



Vassilis Nitsiakos

On the Border

Transborder Mobility,
Ethnic Groups and Boundaries
on the Albanian-Greek Frontier

LIT

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

Vassilis Nitsiakos

On the Border

28.7.2012

To Maxim

just to remember
his days

Nitsa

Vassilis

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

Balkan Border Crossings

Contributions to Balkan Ethnography

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To my friends
of the *Border Crossings* Network

Field next to river
And village next to border
Will not prosper
Prevents from Drabull

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

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PROLOGUE

When I visited the region of the Greek minority of Albania for the first time, immediately after the collapse of the communist regime, in the beginning of 1991, it dawned on me that an immense research challenge was opening ahead. So I immediately started thinking about what I could do on a systematic basis.

The first opportunity appeared only in 1994, when a research partnership was proposed to me by the University of Patras. This concerned a small research project titled "The wider dimensions of the demographic problem of the Greek minority of Albania", which we carried out together with colleague C. Kassimis and which resulted, among other things, in a publication with the characteristic title "The Greek minority of Albania: transition or catastrophe?"

During the period that followed, I participated in a research mission whose object was the recording of folk songs in the same area. In the meantime, I had had other opportunities to visit South Albania and become directly or indirectly preoccupied with it and reflect on all I would observe there.

A few years later, in 2000, one more opportunity was offered to me, to participate in a rather large research project assigned to the Universities of Ioannina and Patras by the ministry of agriculture. The project was titled "The effects on the Greek country-side, of the settlement and employment there of foreign labour", and lasted two years. My personal charge was to investigate how immigration was experienced by the immigrants themselves, so I took hundreds of interviews, mainly from Albanians. Thirteen of those interviews were published in my book, *Testimonies of Albanian Immigrants*, in 2003.

My acquaintance with all those people incited an interest in discovering their places of origin. Questions of collective identities, ethnic relationships and the management of symbolic boundaries by the people were emerging all the more as interesting objects of study. So we submitted, in the framework of the project "Pythagoras II", a proposal for a research project titled "Immigration, borders, cultural identities and ethnic groups in the Greek-Albanian frontier", which was approved in 2005. This project, in the context of which an ethnographic documentary film titled "The Border" was also produced, gave me the opportunity to carry out field research on the other side of the border as well, during which I conceived the idea of writing the present book. My research continued, therefore, even after the completion of the specific project and lasted effectively until the completion of the writing of the book, in November 2008.

The book is based on my research diary, which I composed in a more detailed and analytical manner than usual, because my desire was that the ensuing book would follow the structure and writing of the diary, in terms of both style and organisation. What I did, therefore, was copy out my diary, elaborating fur-

ther on my initial commentary and reflections, analysing further those points where I thought it was necessary to do so, involving theoretical issues and documenting the final ethnographic text with the necessary notes and bibliographical references. In the book, I make use of a small number of itineraries, which function rather as stimuli for bringing up issues and presenting views that had developed throughout the previous period. It goes without saying that the scientific research on which all this depends is in no way confined to the time limits of the particular project, that is, the dates recorded in the diary, which latter, nevertheless, effectively provided the starting point of the whole venture. Moreover, references to other research projects and previous ethnographic endeavours are frequent. I should also mention that I was so very interested in conveying the atmosphere of the diary and the vitality of spontaneous writing, that I mostly kept the chronological order of the ethnographic missions and to a large degree the style of the first writing.

Even though the stylistic features of the writing are rather self-evident, I still believe it is worth accounting for them further. First, the diary mode explains the presence of dimensions such as the oral idiom and spontaneity, elements that encourage references to emotional responses. During the second writing, I reduced or modified such references in a few cases, where I felt that the discourse tended to be inappropriately personal for the genre of ethnographic narrative. Second, self-reflexivity constitutes part of the writing; the subjectivity of response to many of the phenomena I describe is expressed both explicitly and implicitly. Third, the balance, between, on the one hand, the subjectivity of experience and, on the other hand, the desire for the final product of the writing and its assertions over particular

matters of scientific interest to be effectively coherent and documented, was a basic concern of the venture. Fourth, one of the basic strategic choices of the writing was to render myself a narrator who, in parallel with my own perspective, would display other views, as well; apart, that is, from those expressed by the groups or individuals under study. So, I tried to include in my approaches other voices, too, keeping for myself a role similar to a coordinator of a choir, which I wanted to be polyphonic. This effort explains the frequent presence of large passages from other writers' texts that belong to different kinds of writing. Finally, the inclusion of some of my own, previous texts was decided, for the purpose of displaying the genealogy of several of my views and ideas and this also fits the frame of self-reflexivity, to some degree.

This book owes a lot to many people. Above all, it owes its existence to its protagonists. To all those people who found themselves close to the particular border and were subjected to its effects. The text may contain certain references to particular cases, but the book is about the whole of the frontier populations, which, despite their differentiations, share something in common: the border itself. Regarding references to persons, I did not follow the usual ethnographic practice of using pseudonyms, except in very few cases where I thought it ethically necessary. Apart from my own preference for this practice (for reasons of convincing documentation and historical reference), my informants or interlocutors themselves assured me they have no problem whatsoever with being personally named. I am grateful to all these people and anxious to know their views on what I have written, the responsibility of which, of course, is all mine.

From among my colleagues, I owe more than a simple “thank you” to my collaborator Kostas Mantzos, whom I frequently mention in the book anyway. Kostas shared with me not only part of the field research experience but virtually the whole of my thoughts on the issues I raise. Our endless discussions, either on location or outside it, helped me a lot in my understanding of things and his always apt remarks have always been a source of inspiration for me. Kostas also drew the maps and offered a meticulous commentary on my manuscript.

I also owe thanks to my colleagues Vassilis Dalkavoukis, Yiannis Manos and Marilena Papahristoforou, who have read and discussed a previous version of the text, Athina Peglidou, who worked with me during the research, Charalambos Kassimis, for various pertinent collaborations and discussions and Evgenia Sifaki for the initial translation of the text. I also thank my friend Giorgos Chiras, who accompanied me several times in Albania and helped with his sociability. The Ph.D. students and post-graduate students Yiannis Drinis, Fereniki Vatavali, Thodoris Kouros, Vassilis Raptis, Georgia Kitsaki, Christina Daflou, Velta Daljanaj and all the others who have contributed to my work somehow, I thank them all.

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I left for the end Voula and Vasso, without whose love, support and interest this book would not have materialised.

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

INTRODUCTION

Migration and transnationalism

Migration, during the recent decades, has taken on new features, which demand a renegotiation of the theoretical as well as the methodological premises for its study. Globalisation and the conditions of post-modernity have formed, after all, a new framework that re-contextualises and re-configures the phenomenon of migration.

R. Kivisto, in his important article "Theorizing transnational immigration: A critical review of current efforts" (Kivisto 2001), attempts a critical assessment of the ways this term has been used as a theoretical tool for the interpretation of the new migrational identities and communities, an assessment that could be used as starting point for fresh reflection.

As the writer of the above article notes, the term transnationalism was first presented systematically, as a novel analytical tool for studying and interpreting contemporary migration, in the collective volume *Towards a transnational perspective on*



migration, edited by Glick Schiller, Basch and Santon Blanc (1992). The same authors, two years later, published another book, entitled *Nations Unbound* (1994), where they developed further the “transnationalist” conceptual model with respect to contemporary migration. In general terms, they argue that, contrary to previous forms of migration, where there appears a total breakdown of social relations and cultural ties between migrants and their countries of origin, together with a parallel tendency of assimilation by the host country, in the new migration the migrants’ networks of social relations, their activities and patterns of life involve, on the whole, both host and home societies: a social field is being formed which links up the two countries irrespectively of borders and geographical conditions, while the new migrants live thus in between and form rather “hybrid” identities. The process, therefore, through which migrants build these networks between the two countries is called *transnationalism* and the migrants who build them are called *transmigrants* (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992:1; Kivisto 2001: 552).

A detailed presentation of Kivisto’s critical analysis is outside the scope of this work. Especially interesting for us, though, is the discussion on the issue of these migrants’ identity. The supporters of the theory of *transnationalism* point to the multiple and fluid character of the new migrants’ identities and perceive a resistance, on their part, to the conditions of globalisation, in the context of their identity management. This is questioned by Kivisto, who, citing other scholars as well, claims that these new migrants mostly seek their incorporation into the system rather than resist it.

Also, according to Kivisto, many of the features of the new migration are not new at all; for example, the strategies of re-

turn, circulatory and seasonal migration (Kivisto 2001: 555-556). What has really changed is not the phenomena themselves but their extent and frequency. Today, new communication technologies and the improvement of transport systems have rendered migrant movement and activity between the two countries-poles of migration easier, so that the frequency of contacts and visits has increased in such a way as to enable the configuration of a transnational social field.

This position is also supported by the well known researcher of the phenomenon of migration Al. Portes, in two articles, the introductory and concluding ones of the special issue of the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies* that is devoted to the concept of *transnationalism*. Portes argues that while migrant movements from country to country have always taken place, recently they have acquired a massive and composite character, enabling us to talk about the construction of a social field, configured, in effect, by an increasing number of migrants who have two homes, speak two languages and live a life between two countries, whose borders they frequently cross (Portes Al., Guarnizo L.E., Landolt P., 1999:217-237). The closer these countries are geographically, the more intense the phenomenon.

It is obvious that such is the case with the Albanian migrants to Greece and especially the ones who have settled in Epirus, a subject that will concern us presently. The formation of transnational social fields that cut across national borders is a phenomenon that characterises the very relation of the two countries, Greece and Albania, with multiple consequences for both the migrants and the local populations of the two countries. Of significance, with regard to the further elaboration of the transnationalist conceptual model, is the contribution of an-

other scholar, Th. Faist, who, in his book, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, provides a much more developed version. He includes in the definition of the social field, or rather space, the circulation of ideas, symbols and elements of material culture. More specifically, he writes: "Space here does not only refer to physical features, but also to larger opportunity structures, the social life and the subjective images, values, and meanings that the specific and limited place represents to migrants. Space is thus different from place in that it encompasses or spans various territorial locations. It includes two or more places. Space has a special meaning that extends beyond simple territoriality; only with concrete social or symbolic ties does it gain meaning for potential migrants" (Faist 2000:45-6).

I contend that the symbolic dimension of this field that intersects, together with geographical borders, the boundaries of national wholes, is of great consequence to the construction of new identities: new identities that force us to re-define the terms we customarily use to approach national identities, because of their hybrid features and more. The case of Albanian migration to Greece may offer a lot to the study of this phenomenon, provided this study is based on a pertinent interdisciplinary approach. The geographical proximity; the historical background of the population movements; the multi-ethnic makeup of the wider geographical area that encompasses the national ground of the two nation-states, which were shaped mostly in the end of the Balkan wars; the existence of ethnic groups that cut across national borders (i.e. Vlachs); the presence of a recognised Greek minority in Albania and other matters that concern the bilateral relations of the particular states

(for example, the problem of the Çams), all render the phenomenon of the new Albanian migration enticing to the sciences that study migrational phenomena in the world today. Moreover, the very complexity of the phenomenon may prove a good example for the case against over-generalising and simplifying theoretical models.

It is worth staying with this matter, to point out, in brief, the significance of the dimensions mentioned above, of Albanian migration to Greece. There is, first of all, the historical dimension. Is it possible to ignore the fact of the large population movements of Albanians toward areas that are Greek today that took place before the period of Ottoman domination, and led to the presence of Arvanites in Attica and elsewhere? These people are bilingual still now, to a certain extent. This question is pertinent to our understanding of the historical background of migration and, furthermore, it concerns aspects of the contemporary phenomenon, since it appears that the presence of these populations in Greece has affected both the configuration of the map of the new migration and the networks of social relations that have emerged recently. Linguistic community and cultural intimacy have played and still play a role in the search of a place of settlement and line of work on the part of migrants, but, also, in their reception and incorporation by the communities of local Arvanites. I have had the opportunity to substantiate this fact through many interviews with Albanian migrants, whose report of their good reception by the populations of Arvanite villages tends to be uniform, especially around the area of Thebes during the first months of their ventures in Greece. The fact that the elderly, at least, speak Arvanite and can communicate with Albanians is of crucial importance. As to the question of cultural

intimacy, the matter is more complex and demands special research and study. It was brought up at the Korçe conference by S. Mangliveras, who, with his paper on "Albanian immigrants and Arvanite hosts: Identities and relationships" (Magliveras 2004; also Derhemi 2003), demonstrated its complexity and great significance for the understanding of the very concepts of ethnic and cultural identity. It is very interesting, indeed, to examine the way such bonds are activated in the context of migration, but, also, the way the subjects themselves confer meaning to it. After all, the very definition of such a bond is problematic, in the sense that it is essentially ethnic, since it concerns the common ethnic origins of the two groups, while now their members belong to different national wholes, being Greek or Albanian. The formation of modern, "pure" national identities and the ideology of nationalism generate a difficulty in the classification of this bond, as is the case with any kind of identification, which, on top of any other social and psychological consequences it may have, may produce an identity crisis as well. The apparently contradictory attitude of the Arvanites, which Mangliveras discerns, has to do with their difficulty of dealing with this phenomenon in public. Public manifestation of ethnic and linguistic affinity with Albanian immigrants is definitely a problem for the Arvanites, which is why they behave differently in public and in private. For them, the transition from pre-modern ethnic to modern national identity involved, historically, their identification with the Greek nation, a fact that causes bewilderment whenever one wants to talk to them about the activation of ethnic bonds. From this perspective, too, the particular issue is provocative.

With respect to the ethnic history of the wider geographical area where the two nation-states were created, and especially the wider zone where the national border was demarcated (with great difficulty, it is true, due precisely to the composite ethnic mosaic), one can ignore neither the existence of different ethnic groups nor the interpenetration of the two dominant ones, which finally constituted the two nation-states. The example of the Vlachs, a group whose presence persists in both countries even after the demarcation of the national border, is characteristic. Several of the nomadic Vlachs, who move seasonally with their large flocks, just happened to be on one or the other side of the border with their flocks at the time and that chance fact determined their national alignment. In several cases, parts of a kinship group were divided in two and their members became citizens of different nation-states.

When the Albanian regime collapsed, the Vlachs of Albania were of the first to come to Greece, because they were acquainted with the passageways close to the border and because they belonged to family networks, which made their residence and working in Greece easier. I met several such cases during the first years of the exodus (1991-92), in the area of Pogoni and especially in the homogeneously Vlach village Kefalovriso. Here the Vlachs from Albania had relatives whom they sought out and made use of, in the context of individual or family strategies, which they developed subsequently in order to settle in Greece. Many of them stayed initially in this village and then spread out within Greece and especially to areas with Vlach populations (Epirus, Thessaly, Macedonia). It is also worth mentioning that several elderly people with stock breeding experience were occupied in the flocks of the Pindus Vlachs, following

them to their lowland pastures. Common language, common cultural background and, certainly, emotional identification played a crucial role in the formation of permanent networks of collaboration and the smooth incorporation of the immigrants from Albania into the Vlach villages of Greece. The issue of the migration of Albanian Vlachs to Greece is mentioned by the French anthropologist Gilles de Rapper, who has done intensive field work in South Albania, especially in the area of Lunxhëri, in Gjirokastër, where many Vlachs are settled. In an article about emigration from this area he writes that the Vlachs were the first to depart massively for Greece. This happened because their conditions of living were the worst, having suffered discrimination in the past and being persecuted by the regime, but, also, because they had connections with their own people in Greece, even relatives, as in the village Kefalovriso. Moreover, during the first phase, the Vlachs acted as guides to those who wanted to leave for Greece, because they knew well the passageways in the frontiers and held networks of relations in Greece, which were utilised to advance emigrants to the interior of the country (Gilles de Rapper 2005 and 2003).

To the conclusion of the above article, G. De Rapper gives the title "New transnationalism?" and notes: "Emigration and the opening of the border have brought a change in the local conception of identity: the Albanian-Greek opposition has given way to a more complex 'bricolage' based on memory of the *kurbet* and on a cultural and geographic proximity, and this can be seen as the marker of a new situation of transnationalism between Greece and Albania. This is the way the Lunxhotes respond to the challenge of getting access to the Greek labour market" (p.192). Thus he places the issue in a wider context of

discussion about emigration, borders and identity, emphasising the fact that while national classifications still persist, in order to understand the every day reality of people with respect to the migrants' conduct and strategies, it is necessary to take into account other, more ambiguous and fluid categories, such as ethnic identities. It is not easy, however, he concludes, to determine the extent to which this re-emergence of ethnicity is caused by the configuration of a transnational space due to emigration, where antagonism is expressed in ethnic terms, or whether it is a reaction to the nationalist propaganda of the communist era.

Migration or transborder mobility?

It is already obvious that the concept of *transnationalism*, which occupies a crucial position in the debate on migration in the new context of globalisation, becomes very problematic within the context of Albanian immigration to Greece and especially to Epirus. In the latter case, however, even the the term "immigration" becomes problematic, because it also appears inextricably connected to the concept of the nation, which emerges historically in the context of modernity and in relation to the formation of the nation-state. While the migration of people from one place to another is a phenomenon tied in with the historical presence of man on earth, as an object of study of the social sciences it has been linked, *par excellence*, to the reality of the nation-state; consequently, most scientific approaches to the phenomenon are affected to a great extent by this fact. The assumed identification, within national ideology, of a national territory, a people and a culture has influenced directly or indirectly the

course of the study of the migrational phenomenon, namely the methodological and conceptual choices of the relative studies. Perceiving the attachment of a nation's people to its land in terms of natural rooting meant defining all movement out of the borders of the nation-state as not merely a displacement but an "uprooting". Even though the concept of expatriation used to mean, in the pre-modern past, going away from the place of one's origin, which was usually a local community, with the formation of the nation-state this acquired additional national qualities. More and more, one's "homeland" becomes identified with the country one belongs to and ceases to be identified with the particular place of his origin. After all, the national homeland is considered an extension of the local community, which thus becomes not only part of the former but its miniature. The poem we all learnt at school about the expatriate who addresses his homeland and asks it for some Greek soil to take along with him to the foreign lands, is typical ("Now that I leave for foreign lands/ and we shall live apart for months and years/ let me take something from you/ blue homeland beloved..."). It is also significant that, while in the Greek folk songs of expatriation the concept of the national homeland does not exist, since this kind of song is a creation of the pre-national era, a time when the community one parted with to "go to foreign lands" was part of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire, afterwards, various later approaches projected the modern idea of the nation back onto this phenomenon.

The naturalisation of the relation with what emerges as national homeland in the territorial sense of the word ("homeland") reaches such proportions, that even the natural elements of a place acquire national qualities. The investment of the ideo-

logical construct we call “national soil” with strong emotional content has led national ideology to a kind of true fetishism, which constitutes, nevertheless, the basis of patriotism. Identification with the homeland and its territory means readiness for individual and collective sacrifice in defense of its integrity. Expressions of national rhetoric, such as “I shed my blood for my country” or “we shall defend to the last drop of our blood, even the last inch of our ground” demonstrate the proportion of the phenomenon and its importance in fostering national sentiment.

Of course, the omnipotence of national ideology in the modern period has unavoidably affected the social sciences themselves. The nation did not only function as the dominant political and social factor in the organisation of the world but as the main conceptual tool for the interpretation of reality and, certainly, for the writing of history (Liakos 2005). Indicatively, even scientific schools of thought whose aim is to deconstruct all these “constructs” are frequently trapped by the very conceptual frameworks they intend to question.

Such is the case with the study of the migrational phenomenon. While with the term migration we refer to any form of population relocation from place to place, from an agricultural area to another or an urban centre to another, from city to city, from country to country, etc., its use is associated, as a rule, with the movement from nation-state to nation-state. This is why when we refer to relocations within the borders of a state we have to use the term “internal migration”. Even though almost all kinds of relocation, even temporary ones, have been recorded in history as a social problem and are inscribed in the collective consciousness as traumatic experiences, the parting

with the country of origin in particular and the settling in another state is further negatively charged with the ideas of deprivation of a homeland, severing from the national body, uprooting from the land of one's fathers and forced integration with another country and another nation; by definition, the immigrant becomes a national "other", a stranger.

The stereotypes about the unified, homogeneous character of the nation render the process of the immigrant's "integration" a difficult matter, because assimilation is considered a necessary precondition for his incorporation. It isn't by accident, after all, that the first scientific approaches to the phenomenon are focused on this issue. In fact, the assimilation model for the study of immigration starts being queried only just after the 1960s, when new questions are raised, such as the issue of respecting the immigrants' difference, ethnic and cultural, within an ideological and epistemological framework that led, through a "pluralist" approach (the concept of multiculturalism is indicative), to more complex and more consciously political perspectives, mainly regarding immigration to Western Europe. Within this new tendency, which bears the clear marks of Marxist ideology, issues brought forward are the matter of unequal relations between the migrants' host and home countries, in the context of globalisation theory, but also the linking of the ethnic to the class dimension, in the context of the debate over the social inclusion/exclusion of the immigrants.

From the decade of the 1980s onwards we see the emergence of issues that get away from both the ethnocentric approaches of immigrant assimilation and the structuralist ones that underestimate the dimension of the agency of the immi-

grants themselves, emphasising the decisive role of economic and social factors. Indeed, investigations of the relations between different ethnic groups living side by side in the same host country (as is the case, manifestly, in Britain) demonstrated not only the significance of trans-ethnic relations but the importance of identifying the immigrants as social subjects. Not surprisingly, the germs of a revisionist theoretical approach have emerged from this new direction, revising the very category of the nation in more cultural terms. For example, the studies of the national phenomenon by E. Gellner (1983) and A.D. Smith (1991) belong to this perspective.

Generally, from the decade of 1980s onwards, together with the new considerations of the national phenomenon connected with the configuration of a new milieu regarding migration and its consequences for the host countries, but also in the wider context of trans-ethnic relations, a new line of scientific rationales has emerged, from different scientific and geographical areas; these, on the one hand, relocate scholarly interest more towards issues related to the strategies of the migrants themselves, whether on a collective or an individual level, and, on the other, adopt perspectives that promote concepts such as "process" or "construction", in parallel or in opposition to the concept of the "structure". Thus the migrant starts to appear as an active subject and ceases to be merely a victim, while migration starts being dealt with as a multi-dimensional phenomenon and not as a problem or an "anomaly" in need of corrective or therapeutic interventions.

Despite all this, migration continues to be approached through national lenses. The critical approaches to nationalism and the new "constructivist" theories of the nation clearly influ-

enced the discussion on migration and migrant populations, but did not necessarily lead to an epistemological revision of the basic study tools of the phenomenon, or, most importantly, a radical questioning of the structural connection of the national with the migrational phenomenon and a re-adjustment of the conceptual and methodological framework itself (Ventura 1994). This issue is now a matter of urgency, given the generalised spread and intensity of the phenomenon of globalisation and the increase in the mobility of populations, with the ensuing consequence of the multipresence of fluid and hybrid identities. The case of A. Appadurai who has introduced the term *ethnoscapes* is the most characteristic one of this new tendency, which basically leads, directly or indirectly, to the notion of the very "deterritorialisation" of the nation. In other words, Appadurai developed the argument that, with the advancement of globalisation, transnational formations multiply and, as crowds of people and groups cross national borders and configure new landscapes of diaspora, the nation-state increasingly relinquishes its dominant role and people are driven all the more to new forms of collective identification; as a result, their ties with the nation-state of their origin slacken and their identity and culture become gradually "deterritorialised", while in the past the unity of national land, people and culture seemed indissoluble. In the context of the new global ethnoscapes, the flows of human crowds (diasporas, immigrants, refugees, tourists, etc.) form alternative groupings and types of identity, based on fluid relations of internal identification but under similar conditions of mobility and insecurity. These new "communities", contrary to the national ones that are bounded to a fixed territory, are "deterritorialised" (Appadurai 1991 and 1997).

It is understandable why views such as this one do not only provoke deconstructionist perceptions of the nation, but also put to doubt the traditional approaches to migration, which, as we have said, have been dependent on the concept of the nation. Even the concept of transnationalism (and all that goes along with it) reproduces this trend, keeping at the epicentre of discussion the identification between nation and state, an identification which, in its turn, reproduces the isomorphism "one nation-one territory-one culture", consequently confining the nation to the limits of the state, practically regarding the non-identification of the two a deviation and even an "anomaly". The truth is, however, that reality is different to the stereotype the nation has invented for itself and that very often the limits of the nation are not identical with the limits of the state, not only because of the arbitrary demarcation of the borderlines, but because of the migrational relocations that took place during various phases in history (diasporas); as a result, talking about transnational migration produces confusion and, furthermore, it creates methodological impasses. A first and simple question that could be posed is why not use the term "transborder mobility". Something like that could release the discussion from the nation and also introduce the concept of mobility as more appropriate for the new forms of migration in general.

A group of scholars, who study the phenomenon of migration in relation to globalisation, have started a dialogue around the necessity of re-defining the given theoretical and methodological framework, concurrently revising the conceptual tools that have been used up to now. In this context, it is becoming increasingly clearer that transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, but a new approach to the phenomenon of migration.

Indeed, one of the most known scholars, Th. Faist, has suggested that transnationalism is taken as an alternative way of adjustment by immigrants, juxtaposed to those of assimilation and multiculturalism or ethnic pluralism (2000:201). In any case, the more the dialogue moves on, the more scholars become aware of the necessity to transcend the impasses of approaches based on the theoretically and methodologically problematical concept of the nation, as this was defined by the dominant ideology of the nation-state.

The more the omnipotence of the nation-state subsides and the "ethnoscapes" establish their position in the global scene, the more the need grows to abandon the concept of the nation as the basic study tool for migration. The world starts to look more like a whole of landscapes in constant movement and fluidity and less like the sum-total of fixed in space and time, internally homogeneous and totally distinct and different between them nation-states. Thus the very site of the nation, the land, the territory, starts to receive the powerful impact of globalisation, its borders become more porous, so that, gradually, the meanings of both internal cohesion and external differentiation change. Also, alterations in the concept and function of the national border are rendering the movements between states less and less "transnational" and more like movements between different localities within a globalised setting.

Such development is an understandable consequence of the fact that national borders have been transcended on several levels, as in cases of supranational unions, such as the European Union. Due to the weakening, from the inside, of the national borders of the country-members and the free movement between them, "migration" from one country to another has been

transformed into a situation that calls for the revision of the very term. More and more now, movement apparently takes place between different localities in a unified supranational space, while, at the same time, cultural osmoses minimising cultural differences are propagated. Hence moving from one national territory to another feels increasingly less like expatriation, while the host countries become less “foreign”. After all, this kind of mobility has ceased to be considered migration by the countries themselves and is approved as an element of modernisation, a fact that is far remote from the previous dealing with migration as a social problem in the recent European past.

In any case, everything points to the transcendence of the concept of migration, with respect to the study of the phenomena of contemporary mobility, and the necessity of adopting new conceptual tools, which mainly means revising the theoretical and methodological framework. Such revision, of course, has no choice but to focus on the very concept and reality of the nation-state in the era of globalisation (Karagiannis 2006).

Methodological issues

Researching and studying “immigration” in relation to the Albanians who “immigrate” to Greece and concentrating my interest mainly on the Greek-Albanian frontier, I often wonder about the above matters, since the very “data” I have gathered raises questions about the established methodological framework and the very conceptual categories I use in the first place. The choice

of talking about transnationalism in this context is legitimised by the existence of a national border intersected by “immigrant” movements and, of course, by the very consolidation of the two national entities and identities, the Greek and the Albanian, after the formation of the respective nation-states. However, the ethnological reality, as much as the strategies, practices and the very discourse of the “immigrants” themselves often revoke the clear dichotomy between Albanian and Greek. The “immigrants” themselves place these categories under scrutiny by their own practices, in the process of managing: their integration into the host society, their relation with the national group that receives them and their past, as well, matters that are inextricably related. In this context, the concept of border, real and symbolic, acquires primary importance, as we shall see later.

Let's start with the term *Kurbet*, which derives from the Turkish word *gurbet* and means traveling for business. The *kurbet* was used in all the Balkan countries, especially in the years of Ottoman domination but later as well, to indicate the periodic translocations of people to different places for the purpose of work. Among the Albanians it is still used as a term, though it is being gradually replaced by the official terms *emigracion* and *emigrant*, which are commonly used in the media, too. Let's also note that the term *refugjat* is also used, which means refugee and is connected more with the period of the regime, when it had acquired negative connotations (both the fugitive and his family were socially stigmatised). Talking with Albanians in Greece and Albania, I found out that the term *kurbeti* is still used but *emigracion* is considered more modern. In fact, some of my interlocutors told me that all this is “European” stuff, meaning that not only the word derives from Europe, but that the con-

cept is connected with Europeanisation, that is to say, modernisation. The terms *kurbeti* and *kurbetlli* are found in song lyrics, traditional as much as contemporary, but also in literary works and references (Dafa 2003). It is worth mentioning the song that was written for Flamur Pisi, an Albanian immigrant in Greece who was killed by the Albanian police in Elbasan, after a bus hijacking in Greece: here the word *kurbeti* is used repeatedly, as well as the proverb “parja kurbetit është pare e gjaku” (money made in foreign land is blood money) (Papailias 2003); also the name of a polyphonic ensemble of Albanian immigrants in Greece, “Lot kurbetit” (Tear of emigration). So while *emigration* is connected to modernisation, the *kurbet*, distinctly, does not signify merely a different past but the very difference in cultural identity of the various groups that have experienced collectively the phenomenon of this mobility. The differentiation of the two terms, that is, concerns not only the period of time, but cultural identity. Also, the *kurbet* of the past is, distinctly, positively signified in the collective memory of the groups today. Indeed, it often constitutes symbolic capital, employed in the context of the new emigration. Gilles de Rapper observes that migrational experience, the memory of the *kurbet*, occupies an important position in the representations of the past and the self-image of the people of Lunxhëri. Its decisive significance for the formation of their collective identity lies in the fact that the emigrants of the past had given over a great part of their savings for the construction of grand houses in their villages and developed a special way of life and attitude, a sense of superiority in relation to other areas and groups (*aristocraci*). The same scholar stresses, of course, the difference between the *kurbet* of the past and the new emigration: “While the *kurbet* is presented

as a golden age, linked to the economic and social growth of the area as much as to its identity, the new emigration is perceived as a painful and very little productive development. In the first place, narratives of the *kurbet* very rarely mention the practical difficulties of departure and travel, as if borderlines did not exist then (whereas the journey to Istanbul took place via Greece), as if everybody were free to work wherever they wanted. On the contrary, when the talk is about emigration today, the hurdles of departure are always mentioned, whether about the acquisition of a visa, or the traversing of the border, or about the rest of the journey in Greece" (2003:102). If we focus our attention on the Albanians who live and work variously in Greece, we discern a variety of forms of migration, which call for respective differentiations in our manner of approaching them. The presence of Albanians in the Epirus frontier and especially the area of Konitsa bears special characteristics and stands out as a distinct form of "migration" or rather transborder mobility, suitable for testing out an alternative approach and the development of new theoretical and methodological tools for the study of the phenomenon. A simple, superficial effort of locating the Albanian citizens who move and work in this frontier area of Epirus is enough to show their great mobility but, also, how different their individual cases are. To mention the most important categories: families settled in Konitsa or surrounding villages, who visit their home on the other side of the border very often (they keep their houses there and many of them have elderly parents whom they leave behind); families who have settled in Greece but visit their places of origin only occasionally, due to the distance; men or women who work during the week in the area and visit their homes in the weekends; mainly men, who

come for work and return on a daily basis (from the Albanian villages very close to the border); schoolchildren who attend classes in schools in the area, stay in halls of residence or boarding houses in Konitsa and visit their homes on weekends and holidays; elderly people who divide their time between Albania and Greece where their children live; people who work in both countries depending on the season (for example, construction workers who spend their winters in Albania, occupied in various agricultural or construction jobs, while in Greece the demand for such work decreases); and, finally, men and women who are married to Greek citizens and live in the area permanently. So we observe great mobility, but also a differentiation between the various categories, which are fluid themselves, since individual and family strategies change in time, depending on the objective facts of the job market but also each family's cycle of development. On the other hand, given that there is not only geographical proximity but cultural affinity as well, the conditions of Albanians in Greece are nothing like one would expect in a truly foreign land. And this affinity is traced back to the time before the sealing of the border after World War II, when the two sides of the border used to communicate in various ways and the old unity had not broken down, despite the imposition of the national border after the Balkan wars and the foundation of the Albanian state in 1913 (business transactions, social contact, even marriages continued throughout the period between the wars). It extends, and this is important, to the fact that the national border never coincided with the real ethnic and cultural borders between the populations. The ethnic and cultural mosaic of the wider area was so composite, it was impossible to mark down the border in a way that would yield a

clear distinction between Albanians and Greeks. This is exactly why the committees in charge of the border demarcation faced insurmountable obstacles and, in the end, the demarcation was done in an arbitrary way and on the basis of the political power balance in the international scene at the time. The difficulty, as is well known, was not created only by the fact that populations were mixed even within the same areas and villages (i.e. Konitsa and Leskovik), but the fact that the very "objective" distinguishing features of national groups, like language, were not safe indicators, in this case, of national classification and belonging, because, on the level of consciousness, there was a fluidity and in many cases the objective criteria were not identical with the subjective self-definition of the groups or individuals involved. For example, a large part of the Albanian Orthodox population had started to form and even consolidate a Greek national consciousness, through the spread of Greek education and the activity of the Church. On the other hand, the delayed development of an Albanian national consciousness had meant that part of the population had not developed a national consciousness yet, and, as a result, was perplexed at the calls of nationalism for inclusion in one or another group, at a moment when they defined themselves rather in ethnic terms (on the basis of the dominant element of religion, the *millet*) and locally rather than nationally. The example of several Albanian-speaking Muslims in Konitsa is typical and was expressed in the most meaningful way, when, during the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey, after 1923, they had to declare their national identification so that their fortune was decided. In a way, all Muslims were considered Turks and, consequently, were to go to Turkey, but part of the Konitsa Muslims developed a national

consciousness (the brothers Faik and Mehmet Bey Konitza, leading figures of the Albanian national movement are a characteristic example), while some seemed not to have developed a particular national consciousness and defined themselves simply as Muslims from Konitsa, which is why they faced a serious problem when they were called to declare their nationality. Also, it is known and we have mentioned it already, that the Albanian Christian Orthodox had started to develop a Greek national consciousness and were very close, culturally, to the rest of their co-religionists, anyway. It is also important to note that after World War II, especially in the mid-period before the establishment of the communist regime, several Orthodox Albanians and Greeks, too, came and settled willingly in Konitsa and its villages, a phenomenon that continues during the following period, though to a much lesser extent (with fugitives) despite the strict measures of the communist regime in guarding the border. Relevant research we undertook in the registries of the Konitsa municipality confirmed this fact, since the place of descent of all these people is recorded together with a note that they are "registered provisionally [for the purpose of identification]." So we observe the phenomenon that groups of kinfolk and families, too, are divided between the two sides of the national border, with the result of forming in the process different national identities. In Greece, all these people are accepted and inscribed in the collective consciousness as "Vorioepirotēs" (Greeks from Northern Epirus), but they do not all belong to the same ethnic category. They are all Christian and usually of Greek persuasion, but, regarding their ethnic origin, they are differentiated. With the fall of the Albanian regime and the opening of the border, individuals, families and kinfolk, have the

opportunity to reunite and this creates a peculiar situation with respect to "migration". Initially, the networks of these relationships provide assistance to those who wish (and they are the majority) to come to Greece, they accept the help of "their own" people and are generally welcome. For many, and this is the case for Greeks and any others who feel "Greek", the crossing of the border is nothing other than a passage into the "homeland" signifying their re-union with the national body and especially with their own relatives, from whom they had been brutally kept apart for about half a century. Despite the various problems generated by this reunion or encounter, and issues such as inheritance or identity, which provoke tension and disaffection, the fact is that these new "immigrants" are in no way confronted with the usual problems of integration in a foreign country. I mention, as an example, the cases of people who were accommodated by relatives for a long period of time, until they could adjust and stand on their own. Others claimed and acquired houses and other kinds of property they were entitled to, a fact that points to the peculiarity of the situation. Let's also note that, on the other side of the the border, Greek citizens, the so-called "Vorioepirotas" ("Northern Epirotas"), who come from villages or cities of Albania also claim their family houses and property, a process that is rather charged symbolically and emotionally, and in some cases with positive outcome we observe "returns" of property, houses in Albania that are used by Greeks as second residences. This state of affairs reveals how complex the situation is, of the constant moving of people and material goods between the two sides of the border.

Broadly speaking, the new setting is a typical configuration of transnational migration, but this term obscures rather than

illuminates the particular attributes of the real relations and flows that take place in the social field intersecting the national border. The geographical and cultural proximity of the two areas on the two sides of the border, the composite character of ethnic relationships, the historical background of the social and economic relations involved but also of the translocations and relocations from the one area to the other, the fluidity of identities in the past but, to a certain degree, in the present as well, with respect to a large part of Albanian population (mainly the Orthodox Christians), do not allow us to approach the migrational phenomenon in nationalist terms, namely assuming a national purity and homogeneity, which presupposes the existence of national identities, consolidated in time and space and coinciding with the territorial ground of the nation-states. This means that the concept of transnational migration is rather problematic and inadequate for the study of the specific phenomenon and that we have to, on the one hand, transcend the transnational framework that pertains to the existence of nation-states, and attend to the level and the context of ethnic relations, which intersect the national ones; on the other hand, transcending the very concept of migration itself, which is inextricably related to the phenomenon of the nation, we should adopt that of mobility. So, instead of talking about transnational migration, it would be better to talk about transborder mobility.

What about the border?

First incident: In August 2006, while teaching a class of ethnographic field-work specialising in frontier areas, we are, together with a group of post-graduate students, at the border guard-station of Proselio, exactly next to the ruined settlement of Korsacka, which is located, literally, on the border. This settlement was destroyed and abandoned in World War II and its Albanian-speaking Muslim inhabitants moved to Albania.

We leave our vehicle outside the station, which was also abandoned a few years ago, with the pretext that it wasn't needed any more, and we follow the path that leads inside the ruins of the settlement to Albanian ground. This well trodden pathway, is apparently used a lot by the Albanians of the villages nearby, who come and go to Greece with great frequency. Personally, I had been there before, had walked on this path and, had, in fact, crossed a stream using a tree trunk that was set there by Albanians as a bridge, thinking this stream was actually the borderline between the two countries, and had moved thus inside Albanian ground, reaching close to the village Radat in Albania. So I urged my students to do the same, so that they see themselves what a border is like. So we went up to the stream and on our way back, as we were going up towards the guard-station, we had a very interesting encounter. Two Albanians on horseback were returning to their village, Radat, from the Greek village Agia Varvara, where they work; they move in and out this way on a daily basis. We start chatting with them. It so happens, in fact, that I know these men from my previous research in the area. To our question where the border is exactly, they smile and meaningfully point behind them: "the border is

on the way of the waters' flow" they say, and I feel not only embarrassment but shame, as well. Embarrassment because, at this particular moment we have violated the border and are standing illegally on Albanian ground; and shame because it's well known that the principle "the border is on the way of the waters' flow" is adopted whenever borders are demarcated. I couldn't, however, imagine that a village is actually located so close to the borderline, literally *on* it. I thought, of course, that this must be the reason why it was abandoned, remembering the proverb I had heard for the first time in the frontier area of Dropull, "field next to river and village next to border will never prosper". I was very happy though, because everything I had told my students about the nature and character of the border was substantiated in the best way.

Second incident: On Friday afternoon, springtime 2002, I am in the frontier zone village Molivdoskepastos. The border line is about 500 metres from the village church, at the edge of the settlement. The villagers actually say that when the border was first marked, this church had remained on Albanian ground, because the border had been traced on the stream dividing the church from the village; after the villagers' complaints, however, it was moved and the church was included in the Greek side. Still, several pieces of cultivated land remained on Albanian ground, fields which belonged to people from the Greek village. Indeed, up until WWII, an official agreement between the two states allowed them to cultivate these lands. As we drink and chat with the villagers in a café on the central road, I observe a group of children who look like school children, walking towards the border. I inquire about that and find out that they are children from the nearby Greek-speaking villages of Albania,

Vllahopsilloterrë and Biovizhdë, who study in schools in Konitsa; there they stay in halls of residence and boarding houses during the week and return home in the weekends, via the military station of Molivdoskepastos, which functions unofficially as customs for the people of this area. In addition to the pupils, several people from these villages commute on a daily basis to work in Molivdoskepastos.

Third incident: In July 1997 and while in Jannina, I am called on the phone by my parents from my home village, Aetomnitsa, who tell me that Albanians have taken the whole of our flock, about 350 sheep and goats, from their pasture next to the border and led them to Albania. I go to the village, try to console my parents and then I see the Albanian shepherd who worked for my father that summer, coming dressed in rags, weeping and crying that a gang of Albanians beat him up and stole the flock. We start with my father for Plikati, a village between the particular pasture in Grammos and the Albanian border, hoping to find out more. On the way, on the crossroad to Plikati via Pirsoyianni, we meet a police patrol, whose job is to guard the border. We ask them to join us but they refuse, saying that their orders are to guard that particular zone and, if they move further in, nobody can guarantee their safety (this is the time when conditions in Albania are out of control and several Albanian "criminals" enter Greek territory for illegal activities). Of course, no-one, nowhere, can give us relevant information; indeed, the villagers we meet react to our questions with fear, and advise us not to overdo it with our search because these Albanians are ruthless and our very life is in danger. Thankfully, part of the flock returned, the thieves couldn't lead it to Albania (it was a summer afternoon and the animals moved with difficulty, espe-

cially the older and the pregnant ones); so they returned to the pen on their own. The rest were lost forever, having obviously crossed the border.

Fourth incident: It is the summer of 1999 and I'm at my home village. Middle of the day, I hear noise and I'm aware of a strange commotion in the village. I try to understand what's going on and observe various Albanians running away towards the mountain or trying to hide in village basements and huts. In a little while, I see the police car in the village square and then some Albanians arrested by the police being led to the police van, to be deported via the customs of Kakavia. This time of year, about 40 Albanians work in the village as shepherds and about as many in construction sites. Most of them haven't got the required documents "the papers"; they are, that is, "illegal immigrants". In a discussion with the village authorities, I confirm what I more or less already know, that there is a silent agreement with the police to tolerate the immigrants, so that "the village is serviced". Every time something like this happens, it means someone has "snitched" for personal reasons, usually revenge against a particular Albanian or even a fellow villager and so the situation is reversed for a few days, at least. The village authorities, however, consider it their duty to renew this silent agreement with the police, even using their connections with high standing politicians. This is, after all, a common secret not only here but on a national scale. Opinions are, of course, divided, according to self-interest, as to whether so many Albanians should be staying illegally in the village, even though the majority is well served by their presence, especially the shepherds and those building houses. There is a contradiction in the villagers' attitude: whenever there is a problem in their rela-

tionship with the Albanians, they immediately assume a negative attitude and racist behaviour towards these people, whom they themselves have invited in the first place, employ and, actually, complain if the police deport them. In any case, the community authorities take on the responsibility for the presence of the Albanians regarding the preservation of security and order in the village. It seems, somehow, that the border is transposed inside the limits of this frontier community, regarding the relocation and presence of Albanians, especially those from the area of Ersekë, behind Grammos.

Fifth incident: In the winter of 2000, an elderly man from the village Plikati fell ill and had to be hospitalised for several days in Jannina. His wife had to go along, so a problem emerged regarding the care of their few domestic animals. The solution came from a young Albanian from the village Rehovë, who offered to take the animals to his home on the other side of the border and keep them there until the return of the elderly couple...

Sixth incident. A few years after the violent opening of the Albanian border, public opinion in Jannina was preoccupied with a peculiar case of smuggling in the neighbouring country. This phenomenon had been rampant for about a decade and had not been effaced yet (anything, from sheep, goats and other animals, to guns and drugs, was crossing the border in various ways), but the particular case created a strong impression because of the ingenuity involved. It was discovered that from a small village next to the border, where a large family of shepherds reside permanently, large quantities of milk were canalised into Greece via a plastic pipe and sold in the Greek market...

Seventh incident: In a transborder meeting at a frontier village in the autumn of 2005, the representative of the Albanian community from the zone of the Greek minority, referring to the conditions that prevail in his village very close to the border, revealed that often Greek machinery is called for and sent by Greek authorities to open the road to their village, whereas no official agreement exists between the two countries for such actions and the Albanian authorities are not even informed. This report aimed at substantiating his opinion about the abandonment of the area he lives in by the Albanian state and he mentioned one more incident that made an impression. The same year, machinery from Greece entered Albanian territory to repair the ruined road leading from the village to the monastery, so that the villagers could go and carry out their religious festival.

Eighth incident: I copy from the local magazine *Amarandos*: "As in the rest of the country, in our village, too, the census took place. It is known that the villages have been deserted [...]. This is why they tried to bring in populations from the cities, to present an adequate number of people and gain economic benefits [...]. Personally, I am against the creation of a false image, because this way we miss the point of the matter and do not confront the root of the problem. And, of course, I don't measure everything according to the economic benefits, whereas those in charge of the census in our village fell into that trap. Anxious to assemble more people, they brought in Albanian immigrants as well, legal and illegal, from Konitsa and Albania [...]. The individuals registered in the village were 88, not including the soldiers whose number is secret. The Statistics Department that gave me this information provides no more details about the

nationality of those registered, so we do not know how many Albanians were registered. We do know, however, that we only have one, Ligor (Grigori) Roustá from "Podes"[Podë], who comes periodically, and very rarely his brothers, Yianni and Alfredo come, too. Of the 61 Albanians found in the village, 7 were illegal (further responsibility), they were discovered late in the evening by the police. In other villages, the census of Albanians was attempted, but they were thrown out violently (the incident made news on television) [...] (2001:25-29).

So what is the border? Border anthropology is a rapidly developing discipline, which was practically inaugurated with the, very advanced for its time, work by Fr. Barth, on ethnic groups and boundaries (1969). Barth contends that the construction of ethnic identity depends more on an awareness of difference induced by the boundary, namely the encounter with the "other" and otherness, and less with its cultural content, the common qualities in its interior. This approach essentially set the foundations for further investigation of the concept of the symbolic boundary. Soon after, a series of studies advanced the theory of the boundary within wider contexts. It is worth mentioning a study that opened up new ways for anthropological research on the border. It is the work by Cole and Wolf about the Italian Tyrolo (1974), pertaining to the resilience of cultural boundaries, years after the change of the political borders.

As this sector of studies develops, the scholars' interest concentrates more and more on the relations between the local communities of the border zones and the state, with emphasis on the formation of local cultures and border identities but, also, in relation to the processes whereby broader national entities are formed. Thus the dominant view now is that, generally,

the borders are an area where relations between ethnic groups and nation-states are inscribed, where ethnic, national and local identities are formed and reproduced in time and space, and where dynamic relations between political and symbolic boundaries develop within various social groups.

It is not our aim here to provide a detailed presentation of this debate. We shall confine ourselves to a synoptic, selective presentation of the conclusions of the most important up to date relevant publication, the collective volume *Border identities*, edited by Wilson and Donnan (1998). Defining the border in their introduction, the editors refer to three basic dimensions: First, the juridical one, in the sense that the border divides but also unites states between them, second, the natural one, which concerns the necessity of distinguishing and protecting the border that defines state territory, and, third, the social and cultural dimension, which refers to the configuration of a border zone of variable width that extends to both sides of the border, intersecting it; here populations negotiate variously the relations between them, as well as their collective identities. The last dimension is particularly interesting for us, so we shall return to it. For the time being, we will hold onto one point: that we are talking about, literally, territories, not to be confused with the symbolic borderline zones related to the so-called metaphorical identity boundaries, concepts used in the contemporary discussion about "deterritorialised" identities in conditions of post-modernity.

Cultural units are domains, which may intersect or even undermine the political borders between countries; this depends on several factors and mainly on the attitudes of the states themselves and the nature of the bonds that connect or

divide the groups living around the border. Significantly, all cultures, without exception, are inscribed in space and this inscription may continue to connect inextricably a piece of land with a culture, even if its inhabitants abandon it or some dominant power forces population or other changes. Space often betrays and history, in its own way, resists via the signs in a place. Consequently, the "territoriality" of a culture has to be one of the criteria of approaching border ethnic groups and identities, even in conditions that advance the process of "deterritorialisation" (Wilson and Donnan 1998:1-30).

Two of the studies included in the above volume present special interest for us: Kearney's on the border zone between Mexico and the USA and Driessen's about the passage from North Africa to Spain. Kearney describes how the inhabitants of Oaxaca in Mexico cross the border illegally, led by the vision of a better life on the other side, in the USA; he concentrates his attention on the "slackening" of the national boundary, in the context of the operation of the well-known "push and pull" law of migration, which encourages something like this (albeit illegal), as both countries need it for different but complementary reasons. This, however, undermines not only the boundary, but the very sovereignty of Mexico (Kearney 1998). A similar situation is presented by Driessen, who discusses illegal migration from N. Africa to Spain, which is concurrently a passage from the third world to Europe. Driessen also focuses especially on the concept and image of the border zone, as these are signified and reconfigured during the variable crossings of the boundary. The specific article substantiates completely the view that boundaries operate not only on a juridical and political level, but on the level of meaning production, with respect to identities and

asymmetrical power relations between societies “sending” and “hosting” immigrants (Driessen 1998).

Wilson and Donnan conclude their introduction observing, among other things, that the borders are contradictory cultural and power zones, troubling the double process of bureaucratic centralisation and national homogenisation, precisely because of their extreme cultural variability (1998:26).

From the time the above volume was published till today, much ink has been spilt on the issue of borders, as, with the new developments in the global scene, the subject becomes more and more urgent. In recent years, it has been actually at the forefront of all social sciences, as it also favours interdisciplinary approaches by its very nature. Certainly, issues like the creation of cultural formulations and identities, which cut across political borders, the cultural “production” of space and place, the processes of nation-state formation and its impact on local, peripheral and frontier societies, as well as the political economy of international relations in the era of globalisation, are the special concerns of the political anthropology of the borders.

At the same time, the border as an object of study starts playing an important role in post-modern social theory and cultural studies. Of interest is a tendency within cultural studies, to concentrate attention on the metaphorical dimension of the borders and to critique modernist conceptualisations of space and time, more specifically with respect to the issues of culture and identity. The relocation of interest, moreover, by some scholars, to the issue of identity, has brought the border to the forefront, as an ethnographic site that can contribute to a

broader discussion on the political economy of power relations, regarding the formation of cultural identities in the world today.

The new context within which the concept of the border is being approached is decisively pervaded by the phenomenon of extreme mobility, and, of people, ideas and goods, past and beyond national borders. This, however, does not mean that movement and mobility are uncontrolled. On the contrary, the concept of mobility raises the question of the exclusion from movement, of certain groups or individuals, which is linked to the asymmetrical or unequal relations between states and societies. Thus the border becomes symbolically a "topos" for the exposition of these relations. Also, of interest in this context is an analogous approach by H. Cunningham and J. McC. Heyman, who propose the idea of a "mobilities-enclosures continuum" for a more clear-cut, empirical study of the border, which would illuminate further the conjunction of power with the management of wealth-producing sources and ideology at an international level. They go as far as to argue that some social groups and peoples are more equal than others with respect to the right to movement. Somehow, the border reveals the inequalities between its two sides and, moreover, it allows for the identification of the procedures through which changes take place, regarding the cultural and ideological meanings with which objects crossing the border are invested. Studying the border also promotes an awareness of a fact several anthropologists have noticed, that it is wrong to perceive places as autonomous entities which first exist and then come to contact and interact between them; so we should examine how places are constructed historically through specific social and political processes. Clearly, such approaches are far removed from the known static

and essentialist views that objectify both the concepts of place and border, while the perspective they advocate upholds the use of theoretical tools such as process and practice in an historical context, concurrently revealing the importance of political economy. This last parameter introduces the dimension of inequality regarding mobility and migration, a matter that leads us to the heart of politics (Cunnigham and Heyman 2004).

Case study

Let's return though to our own ethnographic field. Based on the above theoretical observations and, of course, the broader discussion on this matter, we can make certain claims with respect to the nature and the character of the Albanian-Greek border.

1. The demarcation of the border line, which took place after the Balkan wars, and the creation of the independent Albanian state in 1913 was done in an arbitrary way, vis-à-vis the ethnic and cultural state of affairs. The committees in charge met insurmountable difficulties in recording the national identities of the populations of the wider area, because, with respect to a large part of the population, the ethnic mosaic was composite, the correspondences between objective facts and subjective self-definitions problematic and the identities and consciousness too fluid. It was, in other words, impossible to find a line that would divide these populations into two homogeneous categories, Greek and Albanian.

The problem was not only the ethnically mixed communities and the geographical interpenetration between the various

ethnic groups, but also the fact of internal differentiation within groups of similar ethnological origin, mainly because of the system of the *millet*, which used to distinguish and still, in a way, distinguishes the Albanians in particular. The distinction between Orthodox Christians and Muslims was decisive not only because it determined their position within the Ottoman dominion, but because it affected their ethnic identity, the basis on which their national consciousness developed during the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of nation-states. The Orthodox Christian Albanians, who belonged to the *rum millet*, identified themselves to a large degree with the rest of the Orthodox, while under the roof of the Patriarchate and later the influence of Greek education they started to form Greek national consciousness, a process that was interrupted by the Albanian national movement in the end of the 19th century and subsequently by the Albanian state. Still, even within the community of the Christians, distinctions based on ethnic origin and language differentiation (Greek-speaking, Albanian-speaking, Vlach-speaking) persisted and the same was the case with the Muslim community, who were divided mainly on the basis of their particular dogma (Sunnis and Bektashis).

For the above reasons, the border changed several times before it became fixed, but was questioned later, especially by the Greek state, and that caused the notorious incidents around the so-called "North Epirus issue" (declaration of independence, recognition of Greek minority, etc.). Even though the border was finally fixed by international treaties, the lack of correspondence between national borders and ethnological facts continued to be a problem, as ethnic groups and even kinfolk and families were divided between the two nation-states.

2. During the period between the creation of the Albanian state and World War II, the border did not obstruct the communication of the two sides. On the contrary, financial transactions and social relationships persisted, as well as cultural contacts, albeit with the required formalities pertaining to the crossing of the border, which, however, was not guarded particularly strictly. People continued to move from one territory to the other without difficulty (tradesmen came and went, shepherds moved with their flocks from their winter pastures to the highlands, women and men visited relatives on the other side, marriage exchanges continued between villages that traditionally used to form marriage alliances, and so on).

However, on both sides of the border, processes of population homogenisation, through ideological and other state apparatuses, are a reality and, in time, the groups which represent otherness start feeling the pressure to become assimilated. In Greece, this process is easier both due to the fact that the state exists for a long time and because of the great influence the Church used to have on all the ethnic groups belonging to the *rum millet*. There was only a problem with the Muslims, but this was also solved, with the exchange of populations after 1923, when most of those who remained after the liberation of Epirus departed as well and the few ones left gradually decreased in number, so that after World War II there were only a few Muslim families in Konitsa, some of whom are still there today.

During the mid-war period and the period between WWII and the foundation of the communist regime in Albania, there is a wave of relocations of Greek and Albanian Christians from South Albania to Greek Epirus, who became known as

“Vorioepirotēs”, meaning Greeks who come from the part of Epirus that was yielded to Albania and is since called by Greeks “Northern Epirus”. The “Vorioepirotēs” of Albanian origin have to a large extent formed Greek consciousness and identity and this is why they choose to come to Greece, where they are dealt with just like the rest. On the contrary, only Muslims who have developed Albanian national consciousness or who cannot identify with either Greeks or Turks leave Greece for Albania, which they choose due to ethnic, language and religious affinity. Let’s note that the flight of the “Vorioepirotēs” of both Greek and Albanian origin persists in the form of escape during the communist regime, despite the Draconian security measures on the border, though to a much lesser degree.

With the collapse of the Albanian regime and the violent opening of the border in 1990, the two sides somehow reunite. Social groups (kinfolk and families) who had been divided have the opportunity to reunite. Financial transactions, social relationships and cultural contact between the two groups are reinstated and, most importantly, a great flow of population takes place, from the Albanian to the Greek side, and configures a transnational field of intense mobility, since, regardless of whether they settle permanently in the area of Konitsa or not, these people cross the border with great frequency. Of course, produce and merchandise, ideas and mentalities cross the border along with them, configuring thus a landscape of flows, which calls for a new methodological and conceptual framework, as has already been stressed.

3. This way, a zone of mobility, activities and flows is being formed, which intersects the national border. This zone is not delimited, but possesses geographical features. It may present

some flexibility, expanding or contracting depending on the relations that prevail at times between the two countries, as well as between the local communities on the two sides of the border. Still, it comprises a band of land, where relations appear generally different to the relations between the two countries and are subject to constant negotiation. The idea of establishing a transborder zone of free exchange, which is often discussed in public debates but has not materialised yet, apparently represents a demand for the institutionalisation of a situation that tends to establish itself permanently, albeit unofficially, and in spite of the law and the border.

The borderline, the border as physical presence, is a fact, but it is there to be violated in practice. This violation expresses an attitude of the border populations, to perpetually resist the boundary in their everyday life. So sometimes the boundary can be compared to a sea wave that ascends and descends intermittently. However, there are points no one can go beyond as an "illegal immigrant", objectively (i.e. due to strict border-patrols – after all the police itself has designated different zones of surveillance), but some obstacles are subjective (such as the lack of social, economic and cultural requirements – what we call "symbolic capital"). Examples: those occupied as shepherds move inside the area of the pastures. Those who work in villages nearby on unofficial agreements move within the limits of those communities – they may dare a trip to Konitsa for some errand but go no further (Konitsa is the limit for many). For the bolder ones, the limit may expand as far as Jannina, but from Jannina to Athens the road is harsh if not impermeable, due to the strict controls and not only.

The zone we are talking about is also a place of extreme intimacy, real and symbolic. Not only the social and cultural environment is familiar to those crossing the border from the nearby areas of Albania, on top of that, human relationships are so personal they make this zone very secure for them. These interpersonal relations also involve individuals in public office and even some in charge of guarding the border and affect their attitude, rendering it more flexible. This is the case with both sides of the border, since on the side of Albania, too, there are guards whose task is to patrol the boundary. An example is enough to illustrate this kind of relationships. In Radat, an Albanian village next to the border, I met one of these guards, who comes from that village and lives there. His father crosses the border illegally to work in the Greek village Amarandos. His son is obliged by his position to at least stop his father from crossing the border illegally... On the Greek side I have met lots of cases of Albanians without the proper documents working and even staying in the homes of Greeks who occupy official positions in the state mechanism, sometimes even related to the guarding of the border... The interpersonal relations which develop often acquire a moral content, disrupting the typical structure of relations and forming a field of mutual trust, which, as a rule, maintains order and security much more effectively than persecuting practices.

4. The above observations regarding the configuration of a broader zone of mobility and exchange around the border, though focused on the geographical dimension, pose, of course, questions of symbolic boundaries. The relation of the material and symbolic boundaries between the various groups who have lived, live and move around the national border is of special in-

terest. While the negotiation of the geographical border, the borderline that was finally fixed, and the political border between the two national states took place in the context of specific procedures pertaining to the international juridical-political framework of settling differences related to border delineation, the negotiation of the symbolic boundaries between national but also particular, ethnic, groups, consists of processes that cannot be confined to set frameworks or time scales. The incompatibility of the political border with the ethnological facts put the former to doubt, in principle and on an official level, a fact that affects, of course, the everyday, private doubts and negotiations of the relations and limits between the groups, whose historical presence in space variously cross-cuts the division of the two national groups that has been imposed from above, two national groups that are supposed to be or appear homogeneous and "pure" according to the dictates of national ideology.

So while the arbitrary demarcation of the borderline, in the first place, and its subsequent sealing (for which the Albanian regime was responsible) provoked ideological and emotional reactions as well as resistance in the populations who found themselves divided between the two states, the result being a struggle between symbolic and political boundaries, its opening in 1990 incited a renewal of renegotiations of relationships and symbolic boundaries. The most characteristic case is that of the Greek population who had stayed in Albanian territory and constituted the Greek minority, recognised or not by international treaties. The imposition and closing down of the border, in the first place, provoked political and ideological and emotional reactions in Greece, leading to the powerful ideological charging

of this excluded from the national body sector of ethnic Greek population and the development of the well known irredentism, which kept alive for a long time the misgivings about the arbitrary demarcation of the particular boundary. Additionally and most importantly, it called for the reproduction of the symbolic border, which opposes the political one. We observe here an oppositional relation and operation of the two forms of border, tackled, quite naturally, differently by the two national states. The Greek one keeps reminding of and nurturing this opposition through its ideological apparatuses and institutions of memory preservation, while the Albanian tries in every way possible to undermine and gradually cancel it with assimilationist policies. The opening of the border, on the other hand, while it was hailed initially by the Greek side as a liberating event for the "Northern Epirus brothers in bondage", allowing the Greek population of Albania to come to contact with the national body and the "motherland", it subsequently provoked negative reactions, resulting in the erection of new symbolic boundaries where the material ones had collapsed.

The massive advent of "Vorioepiotes" from Albania, immediately after the opening of the border, very soon started being experienced as a negative development by their "brothers" in Greece, and it is amazing how a term that used to be charged so positively in the past acquired negative connotations so quickly. Their "brothers" in Greece find it increasingly difficult to identify with them and this finally leads to their rejection.

This rejection in the collective consciousness of the national Greeks is caused mainly by the image the "Vorioepiotes" presented when they first came, an image of beleaguered and miserable people, but also by their attitude and demands on the

Greek state and society, which led eventually to an entrenchment of limits, which turned the ex-brothers into a weird kind of "strangers", a liminal category of citizens between Greeks and Albanians, who, in time, and as the gap deepened, were considered less and less Greek and more and more Albanian. "In Albania we were bloody-Grek and here we are Albanians" is the phrase that condenses the refusal of the Greeks to identify with them, and their symbolic classification with the Albanians. In any case, their very liminality positions them in a condition of insecurity for themselves and jeopardy for the others. Ambiguous identity by definition troubles the clear limits between dominant, "pure" classificatory categories, which, in this case, are the national groups, and thus threatens social order itself (Kassimis and Nitsiakos 1997). Once more we see a renegotiation of boundaries between groups taking place, after the fall of a material border that had prohibited their communication for many years. Thus the fall of a material border signaled the erection of a symbolic one.

Now, as concerns the Albanians themselves who cross the border, legally or illegally after 1990, the renegotiation of relations and symbolic boundaries between different ethnic and religious groups is of multi-dimensional and composite nature. We can, however, generally, observe that the movement of Albanian population to Greece as a migrational destination, with the opening of the border acquired an additional tendency to open up the symbolic boundaries as well, only this opening was one-sided. As much as different categories of Albanians tried to relax the symbolic boundaries and discover or imagine symbolic ties with the Greeks, so as to facilitate their reception and integration in Greek society, so the Greeks raised mental walls of

exclusion regarding the Albanians' symbolic integration, because, otherwise, one way or other, they did become part of Greek society, even if through their marginalisation.

So the symbolic boundaries are influenced by the function of the political borders, but their own function follows separate rules in the context of the conditions of negotiation of collective and individual identities, a phenomenon depending on the historical conjuncture and the various social situations.

5. The relations formed in this transborder context, cannot be understood unless they are examined in relation to the "political economy" of the particular mobility. The concept of asymmetry, the inequality between the two sides of the border is decisive for this. In the first place, the very movement of people from one side to the other is part of a dynamic that develops with the opening of the border, a dynamic that is determined by the tendency or pressure to leave the country because of the great political, social and economic crisis and the attraction of Greece as place for living.

The flow itself being one-sided, directed from one to the other side of the border indicates a relation of inequality between the two countries. Indeed, the violence with which the collapse of the regime is effected and the subsequent opening of the border and the, as a rule, undocumented way of entering Greece, makes this relation even more asymmetrical and places the moving ones in a much more powerless position, as they live and work illegally: their "outlaw" status deprives them of all rights. Legalisation improves their position but does not cancel the structural inequality that characterises the phenomenon of immigration any way, as well as the quality of the immigrant. In any case, the effort of the immigrants to present aspects of iden-

tity that would facilitate their position and residence (proofs of Greek roots or Christian faith, changes of names, etc.) demonstrates, precisely, how they experience this unequal relationship, which is further aggravated by factors pertaining to their otherness.

The transborder zone is not exempted from this parameter, it's just that here immigrants are better qualified to alleviate the negative consequences of this asymmetry and inequality, thanks to the factor of the historical and cultural affinity we mentioned above. Moreover, the geographical proximity itself functions positively in this regard.

While the flow of people is almost exclusively in one direction, where goods are concerned the movement is to both sides but mostly from Greece to Albania. The few exchanges also bear the imprint of the above structural asymmetry and reflect the level of development of the two countries. While mainly agricultural and dairy products (drugs and weapons are a separate chapter) flow in from Albania, mostly uncontrollably, from Greece to Albania we have, in addition to money, a flow of a great gamut of material goods and products, from simple items of everyday use and consumption, to electrical equipment and cars. One may say that, whereas Albanian products represent "nature", Greek ones represent "civilisation", a dichotomy that characterises the differences of the two groups from the point of view of the Greeks: Albanians are classified as "savage", while Greeks as "civilised", a fact that expresses, of course, the general racist attitude of the Greeks.

The Greeks who go to Albania with purposes other than a simple visit are mainly tradesmen, whose presence once more manifests, in its own way, the same relation of inequality be-

tween the two countries. The denial by the majority of Greeks to engage in more permanent relations with Albania corroborates the total rejection of the country's image and reproduces the perception of its inferiority. In any case, the transborder zone of mobility condenses in its own way, though it also somewhat mitigates, the relations of inequality between the two countries.

After the above theoretical and empirical observations around the concept and reality of the border, it is time we moved to a methodological reflection.



Figure 1. The writer during his research in Përmet square

Ethnographic practice

Ethnographic practice (localised field work with “participant observation”), the landmark of anthropology, is tied in with a geographical region that is specific and strictly delimited, a locus in space taken to correspond to a human group and a culture. In the first phase of the science’s development, the field of research was, as a rule, a village, a “tribe”, a social whole, which belonged to a small scale geographical territory and was identified with a particular culture, which was taken to enjoin the group internally and differentiate it from other groups. The attachment of the group and its culture to the specific geographical site was the basis of the work hypothesis of all ethnographical references and anthropological analyses.

This isomorphism was connected to a rather static perception of the relation between place and culture but also with an approach that ignored history. So, places and cultures were “constructed” through the particular kind of ethnographic practice, regardless of the historical reality, more as an outcome of the ethnographers’ theoretical deliberations. The same isomorphism prevailed in the area of folklore, the only difference being that the point of reference here was the nation, which is identified with a geographical region, which constitutes state territory and is characterised by a homogeneous, cohesive and delimited culture. In a way, the small community as an object of study of anthropologists corresponds to the model of the national “imagined community” of folklorists. The static and transcendental relation between a site, a people and a culture is their common characteristic.

This set-up became problematic at the moment when the incorporation of previously "primitive" societies in the global scene emerged as the determining factor of whatever concerns their function, as anthropologists started to transfer their interest to more "historical" societies, initially those of the European periphery and subsequently in the very heart of Europe. The advancement, of course, of globalisation and the new phenomena of population relocations and constant flows of people, capital and cultural goods within a global system, where the borders between states become all the more porous and relations between social groups, places and cultures all the more composite and fluid, do not only put to doubt the established theoretical perceptions and methodological practices, but also, urgently, from within a critical reconsideration, call for the adoption of new, alternative approaches, theoretical and methodological.

Indeed, today it is impossible to practise ethnographic research on the terms and presuppositions of classical anthropology, assuming the identification of human groups, places and cultures. We talk increasingly less of cultures and groups as if they were water tight realities outside the global happenings and history. It is, indeed, characteristic, that what in the past not only used to be an oxymoron but inconceivable scientifically, namely the existence of ethnography without the "ethnos", today is projected as a rational demand and maybe a necessity (Appadurai 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Scientific interest turns increasingly away from the study of separate and cohesive cultural systems and towards the consideration of economic and social processes that make even the most "isolated" of places part of the global system.

The development of critical currents of thought around this matter during the last two decades of the 20th century advanced the idea that we have to cease to consider cultures as unified and homogeneous entities and to stress their fluid and fragmentary character, since the continuation of the use of such a term (culture) is judged conventionally necessary, as J. Clifford has effectively explained (1988:10).

A. Gupta and J. Ferguson, introducing their important publication *Culture, power, place*, define as the aim of this collective volume a critical approach to the usual practice of anthropology, to map out the world as a whole of distinct and localised or "territorialised" cultures. They write, significantly: "The idea that 'a culture' is naturally the property of a spatially localized people and that the way to study such a culture is to go 'there' ('among the so-and-so') has long been part of the unremarked common sense of anthropological practice. Yet, once questioned, this anthropological convention dissolves into a series of challenging and important issues about the contested relations between difference, identity, and place" (1997:3).

In the new conditions of globalisation, where cultures and identities are somehow "deterritorialized", it is of great interest to understand the new ways in which these are connected with the concept of space. The formation of places, cultures and identities in conditions of great fluidity and in relation to the nation-state tends to become one of the basic targets of contemporary anthropological research. Indeed, the dominant issue here is not how to advance the view that cultures should not be considered rooted in specific places, but how to search for answers to the following question: In which ways can we explain the relations between peoples, cultures and places, since we believe that they

are not natural phenomena but historical processes, in the sense that they are relations formed and re-formed in historical conjunctures? The very concept of process in opposition to that of a given entity dislocates our understanding of the relations between the above categories, placing them on a historical basis and in the framework of a political economy.

The above rationale introduces, among others, the concept of "place-making". Places and localities are not given objects, they are constructed historically. The very category of the local should not be assumed to be a pre-existing spatial entity, incorporated in wider spatial wholes or scales (provincial, national, international, global), but as something formed within the dialectical relation it develops with the wider wholes that include it, so it should be approached as a dynamic process and even better as a practice, which in its turn contributes to the formation of identities.

It isn't our intention to go more deeply in this discussion; after all, this has been done adequately by many anthropologists (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Fog Olwig and Hastrup 1997). Here we set the context of the discussion in order to refer to methodological matters pertaining to the study of transborder mobility. A subject that is connected not only with the national border but with the very make-up of the nation-states and the relative ideological and conceptual constructs that concern the concept of space and, by extension, the field of ethnographic research.

As the development of modernist national ideology together with the establishment of the national state as the dominant unit of political organisation in the contemporary world consolidated the schema "one people, one place, one culture", it strengthened its theoretical influence on anthropology even

more, despite the existing critical considerations of the whole matter, especially the theory of the nation, which develops systematically after the decade of 1980s anyway. In the field of folklore, in fact, which is an inherently "national" science, both regarding its ideological direction and its subject matter, the identification of the nation/people and the, by extension "national", space is considered its basic theoretical premise, which then determines its methodological choices. Indeed, in cases where national boundaries and so-called national vital space do not coincide, ethnographic studies move outside the border, aiming at mapping out the whole of the "national culture", a fact that is connected, unavoidably with various kinds of irredentism. Indicatively, when field work on sites outside national borders is objectively impossible it takes place among populations of refugees. The Greek case is a good example. It is also characteristic that, even though in cases of refugees we talk about forced and violent relocations of populations and by extension deterritorialisations of cultures and identities, the main direction of approaching these groups is via the place of their "lost" or "unforgotten" homeland.

It emerges from the above that, in any case, both from the perspective of theory and that of national ideology, the established practice in the methodological field also assumes the division of the world in national states. We have already talked about this matter and its consequences, regarding the development of theories of migration and more specifically regarding the concept of "transnationalism", in an attempt of questioning the theoretical validity of views that reproduce a "construct" as if it were a given and unquestionable reality. Here we are inter-

ested in investigating the methodological dimension in relation to the concept of the field of research.

Freedom from strictly localised field work through the questioning of the static, a-historical relationship "society-culture-place", and the opening up to more historical and dialectical approaches of the matter, resulted in the formation of new perceptions and tools regarding the spatial dimension of field work. The idea of "multi-sited ethnography", for example, which we owe to G. Marcus, was the most decisive step in overcoming the methodological impasse that classic anthropology had faced, with its tool of localised, usually small-scale, locus of field work. It isn't a chance fact that Marcus considers migration as the most privileged field of research for the application of this ethnographic methodology. Let's see, more analytically, how he explains the framework of his proposal, so as to move on to some other thoughts of our own.

Marcus explains that he had, since the mid 1980s, located two ways through which ethnographic methodology engaged the history and political economy of the contemporary global system: The first and most common preserved participant observation intensively focused on a single site, while developing in parallel the context of the global system and embodying the dimension of history. The second, tied in with the theoretical movement of post-modernism, attempts to shed off the attachment to specific geographical sites and develop a new perspective, focused more on the circulation of cultural objects and meanings and the fluidity of identities in diffuse time-space.

In the framework of the second way, a kind of mobile ethnography develops, mapping a different field of research, which intersects with the various localities and searches for new cul-

tural formulations on multiple levels. He calls this kind of ethnography "multi-sited ethnography", which owes a lot to post-modernism but is more linked to the empirical changes in the world and the altering fields of cultural production. Marcus recognises, indeed, that this new tendency in anthropology, to set the object of study in the context of the global system, the history and political economy of colonialism, state-formation and nation-building, is related to the Marxist tradition of thought and the currents conjoining anthropology with political economy and history.

Marcus reconsiders methodological issues raised in the context of this new ethnographic practice, and especially the "construction" of the new multi-sited space within which the ethnographer is now called to move. Multi-sited ethnographic research is designed in ways that associate and connect different sites and localities, as the ethnographer's trajectories construct in practice a rather fluid time-space field of research. Essentially, in this context, the point of reference ceases to be the localised culture of a particular group but rather a social or cultural phenomenon as practice and process.

The same writer proposes a series of techniques through which the field of multi-sited ethnography can be constructed, such as, for example, the technique of following around the people one is studying, the objects, the plot or the history, people's biographies, etc. They all call for a mobility on the part of the ethnographer, which retracts the dominant classical practice of staying in a particular geographical location and doing intensive and in depth research for a specific time period there (Marcus 1998).

The further elaboration of mobile ethnography's new methodology involves, among other issues, the revision of the very idea of participant observation with intensive fieldwork. Still, this is very difficult, because it means shaking the foundations of anthropology as a science, which is predicated and differentiated from other disciplines on this basis. Marcus himself contends that nothing can replace ethnography at the moment, a methodological tradition which defines anthropology as a scientific practice and distinguished field of knowledge production (1998:231).

Despite all that, the critical reconsiderations of this epistemological tradition continue, further enhanced by the increasing tendency to adopt interdisciplinary approaches. For example, the intersection of anthropology with cultural and media studies has been very influential, while the latter disciplines are also influenced by anthropology, at the same time, and adopt the ethnographic method for certain purposes.

In any case, even if one advocates localised ethnographic research today or the focus on one particular group, it is impossible to practise his research in the traditional way, ignoring or underestimating the fact that any locality or group nowadays is not simply embedded in and influenced decisively by the global system but, more specifically, by the increasing flows, beyond geographical restrictions and political borders, of people, capital, cultural objects and information. This is connected with something we have already stressed, the necessity to revise the established static perceptions and practices with respect to culture, that is, stop dealing with culture as if it were an entrenched and "bounded" object.

With respect to the case of migration and transnationalism, it is obvious and we have stressed this before, that the de-linking of the ethnographer from the practices of localised research and the adoption of mobility is a necessity. This is a common assumption now and the anthropology of transnationalism has become a reality, though with some delay. It is, however, interesting that, despite the interest in flows and processes cross-cutting borders and increasingly problematising the very concept of territory, many ethnographers persist in choosing particular regions for research. The phenomena we study become “deterritorialised”, but it seems difficult for research to adjust. This is a crucial epistemological matter. Even in cases of transnational research, usually what happens is that one site is replaced by two or more. This is perfectly natural, especially when the object of research is migrants, who divide their life between two countries, which is what the researcher has to do as well.

In any case, the objective conditions in transnational ethnography generate the need to revise our priorities, question the traditional emphasis on site and relocate our interest onto the phenomenon or process under study itself. So, one can follow people, ideas, relations, objects, etc., beyond geographical restrictions and confinements. This way, Marcus’s idea of a “multi-sited ethnography” changes to a “trans-sited ethnography”, as the emphasis is now placed on the passage through places (the process of connecting through the various flows that mark but also produce various relations), instead of on a multi-sited but still focused-upon-site research (Freidberg 2001; Hannerz 2003; Hage 2005; Wilding 2007).

So, if the ethnographer follows the flows, the relationships, the processes, if he engages in a true trans-sited ethnography, he becomes himself transnational. One could, of course, say that the ethnographer is by definition transnational, since his research presupposes his translocation or movement from one country to the other (at least in the context of classical anthropology), but the new world state of affairs, which has emerged with globalisation is totally different. Since we are talking about "transnational migration" or "transmigration", could not the term transnational ethnography change into "trans-ethnography" as well, so as to avoid the danger inherent in the use of "transnational", to reproduce the concept of the "national" even within contexts that transcend the latter?

Independently of the more general discussion about terminology and the choices one might make on the basis of his theoretical and methodological preferences, the fact is that, since one questions the usefulness of the term transnational migration in a particular context, it follows that he will question related terms such as transnational ethnography and even the possible neologism "trans-ethnography". Since, in our case, we tend to adopt the concept of transborder mobility, we are naturally attracted to an analogous term designating ethnographic methodology and practice. The term "transborder ethnography" could serve effectively the needs of such a study, since, more than all others, it defines the kind of field that is characterised by the presence of the border. This is a type of localised research, which, however, is focused more on the process and less on the site itself and in no way does it isolate the region from the wider international and global context. The temptation for the usage of the term "trans-ethnography" is strong, but my de-

sire to establish the border as the foundational element in the research of migration in its specific version, leads me to stay with “transborder ethnography”.

THE CARCOVE CROSSROADS

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

THE ÇARÇOVË CROSSROADS

We cross the border at mid-noon on 24 June 2005. The first Albanian village on the highway is Çarçovë, very close to the border, on the junction of the roads leading to Përmet and Korçë, via Leskovik and Ersekë.

This particular settlement is relatively new. The old village (Cernasovo or Ceritsovo) used to be in the mountain and at some distance from the public road, like all old settlements. It was burnt down by the Germans and after the war its inhabitants settled in the new location, while populations from other abandoned villages of the area, such as Perati and Serani, assembled there as well. In any case, it was common policy of the regime to evacuate the villages next to the border so as to avert possible getaways. Moreover, the same regime also developed the idea of the creation of new settlements based on "socialist" specifications, in an effort to impose its own logic of space organisation (connected to the new models of economic and social organisation), but also its own forms of political control over the populations.

Indeed, the visitor experiences a sense of estrangement at the sight of the arrangement of the buildings and their design, which defy all expectations of an essentially rural village. The totally square shape, the dominance of apartment blocks and public buildings as well, both in the centre of the settlement and along the public road that traverses it, indicate it was configured according to central planning, while the present image of neglect and abandonment of these buildings suggests the social and economic decay the Albanian population has been suffering since the collapse of the regime. And to think that this is a township with a strong presence of state employees and, by and large, members of the former party elite! Çarçovë is the base of the homonymous municipality (Komuna Çarçovë), which includes nine more villages, Biovizhdë, Vllaho-Psilloterrë, Zhepe, Kanikol, Draçovë, Pëllumbar, Strembec, Iliar, Manushtir-Toranik, the first two of which are Greek-speaking.



Figure 2. The bridge of Sarantaporos and the Albanian customs in Mertziani

Due to the administrative role of Çarçovë, even Muslim Albanians had settled there as state employees or soldiers. So today its population is mixed, whereas in the past the village was Christian. It seems that such mixing of populations was part of the general policy of the regime, whose aim was to formulate a new basis for the structuring of social relations, beyond religious and other ethnic divisions, on Marxist-Leninist principles, but also of a peculiar form of nationalism based on the ideology of “Albanianism” a kind of ideological “umbrella” that would contain religious, ethnic, local and other differentiations of the past.



Figure 3. At the Çarçovë crossroad

On the right side of the road, the village cemetery, dominant on a small hillside, speaks volumes about the new tendencies and values this society has turned to, while at the same time providing evidence about the ethnic and religious make up of the community. The brightly coloured, plastic flowers at the graves make a strong impression and, together with the rest of the decorations, betray the significance for these people of their last place of rest as a symbol of social prestige.

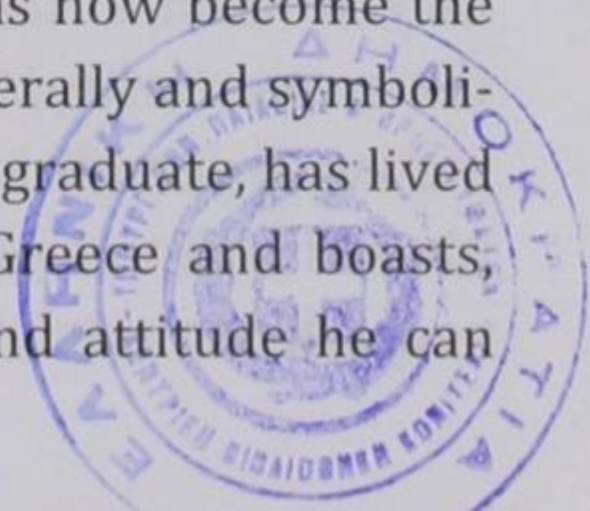
Nowadays, of course, we see the obvious signs of a new phase in the economic life of the village, which was set off, in the first place, by the particularity of its geographical situation, as more and more specialist shops open to provide for the needs of travellers; it has also resulted, however, from an effort to recover lost religious and (in a wider sense) cultural rights and it is evidenced in the reappearance of holy buildings, foremost among them the Orthodox church of St. Kosmas, built a few years ago, precisely at the entrance of the village and next to the public highway.

