsa: rotten produce, mice, and Roma.[8] He said that when the pepper fields were harvested the companies would leave the rotten produce that couldn't be sold at market in the field and go back to gather them later to make lyutenitsa in the factory. Emilia agreed with him that this was the case. He went on to say that when he was working in the factories, they often had problems with mice, and that if a mouse fell into the grinder they wouldn't stop the machines. They'd just grind it up with the rest of the ingredients. This account is reminiscent of the urban legends of food contamination in industrially produced food in the United States, such as the Kentucky Fried Rat (Brunvard 2001). Though in this man's account he personally witnessed the events, rather than hearing about them from a "friend of a friend". Finally, the man warned me that it was mostly Roma people who worked in the factories. He seemed to think this statement spoke for itself and didn't say why he thought this was a problem, but simply listed it as another reason not to buy commercially produced lyutenitsa. Emilia remained silent on the last two points but as we were leaving commented that since he had worked as a machinist in several factories, he probably knew what he was talking about. He categorized industrial lyutenitsa as unclean because of low quality ingredients and contamination from vermin. His negative comments about Roma indicated to me that he, like many people in Bulgaria, believed Roma to be "dirty" and therefore a contaminating factor. Through these statements this man categorized factory produced products as unclean and untrustworthy, in contrast to clean, pure, and trustworthy homemade products.

As we walked back to the courtyard, Emilia told me that she had made lyutenitsa when she was younger but stopped making it after her grandmother died. She said that the festival motivated her to resume making this labor and time-intensive preserve. She now made lyutenitsa for the purpose of giving it away as gifts to special guests at the festival and also helped her aunt make jars to be sold at the food festival. She had also organized a network of gardeners and farmers to preserve several increasingly rare varieties of local fruits and vegetables including the pink

[8] Throughout this conversation, the man used the offensive slur *tsigani* to describe Roma people. This term is believed to have originated from the Greek work *athinganoi* which literally means "untouchables" and/or *atsinganoi* which was associated with sorcerers. While it is a derogatory term, it is widely used in most conversations amongst ethnic Bulgarians with whom I have spoken over the past 14 years. There are other more offensive terms, but these are not as frequently used. Roma face frequent persecution in Bulgaria, where there is the highest concentration of Roma in Europe, and they are the second largest ethnic minority. For more details on the plight of Roma people and response to historical and ongoing discrimination see Silverman 2012, 10-15.

tomato “Golyam Babin,” sweet pepper “Kurtovska Kapiya,” apple “Kurtovka,” peach “Chervena Kurtovka,” and large dry bean “Popski Fasul.” These varieties had once been more popular in the area, but in most cases had features that were not well-suited to the contemporary market environment. For example, some of them didn’t travel well, had a short season, or were time consuming to cook. Gardeners in the village told me that climate change also threatened the viability of some of these varieties. In the case of the “Popski Fasul” bean, in particular, cultivation had all but vanished. Emilia had been able to recruit few gardeners to keep cultivating them to sell at the festival.

Emilia also listed the various ways she had stitched together funding to put on the Kurtovo Konare Fest over the years. She had applied for various grants from organizations like the America for Bulgaria Foundation, had successfully written EU funded project applications, and had collaborated with the regional government for support,[9] though she pointed out that the amount of funding was minimal. In the early years they had used it to purchase infrastructure like the festival stage, lighting, and advertising materials. On a yearly basis, they paid well-known bands and ensembles to perform. Other than those paid performers and chitalishte staff, a very large volunteer effort made the festival possible.

Figure 10.5. Photograph of promotional postcards for Kurtovo Konare Fest created and printed with EU project money. April 13, 2022.

[9] For detailed history on funding of the Kurtovo Konare Fest see Stoilova 2021, 123-132.

Upon our return to the courtyard, we found the other women taking turns stirring the lyutenitsa with a long wooden paddle. They invited me over to the pot to stir for a few seconds at a time. It was heavy work to keep the paddle moving. As the fragrant steam rose up and dampened my face and hair, I was careful not to splash the thickening liquid onto my legs. Emilia snapped some pictures of me at work but took the paddle back quickly because they couldn't risk ruining the whole pot with my inexperienced stirring. They had to stir constantly, scraping the two-meter-long wooden paddle across the bottom of the pot with each figure-eight pass. The pot was sitting up on the gas ring, around which the ladies had pulled some thin sheet metal to shield their shins from the gas heat and any splattering lyutenitsa. They joked around that they were all wearing their long aprons in case of splatters, though the metal did a pretty good job of protecting them and the surrounding walls from the bubbling liquid. The heat was kept low to maintain a steady, slow boil. Compared to *lyutenitsa* cooked over a wood fire, cooking over gas significantly increased the diligence and skill required to keep the liquid from scorching the bottom of the pot. But gas also sped up the process and saved the labor of wood gathering. It was tiring to keep up the stirring, and the women took turns. As the time wore on, they gathered chairs to sit in while they stirred.

