

CHAPTER 5

Transhumance in Kelmend, Northern Albania

Traditions, Contemporary Challenges, and Sustainable Development

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Brief Historical and Geographical Focus

Certified since remote times, transhumance has never ceased to exist in Kelmend. What will become of it in the future depends on each one of us. This book reminds us that “pastoralism is one of the most widespread and ancient forms of human subsistence” as Letizia Bindi writes in the introduction, so it is also the case in Albania. In order to have a better understanding of the situation I would like to focus briefly on the geography and history of Albania. Albania consists of around 80 percent of mountains, with a short littoral plain along the Adriatic Sea, north of the town of Vlorë and south of the Ionian Sea. These two seas are recognized as being the oriental part of the Mediterranean Sea. Pastoralism in Albania belongs to this space of traditional Mediterranean pastoral culture. Archaeologists are assessing that transhumant pastoralism has been present in Northern Albania since extremely ancient times, dating its origins at the very beginning of the Neolithic period, and nomadic pastoralism since the Palaeolithic period. All over Albania, shepherds have determined most of the social and cultural values which characterize Albanian traditional culture (Tirta 2016; Palaj 2018). But I must underline that pastoralism in Northern and Southern Albania is very different and cannot be compared.

Kelmend, situated in the extreme north of Albania, south of the Montenegro border and northwest of Kosovo, has been historically the cradle of transhumant pastoralism, and the shepherds in Kelmend, up to this day,

are the most respected persons in the local communities. Kelmend belongs to the municipality of Malësi e Madhe and the Shkodër region. But Kelmend is also part of the Albanian Alps. Up to the end of the Communist period, transhumant pastoralism existed all over the Albanian Alps. Since the 1990s, transhumant pastoralism has fallen dramatically. Nevertheless, it is still surviving in some zones from the Shkodër and Tropoje regions. Kelmend is one of them.

Kelmend contains four valleys. The alpine plains cover 40 percent of the territory, which is where spring and autumn transhumance occurs. Most of the pastures are over two thousand meters high (Progni 2000). Actual transhumance occurs from the littoral plain to the mountains, as well as from these alpine plains towards the high pastures where there exists very high biodiversity, with endemic flora and fauna and a wide variety of vegetation and medicinal plants. These landscapes have been shaped since very ancient times by transhumant pastoral farming. It is in these harsh natural conditions that a unique way of life within extensive transhumant pastoral activities has been constructed, in conjunction with self-sustaining family agriculture, incorporated within the demographic and historical aspects of traditional culture. Although no support has been given up to now by the government, every year, this area welcomes many transhumant shepherds, coming from the plain (in Lezhe, Milot, this year, I even met one shepherd coming from Durres). Most of these shepherds are of Kelmend origin, and for them, it is extremely important to come to their homeland pasturage. They are added to the herds of local breeders present in Kelmend throughout the year. In Kelmend, transhumant pastoralism is really a co-construction, a story of men and women in union with their animals and the surrounding nature. It belongs to the identity of the region and this fact is crucial to them. This book is about remembering how traditional pastoralism is reconsidered in terms of sustainability, human health/animal welfare, and environmental impact.

Regarding the Albanian Alps, and especially the zone of Kelmend, I like to name them the Illyrian Alps because especially in Kelmend there are ancient Indigenous Albanian populations who have refused all forms of assimilation from successive invaders, and who have tried to preserve and transmit all their autochthonic traditions and customs in these remote and isolated valleys (Rama 2020). The Albanian ethnologist Mark Tirta recognizes some of these traditions as having their origin in Illyrian time (Tirta 2016; Durham [1909] 2013). This culture cannot be understood outside the context of transhumant agropastoral dynamics. Let us look at some historical considerations. The territory of the Albanian state today is very reduced in comparison with historical Albanian territories. When Albanian independence was proclaimed after five hundred years of Otto-

man occupation, Albania lost two thirds of its territories, due to the western geopolitical diplomatic games. Furthermore, historical Kelmend does not correspond to the present region of Kelmend in Albania. A part of the historical Kelmend is now in Montenegro and Kosova (Neziri 2012–13). Over time, the territory of Kelmend narrowed more and more, which is problematic for the pastoral community, as the habitants were cut off from their pastures, water, and herbal sources for the animals, from their transhumance paths and spiritual spaces. In ancient times, their transhumant moving existed over vast spaces up to Bosnia and Croatia in the north and to Bulgaria in the east (Durham 1928).