The presence of such a church is particularly symbolically charged, because the figure of Kosmas Aitolos is inscribed in the collective memory of the Orthodox population, both Greek and Albanian, as a fighter against Islamisation but, also, for his great efforts to propagate Greek language and learning.

We stop over at the junction, at Vangelis's supermarket. I know Vangelis from previous visits. He appears to be the characteristic type of an "ingenious Greek" and proud of it. We start chatting once more, while eating one of the fresh, delicious ice-creams he makes himself, with a modern, automatic machine but with milk from the cow his father rears. Vangelis lives permanently with his family in Gjirokastër, where he keeps another

shop selling automobile spare parts. He has put his younger brother in charge of the business in Çarçovë and he himself moves back and forth. This business started as a small store and café-bar and is now being extended, with the construction of guest rooms on the first floor and a car service, garage and car wash in the back of the building. The newly developed business operates with the assistance of the parents and especially the mother.

In the store one can find everything, from candy to wedding dresses. Actually, to my question about the origin of a wedding dress, Vangelis's mother answered that it was brought from Turkey. Afterwards I learned about the family's relationship with Istanbul. They have inherited an apartment there from an ancestor, which they rent but also use for their vacations. We know about the phenomenon of emigration there of people from this area and the significant presence of their communities in Istanbul, where most were employed initially as gardeners. It is a subject of great interest, both with respect to the legacies that have turned up and their claiming and management after the collapse of the Albanian regime in 1990. Vangelis speaks with great satisfaction and pride about this and adds it self-indulgently to the list of facts that prove his self-proclaimed cosmopolitanism, which he juxtaposes to the stereotype of the miserable Albanian immigrant. He, after all, speaks also as a Greek, in a way that projects sharply the claim of an identity that had been persecuted in the past, but has now become the passport to economic and social rise, both literally and symbolically. Furthermore, Vangelis is an Economics graduate, has lived in several European countries other than Greece and boasts, therefore, that because of his knowledge and attitude he can



import, for example, the technical apparatus for his business directly from Germany.

Vangelis's children go to a Greek school in Gjirokastër; he does not know who the school belongs to but, since the teachers come from Greece, it is likely that it is funded by the Greek government. To our question whether his children are learning Albanian, he answers that they study the Albanian language in the same school. I am under the impression though – and this is frequently the case when I converse with people from Albania – that his answers regarding crucial matters lack precision – I got the same impression about the matter of his property in Istanbul – and I do not know whether to attribute this to the obscurity of certain situations or to a deliberate evasiveness on his part for other reasons. In any case, he appears determined that his children go to college in Greece.

The discussion with Vangelis is fascinating for me. He is in the mood for talking, and, like most Albanian citizens who are or claim to be of Greek origin, he wants to say things that he believes will please us as Greeks, but also show his attachment to the values and ideals of "Greekness" and Christian Orthodoxy.

A good example is his enthusiastic account of how he built a sanctuary with his own expenses, exactly across the road from his store on municipal ground. He has built a fence around it, too, to protect it from anyone who would try to appropriate it and thus secure the space where a big church or a play ground may be built in the future. Vangelis talks about the reaction of the mayor who is, he notes, a Muslim. He indeed dares the mayor to demolish the sanctuary but warns him that, though he himself will not punish him, God will. So, the mayor is scared and will not touch the sanctuary.

This reminds me of all those stories I had heard in Dropull, about the “vakoufia”, sacred trees and groves which nobody ever dared destroy, neither in the distant past of Ottoman domination nor in the recent past of the atheistic regime. It is said that relevant fables about the divine punishment of individuals who had dared mess with such places have functioned as a deterrent to destructive impulses of all sorts. Indeed, one can see that these small oases, in places that were exhaustively cultivated (“even the rock was cultivated and made into a bread producing site” was Hoxha’s favourite expression), are the landmarks of the place and its identity even today. They are ancient trees around chapels and monasteries, whose symbolic function is now gradually restored after the collapse of the regime and they have become objects of protection together with their neighbouring places of worship. Still, I wonder whether absenting from this kind of destruction of sacred places is due to the irrational fear of some divine punishment or a more general cultural osmosis that has developed historically amongst the population of the wider area, especially the Orthodox Christians and the Bektashi Muslims of the Albanian South, who have similar sacred sites and similar, of course, beliefs. There are several stories about sacred trees that were planted together by an Orthodox and a Bektashi priest (baba), such as, for example, the two plane trees in the *tekke* (Muslim monastery) in Glinë, a village next to the Greek border close to the river Sarantaporos. Should we rather, that is, interpret these behaviours on the basis of wider cultural osmoses and collective attitudes that cut across the boundaries of various religious and ethnic groups?

The specific sanctuary is dedicated to St. Dimitris. To our question whether anything similar had existed there in the past

or whether there is some special relationship with the specific Saint we get an answer that surprises us: He tells us that his son is called Dimitris, only he wasn't named after his father, but after the Greek movie star they admire, Dimitris Papamichael, whom they used to watch in Greek movies on television. Vangelis confesses that he is also dreaming of building in the new village two churches corresponding to those which used to operate in the old village, the church of the Madonna, (the relevant building in the old village still stands) and the church of St. Paraskevi that is in ruins. I think of the theoretical discussion around the issue of "reconsecration" of places. I am sure that later on we shall have many opportunities and more material to approach this matter in depth.



Figure 4. The sanctuary of St. Demetris in Çarçovë

We ask him if the Muslims in the village plan or desire to build their own places of worship. The answer is that “they are scattered” and he doesn’t see anything like that happening. Plus, he says, all the villages around are Christian and, in fact, all the Christian Albanians want now to present themselves as “Northern Epirotes”. He means, obviously, that a sense of Christian superiority derived from the dominance of Christian identity is being gradually established in the consciousness of the people and that this functions as the means to claim Greekness, which is developing into a “good” that everyone is trying to possess in the context of a utilitarian practice related to identity, since proof of Greekness functions catalytically with respect to their entrance and acceptance in Greece. This way, after all, it is possible to explain the massive changes of names on the part of Albanian Muslims and their assumption of Christian ones. We shall return to this subject later, as well as the subject of the “Northern Epirote” identity. Here it suffices to say that the Albanians of the South take advantage, in their own way, of the irredentist, on the part of Greece, use of the term “Northern Epirote”, according to which it acquires ethnic content and denotes Greek. Thus it becomes common practice among Albanians, in the whole of the area called “Northern Epirus” by Greeks, to declare themselves “Northern Epirotes”, sending a message to the Greeks that they are of Greek descent. I think of issues such as the politicisation of geography, the fluidity and negotiation of borders with respect to national and ethnic identities, which have preoccupied me in the past and which, it seems, will also dominate my strivings and reflections from now on.

The discussion with a man like Vangelis never ends. Still, we are passers by. We have come here specifically with a view to

visiting the villages around the area. Vangelis promises to accompany us if we wish. We say goodbye and continue on our way to Përmet. The road goes parallel to the river Vjosë and passes through or alongside several villages. Across the road, mount Nemërçka dominates with its steep slopes and high peaks. Several villages are built on the mountain foot, connecting to the main road with wooden bridges. From a distance the landscape looks like a painting. It bears the marks of the activities of human beings. Under the settlements and next to the river lie the fields irrigated by the river, while over it there expand wooded lands, followed by highland pastures reaching to the mountain peaks. One can trace the structuring of the agricultural space and read in it the old regime's organising principles of production relations (square plots of land, irrigation works, etc.), but also the desolation that characterises the place since the year of the regime's collapse. Signs of recovery have just begun to appear, with the cultivation of few fields, the tending of gardens and some small, recently planted vineyards. It is possible to discern a similar recovery in building construction, too, that has timidly started, especially by migrants; in this case the tendency to move towards the main road is prominent, as well as the tendency to build large houses, bearing heavily the marks of Greek influence and a conspicuous element of affectation. Several of the new buildings on or next to the road present the familiar to us combination of a living space over a ground floor, designed to become a store. This manifests both the will of certain emigrants to invest in their home town and the fact that they plan to return in the future. Some of these buildings already operate as cafes and taverns, exploiting the mobility that

has developed in the area recently, after the opening of the customs in Tre Urat.

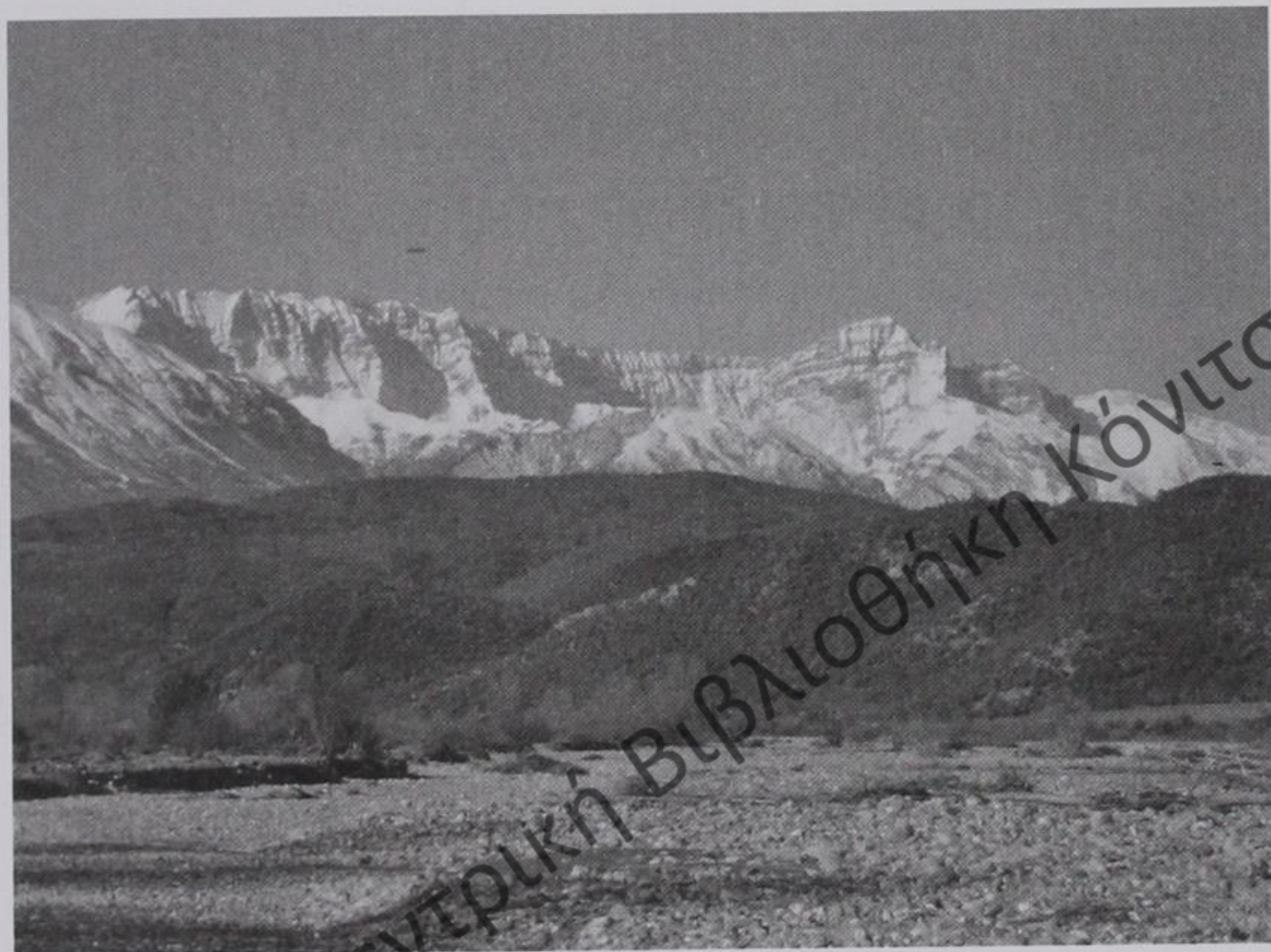


Figure 6. Mount Nemërçka, uniting and dividing the two countries

has developed in the last decade, which is the subject of this study. In the first part of the book, the author discusses the history of the cinema in France, from its beginnings in the late 19th century to the present day.

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

The book is divided into two main parts. The first part, 'The Birth of Cinema', covers the period from 1888 to 1914. It discusses the early experiments with photography and the invention of the cinematograph by Lumiere brothers. The second part, 'The Development of Cinema', covers the period from 1914 to the present day. It discusses the evolution of the cinema as a mass entertainment medium, the rise of silent films, the introduction of sound, and the development of the modern cinema industry.

PËRMET MULTICULTUROR 2005

Our first destination is the guest house near the village Bënjë, eight kilometres before Përmet and two from the main road on the right. The guest house is relatively new; it opened for the first time in the summer of 2004, while before that it used to be a tavern. Its beautiful location amidst a constellation of plane trees and on a stream with clear water and fresh air, in combination with the fact that it offers services of a high level, attracts a lot of people who may come here for a meal, to celebrate events such as weddings and christenings or even for a few days rest from the city of Tirana. Also, hunters from Greece and Italy are regular customers here, especially during the winter season, as well as merchants of various nationalities who visit Përmet on business (I have met, for example, Turks and Bulgarians). Furthermore, during the hot summer months, crowds of people of all ages pass through here, on their way to the spa on the stream Langaricë near the village of Bënjë. On their way back they usually stop over at the tavern to freshen up. The new road after the junction is traced on the old cobbled road which connects Përmet with the area of Kolonjë and the cities Ersekë and

Korçë. This road is not used that much by cars any more, but it is still useful enough for those riding animals. We saw a few times, apart from the inhabitants of the surrounding villages, merchants riding animals to Korçë and the other way round, especially gypsies in the animal trade.

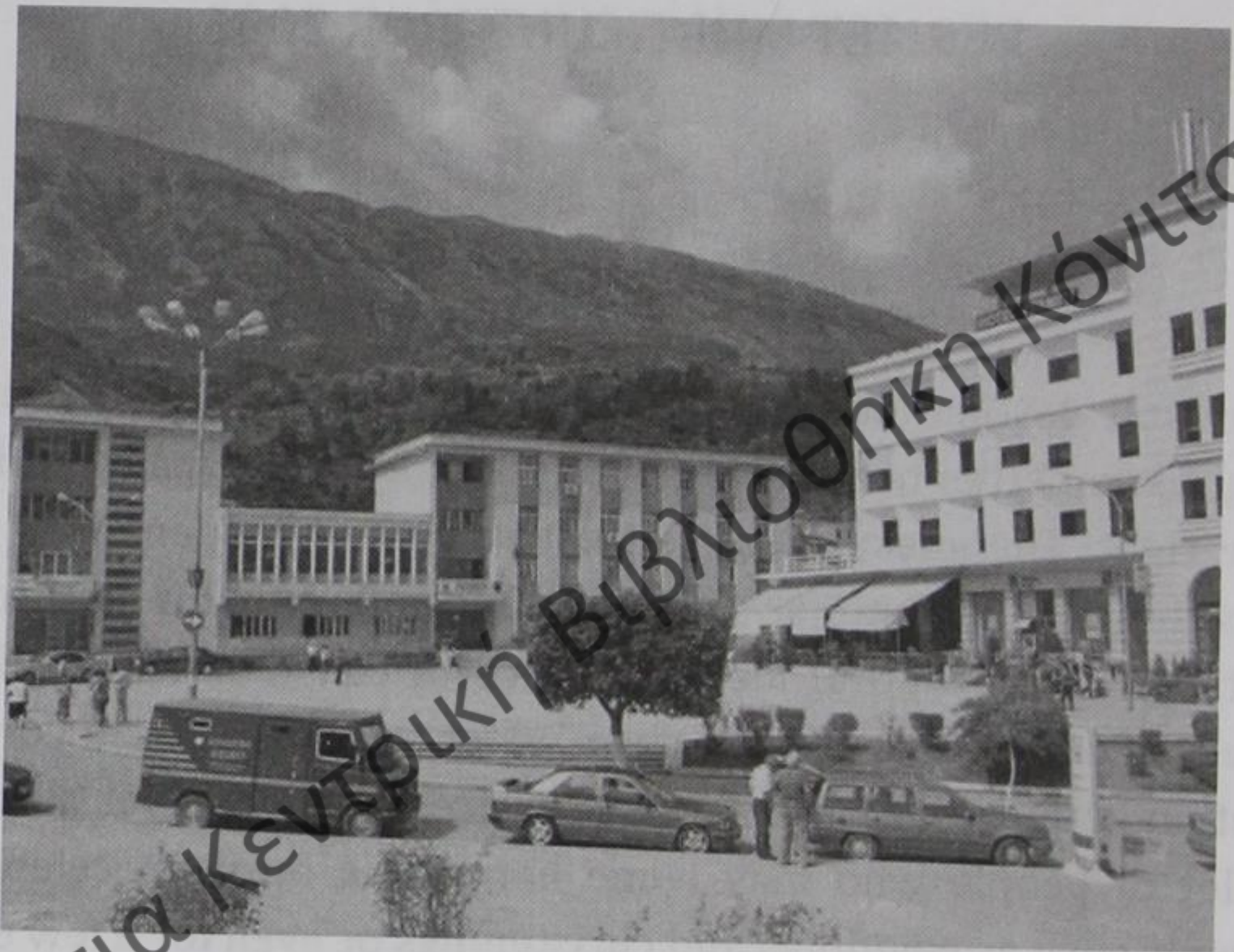


Figure 6. Square in Përmet

At the guest house we meet dear Albanian colleagues, acquaintances from academic conferences and other events. Vasil Tole is there, the ethnomusicologist and composer who became recently known in Greece, when he won the prize for his opera "Furies" in the competition of Cultural Olympics; the orchestra conductor and now lecturer in the University of Leeds in England, Eno Koço; the philologist Niko Mihali, president of the local branch of the organisation CIOFF, the American researcher

of Balkan musical traditions, Ian Price, and the choreographer Deliver Kryeziu who is an Albanian from Kosovo. They are here for the "Përmeti Multiculturor 2005. Etni dhe Minoritete", which is organised for the third time by the Albanian sector of CIOFF in collaboration with the Tirana Council for Albanian Music, the municipality of Përmet and the Artistic-Cultural Association of Gjirokastër "Elena Gjika-Dora D'istria", with the support of the Ministry of Culture, the Soros Foundation and the regional Council of Përmet. The Festival begins on the 21st and will last until the 25th of June. It involves, in addition to music and dance events, book presentations, music publications, ethnographic exhibitions, visits to monuments and a symposium at the monastery of Leusë on the subject of "Cultural diversion and integration" (*Diversitetin kulturor dhe integrimin*).

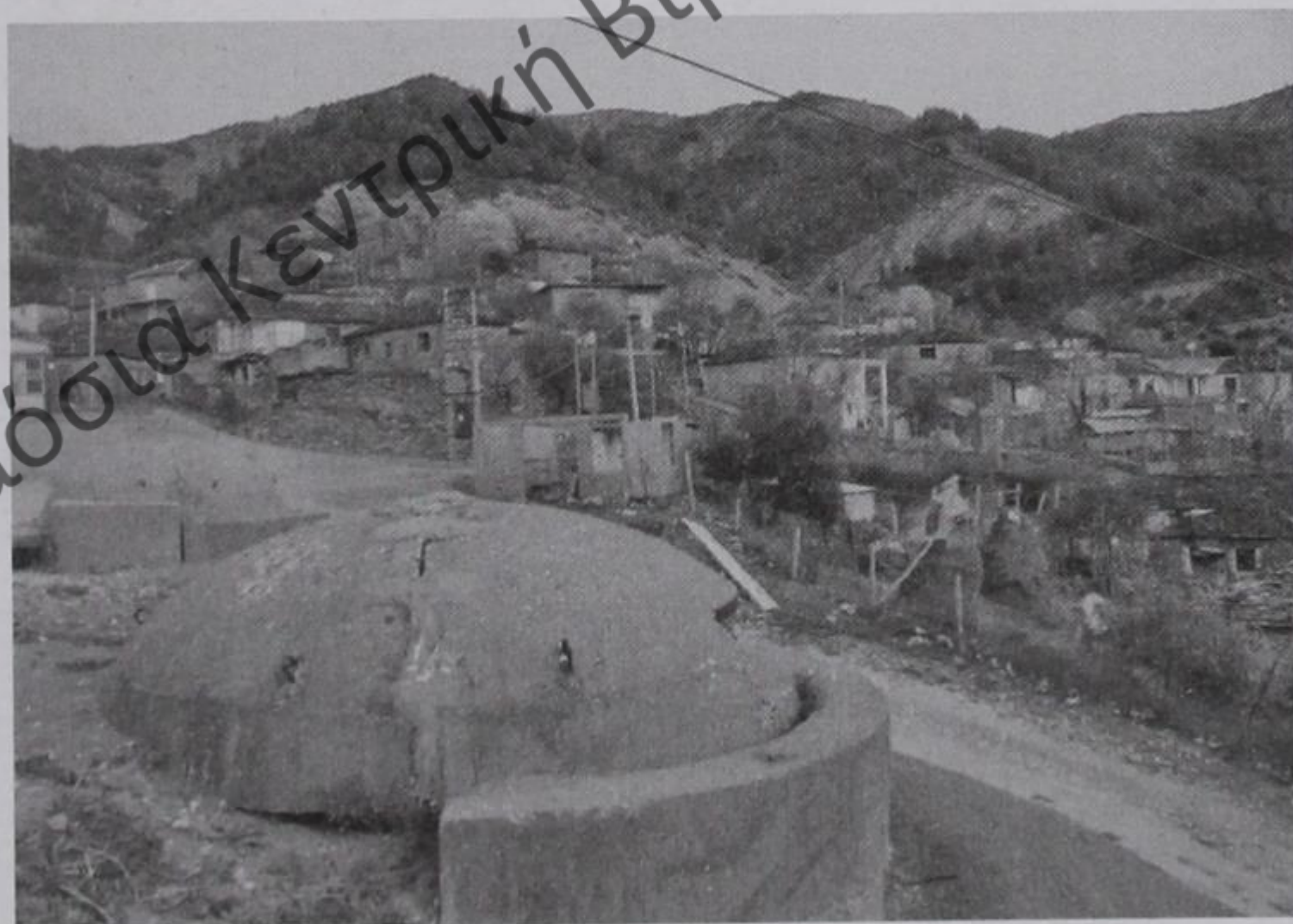


Figure 7. Village in the area of Përmet

We had dinner together and talked a lot, manifestly excited about meeting again. From this gathering, I hold onto the warmth of communication with the three old friends, Eno, Vasil and Niko and the interesting conversation with Dilaver from Kosovo. I was especially impressed by the latter's "Dorian" style, his stern look and his downright suspiciousness. I will never forget his phrase "we talk with everyone but trust no one". I quickly abandoned the effort to develop a relationship with him like the rest of the Albanians... Late afternoon found us still sitting at the table in the cool shadow of the plane tree. Then we all left for some rest, promising to meet again in the evening in the square of Përmet, where the performances by music and dance groups would be taking place.



Figure 8. A company of musicians in Përmet

The festival in the evening was familiar to me from previous years. Quite a few people, a festive atmosphere, a bit like a feast. I notice though that, compared to previous years, the programme is rather poor and the crowd less enthusiastic. I wonder whether the people are tired because the festival lasts for many days. In any case, the setting is the same in front of the Unknown Soldier. The programme includes performances by only two groups, one from Kosovo and one from Himarë. I wonder whether the combination is accidental. The two groups come from the ends of Albanian ethnic territory. The one from the north and outside the border of the Albanian state and the other from the south, inside the border, but from a contested area.

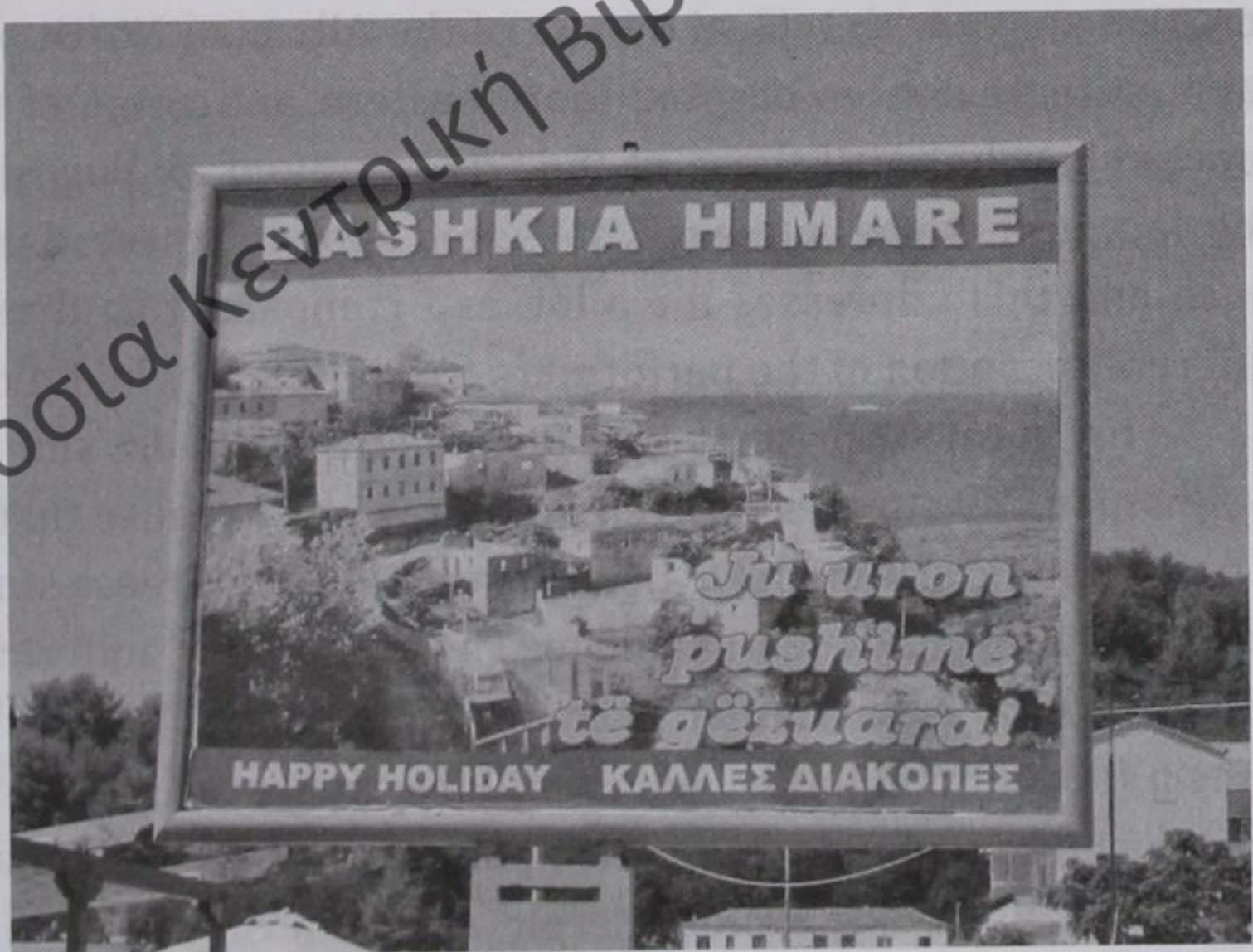


Figure 9. Giant Poster in Himarë

The content of the programme and what follows make it clear that nothing is accidental. For the whole duration of the Kosovars' performance I watch the responses of the audience and listen to my friends' comments. My long formed opinion is confirmed, about the Albanians' ambivalent attitude towards their fellow people from Kosovo. On the one hand, they have idealised them as a group symbolising the Albanian national struggle but, on the other, one hears the worst comments unofficially concerning the ethos of the people who belong to this group. An Albanian acquaintance of mine from Gjirokastër, with whom I am watching the show, completes his negative commentary on the Kosovars saying that their own group never went to dance in Kosovo "because we can't stand them". The Kosovars' program starts with typical dances of the Albanian North, while later on their dances become more eastern and some of their dances sharply recall those of the wider area of ex-Yugoslavia. The fact is that the audience does not applaud these dancers much and this impresses me a lot, as I compare it to the very different reception of the performers from Himarë who follow.

To my great surprise, the performers from Himarë sing only in Albanian. My surprise is even greater, when I realise that this is a polyphonic group I have heard many times in Greece singing exclusively in the Greek language. These are men and women whom I know from similar events in Greece and I know that quite a few of them have lived or still live in Greece, where they are considered, of course, Greeks, part of the Greek population of Albania, indeed, the most heroic and suffering part, that is significantly compared to the Souliotes. I realise that the three last songs they present are very well known from the "Greek"

repertory and here they simply sing them in Albanian. My initial surprise gives way to theoretical speculation regarding the fluidity and management of identities. I assume the organisers asked them to sing in Albanian. Still, this does not mean they should agree to present themselves as Albanians; if that is the case, how can they present themselves as Greeks in Greece? I know the issues of identity these people face any way, since they come from an ethnically contested zone that had not been included in the areas recognised as zones of the Greek minority. I know a lot of people from Himarë, who came to Greece after 1990, who identify themselves as Greek, possibly the majority of them do so. The Olympic medalist Piro Dimas is a characteristic example of a Himariote, a "Vorioepirote", according to the current Greek perception, who has become a hero in Greece due to his achievements in sport, while in Albania he is considered more or less a traitor. On the contrary, I remember cases of Himariotes who had got involved in some criminal act and the Greek press presented them as Albanians, indeed writing their names in Albanian...

Himariotes: Greek or Albanian?

We shall certainly discuss this with the Albanian colleagues, so I try to recall everything I know on the matter of Himarë: the "hill of the sea" with its seven villages, known by the name of the largest, Himarë, is the very same steep and difficult in access mountain chain of the Greek Keravnia, that intervenes in the sea zone starting at Sarandë and ends in the Vlore bay. On its sides and small valleys, climb the villages Himarë, Qeparo, Kudhës,

Vuno, Dhërmi, Palasë and Pilur, which, because of their historical struggles against Ottoman conquerors and local pashas, have become symbols of heroism in the consciousness of all Orthodox peoples but especially the Greeks, who hold them as high as the Souliotes, with whom they have a lot in common regarding their social make up and way of life.

Indicatively, even though Himarë's population is not all Greek-speaking, the area had made an impression to foreign visitors in the past, because of the Greek sentiment of its people. The French journalist René Puaux, in his account of his 1913 itinerary titled *La malheureuse Epire*, writes: "Throughout this fertile slope on the Ionian sea there live Greeks, brothers of the people of Corfu, their close neighbours. Their ties are so perfect that the Turks themselves had to acknowledge them: Of course, Turkish authorities have been kept, in form, in these villages which have been totally Greek for centuries now; Greek with respect to their culture and feelings... The right of Himarë to integrate with Greece is corroborated by its traditions, its patriotism, as well as its geographical and economic position. It is the final ornament on the staff of the blue-and-white flag on this side of Epirus; and it is so well fixed that no storm will ever force it off. The flag may be torn to pieces, but this will stay in place!" (Puaux 1991:86-87).

It is also striking that the Albanian-speaking villages of Himarë kept their Greek schools open until 1920 and that, during the Greek minority's struggle for Greek schools (1934-36), the villages themselves asked for Greek schools, but the Albanian government of the time rejected their demand (Dedes 1976:252).



Figure 10. Beach in Himarë

According to the latest census in the area, the Greek-speaking population is larger but not necessarily continuous and concentrated. The exclusively Greek-speaking villages, apart from Himarë, are Queparo Siperne, Dhërmi and Palasë. The rest are inhabited by Albanian-speaking Orthodox Christians (Kallivretakis 1995:25-58).

Historically, these villages constituted a unity which, thanks to the privileges they managed to secure from the Ottoman conquerors, developed a peculiar status of self-government, based to a large degree on their peculiar system of social make up, organised on the basis of clans, patrilineal kinship groups, analogous to those of the Souliotes. This did not mean at all an absolutely safe and peaceful life for the Himariotes. On the contrary, their historical trajectory has been marked by conflicts with

those who at times schemed against their autonomy. Two important aspects of their turbulent history are related to the enforced dislocation of part of their population, which resulted in the moving in of new settlers and coerced Islamisations on top of that.

Thus an ethnically mixed population is formed, which, however, preserves to a great extent its cohesion, on the axis of a peculiar ethno-local consciousness which, during the last period of Ottoman occupation and before the foundation of the Albanian state, tends towards Greek national identity. One may speak of a peculiar cultural syncretism, which is inscribed in several versions of collective expression, such as customs, folk

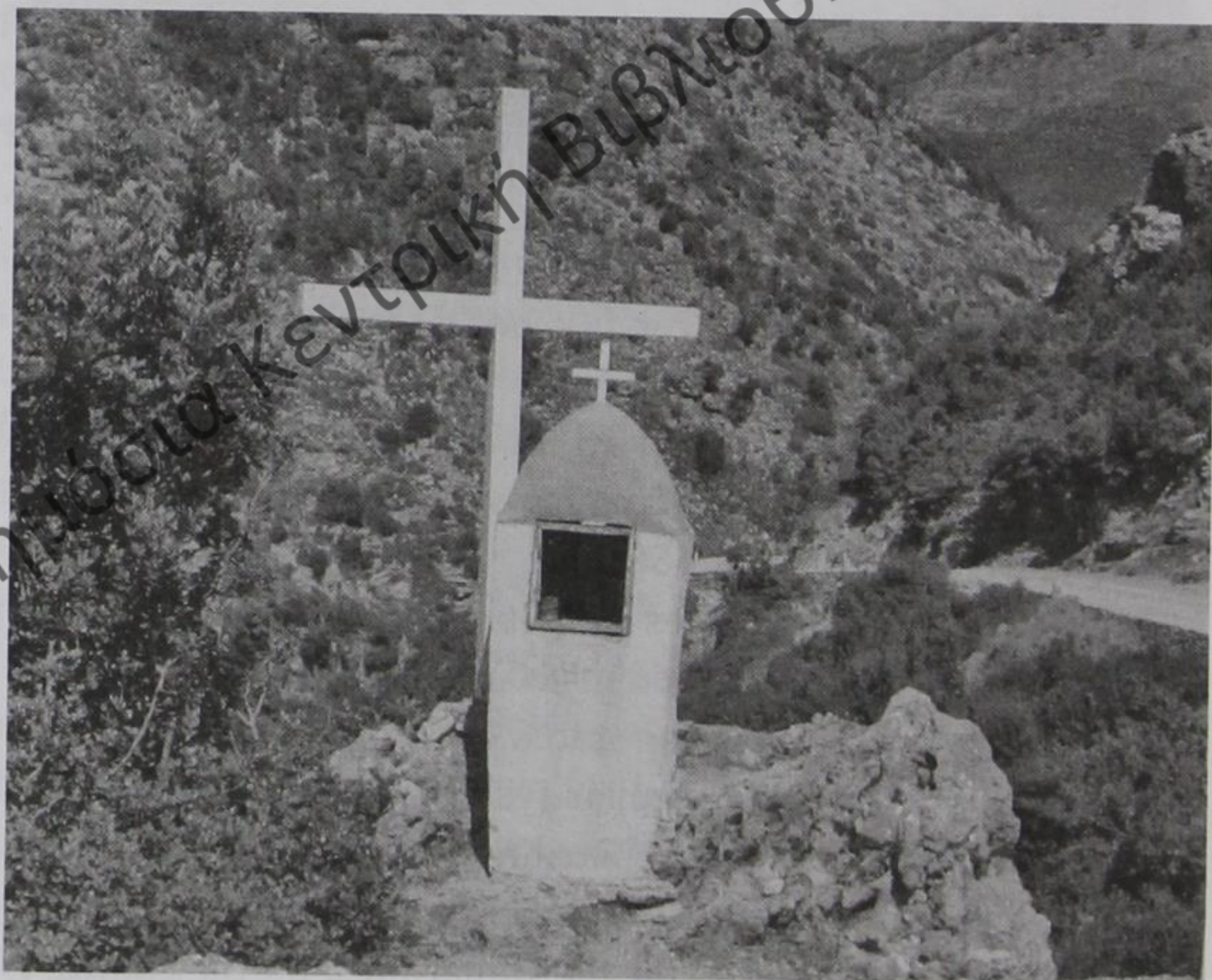


Figure 11. Himarë: The new symbols

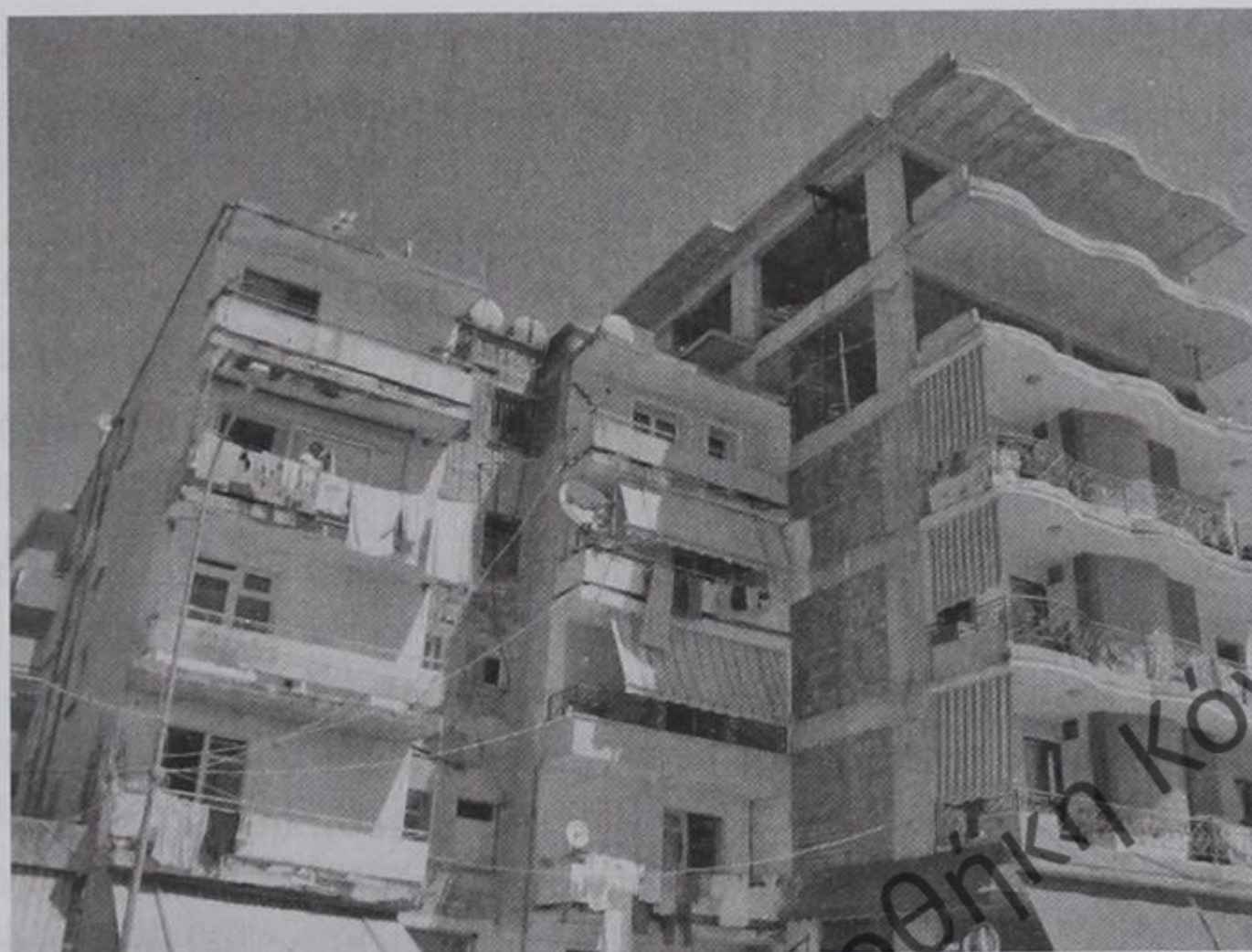


Figure 12. Old and new apartment buildings in Himarë

songs, etc. For example, the fact that Greek speakers sing in Albanian, too, and perform their dirges in Albanian feels strange (Dedes 1976: 250-254). We shall have the opportunity to return to this matter of identities, especially with respect to the construction of the national identity of the Christian populations, independently of their language. In any case, for the time being, I confirm that it is not right to project today's clear-cut national categories and identities onto the past and to deal with group, whose cultural characteristics are hybrid, in terms of national purity and homogeneity. National identity, as a conceptual tool developed in the framework of the modern phenomenon of the nation, is apparently not particularly appropriate for approaching and understanding situations with different characteristics. The same holds for the concept of "tradition". Can we keep talking about it as if it were a situation beyond history or should we

rather historicise it as a concept and examine more seriously the concept of the “invention of tradition”? (Hobsbawm and Rangrs 1983).

I try to recall the view of Albanian scientists on this matter. If I remember it rightly, two On-line articles on the Internet about Himarë support the view of their Hellenisation. Following are some extracts from those articles:

As for the so-called “grecity” of Himarë – a small bilingual community on Albanian Ionian coast – there is strong historical and linguistic evidence of Himariotes being no more than half-grecized Albanians. Because of their geographic isolation, the difficulty of having commerce with Albanian hinterland, and the pressure put on them by the Ottoman administration, they used to look at Greece as their natural protector. Especially Corfu, thanks to its being highly accessible, because of geographic vicinity, became extremely attractive for them, as more and more Himariote families started sending their sons to study in schools on that island, and merchants to trade with the local population. The Greek patois that is currently spoken in Himarë and in some other adjacent villages seems to be closely related to the Greek dialect spoken in Corfu, and several ethnologists have pointed out how the Himariotes make use of Albanian for special ritualistic purposes. Linguists dealing with the Albanian dialect spoken in Himarë, have found in it traces of vocal nasalism, which, along with the use of archaic last names, such as “Gjoleka, Gjipali, Gjidede” (analysable in “Gjon Leka, Gjin Pali, Gjin Deda”), constitute proof for a very old Albanian presence in the area.” (Vehbiu 2008a:4).

And:

The situation we have today in Himarë (and Dhërmi) is the following: an almost completely bilingual community, Albanian and Greek. It is a community that has always thought of itself as something special, different, distinguished from the rest; a community that has been well aware of, and even fully accepted its isolation, by trying to turn it into a weapon for survival...Of the two languages and cultures, the Greek one seems to enjoy, currently, an indisputable prestige: these people live their “Albanian-ness” as a kind of regretful fatality, and their “Grecity” as an almost sacred project. If asked,

they would admit they are Greek, because they feel Greek, and it is difficult to object to such an argument (for it hardly is an argument)...

The hellenisation of Himarë doesn't have a clear beginning in time. Of course, to speak of hellenisation means to imply that the area was, at least in some remote past, not Greek but Albanian, and this is precisely what the supporters of Himarë's Grecity would immediately deny. My point is, however, that much of the Greek culture, language, and identity that is found today in the area has been recently imported from Greece, by people trying to acquire a sharp, distinctive identity of their own. Their efforts to maintain this alleged Grecity even under the most severe cultural and linguistic oppression exerted by the communist regime cannot pass, however, as a proof of what their Greek-supporter ideologues claim.... And in another point:

Besides dialectology, the folkloric evidence as well speaks for quite definite ethnic-Albanian roots in the area: folk songs, and sung rituals (associated to weddings, death and burial ceremonies, etc.) are clearly and typically Albanian: besides the text, their musical characteristics leave no room to doubt: theatrical polyphony (with different roles for different singers within the group), lack of musical or percussion instruments, pentatonic scales employed, etc. Musically, Himarë goes with the rest of Laberia, and it is very hard to believe that Greek "autochthones" came to forget their own songs and traditions, abandon their musical instruments, and adopt a culture they have always looked upon as inferior. (Vehbiu 2008b:2-3).

I think about all this, since in a while I will be discussing the matter with Eno Koço. Indeed, immediately after the show, Eno hastens to express his enthusiasm about the performance of the Himariotes. He comments on how "traditional" and "authentic" they were in their singing. Once more we disagree. I express my reservations, saying that, first, we have to reflect anew on the concepts of "tradition" and "authenticity" and, second, we cannot ignore the interventions of the previous regime, through its cultural institutions and, indeed, the science of Folklore itself, as this was practised in the framework of its political commitment and on the basis of Marxist-Leninist ideology, the way Enver

Hoxha understood it. I also comment on the fact that they sang only in Albanian, making it clear that he should not take my comment as proof of his view that Greeks “want to see everything as Greek”, because, as I have stressed in several occasions, this is not the case with me and neither is it for a large number of Greek academics. I am impressed that he apparently considered their singing exclusively in Albanian totally natural. For self-evident reasons I avoid focusing the discussion on this matter and I insist on the question of “authenticity”. I explain my views, saying, in short, that authentic is what expresses the real conditions of an era and that I disagree with all that is being said about “the authenticity of tradition” and the like. I stress that the more we interfere, on academic or other criteria, in order to “protect” “tradition” from whatever we suppose might “corrupt” it, the more we take away parts of its authenticity. While at first he seems to wonder somewhat about what he hears, later I have the impression that he is considering it seriously. Especially when I refer to important Anglo-Saxon scientists he appears more convinced.

With respect to the language of the Himariotes’ singing, I have to mention that during the dinner provided by the organisers in a central tavern of Përmet, the same people sang quite a few songs in Greek. It was, indeed, very interesting to hear, on the one hand, the young dancers from Kosovo singing Albanian patriotic songs in a strongly heroic and epic manner and, on the other, the Himariotes singing Greek songs, and amongst them the song of Markos Botsaris, a hero of the Greek national revolution...

All this, and especially the stimuli with which Eno always provides me with his comments and questions, as well as the

need to support my side of our argument, prompt my recalling of everything I have read about how the previous Albanian regime used to deal with popular culture and thus moulded to a large extent the perceptions and function of the music and dance groups. I remember the relevant speeches by Enver Hoxha, with explicit instructions to scientists about how they should study but also interfere with folk culture in order to “improve” it! I also remember his view over the existence of “progressive” and “reactionary” elements inside folk culture, of which the former should be upheld and cultivated further, while the latter should be aborted. Just like I remember the censorship imposed on folk songs and the invention of a new category of songs as well, which was added to the existing ones, that of “socialist build-up songs” (Hoxza 1984, 1988).

In addition to all this though, one can summon up evidence in the form of “scientific” publications by folklorists, academics and researchers, pervaded by a politically prejudiced discourse and clearly propagating the “elevation” and “improvement” of folk culture. This way, interventions aiming at the adaptation of folk culture to the demands of Marxism-Leninism, on an ideological level, and to the principles of socialist realism, on the aesthetic level, are patently legitimised. Using an evolutionist framework for the study of folk culture, adjusted, however, to the demands of the “socialist building-up of society”, they dealt with this area as a field requiring intervention, with a view to its supposedly “natural” evolution within a process of consolidating socialism. Moreover, there is a discussion in these texts about the expansion and diffusion of folk culture, as they understand it, to “non-traditional” parts of society. The process is centrally planned and aims at the production of a “new folklore”

that would serve the ideological choices of the party. As a result, often folklorists are caught between this choice and the dogma of "authenticity". It seems that they opt for a reasoning of non violation of "genuineness" in the context of their opposition to the dominant assumption of upgrading, improvement, and so on, with all that this may mean (Uci 1984, 1985). The interventions, for example, in the dance forms of folk groups are severe in this direction. But in musicological studies, too, the insistence on elements that illuminate the "progressive character of tradition", i.e. collectiveness and solidarity in the polyphonic song, is typical. We saw this centralised interventionism surviving on, in the second day of the festival events, during the presentation of the top folk group of the country, that of Tirana. According to the programme, the choreographies were written by the professor of Folklore and cadre of the Tirana Institute for Folklore, Ramadan Bogdani, whom I knew from previous conferences. In fact, he stayed backstage for the whole duration of the performance, instructing the dancers. This sort of "applied" Folklore is inconceivable to Greek academics.

Moreover, there is an emphasis on the utility value of the studies with a view to the development of a "national popular character", of socialist orientation, in Albanian music. One of the better known Albanian scholars of polyphonic song, Spiro Shituni, in an extended study about Labe polyphony of the Albanian South, defines as one of the basic aims of his study the "provision of help to our composers, as part of the open-ended search for ways to intensify the national character of the Albanian music of socialist realism" (Shituni 1989:341). In addition, in another point of the same study, he writes about regulating and developing both folk culture and its studying according to

the dogma of dialectical materialism: "According to dialectical materialism and following the process of our own folk culture's development, we accept that the way to achieve the new quality of folklore is always gradually and without explosions. It cannot be achieved the same way in the whole of folklore or even in the same branch or the same kind. Different branches of folklore, different kinds, all go through different developmental processes regarding quality" (Shituni 1989:352).

Reflecting on all this during dinner, on the occasion of the totally different attitudes and styles of the music and dance groups in this framework, I think again about something that often concerns me. Is it possible that these simple people have a totally practical, even pragmatic sometimes, view, regarding the issues which we, scientists, define as identity questions? Is it possible that even ideas such as multiple and fluid identities and their uses constitute an imposition of our own conceptual schemes onto a reality that will not fit all that? If yes, then new conceptual categories have to be invented, new theoretical tools, but how? Regardless of how they may turn out, will they not still be our own constructs? The idea of "deconstruction" is good but is not its outcome a new construct, too? I think that not only political power and hegemonic discourses impose conduct and relations, dictating categories and classifications through which they reproduce their power, but sciences themselves construct their own power field, which may be identical, parallel or opposed to other fields, but still produces its own hegemonic discourse.

The Himariotes sing Greek and Albanian lyrics with the same passion, have no problem being Greeks in Greece and Albanians in Albania, and declare one or the other identity accord-

ing to the conditions: when they have to act this way, should they be considered “ethnic chameleons” or are they opportunists who shift ethnic identity according to their interest each time? Should we not, on the one hand, try to understand better their historical formation as collective category and, on the other, to research in greater depth the power mechanisms through which similarities and differences, “sameness” and “otherness” are reproduced? Should we not confront more critically the conditions in which a group or an individual is called to declare an ethnic or other “identity”? We know that, not very long ago, in the area of the Balkans the question of national identity was meaningless for many. People were distinguished on the basis of their religious persuasion. In the cases of several ethnic groups, modern national identity was imposed through the ideological apparatuses of the national states, which is why liminal or hybrid categories faced a serious problem of inclusion into one of the “pure” national categories that were legitimised after the Balkan wars. Their insertion into one or the other state was finally done in an arbitrary manner, following the familiar procedure of the demarcation of national borders (Mazower 2000:99-152). The impact and reverberations of these situations are today, still, evident in the area to a larger or lesser degree. This discussion is not of this moment though.

Dropullites: Music, dance and national identity

For the moment, we may discuss and compare the case of the Himariotes who sung in this year’s Përmet’s festival with that of the Dropullites, who had performed in the equivalent previous

festival, in a way that had particularly impressed me and could help us understand the question of collective identity management, as it presents the exact opposite picture of that of the Himariotes. I was so impressed by that show I kept detailed notes; and together with the visual material I secured, I composed the paper I delivered at the International Conference on the subject of "Dance and cultural identities in the Balkans", which took place in Serres (Greece) in October 2004.

I recount what I said at that presentation: I begin with outlining three epistemological theses, which could be taken as working hypotheses. First, national identity constitutes an historical category, which is to say that it is formed historically and hence does not consist of some eternal and unchangeable essence, as is usually claimed by the rhetoric of nationalism (Smith 1991; Banks 1996; Eriksen 1991). Second, the most important element in the constitution of ethnic and national groups is not the content of their culture of reference as such, but the symbolic boundaries that define them in relation to certain other groups (Barth 1969:9-38). Third, culture itself does not consist of an enclosed, unified and homogeneous body that defines a group of people diachronically, but rather a dynamic category, also historical, that exists in continuous fluidity and constitutes an object of negotiation in the construction of collective identities and their otherness. Adopting this point of view, we realise how important a tool of analysis the concept of *cultural practice* is, in the sense defined by P. Bourdieu (1977), as it helps transcend the a-historical, essentialist assumptions concerning culture and national identity.

In the last decades, the concept of culture has become the focal point in a more general discussion and epistemological re-

flection, which in some cases has gone as far as doubting the very validity of the term, focusing its critique mainly on the power dimension of its usage by hegemonic western thought with an emphasis on the solidification of differences and hierarchy between different cultures, as if they were natural systems; a fact that also alludes to the concept of race, as this was used by westerners for the reproduction of a specific hierarchy, together with the naturalisation of cultural difference and the invention of otherness on terms of inferiority. This exceptionally critical stance led to further deconstruction of the concept of culture and an ensuing strategy of writing against it. The article most characteristic of this tendency is *Writing Against Culture* by Abou-Loughod (1991).

I would like to use the above introduction as the background for the formulation of my theoretical basis, the adoption of an approach to *culture* that is alternative to the conventional, established one, and according to which culture is not a static, enclosed and homogeneous corpus passed on unchanged from generation to generation; I argue that culture is a dynamic process, historically determined and subject to constant negotiation. Such an approach does not only help bring historicity to the fore, it also advances the understanding of social and political relations that pertain to the production and reproduction of culture. And all these are especially useful for an effective approach to the issue of culture management that would take into account the explicit or implicit policies concerning collective identities. Obviously, one could argue the same and more about the concept of *tradition*, which is even more bounded to ideology and closely knit with the concept of the nation. Let's not forget that both nation and *tradition* are phenomena of moder-

nity and have been associated with a particular way of managing the past and the construction of historical time as national time, with prominent the dimensions of continuity and cohesion (Lekkas 2001). *Tradition* is not used only as proof of continuity but also as a factor of cohesion and as such it may be even invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

The shift of emphasis from the concepts of *culture* and *tradition*, as enclosed, homogeneous, static and eternally reproduced systems, to the concepts of practice and process may also help transcend the fixed identification of a people with a culture, an identification that virtually naturalises their relation and so is suitable for nationalist practices and rhetoric. The extension of this identification to the concept of identity itself helped formulate the view about homogeneity in space and time, concerning society and culture in the national state (Nitsiakos 2004).

Approaching *culture*, then, as practice and process we can tackle more effectively the social relations of its production and reproduction, as well as the political framework of its management. We can also understand more fully its interior dynamic and its external relationships, which, in turn, may facilitate the understanding of the process of construction and reconstruction of collective identities, the formation, preservation or redefinition and negotiation of their limits. The manipulation of cultural elements together with the selective use of the past and the invention of traditions are objects of investigation in all studies of the phenomenon of nationalism. In the context of nationalist ideology, similarity is the ideal, but difference is a matter of concern, too, since it has to be stressed regarding the nation's relations with others, though it is underplayed in the in-

side of the nation-state. Also, memory is good but frequently oblivion may be better. Societies learn to remember but learn to forget, too (Renan 1998; Connerton 1989).

Talking more specifically about national identity, its construction and reconstruction, it is important to bear in mind the concept of the boundary. The boundary is a geographical category but, when we talk about identities, its symbolic dimension comes prominently to the fore. The boundaries of collective identities are constantly negotiated and pose continuously the question of the relation with the "other", namely the theme of otherness. Border groups, frontier areas, whatever generally exists on the limits of a collective entity and identity, may be geographically marginal but symbolically occupies a central position, because it is in the borders, precisely, that difference with the "other" is configured and solidity with the "same" is consolidated. This is the reason why frontier peoples are raised symbolically to the class of heroes and play a central role in the nations' imaginary. This becomes an imperative need when frontier zones are inhabited by groups of contested identity. Contested zones on the borders of national states usually become areas of tension and control, because, there, both the cohesion and the symbolic legitimisation of the national groups themselves are at stake (Wilson - Donnan 1998).

The above question may of course present a serious problem in cases where, inside the borders of a national state and especially on its borders, there exists a population representing ethnic otherness. Such is the case with the Greek minority of Albania, which is officially recognised as a national minority (Nitsiakos 2003c; Kallivretakis 1995; Hart 1995). Actually, despite the official recognition of this group as a national minority, the

Albanian state dealt with it as an “impure” and “dangerous” zone within its territory and the fact that it constitutes a homogeneous islet of ethnic otherness on its border with Greece, a country not only of national reference, but a country considered by the minority itself as its “mother-land”, rendered the “necessity” for its supervision and the pressure for its incorporation into the broader Albanian society imperative. In addition, given the isolationism and an extreme xenophobia that was above all cultivated by the Hoxha regime, combined with an ongoing irredentism on the Greek side, according to which the minority is an “enslaved” part of the Greek nation, it is possible to understand the oppression these people suffered regarding the expression of their Greekness. Usually, behind a rhetoric of respect for minorities and their particularities and a populist tendency to praise them, there was hidden the desire for their complete submission to the demands of the totalitarian regime (Nitsiakos 1997).

With respect to *folk culture*, the system distinguished between “good” and “bad” traditions, according to its political ideology, and especially stressed elements which the minority had in common with the so-called Albanian “national culture” (Hoxza 1985; Nikas 1988). The management of music and dance tradition, which was particularly favoured, was done through cultural centres operating directly under Party supervision and within an absolutely regulatory framework. Interventions of ideological and aesthetic nature were the basic aim of the whole framework and the repertory in official performances was “balanced” between Greek and Albanian elements. It is also indicative that a new category of folk songs was invented, the “socialist build-up songs”, which was added to the other categories,

while the translations of lyrics from Greek to Albanian was frequent. Also, the view that Albanian traditions had had a crucial influence on the minority was systematically cultivated, the most prominent example being the polyphonic song, which even Albanian scientists consider an Albanian creation, and which is often attributed to biological traits of the Albanian nation (Nitsiakos and Mantzos 2003).

With the collapse of the communist regime in 1990 and the "opening" of the border, the Greek minority experiences a foundational dislocation both in its relation with the Albanian state and with Greece. Apart from the massive exodus, the Greek population of Albania demands the redefinition of its relation to both countries. With respect to its national metropolis, the "fall" of the border triggered off the desire for restoration of relations with fellow Greeks on the other side of the border, but also the expression of accumulated "national sorrow".

In this new situation, where Greece figures, on top of everything else, as the Promised Land, in contrast to Albania that drowns in an economic, social and political crisis, Greekness becomes an object of negotiation, as it is not only a means of insertion into Greek society but a "passport" to being well treated there and finding work. So citizens who emigrate legally or not in Greece search for proofs of their Greekness, so as to enjoy a better reception and other privileges in the country. Of course, this phenomenon creates problems in the relations of immigrants and host society, resulting in a general confusion around the issue of these people's identity and, finally, in a mutual suspiciousness. In any case, the vindication of Greekness, together with the sense of the injustice which they feel has been historically perpetrated against them, and their frustration caused by

their treatment in Greece, are the features of the collective expression of this group, concerning its relation with Greek society (Kassimis and Nitsiakos 1997).

In Albania, however, the count-down began the day after the regime collapsed. The sweeping craze for destruction that obsessed the Albanian population against the previous regime, in the case of the Greek minority was further enhanced by the rejection of all the regime's decisions that concerned them and the restoration of the symbols of their ethnic distinctiveness.

Here we shall focus on the uses of the music and dance tradition, as an important medium for the symbolic reconstruction of the national identity of the Greeks of Albania; the following analysis was prompted by a specific music and dance event in the town of Përmet in 2003.

In the music and dance part of the events, for two consecutive evenings in the central square of Përmet, several dance groups performed accompanied by musicians. The clear intention of the organisers was to include groups representing both local and ethnic differences within Albania. Among them was a group from Dropull, an area of Gjirokastër whose population is exclusively Greek.

The dance group was comprised exclusively of women in traditional dress, while the music group accompanying them constituted of the known instruments of the traditional Epirus group (clarinet, lute, violin, tambourine) and a singer. The show was presented in an especially arranged area in the central square, in front of the large monument of the Unknown Soldier, so everything was happening under the "gaze" of the huge statue.

The group started their show with the “classic” song from Dropull, “Mor’ Deropolitissa” (Hey, girl from Dropull), a song of intensely national and religious content, danced in the “syrto” manner, in two circles. This song is a landmark of the specific region but it is also distinctly “nationalised” by the whole of the Greek minority and not only. This dance charged the show intensely emotionally from the beginning. By the end of the dance, one of the dancers moves to the central microphone and starts singing “Women from Epirus”, a composition by the Greek composer Giorgos Katsaros from his collection “Albania”, that had become known in the neighbouring country when performed by the popular Greek singer Marinela, in the context of the cultural exchanges between the two countries. The symbolic connections between the local and the national, minority and national metropolis, but also between irredentism and the heroism of the minority group are more than obvious. All this takes place under the “gaze” of the Albanian Unknown Soldier. The singer delivers the song in an intensely emotional manner, while the rest of the dancers, hand on waist, sway gently to its rhythm.

The next song, performed by the male singer of the group, was the famous heroic song from Epirus, “Deli papas”. Complementing somehow the previous one, it expanded the nationalist emotional charge of the show, typically connecting the national with the religious dimension. Both songs contain references to religion while the first one more directly: “Oh girl from Dropull, oh poor girl/ when you go to church, you lucky one/ pray for us, too / for us, too, the Christians/ so that the Turks don’t get us/ and slaughter us like lambs/ like goats on St. George’s day ...”. The next two songs were also dance melodies but came from the wider Greek area. The first was a variation of the tune

“Karagouna”, which immediately invoked the version usually performed in Greek schools on national anniversaries, while the second one was a hotch-potch of the well known dances of mount Pindus called “berati”, unusually quick dances, very popular lately in Greece, especially in religious festivals.



Figure 13. Polyphonic singing

The show ended with two songs, during which the dancers merely swayed to their rhythm, hands on waist. The first was the known island song that has spread throughout Greece, “Come and take me”, while the second and last of the show was “Little brunette”, one of the better known imitations of folk song, which is also frequently danced throughout Greece in festivals and night-clubs, too.

We could say that, in terms of the choice of songs, the show presented a movement from the local to the national scale and from more "traditional" songs to contemporary ones. Indeed, ending the show with an imitation of a folk "syрто", that rather refers to the atmosphere of today's festivals and night-clubs, reveals the tendency to connect the cultural identity of the minority with the more contemporary and more "authentic", popular way of entertainment in Greece, which is now familiar to a large part of Albanian population due to emigration. After all, most of the members of the dance and music group live in Greece!

The view that both music and dance are symbols of identity and hence define the boundaries between social and cultural groups is a common assumption in anthropological approaches and not only. However, as we have already stressed, the adoption of the concept of *cultural practice* gives us the opportunity to move further than the view that musical and dance performances reflect social structures and cultural identities and see how, in such acts, both social structures and identities may become objects of negotiation and how they may be transformed during performance. Moving even further, one can talk about the very production of social and cultural meaning of music and dance (Stokes 1994).

Dropullites: Place, locality and national identity

Concerning Dropull, however, I have been preoccupied with it in the past and published on it repeatedly. It was the first area I visited in 1991, after the collapse of the Albanian regime, and will never forget my feelings on that first contact with the place

and the people. Since then and for about ten years, Dropull had virtually monopolised my interest. In terms of research I was involved with it twice. In one of my publications, with the colleague C. Kassimis, we presented the consequences of the Greek minority's massive exodus after the collapse of the Albanian regime. Based on the study of one village, we identify the demographic collapse of the community and illuminate the social and psychological dimensions of absence, experienced by those who remained in place (Kassimis and Nitsiakos 1997).

I quote below the part of the text that concerns my own contribution to this publication and refers to the symbolic relation of the Dropullites with their home.

We are well now, but what's the point? We built houses, we made... but what's the point... If the children are not here the walls cry out at you. Don't they? The place is ruined. Better be together with our children and a little worse off [for money], so to speak. Now to go to Athens myself, to do what? To shut myself inside? Here at least I have my home, I have my own people, I will go out with a neighbour, someone will visit. There you are shut in. I went to Athens and no one tells you "good morning", no one notices you (woman's narration)

The people who have stayed behind in the village refer, in a rather typical way, to an old curse, on which they blame the new disaster. "In this place, let no rooster crow" were the words of the Saint Kosmas Aitolos, as he was leaving Dropull, according to the local oral tradition, and the recent events are experienced as a the tragic fulfillment of this curse.

Despite the fact that the collapse of the regime and the initial exodus towards Greece was experienced by the whole of the population as a redeeming event and despite the fact that emigration (with all its difficulties and adversities) was beneficial

from an economical point of view, abandonment, barrenness, is the other side of the coin.

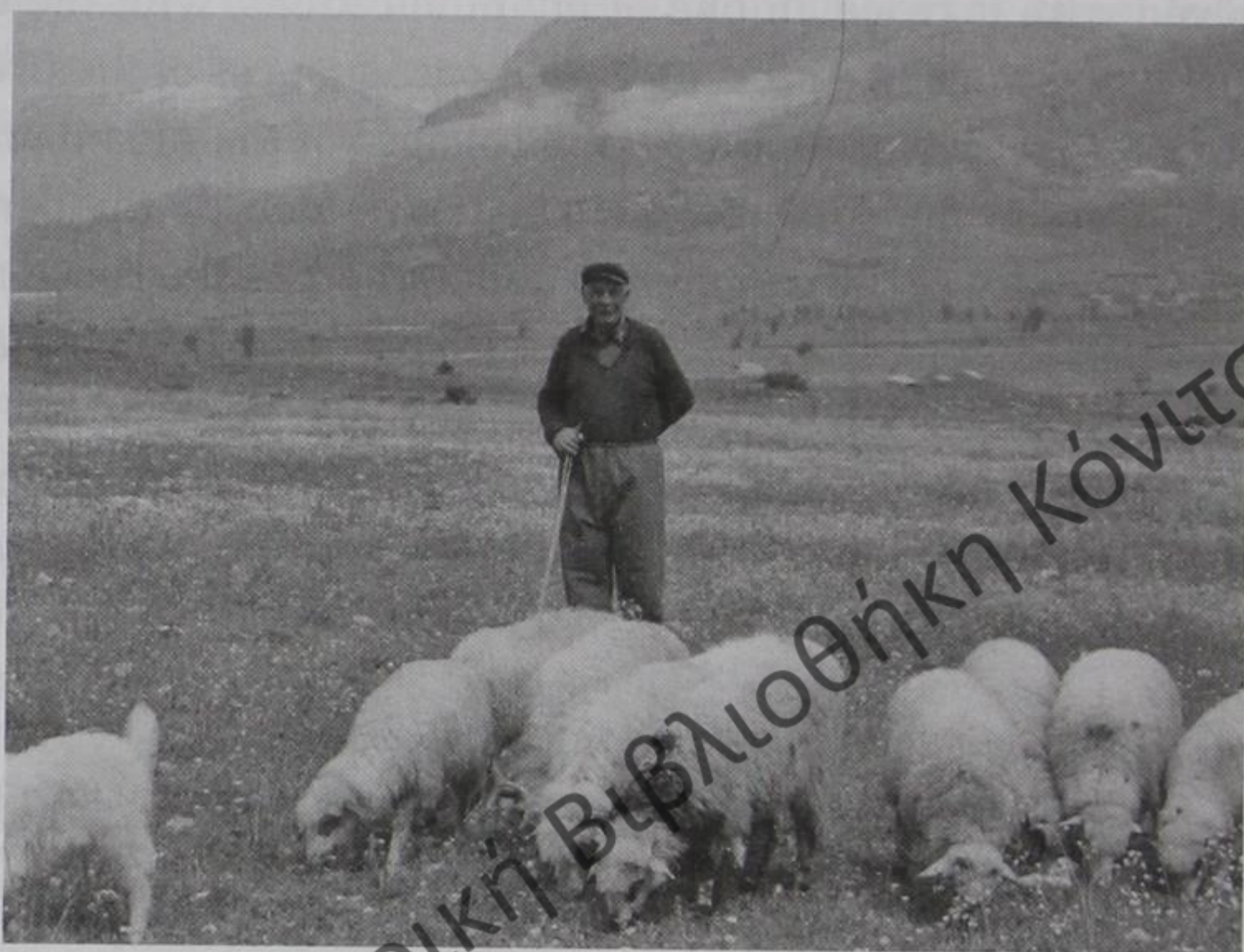


Figure 14. In the Dropull plane

“The rock is heavy in its own home”, they say when they refer to the emigrants, expressing thus the social and psychological cost of separation. Emigration has always been an integral part of these villages’ history before the establishment of the communist regime, but it was mainly emigration of the male population and a kind that did not affect the basic structures of the community (Kalyvopoulos G. and Kalyvopoulos Ch. 1975). This time the case is quite other. Now we have a desperate flight not only of men but of nearly the sum-total of the productive and young part of the population, resulting in the complete dissolution of the community’s social texture.

The picture of abandonment and barrenness becomes even more tragically imposing as the grey landscape bears the marks of the destructive spree which dominated the day after the regime's collapse. Agricultural cooperative warehouses, public buildings, military camps, etc. were subjected to an accumulated anger and frenzy for revenge, giving thus an impression not simply of general crisis but of catastrophe. Also, the natural space, having suffered exhaustive farming for several years, presents the picture of a downgraded landscape, deeply marked by dryness and erosion; this completes the spatial framework of severe social deterioration and decline.

The land, though allotted to the farmers, is not being cultivated; not only because of the absence of young people and the lack of technological and social infrastructure, but also because of the market's incapacity to absorb the produce. Thus the value of the fallow fields they received as allotments seems to be symbolic rather than material for the people. The land is apparently considered more as place and less as a means of production, a fact that has acquired special meaning through its link with their historical presence in the space, with their "roots". This is why, after all, the prospect of expropriation of land, in case it remains uncultivated for a particular length of time, which is what a recent bill that is being discussed in the parliament forecasts, is considered a threat to the very presence and existence of the Greek minority.

In such a framework, the people who have stayed behind, who are mostly elderly, carry around their grief about the present and anxiety about the future. Locked houses, courtyards and streets overgrown with grass, an imposing silence in the air,

convey the reality that is experienced by the inhabitants of the village.

On the other side of the border though, new boundaries are being erected, symbolic ones. For the Greeks in Greece, the massive advent of people from Albania, because of the manner that it happened and also because of the problems it created to the state mechanism and society in general, starts to become a great burden, a social problem, despite the obvious enough economic benefits of the influx of cheap labour.

It is amazing how in a very short period of time the word "Vorioepirotis" (Northern Epirote) acquires negative connotations, as it is also amazing how Greek citizens find it increasingly difficult to identify ethnically with those whom they used to call "brothers" in the past, and with whom they had, indeed, developed an intense emotional bond, precisely because they considered them an "enslaved" part of Hellenic population.

The social rejection of the "Northern Epirote", who is depicted, as a rule, as a harassed fugitive struggling to find a way of survival inside the "motherland", and as such he becomes, on the one hand, a nuisance, while, on the other hand, he disturbs the consciousness of the complacent Greeks, leads, through insecurity, to entrenchment and the rejection of the one who finally proves to be an unwanted other. The result is the advent of a sneaky social racism that gradually transforms the signified of the term "Northern Epirote", when it does not replace it with the term "Albanian". The expression of complaint on the part of the Greeks from Albania is typical, that "in Albania they were bloody-Greeks and in Greece Albanians". It is a procedure of social rejection, which finally leads to ethnic rejection as well. Very often, in fact, the difference is biologised and hence exclu-

sion is strengthened and sanctioned ideologically and not only. One could quote lots of media publications in Greece to document this view. It suffices here, though, to quote an extract from a first page article from "The Voice of Omonoia", the official newspaper of the Greek minority party in Albania:

...Was it by chance that the psychopath, Zounglis, hit the child from Frastani? Why did he not hit another child? Or is even the move of a madman an example of the racist attitude that is developing inside Greek society, against us, the Greeks of Albania and Albanians in general? Can the Greek polity ward off the symptoms of racism? ... (171, 19-5-1991:1).

On conclusion, "Northern Epirotes" occupy a typical "liminal" position between two ethnic groups or even two cultural systems, which, rather characteristically, tend to become understood in racial terms as well. This liminality places them, from an anthropological perspective, in a zone of jeopardy and condition of insecurity. The ambiguous identity consists in, among other things, a provocation to established systems of social order and thought, raising issues of symbolic boundaries. The position between inside and outside, known and unknown, own and strange, sacred and profane, and so on raises issues of bounding lines in people's consciousness. Non inclusion in the one or the other category confuses the limits in the order of things, as this is established and sanctified within all cultural systems, and, as a consequence, it leads to conditions of disorder, impurity and danger. The way this anthropological theory is confirmed in our case is, indeed, characteristic, as very often in Greece one hears of the "filth" of the people who come from Albania. Surely, this is about the known social/moral abject, which is not caused by a lack of bodily cleanliness, but the symbolic impurity that has to do with all that is accounted above

(Douglas 2002). The group baptisms, too, even of adult "Northern Epirotes", that took place on a massive scale constitute not merely a typical entry into the Christian religion and community, but rather symbolise another passage, probably a more important one. One that leads to their incorporation in the community of the Greeks this side of the border and bears the features of a ritual rite of passage, where the water of the font washes away symbolically the previous uncleanness, so that the initiated is incorporated, now purified, in his new condition (Van Gennep 1960).

The case of the "Northern Epirotes" is also a rather typical example which confirms the theoretical view, that ethnic identity should not be understood as a static and descriptive category, but as a dynamic and analytic one. From this perspective, it is understood in terms of social and historical construction and not on the basis of some stable features. The social uses of these features and the symbolic boundaries of the group in relation to other groups are the most crucial elements in what concerns the approach to ethnic groups. The context of ethnic experience must be considered the most important factor when defining an ethnic group. This frame of reference may modify, in space and time, the meaning of those very "objective" racial and cultural characteristics. Hence, we are directed to the known anthropological position that identity may become the object of contestation and negotiation, within specific contexts of its operation and use, or it may be constructed and re-constructed depending on the historical conjuncture (Barth 1969; Glazer and Moynihan 1975; Wallman 1979; Hutchinson and Smith 1996). The realisation that ethnic identity (just as identity in general) is not understood as something special by its subjects,

unless they are found in situations of interaction, acquires in the case of the "Northern Epirotes" a tragic dimension. The first segregation, within a state where they were "objectively" a minority, is substituted by second one, in a state where they are "objectively" once more united with their ethnic community. In the second case, it seems that "objective" ethnic characteristics are not enough for their smooth incorporation in the body of their "Greek brothers". Their life at this stage is on a verge.

I was writing the above, among other things, in 1997 (Kassimis and Nitsiakos 1997). In another text of mine of the same year, another product of the same research project, I was concerned with the issue of identity in relation to place and the concept of locality (Nitsiakos 1997). I quote the complete version:

A tree. / Around the cabin, the fields are strange, / around the fields, the flocks are strange. / A tree, / we used to plant in our courtyard, / was to uphold the farmers' plough, / was to hang the farmers' reaper, / was for the summer itself to climb on high / to throw down a ripe fruit / in the hands of your child, / a tree we used to plant / was to fortify ourselves so that the wind does not blow us away. / They would uproot that, too, / and an empty hole was left in our garden, / and an empty hole was left in our soul, / for the growing / of grievance... But our place insisted that something remains. / Some earth, / enough for life to spread its root, to make dancing ground / and one more trench to fight behind... And we insisted / and our tolerance became / plane trees on the river edges...(Zarmbalas 199:61-66).

One could reverse F. Braudel's known phrase that "a culture is first of all a space" and say that a space is first of all a culture. Only this space, the tamed and humanised space, is not merely space. The space on which, and in which, a culture's diachronic

mark is engraved has been transformed into place; a place that speaks the language of the society it has accommodated for a length of time, and this language is, precisely, the whole way of life itself, the culture of this society. The place, a space, that is, with a particular identity, speaks with its signs, its "marks", and the signifieds are the historically determined values themselves, of a human group that exists in constant, dialectical relation to its environment, while it appropriates it.

The inscription of a culture's basic characteristics on space leads, on the basis of collective experience, to the collective identification of the group with this space and thus to the formation, on various levels, depending on the historical context each time, of an identity that is indissolubly interweaved with a particular space of small scale, constructing what we call "locality" (Terkenli 1995).

Locality as a concept and analytic category has concerned especially the science of Geography, from the decade of 1980 onwards, provoking a creative dialogue that both recalls and, at the same time, relates with the parallel dialogue on the issue of community (Massey 1993). N. Gregson (1987) mentions eight common usages of the term "locality", some of which are, in fact, incompatible between them, while the writers often move from one usage to the other, even within they same study (Dunc and Savage 1989). The discussion has, of course, advanced enough but we still lack a common frame of reference acceptable by all, for the additional reason that the problem is nowadays interdisciplinary, as other sciences, like Social Anthropology and Rural Sociology are now involved with it.

So, all one can and should do, when using the term, is to define its conceptual content accurately. Here we use the term "lo-

cality" meaning an entity of small geographical scale, in relation to a wider whole, which is not understood as a static geographical and social reality but mainly as a symbolic construction, and can be used as a theoretical tool, just like the term "community".

So locality is understood as a frame of social reference and identification, which is associated with the idea of the homeland, local or national. From this point of view it is obvious that locality should not be taken as a "historical phase" that is previous to nationality, but as a mechanism of inclusion and incorporation of local entities in wider wholes, such as the nation-states.

The idea of a community based on foundations of locality is considered a basic cultural feature of the Mediterranean countries and has preoccupied social anthropologists since the beginning of the development of the so-called "Mediterranean Studies". This reality is interwoven with localism, too, the intense emotional and ideological attachment to the place of origin, which is linked to the concept of "moral community", in the sense in which it was attributed to peasant communities (Pitt-Rivers 1954).

The emphasis on the social cohesion, moral unity and introversion of the small agricultural communities of the Mediterranean often led researchers to the view that locality consists in a way of social reference and identification that is not only previous but contrary to that of nationality. This view is pertinent to the known idea of an underdeveloped European South, the idea, that is, of nation-states that are not yet complete as unitary and homogeneous entities, in the sense that, in this case, the transition from locality to nationality has not happened smoothly, so as to incorporate the local communities completely and the pe-

ripheral particularities to recede for the benefit of national homogeneity. Of course, this approach has been justly criticised as dependent on the assumption of lineal evolution (Gilmore 1987; Herzfeld 1987).

The relation of locality with the reality of the nation is rather composite and difficult to study. In the literature of Anthropology, they appear, as a rule, as two different and even independent entities, between which specific relations are formed, ending up in the incorporation and assimilation of the first by the second. This means the final receding of the local in favour of the national spirit, the victory of the homogenising ideology of the nation, which leads to the eradication of any essential local differentiations.

Still, things are not so simple. In the first place, not only is there the fact of locality's resistance and the tolerance of local identities functioning "at the expense" of national homogeneity (which, as we have already said, is considered by many as a mark of underdevelopment), but also the fact of a return to locality in the context of a demand for distinctiveness of identity, in societies and times when homogenising mechanisms lead to cultural flattening.

Maybe, then, locality is not only a "survivor" from the past but a means of vindication and symbolic construction of a special identity and, indeed, this may have emerged from the very reality of the nation-state, with which it develops a dialectical relationship. There is, indeed, interdependence between these two entities.

In other words, the political roof over a culture, as Gellner (1983) has called the modern nation-state, despite its homogenising intensions and function of rearranging the social struc-

ture, it has not led to the extinction of locality; on the contrary, it has provoked and continues to provoke new local ideological and symbolic operations, which, actually, acquire new dimensions with the emergence of supra-national formations and the efforts involved in that, such as, for example, the European Union.

Following, I shall present some first findings of a recent field research in Albanian, regarding the Greek minority of that country. There, the relation of locality and identity, the relation of people with their place in general, is of special interest, because it is also linked to the matter of nationality in a different way. The local group that was "called", 80 years ago, to become integrated with a wider state formation happens to constitute an ethnic minority related to a neighbouring people that has its own nation-state. In addition, this state formation, for the most part of its history, has been characterised by isolationism, a peculiar form of patriotism and a chauvinistic and intensely dogmatic attachment to the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Indeed, its very same rhetoric about the peaceful cohabitation of the peoples, the protection and valuing of the Greek minority's cultural particularity in the name of "socialist internationalism" but also in the framework of "socialist building", where ethnic, religious or racial differences should be blunted in favour of social equality, covered up, it seems, a peculiar nationalism on the part of the dominant ethnic group (Hoxha 1985; Nikas 1988; Panagiotou 1994; Fotiou and Lytis 1995).

The Greek minority of Albania is found in the southern part of the country and it mostly constitutes a compact group of people. Apart from the cities (Gjirokastër, Sarandë), whose population is mixed, the villages of these two areas, which are

officially recognised as minority areas, are in the vast majority of their population Greek (Kallivretakis 1995) and their historical presence in this geographical space, has led to an identification of the group with this place.

Our research took place in the county of Gjirokastër, in the area of Dropull. It basically concerned the demographic problem that resulted in the area, after the collapse of the totalitarian regime in 1990 and the massive flight of the population to Greece. The forsaking, the absence of young population, which is called by the inhabitants themselves "uprooting", raises forcefully the issue of the group's relation with the place (given the intension of the Albanian state to expropriate the land if it isn't cultivated).

The notion of uprooting, meaning the violent tearing away of the roots that hold a group together – like a tree – with its land, with its place, holds, in the collective consciousness as well as, nowadays, in the everyday discourse of the subjects who experience it, such an important position, that it is presented as the basic parameter of their identity problem.

