

# 'Without Co-ops There Would be No Forests!': Historical Memory and the Restitution of Forests in Post-socialist Bulgaria

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*In the wake of Bulgaria's post-socialist restitution of formerly private forests, cooperatives have widespread support among residents of the central Rhodope mountains as a way to manage the newly re-privatised resource. This support occurs despite privatisation programmes designed to foster individual private ownership and a history of socialism, which might bias people against cooperative institutions. Reasons for the favourable attitude towards cooperatives include the economic rationale of large-scale forest management along with social memory of pre-socialist forestry cooperatives in the region as valued community institutions that supported community projects, produced income for forest owners, provided jobs, and managed the forests efficiently and transparently. This case study contributes to a better understanding of natural resource management under post-socialist conditions in which individuated private property often receives the most attention.*

## INTRODUCTION

WITH THE COMMENCEMENT of Bulgaria's post-socialist forest restitution in the late 1990s, forestry cooperatives have received considerable attention in the central Rhodope mountains as a potential—and now actual—means for managing the re-privatised forest resources there. At the same time there appears to be relatively little concern for individuated private property and clear borders between forest parcels among a majority of new forest owners. This suggests a vision of property

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that is not strictly informed by Western capitalist ideals about clear boundaries and autonomous individuals, a situation that Verdery has described in terms of fuzziness or fuzzy property. She writes, 'Neoliberal property notions so often emphasize *rights* (entitlements) and *obligations* (accountability), whose subjects are normatively *individuals* (physical or jural) exercising *exclusive* rights. From this vantage point, all other arrangements look fuzzy' (Verdery 1999: 54, emphasis original). For this article, the nature of the subjects and their rights are of particular interest.

In contrast to the other articles in this collection, this one is not about contestation by different actors over a particular resource. Nor is it specifically about fuzzy property; some aspects of fuzzy property are discussed, but others might see more in this topic than is relevant to the argument being made here. Instead, the article explores the reasons for the widespread support for forestry cooperatives through a historically grounded analysis of property relations with regard to forests in the region. The article is based on nine months of fieldwork in Bulgaria between 2000 and 2002, backed up by a review of documentary material on Bulgarian forests and related legislation, and more than a year of fieldwork in a Rhodope village before the restitution began. My research on the forest restitution focuses on a handful of settlements in the central Rhodope municipality (*obshtina*) of Chepelare, settlements that range in population from less than 100 to about 6,000.

Forests are an important natural resource in the Rhodope mountains, which are an extensive, moderate elevation range located along Bulgaria's southern border with Greece (see Figure 1). This region has the highest concentration of formerly private forests in Bulgaria, it is one of the most forest-rich parts of the country, and forests are particularly important to the local economy due to the marginal nature of agricultural production and lack of substantial industry. More than 70 per cent of the Chepelare municipality is forested, with coniferous forests of pine (especially *Pinus sylvestris*) and spruce (*Picea abies*) being of particular economic importance. About 70 per cent of the forests in the municipality were privately owned prior to their nationalisation in the late 1940s, compared to just 16 per cent nationwide (Stoyanov 1968: 230), and in some communities the proportion of private forests reached 90 per cent or more. This concentration of private forests, combined with the populated nature of the Rhodope landscape, makes it an ideal site to explore the process and aftermath of forest restitution from the standpoint of property relations.

Compared to other mountainous regions of Bulgaria, where human settlements typically ring more compact mountain terrain, Rhodope residents are scattered throughout the expansive range in numerous villages and small towns. Besides forest-related activities, residents have historically relied on mountain agriculture and especially on livestock production for their livelihood. While forests have long been important as a source of building material and fuel wood for local residents, their significance as a commercial resource did not emerge until the early twentieth century when large-scale pastoralism became more difficult and

Figure 1  
The Rhodope Mountains and the Town of Chepelare



Source: Prepared by University of Kentucky Cartography Lab.

transportation infrastructure improved. For much of the socialist period, agropastoralism was organised into state-controlled cooperative farms, and small assembly workshops were established in many communities beginning in the 1970s to provide year-round non-agricultural employment (see also Creed 1995 on such enterprises). In the early to mid-1990s cooperative farms were liquidated and agricultural land was returned to its former owners. Agricultural production in the region is now organised largely on a household level, often using hand labour and animal draught. The resulting produce is consumed by the household, given to family or friends, sold for cash or bartered for a range of goods. Also in the post-socialist period, many of the socialist-era assembly workshops have closed, inflation has eroded the purchasing power of pensions and wages from whatever jobs remain, and many residents struggle to make ends meet.<sup>1</sup> Given the difficulties of agriculture in this mountain landscape, especially undercurrent production and market conditions, forest restitution and the forest products industry more generally are seen as important for the region's economic future.

In analysing the widespread popular support for forestry cooperatives<sup>2</sup> in the central Rhodope, I begin with a historical review of forest ownership and management in the region. As will be seen, this history is important to the shape of post-socialist property relations. Next, a description of forest restitution focuses on the form in which the property is being restored and the kinds of rights and responsibilities associated with it. Finally, moving to a more micro level, the article discusses how individuals in several communities responded to the choice of receiving their forests as individual parcels with real mappable borders or alternatively as 'shares' in a large forested area without internal boundaries that would most likely

be managed jointly on behalf of the co-owners (by a co-op, for example)—in other words, in a form that could be described as fuzzy. Overall, this case highlights the influence of historical memory and the nature of the resource, including the conditions for its exploitation in the larger post-socialist context, on people's opinions about and decisions regarding the preferred form that forests as property take.

#### RHODOPE FOREST OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT: A BRIEF HISTORY

My brief history of forest ownership in the central Rhodope begins with the Ottoman period.<sup>3</sup> Local residents—in some cases as collective groups—gained control over 'mountains' in the region, which were of interest at that time largely as pastures for their vast flocks of sheep and goats. According to local historical sources, they had purchased rights to use pastures and water sources—rights that could be inherited or sold—from nomadic pastoralists who had, in turn, acquired them from the Ottoman Turks. In the 1720s, for example, a few Bulgarian Christian families who were the first residents of what is now the town of Chepelare purchased one-third of the mountain Haidaritsa (later Hadzhiitsa); the other two-thirds of the mountain was purchased by several Bulgarian Muslim families that had recently arrived from a nearby village. Additional mountains were purchased over the next century or so (Dechov 1978; Karaivanov 1990: 16–17). According to one source, Ottoman law later extended these rights to the use of naturally growing trees on this land (Stoyanov 1968). The local Bulgarian population treated such territory as their own private property, cutting trees, making gardens and so on, and then operated as if these property rights continued unchanged after Bulgaria gained independence in 1878. Soon thereafter, however, Bulgaria's 1904 forest law claimed as state property those lands referred to as 'high mountain summer pastures' (*yailatsi*), which included most, if not all, of the forests in the central Rhodope. The state asserted that the local population only had use rights to these lands under Ottoman law, not full ownership rights.

