

“WHERE ARE WE? EUROPE OR ALBANIA?” REGIONALISM AS SEEN BY THE LOCAL PEOPLE OF DHËRMI/ DRIMADES IN SOUTHERN ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

“Where are we? Europe or Albania?” Regionalism as Seen by the Local People of Dhërmi/Drimades in Southern Albania²

This paper illustrates and explains how the villagers of Dhërmi/Drimades in Southern Albania envision and shape “their” place as a distinct region in relation to the European Union’s regional policies. Special attention is given to the local discourses about the inclusion and/or exclusion of the village space into and from the European Union, which is often referred to by the notion of Europe or *Europi/Europa*. The paper aims to explore the ways in which local people construct their regional identity and how they discuss it in their everyday lives. It questions the influences of historical, social, cultural, political and economic changes in postcommunist Albania on people’s perceptions of modernity, which they axiomatically link with “Europe” or the “West”. The paper argues that the local people of Dhërmi/Drimades negotiate their social and spatial boundaries and thus reconstruct their regional identity and belonging through debates about modernity and modernisation.

KEY WORDS: regionalism, modernity and modernisation, social and spatial boundaries, Southern Albania

IZVLEČEK

»Kje smo!? V Evropi ali v Albaniji?« Regionalizem v Dhërmiju/Drimadesu v južni Albaniji

Prispevek predstavi in analizira načine, skozi katere vaščani Dhërmija/Drimadesa v južni Albaniji vzpostavljajo »svoj« kraj kot distinktivno regijo in jo definirajo v soodvisnosti z regionalno politiko Evropske unije. Vsebina članka se osredotoči na lokalne diskurze o vključenosti in/ali izključenosti vaškega prostora v Evropsko unijo ali iz nje, oz. *Europi/Europa* kot jo naslavljajo številni vaščani. Pod drobnogled so postavljeni debate in pogajanja, skozi katere domačini vzpostavljajo regionalno identiteto. Kako zgodovinske, kulturne, politične in ekonomske spremembe v postkomunistični Albaniji vplivajo na lokalne predstave o modernosti, ki jo domačini aksiomatično povezujejo z »Evropo« ali »Zahodom«, predstavlja eno izmed osrednjih vprašanj. Avtorica trdi, da debate o modernosti, modern-

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izaciji in potovanjih vzporedno z družbenimi in prostorskimi razmejevanji predstavljajo pomemben del identitetnih procesov, skozi katere domačini Dhërmi/Drimadesa pogajajo in poustvarjajo regionalnost in pripadnost vasi ali regiji.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: regionalizem, modernost in modernizacija, družbena in prostorska razmejevanja, južna Albanija

“*Ti einai afto, Natasa? Europi i Alvania?*”³ (“Where are we, Natasa? Europe or Albania?”), Ariadne asked me irritably on a winter evening in 2005, while we were experiencing an unexpected electricity blackout and were left in complete darkness in front of a blank TV screen in her living room. Her question left me perplexed, as I knew that whatever my answer would be, she would continue by furiously describing the problems she was experiencing in her everyday life in the village of Dhërmi (official Albanian name) or Drimades (local Greek name) in Southern Albania. Although electricity blackouts were a constant part of everyday life in this as well as in other villages and towns throughout Albania, they were often accompanied with anger and disapprobation, especially when they came at times outside of the expected daily schedule.⁴ My answer “*Europi?*”, which sounded more like a question, evoked another flow of angry words from Ariadne. She explained that this magnitude of disorder, unreliability, bad living conditions, daily electricity blackouts and water cuts and finally the level of corruption do not belong in Europe but are typical for Albania. “*Edo einai Alvania. Monoha pseumata. Simera lene etsi kai avrio anapoda*” (“This is Albania. Only lies. Today they say this and tomorrow the contrary”), she furiously continued.

What did Ariadne actually want to express with her question? How is this question related to her perception of place and spatial belonging? In what ways are spatial perceptions and notions of belonging imbued with national issues on the one hand and the European Union’s regionalism on the other? How is she, born in 1943 in Dhërmi/Drimades after some years of living as emigrants in Greece, mapping her village within the wider spatial map of the world? In what sense do her spatial perceptions correspond to a wider geopolitical division of Europe and the world?

I try to address these, as well as many other related questions in this paper, to show how the villagers of Dhërmi/Drimades envision and shape “their” place as a distinct region in relation to the European Union’s regional policies. Special attention is given to local discourses about the inclusion and/or exclusion of the village space into and from the European Union, which is often referred to by the notion of Europe or *Europi/Europa*⁵. The paper aims to explore the ways in which local people construct their regional identity and how they discuss it in their everyday lives. It questions the influences of

³ Throughout this paper, words in the local Greek dialect are written in *italic*.

⁴ Due to the general energy crisis throughout Albania and because a lot of the users do not pay their electricity bills there are daily electricity blackouts lasting for at least four to six hours. From 2004 to 2005 electricity blackouts were planned daily from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. From December 2007 until the present day in March 2008 there were no power shortages.

⁵ Throughout the paper the dual names of places and things are stated in both languages.

historical, social, cultural, political and economic changes in postcommunist Albania on people's perceptions about modernity, which they axiomatically link with "Europe" or the "West". The paper argues that the local people of Dhërmi/Drimades negotiate their social and spatial boundaries and thus reconstruct their regional identity and belonging through debates about modernity and modernisation.