The opposite of uprooting, the "taking roots", means mainly a symbolic identification with the place and by extension the vindication of nationality. The genealogical relation, after all, is asserted by the word "root" and a specific, genealogical formation (real or mythical) with the word "tree".

These two words have a special place in the oral tradition and the literature of this group, since they are symbolically linked with their struggles against uprooting. The tree, in fact, additionally consisted, as physical presence, an object of contestation and means of expression of, on the one hand, a struggle for "taking roots" and, on the other, against "uprooting".

A tree we used to plant, / was to fortify ourselves, so that the wind does not blow us away. / They would uproot that, too...

Even though the above poem's historical frame of reference is the time before the "communist" regime, the time when the area was dominated by local beys, whose lands the inhabitants of the area used to cultivate as tenants (Kalyvopoulos G. and Kalyvopoulos Ch. 1975), it is evident from the oral testimonies we recorded – and not only those, of course – that it conveys the reality of this regime as well.

The Hoxha regime expropriated the whole of the privately owned land, as well as mobile property (animals, etc.), allowing only one house per family. Community and private lands were nationalised and devolved to the management of the cooperatives. On top of that, spatial organisation and the logic of the landscape changed drastically, in the service of the central authority's new directions.

The barring of the borders and the subsequent isolation took away from the local communities the option they used to have traditionally, for their men to travel as itinerant craftsmen or merchants within a large geographical scale in the wider Balkan area; as a result, they were confined in their villages, encumbering the environment, since now farming became their basic occupation. Thus the environment is first of all under pressure from the very scale and rate of agricultural exploitation, resulting in gradual aridity and the general downgrading caused by over-exploitation, a fact that led, gradually, to a transformation of the landscape itself (Pata and Osmani 1994). For example, the previous unity and balance between horticulture and animal farming (system of fallow fields, the uses of shared pastures, etc.) is broken, wooded areas are destroyed, bureau-

cratic control is imposed, which tends to "square out" a landscape where the curve and circular shapes used to dominate.

The new politics and the corresponding economic and social policies were imposed also through the organisation of space and the symbolic function of its various parts. This meant the eradication of the basic elements and symbols of the previous situation and especially of those that were interweaved with social, political and religious institutions that were considered reactionary and dangerous by the new ideology. In this context, the victims were elements and marks of the space that symbolised institutions and traditions of a different identity, which both in its ethnic and its religious dimension raised obstacles to a "socialist completion" that was beyond and above such differences.

"Sacred" buildings and symbols, such as churches, sanctuaries, etc., if not destroyed, were marginalised or yielded to new uses. Their place was taken over by military camps, guard stations, and cultural centres of very specific architecture and aesthetics. Village squares, dancing grounds, threshing floors, etc., important spaces, that is, for village socialising, were allocated for new operations having to do mainly with people's participation and politicisation, the way the particular regime understood them.

The landscape is literally transformed, not simply in being stamped by the regime's practices, but also by operating as the framework for the imposition and assimilation and reproduction of the new order of things. The attitude and conduct of the regime vis a vis the forests is characteristic, the forests and the trees (to return to an element of the landscape with which we started, symbolically). The unprecedented deracination that

strikes violently the visitor today (indeed, one is shocked when he traverses, say, the border with Greece, by the contrast between the two parts of an ecologically unified space: wooded hills, slopes on the Greek side, – completely barren landscape on the Albanian side) was not merely the means for securing more cultivatable land (more “bread bearing places”) but the result of the effort to impose social and political control, as well as an outcome of symbolic alienation.

First of all, the forests in the frontier zone had to be cut down, so that the area is completely controlled, deterring the potential fugitives to Greece. Then, the militaristic perception combined with an obsession with defense against the neighbours had, on its own, particular impact on the landscape. According to the oral testimony of a retired officer of the Albanian army, the trees of the Dropull flatland, which were traditionally located in specific positions and had taken on certain practical and also symbolic functions (between the fields as “staloi”, providing shadow for the midday summer sleep of the flocks, next to fountains or around country churches with the known semiological functions, etc), were uprooted “so as not to be used as targets in a potential war clash”. According to the same informant, the state would only plant poplar trees along the main road axis, again following a military logic, since this way they would be providing cover-up for the army in an instance of war. The choice of the poplar tree has to do with its capacity to grow quickly but, also, to be cut down easily...

The tree in Greek tradition occupies an important position in terms of its symbolic function. The plane tree in the mid-village is a symbol of local socialising, but as such it is also identified, as visual and aesthetic presence, with the village itself;

the cypress tree is identified with the church and the graveyard, and so on. Characteristically, the only trees that survived the deracinating mania of the state mechanisms were some "holy" trees, the so called "vakoufia", around which there had developed legends about the divine punishment of any one who will dare even cut them for timber, and this has to do exclusively with the fact of the influence that such beliefs and preconceptions had on the common people. Otherwise, their identification itself, practical or symbolic, with elements of a particular identity, and especially of the kind that are considered "incompatible" with the new ideals, would constitute an additional and sufficient reason for their demolition.

Generally, the limiting of ownership to the house and the expropriation of the rest of the communal and private lands of the settlements changed drastically the relation of private and public space, the "inside" and the "outside". Public space is extended at the expense of the private, but most importantly, it turns into a space of intimidating social control on the part of the central authority.

This results in an even stricter separation of the "inside" from the "outside", where the "inside" becomes the only refuge left and as much as possible a space of secret practising of symbolic – in relation to the particular identity – operations. For example, many of the women would hide in secure spots of their home the family icon and the oil-lamp, which, indeed, burnt throughout the prohibition. This act was not only an expression of worship; it also had an ethnic dimension. After all, the metaphorical use of the oil-lamp's flame, burning low in secret, in relation to the survival of the national idea and the consciousness of Hellenism in periods of enslavement, is well known.



Figure 15. Country church in Dropull

So, in the most crucial positions in the public space, the new state buildings are erected, and they are not confined to the accommodation of new operations; more importantly, they express and establish symbolically the new power. Party offices, cooperative offices, cultural centres, stores, warehouses and military camps are the spatial equivalents of a new regime trying to impose its own rationale to the structured space. So all forms of particularity or difference succumb to the central model and tend to become eliminated from public space.

It is not a chance fact that with the collapse of this regime the wrath of the people turned first of all against the state buildings. The destructive spree that erupted had, without doubt, an element of revenge which quickly turned into a demand. A demand that uses on its part, forcefully and typically, the symbols of the place as symbols of identity. Old constitutive elements of

structured space, signs of place, such as sanctuaries, churches, graveyards, etc. crop up again or resurface performing their old functions once more and this way they are included in a whole system of restoring an identity that in many respects was in danger of extinction.

Indeed, it is amazing how place and by extension locality is used in the context of vindicating a special ethnic identity. And, of course, it is more than obvious that locality in this case is also a vehicle for vindicating an ethnic identity and, finally, for the attachment of the group to the national body to which it belongs and towards which the sum-total of the very symbols of locality, the very signs of place, point.

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κονίτσας

KOSINË. MIRKA WHO BECAME SOTIRIS

Kosinë is a relatively large village a few kilometres away from Përmet and approximately one kilometre on the right of the road leading to Tepelenë. Its very position but also an important Byzantine monument there, the church of Shën Mëria, attract visitors from the wider area.

The community has recently fraternised with the community of Vovoussa in the region of Jannina (Greece) and together they materialise works of protection, conservation and promotion of cultural monuments in the framework of the European Programme Interreg. One can already see in the church a psalter that was donated by the community of Vovoussa on the day the fraternity was contracted.

I had promised Sotiris the previous evening that we would go to his village and I had to keep my word. Sotiris had come down for the festival at Përmet and had approached me before the show reminding me of our "ghlendi" in the previous fall in the village and at the wedding, too, which we had attended that night.

Indeed, we had met during a beautiful evening in the centre of Kosinë, where Sotiris kept a small café. Basically he had turned an old container into a shop, placing it on a piece of land he had bought recently with money brought from Greece. It had a makeshift barbecue outside and some



Figure 16. Feast in Kosinë

old tables and chairs. This meager shop operated at the same time as a grocery selling basic goods; especially of the type children usually consume (cheese snacks, croissants, chocolate bars, cookies, etc.). We had sat there with a group of friends who had come along from Jannina and, while drinking the raki Sotiris himself produced with some dozen villagers who gathered at the table, the evening developed into one of those wonderful times one never forgets.

The people who sat at our table were of all ages and all willing to relate and have fun. I had asked initially to see Thoma Poriqui, the previous headman of the community, of Vlach origin, for whom I had heard the best. His name came up every time I asked about the Vlachs in the village. Everyone referred to him as an important figure in the local social and political life. Thoma is indeed an upstanding and gallant man, ready to be of use and to learn new things from "strangers". I knew from his surname, even before I met him, that he is a descendant of the great clan of Poriqui, a large branch of which lives in Kefalovrišo in the Pogoni province (Greece). One may meet several families even today in Jannina and other parts of both Greece and Albania. These are members of the ethnic group of the Arvanite Vlachs, who used to be nomadic stock breeders *par excellence* in the past, moving from the mountains to the planes of the wider Balkan area, but mainly on grounds that belong to Greece and Albania today. As a result of settling down and urbanisation, especially after WWII, one will find them in both countries, spread out from Thessaly and Macedonia to Vlore and Korçë, both in agricultural and urban areas.

I can communicate with Thoma comfortably in Vlach, despite the differences in our idioms. Thus, parallel to the Greek and the Albanian, one can hear the Vlach language spoken intermittently in our company, too. The same holds for the songs, which soon take over and replace or continue our conversation. Albanian polyphonic songs give their place to Vlach songs and vice-versa, while at times Greek songs may be heard, too. Raki flows plenty and merriment hits the highest. In the end it makes no difference what language each of us speaks or sings. All become one...

Our company is joined by our other guest, Gjergj. Gjergj is a teacher of history and geography in the village school, and he is an acquaintance of mine from my previous visit here. I had met the whole of his family then and it had stirred a strong ethnographic interest in me, in addition to great liking. Gjergj is also of Vlach origin, only I cannot speak Vlach with him. He belongs to another category of Vlachs from that of Thoma. His family comes from the villages of Frashëri, an area of mixed population for which we shall talk in detail in another chapter. He came and settled in Kosinë during the 1950s, a time when the regime encouraged massive relocations, recomposing the social and ethnic synthesis of the population. During my visit at their home, the previous summer, I had been both shocked and deeply moved by the conditions I had encountered. But I have to recount the events in order.

I found myself in this house with colleagues, during my first visit while looking for the church keys. Some villagers indicated the house and the son of the family, an 18 year old youth, came willingly to open the church for us. He told us his name was Hristos and started talking to us in fluent Greek. Hristos, Qitso according to his family, is studying nursing in the University of Gjirokastër, having graduated from the Church secondary comprehensive school, which belongs to the Orthodox Independent Church of Albania. On top of his Greek, Hristos impresses us with his conduct and also his deep knowledge of the Orthodox Church tradition. He immediately expressed his philhellenic feelings, just like his generally humane attitude, saying, indeed, that he is glad to be studying nursing, because this way he will be able to offer his services to the ill. He opens the church for us, of which he talks with a lot of respect and piety. After our visit

he kindly invites us to his home to meet his family, who would like to offer us their hospitality.

Greki and Vlachi

His father, Gjergj, welcomes us and so does his mother, Zerina, his sister, Nertila, but above all his grandmother, Qyratso, a strong personality with a black kerchief tied around her head, in a way that brings out memories in me, and black dress. The appearance and conduct of the grandmother do not allow me any other choice but to address her in Vlach. And, of course, the confirmation is immediate. To my phrase "çi s' fatsi, mae?" (how are you grandma?) the answer was "gini lai frate, voi cum hits?" (I'm well my brother, how are you?). As she pronounces the "r" in *frate* like a "gh" she completes the image of an Arvanite Vlach, like those I knew from my childhood years in the Thessalic lowland, in the village Rodia of Tirnavos, where we lived in a neighbourhood with a lot of Arvanite Vlachs. I am deeply moved. I stick to her side. She takes my hand and holds it tight, just like my own grandmother does when I visit her in the village. We start talking. I see she has some difficulty. She hastens to explain that she has almost forgotten the Vlach language, because, since her husband's death, years now, she has no one to talk to in Vlach. Her son neither speaks nor understands it. She tells me she comes from Frashëri. Just before this, Gjergj had told me meaningfully and with emotion that the apricot preserve we had been treated to was made of fruits from their tree in the yard, which they had brought along from Frashëri when they came to live in Kosinë. I sensed he was referring to their

symbolic act, a reaction to being uprooted, the planting in their new home of a tree from the old one with the purpose of taking roots anew. I thought that it is not without reason that Arvanite Vlachs are also called Frasheriotos or Farsheriotos, since, apparently, they consider that area as their basic place of origin. Of course, they call themselves *rëmen* as well, just like the rest of the Vlachs call themselves *rëmuni* or *armëni*.

Gjergj himself is aware of his Vlach origin but seems to have accepted as natural development the fact of his assimilation into the Albanian society. He is a typical Albanian. Nothing in his appearance, his ways, his expression and his consciousness might betray something other than that. I will not forget the emotion with which he sang and recited patriotic songs in the *tekke* in Frashëri during one of our visits. One of the songs was about the Frashëri brothers, leading figures in the Albanian national movement, who came from there. Gjergj, an Orthodox Christian, was singing inside a Bektashi *tekke* in praise of the heroic deeds of the Muslim national heroes of Albania, the Frashëri brothers. We shall have the opportunity to say more on the question of the relationship between religion and national identity, just as about the relationship of the Bektashi Muslims with the Orthodox Christians of the Albanian South. The comment here is meant merely as a pointer to Gjergj's national consciousness. It is also worth mentioning that Gjergj never went to Greece, so he never got into the process of searching for hidden bonds with it, in order to facilitate his life generally or enjoy privileges; this is what many other Albanians of Vlach origin do, exploiting the politics of the Union for Human Rights Party (Omonoia) for the inclusion of the Vlachs in the category of fellow Hellenes, for the

purpose of acquiring the relevant rights. Gjergj never became, or at least has not become yet, a Giorgos.

Gjergj has married an Albanian Christian Orthodox, Zerina, who works as a nurse in the country surgery of the village. His mother says meaningfully about her daughter-in-law that, even though she is not "one of ours" (*nu iasti di anuastrë*) she is good (*iasti bunë*). And of course she never refers to her daughter-in-law by her name. She calls her "nviasta" (the bride) or "aistë" (she). This, too, is part of the moral code of communication revealing the nature of relationships among the members of a Vlach family. I know this well from my own family. But, at this moment, I am thinking more about the categories "one of ours" and "stranger" inside the same family, again in relation to whatever we call "identities". Zerina is "stranger" to her mother-in-law, in the sense that she is not a Vlach. She is "arbiniasë" (an Albanian or, better, an Arvanite). This, too, is very familiar to me. My own wife is not "one of ours" for my parents, namely she is not a Vlach, but a "Greka". We shall return to this category, "Grekos", but here the parallelism is useful for understanding how relative and fluid ethnic classifications and categories are, as they depend on what people define as theirs or other in practice.

I corrected the term "Albanian" above and used "Arvanite" instead, because I believe it expresses the perspective of these people more accurately. If the bride were Muslim, her mother-in-law would most certainly not say that she is not one of our own, she would simply say she is a Turk (though she would have tried to conceal that). The basic distinction established in the wider area of the Balkans and in the context of Ottoman domination was one between Muslims and Christians. For the

Muslims all Christians were *giaour* while for the Christians all Muslims were "Turks". There did exist, however, forms of discrimination amongst the Christian themselves, based on ethnic origin, which were preserved to a large degree even after the formation of the nation-states, though adjusted to the new situation.

The concept of Greekness (*Hellenikotita*), the category of the Greek (*Hellenes*), became an umbrella term covering all ethnic groups living in Greek state territory. Never did the term "Hellenas" become identical to the term "Grekos" (Mackridge 2009; Green 2005). The category "Grekos" became one of the several sub-groups which formed the new Greek national identity. The very name "Hellene" facilitated considerably the transition from the previous ethnic categories to a unified, national one, the Hellenic identity. A Vlach, a Sarakatsanos, an Arvanite or a Local from Macedonia, who could not identify with the category "Grekos", is easily included in the wider, modern category of the "Hellene", while this process is further enabled by the development of Greek education and the prestige of Greek civilisation.

Things in Albania were somewhat different but there, too, the ethnic category of the Albanian, with the parallel development of the equivalent national ideology, became an all-encompassing identity that could contain not only particular ethnic categories such as the Gegs, Tosks, Labes, Çams etc., but – and this was not easy – the different religious groups that had historically acquired different features, social and cultural, and had developed a sense of "otherness" between them. Albanianism emerged as an ideology that would unite the new Albanian nation on a new basis transcending religious and other differ-

ences. Things, of course, for the Albanian nation-state were not as simple as for the Greek one, but, in the last analysis, a new national identity and ideology was developed, and the ethnic groups that were included in this state's territory were called to adjust to it. Still, it would be a mistake to assume a linear evolution or transition from the ethnic to the national phenomenon, because, not only elements of ethnic organisation, identity and consciousness may persist in various aspects of the life and expression of the groups that resist, but, on top of that, new categories may emerge as adjustments of the old or as products of new situations. Identities are not eternal historical categories, they may change or perish and new categories of identity may emerge.

For grandma Qyratso, as a Vlach, I am "hers". She told me from the first moment she met me. But as a Greek? My colleagues, for example, are "other" (Grek). If I had not perceived grandma's Vlach identity and had presented myself simply as a Greek, I would have been a "stranger", too, and certainly not "one of ours" ("anostrou"). I have to admit, and this is typical, that I did not avoid feeling embarrassment – despite the fact that these things are clear inside me – when at some point Qyratso said to me "Aisti sun Grets, tini eshtsë Rëmën" (they are Greki, you are a Vlach). She was talking, so to speak, in terms of ethnicity. With the term "Grekos" she was not referring to the contemporary national identity of the Greeks. Meaning *Grets* as *Greki* she was essentially saying that I am not a *Greku*, and this is not at all strange to me, since this distinction is still used today in my own family and wider social environment. In this context the category "Grekos" is not identical to "Greek". In a similar way, Qyratso says about her daughter-in-law that she is not

“ours”. She is not theirs as a non-Vlach. Her daughter-in-law is an *Arbiniasa* in the ethnic sense of the term, which is an identity other to the Vlach ethnic identity. On a level of national reference, however, in the modern sense of the term, both mother and daughter-in-law belong to the category of the Albanian. This operation of including the ethnic in the national facilitates extremely the self-definition of those who have experienced this transition in their own life-time. Imagine Gjergj wondering whether he is Vlach or Albanian. In this context there is no such dilemma, because the two identities belong to different orders. They do not appear as mutually exclusive, rather the one is part of the other, since the particular ethnic one is rendered part of the wider national identity or, why not, the former succumbs to the latter.

At the Wedding

That evening, at the height of merriment, Thoma suggested we go to a wedding in the neighbouring village. A friend of his was marrying off his daughter and had invited him. To our objection that we were not invited he answered meaningfully that we were his guests. He's a good friend, he told me, so no problem. So we started out, ten men, to go to the wedding. It was Saturday evening and they were having a party in the bride's house, with the bridegroom and his close relatives. The house was in a small settlement, which, they told us, used to be a military camp. It was a linear arrangement of small buildings in dismal condition. The few inhabitants were destitute farmers who took over

the buildings after they were abandoned by the state. The only possession of the father's bride was a cow...

Arriving at the house where the "joy" was taking place, what I faced was in complete contrast to the degradation of the settlement and my Albanian friends' descriptions. The party was in the yard, where dinner tables were ready and the musicians had already started playing. The contrast was made even sharper by the hosts' welcome. Thoma went first, he explained all about our presence to his friends and they immediately came out to the gate to receive us.

They were pleased we had come and showed it with the swift placing of another table in the yard, which was set with great care by two young women; they sat us there and offered us first fruit preserve and raki and then various starters. I was very impressed by the ritually "grand" way of the bride's close relatives. All was done in proper order, as befits the climactic moment of family life which is marriage. The bride's father, wearing simple, dark clothes and a labourer's cap on his head, was radiating feeling greatly honoured and was trying to return the honour to his guests in every way. And we were among them, albeit uninvited...

At the peak of the ritual wedding celebrations, which is the bride's dance, we were invited to dance with the bride in our turn, after the relatives. In this particular phase of the ritual, the bride gathers all the relatives and guests who wish to dance and they, when leaving one by one from the head of the dance circle, treat the bride to money, which they place, discretely but flauntingly at the same time, in her bodice. The money that is collected this way usually pays for the musicians. Sometimes though another type of agreement may be made with the musi-

cians, so the bride keeps part or all the money and this tends to happen more and more lately. I have to say that I will never forget the way the father took me by the hand and led me to the head of the dance circle to dance with the bride. I will also never forget the deep emotion that overcame me, the strange thrill I felt while leading the dance...

We stayed at the "ghlendi" till late, though as the night progressed the cold became annoying (it was the end of October). I could list several memories, but I will confine myself to the general impression with which I departed from that house and which stayed with me for a long time: The sense of honour and dignity, spiritual wealth in general, may be the only antidote to the poverty created and imposed by political systems.

Migration and poverty

Leaving the camp in a hail of thoughts and feelings, I managed to reflect on a matter that concerns migration generally and has preoccupied me in the recent years of studying the phenomenon. It is the questioning of an assumption that dominates the studies on migration, namely that, as a rule, the social groups that migrate are the poorest, which seems reasonable, since these groups face immediate problems of survival and migration is a way out for them.

This view has to be revised on the basis of new studies, because an indisputable fact is that, in many cases, those who migrate are the ones who possess the needed material and cultural capital. Material capital refers to the actual expenses that are required for moving from one country to the other and in cases of non-legal exodus these expenses are much higher (ex-

penses of transport, the pay of guides for crossing the border, expenses for starting out in the host country, etc.), while symbolic capital refers to networks of relationships that are essential for the realisation of such a decision (especially in migration cases with features of a chain type of exodus, where migrating individuals “pull in” various relatives), the capability of getting hold of and managing pertinent information and knowledge which is related to the educational level, etc.



Figure 17. Ploughing



Figure 18. Loading electrical appliances

In the case of the Albanians' migration, especially during its first phase of violent exodus, the previously mentioned factors were crucial to the success or failure of the attempt to leave one country and settle in another. And regarding their migration to Greece in particular, cultural capital was very important, as the most privileged were those of Greek origin or with some relation to Greece (i.e. the Christian Orthodox of the South, descendants of families with a previous history of migrational presence in Greece, etc.). Therefore, the question of who migrates is rather complex and should not be answered in the well-known, narrowly economic, stereotypical way that the poorer migrate. The matter is, of course, connected to the more general question of the causes of migration, namely whether they are to be found in the economic level or whether we should be looking for more complex ways of understanding the phe-

nomenon, since social, political and other historical reasons, separately or variously combined, may be playing a decisive role. On this basis, the term “economic migrant” that is being used all the more frequently may be accepted only conventionally and in the context of distinguishing these migrants from the category of political refugees (Castels 1999; Castels and Miller 1993).

Mirka or Sotiris?

So, arriving in Kosinë, in place of the old container we found an unfinished building which Sotiris was already using as café, judging from the old small barbecue in the front, right next to the construction materials. He had already hung a bunch of garlic in the entrance to ward off the evil eye. There was nobody there, but there were three women in the café/grocery across the street. I ask them about Sotiris. They seem surprised and say there is no Sotiris here, but if we are looking for the person who owns the café, his name is Mirka... Apparently he had been “christened” Sotiris in Greece and drew out the name when he met Greeks. Since Mirka was absent I thought we might pay a visit to Gjergj and his family. They received us with great joy, as their people this time. They were all there except for Qitso, their son, who was in Gjirokastër and would return late in the evening. After they treated us and we had a chat, we agreed to meet again in the evening in Mirka’s café.

In the evening we came back to the village together with Mirka. Gjergj and Qitso were waiting for us at the café. We sat together, ordered beer and started talking. Mirka, who insists

on being Sotiris to us, even though we told him we knew and he admitted he had changed his name in Greece, tells his personal story of his migrational experience in Greece. He went there with the first wave of migrants and after drifting around several places, like almost all immigrants without legal papers, he finally settled in the area of Messolongi and worked there for about seven years. His story resembles all the other life stories I recorded in my previous research, so I think there is no point in discussing the matter in detail here. The interesting part is that Mirka is one of the exceptions of young Albanian emigrants, who have returned to their country and try to stay here, investing their savings from the *kurbet*. Mirka has bought a truck for transportations, the land on which he is building the tavern, and at the same time he works in the production of clover, a seasonal occupation. He also has a vineyard, a vegetable garden, bee hives and a few animals for his family needs. He says he has actually already thought of the name for his tavern, it will be "To Tzaki" (The fireplace). I did not ask him whether it will be in Greek or Albanian, but I was reminded once again of a common tendency among Albanian migrants, namely to copy the Greek ways, behaving similarly to Greek migrants returning to Greece from America, Germany, etc.

Hristos – in his case I think the Greek name is more fitting, probably because of his Greek manners – has literally stuck to my side absorbing anything I say. I ask him about his studies and his life in Gjirokastër. He is generally happy, only the family's financial situation is so bad, he is thinking of getting a job to help his parents. Their salary is about 200 Euros all together and they have two children to support with their studies. Mer-

tila will be going to university soon, she is dreaming of becoming a journalist.

The Albanian Orthodox

Hristos makes me think of all those cases of Christian Orthodox people in the Albanian South, who, through Greek education and the influence of the Orthodox Church, had had formed a Greek sentiment and a lot of them became pioneers in the strengthening of Hellenic culture and also benefited the Greek state in various ways. The influence of Hellenism on the Albanian Orthodox was such that, when the Albanian national idea developed, in the three last decades of the 19th century, they were greatly confused regarding their national identity. Hence we observe the phenomenon that protagonists of the two national movements come from the same village. For example, the village Qestorat in Gjirokastër was the home of the known benefactor Chr. Zografos (Kristaq Zografi) (1820-1896) and his son Georgios, Greek minister of foreign affairs, leading figure of the Greek national movement and first General Governor of Epirus after its liberation in 1913; the same village was also home of the leading figure of the Albanian national movement Pandeli Sotiri, who was a student of the teacher of Greek letters Koto Hoxhi (1824-1895). Hoxhi used to teach the Albanian language secretly to his students, which is why he clashed with the Greek consulate in Jannina, where he had actually made an unsuccessful request for the founding of an Albanian school. He was indeed excommunicated by the Bishop of Gjirokastër. Still, in addition to Sotiri, the school of Qestorat produced one more im-

portant representative of Albanian nationalism, Petro Nini Luarasi (Skendi 1967:133-4).

I don't know why, having Hristos on my side and listening to him speak, I think one could imagine, *mutatis mutandis*, how those young Albanians might have been in the 19th century, studying in Greek schools initially in their own villages and later in the Zosimea School in Jannina and thus partaking in Greek culture, a fact that, in combination with the Christian Orthodox cultural tradition with which they were brought up at home, led to their Hellenisation proper. Hristos admires Greek civilisation, Greece and the Greeks. He badly wants to be able to visit Greece as frequently as possible, but getting hold of a visa is very difficult. Now he would like to be able to go to Greece for seasonal work in the summers, during school holidays. He asks me whether I could help him get a visa for a few months, so he could go to Greece in the next months. This is a problem I face every time I make a new acquaintance. In the past it used to be even worse. A visa is a kind of scarce resource for which most Albanians beg, those of them who have stayed behind and do not want to cross the border illegally. So if they cannot secure it by the standard procedure they employ all other possible means, one of which is the making use of a "connection".

Politics

While we were drinking and talking, the mayor of Konitsa called me on my mobile phone and told me he was in a tavern in Përmet with the Consul of Gjirokastër. I gesture at Hristos that he may be lucky. We go to meet them...

So they came along to Përmet, both Hristos and Mirka. The latter did not actually say he came for the same reason but it was obvious that he could not miss such an opportunity. A visa to Greece is a very important gift and, after all, as he explained later, he needed it to shop for the tavern he would open, as shopping from Greece was most profitable.

In the tavern "24 hours", past the river and next to the stadium of Përmet, we found a big company of Greeks and Albanians who were dining and discussing the pending national elections of Albania. In addition to the Mayor of Konitsa and the consul, there were the parliamentary candidate for the Union for Human Rights "Omonoia", Giorgos Loulemes, the ex-mayor of Përmet who is a member of the Albanian Socialist Party, a Cypriot businessman who is the godfather of Louleme's child and came to help with his election campaign, several others with or without an important role in the campaign and a reporter from the local channel "AOS TV" with his camera man.

As we arrive, they stop their conversation, make space for us at their table and the consul asks me to sit by him to talk. We exchange views on various matters, I inform him about our research in the area and he is greatly interested, but soon we exhaust the themes of culture and literature and the conversation turns to the current political situation. The whole atmosphere recalls scenes from travel narratives in the Balkan area written in the beginning of the 20th century. The theme is how to attract voters and generally influence common opinion in favour of the particular candidate, who comes from the area of Dropull but has a wife from the Orthodox Albanian village of Përmet, which is why he is running for Parliament in the particular area. The presence of the Greek consul, and also the mayor of Konitsa,

gives the impression of Greek interference in the election process and Arian, the ex-mayor of Përmet, expresses his discontent and proclaims the difficulty of his position as politician and prominent cadre of the Socialist Party. This, precisely, was denounced in the newspapers on the next day and quite naturally. The presence of the local television channel made matters worse, especially for those who did not wish the event publicised. One of them was myself, obviously, since any hint of involvement in politics on my part, and especially in such a sensitive matter as the Greek minority organisation "Omonoia", would render problematic my communication as researcher with the people in the area. Therefore, the tension created at some point was predictable and then an effort was made by all to de-politicise the atmosphere in some way.

It would be worth commenting on the presence of the Cypriot businessman, whose bond with the area is long-standing and who continues since 1990 his "patriotic" action, empowering the Greek population of the area in all possible ways. Typically, Hristos already knew him, because he had visited his village and, indeed, had suggested to become the godfather of his sister Nertila, acquiring thus one more relation ("koumbaria"). I think of what I wrote some time ago and in a different context, about the multi-functionality, the adjusting and utilitarian nature of this spiritual form of kinship: Hundreds of "koumbaria" took place between Cypriots and "Northern Epirotes" right after the collapse of the Albanian regime, which operated as important networks for the economic and moral strengthening of the local population and also facilitated migration to Cyprus. Such a "koumbaria", forming a moral collective relationship between two families was useful not only for the god-child but the whole

of its family. Thus the massive contracting of such bonds, which started from the Cypriots' interest in this "disadvantaged" part of Greek population, towards which they felt the need to express their patriotic and human solidarity, as fellow-sufferer Greeks outside the borders of the Greek state, on "the edges of Hellenism" as they say, formed a favourable field for what we call "chain migration" and many Greeks from South Albania found themselves in Cyprus.

It is also especially important to emphasise that, whereas in the case of the Greeks this mechanism resulted in the strengthening of the national tie as well as both their formal and essential re-inclusion in the Orthodox community, in the case of the Albanians to which this practice was extended, it apparently did not have merely a religious dimension, as it is connected with the perception that inclusion in the Orthodox Church equals rapprochement with Hellenism, since, according to the dominant perception in Greece, the two concepts are identical.

In any case, the further interesting point of this phenomenon is the transnational character of the "koumbaria" in the context of migration. Its flexibility and capacity for adjustment to the social and political conditions each time is proven in this context, too, as it is used in the framework of transnational networks that are thus formed, once more filling the institutional gaps in the relationship of the migrants' home and host countries. Just like in the inside of the country, more in the past but today, too, to a certain degree, such "alternative social structures" (Nitsiakos 1991:65-94; 1997:111-121) fill the various institutional gaps (configuring grids of clientelist relationships between countryside and city, farmers and urban middle-classes, between the powerful and the oppressed, etc., namely

trans-local, trans-class and even trans-ethnic networks), so in the particular case, too, the networks of "koumbaria" cut across national borders strengthening the phenomenon we term *transnationalism*.

This is why we should not assume that such phenomena are merely survivals from the past and should deal with them as products of adjustments to transitional or generally disorderly situations. "Traditional" customs and attitudes may operate in conditions of modernity not as survivals but as the result of a dynamic adjustment to the new conditions, in the context of which they acquire new structural and functional features, too. The vertical formation of such networks operates, indeed, as a mechanism of conjoining and covering up institutional gaps between local social groups and wider society; in the case of migration, between immigrants and host societies.

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κοινοτάς

TRANSNATIONAL VJOSË

The Mass

It is Sunday morning, 26th of June, All Saints' Day. In the square at Përmet, a brisk walk from the bank of the river Vjosë, in the former cultural centre of the city that has been restored recently to the Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos, prifti Vasil has begun the service. I have heard a great deal about the dispute regarding the use of this place. In the old days here stood the city's central Orthodox Cathedral that the former atheist regime pulled down to build a cultural centre in its place. After the fall of the regime the building was bestowed to the Albanian Orthodox Church and now functions as a temple. The interior has gone through a rudimentary refurbishment in order to accommodate the divine service, basically with the addition of a simple screen, a few icons on the walls and some stands for the chanters. There are also striking photographs of the old church and the city. For those aware of the relevant dispute, the additional symbolism of these photographs is hard to miss. They are meant as a reminder to those who doubt the right of

the Orthodox Church to rebuild the temple on the exact same spot that they are in the wrong. However, quite a few residents are opposed to such a prospect, supporting the view that the place should remain a cultural centre. At the forefront of this group is a well known scholar, the director of the Përmet History Museum, who, as we have learnt, has the full support of the mayor. Both men come from Muslim families.

I think again about religion and its role in the shaping of identities in Albania. More specifically, I reflect on the myth of the Albanians' religious indifference that was cultivated systematically by the former regime, because the division of the Albanian people into various religious groups was troubling the unity and cohesion of the Albanian nation. I am also thinking of the way Hoxha exploited the idea of several forerunners of the Albanian national movement, that *religion in Albania is Albanianism*, in order to formulate an ad hoc nationalism on the basis of Marxist-Leninist ideology. It was, indeed, necessary to undercut the role of religion as a divisive factor for the Albanian nation and, therefore, a present need was projected onto the past, resulting in a national narrative based on the selective utilisation of relevant historical elements, and in the silencing of others that did not suit that scheme. Certainly, the contradictions in the construction of this national myth are numerous and the most characteristic among them is the employment of the myth of Skanderberg as a starting point in the national narrative of the Albanians, a myth that, nevertheless, symbolises Christian resistance against expansive Islam (Misha 2002; Duijzings 2002; Malcolm 2002; Hysa 2008).

Although one could argue that the reactions to the re-opening of the Orthodox church come mostly from people out-

side the Orthodox community and so this is a conflict of religious nature, things seem to be more complicated, as the issue is connected with a wider debate concerning the management of the past itself, as well as the Albanian national identity. If the dogma of raising the Albanian national ideology to the level of religion is to carry on, together with minimising the significance of religious persuasion regarding the formation of national consciousness and identity, emphasis on religious practices of any kind could be an impediment to the hammering of a new national unity, and it could, on the contrary, act disruptively, by inducing deviating behaviours in the various religious groups that could prove hazardous to national affairs. Therefore, and if we also consider the general context of expressed (and historically founded) fears about the role of Orthodoxy, which, as is well-known, tends to identify itself with Hellenism, we understand better that the reactions are less against religious practices as such, than against what the latter might mean in terms of the construction and management of collective identities, always in relation to the grand end: the preservation of a uniform Albanian national identity.

Inside the church there are a few people, mainly women and children. At the chanter-stand Hristos from Kosinë and two girls of the same age are chanting. I detect the same awkwardness as always when I happen to attend a liturgy in Albania. While the young chanters are doing fine, playing their role with considerable ease, the rest of the congregation look as if they have adjusted neither to the principles nor to the practices of partaking in the ritual. The priest himself puts special effort to officiate properly; however, he is betrayed by the lack of both collective tradition and personal experience. Also evident is the

imitation of Greek ways and the strain to adjust certain things to the Albanian language. We should not forget that the establishment of Albanian as the language of the church service occurred only after many difficulties and struggles of the Albanian orthodox, and only at the turn of the 20th century, which means it has not lasted more than half a century, since Hoxha imposed atheism, forbade the practice of religious tasks, and shut down the temples altogether.

Children also partake in the service; it seems that most of them are children living in Greece who have come to spend the summer holidays in their homeland. They stand apart both because of their dress and their manners. They also seem quite used to the formalities of worship and their general comportment reveals considerable ease, which differentiates them from the rest of the congregation. The presence of children like these, who live with their parents in Greece, is very strong in both the cities and the villages. It is very common to hear children playing and speaking in Greek. In fact, as soon as they realise we are Greeks they rush to greet us and talk to us, their joy evident for doing so. Through these kids, as well as through the migrants who are here for various reasons, the presence of Greece is strongly felt.

Waters, borders, memories

When the service was over we took off with Hristo for the Këlcyrë bazaar. The road continues from Përmet along the river Vjosë (Aos). While driving I keep thinking of this river. Springing from somewhere around Metsovo, as the river Bëiasa of the

Vlachs (in fact, one of the Vlach villages has been named after it; this village, Bëiasa in Vlach and Vovoussa in Greek, is built on the riversides and is thus divided in two neighbourhoods connected to each other with a beautiful stone bridge), it passes from the edge of Konitsa where there is another magnificent bridge, runs through its lowlands to join, close to the Greek-Albanian border, the rivers Voidomates coming from Zagori and Sarantaporos from Grammos, then crosses the border to Albania. Here it continues its route along the foot of mount Nemërçka until Këlcyrë and enters the latter's narrow passages (Gryka e Këlcyrës) to emerge again close to Tepelenë, where it joins the river Drinos coming from Dropull, and finally flows into the Adriatic Sea. It is a river with its own special ecosystem, but it is also a "multicultural" river. During its passage it hears different languages, sees different customs, but shapes in its own way the differences into a unity. In music, for example, this unity is quite evident. It is an interesting task to go through the cities and villages built on and around Vjosë to listen to their different music. This is a working hypothesis we have been discussing with Albanian colleagues, preparing a common project of recordings aiming at a comparative approach: We have named it "Musics of Aaos" and every time I utter these words I feel inundated by Vlach "syn-gathistoi" (couple-dances), "gaidas" (bagpipes) from Mastorochoria, "kangelia" dance tunes from Kolonjë and Përmet, all blended in a divine harmony, most becoming the river...

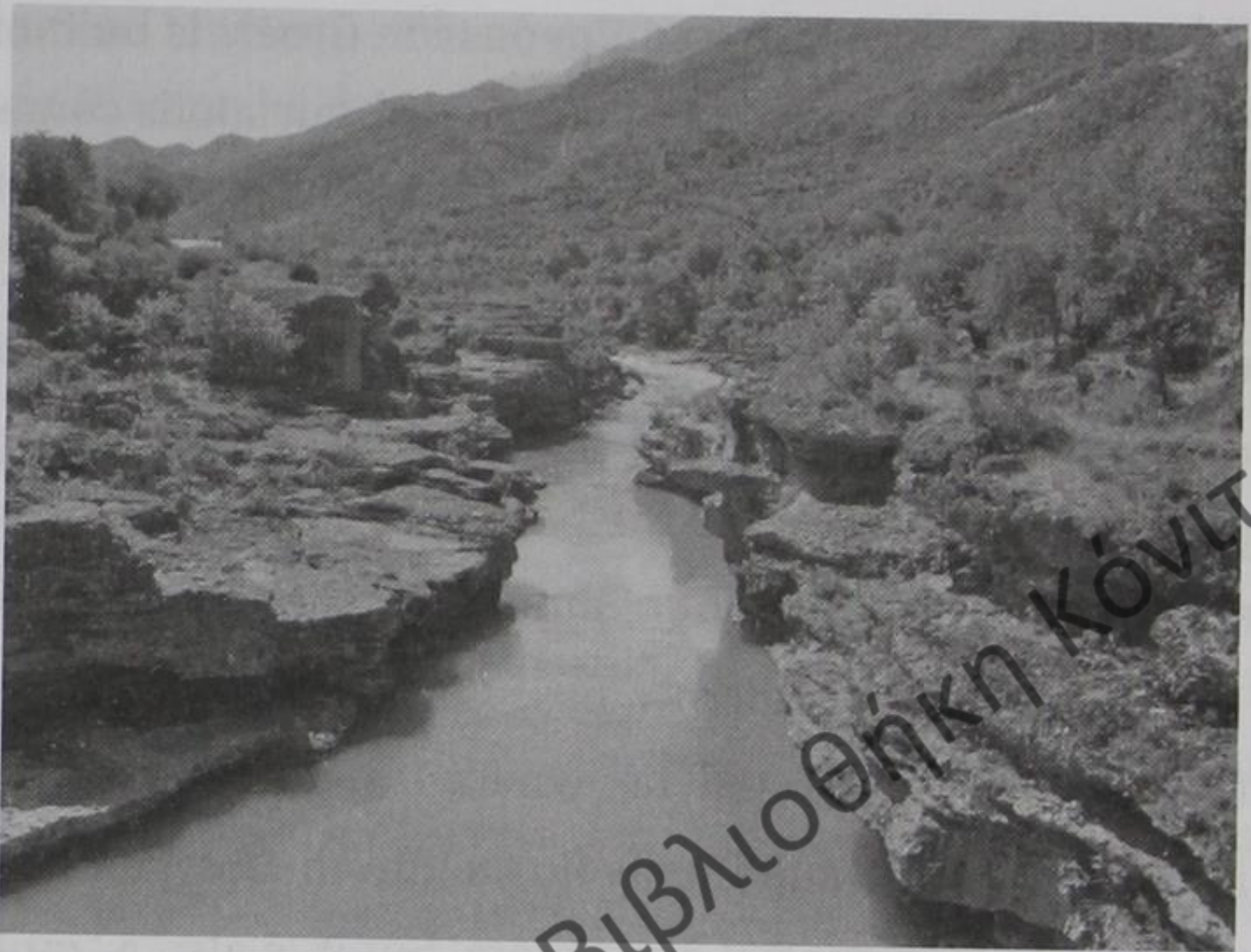


Figure 19. The river Vjosë in Albania

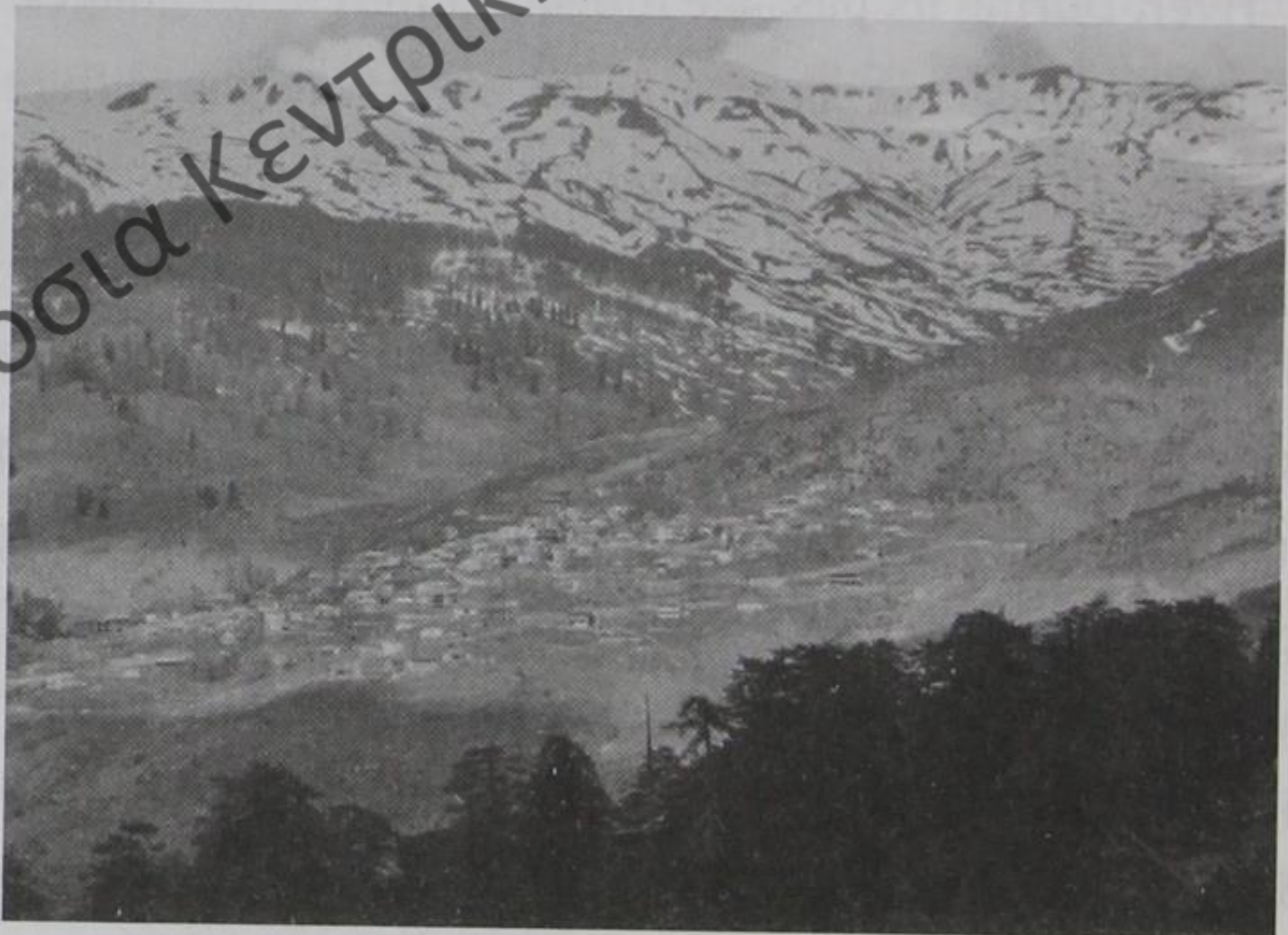


Figure 20. Aetomilitsa on the eastern slopes of mount Grammos

I think of the river as a road; as a road of people and cultures. As a road intercepting the borders marked by political powers. As a road that unites and bridges over differences. Besides, the actual roads have been designed to trace its lead. I'm also thinking of the transhumant pastoralists who follow the river's course descending from the mountains in the winter and vice-versa. One meets them in the fall and springtime when they go down and up mount Grammos, coming from the flatlands and the coasts of the country. I, too, met them recently, next to the river, as they were about to cross it and pass through Nemërçka on their way to Sarandë. But I also met them on the meadows of Grammos next to the Gizdova dragon lake, which is located right on the border. I remember when a few years ago I ate bread together with an Albanian shepherd right next to the lake.

However, I also remember my awe looking across towards Albania, when as a child I used to take my father's flocks up to the mountaintops from where the Albanian villages were clearly visible. Neither they nor we dared approach the border. Inside my mind the Albanians had taken the form of a very unusual and exotic people. I would hear stories from older folk admitting to have stricken up conversation with Albanians on the border and they gave me the chills. Some would tell stories of conversations from afar with Vlach shepherds. Many of my fellow villagers speak Albanian, having spent many years in Albania as political refugees after the civil war. Quite a few of my friends were born in Albania. We used to call these people "Albanians", until the real Albanians came after 1990, and all that has changed ever since.

I also recall how puzzled I used to be by these issues, in all my childish naivety. Why should people be divided like this?

How is it possible for people who speak the same language to belong to different states?

My grandmother's stories about Korçë also spring to mind. Korçë was the commercial centre of our area, the bazaar. There was a path crossing Grammos that led directly to Korçë via the village of Arrëz. I am thinking of all this and I feel very emotional that now I am able to interpret things, to explain whatever used to feel odd or irrational. I also feel vindicated in a sense, for choosing the particular field of study. Still I am continuously tormented by the search for balance between my feelings and my tendency to theorise about various situations. How can one control his emotional world without being reduced to a distant observer and, on the other hand, analyse his lived experience theoretically without being emotionally emaciated?

The waters carry me along and take me to their springs. Via Sarantaporos I ascend onto the headsprings of Grammos. The waters are also used to define the national boundary line in the mountains. A ridge becomes a border and, as a general rule, areas are separated administratively or politically according to the flow of the waters. Whatever lays on the east of the Grammos ridge is Greece, on its west is Albania. I think of the Gizdova dragon lake next to the borderline, on the side of Greece. To the awe inspired by all the myths, legends and traditions this lake is entwined with, in the collective memory of the local people, now is added the dangerousness of the border. A haunted lake on the national border; the dragon (kind of large lizard) living in the lake and haunting it does not merely possess this place. In a way, it protects the homeland. The way in which the haunter-dragon is transformed from protector of a locality to protector of a national homeland, after the demarcation and

imposition of the national border, is particularly interesting. The haunter has been “nationalised”. According to my village’s oral tradition, once, when the Albanians attempted to bring the lake to their own territory, i.e. to move it a few metres to the west, they all drowned. The haunter punished them (Nitsiakos 2003d; Nitsiakos and Arapoglou 2004).

For such is the dynamic of local traditions, of myths: they adjust to new situations, incorporate new ideologies and become the imprint of the latter’s internalisation by the local communities. What was before merely a natural-local boundary is politicised as it becomes a national border. With time, local populations do not merely internalise it as such; they experience it in practice as a prohibition. The stock breeders, for example, who in the old days used to spend the winter at Vlore or Sarandë, simply cannot do that anymore, because these are now territories of another nation. The relations between the lands on both sides of the ridge will be interrupted in an absolute and particularly violent way after the enforcement of the communist regime in Albania and all contact will be strictly forbidden, until the collapse of this regime in 1990. Then the re-activation of the old relations takes place in the way we know and, of course, these relations are now transnational and not inter-local, inter-communal or trans-ethnic, as they used to be before the national borders were set.

The idea of transformation of inter-local relations into transnational relations, of inter-local networks into transnational ones, concerns me greatly. The areas of Konitsa and Përmet provide an excellent example for study. The deeper knowledge of things leads always to new questions and speculations.

With such thoughts, we arrive at the entrance of the city of Këlshyrë.

At Këlshyrë's bazaar

We meet people, whole families dressed in their finest, on horses fully "armed" as if going to a feast, on their way to the area where the bazaar takes place. At the city entrance, on the left side of the road, a new mosque stands dominant, but its most impressive aspect is its abandonment and neglect. Hristos comments: "look how its walls have cracked; not even the earth will accept it". Indeed, although new, it has already begun to collapse. Apparently nobody is taking care of it and it is doubtful whether it is ever used, a fact that surprises me, knowing that in the old days the Muslim presence was strong in the area of Këlshyrë and the city itself was an important centre of Bektashism (Zengin 2005; Hasluck 2005; Clayer 2005 and 2005b).

The bazaar takes place in the commercial heart of the city, while the animal market, which I find most impressive, is at the edge of the city, on the way out towards Tepelenë. Indeed, it brings to mind images from Greece from the 1950s and 1960s and scenes like those we find in the accounts of foreign travellers in the Balkans in the beginnings of the 20th century. Animals of all kinds brought here from inland await their buyer. The presence of gypsy horse-merchants is strong; this profession is almost extinct in Greece. Next to the small herds or the individual animals, groups of mostly men and some women seem to be enjoying the coming together and the general give and take of the bazaar. Observing the products on sale and the methods of

transaction, one can make assumptions about the state of the local and the national economy in Albania. Discussing them here is not timely though, nor central to my quest. I am more interested in the social and cultural dimensions of the bazaar; the exhibition of all these products, that represent different categories of population and different areas, is a cultural display. My attention is drawn to the elderly women who have come down from their villages to sell a few eggs, wild plums, apples, or other products of the so-called “gathering” economy, such as mountain-tea, oregano, herbs etc. I always buy something from these women, delaying the transaction in order to enjoy looking at them, focusing on their faces. This time I buy a few tufts of the yellow mountain-flower I had seen for the first time in Plikati, a flower called both there and here “lule e malit” (flower of the mountain).



Figure 21. Këlshyrë: The new symbols

The presence of emigrants to Greece is evident everywhere in the bazaar. It is not hard to spot them and they are quite a few. Most of them are young. These people stand out because of their clothes (generally of better quality) and their manners. One immediately notices their confident manner but also certain haughtiness and affectation that are more intense when they are in their cars, most of which carry Greek license-plates. When these cars are in motion it is always in high speed in order to draw attention and when they are parked their owners sit inside them for hours with the windows down and the music blasting. This tendency for showing off their financial and social differentiation is reminiscent of Greek emigrants returning to their villages. In fact, it goes to show, that just like we used to call Greek emigrants "Americans", "Germans", etc, according to their respective country of emigration, here they call these people "Grek". I hear that, as expected, they are very eligible for marriage. Besides, every young girl dreams of going to Greece, and marriage is a good and safe way to achieve that. It is a common phenomenon among young migrants to get married in order to live with their wives in Greece. In fact, in the summer months many such marriages take place, as the migrants return for their vacations. All this mobility can be placed within the context of the new transnational field that is being developed, as immigrants are being legally recognised in Greece and, having solved their bread-winning problems, are being reconnected with their home country in various ways.

Josif, Tsiomi and the other transmigrants

We left Këlshyrë at noon. In the early afternoon we visited the village Petran. It is built on the banks of Vjosë, It is crossed by the main road leading from the borders of Albania and Greece to Përmet and is the base of the municipality of the same name, located between the municipalities of Çarçovë and Përmet. We have barely parked our car in the centre of the village, when I hear a gentleman at the café by the road calling my name. It is Josif, whom I have known almost a year now. I had met him the previous year in the guest house in Bënjë, where my friends and I had had a great time together. Josif was with his music group on their way to a wedding in the village where they would play and we had called him to play a little something for us, too. That little something had lasted quite a few hours of singing and dancing. Josif is a very good clarinettist. He has been playing the clarinet professionally from a young age. We are warmly welcomed by him and his friends at their table where they are drinking raki and he orders some for us too.

Josif and his family live permanently in Greece, in Akrata, since the early 1990s. His Greek is flawless and he unfalteringly declares his love for the country that offered them work and bread as he likes to put it. The incidents he narrates from his experience of migration sound so familiar to me after all the interviews I have conducted, they seem stereotypical. Just like the "story" I keep hearing here in the south, from mostly Orthodox Albanians, that they are of Greek origin. Josif says that he comes from the Greek village Roubates (Meropi) in Pogoni. Naturally, following the general rule, he also declares himself to be a "Northern Epirote". It is also interesting that he is actively in-

volved in the electoral campaign supporting the candidate of the Union for Human Rights Party – “Omonoia”.

Josif is a most typical case of “transnational migrant” or “transmigrant”, since he travels often from Greece to Albania and vice versa and is employed in both countries. In Greece he works in the construction industry but also as a musician, while in Albania he works exclusively as a musician, coming for weddings or other social and cultural events. In the past few years he has been spending his summers almost entirely in Albania, provided that there is work there, and he recently built for himself a new house in the village. He speaks proudly of his recently released CD album and runs to his house to bring it. The CD, titled “*çupë nga Përmeti*” (girls from Përmet), includes traditional and contemporary (neodemotic) songs and tunes from the region. That same evening, he informs us, he is going to play at a wedding in Përmet, emphasising the fact that people keep inviting him to weddings and that this gives him the opportunity to be in Albania frequently.

While Josif is away we start a conversation with another regular at the café, Diamanti, who also speaks Greek perfectly. He also lives permanently in Aigio, works in construction and, as he says proudly and not without humour, has been working for quite a few years in tiling, as a collaborator to his own son, a building contractor. This enables him to visit his homeland frequently, look after his house and tend to his vineyard. Thus, he too leads a life between the two countries and agrees with Josif that all the first-generation immigrants will come back to spend their old days in their home, but as far as their children are concerned, they think it rather unlikely that they return. He presents himself also as a “Northern Epirote” and Greek by origin.

He does not remember whether his grandfather's village was Plavali (Agia Varvara), or Isvoros (Amarantos) in Konitsa, but he was Greek. At any rate, like Josif, he learned his Greek in Greece as an immigrant.

Walking along the main road, where quite a few restaurants have sprung up in recent years, I have come across many emigrants to Greece, like I did today. I could classify them into four categories: the first comprises middle-aged people who divide their time between Greece and Albania, working in both countries; the second middle-aged people who come back mostly during the summer, for the upkeep of their houses and their small-scale farming; in the third category belong the young who come either for a short break or to tend to some family affair; finally, the fourth category comprises those who have lived for some years in Greece and are now settled here, without, however, having abandoned the idea of a new departure. Most of them are looking for a way to move back and forth between the two countries. At any rate, such mobility is in fact shaping a transnational landscape, known in the literature of anthropology and sociology as "transnational space".

Such is the case of Thoma, or Tsiomi, as he is also known in the area. Tsiomi now lives in his village, Badëlonjë, on the far side of the river, some eight kilometres before Përmet. This is a village I visited last year. It has two neighbourhoods. The upper side is where the Albanians live, while the lower side is inhabited by Vlachs. The latter are settlers; according to information I have and which remains to be verified, in the old days this neighbourhood was inhabited by Albanian Muslims. A wooden bridge leads to the village, as is the case with the rest of the villages on this side of the river. I leave the jeep by the bridge,

where a national resistance monument stands, bitterly neglected though, and run down. This is the fate of all the monuments erected by the old regime. After the attacks of vandalism that followed the collapse of the regime, these monuments were abandoned at the mercy of the elements. And since they are placed in central positions within organised space, such as major crossroads and entrances to settlements, they reinforce the sense of decadence and desolation the place evokes. On the other hand, the fact that small sanctuaries have started to spring up on the roads is rather characteristic. After all, it was the places of such sanctuaries that the regime had tried to overpower with its own symbols, in an effort to impose "socialist secularisation".

After crossing the bridge we take the way up to the village. At the outskirts of the community, next to a fountain, we meet a villager who is keen to show us the house we are looking for. Tsiomi lives in the upper neighbourhood, in an old house made of stone, with a large gate leading to a beautiful stone-laid courtyard. He kindly welcomes us at the gate and leads us to the living room where his wife appears after a while. We start talking. Although his Greek is not that good he shows a considerable eagerness to communicate with us and to tell us whatever it is we would like to know. We ask him about his experience as an immigrant in Greece. This story also sounds familiar. I feel what is called in biographical method "saturation effect" (Ferraroti 1981). The same old matter, the same personal stories and narratives, again and again, repeated with such regularity that they are rendered stereotypical. As so many of his compatriots, Tsiomi also lived in Greece for a number of years, working in agriculture and moving from place to place; from Epirus to

Agrinio, from there to the Peloponnese and going as far as Crete. He narrates his adventures crossing the border, his ordeals with taxi drivers and various bosses in Greece. Despite all that, he still has good things to say about our country and about the people in general, he does not hesitate to express, clearly honestly, his love of Greece, and tells us that he would like to be able to go to Greece every now and then and work, to supplement his meagre income. For the time being, he works as a secretary in the municipality and during the electoral campaign he is also employed by the office of the parliamentary candidate G. Loulemes. This last fact could be indicative of his political affiliation, but one should also consider both its financial side and the clientelist relations that are formed when political support is exchanged with the securing of visas. Although this particular Albanian citizen seems sincere, given the conditions in this country, it is difficult to form definite opinions on such matters. At any rate, all those who express their support for the Omonoia party and present themselves as Greeks or as friends of Greece, recommend Tsiomi as one of the most trustworthy people in this context.

Tsiomi talks to us about his brother who is in Greece, in Volos. His name is Dhoska but in Greece he uses the name Odiseas. He lives there permanently and they communicate with each other frequently. In fact, Tsiomi gives us his brother's phone number in case we wish to meet him. The following day, at the guest house, when I asked Apostol, the hostel owner, about "Odiseas", he was quick to make a general comment about this "habit" of the Albanians to change their names while in Greece. He was scathingly sarcastic especially about the Muslims, who all suddenly became Hristos and Maria... "The priest

who baptises them should throw on them boiling-hot oil”, he adds sarcastically. “They become Hristos and Maria and then I go to Greece and they call me a Muslim; what can I say...”, Apostol continues, but then becomes serious and concludes his commentary in a condescending way: “But what can people do? They need work and they lie...”.

We stayed in the house for about three hours, in the formal living room with the old furniture, the carpets on the floor and the cheap frames on the walls. Tsiomi's wife goes in and out, bringing different treats every time. She starts with raki for the men, and liqueur for the lady of the group. Next, she serves fruit preserve, Turkish delights, orange juice, etc. She is a retired school-teacher who has never been to Greece. They have two daughters. One is married in Tirana and the other engaged and living in the village, for the time being. Today she is away in Përmet.

We leave Tsiomi's house around ten at night. It is dark already but the moon is not out yet; since there are no electric lights in the village streets, the dark is deep. Without a single torchlight between us, we advance with much difficulty. When we worry about our way we switch on a mobile phone and use the little light it produces to make out our surrounding. The total silence of the night is interrupted every now and then by dogs howling, provoked by our presence in their territory.

The sanctuary placed on the edge of the river and just before the bridge reveals one of its functions; it provides comfort to the passer by, it is a sign in his route and a means of taming the landscape. As soon as we reach it we realise we are on the right track and close to the bridge. We are all relieved. I can't help but think how crucial these holy landmarks must have

been in the organisation and function of space for the muleteers and travellers in the past, in times when conditions were very difficult, because of the absence of modern infrastructure and means, but also because of the prevailing insecurity. A candle, slowly burning in the wilderness, is not only a kind of road sign like the ancient *Hermae* (Herme pillars), it can also function as a small light-house, offering a sense of familiarity in unknown places, and a feeling of peacefulness amidst the wildness of nature.

Arriving at the place we had left the car, despite our tiredness, we can not resist the temptation to drop by Përmet to have a look at the wedding that was taking place there, where Josif had told us he would be playing his clarinet.

The bride's dance

In the centre of Përmet, as soon as we cross the large bridge that leads to the square, we hear clarinets from the grill house *Elena* on the left of the street. I still remember the impression the sign by the entrance of the restaurant had made on me when I had first visited Përmet: *Psistarja Elena*. ("Psistaria" is grill-house in Greek) The importing of professional terminology from Greece, especially in the food and entertainment sectors, is happening on a mass scale in Albania. This phenomenon is connected, naturally, to migration and marks the cultural influence of Greece on this country, a consequence of the large wave of migration and the general financial dependence of Albania on our country. We approach the entrance of the restaurant to see what exactly is happening inside, when I start a conversation with some teenagers that happened to stand there.

Soon a forty year-old man approaches me, dressed in a beige suit, brown shirt and tie and asks me if I am Greek. Immediately he invites me to come in with my friends to celebrate with them. In the meantime, he explains that he is the groom's brother, his name is Elia Proko and lives in Greece years now. Elia speaks perfect Greek; in fact he speaks it with a Thessalian accent that is very familiar to me. He tells me that he lives and works in Vriotopos in the province of Tirnavos, a village just four kilometres away from Rodia, where I have grown up myself. When I tell him about that he shows even greater enthusiasm for this chance meeting. He tells me that he keeps a tavern in Vriotopos, and we start mentioning names of old friends and schoolmates from the Ampelonas High School, and he knows them all well.



Figure 22. Wedding in the Përmet region

After the greetings and the wishes to the newlyweds and their close family, Elia insists that we sit at a table in the front, as guests of honour, but I tell him we had rather sit at the back, more discreetly. As soon as we settle down, his other brothers, the groom and the middle one (who also lives with his family in Ampelonas) come along to make us feel more comfortable and welcome. Elia's wife and his middle brother with his wife sat with us for a while. The topic of discussion was set early on: Greece and the treatment of Albanian immigrants who live there. While they seem perfectly adjusted and satisfied with their situation in Greece, they, especially the women, do not hesitate to criticise the attitude of the Greeks towards the Albanians. Elia's wife complains about the way she is treated by the men because she works in her husband's tavern; "many of them see me as a prostitute, excuse my language", she says characteristically.

Soon their children come over to greet us. Elia's two children are perfectly "hellenised". Their manners and their way of speaking remind me strongly of my own childhood. His son, Dimitris, sits with us for quite a while. He tells us that while they do speak the Albanian language they do not know how to write it. He is attending a State Technical School in Larissa and his sister is a Lyceum (secondary school) student. They have brought with them a friend of his sister from Vryotopos. At the table of young members of the family, one rarely hears Albanian phrases; the main language of conversation is Greek. Even the parents address their children in Greek; I assume they do this because of our presence. I ask about that and the answer I get is that they use both languages at home. In fact, they tell me that,

while the parents speak between them in Albanian, they tend to speak to their children mostly in Greek.

The outside space of the tavern, where the celebration is taking place, is extremely beautiful. The orchestra (clarinet, accordion, drums, tambourine, and a singer) are on the bandstand by the entrance. Exactly opposite the orchestra are seated the bride and groom, with his parents on one side of the table, while the chairs on the other side are still empty, set for the bride's relatives who, as the custom dictates, will be coming later. In other words, the exact opposite of what takes place on the eve of the wedding, when the celebration is organised by the bride's family and the relatives of the groom arrive late and stay for two or three hours only.

The orchestra has been playing various tunes for some time now, a wide spectrum of music extending from the European waltz to the local dance rhythms. The serving of the food has also begun, and a rich variety of assortments arrive at the table, mainly meat and salads. Any time now people will start getting up to dance. Then the bride's entourage arrives, they greet ceremoniously the groom's family and take their designated seats. The highest moment of the wedding party comes when the bride and the groom with the in-laws get up to dance. The orchestra starts with the familiar wedding tune, a "syrtos" dance from Përmet in variations that keep alternating for a long time, while the family dance with the bride. The bride and groom lead the first dance, followed by their relatives in order of degree of kinship. One by one, they are all held briefly by the bride in order to lead the dance. While they dance they ceremoniously hold a paper banknote between the fingers of their right hand, for all to see, which they give to the bride when they

leave. She collects them all and ceremoniously holds them in her hand during the dance. The agreement with the musicians this time was that all the money offered to the bride would go to them as a fee, as Josif, the clarinettist himself, told us.

Elia comes to invite us to dance with the family. To my objection that we should dance only after the family, he retorts that, tonight, we too are family! I end up leading the dance like the rest of the family, a dance from Pogoni, which is common to both sides of the border, and I treat the bride with my offering as the custom dictates. I will never forget the thrill. It has to do both with the honour bestowed on me, and with living the experience of a practice that unites us with these people, despite the nationalist ideologies which intently seek to bring out the things that divide us, with disputes about the origins of cultural traits we share in common. I believe that scholars should cease to preoccupy themselves with issues such as the "national" origin of common cultural practices and waste their time with arguments of doubtful scientific value concerning questions of who borrowed or "stole" from whom, in the context of an ideologically charged obsession with national superiority; they should, instead, examine and interpret the reality of the common cultural practice itself, on the basis of a historical, comparative approach, freed from the familiar ethnocentrism and the selective use of the past.

The celebration is now in full swing, as the main ceremonial part is nearly over, and guests join the dance freely. Greek dances, not just the traditional folk ones but also popular ones such as zeibekikos, "syrto-tsifteteli", etc. come first in their requests. Emigrants from Greece are identifiable not only by their attire and manners, but by their requests for Greek songs. The

musicians themselves seem to have an ample Greek repertory. Around 3 a.m., feeling tired from the wanderings of the day and from the partying, we make a move to leave. When I tell Elia, instead of an answer I receive a forceful invitation to more dancing. He is now dragging me in such a way that I find it hard to react. Before he requests the song I want, he takes the microphone to explain to the guests who I am, adding that it is a great honour for him and his family that a group of friends from Greece are present at his brother's wedding party. My request is my favourite *Leskoviko*, a song praising the city of Leskovik. Josif gives his best self and very soon I am swept off my feet. I find it hard to describe what happened next. This dance is quite speedy, and, towards the end, one can bring it to a climax leading the clarinet; at this point he breaks out of the circle and dances at its centre, an introvert cyclical dancing similar to the Vlach "berati" of Pindos in its finish, but, furthermore, this dance provides the conditions for a sublime self concentration, a communicating with the beyond and the inner self at the same time. And when the rhythm slows down, and the fast movement is followed by a relaxation of both body and soul, the dance recalls those of the twirling Dervishes.

As the rhythm slows down and I gesture to Josif to end it, Elia brings his wife to dance an "antikristos" (face to face) dance with me. The clarinet turns to more oriental tunes, adjusted to the Balkan sounds. Elia's hospitality is completed with the greatest honour one could ever offer a stranger. He brings discretely the bride, too, to dance with me. As the groom's older brother with the "general command" in the party, he is perfectly entitled to do so. The bride has changed clothes. She is now wearing of a long purple dress. Initially I feel awkward, as a cir-

cle of relatives is forming around us clapping their hands and the musicians are playing something like a "karsilamas". Only later, when departing, I realise what has happened at the party and I start thinking about it. I recall all those descriptions and reports of the customs of Albanian hospitality. I recall that a guest in the house of an Albanian is an almost holy person and under the host's protection. That is how Elia made me feel while at the wedding celebration.

During the quieter moments of the wedding feast we talked a lot with Elia. His is a characteristic case of a successful emigrant, both financially and socially. He seems completely integrated in his local host community and well adjusted to Greek everyday life. He speaks enthusiastically about his tavern and also about the respect of the people in the wider area. He refers to important men, especially politicians, who are not only customers but friends. Recently he travelled to Përmet together with the mayor of Larissa, to initiate an inter-municipal collaboration between the two cities. Elia speaks of his vision for Përmet as well. He wants to help his home-town develop. With his help, his younger brother, who is getting married today, has opened a small factory producing plastic bottles and has decided to stay permanently in Albania. Their mother, who has been living all these years with them in Greece has joined him. Elia tells me that the next day he will go to Qilarisht, their village, which is located a few kilometres across Përmet, to pay his respects to his father's grave, who passed away a year ago. He is a man who honours his origin and presents an image of an honest family man, who does not care only about himself but also about the common good.

I next saw Elia a couple of days later in Çarçovë, as they were leaving for Greece. I was quite impressed by their eagerness to go. The children could hardly hide their joy for returning to Greece, while the women told me emphatically that they are leaving because they can't stand it anymore here in Albania...

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

FRASHËRI: VLACH OR BEKTASHI?

I have known about Frashëri since I was a small child. Our own Vlachs call Arvanite-Vlachs "Fërshirots"; the term has been rendered into Greek as Farser(i)otes. When I asked my family why they called them this, they told me it was because they originally came from Frashëri, Albania. Therefore, together with Korçë, Bitola and Vlore, Frashëri has always occupied a special place in my childhood imagination, as well as in the symbolic geography of the Vlach world that has been constructed through various narratives.

The very first moment I met Gjergj and he told me he came from Frashëri, I asked him to take me there. And so, early in the morning on June 27, we passed by Kosinë and took Gjergj and his son Qitso (Hristo) with us to go to Frashëri together.

We take the main road leading to Këlshyrë and Tepelenë. Before we reach the village Piskovë, on the road turning right, there is a large sign informing us about the Hotovë National Park, which we have to cross to get to Frashëri. The dirt road goes parallel to the river Lemnicë and passes through small villages, which seem demographically decimated. The first village

we pass through is Kreshovë, a new village, whose inhabitants came down from the old village of the same name near Frashëri. A little further up, as the road climbs the mountain, on the left side of the road we see the village Alipostivan: the name sounds familiar to me. When Gjergj tells us about an important *tekke* in that village, I remember F. Hasluck mentioning it in his book *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*. He especially mentions a saint buried there, a fact which had made this particular *tekke* an important pilgrimage site for the Bektashis in the past (2004:713). The sign placed recently on the road shows that this particular holy place has been reinstated as a pilgrimage destination.

It is possible to observe the effort to reinstate holy places, both Christian and Muslim, on both sides of the road. The mixed religious identity of the region is clearly inscribed on this landscape of alternating sacred places and monuments: churches and *tekkes*, Christian sanctuaries and Muslim *tourbes* are almost side by side. The economic structures of the past and even the political history of the country are also tangibly inscribed on the landscape. Whether on flat land or mountain foot, the marks of the old regime are evident, both in the structure of the fields and in the infrastructures of the cooperatives, now left in ruin and desolation. I am particularly impressed by the sight of large abandoned warehouses on the edge of the settlements, also by various military establishments, which, together with concrete bunkers invoke the ludicrousness of a military regime, which had demonised its neighbours and always, everywhere invented enemies threatening both the socialist achievements and the territorial integrity of the country.

As we climb on the mountainous areas we perceive the desolation of the place, as well as traces of social and economic structures previous to the communist regime. Further above Alipostivan there is a small village on the left-hand side of the road; it is called Rabon. There is an imposing stone house there, which, Gjergj tells us, used to belong to a great family of Muslim landowners named Meço. Even further up the road we come across the Christian village Odriçan, now inhabited by Muslims who were settled here during the communist regime, as part of the latter's project of populations relocation. On a high pass on the mountain, next to a big precipice, we come across ruined settlements, with traces of threshing floors and sheepfolds: it is the ruined village of Komencka.

We slowly enter the national park. We stop at the guardhouse, where we are welcomed by the only guard there. He offers us *raki*, walnuts, wild honey and cold water. We stay and speak with him for some time and then we take the road sloping down to Frashëri. As we are descending, I suddenly see the settlement amidst a sublime landscape that takes my breath away. It reminds me a lot of the landscape around Voskopojë, and then again I perceive once more the severe marks of the regime, especially in the artificial lake near the settlement and in the "socialist landscape" around it: irrigation and reforestation works. Although the settlement looks just like an old and abandoned village, one gets the impression that something important used to take place here in the past. In the surrounding mountains I recognise the familiar cultural landscape of the Vlachs, shaped by transhumant pastoralism.

Gjergj shows us around the neighbourhoods of Frashëri and explains how they used to be when Frashëri was thriving. The

Muslim quarter is on the one side, the Christian on the other. He uses these terms referring us back to the history of the *millet*. I let him narrate the story in his own way. He talks about his childhood and his work as a teacher in the school of Frashëri, in the times of Hoxha. This school now stands deserted at the edge of the settlement; its present condition denotes abandonment but its size indicates past prosperity. On the left side of the road we see an impressive building with marble busts in the courtyard; this building, too, is abandoned. It is the house of the Frashëri brothers, leading figures in the Albanian national movement, which has been turned into a museum of national history. The door is locked, but many of the windows are broken. Gjergj speaks of the Frashëri brothers with respect and pride. He especially mentions Abdul and Naim and is very happy when I tell him I know of them and I have actually read texts by the latter. We agree to visit the house-museum; but first we will visit the *tekke* situated on the right-hand side of the road, at a short distance, on top of a small hill.

We leave the car by the roadside and walk to the *tekke*. This, too, is one of the important monuments of Albanian national history. As we enter, I look with awe at the plaque informing the public that this is where the second most important meeting of the *Relindja Kombëtare Shqiptare* (Albanian National Renaissance) took place, after the constitutive assembly of Prizren in 1878. I muster my little knowledge of history on this matter: whatever I know does not really help me understand the connection between Bektashism and Albanian nationalism. How can a Bektashi *tekke* have been turned into a place of national memory, a historical monument for Albanians? I know that the Frashëri brothers are considered national heroes here in Alba-

nia, and that Naim Frashëri is also a national poet, but I never suspected the relationship of Bektashism and Albanian nationalism as a whole. This sign triggers off my interest. Gjergj's behaviour multiplies my questions and fuels my curiosity: he is an Orthodox Christian, and yet he seems happy to be in this place; I find this confusing. His son Hristo seems to distance himself more, and is rather cautious. Sometimes he even expresses his difficulty to come to terms with what we see there.

At the entrance we are welcomed by the guard of the *tekke*, a middle-aged man who seems very glad to see us. He is eager to answer all our questions, although he is completely ignorant about all religious matters. When I ask him about Bektashism, about what is special about this faith, all he can come up with is: "God is the same for everybody". He shows us around, explaining that the *tekke* is an important national and religious monument and for this reason it is now undergoing works of restoration and reconstruction. After a tour in the inside of the *tekke* he takes us to the *turbes* where important *babas* (holy men) are buried. One of them is *baba* Alush, who had helped Abdul Frashëri when he came to the South, after Prizren, to raise the population in support of the Albanian national movement.

The *turbes* are sacred places where the faithful worship when they visit the *tekke*. On the tombs of the *babas*, covered in green fabric, there are photographs of them together with some biographical information and plastic flowers of many colours. There is a stone bench running around the wall covered with animal fleeces for the pilgrims to sit on. We leave our shoes outside the door and we enter the two *turbes*: we light candles there.

While we are in the second and larger *turbe* with the tombs of two *babas*, a terrible storm breaks out: thick hail, falling on the tin roof, making a deafening, terrifying noise. This, together with lightning and thunder, creates the impression of a wrathful outburst of nature. I turn to Hristo and ask him, tongue in cheek, if God is punishing us for lighting candles in a *turbe*... He is being serious when he answers: "No, because we didn't mean to worship."

We are still in the *turbe*, kept inside by the storm – a little scared, I have to admit – when Gjergj begins to sing a wonderful, heroic song, urging us to accompany him singing the bass drone called *ison*. He stops to explain that this is a song praising the national activities of the brothers Frashëri and he resumes his song. The guard and I are droning the *ison*. In this chaos Gjergj's song sounds like an incantation. He seems to be carried away, while his son casts him bewildered looks. I think about Hristo and how different he is from his father; this is probably a result of his education and socialisation in a Greek Orthodox boarding school. Hristo belongs to a new kind of Albanian, formed in post-communist era conditions and, more specifically, by ideological apparatuses established by various institutions and agencies in and out of the country.

We spend about an hour in the *turbe* – that's how long the storm lasted – then we take leave of the guard, promising to return there on the 5th of September for the religious festival of the *tekke*, and we direct ourselves to the house of the Frashëri brothers. In the forecourt the busts of the three brothers, Abdul, Naim, and Sami, look forlorn in the wet, sullen, overcast day. The door is locked, but the building is leaking through the broken window-panes. There is no greater indication of the crisis

this country is going through than the abandonment and disrespect of institutions related to national memory, like this museum. Understandably, the citizens themselves may destroy symbols of the recently collapsed regime, but this house is a national symbol, unrelated to the regime, although the latter, in its own way, did adjust it to its own perspective of the national past and incorporated it in its own national narrative.

The museum keys are kept at a villager's house, so we send word to him and he comes to open it for us. The sight of the interior causes an even greater lump in my throat. A large part of the museum's exhibits – anything that was of any value – has been stolen; the glass cases are destroyed. There are papers, posters, and old photographs thrown down on the floor. There are some paintings left on the walls, with themes from the national struggles of the Albanian people. There are still some glass cases left standing, but in imminent danger of collapse, with photographs and texts about the life and activity of the Frashëri brothers. There is constant reference to a heroic Albanian era, to the national renaissance, to a glorious past which seems to be very distant from the misery of the present times. Broken glass, papers and rubbish on the floor, spiders' webs all over the place, exhibits in an imperiled state due to neglect and to the elements of nature, too, since many windows are broken. The rugs and shag carpets at the entrance of the living room and the rest of the everyday objects of the family, exhibited in one of the rooms, bring to mind the past prosperity of the ruling class which has given important intellectuals to the Albanian nation, like the Frashëri family; they also make the contrast between past and present even more poignant.

This picture is completed by the present conditions in the once prosperous town of Frashëri itself. No more than ten houses are now inhabited in the village – all that remains from the old thriving Balkan town it once was. All the young people who are here at the moment have either come for the summer holidays or to carry out work in their paternal homes before they go back to the countries where they have emigrated. The school is closed down; the only cafe in the village is not open today. The incessant rain makes the place look even more melancholy, enhancing the picture of abandonment and desolation. I am very disappointed and saddened. Closing my eyes I can hear the galloping of horses, I can hear voices and songs in a thousand languages and dialects, I can hear the Vlach muleteers shouting “tuarna frate,” and Naim reciting his heroic poems. When I return from my reverie, I meet Gjergj’s sad eyes; there is an unfathomable question in his look...

We barely speak as we leave the place. The question “why?” is hanging over us again. Personally, I find it very difficult to look back. I try to convince myself that next time, when I return for the religious festival, it will not be that hard...

The festival

On September 5 we are in the wider area near Përmet again for a few days, so we can fulfill our promise to participate in the great religious Bektashi festival, taking place in Frashëri every year since the collapse of the atheist communist regime, which had forbidden all religious events for a very long time. My col-

laborators and I reach Frashëri at noon, under very contrary weather, with continuous rain and thin fog.