Throughout history, due to wars and political changes, these transhumance territories have moved and been reduced in size. Unfortunately, till now, shepherds from Kelmend are not allowed to cross the borders towards Montenegro and Kosovo with their herds.

In ancient times, every family in Kelmend was involved in transhumant pastoralism. In Communist times, despite collectivization by the state, transhumance was still very developed. The families secretly transmitted their traditional way of transhumant pastoralism.

Starting in the 1990s, the families tried to take back their traditional way for transhumant pastoralism. They were not encouraged at all by the government who up to that point recognized only intensive farming. The dramatic events of 1997 (collapse of pyramid schemes and widespread corruption, causing big anarchy and rebellion throughout the country) induced a break in this process, and each year the number of transhumant herders was diminished. Exact statistics are unknown; I have heard so many different numbers, depending on who is talking. I have now been in Kelmend for four years. Four years ago, there were still six to eight thousand sheep undertaking transhumance in summer. I cannot say any numbers for the goats. In 2019, only 2,400 goats and 4,700 sheep were registered. In 2018 I evaluated 145 families moving for transhumance to the high pastures. In 2019, they were less than 100 families. The main reason that many did not go this year was climatic difficulties, as explained to me by the shepherds.

From the Dictatorial Times up to the Modern Period

Let us mention the fifty years of totalitarian dictatorship when Albania was totally isolated, living in total autarchy. All those who resisted the dictator, refusing to accept his ideology, were severely oppressed. This was the case for most families in Kelmend. Today, it is terrible to see how in each Kelmend family, some members were killed or tortured in con-

centration camps and prisons. Many children were born and/or grew up in concentration camps. Collectivization of the lands, animals, and persons under state control must also be mentioned as a traumatizing experience for the population. The entire economy was centralized by the dictatorship. (Bardhoshi 2018). The traditional structure of the villages was destroyed, and the transhumance was reduced and organized by the cooperative and state farms. This resulted in loss of knowledge about the practice and paths of transhumance, and the breakdown of relationships between pastoral families in the valley asking for transhumance care and the shepherds living in Kelmend. There were tremendous long-term negative consequences to the multimillennial pastoral ecoculture within Kelmend. Before the Communist period, each family was involved in pastoral activities (Durham [1909] 2013, 1928). Still now the children are having a special moment of family education living in summer with all the family on the high pastures, helping regardless of their age possibilities on pastoral activities.

During Communist times, pastoral traditions specific to the region were undermined. However, although pastoral traditions were reduced, they have never ceased to exist (Bardhoshi 2018). Communism failed with Perestroika beginning in the 90s. Since then, traditional pastoralism has been renewed, with no support from the central or local government, the shepherds working only with the sweat of their brow. Taking back this lost and forbidden tradition became an essential priority for the inhabitants of Kelmend. The same occurs in Romania but nonetheless the maintenance of transhumant practice is considered a way of conserving typical landscape reflecting embedded memories (Chapter 9).

Pastoralism has been declining since 1997, due to the dramatic events that occurred in Albania. From 2013, due to massive emigration of the young, and the rise of mass tourism in some parts of the Albanian Alps, the decline of pastoralism has been strongly accelerated. Having no support each year it becomes more difficult for these transhumant shepherds to go on with the practice of transhumance.

But no one in Kelmend can imagine transhumance ceasing altogether. For the inhabitants of Kelmend, as well as some other parts of the Albanian Alps, transhumance must endure. Albania is now a candidate, together with France and Spain, in asking this nonmaterial cultural heritage to be protected by UNESCO. Therefore, we are working on heritagization of the transhumance process. This is giving a new hope and dynamic to the shepherds presently organizing themselves within networks of transhumant shepherds. They are taking a renewed awareness of their traditional pastoral culture, understanding that they are not alone, and that this culture is shared all over the world.

Transhumance Pastoralism, Still a Living Culture in the Twenty-First Century

In the Gheg language we say, *dale në bjeshkës*, going to the High pastures; *Merr rrugen për bjeshkë*, taking the road towards high pastures; and *jem tu bjeshkua*, I am in the process of grazing. These expressions say a lot about the importance of the transhumance phenomenon and the synergy involved. Transhumance in Kelmend concerns mainly sheep but also goats, led by shepherds from one “humus” to another, or from the plain to the mountain in tune with the rhythm of the seasons, in the organization of a pendulum movement of herds. They are accompanied by horses and mules, transporting human beings and goods, as well as dogs leading and protecting the herds. During the transhumance period, shepherds also collect wild berries and medicinal plants. This results in close complementarity and circulation between the plain and the mountains. Many cultural exchanges flow from this phenomenon. The mountain is a fabulous reservoir of grass, cool even in the heart of summer. By the end of May, beginning of June, the shepherds with their families and animals, leave the grasslands of the plains and the littoral, to find rich grass in the mountains and pure air (*ajër i pastër*). The shepherds tell me, “The health of the animal is asking us to take them to the high pastures, because the pastures clear up all the diseases.”