Once the liquid had started to thicken (as pictured in Figure 1.6 compared to Figure 1.7), we added the seasonings.

Figure 10.6. Photograph of puree for lyutenitsa at the beginning of the cooking process. August 17, 2018.

Figure 10.7. Photograph of thickened puree after cooking. August 17, 2018.

The first seasoning was salt. Emilia's aunt was in charge of this part of the process, and she told me she did everything by "eye" and taste. She instructed me to take two big fists full of salt and add it to the pot. Next, we added some apple cider vinegar from a recycled 2-liter bottle. Emilia said that her son had made the vinegar himself. The stirring never stopped as we added cumin from the small plastic spice bags sold in the village store. Emilia's aunt also instructed me to sprinkle in some sugar. Emilia commented that some people didn't use any sugar but instead sweetened the mix with carrots or apples, which had the added benefit of thickening the lyutenitsa. Finally, Emilia tipped in a bottle of sunflower oil.

Periodically, Emilia or her aunt would use a metal spoon to scoop out a sample of lyutenitsa onto a saucer to check the consistency and flavoring (Figure 10.8). The women handed around small teaspoons so that everyone could taste and add their opinions about the adjustments needed. Interestingly, they also asked for my opinion about the seasonings. Overall, we added more salt than anyone remembered using last year. Every 10 minutes or so we repeated the process until the liquid had cooked down by about half and everyone was satisfied with the flavor. During the final few minutes of cooking, they sent me away to the outdoor sink to wash spoons and invented other errands to keep me away from the pot as they were stirring. While I was away, the women surreptitiously tossed in some additional seasonings. They obviously wanted to keep some details secret, although they generally shared with me the ingredients and techniques.

Figure 10.8. Photograph of Emilia and her aunt stirring in seasonings for lyutenitsa Taken by the author on

During the last half an hour or so of cooking, two women washed and stacked glass jars into black crates. They were round, threaded jars that each held about 1.5 cups. They came with green lids decorated with a picture of mixed vegetables on the top. The women commented on how the lids were so nice looking they wouldn't need to decorate them further. Some women who sold preserves at the festival used paper doilies or colorful napkins tied with string to adorn

the top of the jars. I never saw this type of decorating in cellars or pantries where the jars were not intended for show. With a different audience in mind, and knowing the jars would be publicly displayed, the women modified the typical domestic practice.

This entire batch and at least six others like it were all being made for sale. This group of women planned to make a total of 500 jars that year. Each jar and lid cost about 45 stotinki (about 25 cents in 2018). They would sell the final product for 4 leva and 50 stotinki (about $2.75). For all the labor and the cost of all the ingredients, that price seemed low to me. As was common, the women didn't perceive their labor as a cost, and the vegetables were from their own gardens. While there was a small expense in each batch for the sugar, salt, oil, and spices, the vinegar was a gift and so not calculated. Deducting the cost of the jars and purchased ingredients, which were the major cash outlay, the jars would bring in about 2,000 leva. Put in other terms, the income was very close to the equivalent of a minimum annual pension. On this one hand, this was a significant income supplement. On the other hand, it wasn't enough money to actually support someone.

Figure 10.9. Photograph of lyutenitsa being poured into jars. August 17, 2018.

Figure 10.10. Photograph of lyutenitsa in jar being capped. August 17, 2018.

Figure 10.11. Photograph of scraping the pot clean. August 17, 2018.

We worked together to move the very heavy, scalding hot pot from the burner to a wheeled metal cart and rolled it over to the stacks of glass jars. The women took turns pouring the lyutenitsa into clean jars before handing them down the line to another woman with a damp cloth. The

cloth protected her hand from the heat of the almost boiling lyutenitsa as she wiped down the jar and screwed on the cap. Using a rubber spatula the pot was scraped clean, and all together 71 jars were filled. We dished the last scoop onto a small plate that went onto the lunch table.

The jars (Figure 1.12) were put in a large pot covered with soot from previous fires (Figure 1.13). The pot was filled with very warm water and the jars were submerged with "two fingers" of water over the top of the lids. Pieces of tile weighted down and kept the jars from floating up (Figure 1.14). The large lid was placed on the pot as the gas burner was turned up to high. Once the water boiled, the jars required another fifteen minutes in the water bath to seal the lids and complete the canning process. This gave us plenty of time to stop for lunch.

Figure 10.12. Photograph of lyutenitsa in jars. August 17, 2018.

Figure 10.13. Photograph of pot full of water to process jars. August 17, 2018.

Figure 10.14. Photograph of jars submerged to sterilize and seal. August 17, 2018.