Without these lands, which in some cases also included residents' agricultural fields and hay meadows, and with the declining feasibility of seasonally transhumant pastoralism in which the shepherds and their flocks spent winters in the Aegean lowlands and summers in the Rhodope mountains, many people left the region in search of economic opportunities elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The 1911 Law for the Sale of Some State Forests in the Stanimashka District (*Zakon za Prodavane na Nyakoi Durzhavni Gori v Stanimashka Okoliya* [*Durzhavan Vestnik* 1911]) was in part an effort to stop the outflow of population from this strategically important border region by providing local residents with a source of livelihood (Arnaudov 1998: 42–45; Karaivanov 1990). This legislation authorised the sale of forests at symbolic prices to residents of specified communities in the central Rhodope—south of the town of Asenovgrad to Bulgaria's then southern border with Ottoman Turkey—and the law was amended in 1927 to include communities further south (around the present-day town of Smolyan), which became part of Bulgaria only in 1913. Commercial exploitation of the forests was gaining importance at the

time, with the declining feasibility of pastoralism, and many local residents bought forests (Arnaudov 1998: 42–45; Karaivanov 1990; Stefanov 1983). Timber production became an important economic activity in the region relatively quickly, particularly as improvements in infrastructure made it easier to transport timber and other forest products to lowland markets to the north. By 1927 there were fifty-four sawmills in the Chepelare area (Primovski 1973: 358), and in the 1930s and 1940s Chepelare was the centre of the timber industry in the central Rhodope (Stefanov 1983).

Cooperatives played an important role in forest management in the Rhodope in the pre-socialist period. Bulgaria's first forestry cooperative was established in Chepelare in 1906, and 1923 amendments to the 1911 (re-)privatisation legislation (*Durzhavan vestnik* 1923) mandated that forest holdings below a certain size be managed cooperatively—essentially to improve the economic efficiency of their exploitation.<sup>5</sup> They also required that the forests be exploited according to a management plan. Local chroniclers Mihailov and Demirev (2001: 46) elaborate that these were ten-year plans that specified how much timber could be marked for cutting, when and where, and that allowed harvest rates were based on tree growth rates. Several older Chepelare residents similarly told me that logging was strictly regulated during the pre-socialist era, with permission required from government officials for even the marking of individual trees by government forestry officials prior to cutting. One person further explained that the standing trees were numbered and after cutting the volume of timber was measured and written on a list so that trees 'could not disappear'. 'There was full control,' he said. According to Karaivanov (1990: 83), a Chepelare resident who trained as a forester in the Czech Republic in the 1930s, establishment of the co-ops improved control over the forests and brought an end to the indiscriminate cutting and lack of forest management that had previously been the case. Co-op members received secure income in the form of dividends, he wrote, and some were also paid when they worked for the cooperatives.

Such forestry cooperatives were most well developed around Chepelare, and about half of the forests in the municipality were managed in this fashion (Karaivanov 1990; Kuzmanov 1967; Stefanov 1983).<sup>6</sup> According to one source, fourteen forestry cooperatives were created in Chepelare itself between 1923 and 1925 (Mihailov and Demirev 2001: 46). Another source reports that twenty-three forestry cooperatives were established in the larger region identified with the settlements of Chepelare and Luki between 1923 and 1931, and that four such cooperatives had been established in this area before 1923, that is, before the passage of the law requiring cooperative management (Kuzmanov 1967: 157). In 1931 the law was amended to require that the smaller forest holdings be managed jointly rather than specifically cooperatively, although existing cooperatives were to continue (Karaivanov 1990: 65–66).

The pre-socialist forestry cooperatives and associated dividends reportedly played an important role in the regional economy from the 1920s to the 1940s at both the community and individual levels. Resources from these forestry

cooperatives supported infrastructure development in the rural mountain region before nationalisation, helping to pay for and in some cases directly providing electricity, roads, water systems, schools and so on. The current mayor of one community, for example, related that this small village was electrified in the late 1930s thanks to the village's forestry cooperative—before towns such as Asenovgrad or outlying areas of the larger Plovdiv. Similarly, a 1940 article in the local newspaper, the *Rhodopska Iskra* (1940), lists fifteen forestry cooperatives as having contributed 219,000 leva (Bulgaria's currency), out of total contributions of 394,000 leva, towards the construction of Chepelare's new cultural centre and library (*chitalishte*), much of it in the form of construction material. The contribution from the municipal government was 100,000 leva. Such examples are also found at the individual level. One woman explained that her grandmother was widowed at the age of 28 but was nonetheless able to raise and educate three children on the dividends from the forestry cooperative shares she inherited from her husband 'without working a day in her life'. In other cases, forest holdings were sold to pay for the education of children in Plovdiv, Sofia or even Italy. Forest shares could be bought and sold as a form of investment and income source, without the owners necessarily needing to take an active role in forest management, much less hands-on use. Many local residents owned shares in several different cooperatives, which helped spread the risk in case a co-op had a bad year. The upshot of this is that in the post-socialist period such pre-socialist private forestry cooperatives have a rather positive image for many central Rhodope residents.

Bulgarian forests were (re)nationalised in 1947–48, shortly after the beginning of the country's socialist era, and they were subsequently managed by state forest enterprises. The total area of forests remained relatively constant as reforestation efforts balanced cutting (Bojinov et al. 1994). Some individuals in the region benefited through their employment in forest enterprises and associated processing facilities during the socialist era. Also, the local population continued to be able to obtain firewood and construction material from forests, albeit in exchange for largely symbolic fees to the state forest authorities. When the forests were expropriated, their former owners were, according to the nationalisation law, to be compensated for their lost property. They were never paid, however, and the outstanding compensation obligation thus served as one basis for claims to ownership in the post-socialist period and ultimately forest restitution.