Although nowadays in a very precarious balance, this practice still exists, distinguishing the big transhumance in summer and smaller flows of transhumance on the mountain plains (*vrri*), according to the different seasons (*bjeshkimit pranverore and vjeshtore*). The annual cycle of moving herds up to the mountain areas and then down to the lower plains has become a significant ritual, with celebrations which bring together the whole community. Its history and function shed light on the symbolic relationships that have for so long linked humans and animals to their natural environment, showing how transhumance is still persisting and resisting as an efficient form of farming deeply influencing landscapes (Brisebarre 2007). The Albanian shepherds believe that the maintenance of cultural landscapes and natural (ecological) balance is dependent on them. But also, a whole way of thinking, being, and acting (beliefs and representations) have determined social and cultural life in Kelmend throughout history, perfectly in line with what Tim Ingold outlines in the Foreword, about transdisciplinary cooperation and communication among humans, environmental and animal health, and recognizing this cultural practice as an important form of diversity thriving on the biodiversity of the environment in which it operates.

The practice of transhumance requires a great capacity for adaptation. It enables the development of an agriculture of self-sufficiency combined with breeding of the herds that are complementary to each other. It is a link between the coast and the mountains. It is based on the search for the most nourishing grass, according to the meteorological conditions and the altitude, and on the appropriation of the mountains by man. It is the challenge of a whole system of economic and social relations structuring a vast space, concerning everyone. And from there are delineated all the paths dedicated to transhumance which are called *stigjet* in Gheg vernacular language and *drailles* in French. *Lieux de passage* (trails) are places of meeting, communication, sharing, and exchanging since time immemorial; they are paths that warrant a sociocultural context. Transhumant pastoralism is deeply rooted in the identity of Kelmend. It is also combined with life organization since very ancient times around the multiple sources of water, rivers, and some resting places, which are considered sacred from generation to generation.

Pastoral Knowledge, a Living Intangible Nonmaterial Heritage

The essence of pastoralism is the knowledge of cooperation with heterogeneous ecosystems and a variable climate, in order to feed animals who have themselves learned the mountain regions. This results from a shared reciprocal, balanced listening and understanding (knowledge) between the shepherd and his animals, being one with them, as well as between themselves and their environment. It implies a deep affective relationship where human and animal well-being depends on each other. The shepherd has not only an intimate knowledge of the animals but also a deep complicity (closeness). The shepherds find themselves in a reciprocal listening, where human and animal well-being is closely linked. The animal is a fully-fledged partner of the shepherd in his way of life and production. It is in this relationship to the animal and also to the environment that the shepherd finds balance. He uses his empirical knowledge of the animal's ability to adapt to the environment, and thus they have the ability to move together whenever necessary. Pastoral knowledge includes not only herd composition and management but also specific practices related to animal care, mobility of animals and families, transhumance practices of herds, appropriate search for pastures and forage resources. The shepherd must know how to take care of a herd and lead them, to understand their behaviors, allow them to feed themselves, driving the herd where the best food

is located. He must know the mountain and be able to adapt to it. Pastoral management relies on the knowledge of the shepherds who have a fine understanding of the behavior of their animals, the daily and seasonal rhythms as well as spatial organization of relief and vegetation. He has knowledge of both wild and cultivated plants. By his fine and precise observation, he knows the role these plants play in the nutritional status and health of the animals. He takes into account the diversity of plant species and the resilience of natural environments, or more specifically ecosystems, the resilience of natural habitats, and the irreversibility of certain processes of grassland degradation. Each aspect of his knowledge leads to ways of valuing the heterogeneity of environments, especially through herd mobility, and the nature of the production methods. The shepherds with their herds have maintained and restored these landscapes by ensuring a balanced use of meadows and pastures. The heterogeneity of the environment is valued by the herd's mobility which facilitates a mosaic of diversified vegetation (ecosystems and natural habitats) around which is articulated "a cultural corpus of typical landscapes." The shepherd is looking to identify and preserve them. From these pastoral issues come many skills such as assessing the quality of the meat and dairy products and traditional pharmacopeia, and making traditional local crafts which the shepherds defend fanatically. The shepherds strongly affirm this when they tell me, "all this intangible natural and cultural heritage has to be protected and transmitted." This is the core of their motivation to continue in spite of all the difficulties and adversity encountered day after day.