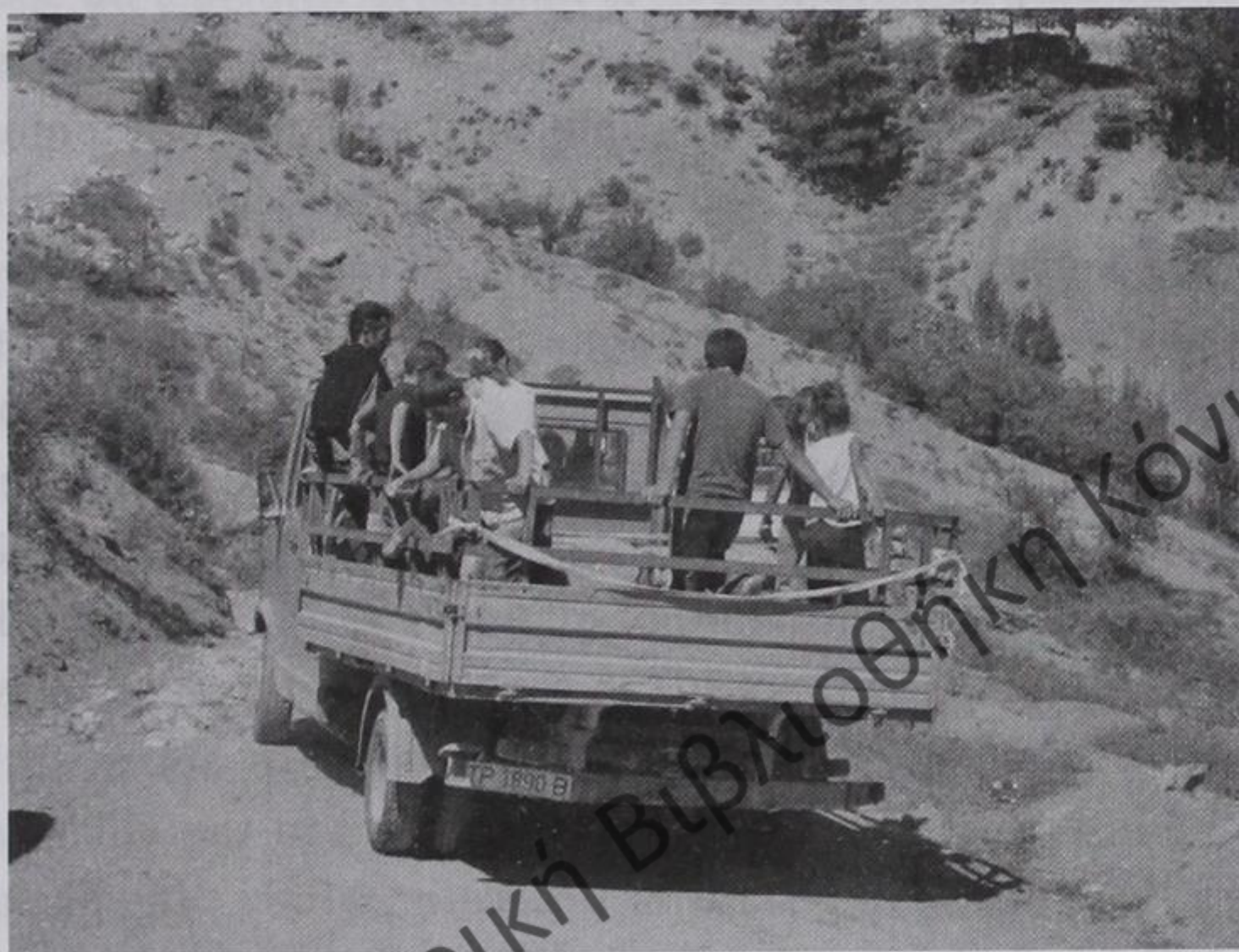


Figure 23. On the way to the festival in Frashëri

The road leading to the *tekke*, as well as the surrounding area, is packed with parked cars, many of them at the entrance of the village. It is raining non-stop. The village looks alive now. In some houses, in the yard, the men are skinning slaughtered animals, and smoke rises towards the cloudy wet sky from many places. We meant to have a few drinks of *raki* before we go to the *tekke*, so we make enquiries about the only village cafe: this time we are told it is open. There are five or six men in the cafe; they look at us with great curiosity as we enter and look for a table. The place is unbelievably grim: broken panes, old dirty disintegrating tables and chairs – an atmosphere that

does not prepare us for a festival at all. The young man who keeps the cafe is also a cheese-maker; we see he sells cheese there. We stay to have a beer. A man buys it for us; he speaks Greek fluently and he introduces himself, telling us he was an immigrant in Greece for a long time, on the island of Salamina.

The man's name is Apostol and he comes from the village Odriçan. He wants company and likes to talk, but soon he becomes rather annoying, trying to impress us with his knowledge of Greece and Greeks and pretending to be a "wise and tough guy", a masculine type he obviously thinks popular in Greece. This is something I see very often in Albanians who have lived in Greece: a clumsy imitation of manners and behaviour which obviously impressed them when they lived in Greece. It is almost a stereotype with many Albanians now. Apostolis – this is how he introduces himself – is now settled in the village and runs a business selling slate to Greece and Italy. He speaks of the Christian Orthodox population of his village with great pride and he mentions the efforts being made to rebuild an old ruined church. At the same time he speaks of Muslims with contempt; he says, characteristically, that they are "wankers", adding that they are of a much lower level than Christians. However, when he sees that our approach is one of respect for Muslims, he contradicts himself many times, and in the end he admits that he has many good Muslim friends of long standing and that he himself has come here for their religious festival; he adds that Christians have always participated in this festival. He finally suggests that we all go to the *tekke* together, and this is exactly what we do, immediately afterwards.

As we approach the *tekke*, we finally get the festive feeling, in spite of the incessant rain which makes things more difficult.

Scores of people come and go, all dressed up. Next to the cars there are also mules and horses tied to tree trunks, to posts or fences; they belong to families who have come from nearby villages: they are covered with multicoloured, woolen, woven blankets and shag carpets. For me, this is an image evoking childhood memories, especially the celebrations on Mount Grammos in late August, which, for our village, was more of a festival than a celebration of the victory of the national army; all the villagers participated, and what mattered most to us was the feast following the official ceremony, on a plateau next to a cold spring. The image of animals covered with multicoloured, woven rugs over their saddles prevailed there. I find it very moving now when I see small caravans of families coming over from their villages for the festival, just like we used to do back then.

In front of the *tekke* entrance there is a parked truck operating as a canteen, selling beer, wine, soft drinks, and various snacks mainly for the children (chocolates, crisps etc.). A little further off there is an open-air slaughter house, where men are paid by pilgrims to slaughter the lambs they have brought to the *tekke*; the lambs will be roasted on spits in the *tekke* area. Many people, disregarding the rain, are already roasting the slaughtered animals under trees or inside the ruined *tekke* buildings. The slaughtering of lambs is a sort of Bektashi sacrifice; a man tells us that it rains on this day every year for the blood of the lambs to be washed away. He presents this as a kind of miracle. "This is a very powerful place," he adds. "Many people come here to be cured and to give offerings." He tells us that this *tekke* is as miracle-working as the monastery of St. Nicholas across the road; many people have been cured here and there; Chris-

tians and Muslims frequent them both. This reminds me of what I have read in the work by Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, and also of things I have heard from many people in the Albanian South, on the relationships between Orthodox Christians and Bektashi Muslims.



Figure 24. Pilgrimage at the turbë in Frashëri



Figure 25. Bektashi dervishes at the Frashëri festival

At the entrance of the *tekke* two flags are flying: the Albanian with the black two-headed eagle on red and the Bektashi with a white plane-tree leaf between two sheaves of wheat. This symbolic union of Albanianism and Bektashism, in conjunction with the inscription on the *tekke* about the historic meeting of 1878, triggers off questions that my knowledge on the matter so far cannot answer. I do believe that there is something special about this relationship, and this idea is strengthened by the fact that in no other religious festival, in no church or monastery have I seen anything similar, namely an Albanian flag flying like this. In the meantime, crowds of people move about, and at some point I see before me six or seven *babas* come out of the *tekke*, with their long beards and impressive costumes, white with belts in reddish hues, dark-coloured coats and white soft hats with green stripes. The religious service is over and they are leaving the *tekke*. As they walk by, people run to them to kiss their hands and receive their blessing. I do the same with a *baba* who is right before me: I greet him bowing slightly, and he gives me his hand, I kiss it and he wishes me *gëzuar* (health).

I go inside the *tekke*, which I know from my previous visit. Amid the ruined buildings there are groups of people roasting meat over open-air fires. There is a fountain on one side where everybody washes their hands. There are people coming in and out of the *turbes* to worship at the tombs of the saints. I notice their piety and reverence: they take off their shoes and kiss both sides of the entrance before they go inside. They worship at the tombs and they usually leave money on top of them. I see a little dress on one tomb: it is probably a votive offering.

Many pilgrims, the majority perhaps, are young. What strikes me though is the fact that most people have an awkward

bearing about them, which I believe is due to their ignorance of ritual and to their overall lack of religious education. I talk to a young man who is waiting outside a *turbe*. He tells me that, although he comes from a Muslim family, he is not going inside to worship because he does not believe in such things; however, he respects his wife's religion; he has accompanied her to the pilgrimage from Tirana and he is waiting for her outside the mausoleum. In spite of his religious skepticism, he begins to speak to me about the wonder-working powers of the *tekke* and of the local monastery of St Nicholas. The man is about thirty-five, a long-time immigrant in Crete, where he works as a builder. His wife is a medical student in Tirana. He explains that the bad economic situation in his country prevents him from coming back. So, for the time being, he takes his wife to Greece with him in the summer, waiting for things to get better in the future. He says he is very content and he speaks about Greeks and Greece with great enthusiasm.

I watch the pilgrimage for a long time. At some point the guard comes to us: he recognises us and greets us heartily, inviting us for coffee. We do not have much time, though; we have to watch the event.

At the entrance of the *tekke* there is a group of men standing under the awning to protect themselves from the rain. They are singing and holding tins of beer. I am standing near them, and they invite me to their group; they offer me drinks and urge me to sing with them. I try to drone the bass (*ison*) when it is necessary, together with the other men. Being in the circle of singers, singing myself, I pass from observation to communion. During the droning I can feel how perfectly each member identifies with the whole group and with each other: it is as if they are

taking off into the sky. As the song is filled with the droning and alternate leaders turn the tune, it is a resounding, collective affirmation of community. The sense of dialogue between one and many, between individual and group, comes out more as a metaphysics of collectivity and less as a dialectic. Harmony and composition are ritually pre-determined. Singing is assertion of an almost supernatural communal stance, which has emerged, however, from the history of the group itself. Most songs refer to historical events. I am surprised to hear the names of Kolotronis and Bouboulina, heroes of the Greek Independence. Could they be doing it for my sake? How do they know such songs anyway? Is it because the struggle for Greek Independence had had great appeal in these parts? Has it got to do with a specific attitude towards Greek Arvanites, who played a prominent part in the revolution of 1821? I ask them about this song, and they answer that it comes from Himarë. Most of them come from Tepelenë. Many of them have lived and worked in Greece. They tell me that they have learned these songs from singing groups in which they participate, and also from records commercially available. Whatever the case, their relationship with the songs is not folkloristic: they sing for hours and the manner of their singing is quite esoteric. It seems that singing in these parts has maintained the essential features of its social function, despite the interventions by the central government.

While we are singing, many visitors and pilgrims are watching with interest. The rain keeps falling though, slow and steady like the song. I make a request for the song of Ali Pasha Tepelenë: it will fit the bill perfectly, since my friends here are from Tepelenë and Ali was a Bektashi, which is something that has interested, and still interests, historians. Every time I begin to

speak of this particular person with an Albanian, I see a gleam in their eyes. I can say that they seem to venerate him. This was recently confirmed during a visit to Tepelenë: at the entrance of the city there is a huge statue of Ali in traditional costume, his proud gaze fixed on his village situated opposite Tepelenë. I have long nourished an interest in this controversial personality, whose mother, Hamko, was from Konitsa; I'm not so much interested in the political dimension of his activities, rather his identity and consciousness. I remember a reference by Mahmed Bey Konitza, himself originally from Konitsa – as indicated by his surname, too – and a Bektashi, in his work titled "The Albanian question" (1919). This was a leaflet which he himself circulated in London, where he was the representative of Vatra, the Pan-Albanian Confederation of America. In this work, Ali was presented as the governor of South Albania, a region reaching as far as Arta and Preveza, with Jannina as its capital. Who and what was this man, beyond the myth of the "Turkish Albanian satrap" cultivated in Greece? I think of how astonished my students always look when I tell them that Ali Pasha was not Turkish but Albanian. I explain that this unclear, ideologically and sentimentally charged term, "Turkish-Albanian", only refers to Muslim Albanians, through a general identification of Turks with Muslims, which is related to the *millet* system of administration used by the Ottomans to classify populations. In a similar manner, most Orthodox Christians were identified with Greeks, causing huge problems to other ethnic groups, hence the schismatic tendencies of national Churches in the time of emerging national movements. Traces of this historical differentiation are still evident in South Albania today between Christian and Muslim Albanians. Very often one hears Christians call

Muslim Albanians "Turks": they, in their turn, often attribute pro-Greek sentiments to Orthodox Christian Albanians.

Religion and national identity

Thus we get to the core of the relationship between religion and national identity in Albania, a subject that turns out especially enticing when dealing with Bektashi Muslims; a subject that preoccupies me intensely and has been tormenting me since my experience in Frashëri, and finally leads me to another journey of questioning and research. When I return home, I examine the relevant literature I have assembled and look for new sources; new publications, articles and books on the subject seem to me like manna from heaven. I begin to find my way, as I search for answers to the fundamental questions that have arisen.

I can now summarise all this adventure in research and I will begin by writing down my first thoughts and conclusions with the relevant documentation.

The issue of the relationship between national identity and religion in what regards the case of Albania has been one of my foremost concerns in my study of Albanian immigrants in Greece. In my interviews with Albanian immigrants, the issue of baptism and the name changing emerges as a key motif in life narratives. Mass baptisms, and even more mass name changes from Muslim to Christian Orthodox are of impressive scale and bring to the fore the matter of the relationship of Albanians with religion once again. I say again, because this matter has also been studied in the past.

"We Albanians have quite peculiar ideas", one notable told Edith Durham. "We will profess any form of religion which leaves us free to carry a gun. Therefore the majority of us are Moslms." "The light way religion hangs on an Albanian" was familiar to many in the nineteenth century, but leaving the "world of ignorance" of "the infidel religion" for the "true faith" was for many in the Ottoman world a less momentous or sudden step than it has come to seem to us, for whom conversion summons up images of apostasy, existential angst and personal and national betrayal. Movement into a new faith was often an accretion of new beliefs to older ones rather than an act of renunciation and immersion. Indeed, converts frequently preserved older religious practices and habits, though they often had to keep these secret, to avert the suspicion that their attachment to Islam was not entirely sincere: They painted red eggs at Easter, while Muslim converts from Judaism – the mysterious Donmeth – were said to preserve their old practices in the privacy of their homes.

The use of secrecy also lay behind the custom of double naming, in which a Suleiman turns out also to be known as Constantine, Hussein as Giorgi. A double name allowed one to dodge between inconvenient official categories, also serving to keep a man's real name hidden: Frangiscan priests in Albania threw up their hands in horror when their charges persisted in calling themselves not by baptismal name, but by an assumed Muslim one, but the young men who did this could not be brought to abandon the practice. What better way, they urged in self-defense, to prevent a witch laying a curse on one than concealing one's real name? Whether against sorcery, or tax farmers or in some cases against the investigators of the Venetian Inquisition, multiple names were a weapon of the weak against the strong, of the private individual against the great powers of the divine and the secular world. Revelation of one's real name thus marked a decisive moment of individual assertion against power. The life of Saint Elia preserves the fateful conversation that preceded his martyrdom. Having been led to embrace Islam, as we are told, by his desire to escape heavy taxation, the saint is asked: "Are you not Moustafa Ardouris?" "Yes, it is I", he replied. "But I am not Moustafa, rather I am Elia, the Orthodox Christian" (Mazower 2002:64-65).

This is what Mark Mazower writes, among other things, in the chapter "Before the Nation" in his book *The Balkans*. Similar references can be found in travellers' narratives, such as V. Berard's. I offer a small selection here:

But Christians and Muslims all belong to the Albanian race. The Asian Turk has never taken root in this area. He only made a brief appearance on the day of the conquest and the local people maintained their Christian faith for a long time. It was only at the end of the past century and in the beginning of the current one, in the times of Ali Tepelenli, that they converted en masse to Islam, whether they liked it or not. These new converts show very little zeal. The Muslims of Kavajë often go to the mosque, a grand, beautiful building, with a dome and a peristyle. Marble facades rise under the cypress trees with their Byzantine columns and their Arabian arches; their ruined interior in vain awaits restoration by a pious benefactor. Religious beliefs in Albanians are just like their mosques, only a facade. They have a monastery where immaculate dervishes are cloistered and where every Friday they get drunk, dancing and shouting, since many taverns offer them *raki* and German alcohol daily, inducing a not so religious state of inebriation. They do not omit any of the ritual washings and purifications prescribed by the law of the prophet, but they are not averse to tins of pork meat either: they have baptised it "Algerian lamb" once and for all. Moreover, except for the imams and clerics who wear the turban, the long robe and the fur caftan, everybody else has kept their national costume, some of them the *foustanela*, [kilt], the gaiters, and the embroidered *fermeli* [waistcoat] of the South, others the black cap and cape, the white tunic, and the wide white breeches with the embroidered fringe of the North. Almost everyone is called Osman, son of Vasili, or Memet, son of Ghiorgj, thus pairing their Muslim name to a family name connected with a Christian father or grandfather.

On their side, Christians do not think that a few bows towards Mecca are too high a price to buy the impartiality or favour of the provincial governor. They keep both Lent and Ramadan, they both baptise and circumcise their children and they are as deficient in keeping the faith of Mohammed in the open as the faith of Jesus in their homes. And amid all this indifference, they all live together in peace. (Berard 1987: 53-55).

A little later, writing about Elbasan he points out:

In the countryside and in small towns, especially after Skanderberg's uprising, when the Turk, more arrogant than ever now and more secure of his conquest, has become more intolerant, the ruling class of the land, counts and dukes of Albania, as well as the great landowners could not hold on to their landed properties unless they paid the price of renouncing their religion. This sacrifice did not cause any hesitation or pain. The Albanian does not have a particularly deep religious feeling. Conversion guaranteed a great many necessities of life: silver-threaded saddles, golden tassels, silver buttons, silk and velvet fabrics, and faraway adventures all over the world of Islam, opened to him now, or here, in his own country, lands grabbed from Christians, the right to bear a sword, the freedom of revenge, everything the Turk forbade to the *giaour* [non-Muslim]... (81-83).

When he refers to the region of Shpati, he writes about the villagers:

... in their villages they are called Vassilis or Ghiorgis, and when they appear in front of their *bey*, Meemet or Suleyman. In town they are obliged to go to mosques and light the oil-lamps over the tombs of holy men; at home they have their secret priests and their secret churches (104).

Elsewhere he writes about the area of Tzoura:

But these Muslims worship Allah only now and then, in public events, so that they can live an untroubled life or obtain the favours of the authorities. They have no mosques and no *hodjas* [religious teachers]. The only religion for which they show any zeal is the religion of beautiful weapons, and their only worship is booty (121).

Then he cites a conversation with an Arvanite Muslim who, when asked about his religion, he answered that

he thought we were European enough not to believe in such nonsense and that an Arvanite proverb says, and rightly so, "my faith is where my sword is"... (130).

In conversations with Albanian immigrants in Greece and in recordings of life-stories recently, I had to deal with a discourse that reminded me very much of the travellers' citations. I cite a few typical excerpts:

We had no priests or *hodjas*... of course I had a Muslim name, I was called Islam there, but I knew no god, nothing of the sort. There was no religion... We did not have religious problems. (Islam - Spyros A.)

In Elbasan then... there was a big factory, everybody turned up... and it's confusing. Turks, how can I put it, Muslims, Orthodox, Catholic, and there was a - what do you call it - you don't know what you are. Are you Christian, or Muslim, or Turk? And we had our own place in Elbasan. We had a church... And I remember we made the Easter eggs, the red ones, my family dyed them in the house in secret... (Edmond - Ghiorgos A.)

In my village it's half and half (Christians and Muslims). But they are apart. Two neighbourhoods. We live on the lower side... There was a mosque, by what old people say... Now they've built a new mosque... There are many churches... I've got the wife from a Muslim... We are Christians but I'm not baptised.... I'm not interested... Before ... when the border opened, the Albanians came here, they knew that in Greece people are Christians. Now all the Albanians who came here, when they didn't have Christian names, they had to get one, to say that ... to appear that they are Christians... They thought that, here, if they were Christians they would be hired for work (Gedian I.) (Nitsiakos 2003a; see also Lelaj and Bardoshi 2008).

When I approached the question of the relationship between religion and the national identity of Albanian immigrants in Greece in a previous essay, I wondered in the conclusion whether the ease with which they change their names and are baptised Christians in Greece, in order to be favourably received, must be considered as an indication of a loose national identity or as a proof of a pragmatist approach to religion, related either to the atheist culture imposed by the previous regime or to a kind of "cultural atavism" referring to practices of the remote past, to mentalities of long duration. My position was that it is a complex phenomenon also linked to the part played by religion in Albanian history, which varied from one ethnic or social group to another. I also pointed out that the di-

vision of the Albanian people into different religious groups seems to have been a crucial factor in the government's decision to downplay the role of religion, in its attempt to construct a uniform Albanian national identity. I even hinted at the fact that the imposition of atheism by the Hoxha regime, apart from its being sanctified by Marxist-Leninist ideology, may well have been linked to this reality.

Now, taking the case of the Bektashis as a starting point and having delved in relative literature, I can investigate this issue in more depth. N. Malkolm, in his article "Myths of Albanian national identity" (2002) defines "indifference to religion" as one of the basic myths, on the basis of which Albanian national identity was constructed (the rest are: the myth of origin, the myth of national homogeneity and cultural purity and the myth of continuing national struggles). The mythic scheme which pervades this national rhetoric is, in short, the following: Religious choice and attachment to one religious dogma did not interest Albanians particularly, because their national identity was constructed independently of such identifications and is rooted in the ancient Illyric past. Even though Malkolm refers to Albanian writers of the beginning of the 20th century living in the USA, we may say that this stereotype is reproduced in various forms in the national narratives of Albanians from the end of the 19th century to the present times.

Since the beginnings of Albanian nationalism there is an evident promotion of a specific perception of religion and national identity, which found its ideal expression in a poem by the famous nationalist author Pashko Vasa, *O moj Shqypni (Oh my poor Albania)*: "Awake, Albanians, awake from your deep slumbers. Come all brothers together to pledge our troth with no

thought of church or mosque. Albanians' faith is Albanianism" (Duijzings 2002:61). This approach is a basic and repeated motif in all the texts of the Albanian *Rilindja* (Renaissance), a fact that shows in itself that religion was not at all a matter of indifference. On the contrary, it was seen as a hurdle when dealing with the construction of a unified national identity and promoting national cohesion. And how could it have been otherwise, when for many centuries during Ottoman rule the most important criterion for the construction of collective identities – apart from the small community scale – was religion? In effect, an ideological choice and a national wish are projected *a posteriori* on a historical reality which is different. This is indeed the unifying function of myths which played a catalytic role in the construction of modern national identities. We can cite here the brochure by M. Konitza, which is a representative text of the Albanian "Renaissance". With reference to religion he writes:

Among the many falsehoods which have been circulated with the object of proving that the Albanians cannot form an independent state, are the statements that they are divided by religious differences...Nevertheless, Albania is perhaps the only country in Europe where religion has produced no dissensions among the inhabitants, who have remained united at every period of their national history...Marriages between Christians and Mohammedans are common in Albania, in spite of the fact that they are contrary to the respective religions. Christians and Moslems may be found in the same family, dwelling amicably under the same roof...The Greeks, the Serbs, and Bulgars who, in large numbers have been converted to Islam, have renounced their nationality and have indeed out-Turked the Turks. The Albanians have remained Albanians throughout (1919: 747-749).

Indeed, with time, the myth caught on and the idea of national unity gradually eliminated religious divisions. Characteristically, religious antagonisms were displaced by ethnic differences and conflicts, a fact which indicates, precisely, that the re-

religious factor is not dominant in group relationships any more. For example, tensions of nationalist nature can be observed between Christian Orthodox Albanians and the Orthodox Church hierarchy, as well as between the nationalist Bektashis of the South and the Suni hierarchy (Duijzings 2002:62; Skendi 1967).

The nationalist effort of Albanians to turn Albanianism itself into a religion, by marginalising religions that were dividing the people, reached its peak during the communist regime. I believe that the enforcement of atheism had less to do with Marxist-Leninist ideology and more with the peculiar nationalism of Enver Hoxha, who took to the letter Pashko Vasa's poetic discourse by turning Albanianism into a religion and abolishing by law all other religious faiths or practices.

The reality emerging in Albania in the post-communist times is also typical. The comeback of religions could, among other things, challenge the unity of the Albanian people, if divisive ideas and tendencies relating to the role of religion started to emerge. The Albanian identity itself would have to face dilemmas of identification with one or the other religion, and this would have wider social and cultural repercussions. At this point, it is interesting to observe that, in view of the danger of divisive tendencies based on religious differences prevailing in the bosom of the nation, there has emerged a discourse of Albanian ecumenism, which draws on the ideological ambit of the thought of pioneering Albanian nationalists. S. Maliqi writes, accordingly: "If the emptiness that Communism left behind can be replaced by something, by some kind of national faith or conviction, then it is the creed that Albanians are a nation of ecumenism, carrying on the tradition of people like Naim Srashëri, Fan Noli and Gjergj Fista" (Maliqi 1997:122; Duijzings 2002:63).

The three specific representatives of the Albanian national movement typically belong to different religious groups. Naim Frashëri is Muslim, Fan Noli is Orthodox Christian and Gjergj Fista is Catholic. What unites and directs them towards the downplaying of religion is a faith in the national idea and the "rebirth" of the Albanian nation in the form of a unified and independent state. We should also point out that, in a way, from the very beginnings of the Albanian national movement, an ambience has been formed, in which particular religious communities compete with each other as to their commitment to Albanianism. Within this framework, Orthodox Christians begin to self-identify as the purest Albanians, claiming that Orthodox Christianity is the oldest religion of the Albanian people, whereas Muslims collaborated and identified largely with the Ottomans (and this is why they call them "Turks", even today). On their part, the Muslims believe that they are the purest Albanians, because they constituted the nucleus of the national renaissance and as great patriots resisted the Serbs, who tried to penetrate and conquer Albanian territories. In reference to Christians, they claim that the Orthodox identified with the Greeks and the Catholic with the Italians. The Catholics, in their turn, stake their claim to Albanian purity in that they have kept traditional customs and morals intact, especially the Albanian common law with its specific codes of honour (*kanuni*).

What we observe here is an outbidding of religious groups against each other with reference to the ideology of Albanianism, which tends to substitute religious faith. After the dissolution of the Ottoman empire and the emergence of national movements in the Balkans, Albanians were left behind in the development of their own national self-awareness, and there-

fore, even belatedly, they are trying to overcome any religious or other cultural differences and to form a common cultural national community, which will be based on other elements and not on religion that, at any rate, divides the nation. The common "racial" origin and common language were the two basic pillars on which the development of a common national consciousness and identity were to be based, a goal which required the creation of ideological apparatuses, such as schools and the development of a common linguistic tool and a national literature. Sami Frashëri, brother of Naim, put it most imperatively when he wrote, in a book published in the late 19th century: "There can be no Albania without Albanians, there can be no Albanians without an Albanian language, there can be no language without its own alphabet and without schools" (Skendi 1967:129).

It is interesting to see the use of history in this context, especially in what regards the national hero of Albania Gjergj Kastrioti-Skanderberg. Skanderberg came from a Christian feudal family and as a child was taken hostage to the Porte by the Ottomans, in order to secure the allegiance of this family. He was raised there as a Muslim, he got the name Skanderberg and he served the Sultan as an army officer, going as high up in the hierarchy as to attain the rank of general and to win the title of *bey*. In 1443, Skanderbeg returned to his fatherland, what is Northwestern Albania today, renounced Islam, united with other noblemen in the region and, with the support of the Vatican and Venice, he challenged the Ottomans in a long struggle, keeping the Ottoman army out of his region till his death in 1468 (Skendi 1967; Vickers 1995).

The case of Skenderberg offered Albanian nationalists a basis to develop a national rhetoric and ideology of national resis-

tance, against enemies threatening the integrity of the fatherland and the unity of the Albanian people. The case of Skenderberg, apart from its heroic attributes and quintessential virtues, can be conveniently adapted for the purposes of the national myth, also in what regards religious traits, since he changed faiths many times. Indeed, the selective use of elements of his story is typical, since a central element is suppressed, namely the resistance of a Christian against Muslim conquerors. The image of Skenderberg is painted with the materials of national myth, and the religious dimension of his identity is eluded. The ideal type of the Albanian is projected onto him, putting into practice the doctrine "one's faith is where one's sword is". Fan Noli, in his very popular book *Historia e Skëndërbeut* (The history of Skenderbeg, 1921), writes: "Skenderbeg is a genuine Albanian since he changed his religious faith depending on political circumstances" (Kaplan 2002).



Figure 26. The Skenderberg Square in Tirana

Even the communists, in their effort to forge national identity within the framework of a peculiar nationalism, connected their movement with Skenderberg's struggles against external conspiracies. Indeed, within the framework of a rhetoric emphasising the continuous and ceaseless struggles of the Albanian people throughout history, they point out parallels between the resistance of the partisans against Axis forces and the resistance of Skenderberg's against the Sultan, stressing the points of self-defence and "lonesome" heroic struggle as proofs of the continuity of Albanian character. It is also interesting to note the way in which the regime modified selectively parts of Skenderberg's story to suit its ideological needs. Thus the fact that his struggle was mainly resistance to Muslim conquerors is suppressed, and the religious dimension is downplayed, since it is divisive for the Albanian nation.

This is a typical example of "reading" the past on the basis of present needs. Essentially a wish or an objective of the present is projected back onto historical reality. The regime, being aware that religious differences may undermine the unity of the Albanian people, which was constituted by multi-religious groups, adopts the myth of religious indifference precisely to counter this threat. This myth is also projected back onto the case of Skenderberg, whose struggles, however, were not lacking a religious dimension at all (Draper 1997:130-131). I contend that a proof of the regime's fear of religion, which is, at the same time, a disclaimer of the view of the people's religious indifference, is the official imposition of atheism in the late 1960s and the frenetic destruction of religious institutions, culminating in the establishment of a "Museum of Atheism" in Shkodër, a city with strong religious traditions.

Even a quick look into the historiography of those times suffices to see the effort to adapt the story of Skenderberg to contemporary ideological stipulations. In the *History of Albania* by Pollo and Puto (1980), Skenderberg is presented as an Albanian patriot fighting against Turks and not as a Christian fighting against Muslims. When the authors cannot avoid mentioning the matter of Skenderberg's religious identity, they hasten to clarify that "he was never a champion of religion, not that he was anti-religious or anti-Catholic, but such a stance would have had disastrous consequences for the national war carried out by Catholic and Orthodox Albanians" (Pollo and Puto 1980:111).

In the same book, we come across the official position of the Party of Labour on religion and its role in Albanian history:

The problem of the historical role of religion in Albania must be seen from two basic perspectives. Albanians, divided in two religious groups (Catholic and Orthodox) in the 11th century and in three (Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim) after the 15th century, were not divided in as many ethnic groups, in contrast to other Balkan people. This ideological differentiation, in spite of the detrimental effects it had on the country for many centuries, did not succeed in eliminating the national consciousness of the Albanians. Although Albania was divided in three religions hostile to one another, it did not have any religious wars in its history. Lord Hobhouse, the companion of Lord Byron in Childe Harold's travels to Albania [sic], wrote that an Albanian would first state he was an Albanian and then he would state his religion. The strong instinct for preserving the Albanian nationality, the fact that religious conversion was imposed on the people by conquerors and the relatively low intellectual level of the majority of clerics were possibly the factors which, alone or together with others, impeded religion from taking deep roots in the Albanian psyche.

The relatively loose ties of Albanians with religion were also due to the political role of the latter. This is the second fundamental aspect of its historical role in Albania. Religions have always been used as ideological weapons of the conquerors, brought from the East and the West. Therefore they

were involved from the first in politics and were used as a prop by the invaders and as an instrument by the powers whose interests lay in a religious dismemberment of Albania that would cause its disintegration on the political level... (Pollo and Puto 1980:366).

After the collapse of the regime in 1991, the religious issue re-emerges and is connected, naturally, to the question of the Albanian national identity, as new directions are now sought. The idea that the Albanian state is a secular one and that religion must not be connected with politics – an approach in tune with the dominant national ideology – is now debated. Orientation towards one or the other direction, in what regards religious choices, is not only a matter of faith, but introduces wider issues of cultural and political alliances, a fact which acquires important dimensions within the framework of the well-known discussion on the Clash of Civilisations (Huntington 1996), focusing on the supposed conflict between the Christian West and the Islamic East, where the Balkans, as a liminal area with important “Islamic pockets”, obtain a new relevance and meaning. The question indeed is put as follows: Quo vadis Albania? The answers vary according to the point of view and the political choices adopted. Roughly, there are three basic approaches: The first one could be called the “Eurocentric” approach; it makes use of the atheistic past and suggests, moreover, that, in order for the nation to develop according to European standards, a new, basically Christian identity which will look to the West should be adopted. In this framework, the Catholics claim that Catholicism is the most suitable road to European cultural integration, since it is the dominant form of religious expression in Europe. Orthodoxy cannot play this part well because of its marginality in Western Europe and its cultural substance itself.

Typically, this is the point of view adopted by intellectuals of both Christian and Muslim origin, Ishmail Kadare among them. It is a viewpoint which, among other things, is in accordance with a specific reading of the Skenderberg case, especially in what regards the matter of choice between East and West. To make myself more clear on this, I cite Pollo and Puto again, who wrote, many years ago, when the Hoxha regime was still powerful:

No one can deny the role played by Skenderberg in the conditions created by the Ottoman descent upon the heart of Europe itself: he was the defender of European civilisation and a soldier of the Renaissance... (Pollo and Puto 1980:122).

The second viewpoint is almost identical to the dominant perception on Albanian national identity, which promotes both its multi-religious character and the minor role of religion in the constitution of this identity. On this basis, both religious pluralism and freedom of religion are advocated, as well as the separation of religion from politics.

The third viewpoint is less widespread and concerns the relationship of Albanianism with Islam ('Islamonalism'). It is additionally interesting that its supporters try to free themselves of the "stigma" attached to the identification of Muslim Albanians with the Ottomans, claiming that Islamisation constituted a "national strategy" to avoid the Slavonisation or Hellenisation of the Albanian people. Obviously this viewpoint has an anti-western character, which hinders its spreading, given the European orientation of the country. (Clayer 2005; Draper 1997; Kaplani 2002).

What about the Bektashi?

What about the Bektashi? Where do they come in? Let us begin at the beginning: who are the Bektashi? R. Elsie in his book *A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture* (2001) states briefly the following:

The Bektashi order is said to have been established in Anatolia by Haji Bektash Veli, who lived in the 13th century. The expansion of the Ottoman Empire introduced the order to the Balkans. We know very little of the early presence of Bektashism in Albania, but we can presume it was entrenched in the area from the late 16th till the mid-17th century.

Albanians were particularly receptive to certain traits of Bektashism, such as tolerance and respect for different religions and their practices. Moreover, contrary to the practices of Orthodox Islam (Sunni), which identified with the Ottoman authority and the Arabic language, Bektashism showed a special interest in and respect for local cultures and languages.

Bektashism was widespread during the reign of Ali Pasha, a Bektashi himself, and played a leading part in the Albanian movement of “national renaissance” (Rilidnja) in the 19th century. It is estimated that at the turn of the 20th century a 15% of the Albanian population was Bektashi – that is a quarter of the Muslim population in the country. Bektashi *tekkes* were centres of the Albanian national movement, especially in what regards the illegal propaganda for Albanian language and education, contributing much to the dissemination of the first books in Albanian.

In their first national conference, which took place in Prishtë, Skrapar, in 1922, the Bektashis declared their independence

from Turk Bektashis; it is characteristic that after Bektashism was prohibited in Turkey in 1925, Tirana became the centre of universal Bektashism.

Bektashism values spiritual meaning over practical rules and conventions. Their rituals and practices are characterised by an advanced degree of liberalism. Some Bektashis consume alcohol; indeed in certain *tekkes* they produce it themselves. Women participate in ceremonies and festivals on the same footing as men. Bektashism has absorbed elements from other religions, particularly Orthodox Christianity in the Balkans. One of its fundamental theological features is a kind of pantheism, about which the Bektashis themselves display a rather mystical behaviour.

Probably the most important source of information on Albanian Bektashism is the *Pamphlet of Bektashism (Fletore e Bektasism)* by Naim Frashëri, a leading figure in the Albanian national movement. Naim Frashëri believed that the liberal ideas and the pantheistic and syncretistic character of Bektashism could form the basis of its development into the national religion of Albania. Indeed, Frashëri believed that the combination of elements from the Qur'an and from the Bible in the Bektashi faith would help to promote unity in the otherwise religiously divided Albanian people.

We cite two excerpts from this work by N. Frashëri, which show the pantheism and the syncretism, as well as the national character of Albanian Bektashism:

The Bektashi believe in God the great and truthful, Mohammed Ai, Hadije, Fatima, Hasan and Husein. In the twelve imams who are...They all have Ali as their father and Fatima as their mother. They also believe in all the blessed of the past and of the future, for they believe in goodness and worship it. And just as they believe in them and love them, so do they believe

in Moses, Mary and Jesus and their disciples. As a founder they have Jafer Sadk and as their superior Haji Bektash Veli who is of the same family. All these have said: "do good and abstain from evil" ...The faith of the Bektashi is a wide road illuminated by wisdom, brotherhood, friendship, love, humanity and all goodness...

The Bektashi are brothers and one soul, not only among one another but to all mankind. They love other Muslims and Christians as their own soul and behave kindly and gently towards all mankind. But most of all they love their motherland and their fellow countrymen, for this is the best of all things...May they strive day and night for that nation which they call father and by which they swear. May they work together with the foremost citizens and with the elders for the salvation of Albania and the Albanians, for Knowledge and culture, for the nation and fatherland, for their own language and for all progress and well-being... (Elsie 2001:25-33; See also Hasluck 2004).

Let us consider the matter of the link between Bektashism and Albanian national movement a little further. N. Clayer, who has dealt systematically with this issue for many years, upon the Greek publication of her important paper titled "Bektashism and Albanian nationalism", felt the need to send the publisher an additional note, in which she admits that in that particular paper, initially published twelve years earlier (and before the collapse of the communist regime), she did not escape from the "constructions" of the Albanian national myth about the ties between Bektashism and the Albanian national movement. In fact, she writes that in her article she claims the existence of such ties dating back from 1826 (date of the abolition of the Janissary order and the prohibition of the Bektashi order in the Ottoman Empire), whereas nationalism did not yet exist amongst Albanians at that time. She goes on to add:

The "anti-Turkish and nationalistic feeling" which should rather be termed as "anti-Ottoman" or even "anti-Hamitic and nationalistic" was there-

fore born later amidst Albanian Bektashis, and went through many adventures. Consequently we do not have a definitive picture "of the movement of the national renaissance for the creation of Albania" which I mentioned in that text. In fact, I was repeating as historical truths many "invented traditions" which, truth be told, still circulate in many studies... All that remains then is the text alone which illuminates precisely the role of the Bektashi network in the circulation of printed matter in the Albanian language, in the teaching of reading and writing in that language during the last decades of the Ottoman era, in the position upheld by the majority of Bektashis in favour of the Latin alphabet, in their support towards the Albanian guerillas, in the introduction of nationalism in the doctrines of the order by Naim Frashëri, even in the composition of nationalistic poems by some *babas*. This study also points out the transformation of the brotherhood of Bektashis into a separate religious community within the framework of an independent Albanian nation due to its power in numbers, as well as its role in the development of Albanian nationalism (Clayer 2005, 125-126; See also Doja 2006).

Independently of the clarification on the above questions and apart from the discussion on "invented tradition", it is a fact that after a certain point Bektashism was particularly connected in one way or another with Albanian nationalism. Furthermore, it is known that the Sunni Muslim Albanians, from the moment the Ottoman Empire begins to collapse, make an effort to distance themselves from it, so as to cast off the stigma attached to their identification with it (Skendi 1967). The Bektashis, beyond their theological and other traits favouring a positive relationship with national ideology, had the added advantage of not only an early differentiation but an essential conflict with the dominant Islam, which also represented Ottoman domination. On this basis, it is easier to understand why Bektashism was so "suitable" for the construction of the national myth, on the one hand, and why it really helped the Albanian national movement,

on the other. The myth is no more than an ideological lever facilitating the actions of people and an important mechanism activating collective visions.

It is rather interesting to see how this process is vested with different mythical elements in various instances. Authority will project its own vision on a selective reading and use of the historical past. I have chosen again a text of "socialist" provenance:

The reason for Naim Frashëri's inclination towards Bektashism must be traced also in the real historical duties which Naim Frashëri worked and fought for. Sufism, though a heresy, represented the ideological form which expressed the opposition and protest of the people against feudalism, the opposition of the people who were enslaved and oppressed by Ottoman dominion... Finally, we must not forget that our people, whose education had been turned towards the spirit of religion for many centuries, understood better and more easily the language of religion. For this reason we must not be surprised by the fact that Naim Frashëri tries to find a way into the spirit and the heart of the Albanian people. This is why he dresses his ideas with the coat of religion... (Xholi 1965: 118: cf. Clayer 2005:118).

There is no doubt that Bektashism and the Albanian national movement were intricately linked with each other ever since the beginnings of the latter. Also, since what is said here it has been prompted by our visit to the *tekke* in Frashëri, it is worth mentioning the following historical data: When Abdul Frashëri returned from the Prizren convention, together with Baba Alush of the Frashëri *tekke*, he organised the famous meeting mentioned in the inscription at the entrance of the *tekke*, which is indeed the first nationalist meeting in the South. It is said that, subsequently, Bektashi dervishes not only played a catalytic part in the propagation of nationalist ideas, but influenced the Christian populations of the wider area as well (Clayer 2005:79-80).

In conclusion, we can say that, invented or not, early or late, the relationship of Bektashism to the Albanian national movement is widespread, and for this reason it was officially recognised by the state as one of the religions of the Albanian nation. This explains how Frashëri is constituted as a symbolic locus of national memory. It is telling that in spite of the fact that the *tekke* was shut down by the regime, the Frashëri family house was turned into a museum of national history. This also explains the presence of the inscription mentioning the meeting of 1878 at the entrance of the *tekke*, as well as the appearance of the Bektashi flag, together with the Albanian, on each side of the entrance during the festival of the 5th of September, and the patriotic fervour of Gjergj and the patriotic songs of the young men from Tepelenë...

As for the title of this chapter "Vlach or Bektashi?" the answer is that official Albanian history clearly favours the Bektashis; but where oral history and the collective consciousness of Arvanite-Vlachs the world over are concerned, Frashëri still remains their place of origin, their very first cradle.

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

AT THE FESTIVAL IN REHOVË

The route

We set out early in the morning of June 29 from the guest house in Bënjë. Our destination was the area of Ersekë. I had in mind that at Rehovë, a village on the foot of Mount Grammos, exactly on the same altitude as Plikati on the Greek side and very near it, they held the festival of the Saint Apostles on that day.

As we reach the crossroad of Çarçovë, we turn left on the road leading to Korçë via Leskovik and Ersekë. Crossing the northern part of Çarçovë at the edges of the settlement, one can see aesthetically pleasing storage houses and stables made of wood and stone, attesting to a long-standing agricultural economy, which seems to ignore and resist political systems and the official political economy, following certain archetypal forms of human adaptation to the primary needs and necessities of life. It is amazing how these productive sites maintain their vigour even today, in spite of the new conditions which effectively enforce their abandonment or, at least, dictate their modernization. One can see the few animals stabled here grazing content-

edly at the side of the road or moving towards their pastures, depending on the time of the day. Beyond the settlement, the road goes up along a rapid stream flowing down the mountain towards the river Vjosë. The road is narrow but asphalted and recently repaired, in view of the coming elections. It is a rather new road and was constructed to replace the old one, which had been traced near the border along the river Sarantaporos, and passed through the village Glinë on the direction of Leskovik. I remember Apostol, a driver who did the Përmet-Korçë itinerary in the times of the communist regime, mentioning the fact that all itineraries along the border were conducted in the escort of a soldier, to prevent drivers from fleeing to Greece. At one point this road passed very near the river Sarantaporos, a little further up from the Mertziani Bridge; from there it was very easy to cross the river and get to the Greek village Kalovrisi, especially during the summer months when the river water was low. This spot was, and still is, one of the main points of passage used by undocumented immigrants. The old road is still there, in very bad condition of course, but it is accessible in a suitable vehicle. The first time I tried it I was disappointed and had to go back, but the second time I attempted it, this time from the side of Glinë, where I had been to the Bektashi festival in the well-known *tekke* via Leskovik, I managed to end up very near the Mertziani custom house rather easily. As I was going down the road, I was thinking of all those people who used to do that itinerary, a breath away from the border – what was running through their minds? Quite a few of them were tempted to escape and succeeded: that is why measures for the control of this border zone were so strict.

As we go up, the landscape becomes all the more feral and impressive, with lush green valleys, steep mountain sides, plenty of running waters. I am also impressed by the works being carried out along the road. I wonder if they have anything to do with the coming elections, or if they are only a symptom of the general efforts of recovery after the great crisis following the collapse of the communist regime. At any rate, the road is dangerous, as confirmed by the various memorials containing photographs of people who have lost their lives in road accidents on the spot; therefore the road works are necessary. As we literally climb on top of the mountain, the landscape mellows, indicating that we are approaching an important settlement. Flat abandoned fields, dry-stone walls, orchards by the riverbanks or inside farmland, and pastures above them, attest to human presence past and present. We reach a central point which appears to have been a crossroad in some older form of space planning; the small roadside sanctuary on the left and the fountain on the right confirm this. Inside the sanctuary containing the icon of St. George there are coins (euro and lek) poking out of the sand placed by the oil lamp burning in front of the icon. Here are the marks of transnationalism, I am thinking: the Euros are obviously donated by migrants to and from Greece. The fountain, according to the inscription on it, has been recently repaired (2000); it is apparently donated by a migrant: he has written his name next to the date. Right by the fountain there is a path leading to a chapel out in the country, commanding the view of the hill. The church and the whole structure of the area make me think, reasonably, of the existence of an old, abandoned settlement. When I asked about it later, I was told that the place was called Causi and belonged to Leskovik. I con-

firmed this during another visit, on the Day of the Saviour (Shën Sotirë), 6th of August, celebrated by that church, with people coming for the festival from Leskovik. Moreover, the festival itself strengthened my hypothesis about an older existing settlement, whose inhabitants must have co-habited Leskovik itself with others. I keep my hypothesis to myself, thinking that one day perhaps I will look into the matter.

My other idea, namely that we are approaching a settlement, is quickly confirmed by the fact that a little further up the road behind the mountain lies Leskovik. As we approach it we see the first buildings, mostly remnants of the old regime, mainly military installations and a playing field where carefree animals graze. The settlement lies on the right side of the road and spreads all over the mountain side. The view reminds me of my favourite song, "Leskoviko" a hymn to the beauty of the place, which begins with the line: "You, Leskovik beneath the rock"; indeed, there is an impressive rock looming over the town, the same that can be seen from Konitsa, exactly opposite to it. On the extension of the old settlement, by the side of the road leading to the main market street, rises a line of grey blocks of flats: their grim appearance showcases the problems of this country. Grimness is their present state, while their shape and aesthetic features allude to the socialist version of modernity. On the one hand, I can imagine how proud the people who built them must have felt, and, on the other, I wonder why they failed to see how much these buildings jarred with the natural setting and with the local tradition. On second thought, perhaps my speculations stem from middle-class perceptions and anxieties and may be an outsider's reflection, in retrospect and from a point of safety; while at the time when all this was

happening, the dominant demand was for functional structures that would answer the basic needs of that society. Form and aesthetics are simply the result of functionality and of priorities concerned with satisfying basic human needs. Fine, I say to myself, but are not the agricultural settlements, the old settlement of Leskovik itself, part of which is still standing, an organic product of a social organisation aiming to cover its basic needs, too? Yes, but there is a qualitative distinction: in the one case the settlement was planned and realised by a central authority by way of centralised, mass production, and in the other it emerges consistently in the context of spontaneous collectivity and on the basis of an organic social make-up in direct relation to nature. Regardless of all this thinking, what stays with me is the negative impression created by what I saw. I wonder if such a beautiful song as the one about Leskovik could have ever been composed if the town had always looked like this. I can just imagine the sort of song that would be written in the context of song production for "socialism building", praising the achievements of Enver Hoxha and the Party of Labour: undoubtedly it would be of similar aesthetic appeal.

Leaving this awful, throat-constricting sight to the left, we enter the town square: on the right-hand side of the entrance looms a large plane tree, with the bubbling water of a spring running down its trunk, and the old "Russian" hotel, constructed by a Soviet firm, now abandoned and waiting, apparently, for the private investor who will restore it. Rumour has it that an Albanian-American business man, originally from the area, has bought it to refurbish and run it again.



Figure 27. The river Sarantaporos-border and the Leskovik region across

All along the market street there are hanging banners advertising political parties and parliament candidates for the imminent general elections on the 3rd of July. On the walls around us many posters are hanging, with optimistic, smiling faces and slogans promising a new Albania (per Shqiperi e re) and suchlike. Shops and various offices of public services are aligned along this road. I am astonished to see the faded Albanian flag in holes and the broken windowpanes at the police station. Leskovik causes me great pain, but also great curiosity for further research. My collaborators and I agree to stop here for a coffee on the way back, and also to see how we can incorporate Leskovik in our research and in the production of the documentary planned as part of it.

We leave the settlement and on the exit we meet two men bearing weapons: they seem to be border patrollers. We go up

the road towards Ersekë and Korçë, and we soon have a panoramic view towards Greece: apart from the mountain peak of Gamila looming opposite, we can discern very clearly the city of Konitsa and all the area between Nemërçka and Timfi, the confluence of the rivers Aoos (Vjosë), Voidomatis and Sarantaporos, and the villages dispersed all over the mountainous basin. Mountains, forests, cultivated lands, abandoned fields and vineyards, rivers and streams, livestock facilities, small churches, monasteries and *tekkes*, sacred places marking the planning of space, small and large settlements make up a landscape inviting one to meditate on its history. We are moving along the motorway which runs parallel to the border for a large stretch. We go through forests and glades, small settlements and meadows, we cross streams and bypass basins and small lakes. The fields in the basins and the glades are abandoned: they have now become one with the pasturelands with flocks grazing here and there. We are in the heart of Kolonjë, a culturally unified area, with Ersekë at its centre. During the Ottoman times, this area used to be an administrative unit as well, incorporating for periods of time villages from what is today the administrative area of Konitsa. The villages Chioniades and Asimochori, for instance, are very near here.

As we go higher up in altitude the landscape turns majestic, with very thick forests. We enter an area which is marked as national park by a sign: "Reserva natyrale." There are hotels at certain key points, and a small wooden settlement belonging to the forest authority. We are especially attracted by a small guest house with a restaurant and garden in the village Gërmenj.

We are still in a lush forest with many brooks and streams. There are many villages, marked by signposts or perceived here

and there, out of the way. Then we begin to descend. As we approach Ersekë, the landscape becomes softer because of the lower altitude and the fact that it is gradually becoming more human-centred. As we descend, the marks of human presence increase and slowly the landscape takes an agricultural, livestock-breeding character, always bearing the marks of interventions by the old regime: works of land re-allotment or reclamation. Of course the collapse of the previous system has resulted in the abandonment, even the collapse and destruction, of infrastructures. The presence of a few machines operating on a small basin is the only visible sign of recovery in the area. A monument, a partisan's statue gazing proudly towards the future, is ironised by today's context of loneliness and despair: it used to inspire farmers in work and life, but now it stands divested of its original social and political framework, and can only be perceived as a note on the ironies of history. We are at Gërmenj, 15 kilometres from Ersekë.

As we go up the mountain pass, right above Gërmenj, I am rendered speechless by the view: a big city spreading on the slopes of Mount Grammos. It is Ersekë. At the background lies the dark side of the mountain, the one that had been forbidden for so many years. I can see the peak where the dragon lake Gizdova is situated. This is incredible. I remember how as a small child I tried to imagine what this forbidden place looked like. I had never imagined such a city amongst the mountains. As we approach I make a phone call to Lorenzo, an Albanian taxi-driver from Ersekë I met in Çarçovë. He says that he is expecting me at the entrance of the city, exactly where the weekly bazaar takes place.

When we arrive Lorenzo is there, waving at us. It is 11a.m. We park the car in front of the bazaar entrance and we take a walk inside: a large crowd, a great variety of merchandise: cassettes and clothes and fruit and vegetables. People from the surrounding villages and merchants from nearby towns and cities, mainly from Korçë, all flock here. The horse market, Lorenzo says, takes place in another part of town. We walk through the bazaar, looking curiously at people and products. On the other end of it, the abandoned barracks remind us again of the collapse; the same old miserable image of destruction... And Mount Grammos looming loftily in the background. A polyphonic song I especially love comes to my mind: "Lucky mountains, lucky vales / they don't fear death, they don't expect the Grim Reaper..." Again I try to figure out how man has managed to violate nature and its values so much in these surroundings. Why was all sense of proportion lost? How could a totalitarian system in the name of communism be born out of communities and clans? How was so much ugliness created? How were the insubordinate and intractable mountain populations trapped in an oppressive, dehumanizing system? Could it be that an authoritarian, centralising, totalitarian system was, after all, the only way to tame this rough people, addicted to social insubordination and banditry? How could a state handle the political dynamics of the clan and the cultural ethos of the *kanun*? How could it form the "new man" out of the collective mentalities of an archaic way of life and the habitus of agro-pastoral cultural systems of centrifugal orientation? Such are the thoughts that overcome me, and unbearable pain takes hold of me. I gaze constantly at Mount Grammos. I rest my eyes upon it, seeking comfort and relief...

We leave the market and direct ourselves towards the city centre. We intend to go to Rehovë. We can see it, as well as Starje, on the slopes of Grammos, at a small distance from Ersekë. Many people from those two villages live permanently or periodically in our own, Greek villages on the other side of the mountain. Many people from Rehovë live in Mastorochoria, and many from Starje are in Aetomilitsa. The inhabitants of Rehovë are Orthodox Christian; those of Starje are Muslim. There is a festival in Rehovë: I know this because some migrants have told me; they have even invited me to go. Some friends from Plikati have been there before and have spoken both of the festival and the village with enthusiasm. Plikati is a "twin" village of Rehovë: the distance between them is about two hours on foot. The national border traced arbitrarily between them changed their relationship, especially after the totalitarian regime was established in Albania and all communication and relations between them were strictly prohibited. The case of these two villages is a typical example of how two communities which belong to the same ethnic group can shape different national identities and consciousness through their incorporation into different national states.

With Mina and Hristo at the festival

On the way to Rehovë I ask Lorenzo if we are going to find my acquaintances there, especially Mina and Hristo, whom I had interviewed during my previous research project. I try to remember certain parts of the interview with Mina – the most compelling interview I have ever done. Part of it was published

in my book *Testimonies by Albanian Immigrants*, in 2003. I remember his phrase: "I kiss with what lips I've got": it was his answer to the racist attitude of some Greeks towards him, a phrase which reflected his pride and his clear stance as to his identity. I cite some excerpts here, which will help towards understanding certain of the issues we will touch upon later:

In 1996 I came to Plikati for work. I worked for five months in the first year, for S. and for other men, whenever I could find work, and in the winter I returned. I did the same in the second and third year. And now I have been doing this for six years... Here in Plikati there are twenty-five of us, most of them from my village, Rehovë. It is an Orthodox village. There were about seven hundred people, now there about five hundred left...

For the first time in Greece I came here to Plikati, that was in 1991. The system had changed five months before, so I came here secretly from my family, because they were afraid to let me go with all those things that had been happening in the border, so many people killed. They were afraid. I came here with two friends and we slept in P.N.'s house. He had us there for a day and the next day we left. When we left he gave us a bag of clothes.

The first time we came from the border, we entered here. They asked us: "Where are you from?" Some men from my village had come and they had done very well. One worked for two days, another worked for a week... He brought some money, he brought some things given to him by the Plikati people, and we said: "What is going on there? Is that Paris? What is that place?"

My family didn't know. We stayed here for two days. We didn't work but we saw things, we saw the village. Here we were impressed; every lamppost had light, the streets here in Plikati were laid with concrete, flagstones on the square, and the rest. It was so different, Rehovë and Plikati. You could see that in Plikati they had a car in every house maybe. We had nothing...

Now, so many years later and with so many people working in Greece, things have changed. Every family has some money and can live better. Me, in 1990 I had nothing in my house. Well, I had the house, the duvet, we had blankets, because we made them... my mother made them, very beautiful, you should see them. But then I did not have a colour TV. In 1996 I bought one here. I had some money I had made in Greece and some money I had

made from the flowers and I bought it... Two years later I bought the fridge, and last week I bought the washing machine...

Today I work here in Plikati but my heart is there... in the village. I like being in the village. Everyone does. One wants to live and die where one looks at the sun in the morning...

That's what we do. We leave at Christmas and return in March. In our village we just hang around. The odd job in the fields, if there is any...

We speak both Arvanite and Greek with the people here. Once I say to them: "You're Albanians, too, because you speak Albanian." "No, we're not Albanians." They sometimes say: "Albanians... Hey, you, Albanian..." I say: "And what good does it do you that you're Greeks and we're Albanians? Any job you can't do, we do it!"....

And do you know why we invited the mayor? Because here these old men and some others look at us so... "Well, they have nothing in Albania. They don't know how to live." And that's what I said: "Are you in the mood, mayor? Would you like to come? To see how we live, what fun we have in our festival?" (Nitsiakos 2003a:33-45).

I have been driving for about twenty minutes on a rocky, narrow dirt road. As we enter Rehovë I am impressed by its similarity to Plikati. Stone houses with slate roofs and verdant courtyards with gardens. A village very much alive, but at the moment it looks deserted. Obviously, everyone is at the festival. It takes place at the country church of the Saint Apostles, ten minutes from the village. We pass by the cathedral of St. Nicholas (Shën Kolli), which is very well preserved. The Saint Apostles are on the road leading to Plikati via Grammos. We can discern the place from the village, there is a telltale grove and some buildings, and of course today there is a large number of parked cars. They obviously belong to migrants who have come for the festival.

When we are there, I am excited by the festive atmosphere. I can hear the orchestra in the distance. We can see people

dancing. The tune the orchestra is playing and people are dancing to at this very moment is Greek, a Greek *zeibekiko*: unbelievable for an unsuspecting visitor, but for me, totally to be expected. At the entrance of the festival we are refreshed by the cool water of a fountain: there is a marble plaque on it with the names of the three donors, decorated with flowers – a picture pleasing to the eye and to the mind. There are two bored-looking policemen sitting on the stone bench next to the fountain. We move towards the crowd. Everywhere under the shady trees there are groups of people sitting on rugs, eating and drinking. Among the first groups we see is Mina's family. He himself recognises us: he welcomes us warmly and invites us to sit with them. We thank him and promise to sit with them after we have seen the people and the festival. Soon my other acquaintance from Greece appears, Hristo, who is very warm with us too. They accompany us as we move towards the orchestra; Mina hastens to buy us beers from the nearby canteen, and says with a meaningful look that we have to enter the dance. I tell him that everything will happen in good time.

The orchestra plays mainly Greek songs: not the typical Epirote songs only, with which people here are familiar anyway, but also the neodemotic, *syrto*s and *tsifteteli* and *zeibekiko* airs, some of them sung in Albanian versions. I wonder if this is due to the presence of migrants from Greece or to the wider influence of Greek culture on Albania, especially here in the South. It could be both; after all, they are connected. Television also plays an important part, since they mostly watch Greek TV channels here. The Albanian songs played here and now are mostly the *koloniarë* (a slow dance of the region), a wedding dance, and some other well-known tunes from Përmet, such as "Yaman,

yaman.” However, in what regards generally folk songs, the “dances in three” and the *Pogoni dance* in a quick tempo are prevalent.

Mina can't wait for us to enter the dance. He drags me by the hand and requests a song from the orchestra which he says is suitable for the occasion. “Tonight there are friends in our village...” I tell him politely that I would prefer something else (it's one of those neo-demotic ones I loathe), but he insists, because, he says, it describes our case to the point: we are a company of foreign guests in their village... I enter the dance and Mina buys the orchestra drinks. I look at the orchestra to see if I recognise anyone, and I see a musician I first met in Plikati (they were there to play in a cafe) and consequently I met him at festive occasions in Përmet. Many Albanian musicians are transmigrants *par excellence*, crossing the border all the time to play. After Mina's request I myself request a “koloniarë”, which they play, then turn it into the “yiatros” (“doctor”) tune; finally I request “Leskoviko,” one of my favourite Albanian songs. The musicians as well as all present company seem to be surprised that a Greek man asks for old Albanian songs and dances to them with such enthusiasm. The clarinet player is especially impressed and follows my steps, playing to my ear with much gusto. I am transported by the sound of the clarinet, and I lose myself, which is what usually happens when the musician “gets” me... Only when I lift my eyes and look at the Grammos peaks do I get back in touch with my surroundings, only to feel that I am living in a dream... Finally, drenched in my own sweat and completely exhausted, I make a sign for the clarinet player to stop, feeling that I am surrounded by my own people. Dance has worked its miracle again. Music has united us, and the festive spirit, now at

its climax, invites everyone to participate. We keep on dancing together, like a group of friends, although the dancers change all the time.

The festival is organised by the church committee, which among other things is paying for the orchestra, so that dancing is free for all. Nevertheless, drinks are bought for the orchestra regularly, and the treats increase as spirits get higher. There are also generous donations to the church. Some members of the committee take a collection, and most people leave some money on the collection plate.

The country church is not there nowadays. The dancing area is on the old foundations. "This is not right," Mina comments, "but what can you do?" People worship the large icon standing right next to it. The church was destroyed in the Hoxha years, and at about the same time a military outpost was built a little further up: today it stands abandoned and is about to collapse. The property now belongs to the church and there are thoughts of turning it into a hotel. Mina and Hristo confide in me that they themselves are thinking about building another hotel nearby, but for the moment all this is just ideas, because investments in Albania are not an easy matter.

Walking around the festival area, I met many people. There are many immigrants to Greece and people from Rehovë who live in other parts of Albania and are here especially for the festival. Among all these people I meet two Greeks. The first is a business man from Athens, who is active in Tirana and has come here with a friend from the village, and the second is a man from Thessaloniki, who is here with his wife, who is originally from Rehovë and an immigrant in Greece. The "bridegroom" from Thessaloniki says he is ecstatic about the place and

the people, adding that till now he refused to come and visit because in his heart he was disdainful of Albania. However, he hastens to add, this is not Albania, but Northern Epirus, confirming the consolidated ideas about Albania, and legitimising in a way his decision to marry that particular woman, a Northern Epirote, (therefore Greek, really), since this is Northern Epirus...

At noon we have lunch with Mina and his family. At the table there are his parents, his brother who works with him in the region around Konitsa with his wife and two daughters, an uncle and two aunts, and Mina himself with his wife and his four-month-old daughter; all of them hospitable and kind. They show openly their joy at our being there, and they are happy, ecstatic even, when I try to speak Albanian to them. They seem to take it as an honour, and it adds a lot to Mina's prestige; indeed, his behaviour is most obliging and noble, as he treats us to the best there is at the table, which is richly laden, but from the canteen as well. I muse on "prestige spending". I believe that, apart from the obligations of hospitality, the incentive of social prestige is also at play here. I think we are not the sole recipients of this message: it is also directed to the people in his village.

As I observe him, memories of the Mina I had met at Plikati spring to my mind. The contrast is sharp. Back then he was a harassed though proud young man, with all the typical traits of the average Albanian immigrant. Here and now, he is a well-dressed family man with all the attributes of the successful emigrant. His car, with Greek license plates, is parked near the family group. He never stops for a moment, buying drinks for the orchestra, showing off his good social and financial standing. His wife and daughter are very smartly dressed, their clothes and attire obviously influenced by Greek fashions, and his par-

ents are typical villagers with characteristic dignity and honour displayed in their overall behaviour.

We talk to each other as much as we can in the general atmosphere of fun and enjoyment escalating by the hour. He tells me, among other things, that now that he owns a car he goes back and forth to Greece "like a human being" through the customs at Mertziani and not on foot from Grammos, like he used to. He shows me the path, commenting on the fact that essentially it takes him the same amount of time to walk there from Plikati as to go all the way round in the car: the difference lies in the quality of life, the dignity and the legality of it all. Those who go by the path are usually illegal immigrants, although nobody really stops them from walking "freely" as far as Plikati. Besides, everyone knows everyone else and there are relationships of mutual trust and solidarity between the two villages. The historical depth of those relationships, the common ethnic background, as well as older and more recent social ties, such as kinship and friendship between families, render co-operation between the two villages a very simple affair. After the opening of the border the old unity of space was restored in one way or another, old relationships were reactivated, and new ones were built. Marriage and wedding or christening sponsorship (*koumbaria*) are the most valid and socially secure relationships, validating and strengthening wider networks cutting through the national border, which essentially exists only as a formal marking line reproducing a political dichotomy, which determined that the two villages should be placed in two different national territories and thus defined their national identity.

Mina has lived in Plikati for many years now and for most of the year he works in the wider area of Mastorochoria and

Konitsa. Recently he has been specializing in roof construction, and he works in the team of a building contractor from Plikati. One of his brothers is with him; the other is in the USA, where he migrated some years ago having won the visa lottery. In the winter months, when there is no work in Greece, Mina goes back to his village and keeps busy with agricultural works. He is also involved in village politics: indeed, at the moment he is busy with the elections, being a local representative of the SPD party, a middle-of-the-road political party, according to him. He goes back to his village every weekend: it is only two hours away.

Hristo, too, seems to be happy to see us. Unlike Mina, he has been living in his village for the last two years; he owns a mini market next to his house now. He explains that all this time he has been busy extending and repairing his house. He too is a different man here in his own territory: happy and rather optimistic. I remember him in Pirsoyianni, living in an abandoned house, in miserable conditions. In my mind I have a picture of him lighting the small gas stove he had for cooking so that we could keep warm. I also have a mental image of his table, laid with newspapers. Hristo has a degree in veterinary medicine, but in Pirsoyianni he worked in construction. He tells me his various thoughts about the future, his plans, and he also questions the general state of the country. It seems that he, too, has concluded that the best plan is to come and go as a transmigrant: spend some time in Greece, some time in Albania. Then we'll see... His parents can look after the mini market; they are relatively young (60-65 years old). A nephew of his is at the festival too, the son of his sister, who has come from Boston, USA, for the holidays. His father is Albanian with American citizen-

ship, which he acquired due to his mother being an immigrant there.

As he tells me all this, I ponder on the matter of the new Albanian diaspora, as well as old emigration and generally the mobility of populations from the late nineteenth century till the establishment of the communist regime, which enforced the isolation of the country. Mobility, either as seasonal movement for work, or long-term migration, or settlement in nearby or distant places, was an essential feature of that society in the past. This reality helps us understand this new mobility and interpret corresponding collective behaviours.

In the meantime, the party is really reaching its peak at the festival. Everyone partakes in it, everyone is having a good time, till tiredness and the hot sun lead to a denouement. Then the singing begins. At first the radio picks up a woman singer from Rehovë who lives and works in Tirana. She renders urban lyrical songs of Korçë very beautifully. Then some people sing, mainly folk songs, and the "show" closes with rock songs written by a man from the village who has recently passed away. This last event moves everyone deeply. In the late afternoon, while the festival still seems to carry on, we cannot refuse the invitations by Mina and Hristo to visit their houses. They consider it a matter of course, and we oblige. In both houses we are impressed by the efforts on hospitality made by everyone.

Reflection

The answer to the question: "How old is the community festival?" could be that it is as old as the community itself. Such a po-

sition initially presupposes the acceptance of the theoretical view that a community, over and beyond a mere social reality, is a cultural phenomenon *par excellence* with an intense symbolic dimension. One might say that a community constitutes mainly a sense of belonging, a consciousness of a common historical fate, a perception of collectivity, defined always in relation to other similar entities; in this framework, the concept of differentiation, of a boundary separating the community from the rest of the world, plays an important part (Cohen 1989; Nitsiakos 1991). Boundaries are of course geographical and social, but mostly they are symbolic. Indeed, it is known that it is at the limits of social groups, at the limits of collective identities, that the process of identity construction itself takes place, by means of an awareness of difference. Symbols, on the other hand, are not only useful in defining the limits in the process of constructing collective identities and in their continuous negotiation (Barth 1969): they are also handy in the construction of society itself, in the functioning of a system, since structures, as is well known, do not produce meaning in themselves but through symbols. Furthermore, the concept of culture itself cannot be understood but in relation to a system of symbols through which man as a social being vests his world with meaning.

The approach adopted in the study of the religious festival, in order to interpret its social function, especially its role in the process of the symbolic construction of the community, is based on the working hypothesis that the religious festival has a relationship of religious worship at its core; on the basis of this relationship and by cause of it, certain phenomena develop, of particular symbolic significance for the social construction, reproduction and reconstruction of a community in space and time.

Ethnographic data in the Balkans and in the Mediterranean region permit us to speak of a direct relationship of the festival with the community. In a way, a festival follows the development of a community historically not simply by being a ritualistic expression of social structures, but also by contributing to their construction itself, with its important function on the symbolic level. It is known, for example, that in ethnographic zones where, historically, a patrilineal system of kinship is set in, patrilineal groups known as "clans" (Greek "phara", "patria", "zadruga" etc.) worship a saint-protector who constitutes a symbol of unity for the group and a symbol of distinction from other similar groups. The day of the festival of that saint-protector is a day of celebration for the whole group and is fundamentally transformed into a feast of intense social symbolism. On that day, all the houses in the group are open to receive visitors, and, effectively, this is a celebration day for a whole neighbourhood ("mahala"), since families of common patrilineal descent build their houses side by side and effectively co-habitate. It is typical that even today, in many communities, in spite of the fact that community consciousness is consolidated rather on the level of a whole village, neighbourhoods still celebrate separately on the day of the saint to whom the neighbourhood church is dedicated, a saint-protector of the family that built the particular neighbourhood within its spatial territory. Therefore, parallel to major festivals, which symbolically express the unity of the community, minor festivals survive as well, corresponding to the particular groups constituting the wider village community.

It can be maintained that, generally, on the symbolic level, the historical transition from the patrilineal kinship group to

the community is expressed through the establishment of the worship of a communal saint, to whom the central church of a village is dedicated, a key community symbol uniting the particular clans on a level that transcends kinship. The establishment of the village itself, as spatial entity corresponding to the social category of community, is linked to the building of a central church, an event that usually acquires mythical dimensions, as it is interwoven with oral traditions belonging to the community's myth of origin, which functions as a cohesive ideology. This central church belongs to the whole village, and the saint-protector belongs symbolically to the community as a whole. For this reason, participation in community festivals is general: all families, all the clans celebrate, all members of the community.

Be it as it may, by looking into the corresponding ethnographic material at our disposal, we get the impression that the festival as a ritual constitutes not only a field where social structures are expressed, but a cultural practice through which social groups negotiate their relationships and the community as a whole is born and reborn symbolically through time. Therefore, if one steps away from an evolutionary approach to the communal religious festival as well as from a viewpoint which takes ritual to be a reflection of social structures, and adopts the concept of practice, which involves the recognition of a dialectical relationship between structure and agency, then the religious festival as a social event can be rendered a field of study of the social constitution of the community.

Reflecting on everything I have seen and observed during my participation in the Rehovë festival, on the basis of the above mentioned theoretical principles, I reached two impor-

tant conclusions as to the symbolic function of the festival. The first regards the obvious efforts of the community to pick up the threads of its own history, threads that are now perceived to have been violently cut by the previous regime. This violent breach was imprinted in the harshest manner on the destruction of the church of the Saint Apostles, which was not simply a place of religious worship but also a place of specific symbolic meaning for the constitution and reproduction of the community. Abolishing the festival and prohibiting religion meant putting a stop to a ritual intricately interwoven with collective identity and consciousness of a common destiny. The community seems to have lost this basic ritual mechanism of symbolic reconstruction in the year cycle for a long time, and now it is trying to revive it in a process suggestive of "regeneration". Now, as the community is being reconstructed, after its social and economic disintegration and a deep moral and cultural crisis, it is seeking out its symbols in order to reconstitute its lost cohesion and to find its internal balance. It is interesting that the defining role in this process is played by those community members who were pushed to migration immediately after the collapse of the regime.

The second point, on which I want to linger a little longer, concerns the process of "regeneration" itself, as it is expressed on the symbolic level. Observing the icon on its stand, which has been placed on top of the foundations of the old church and has been turned into a shrine by the faithful who light candles and leave their votive offers there, one cannot avoid reflections in reference to M. Eliade's writings on the consecration of space. I reflect on his idea that in the ritual orientation and construction of sacred space there is an inherent cosmogonic meaning. In

“traditional societies” the appropriation and habitation of space requires its consecration. This is done by means of ritual ceremonies, which, as a rule, are sacrificial rites requiring or creating sacrificial altars. According to Eliade, the construction of a sacrificial altar legitimizing the settlement constitutes a symbolic act of cosmogony. In his book *The Sacred and the Profane* he writes:

An unknown, alien, uninhabited (often perceived as: uninhabited by “our own”, not yet inhabited) place remains part of a fluid, spectral condition of “chaos”. The moment man conquers it, especially by settling there, he transforms it symbolically – through the symbolic repetition of cosmogony – into cosmos. What will be “our world” must first be “created”, and every creation follows a model: the creation of the universe by the gods [...]. Now if a barren piece of land becomes habitable or if another already inhabited by “other” humans is conquered, the ritual of settlement must always and in every case repeat Cosmogony. Because for the archaic society all that is not “our world” is not “world” at all. An area is only ours when we “create” it anew, i.e. we consecrate it. This religious behaviour was maintained even in the West till early modern times (Eliade 2002:28-29).

In our case it is, in fact, the re-appropriation of a space from which the community had been alienated due to its desanctification and its secularization, which here was, indeed, executed in a totalitarian manner; characteristically, a barracks building was raised on the site of the church. The reclamation of the lost sacred space (and time, of course, in regard to the festival) is realized as a hierology of the rediscovery of a lost sacred space which is re-consecrated, i.e. essentially it is recreated on the symbolic level via the establishment of a shrine-altar, by means of re-establishing the symbol of the cross, a symbol connecting, among other things, religious with ethnic identities (contrast between Christian and Muslim Albanians - “Turks”). The conquest of a new space and a new time by means of ritual

procedures marks the exodus of the community from alienation, and this is expressed in every possible way in the corporeal and rhetoric practices of human beings. The concept of cosmogony is useful not simply in an ontological approach to things, but in understanding the social reality constructed during this transitional phase. The past as a "foreign land" (the communist period) and the elsewhere as an object of familiarization (Greece as migrant destination) constitute two axes defining the field of new claims regarding the future of identity and the identity of the future.

The reclamation of the sacred space is obviously linked to the re-establishment of the connection with the sacred time of the community. It is not simply a case of finding the lost threads of historical time after the breach brought about by the previous regime, but an actual reconnection of the community with its sacred time, its mythical beginnings, which are pre-eminently celebrated at the festival. There, the initial sacred act of the establishment of the community, linked to the establishment of the church as the common sacrificial altar and worship space of the saint-protector, symbol of the common descent and unity, is ritually re-enacted. The mythical time of the community becomes present time in the yearly festival which commemorates and represents a sacred event from the mythical past which is nothing but the "beginning" itself, through ceaseless repetition. Essentially the community is ritually reborn with every festival on the same day every year; it renews its existence validating and strengthening the ties in its interior by means of symbolic acts. A special study on oral traditions and myth of origin of the community would certainly yield material for further substantiation and support of such an approach. At any rate, even in

this manner, based on experience and intuition, I believe that the above thoughts are not simply working hypotheses based on theoretical constructions superimposed on experienced "reality".

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

ON THE EDGE. TWO GREEK-SPEAKING VILLAGES IN
PËRMET

Vllaho-Psilloterrë

On the first of June 2005, early morning finds us on the way to Vllaho-Psilloterrë. This is a community of two settlements, the Vllahi and the Psilloterrë, exactly across Çarçovë on the other side of Vjosë and very near the border on the side of Mollwoskepastos. We leave our vehicle by the wooden bridge, near the public road and at the edge of Çarçovë and go uphill towards the first settlement, Psilloterrë. The pathway is rather narrow and steep and goes through streams and rampant riverside vegetation. Somewhere in the middle of the way, to our great surprise, we run into a road where it is possible to discern traces of tractor or truck wheels. Trying to figure this out, we spot in the bank of Vjosë something looking like a passageway. As the villagers explained later, in the summer months when the waters are low, tractors, trucks and jeeps may cross the river at

two specific points. The rest of the year, however, the crossing is impossible, which is why their main demand is the construction of a modern bridge, a demand they have placed on the Greek side as well but, while they have received a lot of promises, nothing has been done yet.



Figure 28. Old iconostasis on the bank of Vjosë

We arrive at the village after a half hour walk. We face a typical (for us) Epirote village drowning in lush vegetation. While the settlement is comprised mainly of stone buildings, recent house repairs, extensions and new constructions are in evidence. The latter stand out with their red tiles in the midst of old slate roofs.

We move further on the central village street. Several houses seem open; it is the summer, after all. We spot a large

plane tree and next to it a bell tower, which we assume signify the village centre. We start towards them and on the way we meet a woman around sixty and we begin talking with her. She is Chrisavgi Kita and one of the first things she hastens to tell us is that the village is now almost empty, that no more than seven families remain here, only elderly couples. The villagers have all left for Greece, and especially the young, she says. Chrisavgi is the wife of Fotos Kita, a retired teacher, who makes his appearance when we reach the mid-village. He is particularly eager to converse and immediately starts telling stories, especially from the past. He reminisces on the difficult years of the Hoxha. The well-known picture of jails, exiles and relocations re-emerges. In 1951, he says, thirteen families were relocated from the village to various spots in central and northern Albania and as many more in 1974. His brother was imprisoned on charge of collaboration with Greece, while he himself was suspended from his service for a few months. He would have been fired he says, if he hadn't already completed fifteen years of service, which, according to the law, prevented his dismissal. He narrates various incidents, all of which resemble stories I know from my research among the Greek minority. He mentions two schools, a Greek and an Albanian one, that used to operate in the village in the time of King Zogu. He presents the villagers as good patriots who resisted the Albanian regime.

Talking about himself, he tells us that, since the school closed down due to the flight of the population to Greece after 1991, he teaches Greek in a language school run by the diocese of Konitsa in Leskovik. He is paid 90 Euros, which barely covers his expenses, since he goes to Leskovik by taxi twice a week, Saturday and Sunday. He does it rather because he feels it is his

duty. His classes are attended by 54 students from all ethnic groups of the area, even from Muslim families. All want their children to learn Greek, hoping they will continue their studies in Greece one way or another. Indeed, many of the children continue their schooling in Konitsa, where there is a suitable boarding house, while others have gone to Greek universities. While the teacher is telling his story, I feel that somehow "history is being repeated", regarding the role of Greek education. Something similar was happening in the nineteenth and the twentieth century and even after the foundation of the Albanian state, until the establishment of the communist regime, and had significant impact on the formation of the cultural identity and national consciousness of the inhabitants of the wider area of South Albania.

About his family, Fotos tells us his children are in Greece and emphasises the fact that they are well settled there. One of his sons lives in Paros, where he works as a house painter and has managed to buy his own house. The other lives in Chios and he is well settled, too. His daughter is also in Greece. They visit them sometimes, as they possess the *omogenis* (of Greek origin) identity card and can enter Greece freely. He also mentions that, as Greeks themselves, they receive a farmer's pension from Greece, which is very important, since it is 200 Euros per month whereas their Albanian pension is 40 Euros.

Fotos also tells us the story of his first experience in Greece, after the opening of the border, in the context of an organized meeting with the inhabitants of Molivdoskepastos in the latter village in 1992. He stresses two things: First, the reunion with the people of the above village, with whom they have historical bonds of friendship as neighbours and also family relations;

second, how greatly they were impressed by the development and wealth of the Greek village, a fact which he uses to counter the previous regime's propaganda about the poverty and misery of Greece..

While we were talking with Fotos we were joined by a man who looked particularly harassed. He is Vassilis, about whom Fotos hastens to say he had to suffer because of the imprisonment of his father for 18 years (also on the charge of collaboration with Greece) and he himself was stigmatised by this fact. As he himself explains, the stigma led to his social marginalisation; as a result he couldn't find a wife and had to marry in his fifties an Albanian woman from the North. "I was nothing", he says characteristically. Now his wife and kids live in Tirana, because there is no school in the village, and he visits them there from time to time. Vassilis works in Konitsa, when there is work and when he can. Usually his cousins, the brothers Raga, who come from Psilloterrë, offer him work in their firm. They have even offered him a space to stay inside the plant and so he divides his time between Konitsa and his village, where he looks after his elderly father who is 90 years old.

We ask Vassilis to meet his father. He accepts gladly, only apologises that their house is not in good condition, because his wife is away. By the time he goes home and back to fetch us, we also meet a youth who's been listening to our conversation all along. He is from the village and is studying in a secondary school in Konitsa, where he is staying at the diocese boarding house. He has come to the village for a few days and afterwards will go to Crete to work with his uncles who live there. During the school year he comes to the village for the Weekends.

In the meantime, Vassilis returns and invites us to his home. There, we find his father, Kostas, waiting for us in the yard. Erect and smiling, he welcomes us with great joy. He does not show his age at all, despite all he's been through. His problem is his reduced eye sight. We sit inside, in a room that looks like a new extension of the old house. Vassilis offers us raki and fruit preserve, while apologising constantly about not being able to treat us as well as he would like, because his wife is away.