### THE RETURN OF THE FORESTS

Bulgaria's national assembly authorised the forest restitution in late 1997, six years after passage of legislation for the restitution of agricultural land. The Law for the Restitution of Ownership over Forests and Lands from the Forest Fund (*Zakon za Vuzstanovyavane na Sobstvenostta Vurhu Gorite i Zemite ot Gorskiya Fond [Durzhavan Vestnik 1997a]*) returns forests to the pre-nationalisation owners, their heirs or their successors, be they private individuals, legal entities such as churches or schools, or municipalities. An association of private forest owners,

based in Chepelare, and particularly its president—a retired forester—played a role in writing one of the drafts of the law, and thus the legislation reflects the interests of at least some of the owners. The forest restitution law is in some ways similar to that for agricultural land in terms of the priority given to 'old real borders', that is, returning forests in their former physically delimited location, the recreation of the pre-nationalisation ownership structure by returning property to its former owners, the lack of attention to those who had worked the land during the socialist era, and the limitations placed on ownership by foreign individuals and organisations. Passed by a parliament dominated by an anti-Communist coalition, after a socialist government had been virtually overthrown by popular protest the previous winter, the law corresponds to an ideology of private ownership and undoing the wrongs of socialism. In a 1995 article, for example, Stoyanov, a professor of economics at Bulgaria's Higher Institute of Forestry, wrote, 'The restoration [of forests and afforested lands to their former owners] at the transition from "socialist" to market economy is an inevitable fact of life. It will introduce the needed justice to the violently taken away from the owners in 1947 property [*sic*]' (1995: 79). As one Chepelare forest owner further explained, urban property and agricultural land in Bulgaria had been returned; it was only fair that forest owners similarly are returned their forests or otherwise compensated for their losses. Making calculations on the back of a cigarette carton, he continued, saying that the financially pinched government could hardly afford to do so monetarily.

Post-socialist private forest ownership is largely expected to parallel pre-socialist patterns. Prior to nationalisation, about 16 to 17 per cent of Bulgaria's forests nationwide were controlled by individuals, 2 per cent by institutions such as schools and churches, 26 to 27 per cent by the state, and 55 per cent by municipalities (Stoyanov 1968: 230; also Tatyana Andreeva, National Forestry Board, personal communication, 11 January 2000).<sup>7</sup> Although some large private forest holdings existed in the pre-socialist period, most were relatively modest in size. In 1941–42 153 private owners had forest holdings larger than 50 ha and more than 470,000 owners had holdings smaller than 50 ha (Stoyanov 1968: 230). With the re-creation of pre-nationalisation ownership structures, private forests are anticipated to account for a relatively small proportion of the post-restitution forest landscape nationwide, although this varies considerably by region with the Chepelare area being an extreme case.

Although old real borders are preferred under the restitution law, Bulgarian forests are being restored in two different forms. The first is as parcels with such real borders that can be mapped and marked on the ground—preferably at the same location as the pre-nationalisation holdings. This is the kind of property with which the capitalist West is most familiar, and it is also the way in which agricultural land was returned in the Rhodope. In short, this is not particularly fuzzy property. The second form is as shared or joint ownership—*susobstvenost* in Bulgarian—of a particular forest massif or *revir*.<sup>8</sup> Here, the owners will hold different proportions of a named forested massif ranging in overall size from

perhaps 30 to a few hundred hectares, and the particular proportion of ownership by each co-owner in a given *revir* depends on the size of their pre-nationalisation forest holding in that *revir*. The borders between individual holdings within a *revir* are 'ideal'; in other words, they do not exist on the ground. This, then, is a form of property that could be called fuzzy.

This second form of ownership is particularly prominent in the Rhodope, because many of the forests there were incorporated into cooperatives in the early twentieth century. With their establishment, ownership of forests changed from hectares of forest to shares in a pre-socialist forestry cooperative for which owners received dividends, and the locations of the borders between the holdings were largely forgotten with the passage of time.<sup>9</sup> Restituting these forests as separate parcels with real borders was not believed to be possible, and consequently forests that were formerly managed cooperatively were returned as joint property instead. Indeed, the restitution law—which initially only provided for the return of forests with real borders—had to be amended to address the problem of restoring such property. Ownership is not being restored in the pre-socialist cooperatives, but rather in particular forest massifs, in named chunks of forest that are bordered by geographical features such as streams, valley bottoms and ridges.<sup>10</sup> In other words, people are not receiving part of an economic organisation or institution, for example, a co-op, but rather part of a piece of real estate.<sup>11</sup>

#### WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A FOREST OWNER

With the restitution, as was the case before nationalisation, comes the possibility that forest owners will again be able to generate income by selling timber from their private forests or otherwise exploiting them for economic purposes. Owning forests does not mean that owners are free to do whatever they want with the resource, however. In other words, some of the bundle of rights and obligations (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 1999; Hann 1998; Hunt 1998) associated with the forests as property is controlled by the state. Once the owners receive their documents and the borders of the forests are marked on the ground to the extent possible, the forests must be managed according to Bulgaria's new Law on Forests (*Zakon za Gorite [Durzhavan Vestnik 1997b]*), which was passed alongside the restitution law, and associated implementing regulations. The restitution law additionally contains restrictions on the sale and division of forest holdings.

According to the forest law, its purpose is 'the preservation of Bulgaria's forests as a national resource . . . through their regeneration and sustainable development and multipurpose use in the interest of the owners and society' (Article 1, Paragraph 2). A primary focus of the law is on forests as a source of harvestable timber, with requirements for reforestation to maintain the area of forest in a given municipality as of the law's effective date. In some ways reminiscent of pre-socialist forest practice regulations, all forests must be managed according to a plan for their 'optimal use' (and thus cannot go 'unmanaged'), the plan must be approved by

the government forestry administration and a licensed forester must be involved in implementing it. The plan will specify how much timber can be harvested in a given period (currently ten years), and thus it is not necessarily legal for an owner to cut all of his or her forests immediately in order to turn a quick profit following the restitution. Cutting must take place according to the plan, a licensed forester must mark the trees before they are cut, state forestry officials monitor both the marking and the cutting, and clear-cutting of parcels larger than 5 ha is prohibited.

The new forest law also regulates the collection of non-timber forest products such as mushrooms, forest fruits and bark, as well as other so-called auxiliary uses of forest lands such as for livestock pasture.<sup>12</sup> Non-timber forest products in private forests belong to the property owner. Everyone who collects these items for sale must obtain a written permit from the government forest administration, and fees must be paid when the collection takes place in state or municipal forests. The law similarly contains specific regulations regarding pasturing livestock in forests, including limits on animal numbers, prohibitions on pasturing at night or pasturing goats (except under specific circumstances) and a requirement that a herder accompany the animals. Game, meanwhile, continues to be state property according to Bulgaria's constitution, and owners generally may not fence the borders of their forest land in such a way that it restricts the movement of people, wild animals or water.