Living among the shepherds in Kelmend, I can describe them as a community with real social capital, making solidarity work in face of the dangers which happen on a wild mountain that becomes hostile in bad weather. The shepherds have a respectful relationship to their animals, the vegetal world, their whole environment, as well as a sensibility which comprises the mental and spiritual universe of the shepherd. Pastoralism is a co-built harmony between the shepherd and his family, his dog and his horse, his herd and the environment. It is this rich relationship between human beings, animals, and nature which is at the heart of the agropastoral system, with all its behaviors, passions, responsibilities, interdependencies, and freedoms. Another very important thing for shepherds is the genetic selection of animals, which they utilize to reinforce the hardiness of the animals in order to produce breeds which are productive but also suitable for their territory, a selection based on the shepherd's knowledge, his way of life and beliefs. All these aspects color this pastoral society as a unique world. As an anthropologist this fascinated me, I wanted to understand it in a better way. These inhabitants have the resilience to face

the worst difficulties alone, without any support from anyone, tenacity to go on, and the heart to continue to transmit their heritage; this is what convinced me that this way of life has to be protected.

The Maintenance of a Balanced Natural Landscapes Depends on This Dynamic of Transhumance Life

Pastoralism determines the life of the landscape. By driving the animals from the plain to the mountain and from the mountain to the plain, cultural landscapes have been slowly shaped. The landscapes in Kelmend are the work of shepherds and their herds throughout history, resulting from the interaction between man and nature, testifying to the appropriation of nature, adaptation, and modification. Whether it is along streams, forests, or pastures, these landscapes are spectacular, containing a rich and rare biodiversity. There is truly environmental resilience that is entirely dependent on pastoral management and that seems to me a rare and significant model of harmony between man and nature. These cultural landscapes are composed of a succession of strata throughout history, the origin of which dates back in Kelmend to the Palaeolithic period, a strong ancient culture rooted in a nomadic way of life. The oral literature, especially the shepherd songs, testify the survival of the original Illyrian culture (ancestor of the Albanians). Deeply attached to their territory, this environment is of great importance for the inhabitants of Kelmend. They consider their territory as Mother Earth, venerating her and dedicating their deep homage to her at every moment and through each of their actions. It is in this context also that their relationship and deep respect to the animals, whether they be their herds or the wild animals living there, should be understood. This appropriation and the maintenance of these natural landscapes in balance are not limited to their material aspects, they include both cultural and spiritual aspects which must not be forgotten when working on heritagization of the transhumance process.

Pastoralism Is Cultural Heritage

These cultural landscapes have not only an economic significance but also an ecological, cultural, and spiritual significance. These material and intangible heritage elements are keys for reading a land occupation, contributing to a better understanding of the lifestyle and practices of the territory. These cultural landscapes participate in the foundations of the territory's own cultural identity. These cultural landscapes are the place

where all traditional knowledge is developed and maintained, which includes, beyond the custody of the herds and the care of them, many other areas, such as excellent knowledge of the environment, plants, and wildlife, traditional medicine, and traditional use of many materials.