The old man starts his narrations about the village history as well as his own. He never was a partisan, but was a party member, nevertheless. Still, he was persecuted and imprisoned and, along with him, the whole family paid the price of the stigma. He talks about the Greek school that used to operate in the village in the old days. He tells us about the Muslim beys who used to live in the next settlement, Vllahi, and occupied the land as *çiftlik* (landed estate), while the Christian inhabitants of the two settlements would work for them as vassals. Our previous interlocutors had referred to these beys, as well, identifying three particular families. One of their descendants still lives in the village, his surname is Kurani. Checking the electoral lists and the relevant names posted on the door of the municipal offices, I confirmed the existence of this surname and its Muslim identity.

At some point, Vassilis starts monopolising the discussion. He repeats everything he has already mentioned about his sufferings from the Hoxha regime and now criticises particularly the stance and behaviour of his co-villagers, saying, characteristically, that "they used to bad-mouth Greece then and now they receive a pension from it". He stresses the cruelty and absurdity of the regime, constantly repeating his own sufferings. Among

the various incidents he recounts is the following typical one: Local party agents and members of the secret police (*sigurimi*) asked him whether he had visited his father in prison; and to his answer that he had not and he would not want to be associated in any way with his father who "went wrong", they reacted with threats against him, taking his action as dissident; according to them he should be visiting his father, so as to confirm the fact that he is not abused...

Vassilis presents the picture of an unhappy man; he repeats, however, the phrase "thank God" all the time. He is very sorry - he has to send his children to school in Tirana and feels under great pressure lately, because he hasn't gone to Konitsa to work for two months, due to an illness of his wife. Now he hopes, though, that soon his cousins will call him from Konitsa to go for work.

While Vassilis speaks I feel a knot in my stomach. It reminds me of my feelings of dismay when I heard similar stories in Dropull about a decade ago. I think again, on this occasion, how incredibly absurd the regime was. I think of the misfortunes suffered by the whole of this population. With respect to the members of the Greek minority, Greekness seems to have been one more pretext for the regime to apply its totalitarian and inhuman practices. The ploys of exile and relocation would apparently, among other things, secure hands for the factories of the North and the strategy of ideological terrorism as well as the cultivation of a generalised social suspiciousness secured absolute control over the local communities.

As we leave the house of Vassilis Hristos, we meet a woman in the street, with the surname Christides. She also talks to us about her children who are in Greece and her grandchildren

whom she is expecting soon, they will come for their vacation. One of her sons is now in Norway, as he married a Norwegian whom he met in Corfu, where he lived and worked until recently. While she complains that she and her husband have been left alone in the village, she also seems pleased that the old regime is gone and they can now live in dignity and without want... Her only problem seems to be separation and the loneliness of the elderly who have remained in the village. She points suggestively to a decrepit old woman who sits alone in the terrace of her home, saying that she is completely alone.

As we return to the mid-village, we find, next to the fountain, a woman about 30-35 years old with her mother, gazing towards Greece. We start chatting with them, too. The young woman is called Marieta and lives in Konitsa thirteen years now with her husband, Vangelis, who comes from the neighbouring village, Biovizdhë. She has come for the Weekend, to visit her mother. This is the only reason why she ever comes here, just as she goes to Biovizdhë to visit her in-laws. Marieta has very beautiful blue eyes, like her mother. Her mother has very strong features. She comes from an Albanian village next to Leskovik, Çerckë. Her name is Anastasia. She explains that her father gave her to a Greek, because he had good relations with the Greeks and respected them. When she arrived at the village she did not speak a word of Greek, but gradually she learnt. She had nine siblings but, she, too, had ten children, of which nine are living, most of them in Greece. While we speak they observe the harvesting machine reaping a field of theirs in the plane next to the river. We start chatting about the fields. She has 3 acres of land in three different locations. She explains that in the past they used to have very good fields. They had everything growing;

corn, vegetables, fruits, etc. When Hoxha came he imposed monoculture: wheat and sweet corn, because he was only interested in bread sufficiency. Now, they grind the wheat they produce at the mill, in the village Ljar near Përmet, and secure wheat meal for the whole year.

Our discussion turns to the impending elections. Marieta tells us she will not vote, she is not interested at all in politics. She comments disparagingly on the fact that on the electoral lists they have names of people who are in America or people who are dead. She believes the "even the dead will vote". Her attitude towards public issues in Albania is very negative. Her mother tells us that the candidate of the Union for Human Rights Party in the area, G. Loulemes, is with Berisha and speaks negatively about that. Marieta is very happy with her life in Konitsa. Her husband's business is thriving and her children do not want to go to their village in Albania, not even for holidays.

After we finish our discussion, we take the road of return, aiming to visit the next village, Biovizdhë, on the following day. On the public road to Përmet, close to Çarçovë, we run into some cars with posters of G. Loulemes and waving Greek flags. It is a group of young people working for the pre-election campaign in the area. We comment on the use of Greek flags, in an area that does not even belong to the zone of the officially recognised Greek minority...

Biovizdhë

Next morning, we start very early for Biovizdhë, around seven. At Çarçovë, we meet a bus from Greece; we hear it transports G.

Loulemes's voters. At that moment the candidate is welcoming them himself. He invited us for a treat. He had his daughter Varvara with him, who is studying Economics at the University of Macedonia, in Thessaloniki. She has graduated from the 5th Lyceum in Jannina. They tell us, in fact, that they have their own flat in Jannina. Giorgos appears optimistic about the election results. They say that they, too, will later go up to Biovizdhë. He calls some Anastasi, who does the taxi driver, to take them. The taxi driver is, however, in Konitsa. We leave the parliamentary candidate and his company and we start for the village on foot.

Next to the Çarçovë settlement stands one of the wooden bridges of the river Vjosë. We cross it and ascend. Biovizdhë is about an hour away from that point on foot. We are walking under a burning hot sun, so we have to stop at regular intervals for a rest. As we arrive at the settlement we are very impressed by the emptiness. It is the day before the election and we expected to find a lot of people. The village looks a lot like Vllaho-Psilloterrë. Houses steeped in green, with beautiful gardens and many fruit-bearing trees. A lot of them look recently repaired. They bear the relevant signs: roofs of tiles or tin, extensions and plastered walls. The interventions of the last decade, made for the purpose of repair, are evident and these have to do, of course, with migration, just like in Vllaho-Psilloterrë.

At the entrance of the village, the ruined history museum creates a dreadful impression. Next to it is the bust of partizan Skender Tsatsi, son of the old bey of the village, Zeinel bey. It is placed on a pedestal, which is disproportionately high for the village scale, and the proud look of the partisan strikes ironically in the context of the degraded present.

Moving further inside the settlement, we detect two women in a yard, of which one is holding a baby in her arms. I'm impressed by how poor their Greek is. I imagine they must be Albanians who came to the village as brides. A little further down, on the right side of the road, we see a building that looks like a cafe-grocery. The door is open. We enter and see a woman around sixty. The only item in there that reminds of a shop is a pair of scales on a table: a picture of abandonment and misery. This woman, too, speaks very little Greek. She tells us she is a bride from elsewhere. To my question whether there are men in the village, she answers there are a few and they are at work. Most of the men are in Greece.

We leave the store and move towards a fountain we have located. Around there we detect a girl, 16-17 years of age, inside a yard. We greet her and I immediately ask where the people of the village are. She answers that most of them have left for "there" (Greece). A little later, we see the same girl, accompanied by a younger one, crossing the main street of the village, going towards their garden. She is carrying a shovel. She tells us she is going to channel water in the furrow, to irrigate the garden. The water is scarce and they irrigate in turns. We start talking again. Her name is Varvara Koto and she is the only young girl living permanently in the village. She expresses her complaint for having stayed behind and not having had an education, since the village school closed and her parents will not let her go to Greece alone. She occasionally goes to see her brothers who live there. The girl with her tells us she goes to school in Greece, in Monodendri, in Zagori, where she lives in a boarding house. At the moment, she is in the village on holiday.

After a while, two boys approach us as well. One goes to school in Konitsa, where he stays in a boarding house, and the other in Pogoniani (a Greek village near the border). They are also in the village on holiday and they are helping their parents with their farming chores. One of them has just returned from the mountain with a donkey loaded with the herb *asfaka*. He explains they sell it 60 cents a kilo to a merchant in Përmet, who forwards it to Italy, where they use it to make a medicine. This way, two families in the village supplement their income. I know they used to collect this plant in the days of the Hoxha as well. Since it is a plant that thrives in pastures downgraded by overgrazing, I think of an issue that has preoccupied me in the past, namely the environmental dimension of the communist regime's production practices (Nitsiakos 2006).

While we are chatting with the children, I see an elderly woman at the fountain, throwing water on her face. I hasten to meet her. I greet her and she responds with a warm kiss. She tells me her *tensione* (blood pressure) drops, that is why she wets her face. We start talking with her, as well. She says she lives alone in the village. Her children and grandchildren are all in Greece. Her name is Sophia, her maiden surname Nika and her husband's Bekiris (Anastasis). She refers to some first cousin of hers who had left the village a long time ago for Greece and now lives in Jannina. His name is Elia Nikopoulos, and I am to give him her regards. She starts on stories of the past. About Zeinel bey, who was the local landlord but a very good man. He would take the one third of the production and look after all the villagers. He had helped two of her brothers settle with jobs in Tirana, using his connections. Sophia is happy with the latest

developments and her Greek farmer's pension from Greece, but she is sorry that her children are away.

I bid Sophia farewell and, immediately after that, another woman invites us to her home for coffee; Milo (Emilia), who, we learn later, is Varvara's mother. We gladly accept. Milo and her husband, Stavros, have just returned from the field. We sit at the veranda under a beautiful vine. We gaze at Konitsa opposite. They offer us raki, coffee and cherry preserve. Stavros starts speaking. He mentions initially their kin, the Kotollaris. He says that his surname Koto belongs to the same family tree as the surnames Kitas and Hristou, which are found in Vllahopiloterrë. Milo comes from Tsouka in Sarandë, from a Greek family, the family of Godaris Thomas. They met and fell in love in Leskovik, when they both worked as volunteers in the making of vineyards. When he married her she was only fifteen. Now she is forty-two. She looks over fifty. She herself tells us they stay here only for the sake of her mother-in-law, who is ninety and needs care. Otherwise, they would be in Greece, too, with their two children in Athens. One works at the Metro and the other is a builder.

The grandmother comes from the ruined village Perati, next to the border and close to the new customs at Mertziani. One of her brothers lives in Egoumenitsa and she has not managed to meet him, not even after the opening of the border. Her son tells us she finds it very difficult to understand the indifference of his uncle towards his sister... The grandmother receives a pension of 50000 lek for her imprisoned for 25 years husband, Grigoris. She was going, Stavros says, to receive a large compensation as well (24 million lek), according to a law passed by Berisha, but they never gave it to her. Berisha is promising again to give

these compensations, if he wins the next elections. Grigoris Koto was put to jail, because he had helped two of his children escape to Greece, Notis and Giorgos, who settled in Jannina. Giorgos, who was a teacher, has died, while Notis lives. In Greece they both used the surname Hristou. They tell us that Giorgos minded them very much, and died of cardiac arrest reading a letter Stavros had sent him... While Grigoris was in prison his family had been exiled in Lushnjë. He died in prison and they could not even find his bones. While in the village he was a craftsman. They even say that he built his house all by himself and because he made two floors he was accused by the communists that of building it tall in order to be able to see Greece! All of Stavros's stories sound so familiar in my ears... The generalised suspiciousness, lack of freedom, totalitarianism, absurdity... Milo refers to the dominance of fear. She tells us how afraid of speaking they were. They would work close to the border, and women from Molivoskepastos would call at them ("hey, so and so, is my mother alive, is my sister alive?") and they would keep their mouth shut. Nothing!

Stavros then describes how emotional the moments were, when they met for the first time with the inhabitants of Molivoskepastos, who had helped very much in those years. He mentions especially the teacher Apostolos Ristanis, saying that, in the first years after the opening of the border, children from Biovizdhë and Vllaho-Psilloterrë went to school in Molivoskepastos, as in the same year there operated an unofficial customs, mainly for the service of these two villages, from which many people moved on a daily basis for work, and this goes on today, still, though to a lesser degree. The unofficial customs closed down when the nearby customs of Mertziani

started to operate. The flow, however, of people and goods, continues from both channels.

Our talk moves to several issues. One of the most interesting ones concerns the relations the village developed with Cyprus. They recognise the great financial help they were offered by the Cypriots and refer to the bonds that were created by the many christening and marriage sponsorships that followed, since the Cypriots offered to christen many of the children in the village. They also mention the characteristic event that, with the money the children collected when they visited their godparents in Cyprus, in 1995-96, they built the road from the river to the village.

Speaking about the road and the connection of the village with the outside world, the discussion is led to the matter of the building of a modern bridge. In addition to other difficulties, it seems that the two communities are quarrelling over the exact location of the bridge. Stavros is sad to say that the idea of building a bridge connecting their village with Molivoskepasos has also fallen through, because the company that was assigned the work asked for too much money. (He himself believes, of course, that the Albanians do not want this connection).

Stavros is inexhaustible. At some time though, we have to leave. He takes us to the end of the village and bidding us farewell he asks us to return.

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER: DIPALITSA, OSTANITSA AND THE OTHER FRONTIER VILLAGES

During our research in the Përmet area, reports from the Greek villages of the frontier were very frequent. The most typical cases of relations with the other side concern the existence of relatives, who had left their home villages one way or the other and had settled on the other side of the border. Very often these are first degree relatives, which indicates the disbanding of families.

Bearing in mind this fact and, of course, having registered in my notebook specific data about such cases, in parallel to my research in Albania, I start relevant investigations in the wider area of Konitsa and Jannina. A first inquiry in the archives of Konitsa municipality reveals an important number of registered citizens who have come from the villages of the wider area of Përmet, both Greek-speaking and Albanian-speaking. I also get to know personally several inhabitants of Konitsa and the frontier villages who originate from the same area in Albania. So, I embark on systematic research, in order to locate more cases

for further study, aiming to focus my interest in the recording of family trees, life stories and relevant personal testimonies, and manage thus to study in greater depth the matter of identity management.

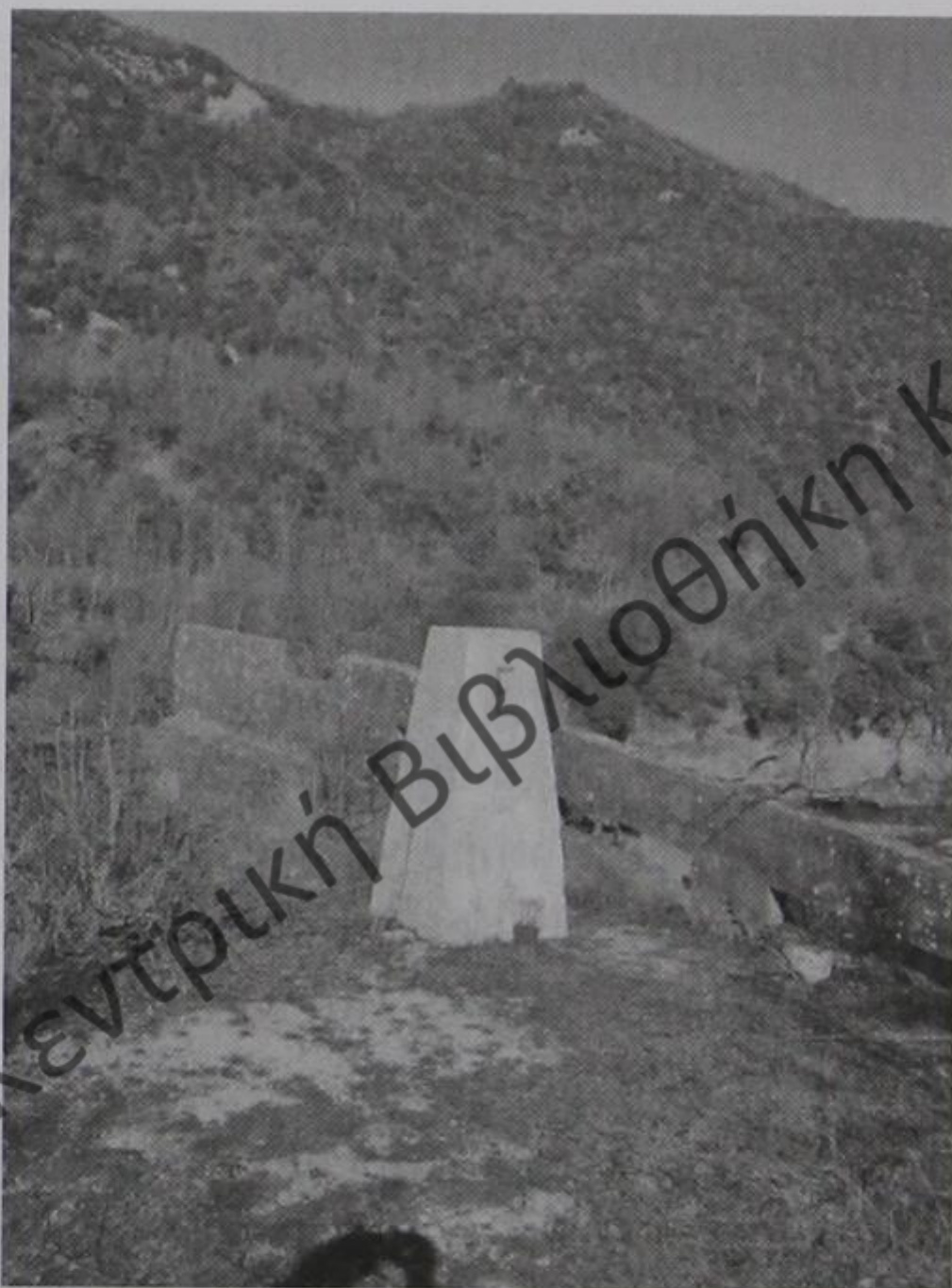


Figure 29. Pyramid on the border

So I start a small project with my collaborators, in the villages next to the border, on the Greek side. I already have sufficient amount of information about the communities of Molivoskepastos (Dipalitsa) and Aidonochori (Ostanitsa), where several inhabitants originate from villages on the Alba-

nian side. Among them are a number of friends and acquaintances, a fact that renders the task somewhat easier.

Ostanitsa. Toula's secret

We start the research missions on location on the axis between these two villages on 3 December 2005. We visit Aidonochori first. We arrive early in the morning and park in front of the central cafe in the village square. We discover damage in the car, a petrol leak. The cafe owner who happens to be outside consoles us, saying he can fix such problems and, indeed, repairs the damage temporarily. This man is around forty and has lived in the village for more than 10 years, working as a wood sculptor while keeping the cafe at the same time. His studio is inside the cafe, and at the moment he is carving parts of a rood screen he was commissioned.

His wife is Albanian. One can tell she is Albanian from both her appearance and her accent. While her husband is occupied with my car she goes around making various comments. In a while their children arrive, a boy and a girl. We learn they are the only children in the village and that they go to school in Konitsa.

A little later an old acquaintance of mine arrives, Dimitris, also a wood sculptor. I had met him many years ago, on the occasion of a folk art exhibition we had organised in Konitsa, on an initiative of the Municipal Cultural Centre. He, too, has moved in the village many years now. We start talking and I ask him, among other things, about his origins. He tells me he comes from the village Badëlonjë in Përmet. His father had escaped in 1928 and had come to Aidonochori, where he married his

mother and so he became a local by marriage (a *sogabros*). His surname was other and he changed it for security reasons after his flight from Albania. To my question whether he knows the original family name he answered that these things are very obscure. Their father had not told them, fearing that the information might leak and he be arrested. I insist discreetly that he tells me whether after 1990 he had had some contact with his relatives in Albania. He tells me he went and found their house. It belongs to an Albanian widow, who, in fact, feared he might reclaim it. He re-assured her he only wanted to see it. Regarding the surname he repeats that things are unclear. There are two or three different possible family names but avoids mentioning them. I do not insist. He tells me that in 1990, when the border fell, several people came who presented themselves as relatives. He welcomed them at first but then rejected them because they were very demanding. He adds that many suffered similarly. They acknowledged relatives but later pulled back. He realises that the problem is not merely economical and practical but has wider ideological and political dimensions. To recognise Albanian relatives means that one admits indirectly his Albanian origin. He himself appears quite at ease about this matter. He knows, as he says, that "his blood is from there". He speaks of the deep emotion he felt when he heard Albanian songs in a program on Albanian television whose signal is received in the area. It reminded him, he says, of the way his father used to sing...

Dimitris does not seem inclined to tell me everything, even though he is glad I am professionally concerned with these matters. He gives me further evidence about other villagers that come from Albania. And he explains their powerful presence

here as the result of their marrying into families of villagers living abroad.

I also ask him about the Albanians who are now staying in the village. He tells me that only two are living in the village at the moment, doing every odd job ("they have mended the village" is the way he puts it) and other two come periodically. The first two were given two empty houses to live in. He also mentions the wife of Lakis, the cafe owner, who is Albanian, too. He repeats continuously that he himself has no problem whatsoever with Albanians, this (the clash) only happened with his relatives because they were pestering him with absurd demands.

In the meantime, Lakis finishes the repair of the car and we sit for a drink of *tsipouro*. The *tsipouro*, as usual, facilitated our communication. We agreed to come back here again and talk more.

We go again next week. We arrive around 10 in the morning, on a Saturday, 10 December 2005, and the cafe is open. Lakis's wife, Toula welcomes us very amicably. Toula comes from the village Çarçovë, very close to the border. In a little while several men arrive: an elderly villager and two hunters, later Lakis himself, who had been in Konitsa on business, as well as an old acquaintance of mine, the previous mayor of the village, Sifis Gouras, who lives permanently in Jannina but visits the village frequently.

The discussion early on turns to issues related to the origin of the villagers, "Northern Epirus" and Albania. The elderly villager reacts somewhat abruptly, saying that he is not going to say anything on these matters. Still, he was listening carefully, at some point it looked as if he wanted to intervene, but he did not,

as the others were talking continuously, so at some point he departed keeping his word.

At some point the discussion turns around Sifis's family. He himself seems willing to talk about everything. He says his family came from the village Badëlonjë in Përmet, but they were originally from Roumeli (Central Greece). Their surname used to be Eliades, while Gouras was initially his grandfather's nickname, who had killed a bey of the area on a rock (gurë=rock). He also mentions that his folk were millers in Albania, a profession they continued to practice in Aidonochori. He presents his ancestors as bandit-heroes, who had to abandon Albania because of their heroic philhellenic activities... He refuses to visit Albania, even though many of his fellow villagers do so regularly, and he didn't even go in 1990, when a trip was organized with the purpose of meeting the inhabitants of the Greek-speaking villages on the other side. He puts it down to his fear of going. However, I also discern a refusal to identify with the people past the border. As the discussion progresses he speaks more frankly and fervently declares that after 1990 all the old Northern Epirotes in Greece are ashamed to say they are Northern Epirotes, while in the past they used to be proud of it. Indeed, he refers to a joke they made up with friend in Jannina, that nowadays it is better to come from Lemonia (to be a Gypsy, that is), than a Northern Epirote! It is worth mentioning that in a relevant discussion with an American acquaintance of Albanian origin, she mentioned that Albanians in the U.S, too, refuse to identify with the more recent migrants and generally differentiate between pre-war Albania and Albania today. Sifis, in any case, persists in declaring his difficulty and rejects right away our suggestion to go to Badëlonjë together.

Sifis departs for Konitsa, where he will be preoccupied with putting together the list of candidates for the impending municipal elections. We stay at the cafe with the couple and two hunters from Corfu, who have been listening attentively all this time and – as expected – take the opportunity to express their totally negative view of this people, saying “it’s all in their blood”...

In the end, we stay only with the couple and have a friendly and important discussion with them, about their case but also more general issues regarding identities, relationships, etc. The two of them met at a wedding in Çarçovë. The two young people getting married were from there, but lived in Aidonochori at the time, in the beginning of 1990. The bride was Toula’s cousin. So they met and she agreed to come to Greece. They remember how difficult not speaking the same language was. Toula did not speak Greek at all. They were trying to teach each other their language with gestures... They settled initially in Jannina, where she faced difficulties of adjustment and communication.

As the discussion turns to Toula’s origin, she reveals her big “secret”. Her father had escaped from Albania, when she was a small child. He married for the second time in Jannina, where he had settled, and had two boys. His name is D.C. and he used to be a taxi driver until recently. She says that, coincidentally, they used to live in the same neighbourhood in Jannina. There was great embarrassment between them and she never attempted to approach him or her half-brothers. She saw him from a distance but avoided getting near. So they never met. She says that in the past he used to send letters but they never received them. So they were alienated. Now she wouldn’t want to create a

problem for him with her presence, and, after all they had written him off.

Toula grew up with her mother, in Elbasan and Tirana. They were not punished harshly for their father's action, because they had relatives, on their mother's side, in high positions in the party mechanism. They were merely relocated and, in their new place of residence, she herself had experienced some prejudice against her.

Her mother comes from Pobickë, a small village next to Leskovik on the side of the border. Her surname is Soulioti which indicates the family's origin from Souli. Now she lives in Përmet in a flat she owns and both Toula and her children visit her frequently.

Her grandfathers were both emigrants in Istanbul, where they used to work as gardeners. She remembers that one of her grandfathers spoke Greek, but in her family they spoke Albanian, which is her own mother-tongue. Her position concerning her identity is clear: she is an Albanian Christian Orthodox and her family has been historically sympathetic towards the Greeks and Hellenism. She speaks scathingly of "this story of the so-called Northern-Epirotes", the fact that all Southern Albanians want to present themselves as "Northern-Epirotes", and condemns the discriminations in Greece. About herself, she says she may have Greek roots, but she grew up as an Albanian and now that she lives in Greece she simply tries to live like a Greek. She is worried though about her children, because there is severe discrimination against Albanians at school. She herself tries not to influence her children's views and be objective. The children themselves like to visit their grandmother in Albania and learn the Albanian language. Her husband has also learnt

Albanian. He comes from Leskovik but in their family they never spoke Albanian. Lakis tells us his father was a shoemaker in the village and had suffered two years in exile as a communist. I think that this explains his progressive ideas around the issue of national identities. In his turn, he also censures the "story with Northern Epirus and the Northern Epirotes". Then he narrates his own adventure. As a small child he was sent to the Georgios Stavros Foundation, where he learnt the art of carver (wood-sculptor). After that, at the age of 16, he was taken to Athens, where he worked initially at a sweet-shop owned by someone from a neighbouring village and then as a carver for various manufacturers. Finally he returned to Jannina, where he continued to work as a carver, until, after his marriage with Toula, they decided to move in the village. Here, while operating the cafe, he also takes on commissions by manufacturers in Jannina.

Our discussion moves to greater depth. They seem to need to talk. We leave late in the afternoon with great difficulty, agreeing to meet again. I feel an important relationship has been formed, which can be utilized in research in various ways.

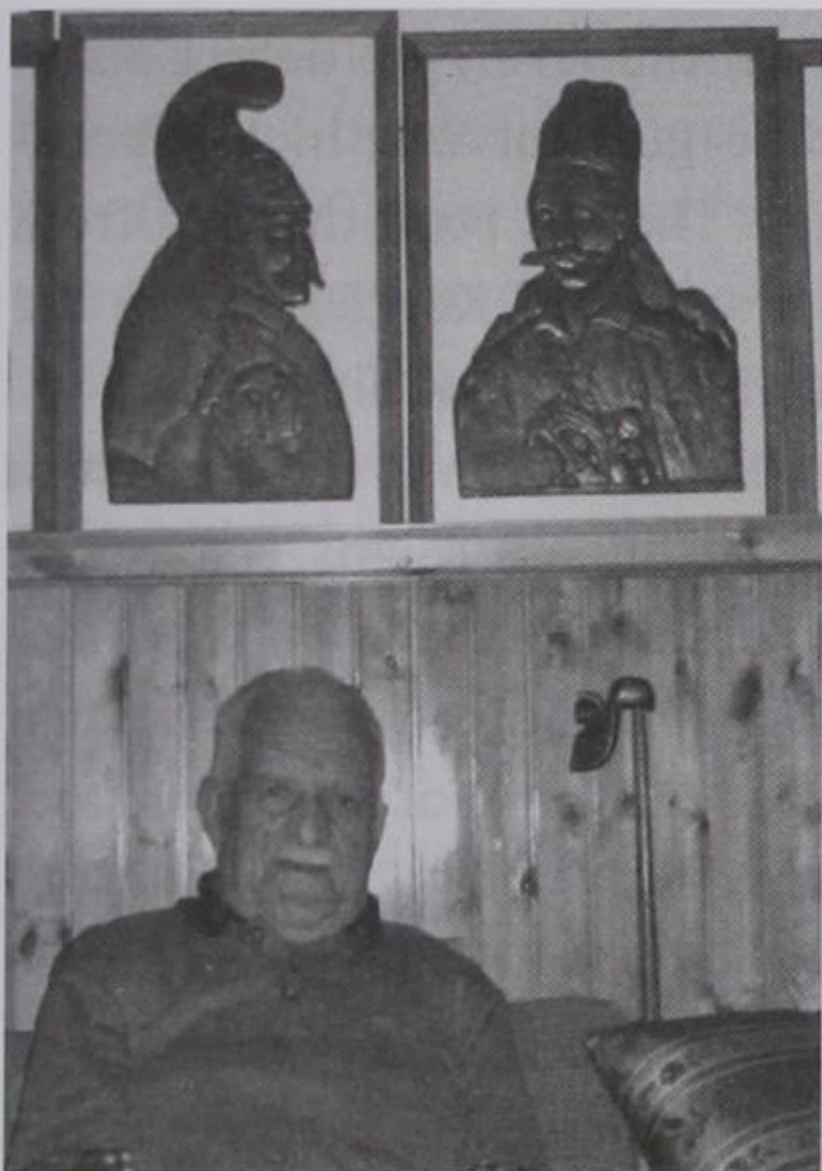
From Dipalitsa to Melissopetra. Theocharis's stories

In the afternoon we went around the surrounding villages, ending up in Molivdoskepastos. We sit at the village cafe, where there are a few men. In a while, Giorgos Gogos appears, whom I know from previous visits and have great respect for, especially regarding his charisma for story-telling, as much as his knowledge of many things and excellent memory. He impresses me once more as we start talking again. He hastens to fill in the

story gaps he thinks he had left in our previous meeting and starts telling new stories. Among them especially interesting is the case of the Toula family, a family of animal farmers, who with the closing down of the Greek-Albanian border is divided in two parts, one in Greece and one in Albania. The parents stay in Albania, in Leskovik, while the children are fenced in the Greek side, in the village Klidonia. The couple has more children. The family reunites in 1990, after the collapse of the Albanian regime and the fall of the border. He describes the relocation as well as tragic moment of the family's reunion, stressing the fact that the siblings that were born after the division could not communicate with the rest, because they did not speak the same language!

I visit Molivdoskepastos very often, because of my friendship with certain villagers. Because of this special relationship with the village, I choose it as the field for the practice of my post-graduate students. So, on Friday, 28 January 2006 we arrive at the village with the intension of staying for a long weekend.

In the afternoon of the same day we walk to the church of St. Apostles next to the border, so as to become acquainted with the place, and have a chat with the soldiers at the guard station about the border and the frontier in general. The soldiers refer to the border by way of the pyramid shaped whatch-towers (A3, A7, etc.). I comment on this fact to my students and urge them to deal with the matter, comparing the specific way of delineation and definition of border with the way the inhabitants of the village understand the border.



*Figure 30. Theocharis
from Melissopetra*

With the students' practice underway, I spend the rest of the days in the wider area of the border, with the purpose, precisely, of investigating the ways in which the inhabitants have experienced the border in the past and perceive it in the present. In the morning of the next day, together with Kostas Mantzos, we embark on a route of tracking the border on the side of the river Sarantaporos. Examining our map, we realise it depicts a road that leads from Kalovrisi along Sarantaporos, at the point where the river constitutes the national border towards Pixaria and the rest of the villages in the North. We decide to follow it. Upon arriving at Kalovrisi, a small village settlement of Melissopetra, a villager informs us that the road is a dead-end and that it leads only to fields and stops exactly at the river, that is, at the border. On the other side of the river is Albania. If we wish, we can easily cross the river, despite the winter weather.

Across and at a short distance from the river, we detect abandoned guard stations and machine gun turrets. In the background we can distinguish villages. The old road that led from Mertziani via Glinë to Leskovik, Ersekë and Korçë goes by the river. Apparently it, too, is going through desolation.

The fields on the Greek side are all cultivated; in contrast to those on the Albanian side where bareness reigns. I stand on the river edge, taking in the difficulties impressed on the Albanian landscape. I think of how people on both sides experienced prohibition for almost half a century. I think of the river, too: what must it know of borders, I wonder...

When we return to the village we meet a villager and start chatting. He is cutting wood on the side of the road. He talks to us about the village and its abandonment. The picture of the fields is deceiving. Those who cultivate them, like himself, do not live here. The permanent inhabitants of the village are only a few elderly people. He himself lives in Konitsa and comes mainly in the weekends for hunting and as much as he needs for the tending of his fields during the cultivation period. The mobility we observe today is due to some memorial ritual in the village.

We ask him about the Albanians. He answers abruptly that "he doesn't even want to hear of them". He is totally negative and declares that he never employs Albanians, neither he nor his fellow-villagers, except occasionally, for the loading and unloading of clover and even then the truck-drivers themselves usually bring them along. We also ask him about the Albanian villages across. He doesn't know them and doesn't want to know them either... I try to understand his behaviour. He soon explains. He speaks of a tragic event. In the beginning of the

1990s, Albanians had shot his brother while on his motorbike next to the border. They caused him two wounds but he survived. They never found out why it happened. Maybe they wanted money, or the motorbike. Since then, he doesn't want to ever set sight on them, he repeats. He also denies any kind of relationship with Albanians in the past. I personally doubt that. I think that he projects his present hatred onto the past. Indeed, I am later informed by some elderly man that in the past they used to have dealings and marriage transactions with the other side, and their bazaar used to take place in Leskovik, which is, after all, closer than Konitsa. I am also informed that the village is a main passageway for Albanians and this may have induced in the remaining villagers feelings of fear. The same man tells us that in the summer, when the sweet corn plants are grown, you go into the field and you don't know what to expect because Albanian illegal migrants hide in there. "We go to our fields with fear in the heart", he says, typically, and once again refers to his brother's injury; the latter actually keeps an agricultural storehouse exactly next to the river-border. I leave with the sense of a fear, which is obviously the result of the conditions that prevailed in this frontier area in the first years after the collapse of the Albanian regime and the border.

We leave Kalovrisi. We stop over at the old ruined bridge that used to join Greece and Albania before the War. At the entry to the bridge the old guard station is still standing. I stand and speculate over the games of history. At the same time I am overcome by strange awe. It has to do with the border. I think about how deeply ingrained in us is the idea of the border. How we have internalised the map hanging on the walls of all the school rooms of our childhood and adolescent years. I remem-

ber Albania was always in white, a picture of vagueness, mysterious and even non-existent, and while inside a square, down on the right, figured Cyprus. Now I wonder why "Northern Epirus" was not marked in a similar manner. I think again how it is possible – even though I have been moving in the border for so long and have totally realised its artificial and arbitrary nature, and have debunked, as well, through my scientific investigations, its national content – to still slightly project onto the geographical landscape the mental map that marked the national division of a unified space. And here, at least, a river constitutes a kind of visible natural border, whereas at other points it is impossible to discern natural borderlines, as it is very difficult to understand the logic behind the demarcation of the borderline.

This state of affairs, in addition to the various inconveniences it caused to the local communities, created a very dangerous situation regarding the very operation of the border, as the locals would cross the border quite often without realising it, endangering thus their own life. An example is the case of the field guard Pavlos Lolis, who was killed by Albanian soldiers on Albanian ground in 1984, and his body was yielded to the Greek authorities at the guard station in Kakavia. Let us note here that St. Apostles' church, precisely because of its position next to the border, acquired special symbolic meaning for the inhabitants of the wider area and not only. The bishop of Konitsa used to perform the holy mass on Easter Day there, turning the loudspeakers to the side of Albania, so that the "enslaved brothers" receive the message of the Resurrection, given that religion was prohibited in their country since 1967. Sound is not subject to border constrictions, but the question here is how easy it would have been for the villagers across to become the recipients of

sounds from the other side, in conditions of suffocating control by state mechanisms, operating both openly and secretly. The same holds for radio and television frequencies. It is true that numerous Albanian citizens were punished even on suspicion of listening to Greek radio stations; for example, it was considered an offence to have a radio or television antenna turned towards Greece.

We leave the destroyed bridge, pass by Mertziani customs, where traffic is low at this hour, and move towards the village Melissopetra. When we arrive we park outside the settlement where the view of the river Aoos, flowing on the mountain ridge towards Albania, is amazing. We meet at this point two men who seem to be enjoying the view and their discussion. They are relatives; one works in the Jannina prefecture and the other is retired and spends a lot of time in the village. I start talking with the latter. I ask him, among other things, about Albanians. He, also, is very negative. He hastens to assert that they never kept Albanians in the village and that there is no Albanian there even today. He mentions that only one co-villager ever married an Albanian woman and he now lives in Konitsa. On the contrary, where the past is concerned, he admits that they used to take Albanian brides and mentions four examples. He tells me about the mother of his brother-in-law who is from Albania and is, indeed, willing to take us home to talk with him.

His brother-in-law, Theocharis Evangelou, aged but quite lively, welcomes us gladly in his home, which is full of wood-carved figures of heroes from the 1821 Greek national revolution, which he models himself. After showing us around his "art exhibition", explaining that he used to be a carpenter, he treats us with tsipouro of his own making and starts answering our

questions with great ease. He is especially intelligent and a very talented story-teller. He tells us his mother came from the village Vllaho-Psilloterrë in Albania (a Greek-speaking village), from the family of Nini and his father's mother from Leskovik and belonged to the Mitsi family, who used to speak both Greek and Albanian and leaves the questions of the latter's ethnic identity open. He also tells us that relatives of his still live in Leskovik and that he helped some of them to come to Greece, where they reside now. Theocharis speaks with love about these people. The view he expresses of Albanians is generally very different from the usual. He speaks of the good relations of the past; he remembers that he, too, had gone to Albania on business. He narrates a relevant adventure he had had with some friends, when they started for Berat on foot to work at the harvest but only managed to get as far as Këlshyrë. He also mentions the fact that numerous people from Greek villages used to go to Albania for begging, but also refers to extensive transactions with Albanian villages, as well as marriage exchanges. He says characteristically that his co-villagers used to do their shopping at Leskovik rather than Konitsa.

I ask him for more about the inter-marriages and he tells us an exciting story. In the 1930s, the Soufleri family from Kalovrisi made a marriage agreement for their son Panayiotis with a girl from an Albanian village. They brought the bride to the customs at Mertziani, the groom and his family saw her, they liked her and the match-making was contracted. They agreed that the wedding take place in the following months. So the group of relatives from Albania arrived with the bride on horseback and her face covered with the *bolia* (kerchief), as was the custom in those days. After the wedding they went home, the bride took

off the veil and the groom was confronted with an unpleasant surprise: the face he saw was nothing like the beautiful girl he had seen at the customs. Apparently her parents had presented him with a sister at the time. Panayiotis, who was a very handsome youth, did not touch her. In the morning of the following day though, he disappeared from the village, leaving the bride with his parents. He himself went to France. He returned to Greece during the Greek-Italian war, served as a soldier in the Albanian front and, on his return, passed through his village like a stranger. He went to the stockroom of their house, where there hung the bunch of bells from his father's herd, he stroke the bells once to express his pain, he stroke them once more and disappeared. They say his sister recognised him but he denied it saying he was just a stranger and passer by. Subsequently he went to Athens, where he opened the cafe "Omonoia", a known meeting-place for Epirotes. Rumour has it it was part of the dowry he received for his second wedding. He never revealed his true identity, despite the fact that several villagers recognised him. He would help all his fellow-Epirotes but stubbornly refused to admit he was Panayiotis Soufleris until the end. His wife died in his village where she lived all her life, since it was unacceptable for her to return to her home after the wedding had taken place. No matter how fictional all this sounds, Theocharis and the other two men present insist it really happened, exactly like that.

Theocharis has the charisma to astound his audience and the more he corroborates this, the more he continues with telling stories. It is worth mentioning the spy mission he was assigned with when he was only 16 years old. He was sent to his mother's village, Vllaho-Psilloterrë, to collect information about

the Italian army in the area. He was arrested, however, at the border and he excused himself by saying he was going there to plough his uncle's field, who was village headman. While arrested he was asked whether the Greek army is close to the border. As he was prepared for the question he answered that there is a whole regiment but not even one platoon. After he was let free he met his uncle, who gave him a piece of paper with information for the Greek army, which he hid in his sock. At the border he was stripped naked, just like everyone else crossing, but nobody saw the note.

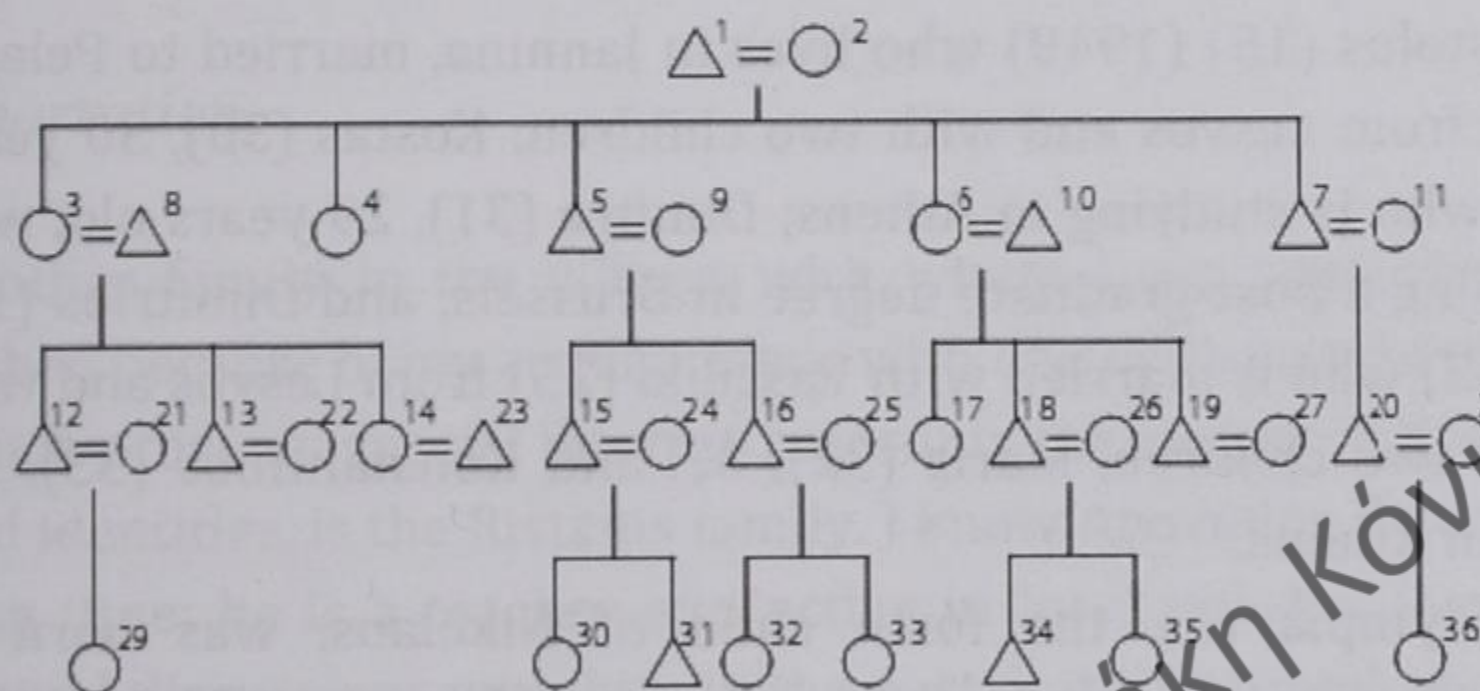
Theocharis is inexhaustible and expresses a perception of Greek-Albanian relations and the border that will come to an end, it seems, with his generation. I promise him we will meet again soon and once more we head for Molivdoskepastos.

A genealogy

In Molivdoskepastos I have started working on particular family genealogies. I have already advanced considerably with the drawing of the Tsipis family tree, based mainly on information provided by my friend Apostolis Tsipis, active member of the local cultural association and a member of the agricultural co-operative. The origin of the family is from Leskovik. Therefore, with Apostolis but the help of other relatives of his as well, we put together their family tree:

Nikolaos Tsipis (1) was born in Leskovik in 1869, left it at the age of eight and moved to Mesarë (destroyed Muslim Albanian village next to the border) as a shepherd, initially in the

service of the bey and later he came to Molivoskepastos, where he married.



His wife, Eleni Roidou (2), from the family of Oikonomou, used to be married in Serani (destroyed Orthodox Albanian village next to the border), but left the place after the death of her child and abandoned her first husband, because she was "faring badly". Nikolas and Eleni had five children, three girls and two boys. Ourania (3) (1917) married Spiros Vlachos (8), a labourer from Pogoniani (Greek village next to the border). Their first child, Petros (12), was born in 1943 and now lives in Athens, married with Roula (21) from Lesvos, with whom they have a daughter, Rania (29), 28 years old. Their second child, Kostas (13), was born in 1947 and lives in Germany married to a German woman (22), with no children. Eleni (14), their third child, was born in 1950 and married and lives in Athens.

Antho (4), second in line, was married in Albania, where she died (nobody knows anything about her life).

Konstantinos (5) was born in 1924, married Dimitra Thanasi or Efstathiou (9) from Biovishdë (Greek speaking Albanian village next to the border) and died in 1975. Their children are: Apostolos (15) (1949) who lives in Jannina, married to Pelagia (24) from Lesvos and with two children; Kostas (30), 30 years old, who is studying in Athens; Dimitra (31), 29 years old, who is doing a post-graduate degree in Brussels; and Dimitrios (16) (1953) who is married with Vassiliki (25) from Lesvos and with their two children, Maria (32), 32, and Konstantinos (33), 29, live in Athens.

Olympia (6), the fourth child of Nikolaos, was born in Molivoskapastos and married Stavros Moraitis (10) from Vasiliko, a nearby village. Together they had three children, Evyenia (17) (1950), Kostas (18) (1953), who lives in Athens with his two children (his wife is dead), and Grigoris (19) (1956), who has married a wife from Kos.

The youngest son, Giorgos (7) (1930), married Erifili Kitsou (11) from Konitsa and had a son, Nikos (20) (1958), who lives in Athens with his wife Tasoula (28) from Elefsina and their daughter Erifili (36).

A first observation we can make on the particular genealogy concerns the passage from Leskovik to Molivoskepastos, which was common practice before the marking of the border; also, the type of the second generation's movements within the local area and the spectacular change in style of the next generation's movements, as they now follow the routes of internal migration and urbanisation. The border, though it remains passable during the period between the wars, seems to be determining the orientation of the local communities, who tend to turn their back to it and finally, after WWII, when it closes rig-

idly, and the exodus from the rural areas starts, the roads lead mainly to Athens and, in any case, away from the village.

A narration

Another family in the village, with whom I am somehow attached because of my acquaintance with one of its members and which presents special interest regarding the matter of borders and identities, is the Ristanis family. I know Apostolos Ristanis a long time; he is a teacher and active in local politics. I've had several discussions with him in the past, but this time I ask him to arrange a special interview meeting. The meeting takes place in the quarters of the Cultural Centre of Molivdoskepastos, in the Parga Square in Jannina. Apostolos agrees to the sound recording of our conversation.

In the first place, I ask him to tell me how he himself had experienced the border, growing up and living in the village for the most part of his life. Following, I quote certain extracts from his narration.

I'll start from very long ago. From the time when, as a small child, I used to go in, before even the border was definite, before the line. I remember we used to go into the nearby villages with my late mother. Because we had property there, fields, that is, and we also had relatives, with whom, even today, we continue to be in touch. I used to go with my mother... The adults must have had special permits to go into Albanian ground, surely. With these permits they could go inside, cultivate the land and return without obstructions. Maybe there would be inspections on the way, but we would go in freely. We cultivated the fields in the plane, as well, the ones that needed watering. I mention it now and remember with great emotion how people used to labour then, how hard the work was. And the Turkish bey would come, I remember now, and at the moment before they had even collected the corn

in piles, he had to separate a part, one half, one tenth, as much as he deserved. And he would say: "Come now Vangelis, I know", he would say to my grandfather, "you give me this much from this field"...

This would go on until 1944. And now we come to the period of 1944, I remember, before the borders closed once and for all, before the line closed down, as we say, a mixed UN Committee passed through. For the first time in my life I saw a Chinese man, a Japanese, an Indian, an American even. On foot or on animals they were brought by the Albanians up to the borderline, where it is still now, and from there we received them and led them to where cars went. Because you should bear in mind there was no road then; they had to go at least as far as Bourazani or Mesogefira to find one. And from there the cars would take them. When this Committee went through, was its purpose the settlement of the border? My memory will not help me... So, after that day when they went through and since, all contact with Albania stopped. Everything we possessed there that was cultivatable, all there was, stayed behind, on Albanian ground. It was now closed to us for ever... Those who happened to be there working, they were allowed some time to return to Greece. But those who were far away, especially on the side of Greece, in Athens, Jannina, wherever, or any who foresaw the development and knew the border would close down had left... I know of a cousin of mine, whose father and siblings stayed in and he is in Athens, he was in Athens at the time. Probably he had some information, that the line would close someday. He was one of the Vlachs. His name was Tsoukas, Evangelos. He is my cousin. The others though and his family stayed in... Now those who stayed in and had relations here had problems, of course. Because the regime suspected they may be collaborating with those on this side.

So the line closed and on the side of Albania a dead zone was created, called "dead zone". Namely, they erected a wire fence at five hundred metres depth, depending on the morphology of the ground, and that space, those fields turned into a jungle. From the wire, that is, that wasn't on the line, the wire was deep inside on Albanian ground. It was a dead zone. We, of course, would cultivate the land, use the pastures, and go up to the borderline; up to the pyramid; up to the border... We'd always figure out where the border is mentally. Because there was nothing on our side saying "do not enter". We knew approximately where the line was drawn... We had no problem during these fifty years, with the exception of the deceased field guard, whom they

killed and let's mention that sad event, if you like. Now in case of trespassing during this period, there was tolerance on the side of the Albanians, because it was impossible for Albanians to come here, unless they were fugitives... For an [Albanian] hunter to be found inside the dead zone would be impossible. And those who entered, if they entered, would do so in the company of soldiers. It was difficult, I mean. We, however, for hunting... either due to recklessness or I don't know what, we would go in, the Albanian soldiers would come, the patrol, that is, and with code words, a cough, this and that... And if we persisted, they came out, I don't know, I know of a specific case of a man collecting fodder very close to Albanian ground. He was so close, two metres, five, ten. And an officer came, with two soldiers and a map and told him at first "This is Albania, get out of here". He tried to say "Greko", and they said "not here". And, indeed, I remember, this man is dead now, he went to my late father and said: "Come here father Stavro", (my father was a priest), "come here", he says, "because Albanians entered Greek ground". And he says, word for word, I remember, I was a pupil then, "Albanians never come onto Greek ground, we have entered the Albanian". And we went there and he told him: "Yes, it is Albanian", my father told him: "Move aside. Don't create problems". There was no further incident. We, repeatedly..., not in a provocative way though, no ... in the sense that we would go there with some audacity, let me put it this way, because we considered it all a bit unfair, as well, since our fields were there... I, too, as a teacher, later, would go with the children to the pyramid and dance around the pyramid and the children would go into the Albanian side. And the Albanian patrol would come... They would either come and turn us out or they would cough from a distance so that we get the message... These things used to happen in the period almost to the fall of the wire, in 1990.

People's life there was hard. If anyone escaped and turned himself in, a whole ritual would take place in the village. We ran to welcome him, to hear news about our own folk, how they fared inside, and they would wonder... I remember specifically a man, he turned himself in on a Good Saturday, 1969 or 1970; he was a soldier. They had brought working army then, because they had three types of army as well as regular and working. They had brought a battalion of working army, the Albanians, I mean. They would do labour and serve in the army for a shorter period of time than the others... So he came and surrendered himself. When he surrendered, on a Good Satur-

day, we saw him and took him to the Greek guard station uphill. Because he came to us in the village. He escaped from there, he had gone to fetch water, they would send them to fetch water, and he escaped. He was an Albanian, from outside Tirana, but he spoke English. He was an educated young man. In any case, this is the important part: When we took him to the guard station, a very polite chap, the soldiers exerted themselves on his behalf: It was Gook Saturday. Fuss, to change his clothes because they were in sorry condition (he was a labouring soldier), food, and so on. But I do remember, he had said then, we had all gone along to the station, he says: "What are they all doing here?" He had said about us: "Are the civilians allowed to..." "Why not", we tell him, "there's nothing wrong with us". And the youth was stunned and he said, word for word: "If you give me a loudspeaker to go to the observatory there and yell..., but if they believe me, no one will stay in there. They will all leave, because they tell us otherwise"...

Most of the information about inside [Albama] came when the border opened. Then we found out how they saw us. Then, in 1990. Before I get there, though, let's continue; life in the village was admittedly hard. Supervised, a strictly supervised zone it was. Guard stations everywhere, and in Bourazani, to pass through and come to the village, one had to hold a special ID or permit from Security. We had that white identity card to go in. But we had had trouble acquiring it. This until 1969, I think. Then it was called off, with an intervention... not in '69, in '76. It was cancelled completely then with an intervention by the Ministry, the Secretary of National Defence, who must have been Averof then, and he cancelled it because it was a hindrance to the economic advancement of our village, of the whole area, not just our village. Imagine, to visit one's parents, that was impossible. One had to go to the Security Police, to take the permits and so on. So life, until the 60s, at least, was terrible. Terrible, I tell you.

I was a high school student in Konitsa. Not in the first year, because I was, of course, in the orphanage. I was in the St. Andreas orphanage and had gone to the Kastri highschool; there in Kastri I had gone to high school for the first year, and then I came to Konitsa. My parents lived in Molivdoskepstos, as normal. Life was difficult. Very, very difficult. Imagine, people were literally ashamed of going to the cafe, they did not even have the money for cigarettes, while sometime they would take an egg from home to go and get one [exchange the egg for a cigarette]...

Our position on the border, you see... Because our village does not possess large pastures or fields, because the two thirds of the plane were on Albanian ground; they remained there. The consequence of all this was poverty... When we asked for some exchange the Greek Parliament reacted, they said such exchange is not to their interests. In any case, in 1960 things change. How? By way of an outlet towards Germany. At that time most of the inhabitants of the village left; the last ones.

This emigration of most of the children happened so that they manage to prosper, to acquire an education, to escape from the misery of the village... So we have the opening to Germany, with the difference that our fellow villagers who went there went with a dream: to return to the village. Maybe the sense of roots, our history, all contribute, contributed so that our village remained. So I felt great disappointment when I found out, in 1972 or 1973, that a report by a forest officer in Konitsa mentioned that in no more than five years this village will be a village of a five old people. That it will be abandoned, because it has no prospect of development. Of course, he was proven wrong patently, because, as I said, the inhabitants had this something...

A lot happened after that. Difficult times. I returned as a teacher in 1972 from Kefalonia, things continued to be hard, regarding transportation. The school deteriorated from year to year, it was heading to closure; I had ended up with four children and then with the help of the Prefecture and the Ministry of Culture, then we managed to provide a dormitory in the village, which belonged to the National Welfare Organisation. This happened in 1976-77. And we had prepared the building, the one that houses the office today, we had prepared it for a guest house, and then the inspector, the general school inspector we had then, together with the prefect, Chanos, summoned me to Jannina. They said they had taken the decision to make a dormitory in Molivoskepastos, that they had all the necessities there. A building that could be passed on. Indeed, the National Organisation was assigned the task, they completed it with the support of the Prefecture and we made the Dormitory. We inaugurated it in 1977, gathered about 23-25 children from the villages around and 45 from our village. This went on until 1991. Since 1991 we've had children from Greek-speaking villages in Albania. So this way a count down has begun...

So, indeed, in the Inauguration of the Dormitory, in my speech and the speech of the Bishop, the late Sevastianos, we had said that this is a happy occasion for Molivoskepastos, because, at last, the streets will start filling with children's voices and this was a big thing. And we, indeed, have kept the school in operation and it has contributed to the life of the village. This is what I believe; this way, conditions changed for the better. The dorm operated until 1996, till I left, when I retired, then it closed down. Not because I left, of course... The dorm closed down. The village had really changed. Because the parents started visiting it and all together they created a... activities, school shows, artistic..., all this offered a different kind of life to the village. In our efforts we were supported by the army, I mean the regiment, and even the police. We had a police station in the village and, actually the Police came up several times to request for the station to close; in the past. And I had told them, I tell them "Molivoskepastos may not be the object of policing, but has other reasons [to have a police station], social ones". One had support when coming down in the morning and four policemen were there, with their families, their children at the school, all this contributed to the preservation of the village, to the keeping of the village together...

Then... Things change. More interest is raised. Other people get involved. The Association in Jannina is created, the one we have today. The Fraternity becomes active in Athens. Friends come, lots of friends, and so on. Some Associations "adopt" Molivoskepastos and help. For example, the Association of Greek Women in Athens, with their president, Garoufalia Marika. They adopt the village, offer substantial help to its inhabitants, including financial help; the customs employees, the employees of the National Bank, the employees, not the Bank. This is why you will see in the village street names such as the "Street of the National Bank Employees". All this happens as a result of lobbying on our part. Or, maybe, an Association like that of the National Bank Employees would take a decision; "why not adopt a village" one would say, why not go and make contact with Molivoskepastos". Well, even the Monastery contributed to this, spontaneously. Because we should not forget that the Monastery was and should be connected to the village... So, well, we have inside the village today the "Street of the National Bank Employees", for example. This was the street that developed into a square and so on. So, well, with friends, acquaintances, adoptions, fraternities we offered the villagers help, and they, relieved, saw a different situation emerg-

ing now in Molivoskepastos. The formal recognition of archaeological sites, Byzantine and post-Byzantine monuments, was not a chance event. These are very important achievements. And after 1976 we have the influx of tourists, the visitors, who, I believe, are an important capital for the village. Because the visitors go around freely and without the restrictions that used to exist. So we arrive at 1990-91, which was joy for Molivoskepastos. Great joy. And I say this, not for any other reason, but because as a local in this village, who had spent my difficult childhood years here, and my years as an adult, a public employee, a teacher, I mean, I used to see the grievances, the pain of the people and the reasonable question: "Will we ever again see our kin from there? Will we ever have that good fortune, we or our grandchildren?" I have a film, shot with old men in the village and one of them, who is an amazing man, says: "Will God ever bless me to go and see for myself?" He had family inside...

And when we reached the first phase, let's call it so, in that we had the first contacts then, messages had already started being exchanged, of course, and youths, soldiers from there would come and surrender all the time; I will mention a specific case, though I'm not sure I should... One morning, as I was going to school, well, I see two soldiers coming down with the chief guard and an Albanian in the middle, a soldier. We're talking about 1989-1990, before the opening of the border. I say "hullo, boys, where are you taking him?" Actually, he was a young boy, shaking badly, with no socks, no coat, nothing. He says "we are giving him back". I say "What are you doing; Giving him back? Where?" "To the Albanians. We'll have a meeting". "Do you realise what you're doing? Who told you so?" He says, "The governor". I say "come on, fellows. No. Come, let's go to the cafe and call the governor. Such crime should not take place in Molivoskepastos, because I know very well that they will put him against the church wall and execute him as a deserter". The moment I said that the boy started crying. And he was Greek. From the next village, and turned out to be a relative of mine, I did not know it then... From Psiloteria, his name was Christidis. Did he understand? But in this case it was the fault of the soldiers, the Greek soldiers. The boy's whole body was shaking at the thought of going there, because he had abandoned his post, he had deserted, had thrown away his weapon and... I call the governor, I don't remember his name now, it doesn't matter. I say "good morning"; "good morning". I say "did you give the order for..." "Yes", he says, "I've got orders from

the Division". "The Division?", I say, "if you commit this crime, I will bring all the television channels up here"; I acted somewhat impudently, but, I don't know, I think it was probably justified; now he tells me: "I don't know where he's deserted from". And I say "listen"... I've called the General... and he ended up saying (I had the backing of Sevastianos as well) "Mister Ristanis, you take your cousin and do as you wish with him". And in the end I took this boy to Konitsa, to Sevastianos, we changed his clothes... I did, with my car. I took him to Konitsa, he went to the Division, there were interrogations, as normal, how, where, they took him to see the..., and I sent him to Athens and today he works in Athens, at a news agency, he gives out newspapers.... At Tsoukas Vangelis, the one I was talking about before, who left the village in 1944.... I phoned him and said "Vangelis, so and so is coming", so he expected him. When this boy visits me here, I realise that, how shall I put it, I was his saviour then. Be that as it may... Every time he comes from Athens, he comes to visit me, no matter what, and brings me a bottle of whiskey, just so as to...

Such things would happen. Difficult situations. This is why, when on Holy Saturday 1990, the first official meeting with the Albanians took place in the third pyramid of our village, on their demand to come and celebrate Easter with us in Molivdoskepastos... It was a committee of two Albanian officers. A committee appointed by the state... The Prefect happened to be one Charalambidis. He had been visiting the village and had gone to the pyramid to wish the soldiers Happy Easter. At this moment the watch calls: "The Albanians want a meeting". They had produced a white cloth... He tells me, I was in the Prefecture Council then and the Officer of the Second Office of the Regiment was present, too. He tells me: "Go across and see what they want", the Prefect says. We start across, go there, hugging, as usual, kissing, without me knowing I had relatives in there. The teachers, Christidis and the rest. "What do you want?", he says "we want something", he says "we want something". I say "what do you want?", while the Lieutenant of the Second Office did not speak, he was standing aside. He says "we want you to allow us, officially, to come tomorrow and solemnise Easter together". I say "but, my friends, do you know what day it is today? Today is Holy Saturday. First of all, who will take the initiative? Who will approve of the plan? How? How? How?" "We want it, he says. I Say "fellows, this here is the Prefect. I will pass on your request to him. If the Prefect gives [his permission] ..." I went to the Prefect, I say "Mr. Prefect, so and so". He looked at me, he says, "come here".

We go to the Community Offices, he calls the General on the phone, of course all the ministries were closed. Holy Saturday Holiday... The General tells him word for word "Mr. Prefect, you can, as a political personage, take the responsibility". Who will take the responsibility now? What was the fear? That those who come never return. That was our problem. That they may scatter in the village and we lose them. He tells me "Are you up to this?" If you take it on, I'll say OK... So, driven by my excitement, etc., I go there "you come but for the Second Resurrection ceremony, at three o'clock, you come and join us for the Holy Service". Excitement. Preparations had to take place though. It wasn't easy to receive them, because they told us a hundred people would come and three hundred came. They even came from Përmet. How did they find out? How did they find out that in Molivdoskepastos they will be coming to observe the Easter ceremony with us and they came! All Greeks. Among them were officers in civilian...

I go to the cafe, there was Tsipis and Manis and I say: "Boys, so and so. Ours is the task at hand. Are you up to it? What shall we do?" I call Sevastianos. I say "Father, so and so". He says "from me, you can immediately have ten lambs, and start roasting them. Where shall we receive them?" I say "in the church, for the second Resurrection, you make a speech and from there we will take them to the village, not in a line, God forbid, and we will go to the room upstairs. There we will have the happening. All right?" "All right". What can enthusiasm do! What can it do! Also the heart-ache, if you like, that we will meet our own kin; our own whom we did not know. Did not know. I didn't know that the teacher I hugged on Saturday, on Holy Saturday noon was my relative; because his wife was my first cousin, my cousin. And I used to correspond with him without knowing it was him...

So, fine. We observed the first Resurrection ceremony, and the Regiment here says "you arrange everything yourselves, our job is only to allow them to enter at three o'clock." I say to the watch over at their guard tower at the church "if you see any movement, call me". Ah! At ten o'clock they call me, they say they have all arrived across, with music, with..." You understand what was going on. Women, children, weeping, voices... They were on Albanian ground. I say "you will not let them in, because we have organised a programme; the Bishop will come, we cannot have them now, what will they do with them now, here. To enter the village now?" They came to the space of the third pyramid, above the church and started dancing around it. At two

and a half, a committee came, myself, Tsipis and Manis, we went up, we hugged, there was a lot of emotion, kissing and crying, we called each other cousin, I was trying to find out who knew me, but the blood... the blood meets easily... Yes. There were people there who were talking alone. They were talking with their eyes... They were talking. No matter how afraid they may have been... Because they were afraid, it's true. They said that responsible for them was an Albanian officer in civilian clothes... We said "we have no problem"...

We go down to the church with the musicians from above the pyramid, with the musicians. People had come from Jannina, from Konitsa, all those who had family, all were searching to find a relative, they were saying "fellows, where is so and so?" "There he is" "Who is he?" "That one." "Hey, how did you get so old? When? How's the mother, the sister?" Forty, fifty years cut off, isolated. After the liturgy, after the second Resurrection took place, Sevastianos gave his talk, that was his wish, after all, we returned, we went to the village, went up where the happening took place, whatever each one had managed... I was impressed by this: when we were walking down I said "how disciplined must you be" meaning that they had brought me a list of names, they were two hundred or so, impossible to check... "You go back there, because the way things are going we will meet again soon; so don't trespass, because it will work against you. If you comply now and say "we went, we saw them, now we'll go home"... In the evening, they went to the village cafe, the small grocery was there. I say "yes, here we go again". "Not even in Tirana do they have such a shop!" I wonder what they have... They bought whatever they could... Strangely, they had money! Mostly dollars... They had it saved... And they left.

It was the first joyful event before the opening, the fall of the border. And subsequently they wanted to repay the visit, us to go there... We went a month later, on 20 May. There is a film [commemorating the event], there is my report as well. Properly, from here, from the border. After my own intervention. In order... We went to a location called Agoritsiani, between Vlaho-Psilotera [Vllaho-Psilloterrë] and Valovista [Biovishdë]. At St. Nikolas. That's where the meeting took place. Three priests came along, as well. We went on foot. An hour walk. Not even a whole hour. In any case... It was so beautiful though, it was spring, wonderful! So, we had agreed with the officers, we sent all our stuff, what we had to send, what could those people do, let's say we

sent the beers, everything, beverages... We sent them with animals. They loaded them. So, plastic glasses and such things arrived, table clothes, roasted chickens... that is, we wanted to help the people, though they, too, gave their best self, no question about that. They made each home give... I don't know, in any case, we sent two priests, three, they would perform the liturgy. In St. Nikolas. While the cultural association here had come to Jannina and did, of course, and did some shopping... school things and gifts for the children... In any case, we went and when we arrived, we assembled there and the officer talked to them, told them what their duties were... I talked and said in a stern style, truly, because among the day-trippers, let me call them that, were some from the "circle", who wanted to create an Northern Epirus issue, and I said to them: "For God's sake, we are visiting a foreign country. We shall respect them, leave aside the songs and the slogans of Northern Epirus, we will have a good time, we will be able to unite, to relate our pain, the pain, to receive their pain, but let's not create trouble and provoke. Let's not provoke, because it is easy to..." And I told them, exactly, in front of the others, the officers: "whoever breaks this order will be immediately deported. He will be accompanied out by an Albanian soldier, and... that's that". These measures should be taken so that there is no...

Indeed, we went to the area of Agoritsiani, the holy service took place there, in the country side, because the church had been turned into a stable... And it was an amazing monument! Amazing! Well, we could not have it [the service there] because there was... manure in the church, an inch high. So it took place outside. Well, after the service, we were divided, they had set table for the officials, so to speak, and had included one of their own from every house. Tables all around, I was the representative of the Prefecture, there was a representative of the Mayor, the Association, the Community, and so on, the village priest... There we chanted all together "Christ is Risen" and they... Albanian officers, Albanian soldiers, standing around, were unarmed... And in addition to those, now small groups and families had laid down [picnic] blankets, so, and all reminded me of old festivals... And the musicians went around... They went from table to table... Toasts were made, as usual at dinners... We danced, we put the priests at the head, we danced, they danced, too... it was an expression, how shall I put it, of brotherhood ...

And I had told them that when the warning sign is given we should leave immediately, because the gates will close; there existed a second line of

wire with iron gates, the so-called second wires, which in my view were more terrible than the first; at the back was the live wire, as they used to say. It was impossible to enter, unless one were a rat, and went beneath, which happened... So, I had some trouble on the side, it was to be expected, a field guard got drunk and started yelling and swearing at the chief officer... I got to him immediately and said "I'm packing you back". Well, such side shows. And the field guard. Indeed, an incident moved me, which shows... that human beings... regardless of the regime, and the officers and the soldiers, of course, they are Epirotes there, well, the emotion of humanness, they had it in them no matter how much the regime had brutalised them. A woman from our village suffered a sun stroke in that place, because that location is terrible. I don't know how, what causes it, we were all marked by the sun... Imagine, there the cherries ripe a month before the rest of the area. That's how it was. I don't know why. And she suffered a sun stroke, so we definitely had to move her... It was difficult for us. Immediately the officer orders his soldiers to prepare a stretcher with a blanket and timber, they put her on, four soldiers and two backups six, and two of our own, they brought the woman up to the monastery. And there the ambulance came and collected her. So that was something that moved us all, let's say, and after a while the lads came back.

Well, when the time for parting came, when we left, the gates had to close. Most had left I stayed last, to make sure nobody is left behind, so we don't have what broke my heart, really... and I mention it in my report... that the Greeks, the villagers there were watching us... sitting and sorry; they were watching us departing happy and all... Well the only thing one could hear them say was "where are you leaving us?"

This is happening in May. And so we went back in with a committee from here, from Jannina, from the Archaeology Service, with Giorgos Smiris, to go to St. Nikolas and see their church as well, the church of the Psilotera, the Madonna, because the Diocese had offered a fund to repair it. They did not have a church, because they had turned it into a cultural centre... And we went unaccompanied, an officer came, he checked on us, we went, we saw the church, Smiris took photographs, we went to the village, as that church had been turned into a cultural centre; well, the regime; they had turned the chancel into a theatre stage and all around there were photos of, well, Hoxha. So, and I remember with emotion the old people there, with the photographs

of Enver Hoxha, they would throw them down, tread on them and say: "How did we wrong you and you caged us in for fifty whole years and we lived outside the world?"

The moments were truly moving, those at the dinner at a house, the house of Christidis the teacher, beautiful things, all done the old way, they brought us fruit preserve, cherry... They brought us raki in their antique glasses. Wonderful. And I, now that the border has opened, fallen, we as a village, I shouldn't say I, and even as a region, as a county, we try to offer all the help we can to those people.

So, we, now as a village, as association, in collaboration with the Diocese, the Prefecture, the Red Cross, I had the luck of being acquainted with the director of the Red Cross, who helped a lot with the collection of clothing, food, and so on, for families [in need] and in particular the Kotta family from Valovista, whose house was destroyed by fire...The help was substantial, I as a Prefect Councillor was trying to collect help in the form of wheat and other meals at first and fertilisers later, because they did not have fertilisers for their fields...

Well, the border falls in 1990-91. In our village we rejoice ...Our relatives would come and visit us now, we all bonded, they came to shop, they made phone calls. They would come with the consent of the authorities. From the proper route, not from behind the cedar trees and the.... They came from behind the church... We approached the Prefecture Offices and the Police to ensure some tolerance there by the guard, so they could cross ... The unofficial customs was set later. Years later. In 1996. But immediately after 1991 they could come easily. And not only to the village; they could go up to Konitsa ... Without special permit. They had nothing. We were trying to see if their identity cards included the phrase "Grek' nationality". If it said that they are Greek. You cannot tell this for sure, of course, because some had it written, some not. In any case, they did come to the village....

Well, stone masons, people who knew the craft of stone, would work the stone, because in those days, in Molivoskepastos at least, all that was done was done then. And in the church and everywhere... They would do the work and leave in the afternoon. Nobody lived in Molivoskepastos. Maybe, one of the important things we achieved was not to have anyone staying in the village. Well, that's why we did not have many cases of theft and so on. For two reasons: First, no one stayed permanently in the village and, second, the

Greeks of the villages next to us, the Greek-speaking villages, functioned as a shield for our village. Because if a gang from the inside came, they would stop them saying "Hey! What are you doing here! We eat bread in there" and I believe this protected us. Thus I say this with assurance, that this protected us. We had some occurrences, because they broke into some houses, but they [the culprits] had nothing to do with those, with ours; they came from further in, from Fieri and the rest, North Albania. They were the scum, and excuse me, because I found the opportunity, I remember specifically I had at home, in the balcony upstairs, an iron table with four chairs. One came, he came and took two of them. He came at night, loaded them, they are difficult to lift, how did he take them then and where... he took them to boast he had taken something from Greece...

In terms of the economy, I'll tell you what happened. I believe that we helped them and they helped us. With their work, first of all. And something I will say is important. No one from my village ever took advantage of an Albanian, a labourer from Northern Epirus... They worked in the gardens, the fields, construction, timber... And this contributed to the return of some villagers to the village. So we both helped them and they helped us back. And financially, because from that time on they would go to the cafe and shop. They would shop. And the cafe revived during this period, the village cafe had work. And they made money. They made money in the good sense, by providing things. They would work, both men and women. The women in the homes. They still work. I, for example, employ workers from there to cultivate my garden; they are three or four women and two men who are regulars. And now, of course, they are allowed to pass, they don't have to show the ID; they have the Identity Card of *Omogenis* [of Greek origin], of course, and they cross. They cross from the church, properly. We achieved that after the closing of the unofficial control station that used to operate at Molivoskepastos and the opening of Mertziani. We managed for the Northern Epirotes to come to the village and work, to use the phone, to shop and leave...

About the children of the dorm, our aim was always to help their socialisation. A terrible struggle. Well, because we had the duty, first of all, to turn them into useful citizens, and with one aim, one precondition I had set, to make them lawful citizens of the Albanian state. What do I mean by that? I used to tell them: "Children, whether you like it or not, you officially belong

to the Albanian state. You have the obligation, when you go there, to respect the Albanian state, because you are citizens of the Albanian state". That is why, every Friday, we would send the kids off. We would send them off in the good sense. And why would we do that? So that they would not forget... So that we do not have any more lost homelands... Namely, that they manage to bond with their families and, if possible, take there what we taught them, and this does not mean proselytizing and propaganda. I don't know, to wash their hands before dinner, or, if you like, before that, to cross themselves, since most of them were baptised here. Eh, I'm referring to a specific example, a parent used to tell me that, but I will explain something here concerning the human power of the Albanians, the Northern Epirotes particularly, if you like. I believe that the regime, this is my view, had formed three categories of people. What do I mean? The age up to fifteen or eighteen, was the tender age, which we could mould if we chose to. Whether we achieved it or not is another matter. There was the difficult age from eighteen and over to fifty-sixty, the age that the regime had altered and defeated... And we have the third age, who used to live with their dreams, and maybe they kept burning a little cinder of faith and nationhood. That is, maybe in some box, bag, chest, they kept an icon... And a parent had told me with emotion, one of the Vlachs, "we were saying: Children, before dinner, before any work, we shall cross ourselves". And indeed, our children had learnt the little prayer: "Come Christ and Mother Mary, bless our dinner"...

Our mission was rather the social adaptation of the children than the teaching, say, of maths... At least so that they learn to speak and write... We christened many, as well. I christened two or three. One, who has prospered very much; he is in Athens. I christened him in a group christening, at the Cathedral. There were four-five godfathers. Each one had his child. Sevastianos had called us "do you want to christen?" I say "I have mine, I have Simos", for example. He was the child of Kostas's brother, whom I had saved, who had surrendered then... Lots of villagers became godparents. They sponsored christenings as well as marriages. We do have such spiritual relations. But we don't have weddings. Because I believe it is... difficult to take... to marry a boy from inside with a girl from here or vice versa. The proof is that whoever got married, those who married women from inside have failed. I don't know what is happening, our attitude is different, they wake up... We in our village have not had such an example... In Aetopetra, Mazi and the rest,

Aidonochori, where they had marriages, most marriages were broken. And this is bad. Did they wake up? I don't know. Let me not put it this way... More demands? They have they tell you... I cannot say it. I cannot... I in my effort, and my father, who was a priest in Kefalovriso, who had lots of relatives coming from inside, because his origin was... and my origin is from Strebec, from Përmet, well, he tried to bring couples together, he failed. All were betrothed inside...

My grandfather, I remember him because he died in 1953, he was born a Christian Greek, he was born in Strebec in Përmet. He was involved in the then revolutionary movement of autonomy. This is why he was outlawed and had to escape. He was a craftsman, his craft was to produce flat timber. He came to Greece after he married and had had two children. My grandmother was from Kaloudi [Kaludh], from the family of Simoni. My grandmother came to Greece without speaking any Greek... My grandfather partakes in the movement of 1914-15... He operated as the link between Greece and the North Epirus struggle. His name was Joseph. He knew Greek, because his village must have had a Greek school. And, indeed, he was honoured by the Greek state and received a pension... He came to Greece in 1917. He came in the night, because he had information that he was going to get caught. He took along his two children and his wife and came to Greece. He came to Molivoskepastos. He had no house, he had nothing. His first job was to go down to the mill and take on the mill. He worked as a miller. There at the mill of the Filios family. Well there he had a building he was staying, he created a garden... became a gardener. So that's how he made a family. He bought a house in the village, of course, and made a large family. When he came from inside he had my father and one girl... After the opening of the border I met, from my father's family, a cousin of his, Nikolas Ristanis, who used to come here. He is now dead. He came to the village and found us... Also one more came, Prokos from Kaloudi, who had a photograph of my grandmother and with this photograph he presented himself to us as a relative... He spoke Albanian, what was he saying... I took him to my father, they recognised each other... and with my father I had a whole adventure, because I took him inside Albania afterwards, loaded with some fifteen bags from here, and it was a mistake, an Albanian officer misled me and I took him up to Gjirokastër with my car... then I could not come back...

Lots of relatives from inside appeared in those days. All Ristanis. In the village, Strebec, most are Ristanis. Now they changed the names... We helped them in the following way: We would take one, say, to Jannina and found him a job, until he could... because he did not speak Greek. We helped them acquire the *omogenis* identity card. The most important. To prove the family relation. That he is kin... And so they acquired the *omogenis* identity card and are settled. ...

During the narration I had to ask for explanations and ask various questions. After a certain point, however, we moved from Apostolis's narration to a dialogue:

– Let me ask you, teacher, because you have thought of these things, I am concerned with the issue of national identity. Namely, I know the area was a mixed zone and that there is some fluidity... Let's say, were there Albanian speakers with a Greek consciousness?

– I believe that, because our area, and I start from some time past, that is before the destruction of the village, I believe that the area of Dipalitsa, and not only the area of Agoritsiani and Ostanitsa and the rest were a centre of development, cultural, economic, religious. We have proofs of this, not just indications. Namely religiousness was developed, the Byzantine and post Byzantine monuments bear witness of that. The place was a Bishop's chair, that is a fact. We have the church of St. Apostles here. It was a centre of economic development, which is a fact; we know this also from the locations' names today: Pazaria, Tsigelia, Tabakaria, and so on. The big animal bazaar took place there, that is a fact as well. What's even more important, and I visualise it with more, let's say, imagination, is the position of the village, of the region. If you think of Dipalitsa in those days as the base of a Municipality, that is how it is mentioned, as a base of a Municipality with a Mayor and everything (and imagine that the historians mention twelve thousand families and I'm not only talking about Dipalitsa, that could not have been possible, the numbers concern the whole of the region, obviously Ostanitsa as well)... its position is such that it dominated in a region of strategic importance. If one sits at the observatory and sets his imagination free, then he will understand. From here they would go to Moldovlachia, they would go to... they had natural passages at their disposal. Molivdoskepastos is situated exactly over these four passages, like an observatory. The Grika ravine, as we

call it here, is the passage from the opening of Sarandë. We have the Aaos valley going towards Grevena. We have the valley of Bourazani going to Jannina-Preveza and the valley of Sanantaporos up to Thessaloniki. Therefore, the position was such that the whole area was developed up to Përmet.

– It had influence in the wider area, you mean...

– It had its influence, despite the raids of the others...

– When was Dipalitsa destroyed?

– In the seventeenth century... The Laliates did not manage, the Laliates, the first, let's say, invaders in the area, who dominated and exploited. It seems that with the Laliates the Christians used to fare much better.

– All this you are saying, have you read it somewhere or do you know it from the oral tradition?

– From Lambridis but from the tradition as well. To collect this evidence I had made an effort once with a co-villager, a chemist, Alekos Prokos, Prokopiou. To gather any facts we could, to publish a book. Of course, the sources of our village's history are confused and difficult. First comes Bucharest, then Istanbul, Venice, because that is where the large printers used to be. And if one looks into the books of the Church, we'll see Venice...

– I'm more concerned, teacher, about the Christian villages of Përmet, Kaloudi, Strebec and the rest. Are they Orthodox Christian villages that had developed a Greek national consciousness?

– Yes. Essentially until the Hoxha, I imagine, and then he came and imposed himself. That's how it is. It belonged to this category of people. Yes. My grandmother used to say "I am a Christian. This is my witness, my mark. I am a Christian. I have been born Greek. He did not let me learn Greek".

– So you think that they were Hellenised through Orthodoxy, or that they were Greeks who were turned Albanian...

– I believe the second. That they were Greeks, who became Arvanites.

– Which means?

– Albanian is other to Arvanite.