Beyond these restrictions on use, a March 2001 amendment to the forest restitution law specifies that such restituted forests cannot be divided and further states that sales of forests that exist as co-property in *revirs* must be carried out in accordance with the law on property. The first limitation was identified by some Chepelare forest owners as having the potential to generate conflicts between the often numerous heirs when such property cannot legally be divided among them, as must happen before each individual has a legal document indicating his or her personal forest holdings. It could create problems, for example, if some heirs wanted to sell their forests, while other heirs of the same deceased forest owner wanted to keep their part of the inheritance. The second restriction is similarly seen as problematic, in that it requires that when forests in jointly owned *revirs* are put up for sale, they must first be offered to the other co-owners of a given *revir* before they can be offered for sale on the open market (*Zakon za Sobstvenostta*, as amended, Article 33 [*Durzhavan Vestnik*, 1951]). Even if they are not interested in buying, the process of informing several hundred co-owners is expected to be difficult and time consuming.

#### LOCAL VOICES AND INDIVIDUAL CHOICES

According to the restitution law, forest restitution claims had to be filed by 30 June or 31 October 1999, depending on the claim type and in particular whether it was based on formal documentation. Private individuals have filed more than 250,000 documented claims for about 300,000 ha of forests and other lands within the forest fund (National Statistical Institute 2000b). This works out to an average

of slightly more than 1 ha of forest per claim, although average claim size varies by region and some private holdings are significantly larger than this average. Also, claims typically represent former forest owners, such that in most cases there are several heirs behind each individual claim. The restitution legislation specified that ownership documents should be distributed by 30 June 2000, but given Bulgaria's experience with the restitution of agricultural land, it comes as no surprise that the documents had only begun to be distributed by this date. However, for forests in the Chepelare municipality, ownership documents had largely been distributed by the end of March 2001.

Commencement of forest exploitation, including in some cases the creation of organisations for forest management, is formally only possible after the ownership documents have been received. In the case of the jointly owned *revirs*, the co-owners of such forest massifs then have to meet and decide how to manage their shared property. According to the law on property, a decision by the owners of more than one-half of the joint property is required regarding its management or use. In principle, it might be possible for them to decide to divide a massif among themselves into individual parcels with real borders, but this would require arranging and paying for valuation of the massif and then agreeing upon a method for dividing it into individual pieces, which would then need to be managed individually. In point of fact, however, this is seen to be unlikely, and indeed, as the owners of forests around the town of Chepelare and surrounding villages began to create forest management structures in the summer and fall of 2001, I heard no discussion of such division.<sup>13</sup> Instead, there was considerable support for co-ops at the level of popular discourse.<sup>14</sup> Thus, most small and medium-sized forest holdings in the Chepelare area will end up under some form of joint management in part as a result of the dominance of cooperatives there before nationalisation.<sup>15</sup> (The largest holdings are *revirs* that are solely owned by individual families or the heirs thereof.)

But for some central Rhodope forest owners, the situation is somewhat different. The remainder of this section turns to a more micro-level analysis in discussing how individuals in several communities responded to the choice of receiving their forests as individual parcels with real mappable borders or alternatively as shares in a forested area that would most likely be managed jointly on behalf of the co-owners. It is occasionally augmented by relevant comments heard in other contexts. These comments by small to medium-sized forest owners provide insights into the reasons for their support for cooperatives.

As part of the restitution process, municipally-based land commissions across Bulgaria held inquiries at which forest owners were asked to identify where their forests were located, often over a map in the mayor's office, and they were sometimes offered the possibility of consolidating scattered parcels. In the Chepelare municipality owners of some parcels with real borders were further given a choice of whether they wanted to receive the actual parcel or parcels, or preferred to have the forests restituted as part of a jointly owned *revir*. Such an inquiry took place for one community in the municipality in late 2000. Less than 100 of the

1,400 forest claims associated with the community's territory included parcels that were not clearly associated with a *revir* and thus whose locations needed to be identified or about which there were other questions. The claims in question were for small parcels with identifiable real borders. The inquiry was not carried out for forests being returned as joint property in a *revir* previously managed cooperatively, nor was it done for those *revirs* that had been owned and managed privately by individuals or families. Owners were asked to come to the land commission office on the appointed day, and I went along to observe.

The inquiry progressed relatively quickly, albeit sometimes a bit chaotically as some of the crowd clustered in the municipal building's small entry hall tried to push their way into the room in which it was taking place. In some cases it turned out that the location in question was clearly part of a *revir*, and in other cases the owner was not given a choice because there was no *revir* in which to incorporate the parcel and thus the forest could only be returned as a real mappable parcel.<sup>16</sup> What I focus on here, though, is cases in which owners were given a choice, and the kind of decisions and comments they made. While this inquiry represented only a fraction of the overall claims for this community, the actions and comments made by the participants help us understand attitudes towards the cooperatives and forests as property. The event was too chaotic for me to keep track of every decision, with many people crowded into a small room and multiple transactions being recorded at once. I later cross-checked my perception about the general trend of the decisions with land commission officials. For the purpose of this article, what I find most interesting is the way in which the cooperatives were discussed. These discussions provide a window to attitudes towards cooperatives.

Many people preferred the option of receiving their forests as a share in a *revir* instead of a parcel with real borders, often quickly and without comment. People with very small parcels were often encouraged to do so by land commission officials, and in nearly all cases they agreed.<sup>17</sup> In one such case an older woman was able to identify the location of her forests on the map, but a land commission official suggested that she opt for forests in a *revir* because she lives in Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second largest city, located about 70 km away, connected by a winding mountain road. 'How will she manage them from there?' they asked. She agreed. As a follow-up to this, the official, a Chepelare native, commented that they often knew which people had the resources to manage forests on their own and which ones would be better off with forests in a *revir*. Another woman signed her forests into a *revir* with the comment, 'Why should I get involved in forest management?'

In many other conversations I had outside of this inquiry, forest owners similarly indicated an interest in having their forests managed by a cooperative. This was sometimes true for larger forest owners as well as smaller ones. For example, in response to my question, one woman asked rhetorically, what they would do with 60 ha of forest and how they would manage it, using as an example her in-laws' largest holding in an individual *revir*. You need a whole group of people, she said, for cutting, protecting, cleaning, reforesting and so on, listing out the various

management activities required under Bulgarian forest law. She does not see another way, an alternative to joint management.