The ecological functions of these cultural landscapes play a fundamental role in maintaining the general stability of the human environment, and they also have a cultural function. The natural environment determines the self-expression of human beings, that is, culture. Their traces have to be evaluated and listed. They are “living cultural landscapes,” which includes the artistic productions that express it and the ethical and spiritual values that are bearing it. These cultural landscapes of great diversity and richness are dynamic and connected to customary law code encompassing a resilient livelihood, as Ingold has highlighted in his Foreword. Kelmend inhabitants state that, “Our culture is to live together with the animals.” Many of their practices belong to what I call “a whole pastoral cosmogony,” which includes the bells and other decorations placed on the animals and the hairstyles on the animals’ heads or tails. By these adornments, the animal is identified with its environment and its social group. These accessories are specific aesthetic markings through which the pastoral knowledge and beliefs of the shepherds are valorized. All these elements symbolize very specific cultural and religious practices which are in a strong syncretism with all the natural environment. There is also music and dance that illustrate great richness of expression and originality. It is the shepherds who are the creators, it is their voice that resonates from the mountains. Also of significance are the epic songs of the *Lahuta*, *kengë I kresnikëve*, which originated in the Homeric era, and the shepherd’s flute *fyjelli* and his lyrical songs; these songs describe the various heroes throughout history, and the *kengë krahu* is the song or call conveying information from one valley to the other, such announcements as births or deaths. These songs reflect the souls of these inhabitants and represent the memory of these mountaineers. They are a veritable encyclopedia that is transmitted from generation to generation since ancient times. They connect the social community to its lineage and its affiliations. They have a magical-spiritual component and accompany all the rituals and celebrations in a richly institutionalized, socializing enchantment. They facilitate through these moments of sharing, in moments of imbalance, the creation of a new balance, the restoration of communication and a circulation of life. They can become moments of regeneration and healing. And therefore, it is important to underline all these moments of feast where the social community meets together, experiencing restorative moments of joy and solidarity, encouraging them to go on living in these arid and wild environments. All that belongs to cultural heritage in links with transhumance.

These Cultural Landscapes Determine a Whole Social Organization

There is a clan organization in Kelmend. The population is exogamous, but the marriage alliances are determined by the pooling of pastures and by the work required by the pastoral culture, deeply linked to local and traditional social structures, kinship relations, and symbolic representations and settlements. These mountaineers have many children. Although their number are getting lower now, it is not rare to find a family with seven to ten children. They represent a work force that makes the pastoral culture possible. There is a knowledge that is transmitted within the family, from the elders to the youth, generation to generation since ancient times. For this pastoral community, they are links to the ancestors, therefore this transmission cannot be broken at any price. This link is sacred. The transmission of pastoral knowledge is carried out within the family, as within village communities and pastures. The art of conducting a transhumant herd is conveyed by gesture and experience. The tasks are clearly delineated between men, women, and children. The whole family takes part in transhumance, and we could say in some way, are therefore some kind of shepherds. The different events of the cycle of life, and the customs that animate them, profoundly influence the pastoral culture. Their social community includes, beyond the family and the village, the animals, and the natural and spiritual environment.

The landscapes and the life lived there have also determined, over time, a set of customary laws that are collected throughout northern Albania in different *Kanun*. In Kelmend, it is the "*Kanun* of the mountain" which predominates. These laws were determined by a council of elders (sages), according to the social reality encountered in the field. Many of them were shepherds and still now, they are the shepherds who assume a mediation role in conflicts, bringing back dialogue, peace, and harmony. This pastoralism of transhumance has determined a whole social and cultural life and many spiritual values that constitute the identity of the region. The animal is the center of everything. The way in which the shepherd apprehends the animals he is conducting in the environment, characterizes certain cultural components of agropastoralism and its strong impact on the landscapes as well as on the population. Because of his activity, the shepherd is confronted with the natural environment he exploits, and the animals he raises. The animal, in particular, is both the purpose of these activities, the operating tool, and the management auxiliary of an environment that is to ensure sustainability, valuing in the best way its potential foraging. The paths of transhumance are real corridors and first trails, passage for the herds and the men, but also for the animal and plant spe-

cies associated with them. They are fundamental cultural and ecological exchange tools. They have been known for centuries and are the origin of cultural practices conveyed by transhumant shepherds. All this needs to be protected. The shepherds in Kelmend walk now where their ancestors have always been walking. Many generations have drunk at the same sacred water sources and have rested at the foot of the same trees which, too, are imbued with holiness. Pastoral culture generates many customs and traditions, including *mirëpritja*, the famous Albanian hospitality; *la parole donnée*, word of honor; and *Besa*, the pledge of honor. These societal values have been determined by transhumant shepherds and can only be understood through the eyes of this multimillennial pastoral culture (Palaj 2018).

Subsistence of Transhumant Breeding in the Twenty-First Century

Transhumant livestock has survived until the twenty-first century because the shepherds knew how to adapt to the demands of a constantly changing world (Fabre, Molénat, and Duclos 2002). But nowadays, in this postmodern period, what will become of them? The shepherds are totally left alone working and can defend themselves only by their own very hard work. Neither state nor local authorities are taking any interest in them. “They are just not considered by anyone in power,” say the shepherds. “They do not merit any interest at all,” are the words of some development NGOs spoken to me some years ago. Del’homme (2016) in his article confirms this attitude. Transhumance practices are totally denied by them and even condemned as primitive, stemming from prehistoric times. Shepherds work in such difficult conditions that few young people want to become shepherds, rejecting the harsh life of their parents. Not believing in any future within their own region, they attempt to emigrate at any price (Mema, Aliaj, and Matoshi 2019). The exodus to the plains and emigration has become massive and is a hemorrhage to the pastoral organization.