Emilia and her aunt prepared the food, and a neighbor woman named Nellie helped set the table. We were served minced meat patties (*kyufte*) with a spicy pepper seasoning, home-made white cheese (*sirene)*, whole wheat bread with sunflower seeds, fresh lyutenitsa straight from the pot, last year's lyutenitsa for comparison, nectarines and peaches from Emilia's orchard, and vegetable stew (*gyuvech*). Two ladies drank some beer together, and after a while a bottle of rakiya emerged from under the table. It was made from grapes right there in the courtyard. The

women tentatively asked if I would try just a little. I said yes, so everyone had a small glass and laughed about drinking in the middle of the day, without any male company.

Figure 10.15. Photograph of jarred foods displayed by a neighbor. August 17, 2018.

A neighbor woman stopped by as we were waiting for the jars to finish boiling. Emilia introduced me, and when the neighbor heard that I was interested in preserves and Bulgarian food she rushed home to bring me some of her own making. I asked her why she made preserves, and she laughed as she said, "I have to eat don't I?" In the jar of cucumber pickles there was one perfectly round slice of onion, peppercorns, dill flowers, and bay leaves. It was obvious that the care she had taken to prepare her preserves represented something more than just making food for survival. When I held up the jar to admire it, she explained that the secret to really delicious pickles was not over cooking them. She said store bought pickles had an unpleasant, rubbery texture but that these homemade pickles were crisp and tasty. She was proud of her work and went through great pains to explain to me the way that she made each jar. She brought me a jar of lyutenitsa from last year and noted that this year's lyutenitsa was a slightly different color that she attributed to the difference the yearly weather made in the tomatoes and peppers. Her recipe and process for making lyutenitsa was very similar to what we had done that day in the courtyard. But her jar was not for sale; she shared it with me as a gift. The rest she planned to eat during the winter.

This brief interaction with a neighbor who was not involved in the Slow Food activities of the village reveals the nuance of converting home-preserved foods into heritage in Kurtovo Konare. There were still many people who made jars as part of their everyday lives. For these practitioners, food preservation was not an "outmoded" or "obsolete" practice and the "added-value" of being heritagized was not required to ensure their ongoing performance. The jars would likely continue to be part of this neighbor's livelihood strategies. They gave her a sense

of security that she would have sufficient food, a way to ensure access to aesthetically appealing foods, and the opportunity to show her skill.

Home-Made Food Preservation as Heritage

Slow Food activists like Emilia were "taking food public" by pulling private foodways practices into the nexus of practices related to the politics of saving food for the future (Counihan 2012, 495). As a social practice, making lyutentitsa that was destined for sale used similar materials and competences. It was recruited into the public politics of "saving food" through converting lyutenitsa as practice and product into heritage. As Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett put it, "Heritage […] is the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct. Heritage is created through a process of exhibition (as knowledge, as performance, as museum display). Exhibition endows heritage thus conceived with a second life" (1995, 369). The home-preserved foods converted into heritage were exhibited by village residents at the food festival to be consumed by attendees in multiple ways. In some versions of the festival, women performed live lyutenitsa making demonstrations for the public, and every year vendors offered tastes of and sold their home-made lyutenitsa.

Though heritage was on display for consumption, including through the sale of home-made preserves, there were still many elements of informal exchange and sociality at the festival. Interestingly, Emilia always referred to the people visiting the festival as "guests" rather than tourists or customers. The term "guest," and the consistent focus on hospitality that Emilia demonstrated in relation to the festival, blurred the distinction between the transactional and social nature of the event. While typical home-made preserve making, distribution, and consumption highlight hospitality and gift giving, they are "obsolete" within the context of the formal market economy. In addition to the products themselves, women also put on display their ongoing practices of hospitality and gift giving. This practice distinguishes these home-made preserves from their industrial equivalents, which are also for sale. It was a way to performatively distance the potentially "contaminating" features of the market economy, which values profit above all else and disconnects producers and consumers.

In the industrial context, consumers have to trust in regulations, testing, labels, and certifications to keep them safe and ensure a high-quality product. This is problematic in Bulgaria because

many people perceive industrially produced jarred foods as low quality; the systems that are supposed to govern food safety are highly suspect because of corporate and governmental corruption. For example, people expected large business owners would bribe and collude with government officials to pass inspections. This tied industrial food to corruption in the government at the expense of "normal" people. In addition, the profit motive created an incentive to cut corners in various ways (rotten produce, mice in the machines). In contrast, at the Kurtovo Konare Fest, the jar makers would offer samples and speak with each customer about their recipes. The lyutenitsa sold at the market was labeled "homemade" (*domashna*) and had the name and telephone number of the person who made it stamped on the side. Often vendors would throw in a small gift with the purchase. So, even though traditional products were displayed and sold between people who didn't necessarily know one another, vendors made efforts to minimize the resemblance of formal market transactions and mimic informal transfer.