Another aspect of the benefits of pre-socialist forest management came up in another conversation outside the inquiry, this one with a relatively large forest owner who is a pensioner but very active in household agricultural production. It highlights another unwelcome facet of post-socialist conditions and thus perhaps another reason for the support for cooperatives. In describing pre-socialist forest management, he decided to tell me about what would now be called transparency associated with timber sales by the pre-socialist private forestry cooperatives. Timber auctions were run by banks, he explained, which required monetary deposits from everyone wishing to participate in them. Bids were taken in what he called an American-style auction until the time on the clock ran out, and the highest bid took the lot. He then contrasted this openness and control with the overwhelming sense of how business is done in the post-socialist period—under the table, behind closed doors, through corrupt, mafia-like connections and so on.<sup>18</sup>

Returning to the inquiry, although people were getting ideal parts in a *revir*, what was important to them was the association with a co-op. Indeed, in many cases it seemed as though they treated these two things as interchangeable, even if they were legally distinct. This was seen in a number of the comments made in the inquiry. The title of this article comes from an older man, who said that he was happy to have his forests put into a *revir*, into a cooperative. He said that if it were not for the co-ops, there would be no forests. He then asked, in a sense looking to demonstrate widespread support for this view, whether anyone had opposed putting his or her forests into a co-op. Other comments were similar. One middle-aged woman declared that it was 'better in a cooperative', while another likewise commented that the most sensible way to manage the forests was in co-ops. They could not be managed separately, she said. A third woman said that she wanted to receive her forests as 'shares' (*dyalove*), that is, as shares in a forestry cooperative.<sup>19</sup> The latter comment was similar to those made by a pair of older men with a large amount of forest in a *revir* who signed a small parcel into the same *revir* at the inquiry. They spoke about this property not as hectares of forests or even shares in a co-op, but rather in terms of *dividenti* (dividends), which a land commission official elaborated upon by saying that the most important thing about owning forests is that they produce dividends.

Some people, however, turned down the choice of opting for a share in a co-op, and asked to have their forests restored adjacent to their agricultural land-holdings. Yet my notes from the inquiry contain no statements about family heritage or other symbolic significance of the forests as the reasons for their choices, nor comments in general opposition to forestry cooperatives, or opposition to consolidating multiple scattered parcels when that was possible. Indeed, when people opted to receive forests as parcels with real borders, scattered parcels were sometimes consolidated into a larger one. A few individuals did, however, indicate clear *economic* motives for wanting to have the forests returned to them as specific

parcels in their original locations. One man, for example, wanted back a certain parcel along the road to the Pamporovo ski resort. It appeared that he had the intention of taking advantage of the roadside location for some sort of commercial development. (His family had previously owned a roadside inn at this location.) A similar economic interest is seen in the request of a man to get back a 0.1 ha parcel at its original location, explaining that the trees were large and of good quality, and that he wanted to harvest them for timber.

At the end of the inquiry I came away with the impression that decisions to receive forest land in a *revir* were associated with the connection of *revirs* with cooperatives, with shares in a cooperative and ultimately with the dividends that one gets from those shares. A desire to not be directly involved in forest management also seemed to play a role. When it was evident why an individual did not want forests in a *revir*, but rather as an individually owned parcel or parcels with real borders, it was often related to the specific nature of the property in question, for example, particularly nice trees or commercial development potential.

This last point is reinforced by a conversation with a forest owner in another village in the municipality, and I close with this case. The owner of this middle-sized forest, in his mid-60s, now lives in Bulgaria's capital city some 200 km distant, and had not been present at the land commission's inquiry for the village where he is an heir to some forests. He explained that someone had signed a particular parcel of his into a *revir* in his absence, but that he actually wanted to get it back in real rather than ideal form. Besides this parcel, he is the heir to a relatively large forest holding in a nearby *revir* and seems content that it is likely to be managed by a cooperative. This suggests that the issue is not cooperatives in general, but rather something specific about this particular piece of property. On the day I talked to him, he was taking his nephew to show him this and an adjacent parcel so that the young man knew where the property borders were. I had just shown up by bus to interview the owner, having heard that he was in the village, and was invited to tag along with the explanation that this was 'about forests'. So off we went up the hill and out of the village. It was not far, perhaps a twenty-minute walk over the top of the first hill. An adjacent parcel—a hay meadow on which several large conifers grew—had already been returned to him in the agricultural land restitution. The parcel in question was in fact the other half of the same hay meadow, again with a row of big trees. It had been classified as forest rather than agricultural land, and thus is being returned in the forest restitution rather than the earlier agricultural land restitution. The request to get the parcel returned with its old real borders was approved, resulting in ownership of a hay meadow 0.5 ha in size not far from the village, whose hay can be harvested annually to feed the livestock, and also some big trees that could eventually be cut and sold as timber.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has sought to understand the widespread support in popular discourse and action for forestry cooperatives in the central Rhodope mountains following

Bulgaria's post-socialist forest restitution and the concomitant general lack of concern regarding real mappable borders and individuated private forest holdings. Another way of framing this question is to ask how we can understand the apparent fuzziness in forests as property, and in particular the lack of concern about the fuzziness. This occurs despite Western capitalist-oriented privatisation programmes designed to foster individual private ownership and a history of socialism, which might bias people against cooperative institutions.

Verdery (1999: 55) identifies three factors as contributing to the fuzziness of property in the post-socialist context for indistinct, ambiguous and partial property rights.<sup>20</sup> The first is contests over resources. The second is overlapping claims (that is, a hierarchy of claims). And the third is a lack of routinised rules and crystallised practices, including constraints on exercising property rights. This conclusion discusses some aspects of fuzziness that are relevant to the material and argument discussed here; others may well have different interpretations of the material with respect to fuzziness. I am, however, less concerned about the sources of fuzziness than about how people react to or feel about it.