Albania is in economic transition and the country is struggling to recover from the destruction of a communist dictatorship. Privatization is accomplished with great difficulty and many errors are perpetuated, which detract from good agropastoral development. There is no land tenure plan. There is a total lack of infrastructure, including school and sanitation. Life becomes increasingly impossible. After the fall of the regime, the practice of transhumance began again but with several problems: loss of knowledge of the traditional practices of transhumance, privatization of land, despoilment of the pastures and trails in order to build roads,

and illegal hydropower plants built against the will of the population, destroying the region's ecosystem, creating many difficulties for further pastoralism.

The Ministry of Agriculture has undertaken important economic reforms and promotes industrial farming with few considerations for transhumance practices. Management of traditional pastoralism is not taken in account. This seriously threatens the cultural landscapes that have been valiantly shaped for millennia. The shepherds are deeply worried about all these issues (Nori 2016). Modernity suddenly erupted when communism fell in Albania; the people were unable to prepare themselves, or adapt materially, psychologically, socially or culturally to the changes. Losing their identity, the population tries to survive as they can. The inhabitants of Kelmend state that, "We do not have the codes of operation of this modern world, we do not know how to deal with it." Albania, in this modern period, is in a very chaotic situation. We are witnessing a crumbling of the social body and a collapse of traditional village structures. The inhabitants, finding it difficult to cope with galloping globalization, are caught between two extreme ways of life in a context which is imposed on them, and which they cannot yet master, feeling torn apart between the forces of tradition and modernity. This results in ambivalence and fear, operating in crisis mode and feeling a drift between the two. These Albanian shepherds no longer possess the keys of interpretation from their ancestors and feel incapable of reproducing the social structures inherited from the past. Nor can they cope with this present society and do not recognize themselves in globalization. They feel locked up in an insecure modernity and seek in the mythical figure of the shepherd and his flock a source of identity, a re-anchoring to a regained identity that can be shared.

The Kelmend region is also presently facing a lot of ecological problems. One of them is its rivers. Cemi is the main one, and half of it is in Montenegro. Kelmend was to become a national park, but the lobbying for hydropower construction was stronger and this project has been silenced by the Albanian government. The historical part of Kelmend around the Cemi river is in Montenegro and is a UNESCO-protected national park, but in the Albanian part, non-scrupulous, illegal initiatives of hydropower construction are destroying the environment and the culture. The Kelmend inhabitants have saved this ecoculture with their blood through centuries. They are convinced of the urgent necessity that their region becomes, as promised, a national park and that they work for heritagization of the transhumance culture in their own region within UNESCO. Such a fact constitutes a deep wound for these inhabitants who find themselves very worried about the future of their region. Therefore, working on heritagization of transhumance is of the highest importance.

A Spiritual Foundation of the Local Population from which a Sustainable Development of Transhumant Pastoralism Can Arise

Nevertheless, transhumance is still alive in Kelmend. The inhabitants are firmly convinced that transhumance needs to endure. This is their force of life, which may enhance further sustainable development. They are conscious that without shepherds, Kelmend, with all the culture that animates it, will not survive. The government is holding a politic of massive tourism within the Albanian Alps, but the shepherd community is mainly against the development of such tourism. Tourism expansion is not their priority. In spite of the fact that these projects are rejected by the whole Albanian pastoral community, some of the shepherds' families began to propose to welcome some tourists within their families in their high pastures, giving them the opportunity to share for a moment their own life, enjoying a strong contact with the animals and surrounding nature.

Furthermore, the transhumance dynamic is very important to the pastoral community. The shepherds are mythical figures within the entire society and are seen to bring social stability and peace. They will always have the support of the inhabitants of the region. These traditional populations gather around a real ecoculture, their beliefs and customs are aligned to this. They are conditioned by this traditional pastoral life towards a deep listening to and respect for their environment. (Descola 2005, 2018). This harmonious relationship with nature and cosmogony gives rise to archetypes that are found within all spheres of society and radiates a whole culture of peace. Living with them for more than four years, I must admit that it was often in close contact with the shepherds and their flocks that the population found calm, stability, and regained peace which animated them through conflicts. They found among them the strength to continue to be resilient in spite of all the difficulties.