There are pre-existing associations for many Bulgarians of villages as places where clean and tasty "authentic" Bulgarian food originates which was an advantage for creating home-made products for sale in a village like Kurtovo Konare (Jung 2014, 93). Another advantage was that most of the people making the preserves for sale in Kurtovo Konare were older women, commonly referred to collectively as "grandmothers" (*babi).* So, while gastrolocalism was certainly at play in the strategic establishment of Kurtovo Konare as the legitimate source and caretakers of authentic Bulgarian foods like lyutenitsa, there was a pre-existing affinity for Bulgarians to search for authentic, traditional, and home-made, foods made by older village women, regardless of specific location.

Festival organizers transformed home-preserved foods like lyutenitsa into culinary heritage in Kurtovo Konare. The organizers converted these typically not marketable home-preservation practices and products into value-added heritage in an effort to preserve them (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1995, 370). The display and consumption primarily took place as part of the Kurtovo Konare Fest. However, local culinary heritage was displayed by the festival organizers in Kurtovo Koanre for more than the touristic audience. The organizers from the chitalishte also exhibited their heritage for various donor and funding agencies. The festival and many chitalishte activities are grant funded, primarily through EU projects but also by donors like the America For Bulgaria Foundation. Festival organizers put these traditional practices and

products on display for donor agencies; the result was that the agencies revalued both, evaluating them not only their "authenticity" but also their alignment with the funding agency's goals and mission. Major concerns for these agencies in Bulgaria include bolstering civil society, economic development particularly in rural areas, and fighting corruption. The home-made preserves in this context became symbolically potent components of protest against government and corporate corruption in Bulgaria, at the same time that they provided a common cause for local grassroots organizing and economic development efforts.

The production of home-made foods for exhibition and sale ran parallel to informal domestic production and did not replace it. Yet the festival organizers' efforts to foreground these traditional foods as authentic Bulgarian foods shifted the consumers of the goods from family and friends to a broader public. Shifting the meaning of the jars shifted the consumers of the jars and also the adjacent and associated practices. In terms of domestic production, the adjacent practices included gardening, foraging, informal trading and gifting, consuming, reinforcing social networks, celebrating holidays, and offering hospitality. In the case of lyutenitsa produced and sold at the festival, novel adjacent practices included grant writing and management, public protest, public education, marketing, and social organizing with food activists within Bulgaria and abroad. Unlike domestic food preservation, protecting these traditional foods required confronting and contesting corruption rather than implicitly refuting, circumventing, or enduring it. All the while heritage-makers delicately navigate the tensions that such a move created by retaining informal social practices like giving gifts, offering hospitality, labeling tourists as guests, and creating long-term inter-personal relationships. The food activists in Kurtovo Konare positioned themselves as protectors of their heritage of food self-provisioning and preservation practices, which included not only the preserved foods but also social relationships of trust and care. They operated not in private, domestic spaces like the other preserve makers in this dissertation, but by entering public markets and political spaces with culinary heritage to which they laid claim.

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CHAPTER 11

PRACTICING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN EVERYDAY LIFE: SALT AND HONEY

"There is always suffering in life. Those before us have suffered and we too must suffer. But there is also happiness, merriment, bliss. To be alive is to hurt and to laugh, not just one or the other. To laugh after you've hurt, while you're hurting, that's a great thing. Stay with me, I wanted to tell her. Let's learn to accept the world together."

(Penkov 2016, 368)

Looking Around Rather Than Ahead

Food self-provisioning and preservation do not fit the timeline of progress for those who operate within a modernist, capitalist conceptualization of development. These practices may also not seem "progressive" through the lens of food-based social movements or public efforts to preserve traditions since these practices are deeply entangled with industrial, global, corporate materials. What gets lost in between these two conceptualizations is the actually emerging, evanescent present that manifests in living practices that draw on inherited, experimental, prototypical, and novel materials, competences, and meanings. Throughout this dissertation I have tried to attend to the present, to hone my "arts of noticing" what is emergent and full of life, casting my gaze to the proximate and ordinary to better understand stability and change (Tsing 2016, 12).

Looking around, rather than ahead, I notice that many Bulgarians continue to practice home-based food preservation as components of their everyday lives and that these practices are occasionally recruited into more public, political movements. Food preservation practices along with adjacent practices like food self-provisioning, are persistent despite their characterization as outdated holdovers by some scholars. Home-preserved foods have long played a role in basic food security in Bulgaria, but this explanation alone is insufficient to explain their ongoing prevalence. And though food self-provisioning and preservation have a wide variety of benefits often associated with "Alternative Food Networks" or food sovereignty, those movements don't appear to be a significant factor for most people. By using a practice theory, I have sought to better understand how food preservation became prevalent historically, how it has changed, and also how and why it has been preserved through continual re-generation. In addition, folklorists have helped me understand why people continue to pass on their cultural traditions. It is almost

never about financial gain but rather about re-creation to ensure something more meaningful than mere survival.