Contests over resources appear to play little role in the fuzziness of central Rhodope forests as property at present, although this is not to say that such conflict will not emerge in the future. There is a potential for conflict between the property rights and responsibilities defined in Bulgaria's new law on forests and associated legislation, and the historical usage of non-timber forest products by local residents (Cellarius 2001). Recent conversations with forestry cooperative officials, however, suggest that they are not inclined to exercise their ownership rights over these resources if it means denying local residents an important source of income in a context of difficult economic conditions. They are, instead, pursuing their options for collecting a tax on mushrooms from the firms that purchase them. (This basically means the continuation of an existing tax; however, it would be distributed to forestry cooperatives rather than the state forest administration.) Another potential area of contestation applicable to this case, and one that may become more clear as efforts intensify to create a large national park or other type of protected area in the region, is between timber production and biodiversity protection, that is, between forest owners and others in the forest products industry (loggers, sawmill owners, and workers) and conservation advocates (see Staddon and Cellarius 2002). Neither of these areas of potential contestation is unique to the post-socialist context, although socialist-era forest practices perhaps created a space in which the historical use of non-timber forest products by the local population could continue into the 1990s without becoming fully monetised.

A hierarchy of claims seems of some relevance, not in terms of different people claiming the same piece of property, but rather in terms of different entities at different levels holding different pieces of the bundle of rights that was introduced earlier.<sup>21</sup> In this case, different rights, obligations and authorities are held by the state, the cooperative and the individual owner/heir or group thereof. On paper the forests may be owned by people; however, the Bulgarian laws and policies affect how they are managed, sold or divided. And the cooperatives formed to

manage the forests also play a part in this nested hierarchy of claims. In case of sales, Bulgarian law requires that the property be offered to all the other co-owners before it is sold on the open market, a daunting task when one considers that there may be several hundred co-owners. For some forest owners the restriction on sales is a matter of contention. They ask, for example, whether this might prevent them from getting a top price. (Others find it less problematic as it could help to keep the forests within the circle of people with connections to the local area and perhaps thwart sales to outsiders or even 'mafia-like' bodies.) When forest property takes the form of joint property in a *revir*, it is to be used and managed in agreement with a decision by the owners who own more than half of the joint property. Thus far, the latter has not proved to be a particular problem for cooperative decision making, although it is unclear what would happen if someone challenged a cooperative in which the members owned less than half of the *revir* it was organised to manage.

In the Rhodope case the situation with regard to the position of local administrators in the hierarchy is more complex than that put forward by Verdery (this issue). She suggests that local foresters might start acting like owners by virtue of their position as state administrative employees. In the case of Chepelare municipality, however, several local foresters are in fact forest owners by virtue of being local residents and the heirs of former forest owners. A few of them, as forest owners or heirs, even serve on the boards of forestry cooperatives or are otherwise involved in managing forests in which they have a financial stake. The other forest owners are often quite happy to have someone with professional forestry experience as part of the management team of the cooperatives, even if the foresters themselves are sometimes reluctant participants. Additionally, when these foresters obtain a licence to be private foresters, they are able to earn extra money on the side by working for the cooperatives and other private forest owners. As one forester pointed out, he cannot get by financially on his state salary and thus sees little choice about spending his evenings or weekends marking privately owned trees for cutting. One forester has left state service to become president of a new forestry cooperative, while others are, for the moment at least, reluctant to give up the security of their state sector jobs. Verdery's comment assumes that the foresters' primary means of access to forests is as state employees. In this case, however, the foresters do have an interest in and access to proprietorship, not as state employees, but rather as owners or heirs.<sup>22</sup>

Of the factors identified by Verdery as being associated with the fuzziness of property in post-socialist contexts, it is perhaps the last one that is most significant in the case described here. This is the ability of the owners of small parcels of forests to manage the resource in a way that makes economic sense, particularly given the mandates of the new law on forests. Many forestry officials have raised concerns about the economic feasibility of managing small parcels of forests individually, especially given the requirements of Bulgaria's forest law, with expenses for a forest plan, hiring a forester and so on.<sup>23</sup> Some forest owners also expressed such concern. Just as some of the Romanians discussed by Verdery



(1999) found it difficult to exploit their agricultural land in the post-socialist period, some Rhodope forest owners also feel overwhelmed by the task of managing forests themselves. Or perhaps they feel that they would be unable to do so in a way that would generate profit, but would nonetheless have to pay taxes on the forest land. With the massive rural–urban migration that took place during the socialist era, many owners no longer live in the region and even those who do may not have any practical experience with forestry.<sup>24</sup>

It is important to recognise, however, that this support for joint management also has to do, in large part, with the nature of the resource and its physical characteristics, rather than something that can be specifically attributed to post-socialist processes. Recall here that Rhodope forestry cooperatives predate socialism, indeed some of them even predated the 1923 amendments to the forest law mandating cooperative management, and a review of literature on property rights and natural resources suggests that forests are often managed jointly (for example, the contributions to Gibson et al. 2000).<sup>25</sup> More generally, it points out that the nature of the resource can play a role in the form that management takes. Factors identified as affecting what sort of ownership regime is most efficient and thus perhaps most likely to emerge include the density and predictability of the resources along with the ability to restrict access and enforce the division of the resource into individual parcels (Bac 1998: 267; McKean 2000; see also Peluso 1996: 514 on the characteristics of different tree varieties). Based on fieldwork in a Swiss mountain village, Netting (1981) observed that forests were managed communally while more concentrated or intensively exploited resources such as agricultural fields were owned or managed individually. Patrick Heady (personal communication, 2001) reports that a similar joint ownership system for forests existed in the north-east Italian Alps. To the resource characteristics mentioned above as influencing the type of property regime that is most efficient, I would additionally argue that the time horizon for forestry is considerably different from that for agriculture. A farmer can harvest a crop or even two each year from a given parcel of agricultural land, while trees might typically be harvested after fifty or more years. Meanwhile, ongoing investment is required for protection and care of these forests over this period. Cooperative or other joint management of a larger geographic area can even out the flow of both revenues and expenses over time and space.

Beyond these practical issues of resource management, the other key factor influencing support for forestry cooperatives in the Chepelare area (and with it a lack of concern about fuzzy borders) is history and in particular historical memory of the pre-socialist forestry cooperatives. I am using the term 'historical memory' to denote memories that view or recall the past through a lens of individual or community experience, memories that are socially constructed. Contrary to one reviewer's assumption, 'historical memory' as used here does not equal 'history'. As both Peluso (1996) and Berry (1989) note, history, including interactions with the larger political economy, is important for understanding property relations. What forest owners—or more likely their parents or grandparents—owned most

recently were shares in forestry cooperatives for which, perhaps most importantly, they received regular income. The co-ops were local social and economic institutions embedded in the local communities. They are remembered as providing income to families or individuals and supporting community projects. This is what people remember and talk about, not some association with individuated forest parcels with real borders. For some, perhaps, there is also a sense that the co-ops were run in a transparent, lawful manner—for example, the 'American-style' timber auctions—and that exploitation was controlled and rational for the long-term productivity and protection of the resource—for example, comments that trees 'could not disappear' and that 'without the co-ops, there would be no forests'. This contrasts with what may be seen as unwelcome or undesirable aspects of the present and the recent past with regard to forest exploitation. Specifically, in the current situation, deals are believed to be made behind closed doors or under the table, and late socialist to early post-socialist management practices are sometimes described as either cutting everything down without regard to the future of the resource or neglecting the forests such that they are not properly managed in terms of thinning and so on. Thus, from the standpoint of historical memory, what one forest owner referred to as 'cooperative times' saw forests being better managed and with less corruption than in recent history.