– How do you mean that?

– The Albanian is Albanian. The Arvanite used to be a Greek, who...

– Who changed, who was Albanised?

– He was coerced. So, when we speak of the Arvanites of Livadia or Thebes...

– Yes, but they are here since the fourteenth century, you know...

– Sure. Yes...

– They are old, so to speak. Now here, in Albania, I cannot tell the difference. Who is Arvanite and who is Albanian?

– Yes, it is not self-evident here, now.

– Now, let's say you meet a Ristani from Strebec, who doesn't speak Greek, is an Albanian citizen, he may have some memory of Greek letters from his grandfathers and the rest, what do you think of him?

– I think of him as part of Greece.

– Regarding his origin, or what?

– Yes.

– But if he himself has Albanian consciousness? Because, if he was born and grown up during the Hoxha regime...

– He was forcibly turned into an Albanian. I think that if he became an Albanian despite his will, if he was forced because of the circumstance, either through schooling of his family, obviously, I cannot tell, either from the environment, society, the regime, I think the roots are still left inside him...

– Would you call him Arvanite or Albanian?

– No, I cannot call him either... Nothing. I will call him a Greek... I consider him a Greek, who was forced to... turn Albanian... My grandfather had the good fortune to get out of there. His relatives had to become Albanians... And they tell me now about his cousin, my uncle, this Nikolas, of whom I told you a while ago that he used to be a captain inside, now with the Hoxha regime he was a political personage and intimidated the Christians, the Greeks... maybe because he wanted to fare well.

– How do you explain that? Does it have to do with identities being fluid?

– Maybe...

– And one can change depending on the conditions?

– And we see this today... We see it in this generation, that their identity is not stable, it is fluid...

– This is what I want to talk about. How do you feel about this, regardless of ideologies, what is your experience...

– Let me give a simple example: One man, my cousin who comes all the time now, Tsoukas, he is my cousin on my mother's side, well, my cousin was telling me that a brother of that Vangelis, who I said had left before, he had told him "I, in order to fare well, so that they don't persecute me, they don't relocate me, because my brother is inside, I was forced to take a communist wife. And they made me a guard. The regime appointed me as a guard and what did I do, I would go every morning and count the coconuts. How many coconuts fell down, let's see, will they collect them?"

– How did he raise his children?

– He says: "as much as I could I gave my children a Greek education"

– Did they live in Strebec?

– No, here in Vllahopsilloterrë. The others did not speak Greek... Strebec did not speak Greek. Except for the old...

– Still, you think that apart from the two villages of the Greek minority, Villa ho-Psilloterrë and Biovizdhë, who preserved the Greek identity, the rest have a problem...

– Definitely... And now they are trying to acquire this Greek, they say "we are Greeks. Why? Because my grandfather Joseph was Greek"... I myself the day before yesterday had to request a family certificate for my grandfather Joseph, to prove that my grandmother, Evangelitsa Simoni was Greek, because she had passed through during the political change here, it says "nationality Grek", Greek... So that they acquire the *omogenis* identity, not for any other reason...

– Don't they care about being Greek? Have you talked to them?

– A lot. A lot.

– Do they feel Albanian?

– They don't flaunt it, so to speak, but I see it ...

– Do they feel Albanian?

– Albanian.

- They simply use the *omogenis* ID to have the privileges they have?
- "Why should the police come after me?..." And I see something more as well. They, or their children live here in Greece, I see them turning towards Greece...
- So it changes in two generations?
- I see it and I see, in fact, that they are repelled by Albania. They do not want to hear of it... I have some relatives here, Tsoukases, I say "aren't you taking the children inside?" "The children do not want to go inside", he says. "They won't hear of it", he says...
- What language do they speak at home?
- I think that they do not speak Albanian that much. Maybe the adults - speak between them.
- The couple. But with the children?
- The children no.
- This is interesting, this turning of the children...
- Maybe their blood is speaking... maybe the blood...
- You think it's the blood?
- I don't know... It impresses me though, it is a fact that the children are turning to Greece...
- Is it the glamour of Greece? Is it that maybe?
- That they are doing well here and they go back and see misery?
- No, I don't mean self-interests. The lure of Greece, the wellbeing...
- The wellbeing...
- Its glamour compared to a country like Albania. Maybe that wins them over?
- Maybe, that's not hard.
- How do you see this then, living with those people, speaking another language?
- I believe they definitely compare the two, life in Albania and ours... The children though have not much experience of the difficult conditions in Albania. The adults... someone may say "I'm OK here, but I have problems". Some reach a point of saying "well, when we were in Albania, at least we had

a piece of bread to eat!" One more thing that impresses me here (I'm talking about the minority villages, I don't know if this was the case further down), when giving their children Christian names was prohibited, after 1967... then the Greeks were compelled to give their children ancient Greek names... Then we have Pyrros and the rest... While here they would turn to Agnes, and Hope or, say, Irine. What we should realise is that these villages preserve, they have that old thing with language that is now being lost. Meaning, I observe: words, for example words that move me, but seem nonsensical to my children, "what are they saying now?" ... Words with great value...

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

AT THE RUINS OF KORSACKA AND BEYOND. THE CASE OF EKREM

Tracing the border

April 1, 2006. Kostas and I are in the area of Amarantos exploring the border. We set out from Pixaria, a small village only a short distance from the border, which gives the impression of a rather deserted settlement. We meet a woman and then her husband, a hunter. During our talk he uses very negative expressions about the Albanians; he even mentions that some of them have set fire to a house. We ask him about the border and Korsacka, but he knows nothing about it; after all he is not originally from the village, he only came here when he married. He suggests we speak to the former mayor, a man called Grigoris Michalopoulos. He takes us to this man's house himself.

Grigoris is very welcoming, cheerful and kind, and so is his wife. He is 75 and a permanent resident of the village; he has been the headman here for a number of years. Before he retired he was a stone-mason, but had also worked in Germany as an

industrial labourer for three years. He reminisces about the past: when he and his wife decided to go back to Germany and settle there permanently, his mother did not offer them her blessing like other mothers; on the contrary, she said: "My curse is upon you." Therefore he tore his travelling papers and stayed in the village. "The curse of parents is the destruction of children," he says. He never regretted it though. He tells us about how the village was abandoned during the post-war years. He explains that everybody moved to the big cities, doing any odd job at first, till they managed to land on their feet and prosper.



Figure 31. Border pathway used by migrants

Grigoris is one of the few left behind; he makes a living by his trade combined with animal husbandry. He speaks of his family and of his life. I ask him about Korsacka. He says it is a

ruined village next to the border checkpoint of Prosilio. He remembers its inhabitants: they were Turks, he says, but very good people. They had animals and land and they got on well with their neighbours. They often passed by the village and greeted them. They even spoke Greek. He speaks animatedly about their kindness. He remembers that they even had a *tekke* in the village. He mentions specific names. He points out there are still some of their descendants living in Konitsa and in the villages round there, but now they have Greek names. He mentions in particular Vangelis Kaliamis, who lives at Illorahi, and his brother who married into a family at Fourka. Also Telis Printzas from Upper Konitsa. The village was abandoned after the war and its inhabitants were dispersed. Their land was bought by people living in the nearby villages. For instance, a large piece of land belongs to the Papamichail family from Amarrantos.

Grigoris has a different opinion of Albanians. He says that in the past people from the villages of that region used to go into Albania to beg. His personal memories and experience of Albanians is positive.

We say goodbye to Grigoris and his wife and, leaving Pixaria behind, we set out to the direction of Korsacka. On the way, at a short distance from the crossroad of Prosilio, we meet a herd of goats guided by an Albanian shepherd. He tells us that the herd belongs to a man named Kokoves who comes from Agia Varvara and lives in Konitsa; the shepherd himself comes from Leskovik; his boss has given him and his family a place to live, an outbuilding next to the stables.

We arrive at the Prosilio border checkpoint. It is obvious even from a distance that it has been abandoned recently. Since

the body of border guards was established and the situation at the borders was normalised, the outpost was considered redundant and was duly put out of commission. We roam the empty rooms and spaces, reading the various signs, trying to figure out their logic. National ideology and what the state perceived as defence against the enemy are summed up in a few square metres. Pictures of monuments, icon screens, national and religious symbols, observatories and machine gun turrets, all derelict now, prompt me to muse on state relationships and the ironies of history. Opposite us in the near distance we can see the region of Leskovik; then further deep we perceive proud Mount Nemërçka connecting the two countries which politics forced apart; a little to the east lies the valley of the river Aaos, a meeting point between three rivers: Aaos, Voidomatis and Sarantaporos. Next to the abandoned outpost, in the ruins of Korsacka, a herd of cows placidly grazing...

There is a well-trodden path among the ruins. It is the ancient path linking the cluster of Mastorochoria villages with the region of Leskovik. I suspect that this is the path used by Albanians who come into Greece. I know that apart from immigrants without legal documents this path is used daily by inhabitants from the village Radat, who come to work in Greek villages on the frontier for the day and return home at night; their own village is about half an hour walk or ride from the border.

As I walk on the path surrounded by dry-stone walls I feel the intense, evocative silence and observe how the wild plum trees in full bloom are counterpointed by ruins. The cherry trees and other fruit-bearing trees are not yet in bloom. Even for the completely clueless, it is quite obvious by a look at the flora and the peaceful, serene landscape that the area was in-

habited till recently. One wonders it took a mere fifty years for the land to end up in this state. It is difficult to say whether it was a proper settlement before, or only a temporary one used for agricultural purposes: the only trace left is ruined dry-stone walls.

We follow the path leading towards Albanian territory. Very near the ruins there is a steep slope leading to a gully; we can hear the roar of the water as it rumbles down the mountain. I suppose this gully is the boundary between the two countries. I suggest to Kostas we go there. That side of the mountain is densely covered with pine trees, mostly; the path can be seen even more clearly. We step on fresh dung as we walk; this means animals have passed through here this very day moving towards Greek territory. We reach the gully and we see that the river is high. We decide to go across using a tree trunk obviously placed there by Albanians, as a makeshift bridge. We want to experience the passage in the same way as the Albanians do, though of course our circumstances are very different. However, it turned out that the tree trunk had been placed there the previous winter: the moment I stepped on it, it broke; it had rotted.

We cross at another point and from there on we must be walking on Albanian soil, apparently: we are very near the village of Radat. There is nothing else, a mark or a sign, to show that we have crossed the border. It takes us no more than twenty minutes to cover the distance between the gully and Radat. So if one drives to the Prosilio checkpoint it is possible to be in Radat within half an hour. We thought about doing that but in the end we decided to go back, leaving the visit and the experience for some other time...

The passage of Agia Varvara

On the way back we decide to visit the village of Agia Varvara, situated by the country road from Konitsa to Amarantos. When we arrive, we go to the village centre where the cafe is open, located in the building which used to be the community office. Apparently the building now belongs to the Cultural Association of the village, as a sign there informs us. We ask if there is anything to eat and to our great surprise the answer is yes. The village is almost deserted: in the winter there are no more than ten elderly inhabitants there. The village cafe of course is open thanks to an Albanian family who have settled in the village, a young couple with their two little girls.

We ask the woman for fried eggs and sausage, chips, salad and cheese. She is very polite, her Greek is flawless with a slight Albanian accent, but she does not seem to be very communicative with us. I am impressed by her perfect behaviour and by how spotlessly clean the establishment is.

As we sit there waiting for our dinner, a woman emerges from her house just opposite the cafe. Apparently she has come to the village from town for the weekend. She asks: "What good wind brings you to the village?" It seems that such visits are very rare at this time of year. We chat with her and ask her, among other things, if there is a path leading to Amarantos. She replies she does not think it is open because it has been out of use in recent years, unless it has been reopened by the Albanians. When she says that word, "Albanians," she lowers her voice and gestures to make us understand that the cafe people are Albanians...

The food arrives and it is excellent. The two little girls are playing in the courtyard creating a happy atmosphere in the deserted place. There are two young men busying themselves about the place. One of them, the husband of the woman who served us, sits at our table when we finish eating and we begin to talk. He is about thirty-five years old. He tells us his story. His name is Leonidao. He comes from Radat and has been living here with his family for a year. They operate the cafe, leased from the Cultural Association without obligation to pay rent. He also works as a builder in Konitsa, while his wife looks after an elderly woman in the village. They live above the cafe. Their children go to school in Konitsa; a taxi paid by the state drives them there everyday. The couple came to Greece nine years ago, when their eldest daughter was one year old. They have worked in Athens and in Megara, a town near Athens, for most of that time. Before Leonidao left Albania he kept a grocery in his village and peddled merchandise around the area. He decided to move to Greece when the vehicle he used for his peddling business broke down.

Leonidao narrates the chronicle of his migratory experience for our benefit. It all sounds so familiar, even commonplace to me now. His wife comes from the village Starje near Ersekë; the other young man is her brother who lives and works in Megara but is here on a visit. He explains how he ended up in this village. He had met the chairman of the Cultural Association, Mr. Kostas Dervenis, a long time ago. The man later became godfather to his two daughters. One is named Stella and the other Georgia. Stella was called Seila before; she chose the name herself to sound like her former one. Georgia was named after her godmother.

I ask Leonidao about religion. He says that he had no problem having his daughters baptised in the Christian faith. He knows nothing about faith, he is not religious... I ask him if people in his village are Muslims. Basically, he avoids giving a straight answer. He insists that he has no religion. As for his children, he "only wants them to find their way." I ask him if he has memories of a mosque or tekke in his village; he replies that in Pobickë (a village nearby) there was a church... It is obvious he evades the subject of his Muslim roots. On the other hand, he insists on his agnosticism and indifference about religion and gives ambiguous or evasive answers. Essentially his position is that he has no problem with his children being baptised Christians; in fact, quite the opposite...

While we talk, another Albanian joins us, a fifty or sixty-year-old man who works in the village. His name is Abdul Avdi and he comes on horseback from Radat every day. We had met this man during a previous visit to the border, together with another man from his village; at the time they had been crossing the border on horseback to go back home. They had told me then that the boundary was not at the gully, as I had thought, but right by the settlement, on the watershed. That means our meeting had taken place on the Albanian side, while we believed we were on the Greek one. So it turned out we were the illegal ones...

Looking for Ekrem

We leave Agia Varvara but my thoughts are still on Korsacka and the border. I think of all those people who have left the ru-

ined village: I wonder how they left and where they are now, those of them that are still alive. I know from various discussions, and particularly from what Thomas Papamichail has told me that most of them are in Albania; he also showed me the purchase contract of his land on that village. Thomas has often spoken to me about an Albanian American, Ekrem (he calls him Kerem), who now lives in Tirana but often visits the area and Konitsa; Ekrem has written a book telling his story. Thomas gave me that book, which was written in Albanian, but later I found out it was also published in English. I think that it would be very interesting to meet this man, Ekrem...

In the months that follow this idea is constantly in my mind and I try to put it into action. Therefore on August 8, 2006, Kostas and I cross the border again. We take a dirt road which runs parallel to the River Sarantaporos, which is also the boundary there. I know that there was a village by the crossroad, called Perati, which was also ruined and deserted after the war; a little further up there was another village, Serani, where only the church of the Holy Virgin (Shën Mëria) stands today. I have recently met people from both villages who live either in Greece or in Albania. Those who live in Greece describe themselves as Greeks from Northern Epirus, while those who stayed in Albania are integrated into the Albanian Christian Orthodox population; after 1990 they "play" with the ambivalence of the term "Northern Epirote"; in Greece to be "Northern Epirote" means to be Greek. I am not sure whether this road will take us to Radat or to Leskovik, but I suggest to Kostas that we follow it and walk along the border, on the Albanian side this time. We walk by the river. The road is in relatively good condition, well-trodden. I feel the awe of liminality, of the danger zone. I sup-

pose that danger was the reason for the evacuation of the villages on the frontier line. It would have been very difficult to control the inhabitants; besides, the wire fences and the machine-gun turrets were further inside Albanian ground. This here is something like a neutral zone. I think of all those men who escaped crossing the river swimming, since the bridge was destroyed in the war. I think even more intensely of "illegal immigrants" and their various narratives, which I had the good luck to write down myself. Even now that the Mertziani customs is open, I hear that many Albanians from the Leskovik villages who do not possess the necessary documents cross the village illegally at this very point...

We walk on. We reach a crossroad. The road to the right, very near the village, is strewn with gravel: it looks very recent. I am certain that it leads to the villa which rumour has it Ekrem has built there (I have seen the villa myself from the other side of the border). There are mineral springs in the area which Ekrem has bought from the state. Till recently there were public state-owned hot springs there, and a hotel was to be erected, but the project was never finished due to the collapse of the regime. Next to the abandoned half-built state building Ekrem has had a very impressive villa built. There is a vineyard, an orchard and many more ornamental plants around it.

We reach the villa. Although we have been prepared, it is really astonishing to see such a splendid building in the middle of nowhere. We are aware of the presence of people. We open the gate and walk towards the house; an elderly woman has just stepped out of it. She has a kindly look; she welcomes us in Albanian (*mirë se vini*) and she invites us to go inside. We enter a large reception hall with modern furniture, and decor appar-

ently chosen by Ekrem himself. Old and new photographs, signs and symbols of his Albanian origins and of his American identity... Three more elderly women and an old man come to greet us. None of them speak any Greek. We summon all our knowledge of the Albanian language to communicate with them. They are Ekrem's relatives and they have come down from Tirana to spend some days here. They say that Ekrem is in the States, he will be back in a few days. They show us the hot springs just outside the house; they say that swimming pools are being built inside the house. We ask if there are any rooms for rent, and their answer is: "Not yet." I wonder if this is really a business – a hotel, as the owner presents it, or just another private house. I have heard in Leskovik and other places that Ekrem talks a lot about investments (he has also bought the old state-owned hotel in the central square of Leskovik) but he has done nothing so far. Of course I know that he already owns a restaurant and cafe in downtown Tirana, just behind the National History Museum. At any rate, people in the area talk a lot about Ekrem; they often sound sceptical. Yet he is very active in the country, promising investments and getting involved in politics, especially in what regards national issues, since he is an important member of the Albanian lobby in the United States.

His relatives are very good to us. They tell us they originally come from Korsacka. The old man's surname is Vasha. They say they have relatives in Thessaloniki. Unfortunately our Albanian is so poor that we cannot have a long conversation with them. We stay for about an hour and then take our leave.

In Leskovik with Petro

We try to follow another road that leads to the North, but it is inaccessible, so we abandon the effort. The same thing happens with another road which seems to lead to Leskovik; that, too, is abandoned and very much damaged; however, our map shows that it does lead to Leskovik. A few days later Apostol Tase, who has worked as a driver in the area for many years, informed me that this was the old road which connected Përmet and Leskovik. Apostol also told me that, being so near the border, the road was very strictly monitored, especially the cars which used it: only one vehicle at a time was allowed on the road and under military escort at that. The measures became even stricter after a driver fled to Greece. I think that Ekrem probably escaped from that point or somewhere nearby, back in 1953...

We take the main road to Leskovik; I keep thinking about Ekrem's case. We arrive at Leskovik at around 2 p.m. There is a fine drizzle. We walk into a new cafe, on the left side of the main road at the entrance of the town. It is situated directly opposite to the "Russian" hotel bought by Ekrem. It is owned by a young couple. We order *raki* and we begin to talk with them. The man introduces himself as "Petros Ioannidis." He comes from the village of Pëllumbar near Përmet; his wife comes from a small village near Leskovik named Çerckë. They lived in Greece, to be precise in Iraklio, Crete, as emigrants for ten years. Petros talks about his adventures: how he was among the first to go in 1991; how he walked all the way down to Antirrio; how he initially stayed at his aunt's place in Athens as a guest, and how he ended up in Crete. He worked for the same boss during all his years there, and though he was reasonably happy with his situa-

tion he had to leave for health reasons: he was constantly under stress, and as a result he often ended up in hospital. He says that now he is all right. He went and “kidnapped” his wife from Greece three years later. She worked in a restaurant kitchen there. Now they live with the income from the cafe and a vineyard in Leskovik. I ask him about his surname and he says there are families with the same name, Ioannidis, in other villages in the region too. It would seem that all of them have had some relationship with Greece and Greeks (of course they must be Albanian Orthodox Christians). Petros learned his Greek in Greece.

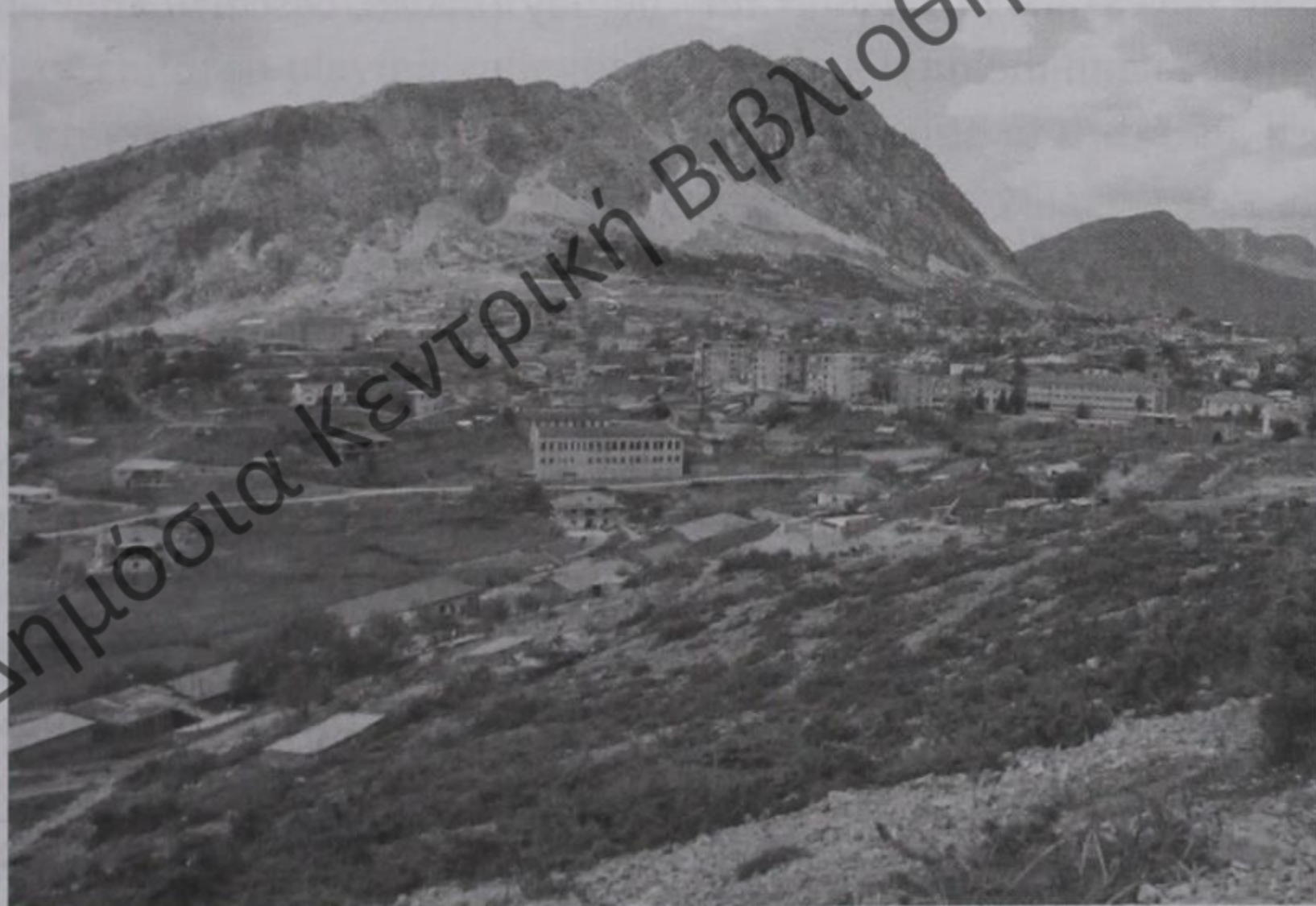


Figure 32. Leskovik: General view

I also ask him about the “Russian” hotel. He says it is called Russian because it was built by Russian engineers in the 1950s,

and that for many years it was a state-owned guest house and restaurant. He adds that it now belongs to Ekrem Bardha, who bought it together with another man from Leskovik with the intention to refurbish it, but Petros is quite sceptical about that. He is overall quite wary and suspicious of Ekrem's attitude and activities: "He is all talk but in the end he will do nothing," he concludes.

Petros is quite friendly and talkative all the time we are there; in the end he refuses to take money from us for our bill. "It's on the house," he says and will not take no for an answer. We take our leave and set out for Radat, after we have bought some necessary provisions for the day (bread, *cascaval* cheese, tomatoes and melon).

With the frontier people in Radat

We took a dirt road; a little further out of Leskovik it branches out to the right, leading to the village Çerckë, and to the left, leading to Glinë, Pobickë, and Radat. Directly opposite from where we stand a splendid panoramic vista to Greece opens up. Our horizon is defined by the mountains of Tymphi on one side and Nemërçka on the other; the whole valley of the river Aoos (Vjosë) with its low mountains and hills, villages scattered here and there lies in front; and in the middle of this landscape we can discern the checkpoint and custom house of Mertziani (Tre Urat = Three Bridges in Albanian). The fields of Leskovik and, further off, its famous vineyards lie at our feet. It is obvious that people are trying to pick up the thread of their lives again, to recuperate their fortunes. Just outside the village we meet a

young gypsy man from Korcë who is collecting soft drink tins in a sack. A little further off we cross paths with a few farmers, children and three policemen in uniform. We pass by public fountains with gurgling clear water, and after the Glinë cross-road on the left side of the hill we see a *tekke*. I remember all I have read in Hasluck's work. Leskovik was an important Bek-tashi centre during the last period of Ottoman rule. The *tekke* is fenced and looks reasonably well-kept. There is a man in the courtyard looking at us. I think I will visit him another time. For now, Radat is our destination. The road soon becomes very bad. We arrive at a small settlement announced by a tiny chapel and gardens with automated irrigation systems. There are three or four children playing volleyball outside a house; they look at us with great curiosity. I park the car on the side of the road. In a large open space, almost at the entrance of the village, there are ruins and a few ancient cypress trees. This is the place where the old church used to stand, the only man we meet assures us; he is a middle-aged man who came out of his house to check us out. He tells us that this is the village of Pobickë and it has about thirty inhabitants.

We decide to walk to Radat from Pobickë; it is a half-hour walk. Radat is situated on a lush green mountain side. At the edge of the settlement on the side of the border we see the outpost, which is now abandoned. The border is just a breath away. Amarantos, on the Greek side, is very near. We are impressed by the springs and running waters of the area. In the meantime it has started to rain; the whole place is dripping. In the centre of the settlement we encounter a group of men putting up a roof on a small square building. We greet them; all of them more or less speak Greek. The building is the village surgery. Next to it

there is another building; they tell us it is the primary school. Children attend it for four years, then they move on to the school in Leskovik for another eight years; they live in the boarding house there. The teacher of the primary school walks from Leskovik every day. In our talk with these men we confirm that they go in and out of Greece every day to work in Amaranotos, at least when there is work to be had. They leave in the morning and return home on horseback at night; it is about an hour and a half away. Nobody disturbs them, because everybody knows who they are, and there is a sort of tacit agreement to let them pass the border and seek work in nearby Greek villages. Indeed we are told that the youngest man in the group is a border policeman, and his father is one of the men who cross the border very often; under normal circumstances the son should arrest the father... They tell us they are on excellent terms with the inhabitants of all neighbouring villages and that they have been to almost all the villages on the frontier line for work, as far as the town of Konitsa. The young border policeman tells us he too has worked in Greece for three months, in the city of Kalamata down south. When I ask him why in Kalamata (he picked olives there) and not in Konitsa, he says that back then, in 1992, the daily wages in Konitsa was 2,000 drachmas, while in Kalamata it was 5,000. He never went back to Greece but his Greek is fluent. When we ask him about this, he says that he learned it from watching television. He adds with a meaningful look that they get all the Greek channels on television here, but only one Albanian channel.

In the meantime the rain gets heavier, and he invites us to his house. His father comes along too. The house is very near. We walk through a wooden gate door into a courtyard where

there are beehives, fruit-bearing trees, flowers and a vine arbour. His mother-in-law and his wife welcome us. The young bride is a stunningly beautiful girl, no more than twenty years old. She tells us she is from Qilarisht, a village opposite Përmet, and that her family are of Vlach origin; their family name is Tanuci. She doesn't speak any Vlach but she says her grandfather used to speak it fluently. The two women do not speak any Greek, as opposed to the men who do. They take us into the best room and offer *raki* and honey which they produce themselves. The television is on, a Greek channel. We learn that the young man's sister lives in Konitsa with her husband who comes originally from Çerckë. They also tell us that there is no mosque in the village any more and they are not interested in rebuilding one. We stay at their house for about half an hour and then we walk back to Pobickë where we left our car.

On the way to Leskovik we stop for lunch at the public fountain on the crossroad to Glinë. It is the afternoon already. We meet a young man walking to his village, Glinë. He sits with us for a while. He says his name is Yanni, but when I ask him for his real name he says: "Terian," adding, "Terian, Yanni, it is the same." His family name is Plljaka. He has worked as a shepherd for Spiros Tsagas in Zerma near Konitsa for a number of years; his boss's flocks pass the winter in the area of Egoumenitsa. He is here in Albania now because he is getting his papers in order, so that he can do his military service. When he is through with the army, he is thinking of going back to Greece to work. Terian invites us to the festival which will take place at the *tekke* of his village, on August 25. We promise that we will go.

In Glinë with Ekrem

I finally managed to go to the festival in Glinë the following year. This is a very interesting event; crowds from all the nearby villages and as far as Konitsa gather there for the festival, Bektashi Muslims and Orthodox Christians alike. I find Terian there and I meet his large family; they live in one of the few humble houses in the village, right next to the *tekke*. There is a wonderful smell of spit roasts, and two bands entertain the participants in the festival. They all worship at the mausoleum (*turbe*); it is decorated with plastic flowers, and so is the fountain in the courtyard. High-ranking members of the Bektashi order have come here from Tirana and from other places, just like at the festival of Frashëri, which I have described in a previous chapter.

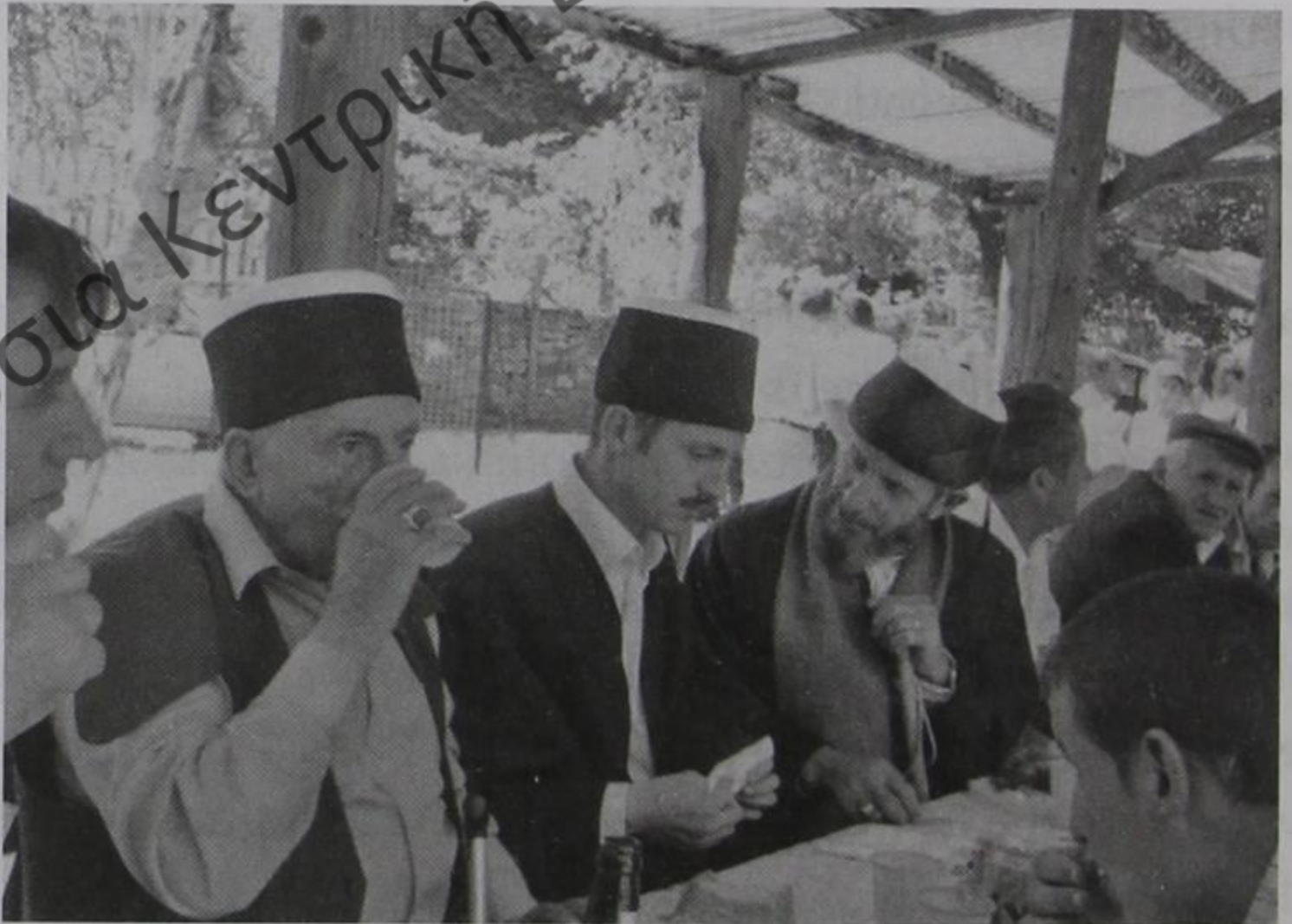


Figure 33. Bektashi dervishes at the Glinë tekke



Figure 34. At the Glinë turbë

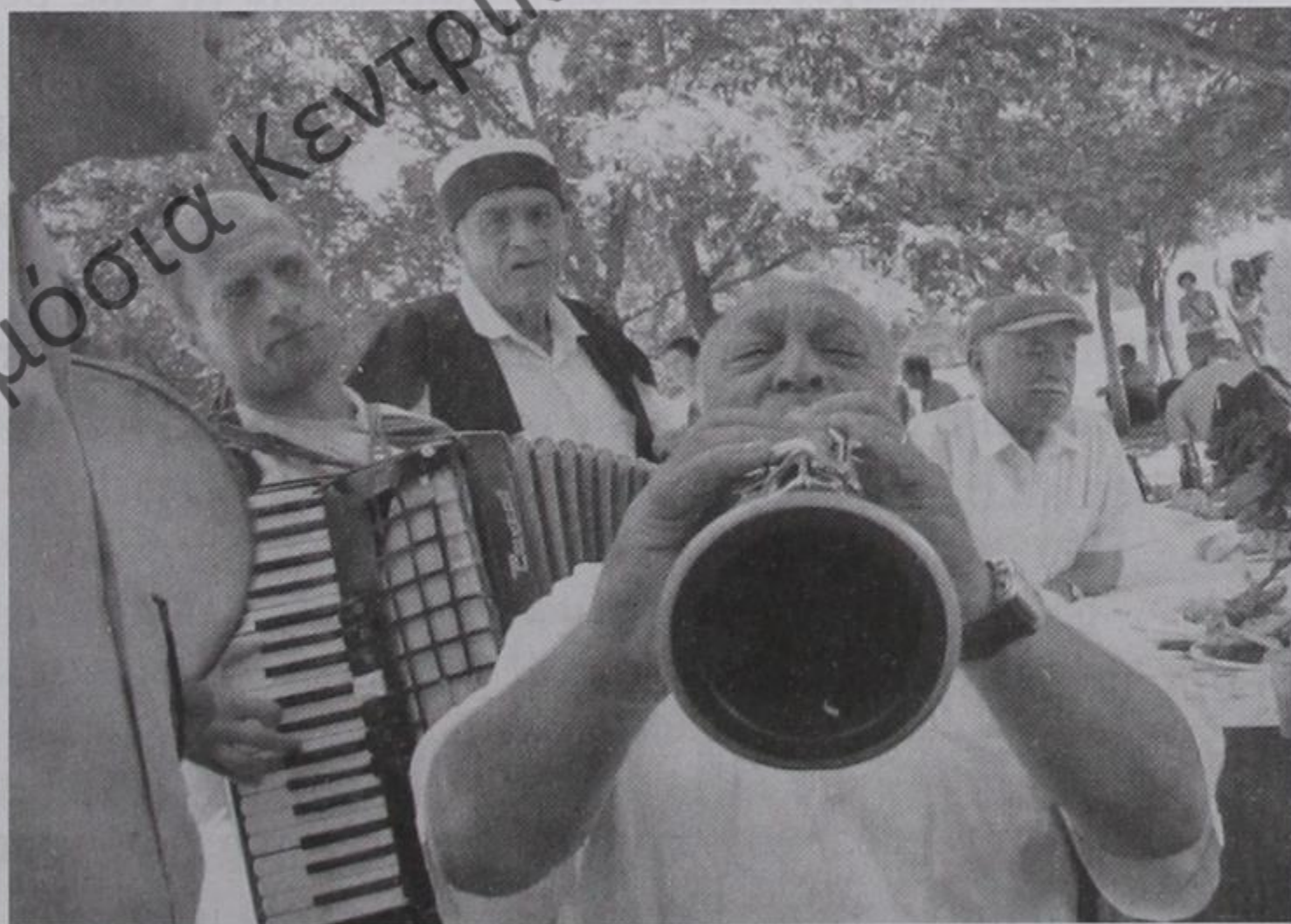


Figure 35. From the feast in Glinë

For me, the most important thing today is that Ekrem is here. He is sitting at the VIP table and he seems to be in command. With him is Thomas Papamichail from Konitsa. The minute they spot me they invite me to their table, and Thomas introduces me to Ekrem. We speak in English; he says he is very pleased to meet me and honoured that I am attending their festival; he also expresses his regard for Greeks and Greek culture. He formally invites me and my wife, who is accompanying me, to sit at their table. We engage a band of musicians and we have a very good time together for hours. There is plenty of food, roast meat and pies, and all our fellow-diners are in excellent spirits. I sit next to Ekrem and I talk to him at every opportunity. He seems a little cautious in his responses at first, but he relaxes after our first dance together. He praises my dancing and this seems to be the catalyst in our communication. At one point I mention his book, saying that Thomas has given it to me. He asks me whether I have got the Albanian or the English edition. I reply that I have got the Albanian one, so he sends his driver to his posh jeep to bring me the English one. He offers it to me with a dedication, in Albanian, in which he expresses his joy for our meeting through traditional music and customs and his faith in Greek-Albanian friendship.

Larg dhe pranë Shqipërisë

This book, to my great joy, contains everything and more of what I want to know about Ekrem's life. The title is *Far yet near Albania*, and it was published by Onufri in Tirana in 2003. The

Albanian edition was published by the same house under the title *Larg dhe pranë Shqipërisë*. The cover in both editions is a picture of the man himself with the American and Albanian flags in the background. His name is the same on both editions: Erkem Bardha. Though I have read a large part of his Albanian book I cannot wait to read the English version; so as soon as I am back in Konitsa I begin reading. I think it is very important to cite certain excerpts from the book without any comments. I begin with his short preface:

My life has not been an easy one. It began in a dictatorship, which took the life of one of my brothers. It then led me abroad to a refugee camp in Greece and later to the "Company 4000" of the US army in Germany. Finally, it brought me to America where I had the opportunity to be free and to achieve. If there is one sentiment which has accompanied me throughout my life, it has been the love I have for my Albanian homeland, both in good days and in bad.

Life in a democratic country such as the United States gave me an opportunity to reflect on many things. I came to understand that we must not seek to avenge the past but must look towards the future and assist in the advancement and well-being of our homeland. Every Albanian ought to ask himself what he has done and what he could do for Albania. Together we can achieve so much...and there remains so much to do! (Bardha 2003: 6).

In the first chapter of his book he talks about the origins of his family, and I must confess that I was a little shocked to read the very first lines...:

My family origins are from Konica, an Albanian city near Jannina, which was given to Greece when the International Boundary Commission drew up the Greek-Albanian border in 1916. It may be recalled that Great Powers were not able to establish this part of the border in 1913 because, as the old people told them, there were still units of the Ottoman Army under Javit Pasha in the area.



Figure 36. The house of Hamko, mother of Ali Pasha, in Konitsa

We have a lot of common things with the Greek people, and personally, I respect their most striking characteristics and traditions, which are quite similar to us, as the two most ancient peoples of Europe. On the other hand, I have made the clear distinction between politics and the reality of the relations between the two peoples.

Konica is a small but beautiful city in the Sarantaporos valley, just a few kilometers from Leskovik. As in most of the smaller towns in the former vilayet of Jannina, the majority of the population was Albanian. For this reason, they were able to make their voices heard more than the others. Despite plots and intrigues hatched by other nations in an attempt to divide the people along religious lines, Moslems and Christians, had very good relations with one another. They spoke the same language and had the same customs.

The Bardhas in Konica were reputed to be an old family, having lived in that region since earliest times. They made their living by various means, in both trade and in farming. The family owned its own house, with a yard, a

garden and a well. Indeed, most of the houses in Konica had their own wells because the town had no running water at the beginning of the last century.

In 1914-1916, Greek paramilitaries tried to get rid of all the Albanians from the Korça and Gjirokastra regions by burning and shooting them out in an unprecedented act of ethnic cleansing. In his writings on Northern Epirus, Mehdi Frashëri [prominent Albanian political figure and writer, prime minister of Albania in 1935-1936] wrote that, as soon as they got control of Chameria, the Greeks embarked upon a campaign of violence and oppression against the ethnic Albanians living in the region.

He wrote: "The killing of Albanians has become a common-day occurrence. No Albanian can now feel safe. Private property owned by Albanians is being ruthlessly confiscated." Frashëri stated that Greek policies were aimed at the thorough Hellenisation of all Albanians. My parents themselves suffered some of the hardship referred to by Mehdi Frashëri. One night, in those years of chaos and confusion, unknown persons suddenly set fire to our home in Konica and everything was burned to the ground. My father, his parents and his younger sister barely escaped with their lives. It was clear that fanatics wanted to expel the Bardhas from their land.

The upheavals of the First World War, unemployment and the burning down of their house forced my father to emigrate to America in 1917. He was the only son among four sisters, and for this reason his parents wanted him to stay at home to preserve the family lineage. However, their state of poverty gave him no choice, and they were forced to put aside their wish to keep him with them.

My father was known in Konica and the surrounding villages as Sulo Bardha, but in America they called him Sulo Konica. It was probably his friends who gave him the new nickname to distinguish him from all the other Sulos. He seems to have liked this nickname which emphasized his family's place of origin.

Father worked for seven or eight years in Boston, Massachusetts, where there were many Albanians from the Korça and Përmet regions. It was here that the Pan Albanian "Vatra" Federation of America was created, which played an important role in stirring national awareness among the Albanians and in saving our homeland from being broken up at a time when there was no central government. Albania had been occupied by various foreign armies that were always fighting among themselves.

He was soon to join the nationalist movement, as he had become a god friend of Faik bey Konitza, a well-known leader of the Albanian colony and of the Pan-Albanian Vatra Federation. Their families had always been friends back in Konica and he knew all of Faik bey's relatives (Bardha 2003:7-10).

Ekrem goes on with his family history for pages and pages. In summary, we can glean the following information: His father was forced to return to Korsacka from America in 1924 for family reasons (his parents had died and his little sister was left alone). He put family duty and honour above his personal interest. Indeed he gave all his savings from America to his sister as a dowry; she married a man from the nearby village of Glinë. After his youngest sister's wedding it was his own turn to marry (he was already in his thirties). Finally he married a girl of the Vasha family from Korsacka; this village, Erkem mentions, had been cut in two, since part of it was given away "unjustly" to Greece. During the matchmaking process the parents of the bride demanded that he stay put and not go abroad again, otherwise their daughter was not available. Although Sulo had indeed been planning to go back to America, he accepted their terms, because he was very keen on marrying Bule, who was to be Ekrem's mother. Sulo and Bule got married and had their first two children in Korsacka.

In 1930 Ekrem's parents left Korsacka with their family and settled in the village of Radanj, near Leskovik, on Albanian territory. Sulo had a hard time finding a job due to political reasons (he was a known supporter of Fan Noli). In the end a solution was found when American aid came in the area to help with the reconstruction of the area after the ravages of fighting. So the couple stayed on in Radanj and had two more children there. A

few years later Ekrem's father was elected headman: he was an educated man, an alumnus of the Zosimaia School of Jannina, and he spoke four languages (Albanian, Greek, Turkish, and English). Ekrem and two more siblings were born in Radanj later.

In 1939, Ekrem's father died of a heart attack. His mother did not remarry, although her brothers urged her to. In the meantime the Greco-Italian war began, which affected the region very much for years to come. Followed the German occupation and the Radanj holocaust, which forced all surviving villagers to abandon the place, Ekrem's family sought refuge at the village Kurtes, where they had relatives, believing they would be safer there. However, in that village too the division between communists and nationalists (*Ballë Kombetar*) had caused a deep rift. It was impossible that this would leave Ekrem's family unscathed.

When the war was over, the family left and settled in Leskovik. Their property was confiscated right after the war, and in 1949 the communist government confiscated their last few remaining animals. In Leskovik, Erkem finished the third and fourth form of primary school. In the meantime, many of his relatives who had taken the part of the Nationalist Front faced the usual consequences. On New Year's Day 1947 his brothers Sami and Niazi, his uncles Haki, Xhako and Faslli, and his cousin Servet fled to Greece. This caused a sensation in the local society and enraged the regime: it was impossible for the family to remain in Leskovik, so they returned to Radanj. Unfortunately, the Germans had burnt down their house. The whole extended family had to live in the one room they somehow managed to knock into shape. Ekrem attended the fifth form there. They were dis-

criminated against as enemies of the regime (*kulaks*); this peculiar sort of social ostracism went on and on, with the usual consequences. Their life continued with a great deal of hardship, both for the family and personally for Erkem, till it was time for his military service.

On October 15, 1951, Ekrem presented himself to the army barracks. He was dealt with as a *kulak*, since he had one brother in prison and another in exile: he was ordered into the forced labour battalion near Tirana, but he escaped and returned to Radanj. Immediately he acquainted his mother with his decision of escaping to Greece: she and his two brothers, Myfit and Agim, were to go with him. And so they did. They left at night, they crossed the border and they were on Greek territory on June 17, 1953.

Ekrem cannot remember which Greek village it was, but it looked a lot like his own village. The villagers did not show any surprise to see them there: it was common enough for them to see Albanians fleeing. Within a few hours a military vehicle took them to Jannina via Konitsa; they were taken to a military camp on the edge of the city. They underwent all the usual procedures of interrogation and, finally, two months later, they were transported to a military camp in Lavrio (in Attica). After that they somehow managed to go to Germany and they ended up in the United States.

So they found themselves in America, where a new life began for Ekrem; he made the American Dream come true for him. Not only did he manage to set up his own successful businesses, he also climbed high up the social ladder and became a prominent member of the Albanian community, and finally an important player in the Albanian lobby. However, as years went by he

was missing home more and more, and in 1978 he and his wife decided to visit Greece, from where he could catch a glimpse of his beloved land. This is how he describes that journey:

When winter makes its appearance, Detroit is covered in snow. The city is situated in the northern part of the United States near the Great Lakes and the winter season is harsh.

One day, while driving into town and watching the snowflakes fall all around me, I thought about how different the climate was from that of my native land. Would winter have arrived in southern Albania already? Would the fields there be covered in snow? Would it be that cold? Visions of my childhood returned to me. In Radanj, the pine trees, boxwood, and the forest clearings, stayed green all winter long. I remember the beautiful hillsides where we used to pick leaves for our herbal tea, *çaj mali*, and the upland pastures, and was filled with longing. I was only the red light at the street corner that brought me back to reality.

Inspired by my daydreams, I suggested to Lumtëri that we take a trip to Greece and visit the town of Konica so that we could have a look across the Leskovik valley and the mountain ranges of Melesin and Nemëçka. I wanted to get as close as I possibly could to the place of my birth. I did not know if I would actually be able to see Radanj from the border posts on Mount Shelegur, but I knew that if I did I would be overjoyed.

In the summer of 1978 we left for Athens. We did not even spend a night in the Greek capital, but continued our journey on a domestic flight to Jannina. As the plane was landing at the airport there, I wondered what had remained of the times of Ali Pasha Tepelena, when Jannina was the capital of his kingdom.

In Jannina, I was greeted by an old friend Llazo Sidheri from Postenan near Leskovik, who had escaped from Albania before me. He had just been appointed head of one section of the Greek-Albanian border and would be in a position to help us go where we wanted without getting into trouble with the Greek authorities.

Llazo received us warmly and, being the hospitable person he always was, he invited us to stay at his house. I told him that I wanted to go first to Konica, the birthplace of my father, and if possible to see the house where he had lived. Closer to the border along the Sarantaporos river, we also wanted

to go up to the Three Bridges border post. He agreed to help us and insisted on accompanying us right to the border, just in case there was any problem.

We drove to Konica in Llazo's car, feeling unaffected by the summer heat and the arduousness of the journey. The valleys, bushes, the colour of the soil, everything seemed familiar to me because the landscape was the same on both sides of the border. With Llazo's assistance, we were able to find my father's house in Konica. Though I was disappointed to see that it was in ruins, I had visions of my forefathers living there and looked fondly at the house just the way it was. There was the cobblestone courtyard and the abandoned vegetable garden covered in nettles and weeds. Lumtëri found the well which my family had once used for drinking water. I was full of nostalgia, but told Llazo that we should set off as quickly as possible towards the Sarantaporos river and drive up to the end of the valley.

The closer we got to the border the more vivid were my memories of the past. I had left Albania many years earlier, risking the lives of my family and leaving my elder brother, Sami, behind in prison.

In the years that followed, I had started a new life in America. I had gotten married and was happy to have found the ideal wife. We had four children, two girls and two boys, as well as a home and jobs providing good income. With us was our extended family: Three brothers and four uncles, not including cousins and other relatives. We had everything we wanted in America, and yet, something was always missing. Somehow I always longed for the country of my birth.

We got out of the car. The Sarantaporos river lay before us, an upper tributary of the Vjosë, which takes its source in the forest-clad Pindus mountains. It therefore never goes dry in the summer. On the other side of the river were the properties of my uncles, which had now long been expropriated. My uncles told me that their father Sulo Konica had signed the ownership documents for the land in their names. I had my own memories of Sarantapor, too. I don't know how many times I had been there in my childhood when I was herding sheep. I knew virtually every stone and every bush and I had the impression that not even a week had passed since I had been there last.

There, too, was the flowing river which formed the Greek-Albanian border. Llazo said that according to international law, half the water in the river belonged to Greece and half to Albania. In the heat of August, there was no

more than a foot of water in it. Were we allowed to wade in the river if we stayed on the Greek side? I asked Llazo. He thought for a moment before answering.

On the other side of the river, two soldiers from the Albanian border patrol made their appearance and were following our every move. Llazo gave us permission. Lumtëri saw that I would have to take off my shoes and socks and roll up my trousers, so she told me to stay put on the bank. She would go instead. I asked her to gather some stones from the Albanian half of the river. The border guards stayed put and observed her. They could obviously not understand what she was up to, simply gathering stones from the middle of the river, just inside Albanian territory. When she got back, I hugged her with joy for the gift. It was as if she had brought a handful of diamonds with her.

We took the stones from the riverbed back to Detroit with us as our most precious souvenirs of the voyage. I used to show them to people who came over for a visit, telling them that they were not simply stones, but stones from my homeland, beloved stones from the old country (Bardha 2003:188-191).

After the passage about his journey to Greece, Ekrem writes about the collapse of the Albanian regime and all that followed, his own activities there being always the main point of reference: not only did he return home, but he participated fully in various financial and political projects. Whenever I tried to meet him again in Albania, it was impossible. Each time he promised he would call me, but he never did. The last time I was in Tirana, in late August 2007, I went with some friends to his cafe and restaurant downtown: he gave orders over the telephone that we were treated on the house, and he promised to call me to arrange a meeting, but it never happened. In the end I decided not to insist. After all, I have got his autobiography...

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

BACK TO LESKOVIK

September 1, 2006. I set out early in the morning from Jannina with my collaborators, Kostas and Athina. We cross the border at the checkpoint of Mertziani and we arrive at Leskovik at noon. We go straight to Petros's cafe, where we order coffee. Petros is glad to see us again, and this time he shows particular interest in our work. The cafe is very busy, full of young people, but he takes time out to answer our questions. I ask him about the "Russian" hotel across the street, and he replies with assurance that nothing is going to happen there, because the two men who bought it (one of them is Ekrem) disagree with each other. He says that Ekrem's co-owner is a well-to-do businessman from Leskovik, who also owns a wine distillery and a supermarket in town.

Petros comments on his young customers lounging on the cafe veranda. They are idlers, he says, they live off their parents. They spend all day going from cafe to cafe. In a whispering voice he adds that they smoke hashish, indeed one of them has just been released from prison. At the time most of them are drinking frappe coffee (iced shaken coffee), mobile phones in hand.

Petros makes a sweeping statement about the new generation as a whole: they have nothing to do and waste their time in cafes. He also mentions drug-trafficking: "Everything passes through Leskovik," he points out.

Soon our talk turns to politics. There is a mention of the Leskovikian MP Mr Tolis. Petros informs us that he was re-elected but he was not re-appointed in the cabinet because of a change of government (this particular MP was the deputy minister of health in Fatos Nano's cabinet). Petros hastens to add that he is a conservative himself and a supporter of Sali Berisha, who, he believes, will make things better. He is negative about Tolis, saying that he became rich from his political activities. He says that when he, Petros, bought the cafe from him, "Tolis flew in from Tirana by helicopter to take his money." In the last elections Tolis stood for election on behalf of the Union for Human Rights Party in collaboration with the Socialist Party. Indeed, I can see posters everywhere urging people to vote for the Socialist Party and for Tolis as MP, which I find unusual, but I learn that their electoral system has this peculiarity. Petros informs me that Tolis's father was of Greek origin and that he came from Egoumenitsa in the 1940s. He does not know the details, but he points out Tolis's house on the main street.

Petros comments on the relationship between Christians and Muslims. He says Muslims do not care whether there is a mosque or not and that nobody goes there to worship anyway; on the other hand, many Muslims go to church with the Christians. He calls the hodja "a foreigner" and he mentions meeting him once in the street: the hodja called out "salamalekum" and Petros swore at him in Albanian, telling him he should be saying "mirë mëngjes" instead of "salamalekum". He has never spoken

to him since... Petros goes on to say that the people generally have no problem with religious differences and that there are many mixed marriages between Christians and Muslims. He points out that the Muslims there are Bektashi and therefore different. On the subject of the hodja he adds that it is not known who pays him and that he is involved with groups of fanatic Muslims. Regardless of Petros's claims about the absence of prejudices, he mentions himself, laughing, that one evening his cafe was full of Christians only, and the cafe across the street of Muslims only... When the subject of gypsies is brought up, Petros says that there are many of them and there are no marked differences among them either, due to mixed marriages. Petros is eager to talk but the cafe is very busy, so we say goodbye and take the road to Glinë.

At the Glinë tekke

When we arrive there we see a small impoverished settlement with an imposing *tekke* and old plane trees and oak trees. This sacred site is fenced with wire and inside there are wooden kiosks, tables and chairs for the festival. There are plastic flowers everywhere, on the lodge under the plane tree, on the fountain and on the two *turbes*, evidently left there by the faithful. Before we have time to look for old acquaintances from the village, Ar-ian Pllako (Yanni) appears before us: we had met him at the public fountain on the crossroad in a previous visit. He recognises us, he welcomes us and opens the front door of the *tekke* so that we can visit. There are still fresh traces from the festival that took place a few days ago. I look at a spot where it is obvi-

ous rams were slaughtered: there is dry blood on the earth and a ram fleece on the roof of a *turbe*. Arian explains that on the day of the festival all ram fleeces are placed on the roof; this one has just been forgotten there.

We go inside the *turbes* leaving our shoes outside. In each there is a tomb of a *baba* wrapped in green cloth. Arian does not know their names, and he does not seem interested in finding out. There are framed pictures of landscapes and bands with scenes from Mecca; there is also one of Christ as the Good Shepherd. I remember what is said about the syncretism of the Bektashi sect. On the other hand, I wonder whether this might just be an intended choice, the gift of a Christian or mere chance. Plastic is prevalent here: even the ram, symbol of the Bektashi worship, which is placed on the tomb, is made of plastic: indeed it is a cheap one, the sort you can buy in the bazaar as an ornament or toy. Outside the *turbe* there are scores of candles big and small, left there since the day of festival, when it is the custom to light them.

I am impressed by the place: the location, the solemn, evocative atmosphere is perfect for meditation. The *vakif* trees (belonging to a Muslim monastery) mark its age and give it its aesthetic character. According to oral tradition, the two plane trees were sown by a Bektashi and an Orthodox priest as a symbol of friendship between the two religious groups.

Arian proposes that we go to his house for a cup of coffee. We are welcomed there by his mother, his sisters and his nephews and nieces. There are seven siblings in Arian's family, one of them in Greece. Their father is out in the forest to gather firewood, the third brother has taken the fifteen goats of the family out to graze. We are offered coffee and yellow grapes

from their own vine-arbour in the courtyard. Arian tells us about his family and offers information about the village: only five families inhabit it at present. The school is still open though; there are about ten pupils, and the teacher walks everyday from Leskovik. The women and children in the family look at us with great curiosity. They tell us they have never been to Greece, but they would love to go. I ask a little boy what he wants to do when he grows up. He replies: "I want to go to Greece and become a shepherd."

Arian will return to the army very shortly and afterwards he intends to go back to Greece. He is very attentive to us and so is the rest of the family. I am impressed by how close the members of that family seem to be, and how affectionate the grown-ups are to little children. On the other hand, poverty and isolation are stamped on the women's prematurely aged faces and their toothless mouths which give an impression of misery, in spite of their youth, their lively expressions and their shining eyes. We stay with them for about an hour. As we take our leave, Arian shows us his old white Mercedes car: he has taken the tyres out to keep them from wearing and has placed it on stones... The sight of the tyre-less car on stones in front of the humble little house and the surrounding ruins is quite evocative of the general situation in these parts...

Conversations in Leskovik

We return to Leskovik. It is late afternoon and the centre of the town is full of people. We take a stroll on the main street off the central square, which has only recently been asphalted. A little

further from the mosque, which seems to be abandoned, a new building is being erected. Immediately it draws our attention. We begin to talk to the people who work there; they readily invite us to drink *raki* with them. We learn that this building belongs to two brothers whose parents are of Greek origin, though they themselves do not speak any Greek. There will be two flats upstairs and shops on the ground floor. As is the case in most new buildings in Albania, there are many *dordolec* hanging from the building to ward off the evil eye. The brothers' family name is Tula and their mother, née Risto (Hristou), comes from Biovizhdë. One of the workers, named Sotiri Yioti, speaks Greek: he has been living and working in Athens for many years. He claims that his origin is from Souli, a commonplace claim for many people in the region who want to prove a Greek origin. As we talk, many passers-by join us in the conversation.



Figure 37. Scarecrow (*dordolec*) in new building

The labourers go back to work and I begin to talk with a thirty-year-old black-haired man, who seems very eager to speak with us. His name is Llazo and he speaks about Greece with great affection, confessing early on in the conversation that he loves Greece and Greeks very much, in spite of the fact that he spent four years in a Greek prison. He tells us his story. He was arrested five years ago in Kleidonia, Konitsa, because he was trafficking eight sacks of hashish on two mules. He was taking them from Leskovik to Greece and he was to hand them over to a Greek drug-dealer. To this effect he had been given the merchandise and 300,000 drachmas by Albanian mobsters. But he was arrested in Greece and condemned to four years' imprisonment; he repeatedly did time in the Greek prisons of Jannina and Patras. He says that the first time he did it for the money, and then he was blackmailed to keep on doing it by the mobsters. He seems deeply repentant now and he especially regrets the fact he is not allowed back in Greece. He has two small children to raise, so he does seasonal work, at building sites or wherever he can get a job; he also has a vineyard and a vegetable garden. Recently he has been working with his brother in a nearby village as a muleteer, since the village is inaccessible to vehicles.

Llazo speaks very good Greek, which he says he learned in prison: he got a good education there because his long-time cellmate was a Greek teacher from Florina. He says that in prison he avoided other Albanians and he only made friends with Greeks. He keeps repeating how much he loves Greece and how sorry he is for what he has done. He says that he would do anything to go back to Greece to work, even if only as far as

Konitsa. He wants it even more for his children: he would love them to live and study in Greece. Of course, he, too, assures us he is "Northern Epirote".

We talk about other things. I want to find out about the family of Tolis, the MP. I am informed that his father lives just across the street. I request that he is invited out to talk to me. A portly tall gentleman approaches us; he must be about seventy-five, and his big belly makes him even more formidable. He welcomes us and sits with us for a short time. I ask him about his life story. He says that it would take him two days to narrate it. He left his village, Pigadoulia in Thesprotia, in 1944 with other people who were then going to Albania. When I ask him if he left with the Çams he avoids answering. He states as his reason of leaving that his father had died, his mother remarried and his stepfather was mean to him. He came to Leskovik, married a local woman from a good family, and had three children who prospered: one of them, Leonida, went so far as to become a deputy cabinet minister, and the two others are in commerce. By coincidence one of them arrives at the building to put up the glazing, which comes from his shop. He does not speak any Greek. We learn that Leonida speaks Greek well – besides, he was a member of the Union for Human Rights Party. The old man, Notis, does not stay with us long, but he invites us to his house for more talk...

When he leaves we go on talking to the others. There are two children there too; one of them joins in the conversation quite a lot, and he appears to be quite intelligent. His name is Kostas Petrou, and he comes from Biovizhdë on his father's side and from Drenovë near Korçë from his mother's side. They all live in Athens; Kostas goes to school there. He spends his sum-

mer holidays between Leskovik and Drenovë. Kostas makes many clever comments on various subjects; he says he wants to be a football player. Since the discussion revolves around the subject of identity, about Albanians, Greeks, Northern Epirotes and suchlike, I ask him: "If you become a football player, will you play for Greece or for Albania?" "For whichever team asks me," he replies. I tell him that this is not how it is done: he must decide himself whether he is Greek or Albanian and then he must be naturalised, etc. He tells me: "I come from Northern Epirus, I am a Northern Epirote." I am about to reply that there is no national team for Northern Epirus, but I do not want to make things difficult for him... Instead, I smile at him and tell him he is a very clever boy. I ask him if his mother and grandparents from Drenovë are Vlachs, and he replies: "No, they are *kaour*." "*Kaour*" or "*giaour*" is what the Muslims still call the Christians in Albania. In a somewhat strict tone of voice I tell him that he is not telling the truth, because I know that the inhabitants of Drenovë are Vlachs. I describe the village to him; he is impressed by how well I know it, and there is a mischievous smile on his face. Then he admits that indeed his mother's family are Vlachs. I ask him if he knows the language himself, and he answers with a few commonplace Vlach phrases. I wonder how he describes himself in Greece; as a Greek, I suppose, and when that is not possible, as a Northern Epirote. I wonder what "a Vlach from Albania" would sound like in Athens... But in the end I prefer to imagine his grandmother in Drenovë welcoming him with the phrase: "*vini dashu*" (the beloved has come).

We leave the building site after we have thanked the people for the mulberry *raki*, the white grapes from the arbour, and the company. Llazo offers to buy us a coffee or a *raki* in one of the

cafes, so we go back to the centre. We go to Petros's cafe. Our discussion with Llazo goes on. He speaks of his adventure in details. He claims that he has never tried hashish while all young men in Leskovik smoke it. He characteristically says that he does not even know what it looks like, that he was never even curious to look inside the sacks he carried. We learn a lot about drug-trafficking and networks in Greece. He mentions names of Greek people involved in his case. At some point his younger brother comes along and introduces himself. He says that he would very much like to invite us to his house, but his wife is away and he could not offer us as good hospitality without her. He makes us promise that we will go the next time we are here. We ask Llazo about his family, how they coped while he was in jail. He says that they all went to live with his in-laws in Çarçovë. He keeps telling us how sorry he is for what he has done, how much he wants to be allowed to go back to Greece some day. His imploring look seems to be saying: "Please do something if you can, I am truly sorry" ...

THE WEDDING IN PETRAN

We leave Leskovik and are on our way to Bënjë. As we pass through Petran, a village on the motorway to Përmet, built on the right bank of the river Vjosë, we see that one of the cafes is full of people celebrating. It is a party for the wedding of Josif's daughter, and I am invited. It is Friday evening and he has invited his family and close friends to a party; the next evening there will be the main wedding party where everybody is invited, including ourselves. We are all tired and decide not to stay, so we go straight to the guest-house for a good rest.

On Saturday morning we decide to go to the village early so that we can watch the wedding preparations. We sit at the cafe, and a nice gentleman in his early forties comes over and greets us in Greek. He introduces himself as Kostas, Josif's nephew, and he invites us to sit and have a drink with him. From the very first moment he assures us of his happiness to meet Greeks. He has been living in Akrata, Greece, for many years now; he works as a building contractor there. He tells us all about the wedding. Josif has invited all his personal friends to a party at noon. As a

matter of fact, we see the musicians preparing while men of Kostas's age begin to gather at the cafe.

Kostas's adventure

Kostas has already ordered *raki* and not only is he happy to be with us but very communicative as well. He speaks of his life, of his family and his business. Soon he embarks on some sort of confession. Though he seems to have some difficulty at first, he tells us his personal story. In 1981 he was at the Kakavi border, in a "pyramid" (pyramid-shaped watchtower). One day, two men escaped to Greece passing through that spot. He did not shoot them as he ought to, and for this reason he went to prison and was stigmatised for the rest of his life. He talks in detail about the escape incident and his life in prison. When he was released, nobody in the village went near him. Only his parents stood by him. Even his wife-to-be renounced him initially and it took him an awfully long time to persuade her to marry him. His father, an important member of the Party of Labour (Communist Party) and director of the village co-operative, was demoted. Kostas does not want to linger in the past, but he has told the story to his children: he wants them to know. He could not shoot men, and he never regretted it. His own father, while visiting him in prison, told him he had not done his duty; but what could he have said under the watchful eye of the prison wardens?

The *raki* is plentiful and Kostas becomes more talkative by the hour. In the meantime, he is looking after us very well. He brings various dishes to our table: meat, salads, cheese, chips. In the cafe the party is getting really lively. As soon as the band

stops playing, the gathered company begins to sing beautiful iso-polyphonic songs. At some point the bride makes an appearance. She is all dolled-up, and she is very pretty. She is here to honour her father's friends. She leads a dance and then she leaves. The party goes on till late afternoon. Kostas is with us. Among other things, he explains all the wedding traditions of his village. He leaves us to go to his own friends from time to time but always comes back.

We begin to talk about identity. He says that not only does he *feel* Greek, he *is* Greek: his grandfather spoke and wrote in Greek, and his surname was Dimitriou. Later their name was changed. He told us that he intended to change it back to Dimitriou when he was in Greece, but he was told he could only do this in Albania. However, the Albanian authorities refused to change it. He has been naturalised as a Greek with the help of the Institute for Northern Epirote Studies, on the basis of his family originating from the village of Kaludh which, according to the Institute, was part of Northern Epirus, therefore its inhabitants must be Greek. Kostas is passionate about his Greek origin; he says that all the Christians in the region were Greeks who were forced to assume the Albanian identity by the machinations of the previous regime. In fact, when an old acquaintance of ours, Thoma from Badëlonjë, comes to say hello, Kostas asks him persistently whether he is Greek or Albanian. Thoma replies "Greek," his look full of meaning.

Kostas is an indefatigable and interesting narrator. I suggest that he writes his life story. He answers that it is painful for him to remember. To make this clear, he says he never goes near the Kakavi checkpoint, he cannot bear it, because this is where that calamitous incident took place. He shows us the "stupid" (his

words) tattoo of the Albanian Communist Party star on his arm. There is a date beneath 1981-83. That is when he was doing military service stationed at the pyramid at the border. He points out that it was very stupid of him to have the tattoo, because now he cannot wipe it out and it will always remind him of what he has been through.

Kostas keeps repeating how happy he is to be with us. He also says that he cannot wait to meet his uncle's guests from Greece; an MP of *Nea Dimokratia* (the Greek conservative party) will be among them. He wants all the Greek guests to see that he and his compatriots have homes too, and friends, and a place to call their own; that they too are respectable. He wishes it with all his heart. In the meantime he shows us his appreciation for our company and he is happy that he can offer lavish hospitality and that he can feel like a "lord" in his hometown. This is a sort of typical behaviour of most emigrants when they are back home. They want to prove to us that here, in their own land, they too can be proud of themselves and be respectable. At any rate, I make up my mind that we will have to meet Kostas again.

The party is still going on when we decide to leave, promising Josif that we will be there at his daughter's wedding the following day, officially his guests.

When we return to the guest house, Apostolis asks me, as usual, how the research went. I tell him all about Kostas. He and his wife, Melpo, have serious doubts about the truth of Kostas's story. They say that everybody now pretends they were opposed to the Enver Hoxha regime, that everybody claims they were persecuted, imprisoned etc. They argue that Kostas's father was high up in the local party hierarchy: if his son had indeed been imprisoned, not only would he lose his position, but

he and all the members of his family would have been exiled as well. All this reminds me of other similar situations, when I was staying at Buliarat of Dropull, ten years ago, doing research on site. I remember that hard as I tried to understand the inner workings of the regime and their impact on human and social relationships and mentalities, it was impossible for me to make heads or tails of the stories I heard: there were so many contradictions, gaps, retractions, inventions and fabrications forming a picture of absurdity impossible to negotiate in any rational manner. This is when I stopped writing down autobiographical narratives and abandoned the ones I had already written down, realising that all these data would be more useful as material for fiction... The discussion in the guest house only makes my head more foggy and muddled, especially after all that drinking of *raki*; so I suggest to Kostas, my collaborator, to go swimming to Lengaricës, although it is already dark.

At the celebration or "our home is where our work is"

The next morning we go to Petran to give the bride the wedding present we have brought for her. We arrive at her house as she is trying her wedding dress on. Her mother and a cousin her own age are there with her. The bride's name is now Efie (Efthymia); before she was baptised she was called Elda. Her mother, 46 years-old, she tells us she, too, has worked in Greece for many years, mainly cleaning houses in Akrata. They offer *raki* to us men and liqueur to women; also chocolates and turkish delights. We talk about the wedding for a while. The young couple will live in Aigio, Greece. Both the bride and the groom

speak Greek fluently. We do not stay long, taking our cue from other people who come to visit and go soon. Athina makes an appointment with Efië to go to the hairdresser's in Përmet later in the afternoon.

We all return to the cafe in Petran for the party in the evening. We arrive at about nine o'clock and we see that the place is rearranged suitably; many people are already seated at tables and the musicians are ready to begin. Kostas is there, of course, and he rushes to find us a table: we sit with some friends of his who are also emigrants in Greece. We are sitting right next to the musicians. We are introduced to the company at the table. The forty year old man sitting opposite me is Haris, and next to him is his ten-year-old son Dimitris. They come from the Lunxhëri villages. Haris presents himself as a Greek, too, and he speaks proudly about the past in his village, its churches, schools, life in Greece and Istanbul: the same old stereotypical images. The assertion of a Greek origin and identity takes centre stage. The man's son sounds fanatical about Greece; he even wears a wristband with the Greek flag. His Greek is flawless and he has the typical manners of a Greek child of urban areas. His father says that the son does not speak Albanian well, but he himself does not mind at all. He and his wife speak both languages at home now; they have been in Greece for fifteen years. They live in Akrata, where he worked till recently as a builder and now he has got the lease on a kiosk. He tells us that they have recently bought a house which is not completed yet. He speaks of Greece and Greeks in a very positive way. He predicts that his son and daughter will decide to stay in Greece eventually; after all, he says, everything in Greece is better than in Al-

bania. His discourse is generally typical of the professionally successful and socially integrated emigrant.

Next to Haris, on the other side, sits a well-built man with a shaved head. His name is Freddy and he works as a blacksmith in Akrata. He tells me he comes from a village called Rehovë near Ersekë; when I tell him that I have been to his village, indeed to the religious festival of the village, he is very happy and he says proudly that all the people in his village are Christian Orthodox. On the other side of him sits Viron, a lawyer from Përmet; he too speaks Greek, as he used to work in Greece, intermittently. He comes originally from the village Zepë near Çarçovë, on the other side of the river Vjosë. He claims a Greek origin, too, and he says that his family name used to be Vasiliou. His narrative moves along the same old stereotype that his ancestors came from Greece and settled here. Zepë is another Albanian-speaking, Christian Orthodox village, with a past of Greek education and ways aspiring to Greekness: this is something they all resort to when they try to gain access to the established privileges of "Northern Epirotes".

The wedding party goes on. We are served salads, drinks and the first course (sausage, chops, variety of appetizers). The band plays on. Josif takes the microphone and thanks everyone. He thanks me personally, and he says in Greek (and in Albanian): "It is so special to have with us professor Vassilis from Greece." Then he sits next to his daughter at the top table. His older brother, Fore (Hristofore) takes the microphone to thank everybody in his turn. The dance begins soon after. The main dance is the bride's dance, a circular dance which is quite similar to the bridal *patinada* dances of the Konitsa region.

The relatives of the bride dance first. Following a hierarchical order on the basis of degree of kinship and age, each relative leads the dance showing off the banknote he or she will present to the bride, who dances with each one of them. The singer changes the song lyrics according to who is leading the dance each time, mentioning the relationship: it is the brother, the cousin, etc. It is easy to improvise on the tune of this song, so Kostas picks up the second microphone and sings along with the singer explaining who the leading dancer is every time.

Josif often takes the microphone to say things that express his happiness and to stir spirits up. At some point all the Greeks are invited to get up and dance. About 20-25 people rise. They are emigrants, of course. Although Greek songs have held a place of honour in the programme from the start, now they are much more frequent. Overall the influence of Greek manners is striking, from the choice of songs to the behaviour of the wedding party guests. Many popular modern songs in the manner of traditional ones (the so-called neo-demotic songs) are sung, such as "*Triandafyllia*" (Rose-bush) or "*Me kitas ke paramilo*" (You look at me and I lose my words). Greek folk songs are also prominent. I reflect on how much Greek culture has penetrated Albania in all aspects and what important role migration has played here.

At some point Josif invites me to dance. He holds me by the hand. I request that the band play "*Kolonjare*," a dance from the region of Kolonjë, and then a "*Pogoni*" tune, from the area of Pogoni. I feel deeply moved as I look into Josif's eyes and read his feelings... The dancing goes on for hours.

Later on Josif picks up the clarinet and plays some tunes, expressing deep emotion. The first tune is the famous dirge of

Përmet. He renders it beautifully. The party goes on; at one point the bridegroom's friends arrive, according to custom; they are seated at the top table, in seats specially kept for them opposite to the bride's people. Josif presents them to his guests and then they all dance in turns in front of the bride. They stay for about a couple of hours and then they leave. The party seems to be near its end now, and Josif picks up the microphone again to thank all his guests for honouring him with their presence at the wedding party. He greets and thanks especially the guest who came from Greece, saying in Greek: "Our home is where our work is."

At the bride's house

This last phrase of Josif's rang in my ears all night. The following morning at about half past nine we go to the actual wedding. The musicians are already in the courtyard outside the bride's house and a crowd is slowly gathering.

Josif himself greets us, all smiles. The musicians begin to play, mostly bridal tunes. Some people dance. This will go on until the bride and groom set out from the house to the church for the actual wedding ceremony.

Inside, in one of the two rooms in the house, the women are dressing up the bride, while at the same time singing mournful polyphonic songs that counterbalance the general atmosphere of joy and merrymaking which is prevalent in the rest of the house and in the courtyard, where the drink is plentiful and the people sing and dance to the music.



Figure 38. Dance at the wedding



Figure 39. The bride's dance

At around eleven o'clock the bridegroom and his friends arrive. They are ceremoniously welcomed at the entrance of the courtyard and then they go into the house, in the other room. They begin their own polyphonic songs, whereas the women next door go on with theirs. So there are three different sources of music in the house, since the musicians in the courtyard are still playing, too.

In the courtyard and outside, on the street, there is a large crowd watching. A man offers everybody *raki* and a woman offers sweets. There are also treats from the bridegroom's people.

While all this is taking place, many people come to me and ask me where I come from, etc. Everyone wants to know how Josif and I have met. At some point I begin to speak with the guitar-player of the band, who is not playing all this time since there are not amplifiers or electrical connection to plug into. I have already been told that he is a very good musician and that he plays in Athens, "in very good joints." He is short, thin and swarthy (they have already taken care to inform me he is a gypsy). He is standing there, watching. He tells me that he works in Athens as a blacksmith and a musician. He often plays with the clarinetist Hristos Zoumbas, and he has even played with the famous Petros Loukas Chalkias. He normally plays the lute, but he will play the guitar here, because he left his lute behind in Greece. He makes disparaging remarks about his fellow musicians, stating that they do not uphold the traditions and "play whatever." He is also dismissive about the "hodgepodge" of various Greek neo-demotic songs so prominent in the party music.

The singer from last night is not here, and he is replaced by the man who plays the accordion. I take note of the fact that

though this new singer's Greek seems to be very bad and the lyrics of the songs sound funny (he seems to have learnt them by heart without speaking the language), he seems to really enjoy singing Greek songs.

When it is nearly time for the wedding ceremony, all singing and dancing stops; the bridegroom and his retinue leave the house, then follows the bride escorted by her father and youngest brother. When she is at the threshold of her parent's house she breaks a glass behind her, and then she is given to the bridegroom. As they go through the courtyard towards the exit, people shower them with sweets and coins. I observe that some men pick up coins from the ground. Together bride and groom walk along the main street of the village while the musicians are playing bridal tunes for the road. There is a luxurious Mercedes waiting for them, adorned with plastic flowers in shades of pink and red.

Then the car with the young couple inside and the crowd behind them move towards the town of Përmet; the wedding ceremony will take place in the cathedral church of the Holy Virgin (Shën Mëria). When I arrive at the church I notice that only a few people from the wedding party have followed, only about thirty or forty in all. Not even the parents of the bride are here. I wonder if this is a custom or if they just did not think it was necessary for them to attend.

At the church

The priest, *Prifti Vasil*, begins the ceremony at once; two teenage girls offer their services as chanters. The whole thing has a

hurried character and most people are very awkward in their demeanour and behaviour. Neither the couple nor the best man and the bridesmaid seem to know what to do and the priest has to instruct them step by step. When the "dance of Isaiah" begins, the guests throw rice over the bride and groom. When the ceremony is over, the bride and groom alone stand at the church door to greet all their guests one by one as they file out. Sweets are given to everyone. As the bride is leaving she throws her wedding bouquet, and a cousin of hers catches it (according to the custom the girl who catches the flowers will be the first to marry).

I reflect on all this: the integration of the religious ceremony in the traditional wedding procedures, the awkwardness of the people, the copying of similar Greek "customs and traditions." I wonder about the religious ceremony itself: has Archbishop Anastasios developed new texts especially for the Albanian Orthodox, or has he used existing ones? It seems to me that most of the texts used in the ceremony were translated from Greek, and some stereotypical expressions were in Greek. This is an interesting subject for further research, but it is not in my immediate interests for the time being.

This is the end of the wedding. The young couple will soon get ready to go back to Greece. I also ponder the question, put in many ways and in various circumstances, about the future of this kind of young emigrants: will they ever return to live in Albania?

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

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TRACING THE PAST IN VOSKOPOJË

The trip

This time we cross the border from the Macedonian side; we are at the Krystallopigi customs. Krystallopigi is one of those villages on the frontier abandoned by their inhabitants after the Civil War (1949) and then re-inhabited by nomad Arvanite-Vlach livestock breeders. We go past the peaks of the mountain range of Grammos, by the foot of Mount Arina, then we cross river Aliakmon at the bridge of Nestorio and we drive on the road to Korçë off the Egnatia motorway. It is July 25, 2005, and at noon we cross the border and are on our way to Korçë. A good friend is with me; he has no professional relationship with all this but he is interested in my work and he often comes along on my research missions, when I go without my regular collaborators.

The road beyond the border is unexpectedly good, at least to my view: I have some experience of roads all over South Albania. Just before Korçë we enter one of the roadside villages for a coffee and because we want to get an idea of the situation

in these parts. It is a typical agricultural village; agricultural activities are now at a peak, with the harvesting of crops and collecting the hay and storing it for the winter. On every road there are carts carrying large heaps of grass, and tons of grass are laid out in courtyards to dry. Small children hang out in the streets, carefree and leisurely; but soon as they realise we are there, they run towards us to see who we are, and they seem to be wondering what we are after.

The settlement is obviously poor, but there is also considerable building activity, which is at odds with the general situation. Apparently it has something to do with emigrant money coming in. Many houses bear the marks of recent repairs, of additions and extensions, and some new buildings are being erected. We look for a cafe in vain. This is the strongest indication of abandonment. Indeed we are told that most young people from the village are away, living and working in Greece.