Inheritances

I began by arguing that home-based food preservation in contemporary Bulgaria is deeply influenced by materials and competences made common during the years of state-socialism. I framed these as inheritances from the past that many Bulgarians continue to hold in common. People could and did readily join jars, tools, and ingredients together with embodied competences and encoded knowledge like recipes and cookbooks, all inherited from that period. Another tangible inheritance for many people is land on which to grow and preserve food. There are inherited meanings from the years of state socialism as well. For many, taste memories from that period also often involved home-grown and home-preserved foods that they often associated with grandmothers and villages.

The economies of shortage significantly constrained choices in consumption and supplies; even some basic foods were unpredictable. Therefore, storing up food in the cellar was a way to insulate the family from scarce and unreliable supplies. Industrially produced foods were sometimes suspect in terms of quality. Concerns ranged from rotten ingredients to over-reliance on salt, sugar, and long processing times to preserve foods in factories. As Nadezhda Maksimova pointed out, her grandmother produced preserves at home because of her concerns about the aesthetic qualities (like texture) and healthfulness of the industrially produced alternatives. Preserving food at home was a way to exercise agency within constraints, to imbue life with aesthetic pleasures, to shore up social networks, and to demonstrate care for loved ones. It was also grueling work that was undertaken due to necessity and associated with informal rural practices in a time when the State's vision of the future was urban, industrial, and modern.

Contemporary Context

When goods flooded into the market after the end of state socialism in Bulgaria, people generally perceived those goods as high quality if they were from the West. But they were also expensive, and while incomes remained low, state supports simultaneously diminished. Food self-provisioning and preservation continued to be adaptive in the face of economic uncertainties. Ongoing low wages and pensions mean that many people needed to engage in livelihood

strategies outside of the formal market to make ends meet. One of the strategies close at hand was (and is) food preservation. This can be summed up in the quote, "I have to eat don't I?"

Beyond sustenance, there are many other reasons "normal" people continue to engage in home-based food preservation. These include carrying on family traditions, such as in the cases of Tatyana and Nadi in Mladen and Vassi in Simitli. Mothers, grandmothers, and mothers-in law taught people how to preserve food. They now carry on the practices, sharing their output with their children and grandchildren. As we toured their cellars, they enjoyed reminiscing about old recipes they had learned and stories associated with their childhoods. The practices were a touchpoint to their personal histories; they honored the hard work and skill of the women who came before them by remembering them and keeping their traditions alive.

Health was another meaning associated with home-preserved foods. As Nadezhda Maksimova illustrated, health is closely related to diet, and home-preserved foods could be tailored to suit individual or familial concerns for healthfulness. This included control over the ingredients like salt and sugar and avoiding chemical inputs. Home-preserved foods also served as functional and medicinal foods for the general preservation of health and the specific treatment of particular ailments.

Related to health, safety was another particular quality of home-preserved foods as contrasted with industrially preserved foods. Concern with safety highlights the deep distrust that many Bulgarians have of corporations and the government. While there is burgeoning availability of organic certified foods in Bulgaria, even these foods are eyed with caution by people with whom I spoke. As my friend Dilyana put it, "I could spend all my money on Bio[1] certified food and still not be certain that it is really without chemicals and clean. I don't think that these [industrial] jars are counterfeit (*mente*), but I think that they are lower quality than other places in Europe and definitely lower quality than homemade." While many people described the early years after state socialism as a time when consumers perceived Western goods as very high quality, that has changed over time. As Dilyana's quote illustrates, now many fear that the Bulgarian market is the endpoint for products that can't be sold in other countries with more stringent standards. All of this deepens the everyday experience of Bulgarians as living in a

[1] This is the equivalent term for organic certification in Bulgaria.

country that is “not normal.” Home-grown and preserved foods in this context provide a safe refuge from state regulations that are unreliably enforced, and market forces that can’t be trusted.

Domestic food preserving practices also prevent waste. Produce, herbs, and mushrooms that are seasonally abundant can be converted into long storing food, tea, or alcohol through fermentation, dehydration, or sterilization. As shelf-stable products, they also don’t require ongoing supplies of electricity to maintain their freshness. These foods even out food availability over the year when there is a natural rhythm of over-abundance followed by unproductive seasons due to local climate. The jars used to preserve many foods are also durable and re-usable. People can use them for many years and need only replace the metal lids. This reduces disposable food packaging.