This brings us to the question of what is uniquely post-socialist about property relations in the case of Bulgarian forests. Much of the fuzziness with regard to the Rhodope forests is not unique to the post-socialist context, for example, the economic advantages of joint management. Here, one could look to the large literature on forest management for examples in a variety of political and economic contexts. Yet the history of socialism and post-socialism in Bulgaria has had some influence. In other words, the pre-socialist past is seen through lenses coloured by socialism and post-socialism. First, memories of socialist-era agricultural cooperatives might be grounds for a lack of trust in co-op leaders, and thus make people more cautious about leadership and issues of transparency in the organisation and management of post-socialist cooperatives. Some conversations I had in the course of the study suggested that this might be the case, as did concerns about election procedures and avoiding close relations among board members at the fall 2001 assemblies at which new forestry cooperatives were created. Also, with the significant rural–urban migration that took place in socialist-era Bulgaria through industrialisation-focused economic development strategies, many forest heirs no longer live in the areas where their forests are, with the accompanying implications for their possible involvement in forest management.

Second, and perhaps more critically, some aspects of the experience and context of post-socialism appear relevant in guiding historical memory or evaluating one's options. The difficult economic situation in post-socialist Bulgaria, especially in rural areas, means that people are particularly interested in the forests as a source of income—assuming that they can figure out what to do with them. One aspect of this is uncertainty about the length of time that will be necessary for the development of a market in which owners can receive fair values for their forests.

But perhaps more importantly, the forestry cooperatives may be seen as especially desirable when compared to perceptions of various unwelcome aspects of the post-socialist context—particularly increasing inequality, lawlessness and lack of transparency in doing business. The pre-socialist co-ops are remembered as being the antithesis of this situation and thus may appear particularly attractive.

In closing, focusing on the case of Rhodope forestry cooperatives, the shape of property relations that seems to be emerging—fuzzy as they may be—appears largely to be a matter of historical memory combined with the practicalities of resource management. Neither of these factors is particularly unique to the post-socialist context. Yet the memories of the previous era's co-ops and ideas about management practicalities in the present are likely to have been influenced in subtle ways by the lived experience—and memories thereof—of socialism and post-socialism.

### Notes

1. Economic conditions in Bulgaria have been difficult since the collapse of state socialism in 1989–90 (see Wyzan 1998). Rural areas have been hard hit by the liquidation of collectivised agriculture and closure or contraction of branch plants and assembly workshops, such that rural unemployment rates are consistently 4 to 5 percentage points higher than urban ones (National Statistical Institute 2000a). Yet rural residents generally have easier access to land on which they can produce some of their own food and in some cases firewood for heating. Meanwhile, urban residents often struggle to buy bread and pay utility bills—assuming that they have not had their central heating turned off due to cost concerns.
2. I have translated the phrase '*gorovladelska proizvoditelna kooperatsiya*' as 'forestry cooperative'. The first term signals forest (*gora*) ownership or possession (*vladenie*); the second term refers to production or output. In the pre-socialist era there were also *trudovi gorski proizvoditelni kooperatsii*, which were cooperatives of forest workers (for example, loggers) rather than forest owners, the term *trud* referring to work or labour (Karaivanov 1990; Kuzmanov 1967).
3. The territory that is now Bulgaria was controlled by the Ottoman empire for five centuries, from the late fourteenth century to the late nineteenth century. Bulgaria's autonomy from Ottoman powers is generally dated to the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano on 3 March 1878, although full independence did not occur until 1908 and the country's south-west remained under Ottoman control until 1912–13 (Lampe 1986).
4. After Bulgaria's autonomy from the Ottoman empire in 1878, access to pastures and markets along the Aegean coast involved crossing the international border with Ottoman Turkey, and, consequently, became more difficult. Then, Western Thrace was transferred to Greece in 1919 following Bulgarian losses in World War I, essentially precluding access to these pastures (Jelavich 1983).
5. This occurred while the government was controlled by a peasant party, the Bulgarian Agricultural National Union (see Bell 1977). While land-ownership remained in private hands, an economic development strategy based on co-ops was encouraged in an effort to counteract the fragmented nature of property holdings and to improve conditions in the rural areas from which the party drew its support. This built upon earlier trends toward the creation of cooperative institutions, including a 1907 law on cooperative associations that had stimulated the growth of institutions such as cooperative banks and credit associations, marketing cooperatives and cooperative purchase of farm equipment (Crampton 1987, 1997; Lampe 1986).
6. Most forests in the area that were not managed by cooperatives consisted of either municipally controlled forests or large chunks of forests, that is, 'mountains', owned by individual families and exceeding the size limit below which cooperative management was mandated.
7. Figures shown here for municipal forests include those allocated to municipalities 'for use' as well as forests owned outright by them. Under the restitution law, only those forests actually owned will be restored. Thus, municipalities are expected to control a smaller share of the nation's forests than they did before nationalisation.
8. In many cases, these *revirs* are the 'mountains' of an earlier era of forest control. *Revir* is a German term (*revier*) meaning territory or district. Its usage reflects the influence of German forestry techniques in Bulgaria.
9. Indeed, in some cases forest purchases authorised in 1911 were delayed by the Balkan Wars and World War I, such that sales only took place in the early 1920s—in other words, at approximately the same time that the cooperatives were established. In such cases, particularly the smaller owners may never have known these forests to have real borders.
10. Some stakeholders advocated returning the forests to cooperatives, and such a variant was proposed in parliamentary deliberations. Forests had been taken away from forest owners, however, and thus were to be returned to these individuals. Also, returning forests to individuals better fits the ideology of private ownership, while recreating specific institutions that had not existed for fifty years was seen to be difficult if not impossible.
11. There is a legal distinction between an economic organisation and a piece of real estate, even if individual property owners do not recognise it.
12. In the initial version of the law, medicinal plants were included in the list cited here. Collection of medicinal plants is now regulated by the new Law on Medicinal Plants (*Zakon za Lechebnite Rasteniya [Durzhavan Vestnik, 2000]*), and the forest law as amended in spring 2000 contains a reference to this.
13. In some conversations another, albeit not mutually exclusive, reason for supporting receipt of forests in a jointly owned *revir* came up. Some people expressed concern that if they had received forests with new real borders, corrupt officials would keep the good forests for themselves or for the state, assigning the new private owners poor quality parcels. In one village the case of a man who received his 'forests' at a location that consisted of only rocks and never could have been forested is cited as an example of what can happen. It is felt that such potentially unfair distribution is avoided by receiving the forests as joint property.
14. While it would have been possible to create an economic organisation called something other than a co-op, which might have been an anticipated response to potentially negative memories of socialist-era cooperatives, the organisations created were specifically referred to as cooperatives—even in the cases when they were legally different from cooperatives.
15. There are, of course, significant differences between the pre- and post-socialist forestry cooperatives at both legal and practical levels, but this does not necessarily negate the positive image of cooperatives. First, the legal bases in the form of the cooperative laws are different. Among other things, the current law is seen to be problematic inasmuch as it was initially designed for agricultural cooperatives. Meanwhile, the pre-socialist cooperatives experienced considerable oversight by cooperative banks, even when cooperatives did not have loans from the bank. Such is not the case with the new co-ops. Second, the earlier cooperatives had a more limited membership base, most, if not all, of whom were local residents due to initial rules restricting forest purchases to local residents. Now, in contrast, owners are scattered all over Bulgaria and sometimes in other countries as well. This is the result of migration processes in the fifty-plus years since the forests have been nationalised. Associated with this, the numbers of potential members has increased in the post-socialist period, with an accompanying decrease in holding size per person, as holdings are divided among one to three generations of heirs. Third, the pre-socialist cooperatives typically had very few regular paid employees, with the managing board members—including the president—usually being volunteers. (The president was frequently one of the largest owners, which meant that he benefited the most from the