We resume our journey to Korçë. As we get nearer, there are more abundant signs of reconstruction and development. There is thriving building activity at the entrance of the town. New houses and buildings for various other uses are under construction, leaving us with a feeling that something is happening, even though in a rather chaotic manner. We go straight to Krystal Hotel on top of the hill overlooking the town; it is the old state-owned hotel, but now it is in the hands of private businessmen and is being refurbished. I stayed here the previous September, during a conference on Albanian migration organised by the Institute of Ethnic and Migration Studies (University of Sussex). Korçë still seems beautiful as I look at it from the hill top, spread out on a large mountain basin.

I know some people here; I met them during my previous visit. I plan to begin with Foto Ciko, owner of Villa Korçe, a downtown cafe-restaurant. Unfortunately, the waiter tells us, Foto is away on business to Greece. Foto is one of those businessmen who move between the two countries, taking full advantage of the new possibilities for development in commerce offered there. He is of Vlach origin, he speaks Greek and his family live in Thessaloniki: his children attend the American College there. He bought this particular building from the state immediately after the fall of the regime and had it converted into a bar-restaurant. Foto and his whole family have Greek passports now, because his own father was born in Paramythia near Egoumenitsa, where he and his flocks used to spend the winter. That was before the border was closed. The Ciko family is one of those families who found themselves on the other side of the border when this happened and they were forced to remain there. In fact Foto's father, Dimitri, has told me that he could have returned to Greece in the early 1960s, together with other Greek political refugees who found themselves there after the Civil War, but he already had a new family in Korçë, so he decided not to. It must be pointed out that, as was often the case with other families of Vlachs, there were members of the family who had been on the Greek side of the border: all those family members only met each other after the collapse of the Albanian regime in 1990.

Well, Foto is away and it can't be helped. We order coffee and I telephone another Vlach from Korçë, whom I have not met yet, but many people have told me about him. His name is Thanas Poçi, and he is the health minister in the Albanian government. I was given his telephone number by a relative of his, Od-

ysseas Potsis from Kefalovriso, a dentist and member of the prefecture council for Jannina. "He is a trustworthy man and you can count on him," he told me. He also mentioned that Thanas Poçi had some relation with Nikos Gatzoyiannis (Nicholas Gage), the well known Greek-American journalist and novelist, author of the best seller "Eleni", who indeed played some part in his appointment as cabinet minister. Unfortunately there is no answer on the telephone.

In Voskopojë for the first time

I keep thinking about Voskopojë. I am so near it that I find I cannot keep myself away. I suggest we go there before noon. As we leave Korçë we come across the bazaar near closing time. We walk around it and I am impressed by the atmosphere; the colours, the sounds and the faces. I promise myself to come back soon; but for the present Voskopojë is drawing me like a magnet.

We finally leave Korçë behind and climb slowly upwards towards Voskopojë. We stop at the crossroad to the village Gjonomadh by a fountain with cold water to have lunch: bread, cheese and tomato brought from Jannina. Afterwards we visit the village briefly, following a road recently laid with gravel. It is a very beautiful village, but there are conspicuous marks of abandonment and poverty. The people look at us in a peculiar manner, as if they have never seen a stranger before. Many abandoned houses are used as stables. In vain do we look for a cafe. They point to a very humble house, more like a hut, saying that it is the village cafe, but it is closed. The only indication that

it might be a cafe is a makeshift grill and an empty case of beers in the courtyard. A group of small children is following us around. At one point we come across a man who has been to Greece and speaks some broken Greek. He tells us that the village is deserted because the inhabitants have migrated, mostly to Greece, but also to America.



Figure 40. Church in Voskopojë

I am told that all the inhabitants of this village are Muslim, but there is no mosque or any other holy place in the settlement. Around the village the marks of desolation and ruin are also prominent; it is strange to see the bareness of the place, too, considering that the soil is fertile and it was built in terraces cultivated by the co-operatives of the communist era; I am told they used to specialise in the production of fruit and vegetables.

I leave this place with a heartache. The farewell of the children and the look in their eyes will haunt me all day.

We arrive at Voskopojë at noon. On the main cobblestoned street we meet a middle-aged man, Thoma Bani, and I engage him in conversation. Presently his wife comes out of his brother Giorgo's house. They both invite us for coffee. Giorgo welcomes us. He says that he works there as the community veterinary. He speaks a somewhat broken Vlach. He tells me that his family is the only one left of the original Voskopojë families; all other Vlachs settled here relatively recently, in the 1950s and 1960s, and they are former nomads who belong to the ethnic group of Arvanite-Vlachs or Frashërots. There are obvious differences in their idiom. We spoke at length about many things. What stays in my mind is Giorgo's emphatic mention of his friendship with Yannis Averof, a former Greek MP and mayor of Metsovo. Due to their friendship, Giorgo has visited Metsovo. Soon their grandchildren arrive; they live in Athens with their parents. They speak flawless Greek and one of them very good Vlach, too. They are with some friends; the children sometimes speak Greek and sometimes Albanian between them. We drink the *raki* made from wild plums and the coffee they have given us, then we take our leave and go to the church.

One of the children runs ahead to call the priest. He is not there, but his father comes to meet us; he is a fine old man, a typical Vlach face; he speaks Greek and Vlach equally well. His name is Nico Samara, though the family name used to be Çolaki. He tells us that they are related to the well-known Pitouli family of Thesprotia (Greece), and that they, too, used to spend the winters with the flocks in Sagiada and in Filiates before the war. He himself was born in these parts. Like all Vlachs who man-

aged to produce documents proving that an ancestor was registered in the books of a Greek village or town, he has obtained Greek nationality.

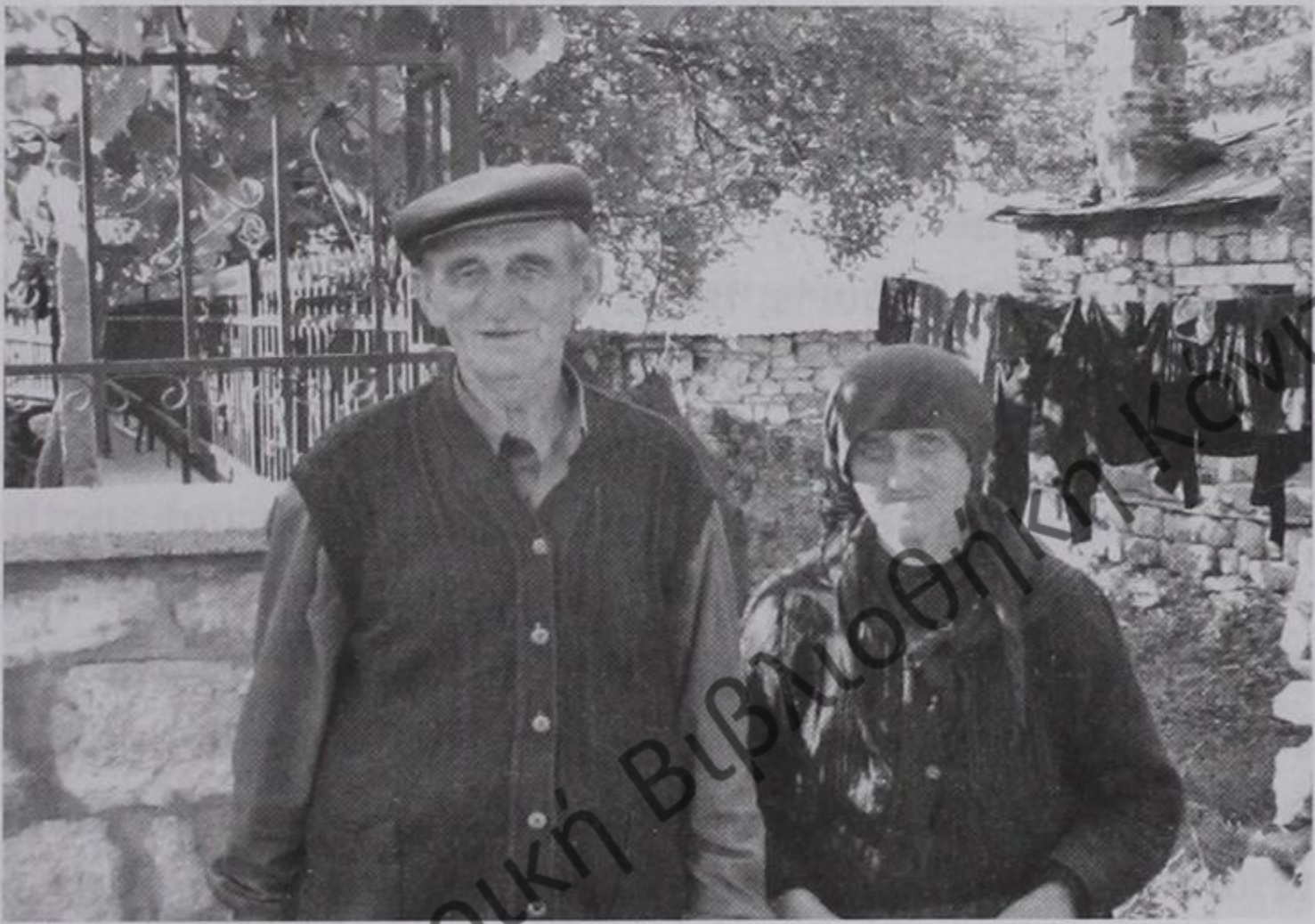


Figure 41. Vlachs in Voskopojë

Nico opens the Church of Shën Kolli (Saint Nikolas) for us; it is across the street from his house. As we enter the courtyard facing the *hayat* (roofed and closed-in veranda), it is very painful to see that the murals are damaged. It is not only the ravages of time and the lack of any efforts of conservation: what really grieves me is the vandals, “passers-by” or “visitors” who have left indelible marks of their presence there, etching their names or other marks on the church murals...

Inside the church it is not any better. The iconostasis is pilaged. Most icons are gone, and there are pieces of wood nailed haphazardly in their places. Those of the old inscriptions that

still remain are all in Greek. On the other hand, all new icons bear inscriptions in Albanian. I copy some of them: "... Dhuratë (Donated by) Kristaq Kuro, Gjergj Samaraj, Toli Zguri, Mihalaq Samaraj, Vasilaq Zguri, Andrea Zguri", "Dhuratë: Al.Thoma Samaraj, Rrapo Zguri, Thimio Samaraj, Thanas Samaraj, Thimaq Beta, Ilia Beta. Voskopoje 1995". It is strange for me to read these names. The family names are quite familiar to me (Kouros, Samaras, Zgouris, Betas), although here is their Albanian version. One more time I reflect on the subject of the construction of national identities; how one cousin (member of the same family) is called Hristos Kouros in Greece and another in Albania is Kristaq Kuro. I also consider that after 1990, in the context of migration, Albanian names became Greek, and that all these people carry two passports, two national identities, over and above their ethnic identity, which is Vlach. I think about this game of identities, about people's strategies. This was a prominent theme at the turn of the twentieth century and now it has come back in different ways. It is as if it had been put in cold storage during all those years of communist rule...

We spend some time in the church. I cannot describe my feelings. On the exit I take a picture of a stone-relief portrait of the church artist, which reminds me of the Mastrochoria villages. Then Nico takes us to his house, where we are welcomed by his wife Zorika. In the meantime their son, the priest Father Thoma, has returned: he comes outside in plain clothes (he is not wearing his cassock, as Orthodox priests always do) and greets us. We spend some time talking with him, too.

We leave the priest's house and we take a stroll in the cobble-stoned streets of the village. The houses seem to be in good condition, with many repairs and recent additions. There is also

a strong indication of tourist development, which everybody talks about as if it were the only prospect for the future. Many inhabitants have already turned parts of their houses into rooms for rent. Many children we meet in the street speak Greek fluently. They are the children of emigrants, here for the summer holidays. I find myself tempted to think that the Greek language has returned to this place many years later by means of this new Albanian migration pattern; I think of the printing presses, the publishing houses and the intellectuals who used to flourish when the town was in its heyday, in the eighteenth century. I wonder where this whole new situation will lead...

In the downtown area there are small groceries and a few cafes. The newly built hotels in and out of the town are quite impressive. There are young and old women and children sitting on doorsteps. I speak to a group of them: the grandmother speaks Vlach, her grandchild who lives in Greece speaks Greek. I speak to the grandmother in Vlach. Her name is Vassiliki Brenda and she comes from the neighbouring Vlach village of Shipckë. Her Vlach is very good, although at first she speaks with some difficulty. She tells me that she lives here with her daughter; her son-in-law is not Vlach, and as a result they speak Albanian in the house.

We move on. Further down the street we meet an elderly couple. I greet them in Vlach and they respond. They are Panteli Zgouri and his wife, who tells me that she is a member of the Dima family and she has relatives in Vovoussa, a village near Jannina. Panteli offers to show us around the village, and I ask him about the big building project right in front of us. This particular construction impresses all visitors, he says; it is designed to be a hotel, super market and night club. The multiplex is built

entirely from hewn stone. One can reasonably wonder about the provenance of the money for this investment. In the courtyard they are building an open-air theatre with stones and marbles obviously taken from old buildings, churches and ancient monuments. I wonder if there is any kind of state control on such procedures. Panteli winks at me...



Figure 42. The new hotel in Voskopojë

As the discussion goes on, he reveals to us that the owner of the multiplex is a forty-year-old man who has grown very rich in recent years and has great property in both Albania and Greece. He is also the owner of one of the biggest hotels in Korçë. I am impressed by the fact that the inhabitants of the village do not care very much about where the money comes from, that they are interested only in the fact that this investment of-

fers work to many villagers and will create jobs in the future. I am shocked by the pillaging of sacred and other public ancient, Byzantine and more recent monuments, parts of which have been used in building and adorning this new building project. I am told that even a cast-iron fountain has been removed from a public space in Korçë...

The guard of the multiplex approaches us. His name is Petrit, he is a Muslim and he comes from a village nearby. He is friendly and eager to explain anything we want to know. He has been an emigrant in Greece, too, and he speaks some Greek. Petrit will be our guide for the rest of the day. He belongs to a group of Muslims who settled here about twenty years ago; they came from nearby villages. According to my Vlach informants, not only do these Muslim not request a mosque, but they often go to church with the Christians. However, the fact of changing Muslim names into Christian has to do mostly with the need to secure a visa to Greece and access to the opportunities offered there, rather than with any process of religious conversion.

Among other things Petrit wants to show us the church of the Holy Virgin. We do not have the keys to get inside, but the condition of the building on the outside is disappointing. Actually, it is on the brink of collapse. Once again, I leave the place with a very sad feeling...

On our way to the centre of the village we meet a group of French-speaking young people. I am told that they are part of a group of university students of monument conservation, and they are here for a training course. Under the supervision of their teacher they supervise the work carried out on the church of Saint Athanassios. Presently I meet their teacher, an Austrian professor; she explains to me that this is a European educa-

tional programme; the participating students are from France, Germany, Italy, Albania, and a group of Greek students is expected to join them in a few days. In the team there is also an Albanian interpreter and an Austrian photographer, whom I meet the next day. The photographer tells me he is preparing a portfolio with pictures of Vlach settlements. He tells me about his work and about his connections with various Vlachs of the diaspora who are very active on issues of Vlach identity and culture.

After all this I express to Petrit a wish to visit Shipckë. It lies north of Voskopojë, situated at 1400 metres above sea level. I am driving on a very bad road, perhaps the worst I have seen so far. About twenty minutes later I see a settlement of stone buildings deep in lush vegetation. I can distinguish the church at the edge of the village. As I go nearer I see that they are carrying out repair work on the church. I am soon told that the project is funded by Yannis Averof – it is not clear how, exactly – who often visits to supervise the works. I wander among the graves in the churchyard and I look at the family names and photographs of the dead. Nasio, Busio, Tzoka, Apostollara. I lose myself in the Vlach names and faces. I am carried away by a strange feeling. I let myself sink into the eternity of the moment, when a cry from the mountain opposite brings me back to reality: “S’ti mëkë lupu, s’ti mëkë” (may the wolf eat you, may it eat you). It is a shepherd shouting at his animals. He carries on, using other similar strange expressions; to me, they sound familiar. It is a strange feeling...

The man sent to fetch the church keys is taking his time, so we decide to have a stroll in the village before it is dark. We go up the streets, passing by the deserted and ruined warehouses

of the agricultural cooperative. Further up, the school is in ruins, too. We go into by-streets. We meet a woman outside her house. I speak to her in Vlach. The first thing she tells me is that the people have left. They have all gone to Greece, particularly to Thessaloniki. A little further up the road another woman comes out of her house, elderly, in black clothes and in a black scarf covering her head. I speak to her. She has a strong Arvanite-Vlach accent. I think that here, too, the same thing as in Voskopojë must have happened: The locals departed and former nomadic livestock breeders settled in. Whatever the case, the only permanent inhabitants of the village are three elderly couples. The few young people and the children we meet are here from Greece only for the holidays. Shipckë is dying a slow death.

When darkness has set in for good, we go back to Voskopojë. We go to the Hotel "Academia Voskopojës" to ask for a room. There is nothing available. The manager says that especially for the weekend one should book well in advance, since there are many tourists: not only middle-class tourists from Tirana who come here for a rest, but many foreigners as well.

We go down to the village again, looking for accommodation. At first we sit at a cafe and order *raki* and then dinner. Petrit goes to inquire about rooms. He comes back with a gentleman, Thoma Brenda, who is the owner of rooms for rent. We invite him to sit with us. We begin to talk with him. Thoma is an old member of the Party of Labour and he says he is proud of it. He is, of course, an exception. He admits that Enver Hoxha made three very important mistakes: first, he nationalised all private property, which made people indifferent to the "collective" property; second, he discriminated against non-members of the

party, pushing them towards social exclusion; thirdly, he placed wire fences on the frontier line between Albania and Greece and, generally, he isolated the country. Thoma speaks with self-assurance, and at any rate he is one of the very few people who do not deny they had participated in the old regime. Soon his son-in-law turns up; he speaks very good Greek, as he has been an emigrant in Greece for over ten years. He has a steady job as a driver in Halkida. He is here on a short holiday. I am impressed by the amount of gold he carries on his person: double and triple gold chains round his neck and wrists. He speaks with great confidence and shows off. He is trying to show how well he is acquainted with Greek mannerisms. He is stereotypical of a certain group of Greek people. His father-in-law tells us that the younger man comes from Voskopoje (of Vlach origin) but was born and grew up in Elbasan. Now he prefers to spend his holidays in Voskopoje and help his father-in-law with the hotel business. He seems to be an interesting specimen. He sits with us and immediately orders that *raki* is brought to our table, he is treating us. We spend a few hours together till we leave the cafe exhausted and go to bed.

The next day I take a stroll around and outside the settlement. I am carried away by the reverberations of history and the deafening silence of the present. The few people that remain here seem to be interested only in tourism and similar activities. In this framework the same old discussion about environmental and cultural development has been introduced here. History is an issue, too; but which history? What is the history of Voskopoje? In which national narrative does it belong, and how does it integrate in it? How have the Albanians incorporated it

into their own national past? Such are the questions that keep buzzing in my head.

Identity, history and memory

As I approach the war memorial in the central square I remember how Stephanie Schwander-Sievers refers to this issue in the introduction of her book *Albanian Identities* (2004). On the subject of historical “truth” and memory as an object of ambivalence and re-negotiation in the post-communist era, she asserts that during the construction of a homogenising project of national historiography a number of local and other versions of historical experience and memory have been excluded from the hegemonic historiographic narrative and from related representations as a whole, and she wonders what happens during the transition to a new era supposed to be pluralistic also in reference to the reading of the past and its representation in the present. What happens to “sub-groups” which have their own particularities and strive for a reading of their own particular history outside the framework of the hegemonic national historiography in the new era? In the same book, Fatos Lubonja points out the hypocrisy prevalent in Albania, where the dominant representation of history did not correspond to the personal experiences, memories and expectation of its recipients (Lubonja 2004). Nevertheless, having to deal with totalitarian means of coercion, they got used to living in a constant state of dissimulation. Today, emerging groups in modern Albanian society stress their own particular mythologies and offer illuminating paradigms of ideological dilemmas which appear when

the national myths of homogeneity are contradicted by an evident diversity.

Schwander-Sievers uses an example from the Vlachs who, in the new post-communist era, are recognised as a particular “cultural group.” However, she mentions that during her research in 1996 she met many Vlachs who openly identified with the Albanian nationality. Within this framework, she says, she came to realise how interpretations found in a history textbook could be disappointing to those people in relation to their own collective myth as Vlachs. In this textbook, Sali Butka (1852-1938) is presented as a patriot leader of the Albanian “liberation struggle” during the Balkan wars and World War I, especially against Greek military and paramilitary (brigand) operations in the region of South Albania.



Figure 43. National holiday in Voskopojë

During those “heroic” activities Butka executed a number of “Greeks” in Voskopojë. Some of the executed men happened to be parents, uncles or grandfathers of the people Schwander-Sievers spoke to. Their own approach and version of the facts was very different from the one offered by the dominant national history. Those men were not “traitors to the nation” but rather Vlach martyrs. As far as the position Butka occupies in national history, their view is that, in the best of cases, it expresses a non-sensitive stance against the Vlachs. The worst for them is that all those issues of contradicting views on history, of differentiated readings of the past, were not part of a public discussion, and that the Vlach issue began to acquire a negative character, because a number of Albanian intellectuals and journalists turned the Vlachs into scapegoats, constructing them as “internal other” whom they blamed for everything that was wrong... (Schwandner-Sievers 2004).

The public argument between I. Kadare and the Vlach associations of Albania spring to mind. Many people have talked to me about it. I even keep in my files a newspaper clipping given by an Albanian friend of Vlach origin; it is an article by Kadare entitled: “A discussion turns into a provocation.” He writes:

In the pages of the newspaper *Sot* there was a discussion about the relationships of the Vlach community with Albanians. This discussion has been turned into a provocation by certain people who mean to add one more cause for quarrel to the already existing fragmentation of the sense of community which is tormenting the Albanian people. I doubt if there has been so much tension in the relationships between Albanians and Vlachs before. The last thing we needed was to inaugurate the new year 2003 by adding a non-existent issue. Since I was mentioned in this discussion as the instigator of a “morbid campaign against Albanian Vlachs”, I find it is my moral duty to state my position on the matter. The author of the article does not particu-

larly deserve an answer, but, as I mentioned before, I felt obligated to do it out of respect for the Vlach community, one of the most important in the country. I have many Vlach friends and associates, and it is their community that's being dragged into a suspicious, dangerous swamp. I believe that this is the cause for the cheap, vulgar provocation. A. Siounto [the author of the article], who self-identifies as a Vlach, begins his article by citing a few lines from a text of mine published in Paris thirteen years ago. In this text I stated my opinion on why a large number of members of the politburo of the Party for Labour [Albanian communist party] were of Macedonian or Vlach origin. Whether correct or incorrect, wise or unwise, clear or unclear, this opinion has already been stated before in the minorities press by Arsi Ripa and I cite it in my book *From One December to Another*. This is the background of my writing on Vlachs. From time to time it has been stated in publications and interviews that in the Ottoman empire as well as in totalitarian communist countries which copied it, foreign conquerors of local populations were usually appointed as high rank officers, governors, or pashas, because they would not be overcome by any feelings of mercy in their campaigns to raze all values to the ground. Amongst these horrible cases I first and foremost mentioned the merciless – but no more or less so than others - Albanian pashas. A recent example of that sort was Vaso Pasa, a melancholy Albanian poet who was a cruel dictator in Lebanon for nine years. I have written thousands of pages, positive or negative, on many personalities of various nationalities: Albanian, Greek, German, Russian, Chinese, Dutch, and Vlach among them; on those last ones there is not one offending line in my writings. On the contrary, in my novel *Cantankerous Time* there are many men among those who were sacrificed for Albania whose names bear witness to their Vlach origins. Be it as it might, I find it hard to believe that ten lines written thirteen years ago can be characterised as “a morbid campaign against Vlachs”. At any rate, a campaign (started by Fan Noli, according to the author, and continued by me) which has been put on hold for thirteen years would be a very strange thing. It is equally difficult for me to imagine that “Hitler himself would envy the cited lines by I. Kadare”, as the author asserts. I will not say more on the nonsense that follows; the grotesque arguments, the direct threats and, finally, the unfathomable hypocrisy. “With all due respect to Kadare, I would like to make the necessary observations”. It is obvious that the author has no idea what respect means, otherwise he would have

known that no respect is due to individuals who carry racist campaigns against whole populations, in particular individuals who are, allegedly, darker than Hitler. The most worrying trait in this article as well as in the attitude of the publishers of the Vlach Association newspaper is that they go looking for a cause for conflict and show a provocative thirst for division, a fact ascertained by their impatient and covert Albanophobia. One is left with the impression that when the anti-Albanian riots took place in Himarë, they were encouraged rather than stopped by local hot-heads. To make myself clear, I would like to emphatically state my opinion, which is shared by the Albanian majority, that respect to ethnic minorities is a ruling principle and a pillar of European civilisation and its values. As a consequence, according to this vision, individuals of a different ethnic origin from that of the national majority of a state can be as valuable citizens as – and often more so than – the majority. Europe is an example of this principle.

Albanian history of both older and more recent times shows that Albanians of Vlach, Jewish, Greek, or Macedonian origin were as dedicated [patriots] as the majority, perhaps even more so. It is an honour for both sides, much as the opposite is a disgrace. This important principle results in mutual understanding. It would be cowardly and shameful for the Albanian majority to take advantage of this principle in order to violate, even in the slightest degree, the rights of the minorities. This does not mean that the majority should put up with the kind of behaviour, on the part of the minority, which it does not allow itself.

Recently, Albanians are being attacked from various directions with a view to their systematic humiliation. It is sad that representatives of minorities should be involved in this situation. Therefore, I would like to remind them here – and it should be taken as advice for the time being – that a fundamental European principle for the minorities is their allegiance to the country and to the people with which they coexist. When this is not the case, something is wrong. When the opposite is in operation, then the alert should be raised (Kadare 2003).

All this debate, reverberations of which I continually perceive as I move around the area, feeds my reflection on the position of Vlachs in the Balkans and especially in Albania. My re-

search in Korçë and the villages of that region yields material which I intend to use as a basis for a more systematic negotiation of the matter in future.

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

WITH THE VLACHS OF KORÇË. DRENOVË,
BOBOSHTICE, DARDHË AND THE ENVIRONS

With Foto in Korçë

We leave Voskopoje the next day at noon. Our intention is to visit Korçë and then the nearby Vlach villages. We arrive at Korçë in the early afternoon. It is unpleasantly hot. We decide to stay at the Hotel Gold in the city centre. Hotel prices are at around 20-25 euro. After the siesta we go out for coffee. We go directly to Villa Korçe. Foto has returned from Greece. The waiter lets him know we are here and he comes to meet us with obvious pleasure. He offers us coffee and we begin to talk. His merchant business is doing well. We comment on the political news. He expresses his opposition to the Union of Human Rights Party because, in his opinion, they do not have a clear political orientation or consistency; indeed, quite the opposite: "They sometimes go this way and sometimes that way." I ask him about the Vlach situation. He tactfully avoids to talk about the

division inside the community. He says that Vlachs generally mind their own business, which is what they always did and that's why they prospered. He adds that they are dominant in the economy in Korçë: all good businesses and shops belong to them. Only after I insist on the matter of the Vlachs' national orientation does he tell me that the influence of those with Romanian connection is practically non-existent. At any rate he seems unwilling to talk about it for long.

We change the subject. I ask him about Thanas Poci. He tells me that he is in Tirana, but he immediately tries to get in touch with him through his brother-in-law. We manage to establish a telephone connection, and he passes him on to me. I speak to him in Vlach, saying that I am calling on behalf of his cousin Odysseas Potsis in Jannina. At first he replies in Vlach, but soon he turns into flawless Greek. He tells me he is very busy because his party is in continuous negotiations with Berisha for the formation of a government cabinet. His words confirm what Foto has just been telling me about the Union of Human Rights Party: Thanas is a member of that party. In the previous socialist government of Fatos Nano he was deputy minister of health.

One can talk to Foto for hours. He is a typical case of a man who minds his own business and has very clear goals set for himself and for his family. He tells me that Greece is a better place to live but the big money is in Albania and if one is clever, loads of it can be made. He tells me that Albanians are hard-working, honest people; the problem lies with the government. Foto is one of those Albanian Vlachs who turned to Greece immediately after the border opened, reactivating all the links they had with it and acquiring Greek citizenship. He is a person

who lives a trans-national life crossing the geopolitical and symbolic border almost every day.



Figure 44. Korçë



Figure 45. Animal bazaar in Korçë

The ex-employee of the Greek consulate

We take our leave of Foto and we have a stroll in the town. The main street is closed to traffic in the evenings and becomes a pedestrian street for people to stroll up and down. It is an image which evokes vividly the city of Jannina in the 1970s. One feels that the whole town is pouring out in this street and that its people are somehow "on show". Men and women of all ages walk up and down the street in a relaxed, communicative atmosphere. The emigrants' presence (people who have migrated and are only back for the holidays) is more than obvious; Greek music is wafting from surrounding shops and cafes. Street hawkers and roasted sweet-corn sellers complement the vivid picture.

After a few strolls, we enter a grill restaurant named "Karavi" (Boat in Greek). The name is Greek, and so is everything else in the place. The owners speak fluent Greek and it is obvious that they are former emigrants who have returned from Greece. Later I find out that they, too, are Vlachs. They worked in a grill restaurant of the same name in Athens for many years. They are particularly friendly with us and they keep asking us whether we are pleased with the service.

As we walk down another street later, we pass by a souvlaki place named "Kamara." The owner here speaks fluent Greek and has Greek manners. We speak to him and he tells us at once that he is a Vlach. His name is Giorgio Belo. He worked in Thessaloniki for many years, and he was a clerk in the Greek Consulate in Korçë for another two. He has many connections with Greece and he seems very well informed on the "Vlach question". He knows people and things in the Greek Consulate. Indeed, he

admits that during his service at the consulate he had the opportunity to make himself rich through the process of issuing visas to Greece, but refused to take advantage of it. He tells us that he learned Greek as an adult and that he did not take the Greek nationality, although he could, because he would have to serve in the Greek army for three months. He is very eager to talk about the Vlachs; he seems to be personally interested in the matter. He is passionate about the hard-working habits of Vlachs, their success in business, as well as their Greekness. He points at himself as an example: he works hard, from early morning till late night. He claims that this was the reason he got a divorce from his first wife. He has a Vlach wife now, and she understands and supports him. He adds very seriously that royal families knew a thing or two when they did not intermarry... He tells us many things. His national orientation is clearly Greek. He cites specific Greek academic books on the Vlach issue, which have formed his view significantly: he takes his arguments on the Greekness of Vlachs from them. He is very negative about the Albanians' refusal to accept estimates of the Vlach population in their country, at the same time refusing to do a census themselves. Among other things, he mentions an old ledger left to him by his grandfather, who was a grocer in Shipckë. He promises to give me a copy of it, together with some publications on the subject of Vlachs.

The next day we take our morning coffee at the cafe by the Vlach church of Shën Sotiri. The woman who owns the cafe has worked in Greece, too; the music in the cafe is Greek. I visit the church. I take a photograph of the large sign that announces the project of its construction:

KISHA ORTHODOKSE
 AUTOQEFALE SHQIPTARE
 OBJECTI: KISHA ORTHODOKSE
 AROMUNE E "SHËN SOTIRIT"

Investoi: NDHIMA NGA BESIMTARE AROMUNE
 RUMUNE E SHQIPTARE NGA SHQIPERI, RUMANIA, AMERICA

Projektoi: S.C. , "PROJECT ARGES" S.A. PITESTI RUMANI
 DIRECTOR GENERAL SEF. C.S.C.T.E.

ING.DUMITRACHE EUGENIU ARCH. MULTESCU MARIA
 2 batoi: FIRMA SIMACU

(Autocephalous Albanian Orthodox Church

Project: Vlach Orthodox Church of the Holy Saviour.

Investment: Contributions from pious Vlachs, Romanians and Albanians
 from Albania, Romania, America.

Project: S.K. "Project Arges" S.A. Pitesti Rumani

Director General: Engineer D.E., Architect M.M., Company S.)

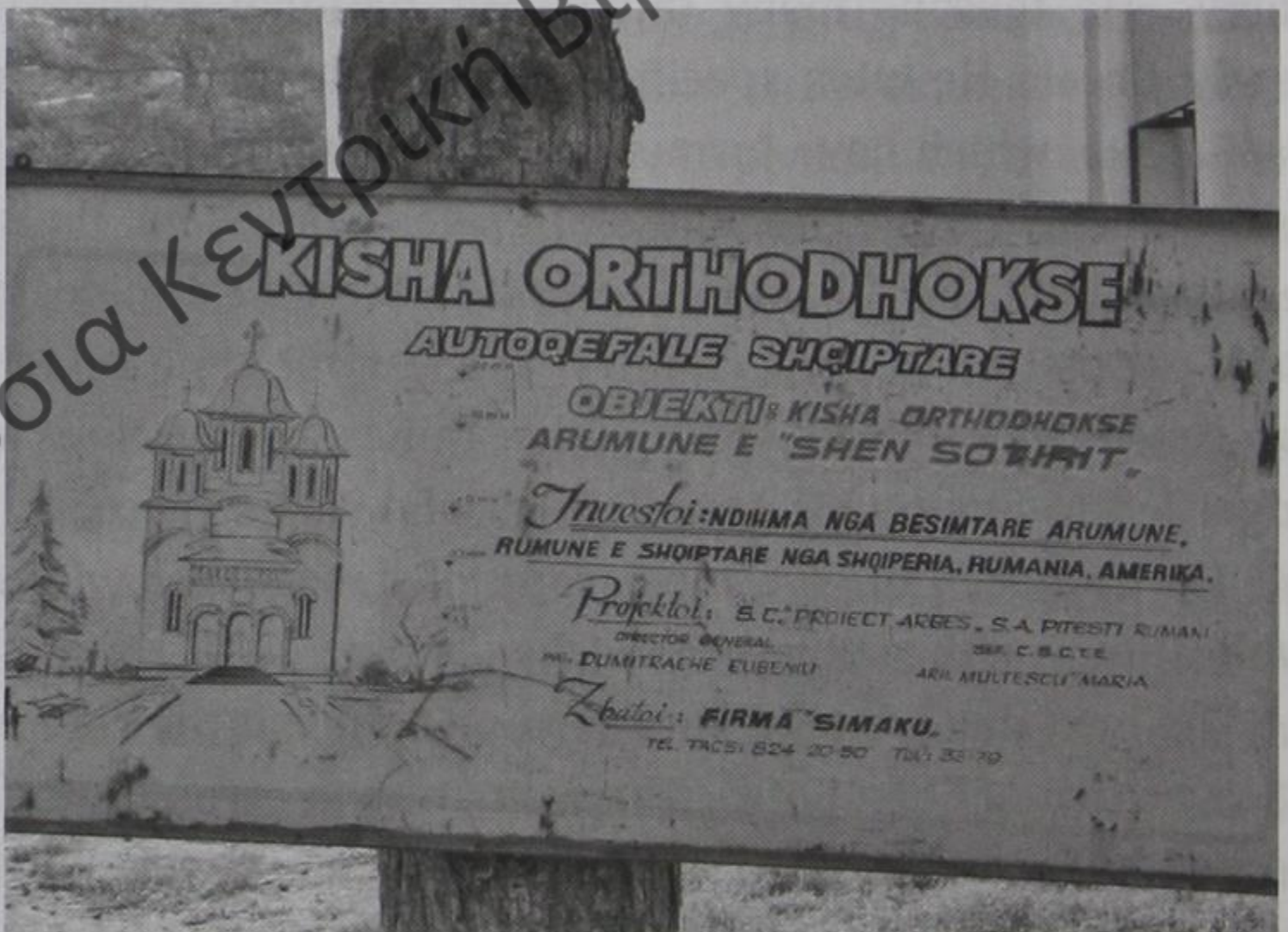


Figure 46. The Vlach church in Korçë

While I take photographs and examine the place, a man is sweeping the churchyard. I go near him tactfully and ask him about the church in Vlach. He replies, in Vlach, that this is the Vlach church, the interior of which was left unfinished due to lack of funds. It is being cleaned now because on August 6 it is the Saint's Day (the church festival) and many people will come from all over Albania for the celebrating liturgy.

As I leave I meet an old lady who has come to church to light a candle. We speak. She is Vlach, too, from the Niço clan, as she says, and she has relatives in the village Karvounari in Thesprotia. She asks me where I come from, and when I say I am from Denisko, she says: "Ni scula perlu" (my hair is standing on end). Indeed she looks very much moved by our encounter. I ask her about the church and she replies it is the Vlach church and she has come here to light a candle. I think that people like her can have nothing to do with agendas and propaganda. They are the faithful, they only see the religious side. Indeed they are relieved that after half a century's worth of oppression they are at last free to express their belief and the symbolic dimension that is immanent in the exercise of religious duty. My thoughts are soon confirmed by Giorgo Belo.

I go back to Giorgo's place; we have an appointment so that he can give me his grandfather's old ledger. He has also brought a book on Vlachs. We begin to talk. He tells me a few more things about himself. There is a typical story concerning his name. His father had named him Alban, having been obliged to pick a name from a special list under the previous regime. However, that name was never used. Even at school the other children called him Giorgo. He was Alban only on official papers. He speaks to me of his grandmother; she knows many Vlach songs.

He narrates a story that shows what Vlachs thought of Muslim Albanians, whom they call "Turks". His grandmother lived in the village of Mborje, where there were Muslims as well as Christians. She went to a funeral (bearing tattoos of crosses on her forehead and hands) and she sang a dirge lament for the dead man in Vlach:

"Let what remained no more remain
Seven every week"

Jorgo explains the meaning of the lines: let none of them – meaning the Muslims – remain, let seven of them die every week. He laughingly adds that the Muslims thought she was mourning for the dead man while she was really cursing them all...

Drenovë

We take leave of Giorgio and are on our way to the Vlach villages on the direction of Ersekë. A few kilometres off the main road on the left, at the foot of Mount Moravë, there is the village of Drenovë. It is a picturesque village, lush with vegetation, bearing many signs of building and reconstruction. The first thing that strikes me is the great number of houses being built; apparently they belong to emigrants. We stop at the cafes of the central square. In one of them there are groups of mostly elderly men drinking and talking. I speak to them in Vlach and they

respond with enthusiasm. I greet them one by one, and they all invite us to sit at their table.

We sit with the most numerous company; they are the eldest, too. We begin the introductions. All their surnames sound familiar to me: Fouki, Nita, Grammozi, Kapourani, Michallari, Nikollari... Most of these family names can be found in Kefalovriso, in Pogoni, and also in other villages on the Greek side where there are Arvanite-Vlachs. They are former nomad livestock breeders, who settled here permanently after the establishment of the communist regime in Albania in the 1950s. Before that, these particular families moved with their flocks from their winter quarters in the region of Sarandë, and mainly in Konispol, to the mountain pastures of Moravë, Northeast of Drenovë.

They offer us *raki* made from mulberries, and the discussion immediately revolves around the Vlach issue. They are passionate on the subject and proud of their Vlach identity; they love their relatives in Greece and they are nostalgic about the past year of the nomad communities. On the other hand, they are very bitter about Enver Hoxha's policy of confiscating their herds, leaving each family with only ten animals: this had a disastrous effect on their way of life, and it also hurt their pride and sense of honour. They speak with dislike about Muslim Albanians, whom they call "Turks," and with great emotion about Greece and Greeks. They seem to consider Orthodox Albanians as their own people. They all have children in Greece and they have all visited the country, several times. Those who sought a Greek passport obtained it, for themselves and for their children.



Figure 47. A group of Vlachs in Drenovë

I have a nice warm feeling being there with them, and their words cause thrills of emotion in me; they remind me so much of the Arvanite-Vlachs of Thessaly, with whom I have spent a great part of my childhood and teenage years. They invite us to stay in their houses; they will offer us hospitality “by turns”. We talk in Vlach, but when it is necessary to speak in Greek, due to my friend’s presence there, we speak Greek, which they all speak clearly but with some difficulty. They ask me about my “milleti” (origin) and when I tell them I am from Denisko they are all very enthusiastic about it because they all know my village and most of them have had some relation to people from there. I am aware of the fact that when Vlachs here talk about “milleti” they mean kinfolk, so I tell them my surname, which

derives from the name Niço, with which, of course, they are quite familiar.

We said a lot. They spoke proudly about the many churches and chapels of the village and especially mentioned the cathedral church of Saint Constantine, which celebrates the Saint's Day (May 21) with a festival. Those people induced in me a sense of pride and optimism I kept feeling during the following days. I am left with the impression that the totalitarian regime did not succeed in defeating those "old bones", even though it did try to destroy their self-esteem... I took my leave of them unwillingly, explaining that I needed to visit the other Vlach villages as well. They bid us farewell using the well-known expression "uarë bunë" (farewell, good hour) and their eyes expressed how glad they were to have met us.

Boboshtice

We take the road to Boboshtice. On the way we come across a small settlement; there is an elderly man on a field there laying out wheat grain to dry. We approach him and begin to talk; we ask to buy a little wheat grain. He invites us to his house, where he gives us the grain for free and his wife offers coffee and *raki*. Right across the street from his house lives a lady who comes from Zervat of Dropull; she is of Greek origin and is married here. We speak to her for a while. Her grandchildren approach us, too; their Greek is fluent. They live in Athens with their parents and are here for the summer holidays. One could say that the presence of children of emigrants from Greece is one of the typical aspects of most Southern Albanian villages at this time of

the year. Another typical aspect is newly erected houses, usually next to the old ones, which emigrants build for when they decide to return definitely, a future that seems rather distant for the time being. This particular settlement, I find out later, was built by the previous regime for the needs of an agricultural co-operative (administration services, warehouses, etc.) This is something one can deduce easily, by looking at the structure and form of the settlement and the particular buildings.

We then reach Boboshtice, also situated at the foot of Mountain Moravë. On entering the settlement we meet an old woman dressed in black, head covered with a black scarf. She is collecting red mulberries, which they use here to make *raki*. I greet her in Vlach and she reciprocates. Her name is Athina Marku. She has a family in Kefalovriso. All of her seven children are emigrants to Greece; four in Athens, three in Larissa. As we speak her mobile phone rings: it is one of her sons, with whom she speaks in Vlach. I notice she says "hiritimati a li mviasti" (greetings to the daughter-in-law). Later I find out she speaks Greek too. I ask her if I can take a picture of her and she accepts. Her pose reminds me of old photographs.

What impresses me at the entrance of this village is the number of mulberry trees. There are whole orchards of them, and they appear to have been very well-kept till recently. There are dry-stone walls built round the tree trunks, filled with pressed earth: this facilitates the collection of the fruit. Some of these constructions have thick plastic sheets laid on them. They remind me very much of the mastic trees of Chios. I taste the mulberries: they are delicious and juicy and they leave red marks on our hands. A neighbour gives us a tip about taking the colour off: we must rub them with unripe, green mulberries.

This neighbour introduces himself: he came to Boboshtice as a bridegroom. His wife is a member of the Belo family, a cousin of Jorgo Belo from Korçë. His name is Pavlo and his surname Giorgo. He is not a Vlach, and according to him this is the reason why he has not got a Greek passport, while his wife and children have. They all live in Athens; he works there but is here now to supervise the building of his new house. He does not think his children will want to return here, but the house is being built for him, just to have it there and spend the holidays and perhaps live after his retirement. The building is right next to the main street, where there are many newly built houses, or under construction. It is typical of those villages that when new buildings are erected they tend to be moving towards and along the main street, particularly when there is a motorway, drifting away from the foot of the mountain and abandoning the traditional circular shape of the settlements in favour of a linear one. Some typical examples are the settlements on the motorway between Korçë - Ersekë.

We go through Boboshtice and move towards the direction of Dardhë. Just outside the settlement I am attracted by a beautiful fountain next to a roadside chapel with the icon of Saint Anargyroi. On the front of the chapel there is an inscription: "Dhurate Sterjo Tona" (Donation of Stergjo Tona). I am familiar with the surname of Tona from the Arvanite-Vlachs of Greece, particularly in the region around Thesprotia. We meet Hristaqui Shaka here and talk with him. He tells me that for many years he worked in Greece as a shepherd to the herd of Hristos Ziagas, a Vlach livestock breeder from Samarina who spends the winter in Ambelonas near Larissa. He tells me that his brother lives and works in the village Rodia of Tirnavos. Hristaqui Shaka is re-

tired now but his three children are still in Greece working; one son is a builder, the other a cheese-maker and his daughter works at various jobs. He characteristically says in Vlach: "All our children are there, we only have old people here." His house is next to the spring and fountain. Soon his wife appears holding a grandchild in arms. She tells me she spent last winter in Athens looking after the grandchildren while her children were at work. I ask her if she speaks Greek but her answer is negative. When I ask her how she managed in Athens without speaking any Greek she says: "I stayed in the house." Her name is Evyenia and she comes from the Leventi family, who she says are from Trikala. She asks me where I come from and when I reply "Denisko," to my great surprise she says that her family came originally from Denisko, then moved to Vithkuq and then to Boboshtice.

Dardhë

As we leave Boboshtice we see the chapel of St. Nikolas on a hill-top to our left. The way to Dardhë is uphill. As we go higher the landscape becomes alpine, with forests of oaks, pines and beeches. We also cross large meadows where I can see traces of past agricultural activities. The previous regime had ploughed every inch of relatively flat ground, even on such a high altitude, in order to create "bread-producing places". In the same manner it "sowed" the land with the notorious concrete gun-turrets, which look even more grotesque up here and emphasise the absurdity of that regime. We come across apiculture installations, also a modern small plant of water-bottling. It strikes me that

although this is pastoralist landscape *par excellence*, we do not see any animals. We reach a high pass; from this point on the road goes down a slope. There is a crossing here and a sign that shows to Arrëz on the right and to Dardhë on the left. We follow the dirt road to Dardhë; it is in bad condition. We keep on descending for quite some time. From the distance I can see a big building. Before we reach it, we pass by a fenced-in area which looks like a summer camp. It appears to be deserted. We approach the big building. It is a construction site for a big hotel complex in the forest. I am shocked at the violation of the natural scale and the enforcement of concrete on this beautiful landscape. I see some builders working on scaffolds. Somebody waves hello. We keep on descending. Soon we enter the settlement. It is a village of stone houses lush with vegetation. On the left there is a sign: Bar-Bufe. A little further off there is a very basic car park, and even further a quite impressive church. It is the church of St. George which is undergoing restoration.

We leave the car at the car park and head for the hotel across the road. It is a formerly state-owned hotel which is now leased to private businessmen. In the old times it was used by party members for the summer and winter holidays. It is a two-storied stone building, with a restaurant and a large courtyard with a kiosk, benches and a fountain. There are groups of people having lunch or drinks in the courtyard; we greet them. Then we speak to the people in charge of the rooms. I shouldn't be surprised really: both the man who has got the lease on the hotel and his son-in-law who helps him are Vlach. The son-in-law is from Pogradec and he speaks Greek which he learned in Greece: he lived there for a number of years. His wife and her

mother (his mother-in-law) speak Vlach with a very thick Arvanite-Vlach accent.

I cannot confirm my previous information of Dardhë being a Vlach village. There are very few Vlach families here and they came in after 1950. The old inhabitants of the village were Orthodox Albanians and most of them have moved to the urban centres of Albania, mainly Tirana and Korçë; some went to America.



Figure 48. Dardhë: Partial view

From the very first moment I experience an uncommon spiritual stimulation in this place. There is something strongly evocative here. I feel the weight of history descend upon me. There is a fine drizzle; a mist is rising here and there, which completes the mysterious atmosphere of the place. The narrow

streets, the houses, the gardens, everything in this place evokes images of my childhood. I reflect on the unity of the wider Epirote space: unity in diversity. I think of all those groups who have lived here together for centuries: Greek-speaking, Albanian-speaking, Vlach-speaking, Christian, Muslim, Bektashi...

The inscriptions on corner stones are in Greek, mostly dated back to the interwar years. I walk around the place, my breath taken away, shooting photographs. Here and there I see teams of builders restoring, repairing or rebuilding houses on the foundations of old, ruined ones. It is a surprising sight in such a mountainous, remote area. Is it the prospect of tourist development or the dynamics of the Dardhë diaspora returning to their birthplace? A combination of both, perhaps.

I approach a building site. I talk to a man my age, brown-haired, of average height. He speaks broken Greek and soon I find out he is a Vlach. His name is Thoma. He explains that he is not from the village, that he lives in Korçë, where he is a building contractor; he bought this plot of land to build a holiday home for himself and his family. He comes from Drenovë, where his father's house is. He is very happy to hear that I am a Vlach, too, and he is eager to show me around the village.

While we walk he talks about the old inhabitants of Dardhë with great admiration. "They were all Christian Orthodox. There was not one single Muslim here; we call them *bilic* (skinned)" he says emphatically. He speaks with great disdain about the Muslim Albanians, whom he calls Turks; he separates them from the Christian Albanians, for whom he only has good things to say. They were always on the best of terms with them, he says. He also has only good words for the villagers, pointing out that this place has given birth to very important people, distinguished in

letters, politics, commerce, etc. He points to a newly-built house: it belongs to the Mayor of Tirana. Another one belongs to a famous writer, a third to an MP. I realise that this village is a fashionable place for the elite of Tirana and that it is bound to become an important resort and tourist destination.

While he speaks of the present, I look at the large stone houses and realise that the wealth of this mountainous place goes back to the late period of Ottoman rule which has left its mark all over the Balkans.

We approach the cemetery. "Murmintu", he says: the word meaning cemetery or grave. It is a word which I know rather from oral Vlach literature than the spoken language: I do not recall having ever heard it in my village. I look at the names on the graves. The first names are Christian, the surnames familiar: Kakuri, Kaçani, Coti, Ceku, Comi, Daku, Dolo, Filipi, Farmaqi... I take a photograph of the memorial dedicated to the founders of the village, erected with the financial aid of the Greek Consul of Korçë. I ask about the Vlach surnames; the answer I get is that the only Vlach surnames here are Dhima and Kapurani: these are Arvanite-Vlach surnames which I encounter all over the region. It is clear that the old inhabitants of Dardhë were not Vlach.

We leave the cemetery behind and walk around the narrow streets of the village. We come across an old man in his nineties; he is wearing a hat. Thoma whispers to me that during the Hoxha years this man was an agent of the *Sigurimi* (secret police) and that he sent many a person to *hapsi* (prison). It was his job to denounce all suspects. "He made sure nobody fled to Greece", Thoma concludes.

After we have wandered in the settlement for about an hour, Thoma and I go back to the hotel, where we continue our talk. I learn many things from him. He has relatives of the same surname in the village Kria Vrisi, near Giannitsa, where he has lived and worked for many years. He has a Greek passport, too. When I ask about his national identity and consciousness, he tries to answer in Vlach: "*Him Grets*" (We are Greek), but before finishing his phrase he changes "Grets" to "Ellini" (Hellene). Obviously "Grets" did not work for him, because in the Vlach language there is a distinction between Vlachs (Armëni) and Greeks (Greek-speaking, Grets); if a Vlach says: "I am Grecu" (Greek), it is of course problematic and creates confusion. If our talk had been carried out in Greek, there would not have been a problem; he would just say: "*Eimaste Ellines*" (we are Hellenes). Besides, the Vlachs of Greece self-identify as *Ellines* (Hellenes) and not as *Greci*, because the latter is the term referring to the Greek-speaking people from whom they distance themselves, as we have pointed out elsewhere. Here ends the discussion with Thoma.

Cinicë

A little later, near sunset, we decide to visit the next village Cinicë. We walk down an ill-kept road, through a lush green landscape. There are small vegetable gardens, and old flower gardens everywhere. There are many little springs, abundant water. So many plum-trees; so much reminds me of Linotopi, a place where I used to spend the summers in my father's sheepfold. That place is so near here, just on the other side of the bor-

der. In fact, before I looked at the map I had been under the impression that the village after Dardhë would be Nikolicë, the ruined village next to Linotopi.

Just outside the village we meet a man with two horses carrying wood. I speak to him in my inadequate Albanian. His name is Elia and he is very glad to see us. He tells us he will meet us at the village. Later I learn that timber is the main produce of the village: they sell it to merchants who come from Korçë.

On entering the village we meet few people; mostly children who run towards us looking very curious, as if they have never seen strangers before. I believe that within a few minutes the whole population of the village has gathered on the main street where we stop. I find out that there is nobody here who speaks either Greek or Vlach; this is my chance to practise my Albanian. A woman shows me her mobile phone and says she cannot speak to her sister in Naousa, Greece; the recorded answer-phone message is in Greek (the mobile service provider is Greek) and she cannot understand what it says.

The village children, about ten in all, keep running after us. Elia's son is among them; he keeps begging for money: "o burra, lek" (O man, money). They want to show us their church, of which they seem to be very proud. It is the church of St. Nikolas, a typical stone building, white-washed on the inside. All the old icons on the iconostasis have been replaced by new ones, most of which are donated by a family whose origins are here but have been living in Naousa for a very long time. The inscriptions are in Greek.

Directly opposite the church, and not far from it, there are two large buildings, which I am told are the village schools. In the old times there were as many as 300 pupils; there are no

more than 15 now. It is obvious that here, too, operates the same phenomenon of urbanisation that took place in Epirus in the 1960s, which caused an unprecedented demographic haemorrhage in the area.

On the outskirts of the settlement there is a stream with clear babbling water irrigating the fields on both sides. I see a water mill by the stream; it looks deserted. What is interesting about this settlement compared to other villages nearby is that there is not one new building here: all the houses are old, made of stone with slate roofs. I cannot even see signs of any repairs - carried out anywhere. The contrast to Dardhë is very deep. I wonder about it: is it because Dardhë is investing the important symbolic capital of its past and its diaspora, or is there something else that comes into play?

Poverty, neglect and misery are stamped on the place and etched on the faces of the people. They seem to feel so totally abandoned to their fate that they are very perplexed about our interest in their village. They look at me with very sceptical expressions when I tell them that their village is very beautiful. I feel the look in their eyes is saying: "Oh, yeah? Come and spend some time here and then we'll talk."

After our brief wander we returned to the village centre. My friend yields to the supplications of Elia's small son and gives him 2000 lek (around 1,5 euros). The child is ecstatic. His father urges him to give the money to his mother. I reflect on how poverty and misery corrode values and self-respect. These "children of eagles" are not simply wounded; their very morale is broken. The more I talk to them the more saddened I become. The only thing to offer itself as a counterweight to the miserable impression of human society here is nature: it has got a chance

to thrive again now that the people have gone away. But what looks beautiful to the eye of a middle-class foreigner is only a more emphatic lack of human presence for the local people. The streets and open spaces are deserted; the paths and roads are abandoned; opportunities for those left behind are scarce... They tell us all about it, but they do not need to...

We end up at the cafe. It is a new, makeshift construction with a small buffet and two small tables with chairs. Judging by the exterior, one would never think that this small building is a cafe. It belongs to a young couple; the woman is pregnant. They offer us buttermilk and then *raki* made from wild plums. They have a tape-recorder, and they play Greek music to please us. I tell them I would rather listen to Albanian songs. They choose a tape with modern neo-demotic songs from the Voskopojë region. My poor Albanian is not much help to the conversation, but I insist on asking questions. They tell me that in the past the village was purely Orthodox but now some Muslims live here. Elia's wife tells me she is Catholic; she comes from the North. It was one of Enver Hoxha's policies to encourage mixed marriages as a means to eradicate all religious and ethnic differences, basing his vision of a socialist society on solid national cohesion.

Our wish to communicate breaks down the barrier of language difficulties. Although I am not very happy about how bad my Albanian is, they seem very happy about my efforts to speak their language. At sunset I tell them that we have to go. I ask for the bill, but the woman says: "Yo" (no); her husband explains it is a tradition. A man is glaring at them, trying to get across the message that it is wrong not to accept payment. We leave 2000 leks on the table. The children are waiting for us outside the

cafe, and they follow us all the way to the car. When we are there, I give them a piece of baklava from Jannina, instructing them to share it among them. A woman undertakes to share it out equally; they flock around her; it's like a party. I never thought a piece of baklava could bring so much joy to children...

We return to Dardhë. On the way back we are wondering how it can be possible that only a few kilometres away from the Greek border there are people who live under such conditions of abandonment and misery...



Figure 49. Children at Cinicë

That night in Dardhë we have a supper of fried kaskaval cheese, roast lamb and salads. We drink lots of good red wine made locally. We begin the meal sitting in the hotel courtyard

but the fine drizzle obliges us to move back inside the restaurant. It is a nice place, cosy and well-tended, with many old objects hanging on the walls and above the large fireplace. The hotel managers have worked in the tourist trade in the village Portaria on Mount Pelion, Greece, for many years; this is where they got the idea for the decor. We meet a family, a lady with her two children and her father. They tell us that they originally come from the village but they live in Tirana. Their appearance and manners show them to be members of the Albanian capital elite. They tell us that they have relatives in America, who migrated at the turn of the twentieth century. There is also a group of young people in the restaurant lounging about. When supper is over, we ask for the bill. This is what the receipt said: "Pika Turistike, Vatra Dardhëre."

Arrëz

The next day we set out very early for the journey back. On the crossroad near the mountain pass, before the large steep slope leading to Boboshtice, we turn left following a rusty sign that reads "Arrëz." We go down a difficult, ill-kept road. Here, too, the landscape looks very familiar to me; it is the typical landscape of Mount Grammos, whose peaks I can make out at the distance; it sends shivers down my spine. We go through a beech forest and further down we enter an old oak forest. It seems to be a *vakif* forest (to a religious establishment). This is a holy place, therefore the settlement must be near here. I see a small building which does not appear to be either a chapel or a

tekke. I will enquire at the village, which now I can make out in a hollow in the distance.

As we approach the settlement we go over a stream. The impression we get on entering the village is the same as Cinicë: small stone houses with black slate roofs. They all boast well-tended yards and gardens. We meet three women who look at us in great wonder. They ask us where we come from and what we are looking for. When I tell them that we are here because "we felt like it," they burst out laughing. One of them invites us to her house for coffee. "Later," I say. Then from the same house a girl comes out; she is well-dressed and wears glasses; she does not seem to be a permanent resident. In fact she is a law student in Tirana and is here for the holidays. She speaks Greek very well; she has lived in Thessaloniki for many years. She tells us that once the village was well-populated, but now most inhabitants have migrated to Greece. She, too, would like to go back, but it is very difficult to obtain a visa. We ask her about the population makeup: are they Christian or Muslim? She says the population is mixed, there are both Christians and Muslims. But this is later denied by what the rest of the inhabitants say; also by the conspicuous absence of a church. The mosque, situated at the centre of the village, was demolished by the previous regime, and a cultural centre was built in its place. I consider the girl's stance: obviously, knowing that Greeks regard Muslims in a negative way, she did not want to admit to us that the village was Muslim. Isn't this the reason most Muslim Albanians change their names in Greece, so that they can present themselves as Christian?

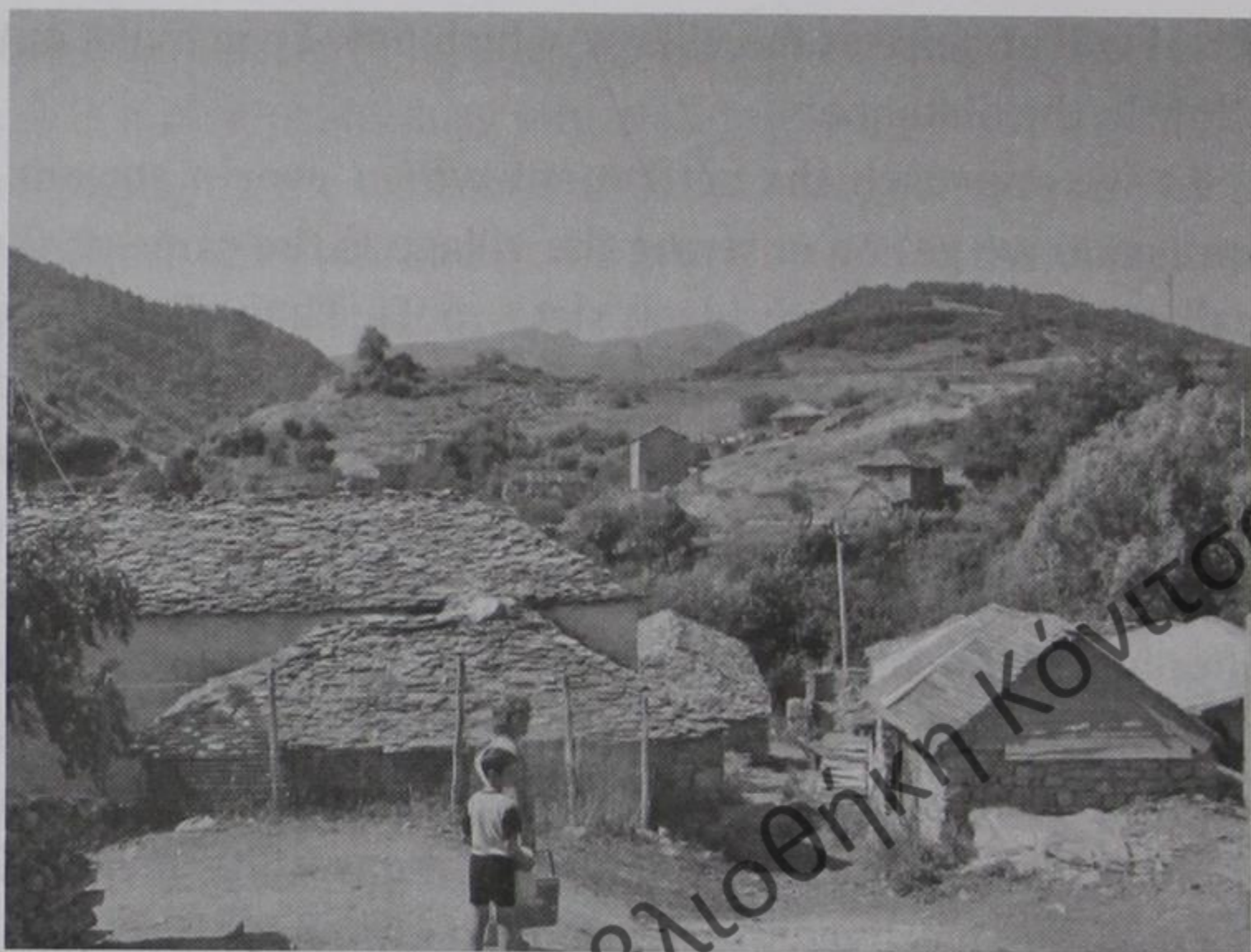


Figure 50. Arrëz: Partial view

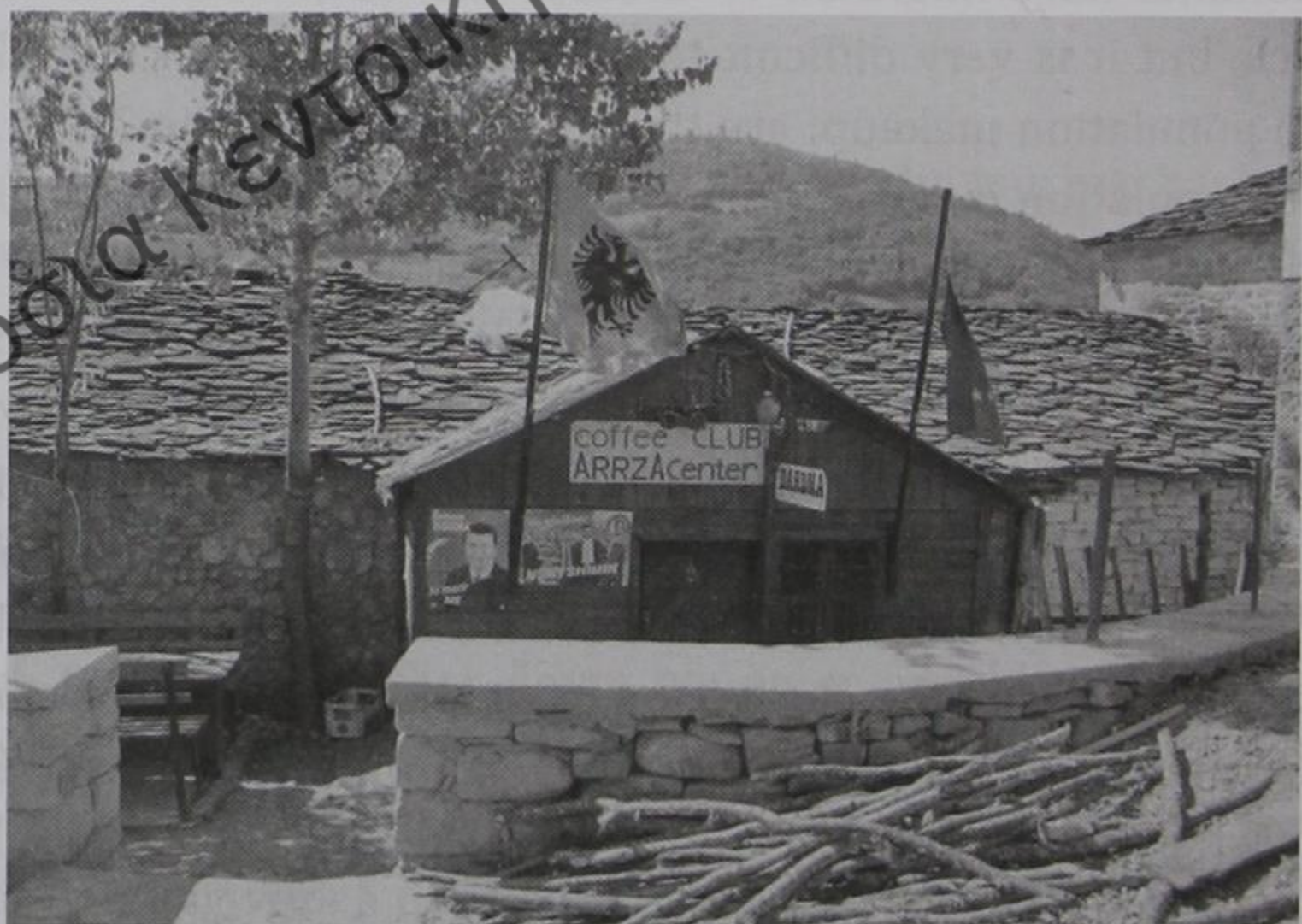


Figure 51. Arrëz

This is exactly what the next man we meet on the road has done: "In Greece my name is Notis, here my name is Muslim," he says, adding: "I changed it because it wasn't easy to get a job." Notis has worked in Greece for many years, but now he cannot obtain another visa, so he has to remain at the village. He offers to show us around. He explains to me why people leave. He describes a local economy which has very little to do with market economy. Most people produce what they consume; very few produce for commerce. He himself produces plums, which he sells at the Korçë market, as well as a few vegetables and cereals; he also has a cow and a few sheep and goats which provide the meat and dairy of the year.

Here as in Cinicë the impression of abandonment is very intense. Children run behind us and stare. The village cafe is also newly erected like the one in Cinicë but bigger. We walk around the narrow streets and Notis tells me about his adventures in Greece the first time he was there. I heard such stories during my previous research. They went from the villages on the mountain range of Grammos to Pentalofos via Voio; and after Pentalofos, they would go wherever the road would take them. It was a two-day walk as far as Pentalofos. Once he walked all the way to Veria: it took him eight days. He says he can find his way round those paths blindfolded. I notice that they used the same path which our own muleteers used to take to go to Korçë before the war. Grammosta - Nikolicë - Arrëz - Drenovë - Korçë: it is the same itinerary back to front. I am deeply moved, remembering my grandmother's stories about going to the Korçë bazaar.

Another man we meet on the way, father of an emigrant, remembers the people from my village passing through... They

were always on good terms. He and other people from here used to pass by the Grammos villages on the Greek side. He too seems moved to have met us. He invites us to his house for dinner. "We'll eat whatever we have. It will be a shame for me not to invite you strangers to my home." His son, Pëllumb, who uses the Greek translation of his name, Peristeris, when in Greece, is here this month, helping his father with agricultural work. Many migrants do this: they return in the summer to help with the season's chores: preparing for the winter, storing fodder, splitting wood, etc.) They also help with house repairs. Peristeris works in Attica and is content; his family is there with him. He confirms that all inhabitants are Muslims, adding that this has no particular significance for them. He explains that one of the good things Hoxha did for his country was to eliminate all those discriminations. "For him there were no Christians or Muslims and suchlike; they were all the same." he points out. I ask him if they are Bektashi but his answer is negative. I am impressed that they are not at all interested in rebuilding the village mosque. This, I think, is a difference they have with Christian villages, where the first thing the inhabitants did after the regime collapsed was to restore the ruined churches or to build new ones.

I ask him if they have some festival or fair or anything similar. He tells me that every year all the villagers have a meeting on the mountain, at that location with the ancient trees and the small building we met on the way. He explains that it is not a festival, and that he does not know if there used to be some sort of sacred place there. Dobra Gora (Good Mountain) is for him just a place where all the people who come from the village, wherever they happen to be, come to meet each other on Au-

gust 20 every year. For me the landmarks as well as the name of the place itself hint at the presence of some temple, of a place of worship in the past. This is a matter worth looking into...

I leave my friends behind, having decided to take a solitary walk around the village. I walk on the banks of the river Devoll. It is a place which has mythical dimensions for me, probably because of the dance of the same name, which is a special favourite of mine. I must confess that the best rendition of this dance I have ever heard was by Michalis Panousakos, a musician from Konitsa, with origins in Leskovik. I often request this tune from Albanian musicians, but they are more familiar with a faster version called Devollicë. I approach a wood mill. I am impressed by how well and prosperous the business looks. It seems quite productive, judging by the amount of timber stalked in the yard. The owner, a man about forty, asks me about the purpose of my visit in broken Greek. He tells me that in the past he was worked with livestock breeders on the Greek side – in the animal smuggling business – but they let him down in the transactions. He seems to believe that this is the reason I am there – animal smuggling. He hastens to open his cafe in the village centre; I think he is doing it thinking that I will be more open to him about the purpose of my visit there. However, I tell him very politely that we have to go; he is disappointed, but I take my leave.

Outside the village a gypsy from Bilisht has parked his car and has laid out his merchandise, shoes, waiting for the villagers to come and buy. We go up the road we came from; it is only four kilometres to the crossroad, though when we were coming the road seemed to go on and on forever. On the way down towards Boboshtice we give a lift to two women and a small child, who have set out on foot from Dardhë and are on their way to

Korçë. They had come to Dardhë to visit some relatives. We leave them at Boboshtice and take the road to Ersekë.

On the way to Ersekë

As we go along on the motorway I observe the villages lined up on the left side, on the foot of the mountain. I find it interesting that there is a tendency to move settlements nearer the motorway, where a great number of new houses are being erected; they must belong to emigrants to Greece, the imitation of Greek models is very obvious. In most villages one can see the church rising in the distance, and once in a while, a minaret.

On the way, we come across a party taking place in a newly-built taverna: people in their Sunday best are dancing to live music. This is a familiar image to me; I have been to many wedding parties like this. However, it is only Thursday afternoon, which would be unusual for a wedding party. I stop to ask what this is about. The owner of the taverna himself approaches us; he informs us it is an engagement party. I observe the dance. It is a quick dance, danced in a somewhat awkward fashion. Again I wonder why when dancers in Greece want to dance to a slow, heavy tune, they request the orchestra to "play Albania" or "as in there" (and they point to the direction of Albania). So far I have never seen any Albanians dance to a slow or heavy tune... The band plays mostly neo-demotic Albanian songs, and some Greek ones. The taverna proprietor invites us to stay. He does not speak any Greek. When I tell him I am Vlach, he says: "Wait a minute," and he introduces his Vlach wife. She is a typical Arvanite-Vlach in appearance and speech: the familiar accent... She

tells me that many Vlachs live in the neighbouring villages. We don't stay long; after a short talk we take our leave of them and go on our way.

Vithkuq

On the way to Ersekë, I observe the plains of Korçë. It is obvious that people are trying to rally after the shock of the regime collapsing and to make a new life for themselves. However, the plain still has the appearance of a half-deserted place. We reach the crossroad to Vithkuq. I cannot resist the temptation. For me, among all Albanian places, Vithkuq is a mythical place; I could not say why. Looking at the map I see that it is only 15 kilometres away. I do not think twice: I turn right and go up a bare hill with a panoramic view of the plain. There is a hydroelectric plant ahead in the distance, operating with water brought from the mountain by means of large conduits. It seems that this water irrigates the Korçë plain. A little further up we come across an artificial lake gathering the water before it is channelled to the power plant. There is a strong mark of state intervention on this landscape: the previous regime was very proud of such projects.

We bypass the lake. We come across herds of goats. It is noon already. We go past a village by the end of a stream to our left, and we go up a climbing road. We discern Vithkuq in the distance: it seems to be a large settlement, sprawled on hills, buried in lush foliage. As we approach I can see little gardens, orchards and abundant waters. There is a large number of sacred buildings; roadside chapels and churches everywhere. Set

against the orgy of vegetation and running waters are the grey, almost deserted buildings of the previous regime, and a general feeling of desolation. Leaving behind the symbolic village centre erected by the old regime, we enter the old settlement, whose traditional stone buildings and beauty take our breath away. There are stone houses everywhere, with beautiful, well-kept courtyards. On the outskirts of the settlement there is a fenced landscape of fields dedicated to cultivating plants mainly for fodder (clover, barley, etc.)

I speak to everyone we meet on our way. They tell me that all the inhabitants are Christians, and that there are three neighbourhoods in the village, one of them called Greka. I give a lift to a woman and her grandchild; they are going to their house near the church of the Archangel Michael, right at the end of the "Greek" neighbourhood. We stop in front of the church. The gate is open, but not the front door. However, one can enter from a side door; that side of the church is ruined. We enter. I feel cold chills down my spine. There is wealth of inestimable value here, all exposed and unprotected. There are no icons on the iconostasis here either. The murals are abandoned to the ravages of time and decay. It is impossible to bear the sight. I leave the place feeling devastated. I notice that on the new iron gate door there is the name of a privately-owned company from Korçë, which donated it. My happiness to see Vithkuq is counterbalanced by my deep sadness for the condition of this church.

We go down the road towards the exit of the village and back to the road where we came from. As we approach a nearby river I notice a sign denoting the presence of a fish farm on the left. I turn to that direction, parallel to the river. All along the

road by the riverbank I admire the small fodder producing fields. There is a variety of mainly hydrophilous shrubs and trees on the banks, the mountain willow prevailing. At the end of the road, instead of the expected fish farm we see a *nerotrivi* (industrial washing drum operated by water) in operation: some shag carpets are being washed; the water comes from the direction of the settlement. The afternoon heat is so intense that I cannot restrain myself from jumping in the water. The place is deserted...

Leshnjë

We stay there for about an hour and then we go back. On the way towards the Korçë - Ersekë motorway, after a short detour, we stop at a village on the right. It is the village Leshnjë. On entering the village, we are impressed by the sight of huts made of wood and thatch. The main part of the village is a typical agro-pastoral settlement: plain houses with pretty courtyards, teeming with people and movement at this time of the year, since agricultural activities are at their peak.

We stop at the middle of the village; there is a beautiful public pump next to a big walnut tree, and beside them a new building which looks like a cafe. There are two girls washing wheat grain under the pump. Our presence stimulates the curiosity of neighbours and passers-by: within a few minutes people of all ages surround us. We ask them if we could have a cup of coffee. They reply that we could have one, at the cafe. A ten-year-old child prepares it for us; he is one of a large group of children who surround us looking with curiosity and cracking jokes. The

boy's father has gone to town. The boy draws a table in the shade of the walnut tree and brings us the coffee. Afterwards we order *raki*. There are already three villagers sitting with us by that time; they order beer. One of them is the headman. Only one of them, the youngest, speaks Greek; he is an emigrant to Greece; he lives and works at a manufacture in Ambelonas, near Larissa. He is here now because he is building himself a house in the village. We discuss his life in Greece. He is happy with it: he works eight hours a day; he has got social security and humane work conditions. The headman seems to be a quiet, hardworking man. He tells us that he does odd jobs to scrape a living for himself and his family: as a headman he receives a salary of 20 euros per month, he tells us smiling. I am impressed by him: he radiates optimism. Our talk is very pleasant, full of jokes. An old man joins us; he says he is an admirer of Enver Hoxha and feels nostalgia for the past. He asserts he is proud to be a communist. He invites us to stay at the village and offers us hospitality in his house. He banters with us for a while and then leaves; he has work to do at his fields. Presently the third man in the company brings us a plate of honey and feta cheese from his house, to accompany our drinks. We stay long under the shady walnut tree, and we leave for Ersekë late in the afternoon. As we leave the Korçë region, I am thinking that I must come back here on the

6th of August for the religious festival, and attend the liturgy celebrating the Transfiguration of the Saviour in the Vlach church of Shën Sotiri.



Figure 52. Farmers' huts

... of August for the religious festival and attend the journey
... that a search was made for the remains of the victim in the
... the investigation of the case and the search for the body
... the search for the body of the victim and the search for the
... the search for the body of the victim and the search for the

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

... for the past several years, and for the past several years
... the search for the body of the victim and the search for the
... the search for the body of the victim and the search for the
... the search for the body of the victim and the search for the
... the search for the body of the victim and the search for the
... the search for the body of the victim and the search for the

SHËN SOTIRI

Vlach matters

Aristidis, Alexis and Kosmas walked towards the cafe. All three of them had set out together from Kastoria to Korçë that morning. Alexis was the obsessive type; in Athens and in his home town many people called him a maniac. He wanted to prove that the active support of Greece would help the Greek community of Korçë and the neighbouring regions on their way to liberation and free expression. There was no official response to his efforts and he went on alone. Only later did he realise how many obstacles were placed in front of him. He had not remotely imagined this when he began to contact the Greeks and Albanians of Korçë and Ersekë. All this, instead of bringing him down to his knees, steeled his will. Kosmas had set up a small business in Korçë, manufacturing clothes. He had proved that investment in Albania was an easy thing; the car was his, too, and he had offered it for the visit to Ersekë and the surrounding villages. They decided to begin by visiting the villages in the poorest province. They wanted to see the reactions of the inhabitants, Greek and Vlach, of the remotest, more isolated communities: the authoritarianism of the old regime had more chances of surviving there.

They walked into a cafe somewhat cautiously; a few tables about to fall apart, chairs in a similar state, walls bare and unpainted; further off a countertop with only a few glasses on it, a young man behind it. They greeted him in Greek.

Soon a man walked in; he was about forty, of average height, with a polite expression on his face but there was also something hard bitten about him. He looked the resolute type. He introduced himself.

"I am Alcibiadis... the headman."

"I am Aristidis... from Greece." He managed to communicate in Vlach, though he didn't speak it well: he tried hard to remember what Vlach was spoken at home when he was a child. His mother almost never spoke Vlach to him; it was always Greek. However, he used to listen to the shepherds and the neighbours when they talked with his mother and his family. He went out with the flocks sometimes, he slept in the hut, and that's where mostly Vlach was spoken. Now, forty years later, he realised he remembered quite a lot. The headman seemed quite pleased that a Greek was in their village, for the first time. He opened his heart to them; he spoke to them in Vlach. So far it was only relatives from nearby Greek villages or emigrants to America and Australia who had come to offer much needed help: this is how they survived that first harsh winter.

They talked at length about their difficulties, about the disintegration of everything around them. They uttered the important phrase: "him frats" ("We are brothers"). They hugged each other.

Everybody drank "to their health"; Alexis was talking to Yianni in his broken Greek. Then the headman said to Aristidis:

"Beware of him, he's Bulgarian."

Aristidis made a hasty sign to Alexis, who caught it, but went on talking, pretending insouciance (...)

Alcibiadis was telling him about what they had been through; imprisonment, exile.

"We were persecuted not only when we spoke Greek – this was the case even when Ahmet Zogu and the Italians were in power – but also when we spoke Vlach. The communists understood that our speaking Vlach meant we showed our opposition to the regime and our allegiance to the Greeks".

Aristidis was shaking his head; he did not know what to say.

Soon they heard the distant sound of gunshots; but Alcibiades was talking about his own adventures and he did not want to interrupt him.

"Did you spent many years in prison?"

"Eight in a row, not counting exile."

He asks him if the Vlachs have formed an association.

"There is an association in Korçë, they have a chairman too". He said he wished to meet him; Alcibiadis nodded and said he would write down the man's address in Korçë. He asked someone at a nearby table and was told that the man was in Romania now, and then he would go to Athens.

"I'll meet him there then", Aristidis said. "What is he doing in Romania?"

"He is with the propaganda people; he often travels there."

"And you follow him?"

"We have no dealings with them. We are Greek. Nobody from the villages follows him; he's only got a few in the city."

"Say it, brother", Aristidis says and hugs him. They remain like this for a while, hugging each other, tears in their eyes.

"I was afraid you would be for the propaganda, that's why I was cautious at first; but now I see", he said and held his hand.

"We run them out of town whenever they come here; none of them dares set a foot in the village; they run them out of the Korçë villages too. But there are some in the city; they receive money from Romania, from somewhere else, we don't know exactly. We Vlachs are all Greek; we shout it out loud, we are not afraid."

Aristidis did not know what to say; they spoke through their hands and through their tearful eyes.