Because of pervasive memories associated with home-preserved foods, many people continued to valorize the tastes of these foods. This was particularly common among urban or ex-pat Bulgarians who don’t make their own preserves. Home-preserved foods were tastes of home, family, and the past (Jones and Long 2017, 3-16). These memories were largely positive, and often associated with childhood. Opening up a jar of roasted peppers in the dead of winter also conjured up a more recent past. As one woman put it, “It’s a taste of summer in the winter.” The smell of roasting peppers, often the first step in preserving them, is another common memory associated with home-preserved foods and late summer in Bulgaria. These tastes and smells leave a strong imprint and connect people across time to their embodied experiences of the past both distant and more proximate (Proust 1981).

Beyond memory, people I spoke with also valued the aesthetics of home-preserved foods. Home-preserved foods had tastes and textures that were different than industrially produced alternatives. Preserve makers catered to their own preferences and those of their families. They customized via seasoning and cooking processes. Preserved foods also offered visual appeal. This ranged from how products were sliced and arranged in a jar to how jars were arranged on shelves and in pantries. Good taste, pleasant aromas, satisfying textures, and visually appealing display were all specific qualities of home-preserved foods.

Domestic food preservation also creates connections among its practitioners through working together, gift giving, and as manifestations of care. Often, these created and reinforced multigenerational ties. For example, many younger people expressed great fondness for

gathering on summer days spent in their familial villages to share in the work and festivities of food preservation. As Yelena, who worked for a large winery, put it, "My family and the family of my husband we gather all together and we roast peppers and peel them for winter…and we are laughing and we are telling different stories and we are doing this all day. It's like a family gathering."[2] Some younger interviewees indicated that they were drivers in their household to make certain preserved foods, such as lyutenitsa, and that they bring the generations together so that they can learn through doing. Like jars, these competences may lay dormant for years before being pulled back into use. These embodied competences can be flexibly deployed, innovated, and called into action when necessary or desirable. Kristiyan, a young professional who lives in Sofia, put it this way:

> At first it [making jars] was just interesting to me. But when I thought more deeply about why I want to do this and why it is important it was mainly because somehow I decided I wanted to gain some skills. To learn from older people or from my friends or from whatever information I can get about how to make lyutenitsa and all kinds of jars. And somehow in this moment that information became very accessible. Some books appeared, some other friends started doing the same thing. My grandmother and grandfather made jars [in the past] but not my parents. So, I started asking them and it turns out my grandmother and grandfather they actually know a lot. They just live in an apartment now so that's why they stopped doing the things they did before. I think these skills are very important because you don't know what will happen in the future. I mean, I live in the capital now, but after 10 years maybe I will need to grow my own food or prepare my own food. Not necessarily connected to some apocalyptic forecast, it could be just the changing of the economy or something like that.

Jars of food made specifically to share with children or grandchildren, travelling across rural and urban divides, also created intergenerational connections. In fact, these preserved foods and alcohol travel far beyond the borders of Bulgaria, creating global connections to place and people. When I asked my friend Ivan, who moved to Canada in 2019, what he brought with him

[2] Folklorists have extensively documented family foodways, for example see Kathy Neustadt's chapter "'Born among the Shells' The Quakers of Allen's Neck and Their Clambake" and Barbara Fertig's chapter "Hog Killing in Virginia: Work as Celebration" in *"We Gather Together": Food and Festival in American Life*, edited by Theodore C. Humphrey and Lin T. Humphrey (1988).

from Bulgaria, he immediately wrote back via Facebook Messenger, "A bottle of my father's rakiya, of course!" Preserved foods are also served at gatherings such as calendrical and life cycle rituals and other celebrations. They are a component of hospitality that ties people together and can be used as gifts to create or recreate social networks (Noyes 2003).

Vasi's words at the end of our interview, that she preserved foods to "To have a more joyful life" are also significant. While this theme is in some ways linked to aesthetic pleasures and creating connections, preserve makers also articulated a broader conceptualization of living a good life. Again, this marked making preserved foods as a choice and not as a necessity born of want. In fact, these comments explicitly spoke against poverty or deprivation as the main motivating factor for making these foods. They were part of how people created wellbeing for themselves and their families. The line between work and leisure in making preserved foods was blurry. It was a production-oriented leisure activity for many people who described it as relaxing and enjoyable work, even while it was stressful and overwhelming at times.

Bringing it Home to the West

We could read these everyday food saving practices as "infrapolitical" or "hidden transcripts" because while they typically negotiate powerful systems discreetly, they occasionally burst out into public view and challenge systems directly (Scott 2008). But this gives short shrift to the worlds in the making that these practices enable. They are not "ineffective" or "less important" politically when they are not explicitly motivated by a social movement or because they occur in less visible domestic spaces. They actively create a niche within which to thrive. They make food sovereignty manifest within this niche, even while not always engaging with explicit political struggle against the systems that confine them.