The Shepherd, Emblematic Figure, Guardian of Tradition, and a Culture of Peace

The inhabitants of Kelmend are characterized by their inner nobility, their values, their bravery, and their courage. These mountaineers have a particular relationship to the cosmogony. Their Christian faith is part of a great syncretism of animist *beliefs*, and the oral traditions they maintain bear traces of a rich mythology that dates back to ancient times but which is still alive. All this results in many ritual celebrations. These traditional populations carry a real "Ecoculture" and defend many values and cus-

toms dating back to ancient times. Their link to nature and to cosmogony is expressed in all spheres of life. It expresses itself also in oral traditions that accompany their children's development through the whole life cycle. This link regulates the inscription of everyone as a social and cultural being within the community to which they belong. The inhabitants still seek, despite a threatened ecosystem, to live in interaction and harmony, and this is where the shepherd carrying this multimillennial culture plays a major role as regulator and stabilizer within the society. This is even more valid for the uprooted sections of the population living on the plains, lacking benchmarks, being hostages of a brutal burst of modernity. The inhabitants do not welcome new modes of being, thinking and acting. They are in a negotiation of their here and now, while still struggling with tradition (Breda, Derridder, and Laurent 2013).

The shepherd plays a central role within Kelmend society, alongside the priest. Everyone listens to him, respects him, and honors him. He is often a mediator in conflicts, taking a central place at the assembly of elders. This pastoral people of the mountains of northern Albania maintains a close relationship to the cosmogony, in resonance with the visible and invisible world, in an intimate relationship to the environment that surrounds them, to others and to themselves. Their sense of the sacred in all things, the spiritual values they defend, their understanding of the therapeutic, of disease and healing, imbue them with many capacities of resilience, despite the worst difficulties (Brisebarre, Lebaudy, Gonzalez 2018). It is because they are aware of their identity, and of what animates and inhabits them, that they have been able to go on living, mobilizing all their creativity in face of adversity. It is in their attachment to tradition, to the long lineage of ancestors and to Mother Earth, in close relationship with the whole cosmogony, that these populations have found the strength to be able to resist and innovate in a better way.

The Shepherd, a Mythical Figure That Embodies Tradition and Stability

The inhabitants explain to me that the shepherd "is like the rock of the mountain." He has a very special importance within the society. As he has met many people, walked many paths, he has many things to tell. Living in nature that he knows perfectly and being keeper of the herds, he is the guarantor of balance and a peacemaker. He maintains a quasi-mystical relationship with his flock and the nature that surrounds him. This also includes the other beings living there. He thus has a very special function, being both a priest and a popular healer, allowing the creation of "new

social landscapes,” bringing together young and old, transmitting the traditional knowledge necessary to survive in the mountains. It is around the shepherd that the inhabitants, in this world full of social and cultural change, in deregulation and reconfiguration, try in community to recreate spaces of sociality. They try to reorganize, regain coherence, and rebuild a self-identity, a living together and, while facing adversity, to seek together how to navigate this passage. It is around the shepherd who has always been able to demonstrate adaptation and invention that the population seeks to make their way in the face of the chaotic situation caused by the abrupt eruption of modernity (Charbonnier and Romagny 2012). The shepherd and his herd are playing a central role in social and cultural terms. It is through their contact and oneness with nature, that everyone can regain a sensitive world, a vibratory link with nature and life, an intelligibility of the world. (These words have been said by local habitants.) Shepherds are living witnesses of a culture of the bond, and a participatory ecology. As some inhabitants explained to me: “They [shepherds] are the guardians of a balance to maintain and share. They remind us of the necessity of the beautiful, the orderly and the harmonious. It is their human qualities that will save us, in a relationship of intimacy, respect and peace with nature, the visible and invisible world.” The shepherd is the artist around whom, in the light of contemporary issues, new contexts can be invented and recreated, which will generate tuning and cohesion and bring a renewal. This is coherent with the idea of transhumant pastoralism as a form of husbandry ecosystem services, contributing to the protection and regeneration of mountain environments and biodiversity.

What Can Be Done So That This Transhumant Pastoral Culture Survives?