"They pressed us very hard - not everybody in the same degree, but particularly me, being the headman, and others - to attend the convention of Vlachs in Tirana three months ago. They told us not to let the Greek Vlachs speak, and to shout that Vlachs are not Greek. We did the opposite: as soon as some people from the villages of Avlona requested that the Greeks speak too, we shouted along with them. We shouted, and then we applauded them; I remember particularly the mayor of Metsovo. Since then, I and the others have been blacklisted. We had come to an understanding with people in Greece to send the mayor to the Metsovo convention, together with the others, those who shouted. The people from Metsovo knew Vlachs from the Avlona villages; they went to them and took them along, to have them standing by to protest if [the Greeks] were not given the opportunity to speak. I had spoken to some of them myself; we Vlachs from all over the place agreed on it. That's why it worked."

Aristidis remembered all this; he had experienced it personally in Athens. He said no more; he couldn't speak.

A few minutes passed in silence; it seemed to them a long time; it looked as if they had nothing to say. Aristides broke the silence; he had noticed some men go in and out of the cafe, and he remembered the gunshots.

“Anything happened? I heard gunshots before...”

“No, nothing; it was just some of our people who went to the cemetery and shot their guns.”

“To the cemetery? Why?”

“Our parents had asked us to do it; they said when the Greeks arrived, we were to go to the cemetery and shoot, so that they could hear it and rejoice” (Timenos 1993:13-19).

Excerpts of that text, written by Timenos (pen name of a Vlach journalist) and similar, spring to mind as I go through the checkpoint of Krystallopigi on August 5, 2005; it is the eve of the religious festival for the Transfiguration of the Saviour.

An anthropologist's testimony

I think also of the studies by the anthropologist Stephanie Schwander-Sievers on the Vlachs of Korçë; those studies were based on fieldwork she carried out in that region. I cite a few excerpts:

In the early post-Communist transition period a vivid Aromanian ethnic movement emerged in Albania. The slumber of a sleeping beauty nation ended, and it became part of a recent pan-Balkan initiative. In 1997, the Union for Aromanian language and Culture (*Union für aromuniische Sprache und Kultur*), based in Freiburg, Germany and led by the well-known diaspora activist Vasile Barba, succeeded in leading the parliamentary Assembly of The Council of Europe to formulate a recommendation for the protection of Aromanian culture and language in its host countries [Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly AACR 18.7]. However, this decision was made without Greek participation.[...]

If a failed Aromanian national movement and a more or less forced homogenisation process in Communist Albania have led to their assimilation, certain questions arise: why and how did Aromanian ethnicity emerge with political transition in Albania? Can the re-emergence of Aromanian identity be seen as the result of transition, i.e. of re-privatisation, the new freedom of religion, the emergence of party politics, globalization, or some other innovations in society? [...]

I would like to argue that the Albanian Aromanians' new emphasis on their identity can be seen as a pragmatic strategy to adjust to successes or failures in the Albanian political transition and also to globalization. I would like to stress that, today, it is exactly the revitalization of the conflict between followers of a pro-Greek and a pro-Romanian identification that serves to broaden the scope of options for potential exploitation. In constructing antagonistic discourses mirroring Romanian or, respectively, Greek world-views, Albanian Aromanians manage to secure the future of their offspring and to create new social positions for themselves. [...]

Leading figures of both Aromanian association factions accuse each other of abusing their position by taking money from the candidates. People in the villages told me that "with poor people you can do what you want". They argued that the poor would sign anything and with any faction if it could help them progress. There is also evidence (although no one would confess to this) that leaders from both factions switched their orientation in the last few years and had their children study first in Greece, but then in Romania, and vice versa. There is also, of course, a very emotional bond and strong identification respectively with either the Romanian or the Greek state in cases where help had already been received, as witnessed by temporary returnees to the villages. When a new ethnicity had proven helpful in every-day life and contributed to boosting pride, emotional attachments developed.

Finally, Aromanian identity is not always and everywhere of relevance. It is normally referred to when it is a disadvantage. Apparently, Albanian Aromanian people of high social status in modern Albanian society, and this includes many well known scholars, politicians and artists, tend not to engage in Aromanian ethnic politics. Under no circumstances at all would some admit to their Aromanian family background. [...]

Summarising the key points, I would like to stress that there is utilization of identities as well as emotions with regard to these identities. In this there is a generation gap. The older generation was able to refer to an old mode of Aromanian identity when there was no social order and structure immediately after the breakdown of the Communist regime. They also felt a certain nostalgia remembering old Aromanian identity features from their pre- or early Communist past, and now they also utilize identity politics for social positions, reputation, psychological compensation for an inferiority complex, economic advantages, and, most importantly, to secure future opportunities for their children. The younger people seem not to care very much about Aromanian identity in terms of its symbolic meaning, but also utilize it to gain better opportunities for jobs and education. Emotional attachment may appear after having received benefits.

In conclusion, the evidence strongly suggests that Albanian Aromanians' globalizing identity confers an advantage to them over non-Aromanian Albanians. By renouncing a local identification in favour of one associated with more powerful states (Romania and Greece), that is, associated with ideas distant in space and time and therefore mythical and unchallengeable they create access to scarce social, economic, political and cultural resources while profiting from new opportunities in the Albanian transition process. Besides creating a sense of exclusivity, they are able to shift identities in various situations, referring to the pre-Communist situation if opportune. This flexibility is an efficient and profitable strategy of adjustment to different circumstances. It is undoubtedly not unique to the Albanian case. In contrast to essentialist assumptions, I want to stress that it is the flexibility that makes people strong everywhere (Schwandner-Sievers 2002:149-157).

And a Vlach's point of view

It also brings to my mind various scenes from the first year after the fall of the Albanian regime, when various circles of Greek Vlachs tried to penetrate into Albania in many ways in order to

influence the Vlach community towards a positive approach to Greece. Here I can mention a meeting I had with certain members of the Pan-Hellenic Union of Vlach Cultural Associations, on their initiative, with the purpose of following them to a trip to Albania, where they would meet with Vlach groups and associations, in view of the international Vlach convention programmed to take place in Tirana soon afterwards. I left that meeting deeply disappointed, shocked even, because of this one phrase I heard and which was etched deeply into my memory: somebody, in his efforts to persuade me to go to Albania with them for the fulfilment of the "sacred" cause, told me, with a meaningful look: "We can take them on our side for a loaf of bread". After that, I could not utter a single word...

Since I mentioned that convention, about which so much has been said and heard, concerning conflicts, disputes, etc. between various groups and factions, I am tempted to cite an excerpt from the report of a well-known Vlach of the diaspora, who participated in the convention, representing an organisation from the USA:

In 1991, when the fog of totalitarian rule finally lifted from Albania, the Vlachs there were permitted to organize an ethnic society. The first conference of this new society was scheduled for April 5th, 1992, but my father had died fifteen years before, so it was left to me to complete the circle.[...]

I woke up early Sunday morning, eager to see what would happen at the Vlach conference. The Albanian government had been kind enough to lend us a large auditorium in Tirana University. As Victor and I walked there, we met many people we knew on the street. The hall was packed with hundreds of people, and every country and faction was represented. The Vlachs have been in a precarious position as an ethnic group since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, when we were divided among Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia. Too few and geographically dispersed to even consider having our own state, we were claimed by Greece, to which we are linked culturally, and

Romania, to which we are linked linguistically. This tug-of-war for our loyalties lasted from about 1860 until 1945, when the post-war Romanian communist regime decided to give up on us. With the overthrow of Romanian communism in 1989, however, the Greek-versus-Romanian debate resumed, joined by a third group that holds that we are neither Greek nor Romanian but just Vlach citizens of whichever state we happen to live in.

Meanwhile, our numbers have continued to dwindle. At the turn of the century, two British scholars who studied the Vlachs estimated our population at 500,000. The most recent survey, a book written in 1989 by another British academic, Dr. Tom Winnifrith – a scholar who has had a lifelong fascination with the Vlachs – figured the number of Vlachs at perhaps 50,000. But that was before Albania was opened up to western eyes.

Like everything else in the Balkans, population statistics are tied to history; indeed, if the peoples of the Balkans ever succeed in destroying one another, the cause of death can be listed in just one word: history. And only history can explain the question of Vlach population statistics. Albania was created just before the first World War and saved from dismemberment just after it by Woodrow Wilson, of all people. Serbia and Montenegro felt the northern part of the country belonged to them; Italy considered Albania its special colony in the Balkans; while Greece claimed southern Albania, which it began to call “Northern Epirus” as if a region by that name had always existed. Everyone has since given up on these claims except some extremist Greeks who are in any case not supported by their government. The basis of their argument is the Greek minority in Albania, known in Greece as Northern Epirotes. But when they reckon the number of their minority in Albania, Greek nationalists sometimes count *all* the Orthodox, regardless of whether they are Greek, Vlach, or Albanian.

Today, the Greeks claim to have anywhere from 50,000 to 350,000 compatriots within Albania. Several Vlachs in Albania told me that there are only 50-100,000 Greeks, while there are 200-300,000 Vlachs. I honestly do not know whom to believe, and conditions being as they are in Albania, it will be some time before a reliable census is taken. Only one thing is for sure: even together, Vlachs and Greeks today comprise a rather small portion of Albania’s population.

The conference of the Albanian Vlachs began in an orderly way. Since people from the village of Selenitsa provided the main impetus for the crea-

tion of an ethnic society, they predominated on the board, which was seated at a dais on the stage of the auditorium. There were even a few women, and goodwill was evident everywhere. But the dynamics of a traditional society are very simple: traditions, rituals, and customs bring a modicum of order to an otherwise chaotic world. Say we are living in a village hidden way up in the Pindus mountains, out of the reach of any civilization or law; what is to prevent me from killing you, raping your daughter, or stealing all your livestock? The consensus afforded by tradition – that's all. It's the only thing that keeps the lid on such a society; and when the lid starts to blow, watch out. As we all know, it blows rather often on this peninsula. Maybe this has something to do with the mobility of the modern world: it is possible, though difficult, to keep an entire village hewing to the same tradition, but imagine the problems when you meet people from another village, or another region, or another country, or another continent, whose traditions do not match your own? All of a sudden, the lid no longer fits.

So the Vlach conference worked splendidly for as long as a consensus was maintained, and then it spun quickly out of control. Once these meetings go out of control, they assume the nature of a bidding war: Someone on the stage says something that so unnerves a member of the audience that the latter feels he must stand up in his seat and disagree; hearing shouts of approval from the audience, another person is emboldened to stand up and outbid the fellow before him with an even more radical idea (or a more radical statement of the same idea); and so on. Such meetings offer a flash of insight into the process of radicalization at times of chaos – all of a sudden, you see before you not Costa and Spiru, but Danton and Robespierre, or Trotsky and Lenin. I am filled with awe for the achievement of modern institutions like political parties, the U.S. House of Representatives, the Society Farsharotul, or even whole countries, which manage to stay together by creating a consensus for a new tradition.

The pro-Romanian faction had prepared itself well and the speaking program included the Romanian ambassador to Albania, who spoke of the Vlachs and Romanians as "one people"; a Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan who promised to build churches for the Vlachs; and a Romanian Senator from Transylvania whose nationalist party enjoys the support of many hard-line members of the Vlach emigrant community in Romania. But while the Romanians either spoke in Albanian or required translators from Romanian

into Vlach, the Greeks had the presence of mind to see that their delegation was entirely Vlach (led by the Mayor of Metsovo, the largest Vlach town in Greece) and spoke our language perfectly. The loudest incident of the day occurred when the Romanian Ambassador was allowed to speak before the Mayor of Metsovo, which was considered a grievous insult by the Greek Vlachs – “How could you put that foreigner before *un di a nostru* (one of our own)?” The entire Greek delegation staged a noisy protest at the foot of the stage, drowning out the Romanian ambassador until they were promised that the Mayor of Metsovo would be the very next speaker. This man, Aleko Kakrimani, spoke so eloquently, succinctly, and non-politically about the bonds between Greek and Albanian Vlachs that he almost brought the house down (it didn't hurt that people from Metsovo speak a particularly melodic version of our language).

Although pro-Greeks and pro-Romanians later engaged in more bitter polemics outside the conference hall, it turned out that they were little more than a sideshow, for the vast majority of Vlachs in Albania think of themselves as neither Greek nor Romanian but simply as Vlach citizens of Albania. I found this everywhere I went, even in Korçë, where at the turn of this century emotions had run strongest on both sides, pro-Greek and pro-Romanian. The leadership of the Albanian Vlach Society has followed this non-partisan line despite pressures and blandishments, earning if nothing else the goodwill of the Albanian government, which would no doubt view the Vlachs differently were a nearby state to claim their loyalty. And by repeatedly emphasizing this position, these leaders skilfully kept their conference on track despite all the fireworks.

I have by now served on enough boards and attended enough conferences to know that the most important work often takes place before or after the regularly scheduled activities, usually at the luncheons and repasts that accompany such events. The Vlach conference was no different; after the formalities were concluded, we walked back to the Hotel Arbëria for a banquet that is lavish by many standards, especially those of Albania in early 1992. It was there that I got to meet everyone face-to-face; it was there also that most of the real deals were made and schemes hatched. There were some bright spots, like Orthodox Archbishop Anastas, who spoke very openly about letting the Vlachs celebrate the liturgy in their own language, a position never before heard from a Greek prelate. There were also some dark

spots, like the attempt to create a "Balkan Federation of Vlach Societies" without the Greek Vlachs – indeed, without any semblance of a democratic debate (the discussion was held behind closed doors by "intellectuals", the second most dangerous class of human beings in the Balkan Peninsula after men in general). I found out about the meeting quite by accident, went into the room, and stood alone against excluding the Greeks; the consensus was damaged and it soon ruptured on another issue. A bidding war began, no new consensus was achieved, and the meeting broke up when someone made the face-saving comment, "We get fired up and all of a sudden we want to do everything under the sun in one day". The banquet ended with many a warm embrace and a few cold stares... (Balamaci 1993:8-11)

All this recalls the conditions in the turn of the 20th century. Except oppositions and conflicts in those days were bloody. The consummation of national identities through national state formations was based on human sacrifices. The founding of national constructions, it seems, had to follow the known Balkan mythical motif about cementing stability through human sacrifice. All this recalls descriptions of European travellers in the Balkans. But we need not resort to them to represent the atmosphere of the era. The same writer of the above passages, in the same text, describes scenes of his family life, which are absolutely typical.

[My father] also told me over and over about an Albanian "revolution", but this confused me because it wasn't like the American revolution; I learned much later in graduate school that this relatively minor incident in the overall scheme of international affairs took place during a period of near-anarchy in Albania between the start of the Balkan Wars in 1912 and the end of World War I in 1918. This "revolution", however, was the defining moment of his life – indeed, the defining moment in the life of most of the members of his clan: the cold-blooded murder in 1914 of his father's first cousins, the priest Haralambis Balamaci and his brother Sotir, by pro-Greek nationalists in Korçë.

The Balamacis are part of a large Vlach tribe known as Farsharots. Like so many other aspects of Vlach history, the source of this title is uncertain; it is thought to come from the Albanian town of Frashari, but it is not clear that the tribe was ever based there. Haralambie Balamaci (also known by the honorific title Papa Lambru) was born in 1863, one of a number of priests in the Balamaci family. He had been raised in Greek Orthodoxy (a Greek church was built in Pliassa in 1801), but in 1860 the Romanian government, motivated as much by romantic nationalism as by the need for more chips in its bid to become a player in Balkan power politics, had begun its campaign to bring the Vlachs under its influence by building churches and schools for them in and around the Vlach heartland of Macedonia, which was then still under Ottoman control. The Balamacis were among the strongest clan in their community, largely because of the great wealth in sheep possessed by Haralambie's uncle, Spiru Balamaci; once they were won over to the Romanian cause, almost the entire Farsharot tribe came with them.

Haralambie renounced the Greek church and began to celebrate the liturgy in Romanian, which he and others believed was the Vlachs' "literary language". This upset the local Greeks and pro-Greek Vlachs and Albanians greatly. When the Ottomans ceded Thessaly to Greece in 1881, many Albanian Vlachs were cut off from their winter pastures by the border change; Papa Lambru joined his uncle Spiru in a Vlach delegation that lodged a protest with the Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul. This upset the pro-Greek Vlachs and Albanians of Korçë still more and ten years later, when Papa Lambru again travelled to Istanbul, this time to request the creation of a Romanian Episcopate in Vlach regions, an attempt was made on his life.

This was the period of a savage guerilla war between pro-Greek and pro-Bulgarian forces over who would get Macedonia once the Turks inevitably pulled out. In southern Albania, the pro-Romanians tended to side with the pro-Bulgarians against the Greeks. (I am told there were very few ethnic Greeks in Korçë, though there were enough pro-Greek Vlachs and Albanians to sustain a Greek Orthodox Cathedral there. There were definitely no ethnic Romanians.) Tensions grew between pro-Greeks and pro-Romanians. In 1905 the Greeks sent a band of guerillas led by a pro-Greek Vlach named Gouda to Pliassa to discourage the use of a Romanian liturgy in the church named Saint Mary (in Vlach, *S'ta Maria*); he burned the liturgy books, but worship in Romanian continued. In 1906, the Greek Bishop of Korçë, Fotios,

decided to visit Pliassa and personally change the language of the liturgy from Romanian to Greek. He was warned not to go and was stoned when he arrived, which so enraged him that he excommunicated Papa Lambru and all of his supporters. Papa Lambru went directly to Pliassa and held a service in Romanian to rally his people and then he bought a house in Korçë and started his own Romanian school there. In retaliation, Fotios barred all pro-Romanian Vlachs from the Greek church in Korçë; Papa Lambru promptly began holding services in the house, in Romanian, galling Fotios still more.

Later that year, Fotios was assassinated by a Vlach named Thanas Nastu, who escaped to Romania. Turkish authorities rounded up several Balamacis and put them in jail but were unable to link them to the crime. In 1908 the new Greek bishop of Korçë repeated the rite of excommunication, but the victory of the Young Turks in the same year and their repression of all Balkan ethnic groups alike led those groups to unite in a final revolution against Turkish rule in the peninsula. The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 prised most of Turkey in Europe away from the Ottomans but although the Greeks won much of Macedonia, they also desined southern Albania ("Northern Epirus"). Greek troops occupied the region and the local pro-Greek faction was ecstatic, fully expecting union with Greece. But the mysterious ways of Great Power politics defied their expectations, and in the middle of March 1914 they learned that Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos had concluded an agreement with the Powers wherein Greece gave up its claim to southern Albania and instead received the Aegean Islands (Chios, Mytilene, and others). Greek troops were to withdraw from Albania by March 31st.

In the months before, Papa Lambru's life had been threatened several times. Albania was in a state of near-anarchy, and he had become a virtual prisoner in his own household, afraid to come out even to shop. The pro-Greek faction of Korçë detested him and when they saw that, partly as a result of his efforts, their cause was being lost, their anger no longer knew any bounds and they cried out for his blood. Early on the morning of March 23rd, 1914, a group of some 60 armed men surrounded the house where Papa Lambru and his brother Sotir lived with their families. They shouted that if the priest did not come outside, they would burn down the house. Papa Lambru came out, followed by Sotir, who refused to leave his brother's side. Their pockets were emptied and the contents replaced with pictures of Fotios, the assassinated Greek Bishop. The two brothers were marched to a

piece of high ground just below the Orthodox church of St. Elia (called *Shin d'Ili* in Vlach, a corruption of the Albanian *Shën Ilia*). Sotir's wife and son followed at a distance. Along the way, Papa Lambru and Sotir were kicked, beaten, tortured, and stabbed. When they neared *Shin d'Ili*, they were tied to trees and shot dead. Their bruised and bullet-riddled bodies were kept on display there for three days... (Balamaci 1993:15-17).

Such things come to my mind throughout the day, as we visit various villages in the area of Bilisht. Next morning we go to the Vlach church to attend the holy service.

The mass

This is a special day for the Vlach community in Korçë, I understand. I do not know if this is the case for the whole of the community, but at least those I have talked to about this matter do believe it. In any case, a lot of people are already assembled in the church and everything looks as if this is going to a very important event, indeed. Even though the new church building is not completely finished, today is, basically, its official inauguration. Leading the service is the Bishop of Korçë, Ioannis, and several other priests, together with the Vlach priest Christo. Entering the church I realise it is already packed and the atmosphere is truly celebratory.

Of course, my information about the Holy Service today taking place in the Vlach language proves wrong. In a later visit, however, I discovered that the liturgy is nowadays in the Vlach language. I have in my possession the text of the liturgy (Gura 1967).

Today it is in Albanian, except for a few phrases and some passages chanted by the Vlach priest in Vlach. I ask the person

next to me discretely about this, and he answers that it is because most of them do not speak Vlach and that quite a few Albanians are among them, as well. The Bishop is rather young, around forty. I learn he is Muslim on the side of his father and Christian on his mother's side. He was christened and studied for ten whole years in the U.S.A. I am especially impressed by the piety of the people participating, as they very often repeat in chorus stereotypical phrases or even known passages of the liturgy, which I never noticed happening in any of the Albanian services I have partaken till now. In the end of the liturgy the Bishop performs his preaching and Holy Communion follows and the offer of boiled wheat and Holy Bread in small plastic cups. Some young people are taking videos of the whole event, while the conversations of the faithful are in both the Vlach and the Albanian languages.

An interview

As I come out of the church, I start a conversation with two men. We get to know each other better, they want to know more about us, too. They offer to buy us coffee in the nearby cafe. We order raki. I ask whether I can record the discussion, they agree and, moreover, seem quite happy about this encounter. Our discussion takes place mainly in Vlach, from time to time we switch to Greek for the sake of my partner, but they find it difficult, despite the fact that they have lived and worked in Greece.

If I wanted to sum up our conversation, I would start by saying that, above all, I have the impression they were totally sincere with me. In no way did they try to present themselves as

Greeks, as [Vlachs have done] in many other cases, and neither did they try to overbid for some form of patriotism. Sharing their reflections about their Vlach origin and identity, they used the expression that the Vlachs in the Balkans are like oil in water (*ka untulemou pi apa*): Drops here and there and the question is where these drops come from. Their talk often moves to Pliasa (Plasë) and Moshopoli (Voskopojë), as important places for the Vlachs of Albania and not only. They talk to us about the old nomadic relocations that knew no borders, but also about migration to Romania in the first decades of the twentieth century. They are obviously aware of both the fluidity of identities and their negotiation on the basis of the conditions each time and the assessment of what was beneficial for them each time. Their basic point is that, in the last analysis, one adjusts and belongs where one lives and "eats bread". They themselves have their children in Greece, they all have a Greek passport as well, while one of them has his daughter in Romania where she is studying on a Romanian government scholarship. They do not hide the fact that they make use of "two cards", the Greek and the Romanian, to their benefit, as they do not hide a generally pragmatist attitude regarding the issue of national integration. They talk to us very positively about Greece, about the pension they hope to receive from it, about their children who are just fine living there and their grandchildren who speak only Greek; but they also talk about the presence of the Romanian Ambassador from Tirana in the celebratory liturgy of Shën Sotiri and the other financial provisions of Romania, such as the scholarships for children of Vlach origin. The discussion reminds me of a similar one with some elderly people in the village Drenovë, a few kilometres away from Korçë, who were telling me that

when in Albania they show their Albanian passport and in Greece the Greek one... I even remember one of them who had worked years in Greece telling me that he would show a photo of his in kilt and playing the clarinet (which he used to do in the time of the Hoxha, partaking in festivals as a musician) and this was the best passport! He mentions as a typical example waiting in line to get a residence permit and the moment he shows the photograph the person in charge gives him priority... In the music groups he used to participate as an Albanian, of course, but in Greece both the clarinet and the kilt are exclusively symbols of the Greek identity.

The Romanian propaganda

The above issue has especially preoccupied me since the first moment I came to contact with the Vlachs of Albania. I met several parents who mentioned the fact that their children are studying in Romania on Romanian government scholarships. I even met cases of families who had one child studying in Romania and the other in Greece on similar scholarships. The phenomenon has apparently acquired significant proportions, as both countries are employing policies aiming at the affiliation of the particular group. As regards Greece, the situation is well known; the Vlachs of Albania are considered Hellenes and enjoy all the relative privileges. Regarding Romania, it appears that after the collapse of the communist regime, it has revitalised its politics of the past, considering the Vlachs part of the Romanian diaspora.

As I was meeting more and more young people who, making use of their real or supposed Vlach origin, study in Romania on scholarships, I searched for more evidence about this matter. All you have to do is visit the website of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discover that the Vlachs are considered Romanians of the diaspora and enjoy all the relative privileges. We copy, then, from the law in question:

Article 1. The Romanian state supports the development of bonds with Romanians everywhere, for the purpose of the preservation and strengthening of their national, language and religious identity, with respect to the legislation of the countries where they belong.

Article 2. The law standardises:

The rights of persons of freely defined Romanian origin, who, being Romanian citizens, ex-Romanian citizens, descendants of Romanians or speaking one of the dialects of the Romanian language as mother-tongue, and who, for various reasons, live, for the time being, outside the state borders of Romania. These persons are going to be called from now on "the everywhere Romanians".

In the spirit of the present law, the term "everywhere Romanians" (independently of the actual name: rumani, vlahi, valahi, macedoromani, aromani, meglaromani, istroromani, moldoveni) denotes those persons of freely defined Romanian origin, who... are living, for the time being, outside the state borders of Romania (<http://www.mae.ro/index.php?und=doc&id=29228>, 20-10-2008)

So, if someone secures a document from a Vlach association that confirms his Vlach origin, he is immediately considered "a Romanian of the diaspora" by the Romanian government and enjoys all the pertinent privileges that are granted by the law. The same holds, after all, with the Greek side: If some one provides the relevant documentation of his Vlach origin, he is considered a Hellene by the Greek state. The situation is, of course, reflected in the fact that two categories of associations exist on the Albanian terrain, one pro-Greek and one pro-Romanian,

whose members, moreover, may alternate their registration, which is something that even their leaders may do, depending on their orientation each time. The two associations, however, are in bad terms and the clashes between them many (Schwandner-Sievers 2002).

The above issue is so complex and the research ground in this field generally so slippery, that I hesitate, for the time being, to “go deep” into it. Moreover, I have not attempted to investigate the matter of the Vlach identity systematically in Greece either, though here things are clearer and no political controversy exists, in my view, regarding the “Vlach question”. In my Ph.D. I did not get involved with this subject, since my focus was other. For the time being, then, I confine myself to the presentation of an early paper about the Vlachs of Greece, which was delivered in the *Third European Conference of Modern Greek Studies*, (Bucharest, 2-4 June 2006).

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιας

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

THE VLACHS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER. NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

In the early nineteenth century the differing linguistic groups among the Orthodox Christians in the region showed considerable solidarity. As the linguistically based nationalist programme spread through Europe with the associated attempt to resurrect earlier kingdoms as nation-states, serious conflict arose with heterophone Orthodox who rejected assimilation. The area of sharper confrontation was Macedonia. Here, most Vlachs, who called themselves "Aroumani" and shared the Romaic background and commercial proclivities of many Greek speakers, preferred the Hellenic state to the alternatives. Even so, however, some were attracted by linguistic affinity to Romania, despite its distance.

The above quotation is from the article "Greek identity: A long view", by C. Carras, which is included in the volume *Balkan Identities* that was edited recently by M. Todorova Carras (2004:320).

It is, indeed, true that with the dissolution of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire and the expansion in the Balkans of the modern national phenomenon, the search for factors that would differentiate the Orthodox ethnic groups between them (groups

that were previously identified, to a large degree, on the basis of the *millet* system), was focused mainly on the language, that was, after all, a relatively safe “objective” criterion and also suitable for classifications in the context of the general national project; the latter was based considerably on “language nationalism”, any way. The effort of the Greek side to preserve the identification of Hellenism with Orthodoxy (Matalas 2002), apart from provoking in other Balkan Churches nationalist moves of seceding from the “Hellenic oriented” Ecumenical Patriarchate, it also provoked other types of reactions by ethnic groups, who developed their own, distinct national movement with the ultimate purpose of constructing a nation state. This was the case with most of the ethnic groups, which developed their own national narratives in a stereotypical manner, on the line of the “national awakening or renaissance” dogma, in the framework of which the cultivation of a unitary national language and national literature was a basic concern (Mazower 2002; Prevelakis 2001; Totorova 2004; Kitromilidis 1997).

The Vlachs, in the context of these processes, present a very interesting divergence. If we accept the evolutionary scheme, according to which, in the modern times, and as national ideals develop, previously ethnic groups demand their transformation into national ones via national state formations, this, in the case of the Vlachs, never happened. The discussion of how and why the case is so is long and difficult, so much so that it would be naive to think we could address this issue here.

We shall attempt, therefore, to examine the cultural dimensions of the inclusion in the Greek nation-state, of the Vlachs who were living on Greek ground, and their subsequent gradual assimilation. Our theoretical approach is that of social and cul-

tural anthropology, dealing with its subject in a holistic manner, namely rejecting essentialism and concurrently adopting a critical stance towards all kinds of eclecticism and also towards any one-sided views of the national and ethnic phenomenon (Llobera 1987; Tonkin et al. 1989; Barth 1969). Also, our approach attempts to transcend the weaknesses of the evolutionary scheme that deals with ethnicity as a historical reality previous to nationalism, adopting instead the views of a dialectical historical structuralism; according to the latter, both the view of historical evolution as lineal and the adoption of an one-sided determinism that attributes historical change to the determining influence of some or other factor are equally rejected. From the perspective of this critical theoretical position, the phenomenon of ethnicity may have emerged from within the very process of nation-state formation and does not necessarily precede it (Banks 1996; Eriksen 1991).

The above thoughts concern the concept of ethnic identity. Regarding the ideas of cultural identity or the cultural "tradition" of a particular group that is included in a nation and a "national tradition" that is constructed on terms of continuity and homogeneity, we also have to resort to some necessary theoretical statements. Culture, here, is not considered a closed and cohesive whole but rather an open, dynamic process and practice. In this sense, we do not adopt a static and essentialist approach to cultural identity but a dynamic and historical perspective that allows for both the possibility of identity transformation and that of the invention of traditions (Bourdieu 1977; Kuper 1999; Abou-Lugod 1991; Hobsbawm-Ranger 1983).

Let's see, then, whether we can talk about a "Vlach culture" or a "Vlach tradition". Let's say, in advance, that these phrases may be adopted only as conventions for the sake of the discussion of our theme and not as realities. If we assumed the existence of a Vlach culture, we would have to deny our theoretical framework, which does not accept the concept of culture as homogeneous and cohesive whole, and even the very concept of historicity, which involves a dynamic approach to space and time. We shall talk then conventionally, as agreed, about "Vlach culture", or, if you like, about the Vlach cultural realities in the territory of Greece from the beginnings of the foundation of the Greek state.

To the extent that we can isolate certain common characteristics of these communities and groups, that developed on the basis of stock breeding activities in the mountain area of Pindos and in relation to the nearby flatlands and coastal areas they use as winter pastures, we are directed to the historical reality of Ottoman domination, the creation of mountain communities, the economic thriving of pastoralism reaching its peak with the development of interrelated manufacturing activities and the transition of a significant part of the population to commercial operations.

The creation of Vlach settlements in the mountains of the Greek country, just as in the wider Balkan area, is dated from between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries and marks the end of nomadic life for a large part of Vlach population. This development, for any who continue their stock breeding activity, means the transition to the vertical relocations, from the mountain to the planes and vice-versa (spring time-autumn), a system internationally known as *transhumance*. The base for these

movements is the mountain village, which this way develops considerably.

The flourishing of pastoralism, which is due to the economic and political context of the era, leads to a booming that translates into significant manufacturing activities related to pastoral produce and not only. Subsequently, from manufacturing activity there emerges commerce, too, which starts out, partly, as transportation. This new development, which already begins from the seventeenth century and reaches its peak in the nineteenth, will lead to the creation of large merchant houses abroad and a transformation of the local communities, involving economic, social and cultural differentiations between them at the same time.

Manufacturing and commercial activities bring about economic and social re-arrangements, the most important of which is the differentiation of the stratum that enters these activities, which, subsequently, will play a crucial role in the inclusion, precisely, of the local communities in the wider social and political frame and their cultural transformation. A significant fact is that the new social layering produces new tensions within the communities themselves, while, concurrently, a differentiation on an inter-communal level is also being created, between a category of communities that develop into important manufacturing and commercial centres and those that remain basically pastoral. This socio-economic differentiation generates a cultural distinction as well, a differentiation on the level of mentalities and by extension on the ideological framework, a phenomenon, which, in my view, may provide the key for understanding the developments that follow, concerning the incorporation of the Vlachs into the Greek nation and their active in-

volvement in the process of the completion of the corresponding nation-state.

The social stratum of merchants, which emerges from the bosom of the stock breeding community via particular mechanisms operating within the Ottoman political economy, transcends the limits of the local cultural systems and their corresponding collective mentalities, adopts new cultural models and values, forms a new consciousness and partakes in the circle of an emerging elite, which takes on a pioneering role with respect to the formation of the national liberating movement. The process of economic and social transition is identified with a cultural transformation, which, in the last analysis, equals the inclusion of this part of the Vlach ethnic group into the bosom of the Greek national elite that played a determining role in the cause of Greek nation-state formation and the development of national ideology itself. From the moment that the representatives of this category, in their vast majority, form a modern national consciousness, this is a Greek one, and important factors for this development are Greek education, which is identified with economic and social upward mobility, as well as Orthodoxy, which, by and large, identifies with Hellenism in the era of the emergence of nationalisms in the Balkans.

The transformation of an ethnic identity with strong local characteristics into a national one essentially meant for the Vlachs their integration into the new Greek nation. This is a complex historical process that can be comprehended and interpreted with the tools of a contemporary anthropological theory of the nation. Throughout this process, a decisive role was played by the economic and social transformations that led to the creation of all those social strata, for which the very process

of transition was parallel with their involvement in the Greek national movement. Therefore, the role of the commercial class and of the peculiar elite that emerged from the processes mentioned above was crucial, also with respect to the formation of a Greek national consciousness in the wider population of Vlach societies, which followed. Let's not forget, for example, that a multitude of merchants, intellectuals and priests of Vlach origin develop intense activity regarding the spreading of Greek language and letters, an activity that rather frequently goes hand in hand with a negative positioning against their own mother-tongue which is the Vlach language.

The example of Daniel Moschopolitis (1754-1822) is rather typical. Daniel belongs to the category of those clerics, intellectuals and teachers, who, following the teachings of Kosmas Aitolos and not only struggle for the prevalence of the Greek language in the Balkans. In this line of thought, he also publishes his *Dictionary of Four Languages*, in 1802 (Konstantakopoulou 1988). On the other hand, a typical case of a merchant who offers part of his property for the sake of spreading the Greek language within the area of his native homeland is Michael Tositsas from Metsovo, who bequeathed his home town a large sum of money, with the purpose of "the expansion of Hellenism and the uprooting of the prevalent local tongue, the so-called Vlach" (Tsoukalas 1977: 31-63).

Even in the community of Central Europe, where among intellectuals of Vlach origin a dispute breaks out concerning the written form of the Vlach language, the view that prevails is that the Greek alphabet should be adopted. Moreover, those who support the necessity of preserving the Vlach language do not connect this demand with claims of national character. There is

a group of intellectuals who support the choice of the Latin alphabet for the written version of Vlach, among them some fanatic proponents for the cause of this language's preservation, like G. Rosia and M. Boiagi (the latter also published a Grammar of Vlach), who, however, do not seem to have a clear position on the national direction of the Vlachs. We can generally say that, though a dispute among Vlach intellectuals and scholars in Central Europe and the surrounding countries was not avoided altogether, on the matter of their choice of nationhood, their vast majority backs the choice of Hellenism, and more particularly the version propounded by Regas Feraios; only a small group supported forcefully the right of respect for cultural particularity and especially their language difference. A rather small, dissenting group, that represented a peculiar language "nationalism", supporting the establishment of the Vlach language in conjunction with the employment of the Latin alphabet, seems to have been connected more with the emergence of the Romanian national movement, which afterwards created the known problem of "Romanian propaganda", rather than expressing an autonomous Vlach national move (Konstantakopoulou 1988; Garidis 1985; Berard 1987; Nikolaidou 1995).

Already since the eighteenth century then, next to the agropastoral world, a second world of commerce is created as well, connected with large-scale transportations and the big commercial centres of Europe. The future of the Vlach people is shaped on the basis of these two poles that interact intensely; but of the two, the second one is the most influential, regarding their cultural development (Rokou 1983).

If the first important landmark in the history of Vlach populations was the construction of communities and the following

economic, social and cultural development on the axis of manufacturing and long distance commercial activities, the second landmark was their integration in the Greek nation-state itself, a process that was long and complex, given the delayed annexation of the North counties of the country, where they are chiefly located. Their integration into the Greek nation-state, apart from the transformation of local-ethnic identities into a unitary national identity that meant a downgrading of the group's cultural particularities in favour of national homogeneity, had long-standing consequences for the political operation of the communities, which involved their weakening, as they now succumbed to a centralised government, giving up any elements of self-rule and autonomy that used to distinguish them in the context of the Ottoman system of government.

The new governmental and political framework of operation for the local communities is a condition that weakens them culturally as well, since it disrupts significantly its economical and social texture. Thus they experience a sense of increasing decline, since at the same time they partake in a rationale of homogenisation, where the elements of their difference, to the extent that they cannot be transformed into peripheral variations of the central national model, are marginalised or gradually eliminated (Herzfeld 1982; Karakasidou 1993; Tziouvas 1994; Just 1989). Above all, the Vlach language is subjected to gradual downgrading and is in danger of extinction, since it remains oral and is used only among the Vlachs themselves within community spaces and in family frameworks, with a generally increasing tendency to abandon it altogether.

The peculiarity, however, that characterises the development of the contemporary Greek state, from the perspective of

political economy, that is also an effect of its dependencies, and the consequent "dualism" of the modern Greek social formation on the axis of a dichotomy between urban centre and periphery, functioned somehow, ironically, beneficently for the survival of "traditional" forms of social organisation and cultural expression, at least in the short term (Mouzelis 1978; Vergopoulos 1975). The marginalisation of the provinces obstructed its smooth urbanisation process, and effectuated a concoction of different elements, in a way that led, for a period of time, to the reproduction of particular cultural differences. The communities, operating in the framework of a problematical modernisation process that in parallel to the much desired "development" produced aspects of underdevelopment as well, either by growing defence mechanisms or because of an incapacity to adjust, preserve elements of their "traditional" organisation, not as survivals of the past, but as live constituents of their identity, an identity in a state of prolonged transition and suspended transformation (Nitsiakos 1995; Damianakos et al. 1997).

Generally, the period from the integration of the Northern counties of the country, with the end of the Balkan Wars (1912-13), until the end of the Civil War (1949) is characterised by tense assimilating processes. On the one hand, the ideological apparatuses of the national state and, on the other, the very process of modernisation and urbanisation of the Greek society contribute to a rash marginalisation of peripheral and ethnic differences and an analogous empowering of the centre's standards and of the apparatuses of cultural homogenisation.

And while all this happens at a relatively slow pace until the Civil War, during the period after that, the process is accelerated and manifest in forms of subversive changes, such that allow us

to speak of deep fractures in the social structures and the cultural systems of the periphery. The great exodus from the rural areas and the barrenness of the mountain areas in particular, together with the prevalence of urban ideals and urbanisation, do not lead only to a demographic draining of the Vlach communities but engender a diaspora that will signal the beginning of the end of a long period. Very often, the break with the past takes the form of a denial of one's cultural foundations, and the depreciation of a dated way of life leads to social stigma for those who represent it. Those who stay behind have to confront, together with their economical problems, their social marginalisation, while those who leave make anxious efforts to adjust to the life in the urban centres, a fact of great consequences as regards their very cultural identity.

The decades of 1950 and 1960 create, indeed, a fracture, the awareness of which, in conjunction with the conditions that prevailed in the next decades (the phenomenon of "return to the roots" and its cultural effects), leads to a generalised effort of reconnecting with the place of origin and preserving cultural traditions. While the discussion about the concept of "tradition", as this is constructed in the context of a whole current of thought called "Folklorismus" (Meraklis 1989), is outside our scope here, we can still stress the fact that all this "return" stays on the surface of things, on the picturesque aspects of culture, without ever really posing issues of otherness. On the contrary, it functions largely as one more mechanism of integration and assimilation.

Generally, the increasing social and cultural integration, which was effectuated, after a certain point, on the basic axis of the urbanisation process, stroke the final blow to the historical

context of Vlach cultural otherness, just like all the other peripheral, local and ethnic identities, with the result of its gradual assimilation by the central cultural prototypes, which, indeed, are now slowly escaping from the control of the nation-state itself, via the European institutions and the apparatuses of globalisation in the last decades of the twentieth century. The discussion about multi-culturalism and respect of cultural others within this new framework is another chapter, outside the scope of this study.

Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

WHAT IS NORTH EPIRUS THEN?

I think that a reflection about the content and various uses of the terms "North Epirus" and "Northern Epirote" has already emerged in the previous chapters, albeit indirectly. The fact is striking, that in the context of the new Albanian migration, after the collapse of the Albanian regime in 1991, Albanian immigrants themselves employ the irredentist, on the side of Greeks, uses of the term for their own benefit. So one observes the "utilisation" of the most extreme expansionist positions of nationalist circles in Greece, who would like the "Northern Epirus" area reaching up to the Shkumbin river. People from Tepeleni, Berati, and even Elbasan declare themselves "Northern Epirotes" with great ease, hoping that the identification of the term with Greekness will facilitate their reception and improve their treatment in Greece

So, let's see what this "Northern Epirus" is:

The line was clearly marked up to the edge of Mandra Nikolitsa; to its North, the borderline between Greece and Albania was drawn, approximately, on the natural line dividing the waters of the rivers Ano Devoli and Ano Aliakmon, following the Greek Government proposition which was ac-

cepted by the Great Powers in February 1914. On this issue, in Florence, the administrative boundaries of Kaza in Korçë had been adopted as a borderline, but these were not clear.

North Epirus does not consist in itself a geographical unity. The name of this area was initially a diplomatic term and later a political one.



Figure 53. Gjirokastër

The above, among other things, are included in the statement on the "Ethnographic Map of Northern Epirus in 1913", which was published by the Headquarters of the Greek Army in 1919 (Puaux 1991), impressing, together with the other facts, the way the "demarcating line" was drawn, a way that ignored completely the needs of the people; the people on the two sides of the "ironic" line, who keep repeating for three generations since the saying "field next to river and village next to border will never prosper", subjecting thus the commands of the Powerful to their own kind of wise criticism, indirect but based on lived experience.



Figure 54. Vuno, Himarë

The term "North Epirus" then (and its derivatives) is, therefore, a political term that prevailed in reference to the specific geographical part of Epirus, after the failure of Greek foreign politics to annex it to its own territory, at the time when the borders between the national states of the area were being marked, in the end of the Balkan Wars. It is obvious even today, after all, that the specific borderline that was imposed does not express some ethnic or cultural division; on the contrary, in a completely arbitrary and violent manner, it divides populations, who not only belong historically to the same anthropo-geographic unity or the same ethnic group, but are connected with close bonds of kinship, a fact that conferred on the carving of the "line" a tragic dimension. In Dropull and Pogon, but Konitsa, too, especially regarding the frontier villages, the separation of members of the same family among the two states is common reality; and the cases of individuals, who happened to be on one of the two sides for a visit and were forced to stay

there for the rest of their lives, because “the border caught them” are striking in their tragedy.

The politicisation of this term roused an intense ideological and emotional charge afterwards, as it was invested with passionate irredentist content. So “North Epirus” became the “enslaved sister”, and this picture was systematically cultivated among the lower social strata by official and unofficial institutions and apparatuses. This continual and emphatic use of the term led to the establishment of the derivative “Northern Epirote” in Greece, which, as time passes, starts to denote a distinctive part of Greeks living in that part of Epirus that was included in the Albanian state. Once again, the cases of neighbouring villages divided by the border is characteristic, villages whose inhabitants are afterwards classified on the basis of this division and those outside Greek territory are called “North Epirotes”, while the other remain simply “Epirotes”.



Figure 55. Sarandë

The politicisation of Epirus geography generally led to a fluidity and vagueness regarding its borders in the north. The fact is typical, that various writers and other public figures who have been concerned with this matter at times, position themselves according to the ideological and political direction they adopt. Starting with today, one could refer to recent views regarding the northern borders of "North Epirus", where, among others, the most extreme from the perspective of "national rights" position places the northern borders of Hellenism at the river Shkumbin, using historical evidence from previous periods, which obviously does not respond to today's reality.

The ancient writers considered as northern border of Epirus the mountain Akrokeravnia, meaning the point that marked the end of the territory of the ancient Greek tribe Chaonians (Hammond 1967; Aravantinos 1984; Kokolakis 1993). On the contrary, several Middle Ages sources move the borders of Epirus at Shkoder and even further away. During the post-Byzantine years, one more relocation of the border to the south is observed, which has to do with a more general change in the ethno-cultural facts, where an important part is apparently played by the distinction between a Catholic North and an Orthodox South (Kokolakis 1993).

During the period of Ottoman dominance a tendency emerges to adopt the river Aoos (Vjosë) as the natural border of Epirus, with small divergences, despite the fact of a more general differentiation of perceptions, which corresponded to the general ideologico-political difference (Kokolakis 1993). Moreover, a vagueness and even confusion is frequently observable in the use of the terms "Epirus", "Albania", "Arvanitia", etc.; a

typical case of this is the known scholar Ath. Psalidas (Thesprotos- Psalidas 1964).

Unquestionably, in all historical periods, the demarcation of the geographical space of Epirus is dependent on particular ideological and political orientations and choices and so searching for diachronic borders and, moreover, such that may correspond to permanent and "pure" ethnic divisions would be a futile venture.

We may, however, from a point on, distinguish between two wider cultural zones. It would be a glaring mistake, though, to identify them diachronically with national zones, the way we understand them today. The river Shkumbin is, indeed, a border between a Muslim and Catholic North and an Orthodox South, which, in combination with the ethnic differentiation between Gekis and Toskis respectively, cuts across the borders of the modern Albanian nation and historically forms a peculiar situation, which can hardly be understood in terms of ethnic purity. On the south of Shkumbin, there historically coexist various ethnic groups, whose characteristics as well as consciousness change along a historical course that has been anything but smooth.

This complexity of the ethno-cultural facts of the area has been known from the past and was, moreover, manifest historically through important events, especially during the nineteenth century, when the national movements in the wider Balkan area were at their peak and particular groups of populations were called to integrate with wider national wholes; then both the fluidity of the borders and the flexibility of national consciousnesses became obvious, especially with respect to the Albanian-speaking populations (Ars 1994).

This is a reality that political powers persist in ignoring, as well as the official maps that they produce, but the inhabitants of the area today are very much aware of it, when they define themselves via their differentiation from the other groups. These groups are not self-defined according to nationality as we generally understand it, but on the basis of certain combination of characteristics, historical, linguistic, religious, and so on, that intersect the borders of the general distinction between Greeks and Albanians and form a peculiar situation, that demands a special ethnographic approach if it is to be understood.

The "perseverance" of these distinctions in time is, after all, striking, despite the influence of the homogenising apparatuses of the previous totalitarian regime. The ethnic synthesis today of the population in South Albania, despite any alterations that might have occurred, is still close enough to the picture we have from the sources of the two previous centuries. The inhabitants of the area still refer to villages as Greek, Albanian Christian, Albanian Muslim, and to other ethnic groups, such as Vlachs, Çam, Labës, Gypsies.

Religion remains an important factor of differentiation and the distinction the Greeks make today between Christian and Muslim Albanians, considering the former "relatives", while the latter "Turks", is typical. Regardless of all this, however, the zones of purely Greek population today are identified with the known historical cultural micro-units in the areas of Gjirokastër and Sarandë.

Closing this report on "Northern Epirus", I consider it worth mentioning the Albanian approach to the matter as well. I shall merely quote a typical extract from an article by Ardian Vehbiu, which is available on the Internet :

Questioning history Northern Epirus is a mythic-geographical expression that, during this century has acquired some pseudo-historical, and pseudo-cultural meaning, thanks to the efforts of fanatic political, religious and cultural groups and associations in Greece and in the Greek Diaspora. It now offers the base to a nationalistic doctrine, which represents the sum of all Greek claims of Albanian territories. "Northern Epirus" is the Greek name for those Albanian territories lying between the river Shkumbin and the country's Southern border, generally known as Toskëria in broader sense (i.e., including Labëria). The historical purport of this expression got the upper hand on its descriptive meaning as soon as Albania acquired the independence and had its southern border recognized by the Great Powers. The core of the Vorio-Epirote doctrine can be summarized as follows: the population inhabiting the northern part of Epirus, in spite of its speaking Albanian, is basically Greek, as is positively Greek all southern Albanian territory. The "true" Albanians, who are Muslim (or Catholic) belong therefore to the north of Shkumbin river. The doctrine, to justify its historical absurdity, tries to minimize the Albanian contribution to the history of the area. According to it, the only light in Albania's historically perpetual dark age has always come from the glorious Hellenic beacon. Therefore the Albanians are not the descendants of Illyrians, but simply nomad Middle Age invaders, who later settled themselves as "mountaineer pirates," and survived by raping "virgin" Greek Adriatic cities. Most of southern Albanians are indeed "Albanian speaking Greeks," who have not forgotten their attachment to their Hellenic motherland. The ethnic Albanians, i.e. the Moslems, through all their known (short) history, have typically sided with Greece's enemies and fought for the destruction of the Greek nation, deeply ungrateful to that "historical" fact that all Albanian major historic achievements are due to the Greek territorial presence, religious influence, and cultural glory. Throughout the ages, Greece is supposed to have fought for the education of these ungracious sons – barbarous, illiterate and without a history as they were. Allied to the infidel Turks, they allegedly were among the cruellest in suppressing with blood the Greek revolution. Allied to the Italians and later to the Germans, they terrorized Greece, and slain its best anti-fascist heroes...

If it were not for its being absurd, anachronistic, and often ridiculous, the Vorio-Epirote doctrine would have represented the most pernicious attack ever made against the very existence of Albania as a nation, and of Alba-

nians as an ethnic community. Its major threat, however, is now directly related to its emotive impact on an already sensitive Greek public opinion, inside and outside Greece. It can and will gain credibility from the highly preoccupying political instability of Albania. On the other hand, it has profited, and will profit in the future, from a higher international awareness concerning minorities' rights. It might as well be gaining further ground thanks to repeated provocative attempts, inside Albania, of transposing political controversies into geographic ones, and of associating southern Albania with communism, totalitarianism, and anti-democratic subversion.

Since its creation, the doctrine has always functioned as a historical and linguistic makeup for the true anachronistic face of Greek ultra-nationalist fanaticism, and their diehard expansionist dreams. By making use of often-distorted and even deliberately falsified historical, archaeological and linguistic evidence; by employing the obsolete argumentative technique of infinite inclusion, implication and assumption; by the systematic confusion between geography and history; by the methodical mystification of reality and the paranoid refusal to recognize truth; by the manicheistic interpretation of history and foreign relations; by extensively relying on the notorious Greek egocentrism, the Vorio-Epirote doctrinaires have succeeded in including even their own theory in the global myth of Greek racial supremacy in the Balkans.

The fact is that they have taken the old and often folkloristic distinction between Greeks and "barbarians" and have overburdened it with racial connotations, though, from a strictly physical anthropologic point of view it is difficult to find a more mixed people than modern Greeks, who - simply because of the geographic exposure - include, in their genetic pool, Slavic, Albanian, Turk, Aromanian, Arab and Gypsy elements.

Their insisting on the necessity of opening Greek schools and of providing adequate education for the Greek minority in southern Albania can be explained with the special role attributed to Greek language inside the Greek global myth. Greek language, to them, is the sacred weapon by which old Greek supremacy and glory will return to the modern "barbarous" Toskëria. This language, especially in its written form, will work like a set of cabalistic formulas capable of awakening the Greek soul still dormant in every "Vorio-Epirote". And since they strongly believe that all these "Albanian speaking Greeks" (this absurd expression is theirs) lost their language because of his-

torical vicissitudes, the proposed schools will be meant to operate like Greek rehabilitation centres, in a to-be-recovered territory. Incidentally, it is even more disturbing the fact that similar attempts are reportedly being made also by some offshoots of Orthodox Church in Albania, with the silent approval of Bishop Janulatos, and in clear contravention with the rules and by-laws of the Albanian Orthodox Church.

There is more: the Greek Orthodox church, which has always thought of itself as a body in which the sublunary sacrality of Greek language joins the divine sacrality of pure Christian religion, and which has always tried to bring the gift of the Word – literally and metaphorically – to the “barbarians” next door. The true Greek Orthodoxy needs the magic of the letter shapes of the Greek script to come alive, for it lives through the written word, in the written word, and with the written word. Therefore it is not fortuitous that the Vorio-Epirote doctrine has been welcome within the ranks of the Greek Orthodox church, which traditionally professes Orthodoxy not only in religious matters, but in written language matters as well. It is a strange myth, that equally, and ambiguously, adopts ethnic intolerance and love for the next, nationalism and Christianity, proselytism and genocide. Its superb historicism let it absorb everything that has taken place in the past, due to the assumption that – so far as the Balkans are concerned – only the elected people, i.e., the Hellenes, have been capable of transforming incidental events into History. There is, objectively, no direct link between problems related to Greek minority in Albania, and the Vorio-Epirote myth. The former are real problems, whose solution might be delayed if the myth gains terrain among Greek minority representatives and associations. The latter is a collection of dreams, fantasies, and deliberate lies, by people willing to use the Greek minority in Albania as a basis for the cancellation of southern Albania from the map. Of course, in so far as the economical gap between Albania and Greece will persist, the Greek minority will always be the focus of irrational disruptive forces, tendencies and impulses (Vehbiu 2008).

EPILOGUE

WITH THEMISTOKLIS ON HOME GROUND

It is the afternoon, Holy Monday 2006. We start from Jannina with Themistoklis and his brother in-law Vassili for our final destination, Delvinë. We follow the route via Filiata-Sagiada, with the aim of entering Albania from the new customs in Mavromati. Themistoklis comes from Delvinë and Gjirokastër. He escaped from Albania in 1945, at the age of 16. We have already met and he has told me the story of his life. We have agreed to embark on this journey together so that he shows me his home and tell me more there. On our way, close to Zitsa, we took along a monk from Mount Athos as well, who was going to his village in the area of Filiata. We got on talking with him. Among the various things he told us, he did not neglect to express an unbelievable racism against Albanians. Themistoklis tried to interrupt him and tell him he feels offended, but in vain. He continued the monologue and to a remark of mine about the human rights of the Albanians he answered characteristically: "The Albanians have all the human rights except one: to become Greeks"!

We continue our conversation with Themistoklis, having one more cause for discussion: what the monk has told us. Themistoklis has a clear view about his identity. He comes from a family of Greek cultural identity and consciousness but defines himself as “Arvanite”. These are the Albanian Orthodox of the Albanian South, who have formed a Greek identity and consciousness within a particular space and time framework, an issue to which I have already referred.

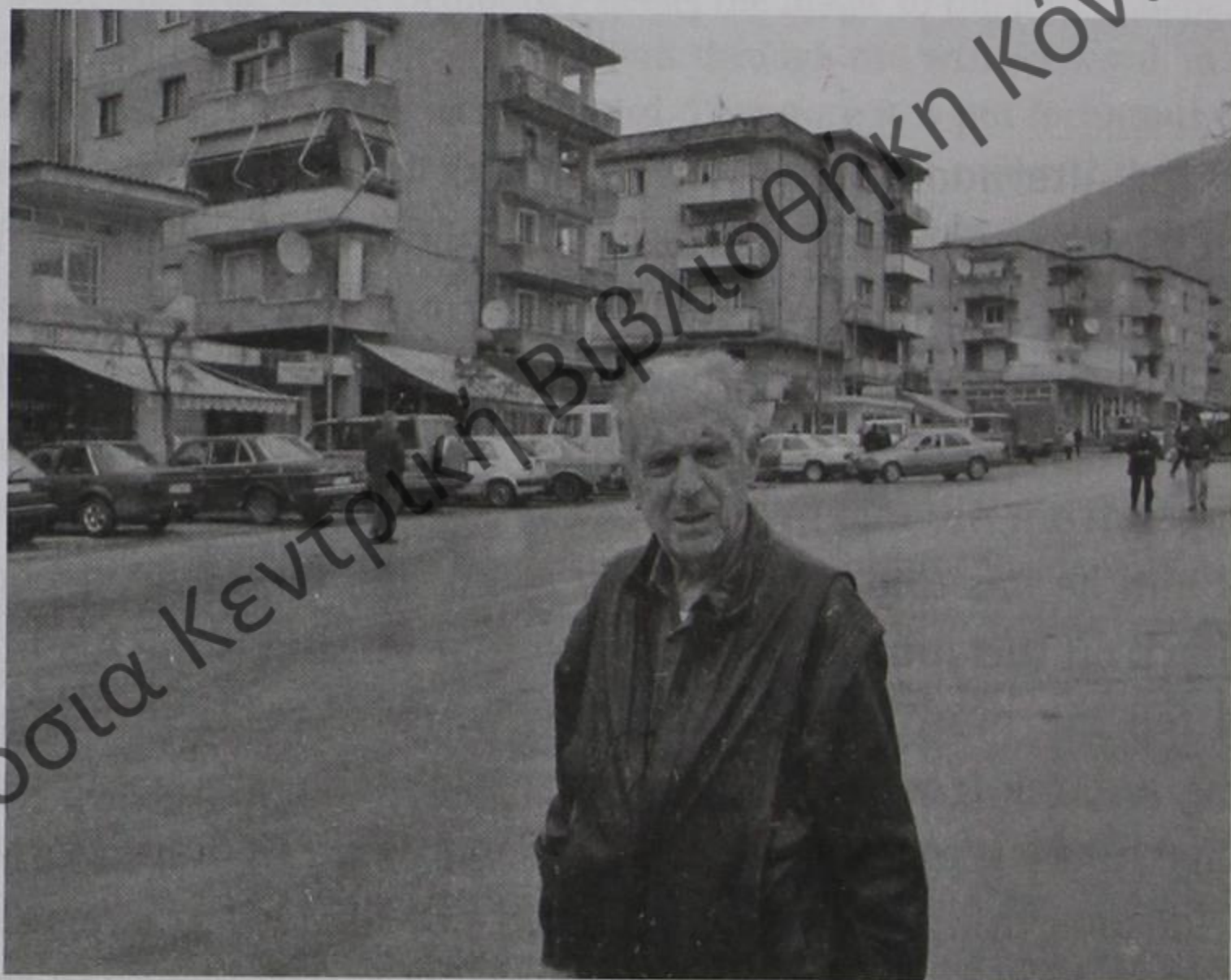


Figure 56. Themistoklis in Delvinë

We arrive at the customs in Mavromati. Themistoklis moves with great ease, revealing his acquaintance with the procedures of border crossing, but also his feeling of intimacy as he approaches home ground. He gets on talking with various Albani-

ans in Albanian and is in a particularly good mood. He shows a woman his identity card, where the phrase "Albanian citizen" is displayed. The woman tells him: "What difference does it make? You can move in and out, so it's the same ...". After a while a gentleman approaches him and tells him they have the same surname. They come from the same family. He is an Albanian immigrant who is going home for Easter. Themistoklis does not simply acknowledge the relation; he identifies the particular family branch. He does not hesitate to tell anyone who asks him that he is an "Arvanite" and that he had "escaped" to Greece. - Most remark that he did well, because he got free of the Hoxha and lived like a human being.



Figure 57. Delninë: Partial view

We enter Albania. We cross a geographical zone inhabited by Çams. The village Konispol is its centre. We pass by fertile fields planted with water melons. Themistoklis mentions a rich bey who used to possess this whole plane in the time before the war. We are impressed by the rebuilding activity and the signs of recovery in agricultural economy. The settlement is built on a hill, and in the north of the plane there lies a low and smooth mountain bearing the marks of stock breeding. It is known that this place consists one of the best winter pastures for the nomadic animal farmers. I've been in Konispol several times. Still, I've never dared photograph the monument they have erected in the square, commemorating what the Albanians call the "genocide" of the Çams in Greece. This is a small town, really, of 3000 people. I think that maybe the fact that it has not emptied, like so many villages close to the border, has to do with its ethnic identity. On the other hand, I am informed that many of its inhabitants move for seasonal work to the area of Sagiada on the other side of the border, and some even cross the border on a daily basis.

We move on, pass through the village Shkallë and cross the river Pavlës to Mursi and go from there to Butrint. During this route, Themistoklis recurrently expresses his disappointment on seeing Albanian flags around, because, as far as he remembers, this area used to be inhabited by Greeks in the past. In the crossing of Butrint he asks a child working there where he is from and when he answers "from Vrinë" he asks him if he speaks Greek. To the child's negative answer he reacts with a very severe "pse?" (why). The child looks at him startled and with great wonder. Themistoklis turns to me saying "these peo-

ple are all Greeks". At Butrint we visit the archaeological site. Themistoklis expresses his pride that all the monuments demonstrate the Greekness of the area.

We continue towards Sarandë, along the Butrint lake and on the coast in the area of Ksamili, where reconstruction and touristic development are really impressive. We have a conversation with Themistoklis about the populations of the area. In what regards the Christians, he refers to them all as "Greek" and then he adds "Christians, I mean". He calls the Muslims Ottomans. It is clear he has in mind the categories of the millet. It strikes me that he avoids the term "Turk" for the Muslims, which is common among the Christians of Albania. Also, I am impressed by the fact that he talks about them positively, excepting the Çams and the Labës, whom he thinks of as "bad stock". About the "Ottomans", with whom he used to live in Delvinë, he only has good things to say. They used to have perfect relationships, exchange visits, go to their weddings, funerals, etc., only they did not intermarry. To prove his words, he mentions an incident about the time when some friends, Muslims, had put them up to protect them from the Germans and when the Germans located them they told them: "You kill us first and then our guests". And this saved them. He talks about their "besa" (trustworthiness) and the moral values they had. He presents them as rich and magnanimous. He says that even though they called the Christians "giaour" (infidels), they treated them well. On the contrary, they, too, used to despise the Çams, thinking them mean and inferior.

We arrive at Sarandë. I am shocked by the rate of reconstruction. In the entrance of the city dozens of many-floored buildings are being prepared for hotels. The old small town I

had in my mind has been drastically transformed. We stay at the Porto Eda hotel on the beach. The owner worked in Greece for several years and invested his money in this hotel. He speaks very good Greek, just like his daughter who has learnt it from television. She is studying law in Tirana.

We rested for a while in the hotel and in the afternoon we decided to pay a visit to Himarë. The route is very beautiful. We go through Nivicë and other villages that remind me of the descriptions of R. Puaux. The road runs along the sea after a point. We go through various villages that are Christian, except for Borsh that is Muslim. Themistoklis wonders how the "Ottomans" came here...

We arrive at Himarë at night. We walk on the beach. Here, too, the signs of touristic development and anarchic building are powerful. In a cafe we converse with some customers. They immediately and forcefully express their Greek sentiment and talk of their dissenting behaviour against the Albanians. They show us with pride, and a conniving look as well, an advertising sign that is written in Greek. One of our interlocutors, Lefteris, tells us about how Albanians beat him up in the last elections. All speak proudly of their Greekness and their demand for human rights. They introduce us to the Mayor. He welcomes us and tells me his son is studying economics in the University of Jannina. I ask them about the villages around. They say some are Albanian-speaking but Christian and stress the latter fact especially. Our conversation moves on to their culture and quickly the issue of songs comes up. They disagree between them on whether they sing in Albanian as well. The strongest supporters of Greekness say that those who perform at festivals singing in Albanian are traitors. I am reminded of the Përmet

festival, where they sang exclusively in Albanian. They want my view on this as well. When they realise I do not side with nationalist views and that I adopt a rather mild stance, they more or less agree that they also used to sing in Albanian and that they still do. I realise that absolute and extreme views have to do with their more general dispute with the Albanian state in recent years, rather than with what they really believe.

Himarë is a holiday destination for the Albanians of the North as well as the Kosovars. However, a lot of migrants from the North live here, too; they are staying in the houses of the Himariotes who are in Greece. Their presence is evident, since they constitute the lowest social stratum. The intense reconstruction we observe in the area relies on their labour. This is a phenomenon worth investigating, given that frequently these internal migrants are employed by external immigrants who invest in the area. We end up at an eating place by the sea and on the edge of the settlement, where a hotel operates as well, above the restaurant, on the first floor. The owner tells us he built the whole building himself with the help of his son. He is a hardworking man, with whom I start a relationship of friendship. I learn a lot from Tassos. In the end, I ask him to make clear for me what Himarë is. I am impressed with how clear everything is in his mind. He tells me that only three villages, Himarë, Dhërmi and Palasë are Greek-speaking and the rest are Albanian-speaking and Christian. He explains, however, that they themselves do not discriminate against the Albanian speakers and they always intermarried and felt one with them. As an example, he mentions that one of his grandmothers was from Kudhës, an Albanian-speaking village, while his other grandmother from Himarë did not speak a word of Albanian. He

also adds that the area was bilingual to a large degree and that both groups would sing in both languages.

The repeated visits I made in the area confirmed Tassos's version. I can mention the village Vuno, where I conversed several times with the villagers. Quite a few of the young people in the village speak Greek, because they have worked in Greece. The older ones speak only Albanian. They talk proudly about their Orthodox Christian identity and their friendly feelings towards Greece; they are thankful to Greece, for both letting the young people of the village work there and for giving out to them agricultural pensions as "Hellenes". When they mention their national identity they are very careful. They never define themselves directly as Greek and use the terms "Northern Epirote" or "Orthodox" instead. The term "Northern Epirote" is particularly convenient in its ambiguity, but they prefer it because they know it means "Greek" to the Greeks. This way they both appear honest and achieve their goal without falling into the trap of denying the true national identity. This is actually the case with the majority of the Orthodox Christians of the Albanian south. They also talk proudly about how their ancestors used to travel to Greece for work in the past and about the relation of their ancestors with Greece in general. Typically, they bring up the Himariotes' participation in the 1821 revolution and the liberation of Jannina. One notices easily that it is not because of self-interest that they present themselves as friendly to Greece or leave open and hazy the question of their nationality, throwing hints about their Greekness, but rather their own historical background plays an important role regarding this matter, given that these populations had hybrid characteristics anyway and, through the influence of Greek education and the

Church in the past, they had formed a Greek national consciousness to a large degree. "We always looked to Greece" a man from Koudhës, another Albanian-speaking village, told me meaningfully in one of my visits there.

Our journey's basic destination being Delvinë, we return in the evening to Sarandë. The next day, at dawn, we start for Delvinë. We take the upper road through Bamatat. Themistoklis remembers and narrates. Bamatat was a Muslim village. On the left side of the road a small *turbë* is still standing (Beqir Efendi). According to Themistoklis there used to be a mosque on the right side of the road. Marks on the landscape indicate the important role this place used to play in the past. An old plane tree is still standing, while next to it there is a stream.

We approach Delvinë. We enter the settlement from the lower neighbourhood, where Muslims used to live. In the entrance, Themistoklis shows me the house of bey Asim Kalesa, who was killed by his own son. According to Themistoklis's story, his son had loved a girl the bey did not approve of and so he eloped with her and they went to live in Corfu. The father sent people there to kill him, but they failed. So the son took his revenge in the end, killing his father himself.

Delvinë is a place bearing profound traces of an important past. It is built between two hills and crossed by a stream. Themistoklis cannot stop pointing things out and narrating. Until we reach his home. He shows us the place with a lot of emotion, explaining that his house does not exist any more. In its place they have built a new one. On the other side of the road is his land. A whole hill. Vines, vegetable gardens, orchards. He has appointed a lawyer to claim them back. He says he has already won parts of the land back "on paper". In practice he cannot

possess them because they are occupied by Albanians. Behind the field and towards the stream he points to the position where the tannery used to be. It was destroyed by Hoxha. He tells us stories of his childhood. This is where he grew up and made sense of the world. All his dreams have this place as background. He complains that the children don't even want to know this place. Not only are they not interested, they don't even want him to say he comes from here. This is a complaint he had expressed during a meeting of ours in Jannina as well. He had said, strikingly, that he will die with this grief. His daughter's husband had mentioned the same things. In a meeting with his daughter I had the chance to talk about all this. She spoke sincerely about this problem: a problem that basically emerged in the family from the moment the border opened and various relatives came from Albania, who were obviously Albanian. The family knew that father was a "Northern Epirote" which means Greek. Their negative experience of the relatives, who visited them immediately after the opening of the border in 1991, some of whom stayed at their home for a long while, but also the more general picture of Albanians that was formed in Greece during the same period, caused the rejection of their Albanian relatives, on the one hand, and created a problem in the family regarding father's origin ... His daughter, during our discussion, mentioned another incident to show me how she experienced this awareness. She had gone to America to visit her father's brother and on the 25th of March, Greek Independence Day, she tried to prompt her cousin to go and watch the parade together. Her cousin refused saying that she is Albanian and has nothing to do with the Greek national holiday. This was a real shock to her.

Both of Themistoklis's daughters obtained the Greek nationality a few years ago, when they were going to be appointed to the civil service, while he himself never managed to acquire it, a fact that causes him great indignation. Themistoklis's position is crystal clear: he is a "Greek Arvanite". This is why he does not understand why he should deny his roots but also why the state refused him the Greek nationality...



Figure 58. Bazaar in Delvinë

In the city centre he shows us the old market. Only one old section is preserved, recalling its old glamour. Now the street market takes place here. Various producers sell their goods here today, just like they used to in the past: vegetables, fruit, dairy products, etc. The neighbourhood Lakka presents a nice

view opposite and according to Themistoklis this has not changed at all. Very close to the centre there is a low hill, where the central church of St. Athanassios used to be. Today the point is marked by an Albanian monument and next to it a sanctuary. The new church has been built a few metres away. All this time we are spending in Delvinë I observe Themistoklis's reactions carefully. He seems to be enjoying himself like a small child but he is in pain as well. Above all, he is clearly proud of his place of origin...

We depart from Delvinë for the destination of Gjirokastër, following the road that goes through Kardhikaa. It is a very interesting route through high mountains and never-ending pastures. From the top I see Nemërcka in the background. Themistoklis talks about the old *tselingata* that used to come forth in these areas in the summers. Descending, we come to Muzinë and from there we take the central road leading to Dropull and Gjirokastër.

After a visit to Bularat, where I had done some field work in the past, and our meal in one of the hotels that seem to be cropping up like mushrooms in the area, we end up seeking accommodation at a guest house in the old part of the city of Gjirokastër. This is a restored mansion whose owner is apparently a modern businessman, occupied with commerce, as well (imports from Greece). He speaks a little Greek and fluent English. He tells me I can find his guest house on the Internet. I am impressed by the room I am staying, where carved wood and folk paintings are prevalent. It is the ideal place for my midday rest...

In the afternoon, we decide to visit the area of Lunxhëria, having in mind mainly Zappa's Labovë. We take the road to Tepeleni and turn right after the Vlach village Anton Poçi, follow-

ing a road that passes from one of the many bridges of Drinos. The first village we meet in our ascent is Tërbuq. Entering the settlement we run into flocks returning from their pastures. I ask a shepherd if he is Vlach and he tells me his wife is a Vlach. Themistoklis starts chatting in Albanian. A little further up we meet a young man who tells us he is a policeman and offers to accompany us to Labovë. His name is Petros. From the start, he registers his Greekness by speaking in relatively good Greek. He says his ancestors have come from Greece, giving us the known stereotypical story I hear again and again by the Albanian Orthodox of the South. He claims that their villages are Greek and that this has to be recognised in Greece. He himself has lived for a period of time in Athens and was active there in the Association of Northern Epirotes. He thinks it unfair that they are not acknowledged as Greek in Greece, while in Tirana they call them "bloody Greek". I hassle him a bit about the matter of their identity. He insists on referring to the "Greek past" of Lintzouria. When I appeal to him to reveal what he is really hiding in his soul he answers meaningfully "no comment". When I ask him about Aleksander Meksi who comes from Labovë and became a prime minister in Albania, he simply answers he is a traitor. All in all his behaviour confirms everything I have heard about the Lintzouriotés and their relationship with Greece. I ask him about the Vlachs. He speaks the best of them. He thinks them honest and hardworking. He mentions his personal friendship with the mayor of Anton Poçi. After a lot of effort and probing on my part on the matter of Lunxheria's Greekness, he tells me with a forceful look: "My friend, this here is not Albania". I cannot believe I'm hearing these words from the mouth of an active policeman He continues, documenting his views with proverbs: "We do

our job and eat our bread. We do not eat the bread of the Turk to do our job". (Nuk ham bukën e Turkut te bëjmë punonton. Pnojme për vetet dhe bomë vetë nuk bejme duka). We stayed in Labovë for a long time, mostly in the ruined mansion of the Zappa brothers. Petros's words keep returning in my mind. His last proverb confused me somehow, so I asked him to write it down in my notebook. When I returned to Gjirokastër and showed it to a friend, he said it was not correct, and suggested his own version: "I eat Turkish bread and pray for the Christian". I try to understand ...



Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κονιτσάς

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Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

Ethnologie

Vassilis Nitsiakos; Ioannis Manos;
Georgios Agelopoulos; Aiki Angelidou;
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Ethnologia Balkanica

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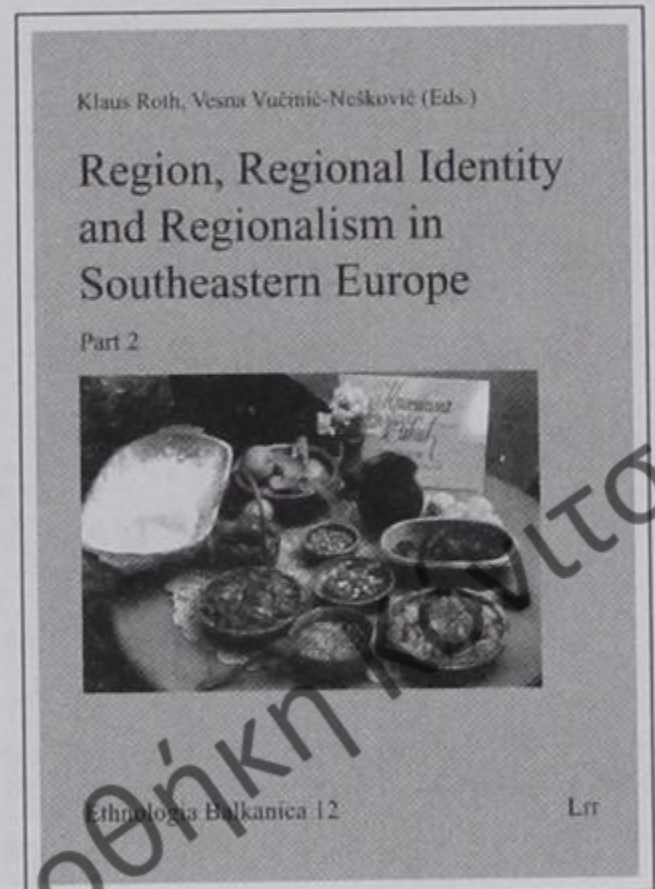
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Southeastern Europe is often portrayed as an area plagued by endemic nationalisms, a view that seems to be confirmed by the break-up of Yugoslavia. However, a closer look shows that the nation is not the only territorial unit of identification. Regions play an important role as well, especially those that look back on traditions that differ from those of the national state. Thus, the end of socialism also brought forward regional movements which articulated opposition to the dominance of the centralized state. These developments are furthered by the integration into the European Union, whose policy of a "Europe of the Regions" demands strong regional centres for the administration of structural funds and for the empowerment of the regions. The contributions to this volume address the dynamics of regions, regionalism and regional identities in

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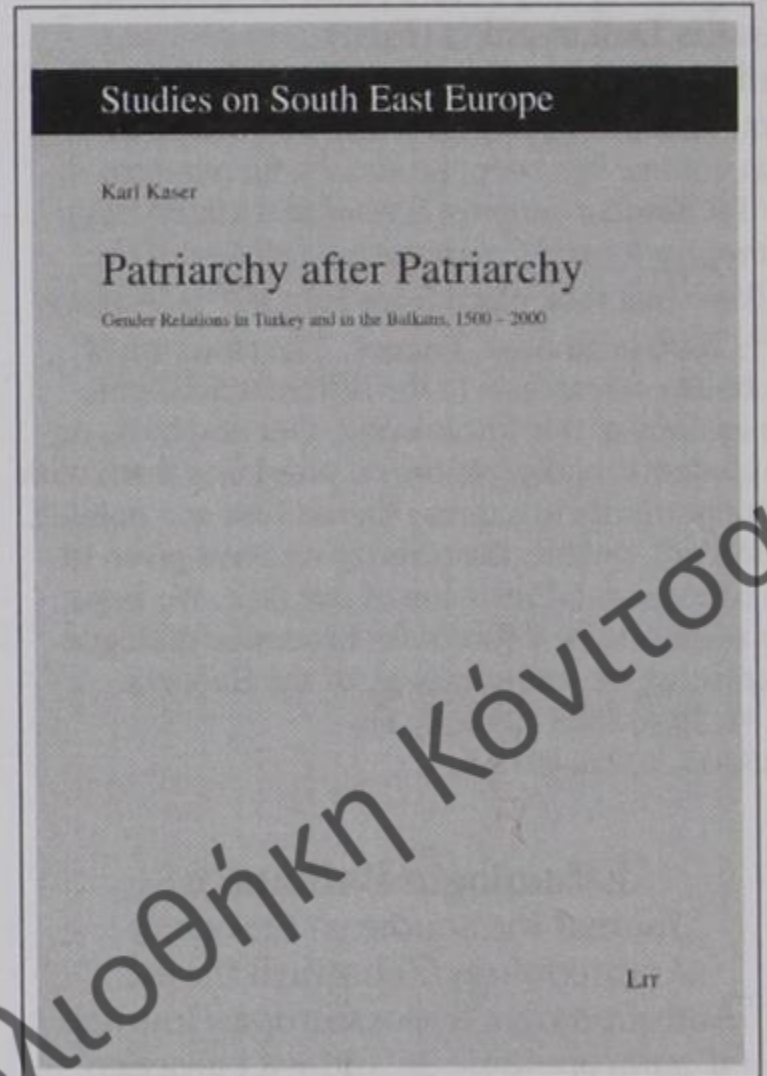
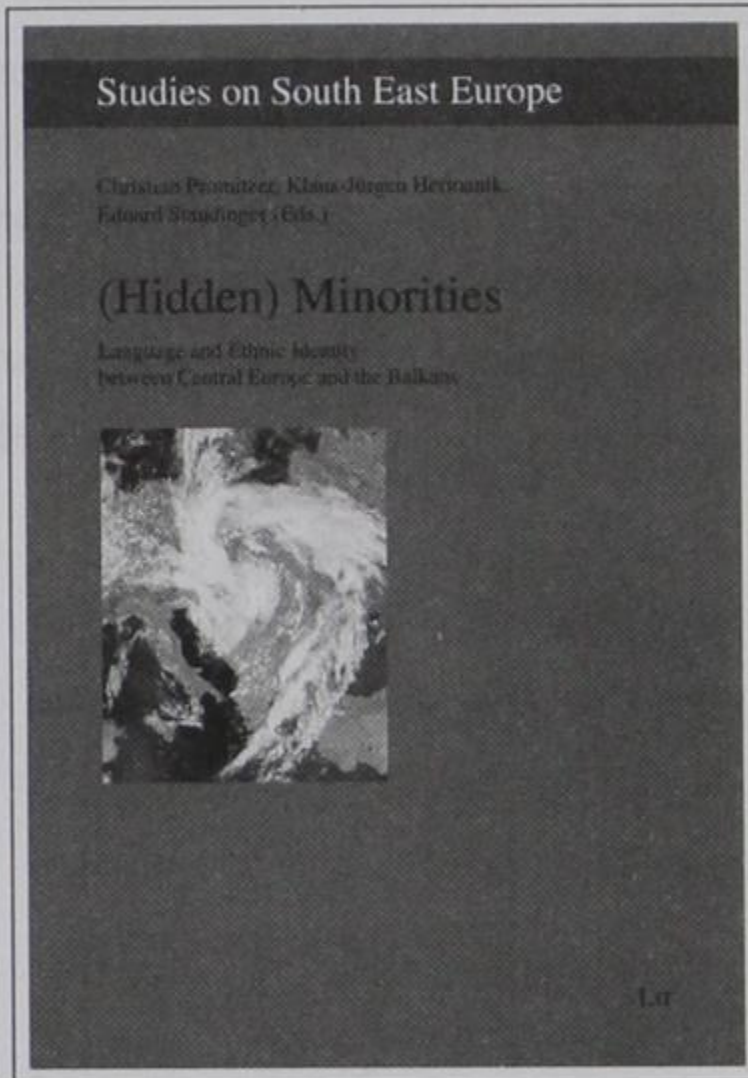
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Δημόσια Κεντρική Βιβλιοθήκη Κόνιτσας

The flow of emigrants from Albania to Greece, being one-sided, indicates a relation of inequality between the two countries. Indeed, the violence with which the collapse of the regime is effected and the subsequent opening of the border and the, as a rule, undocumented way of entering Greece, makes this relation even more asymmetrical and places the moving ones in a much more powerless position, as they live and work illegally: their "outlaw" status deprives them of all rights. Legalisation improves their position but does not cancel the structural inequality that characterises the phenomenon of immigration any way, as well as the quality of the immigrant. In any case, the effort of the immigrants to present aspects of identity that would facilitate their position and residence (proofs of Greek roots or Christian faith, changes of names, etc.) demonstrates, precisely, how they experience this unequal relationship, which is further aggravated by factors pertaining to their otherness.

Vassilis Nitsiakos holds a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge (England) and is Professor at the University of Ioannina (Greece)

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