There is no "outside" the state or the market. These practices operate within them and between them negotiating them on their own terms without directly confronting or conforming to the official regimes. Everyone I interviewed benefitted from state supports such as healthcare, pensions, or paid maternity leave. Everyone also received infusions of cash from sources such as remittances, wage labor, or formal entrepreneurial businesses. Many people also earned cash from informal activities like selling in markets or food festivals. They also engaged in exchanges without money for goods or services, shared and traded work. Thinking about home-

preserved foods like an East European is therefore not only about resistance or subversion but also about making-do and the art of living a good life.

Food self-provisioning and preservation were not characterized by most preserve makers as "resistance" to the state or the formal market but rather as arts of living well within constraints. This is similar to Caldwell's observations in Russia that frame food preservation and self-provisioning as practices that "[…] creatively patched together multiple sets of resources" (Caldwell 2004, 111). As Nadezhda put it, she would be able to endure political and economic systems that didn't serve "normal" people by "keeping her head down and sticking to the land" while also drawing on resources from the state and various kinds of market exchange. This is also resonant with observations made by Morris and Fitzherbert about contemporary Maori food sovereignty practices in New Zealand. Their research also highlighted multi-faceted practices that move among multiple spheres of production and exchange (2017, 29-31). The fluid movement between self-provisioning, formal and informal exchange, local production, and imported foods, reduced dependence on any one system. This diversified dependence, which food preservation supports, created niches within formal state and market systems for quiet food sovereignty to flourish.

"Thinking of Food Like an East European" reframes the constellation of practices common in East European food systems as resilient and adaptive innovations rather than "relics" (Jehlička et al. 2021). Similar to my own findings, those of Jehlička et al. highlight the complex and interlocking elements of Eastern European food systems that defy an antagonistic characterization between industrial and small-scale agriculture and highlight the multiple non-commodified ways people obtain and share food, including foraged foods. Food preservation practices that I observed were not oppositional to global, industrial, capitalized food systems. Some people I interviewed gained income by working in industrial food manufacturing. Ingredients and methods from those systems are also integrated into domestic food preservation. This can be in the form of ingredients like sugar, salt, and spices. It can also be in the form of seeds. This multiplicity of materials and competences can be re-worked and recruited into different assemblages to create resilient pools of resources in the face of unknown and unpredictable changes and shocks.

Often Western-based food scholars have conducted their research in a context that presumes a universal, highly commodified, and segmented food system and therefore it, "[…] prioritized alternatives to the food system and its transformations based on ethical consumerism, food commodification, certification and marketisation" (Jehlička et al. 2020 289). Alternatively, Eastern Europe, "[…] harbours 'implicit', 'quiet' alternatives that do not result from intentional, individualised behaviours motivated by environmental and social responsibility" (Jehlička et al. 2020, 289). Preserve makers in Bulgaria demonstrate the power of these "quiet" alternatives. They are making a niche for themselves and form a community of practice even when they are not co-located. The prevalence of these practices means that there is a large community of people practicing food sovereignty through the consistent re-enactment of their everyday foodways, such as saving food for winter.

If we take seriously the idea of structuration, that agents and structures are co-constitutive and recursively created and re-created, then we can better understand the power of "quiet" food sovereignty (Giddens 1984). Home-based food preservation, as an extension of everyday life, is simultaneously created by and re-fashioning broader structures. For example, pervasive and ongoing creation of alternatives to corporate industrial agriculture for basic food provisioning erodes the totalizing power of that system. As ongoing practices enlarge the niche of food self-provisioning and preservation, the edges of the constraining structures weaken and crumble. Within the niche, people can exercise more autonomy in their foodways and preserve a wider variety of elements to recruit into future practice. Ironically, the "development" of more stringent food hygiene rules, particularly associated with EU integration, makes some of these domestic food preservation practices and alternative food markets illegal. In this case, public political work to re-legalize traditional foodways, especially for small producers, may be a useful intervention. In the meantime, a robust informal economy works around the constraints of the formal, capitalized, and "legal" food systems.

Increasing access to reliable, safe, desirable foods in the commercial and formal sector is also something that people want. As Melissa Caldwell pointed out in a recent edited volume dedicated to indigenous and post-colonial food sovereignties, having the option to buy safe, desirable, high-quality foods and therefore avoid the time and labor associated with self-provisioning is also part of how we should define food sovereignty. Note that some people I

spoke with were very happy to not have to make home preserves. Stefka, for example, preferred to buy the industrial variety of lyutenitsa and was relieved that her late summers were free for pursuits other than preserving food over a hot fire. More trustworthy industrial food would be a win in terms of choice, time savings, and insulation against micro-local shortages due to contingencies like weather.