Pastoralism modulates important aspects of cultural, historical, and traditional heritage, established and developed by the history of these populations, but which today are seriously threatened by the evolution of the modern globalizing world (Lacirignola 2016). Personally, I helped the shepherds from Kelmend to organize themselves as a professional group fighting as a civil society for their rights in respect of their traditional culture, and we have established links with individuals in the south of France. That was primordial for them, as they are feeling isolated and forgotten, and we are working together towards cooperative projects. Together we set up some development priorities, and I must confess that the shepherds in Kelmend are working in terrible conditions, which need to be improved. Nothing is organized and they do not have the education

to do it alone. They need expertise and training. But the shepherds are convinced that they have to work in close relationship and collaboration with all the actors sharing the same territories—e.g., ecotourism, environmental protection, etc. Also, they are aware of the creation of professional shepherd schools in France which have induced a renewal of transhumant pastoralism. Despite the fact that they attach the utmost importance to learning from generation to generation within the family, they recognize the importance of supplementing it with scientific training for their young people, which could be done in professional schools that still have to be created. The shepherds are convinced that establishing professional training with a French-Albanian diploma will encourage youth to stay in the Albanian Alps and choose to become shepherds.

Recently in Kelmend, the shepherds have created the House of Shepherds and Transhumance (*shtepia e bariut dhe bjeshkimit*) linked to La Maison de la Transhumance in Salon de Provence in the south of France. This will create opportunities for them to connect with the local, regional, and central powers in order to work in close relationship with the civil society for an evaluation of the situation. Also, the perspective to join France, Spain, and some other countries asking UNESCO protection of the transhumance as a nonmaterial cultural heritage is presently giving new perspectives and a new visibility to this phenomenon and our region. This institution not only brings together transhumant shepherds from the Albanian Alps, but it also hopes to have regional repercussions in the Balkans in the medium term. Its long-term vocation is to become an interpretation center for pastoral cultures and an observatory of transhumance throughout the region.

Kelmend, a cradle of transhumant pastoralism, is presently convinced of the urgent necessity to associate with interdisciplinary researchers who will help them by giving scientific methods for enhancing development projects. The shepherds from Kelmend therefore began to mobilize to University of Shkodër and the agriculture university in Tirana. As an anthropologist, I joined them, offering my expertise, being convinced about the necessity of multidisciplinary research. But in the future we would like these research teams to be linked with international universities with high-level scientific standards within European projects.

But let us not forget our youth. Unfortunately, school programs are not giving any room for this pastoral culture. The children of the shepherds are often discriminated against; many of them do not have real access to school. In view of the school programs which are out of step with what the children of the shepherds experience in their everyday life, new forms of formal and nonformal education remain to be found. No sustainable development can really happen without it. In the past few years, we had tried a few nonformal school initiatives during summer holidays around

nature. Now the children of the shepherds of certain pastures are beginning to get involved in writing a book on their pastoral life. The young people, who until now organized festive moments of dances and sports games between pastures, are preparing to invite the young people of the city next summer for a moment of conviviality and sharing, a pasture festival. And we all hope together that in the future they will be authorized to create cultural places seeking to bear witness to this pastoral ecoculture (for example, through a pastoral ecomuseum). Therefore, young shepherds are presently taking plenty of photos of their pastoral life.

Conclusion

I would like to say that in so many countries transhumance dynamics has ceased to exist. In some countries, such as France, transhumance pastoralism is experiencing a resurgence (Msika, Lebaudy, and Caraguel 2015). In some countries, transhumant pastoralism has never disappeared, in spite of all the historical wounds that have happened. We must learn from each other, meeting and exchanging information between the different countries. But please, do not forget that wherever we are, transhumance pastoralism is a global phenomenon, “un fait social et culturel total,” according to Marcel Mauss, which includes so many facts which are all in interaction (interconnection). None of them makes sense without the others. We are presently thinking about what should be heritagization of transhumance, as nonmaterial heritage within UNESCO. We must define all the relevant factors and integrate them in this globalism phenomenon, in order to be protected. The shepherds from Kelmend have convinced me that we scientists, whether anthropologists from the agriculture field or elsewhere, must work together defining what is the transhumance dynamic and conduct research to help these pastoral populations. A documentary film has been made in Kelmend and the filmmaker called the shepherds, “the heroes of the High pastures.” I would like to add that we need to be careful about folklorization of the transhumance, which could negate what is, in reality, a sacred experience. And this is what the forgotten shepherds from Albania with their herds, are reminding all of us. “Mire se vini në bjeshkët e Kelmendit”: welcome to the high pastures of Kelmend.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Mhairi Forbes for the revision of the English text.

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