- cooperative's success.) Now most cooperatives have a paid president or managing director. Fourth, the pre-socialist forestry cooperatives were important local players, making donations to community projects, for example. It is yet to be seen whether the new cooperatives have such a valued community role. Will they, too, be community as well as economic institutions? Other differences are more indirect, relating to changes in the larger context, such as developments in the wood products market over fifty years, as well as changes in household budget needs, such that the same size holding could make a different relative contribution to a given household's budget now in comparison with the 1930s.
16. In one such case, an owner was assigned a parcel directly adjacent to a *revir*, such that it would be relatively easy to incorporate into the *revir* at a later date, and he indicated an interest in doing so.
  17. A forester observing such an inquiry in another community reported that '90 per cent' of the people there who were given the choice opted for forests in a *revir* rather than with real borders. The only exception he specifically recalled was a man who wanted to receive a small forest parcel directly adjacent to his agricultural land. Another participant in the inquiry there—a forest heir in this case—described it as a non-choice, saying that the land commission had had forms prepared and he had just signed.
  18. See also Standart Team (2001a, 2001b) for allegations of corruption in post-socialist timber sales in another part of the country. This is a sector-specific manifestation of a much more widespread discourse about corruption at all levels in post-socialist Bulgaria (see Wedel 1998a, 1998b for similar circumstances elsewhere in the post-socialist world). This discourse ranges from stories of powerful and secretive financial groups composed of former Communist officials and controlling large segments of the economy (Ganev 2001) to the rumours I heard one summer about the unclean economic activities of former government officials and allegations of bribery at all levels of society—a frequent topic of newspaper stories as well as occasional academic articles (Grodeland et al. 1998).
  19. On another occasion, a retired individual from Chepelare, but who lived in a large town, similarly responded to my request to talk to him about his forests with the statement that he did not own any forests, only shares. And more generally, people often talk about their forests in terms of shares.
  20. Just because the owners understand what it is they own, does not necessarily negate the fuzziness. Verdery (1999: 55, emphasis in the original) writes:

The hierarchy of rights and obligations may in fact be very *unambiguous*, but from the point of view of privatization programs such as those being implemented in the former socialist bloc the rights appear fuzzy because of their complex interrelations and the multiplicity of actors holding them.

21. It is perhaps prudent to recognise here that the separation of such a bundle of rights and responsibilities among different groups and individuals is not unique to either the post-socialist or post-colonial world. A key aspect of arguments by the property rights movement in the US is that the government is taking away certain aspects of the rights of property owners to use their property as it sees fit—such as filling in wetlands or building a factory in an area zoned residential—and thus should compensate them for their lost property value. At a more mundane level are subdivision covenants, which in some places include prohibitions on (sled) dog lots, or renting out rooms or regulate on how one paints a house.
22. Elderly forest owners sometimes give their children a power of attorney to take care of forest ownership responsibilities. In some cases, it is these children who are elected to cooperative boards.
23. This discussion focuses on costs and benefits rather than risks, because risk rarely came up in conversations with forest owners. The one place risk was discussed was at an assembly to create a management body for one *revir*. Unlike the other assemblies for founding post-socialist forestry cooperatives and other management associations, participants in this meeting actually

- voted about the form that management would take. Their unanimous choice was for a cooperative, in part because of concern that it was possible that they could lose their forests with a joint stock company. One woman explained that for her this was a moral issue. She does not want to participate in a management form where there is a possibility to lose something that her ancestors worked hard for.
24. In a better developed market economy sale might be an alternative to forest management on an individual or joint basis. But thus far a market for forest land has not developed. (Nor, for that matter, is there much of an active market for agricultural land in this region.) One reason is uncertainty about the value of such property. Also, as previously mentioned, sales of joint property are constrained by Bulgaria's Law on Property such that the forests returned as joint property must first be offered to all the co-owners in a given *revir*.
  25. Forests are one of the resource types often mentioned in the literature on common pool resource, self-government, co-management and so on (for example, Klooster 2000; Morrow and Hull 1996; Ostrom 1999; Varughese and Ostrom 2001). Most of this literature differs somewhat from the case discussed here, however, in that the focus is typically on *user* groups (or perhaps communities) that many not have formal ownership rights over a resource, while Rhodope forest *owners* are more interested in having someone else manage their property for them in such a way that they see some cash income. Their direct use of the forest is a secondary concern.

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