Home-based food preservation practices are about living life as fully as possible, in the context of ongoing and unpredictable precarity. The Bulgarian cellar is a part of life as it is lived in the moment with reference to both future and past but with no inevitable outcome. It's about making a plan for how to *dwell* amidst both the predictable fluctuations in food availability due to weather and the less predictable changes due to global or European politics. The cellar is home to the contingently assembled practices of home-based food preservation and procurement. Filling the cellar with preserved foods is what makes sense for a large number of Bulgarians and Eastern Europeans in their contemporary contexts given their particular histories, natural resources, and learned competences. These practices are entangled with a web of other practices related to everyday life. They generate material provisions that can be stored for the future or converted into other material needs. They are also integrally linked to the pleasure and aesthetics of food and provide critical components of ritual life and activity. Finally, they reproduce social relationships through production and exchange and are linked to familial, community, rural, and national identity.

This study shows that home preserved foods are a nexus of practices that link material, biological, and cultural survival; formal and informal economies; social networks; wild and cultivated foods; and overt as well as more covert forms of political activity. As such, they are an ideal subject for investigating how ordinary people engaging in mundane social practices, like saving food for the winter, are creating resilience and meaning in their lives. They do this in the context of broader economic and political forces that lay largely beyond their control; through the very process of re-generating these practices, they are making sanctuaries within these systems. Home-based food preservation practices provided resilience in the context of the socialist food regimes of the past and continue to be adaptive as Bulgaria joins the global market economy and is increasingly integrating into the industrial, corporate food regime. It's about *saving food* in both the immediate and longer term, for the winter and for future generations.

And it's about *food that saves* in terms of food security but also in terms of identity and the pursuit of a meaningful life even in the ruins of both state-socialist and neoliberal capitalist regimes. In sum, these practices provide an illustration of quiet food sovereignty.

The *practices* of saving food for the winter are not preserved through stasis. Rather, they are preserved through dynamic and responsive re-generation. We can attempt to preserve elements in stasis like seeds, or recipes, or instructional videos, but there must be carriers able and willing to bring the elements together to have a living practice. Our focus thus shifts from preserving any one particular element to the relationship between the elements, the carriers who maintain and re-create them, and the field of opportunity within which they occur. This regenerative process can integrate new elements, competences and meanings and still be recognizable. It has some continuity to the past, some durability, and yet integrates contemporary elements and is flexible to dynamic circumstances that open future possibilities.

Coming Full Circle: Honey and Salt, Beauty and Heartbreak

I will end this dissertation returning to my first ritual meal in Bulgaria. It was August 2006. My husband and I, along with three other American Peace Corps volunteers, had just arrived in Simitli, a small, southwestern town of several thousand people. We were taken through a metal gate into a garden courtyard filled with people—extended family, neighbors, and friends of the host-families who had agreed to take us in for our three months of language training. Two grandmothers, Baba Tonka and Baba Lily, approached us. Baba Tonka was in a light blue dress with a tiny, white flower print and a dark apron, her dark hair carefully styled. Baba Lily had her gray hair pinned back and gathered in a small ponytail tied with yellow yarn, and a bright red, flower-covered shawl. Baba Lily gave a speech, welcoming us as explorers in a new land. Then, as people in the crowd snapped photos, she approached us Americans with a large tray, bearing a round bread with two small dishes on the side, one with salt and one with honey. She gave us instructions, which we couldn't really understand. So, the grandmothers used gestures and body language to get us each to each take a small piece of bread to dip in the dish of salt and then the honey. Because we didn't speak any Bulgarian, my husband's host-father, Borko, translated for us. The honey represented the sweet things in life, while salt represented tears, hard work, and difficult times. While we were the first to partake of this ritual meal, as the newly welcomed guests, everyone in the yard also participated. And in this act we were ushered in, to experience

the joy and the heartbreak of life in Bulgaria, and to do it all together as a group newly formed by the ritual of sharing bread, literally becoming companions.

Figure 11.1. Photograph of author eating bread dipped in honey and salt, served by Baba Lily. Taken by Borko Dafkov on August 10, 2006.

For me, this meal has come to symbolize more than my welcome and integration into Bulgarian life. It has become a metaphor for my general experience in Bulgaria and a guide for developing this dissertation. On the one hand I have encountered intense beauty, joy, hospitality, and love. On the other there is also of sorrow, heartbreak, constraint, pain, and loss. You can't have one without the other; they all exist together, side by side with the everyday mundane practices of eating bread and trying to figure out how to live together. I hope to have captured some of both the honey and the salt in this dissertation, to have avoided both unmitigated critique, mourning and deconstruction as well as romanticized "resilience porn." I hope that you have been able to see the beauty and the heartbreak, side by side. I hope that you can begin to notice with me microcosms of emergent life, and how that life transforms the world around it. And I hope that we will work together to attend to that life, to enlarge the niche when possible, to stay present, engaged, entangled—in other words, to be committed to dwelling together in a world as it is becoming.

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