The narratives presented are told in the people's own words. They were collected during thirteen months of anthropological field research in the coastal village of Dhërmi/Drimades in Southern Albania which took place between 2004 and 2005 and in 2008. To maintain the anonymity of my interlocutors I have changed their names as well as some of the information of their life stories that are not important to the following discussion.

AMBIGUITIES AND NESTED HIERARCHIES

The dual name of the village Dhërmi/Drimades already discloses the first ambiguities that constitute the "whereness" of the village. On the one hand, from the perspective of the legal policies and the mainstream public opinion in Greece, Dhërmi/Drimades and Himarë/Himara area are located in the historical and political region of Northern Epirus; on the other hand, however, from the perspective of the legal policies and the public opinion in Albania they are located in Southern Albania. These ambiguous locations lead further to the ambiguities in people's identification, where the Northern Epirot can mean the Albanian and/or the Greek or European; and where the Greek-speaking Christian Orthodox can be identified as an Albanian citizen of Greek nationality and/or an Albanian citizen and/or a member of the Greek national minority.

According to Sarah Green (2005: 12) ambiguity "can be as hegemonic and subject to disciplinary regimes as clarity; confusion, lack of means to pin things down". Upon her fieldwork in Pogoni in Epirus in northern Greece, she maintains that these ambiguities are generated "as positive assertions and constructions of truth: 'This is the Balkans Sarah; what did you expect'" (ibid.). Contrary to the people of Pogoni the people of Dhërmi/Drimades do not explain the ambiguities, lack of clarity and confusions with a shared place such as the Balkans, but ascribe them to Albania. The fluidity and indeterminacy of Albanian places can be read already in Ariadne's words: "This is Albania. Only lies. Today they say this and tomorrow the contrary".

In everyday conversations of many local people in Dhërmi/Drimades, Albania is defined in opposition to the European Union. The latter is thought of as a cluster of countries of Western Europe, where the people of Dhërmi/Drimades locate Greece, Italy, Germany and Austria. In contrast to the European Union, which is seen as economically and politically ordered, fixed and stable, Albania is defined as disordered, mixed and unstable. The term "the Balkans"⁶ is used more in political and media discourse than in the everyday

⁶ For more on the notion of the Balkans and its discursive meanings see Norris (1999); Bjelić and Savić (2002); Todorova (1997, 2004); and for the Balkans as hegemonic concept see Green (2005).

talk in the village. Compared to the “ordered” Western Europe, the Balkans carries rather a pejorative meaning (e.g. the “turbulent Balkans” - cf. Todorova 1997: 45)

Today, following their emigration to Greece and regular returns to their natal village during the summer, the people of Dhërmi/Drimades redefine their place and map it onto a geopolitical map as the predominant way of organizing the space. They see the village side by side with Greece and the European Union. For many of them the Albanian border is situated north of the Himarë/Himara area. This kind of mapping continually produces a hierarchy of places where power and place dynamically constitute each other, depending on a historically contingent and politically shaped social context. I explore this kind of hierarchy in this paper. Here I refer to the notion of “nested hierarchies” as defined by Green (2005: 230). Nested hierarchies pertain to people’s awareness that modernisation comes in many forms. It relates to their habit of measuring this diversity “against a single scale value (‘better’ or ‘worse’, ‘authentic’ or ‘fake’ forms of modernity)” and leads to the idea that “one particular form of modernity (the ‘Western’ form)” is the “‘best’ sort, the standard, or benchmark, against all others were to be measured” (ibid.).

The notions of place and space⁷ to which I refer in this paper are defined in terms of processes. Following several scholars (Lefebvre 1991; Foucault 1975, 1980; de Certeau 1984; Ingold 2000, et.al.) who have studied spatial notions, the meanings of space and place are not fixed and static entities but are continuously reproduced and recreated through the processes of social relations. In contrast to the above mentioned authors, Gupta and Ferguson (2001 [1997]) situate their studies of spatial construction within the contemporary context of migrations and transnational culture flows of the late capitalist world. They focus on the “ways in which dominant cultural forms may be picked up and used – and significantly transformed – in the midst of the fields of power relations that link localities to a wider world” (2001: 5). In their edited collection *Culture, Power and Place* (2001) Gupta and Ferguson critically rethink the relations between place and power, which are intimately intertwined. People and places are not enclosed homogeneities and their locality does not necessarily relate to the sense of being rooted to a particular place. Locality “is not simply that one is located in a certain place but that particular place is set apart and opposed to other places” (2001: 13). There is a mutual relation between the process of place making and the process of construction of locality and identity. In parallel to the processes of place making, which are always contested, Gupta (2001: 17) points out the relations between places that continuously shift as a result of political and economic reorganisation of space in the world system. Moreover he argues that the “dominant cultural forms” (2001: 5) that are being imposed are never simply enacted by social agents but are always reappropriated and reinterpreted by those agents. As such the notions of place and identity are socially constructed, and always in the process of becoming.

Building on Gupta and Ferguson’s concept of dominant cultural forms, my article

⁷ I consider place and space as different but also related. I generally use notion of place (*topos/vëndi*) in terms of social interactions, experiences and practices, and the notion of space (*horos/hapsirë*) in terms of abstractions and wider social and political conceptualisations of people’s life-worlds.

questions how the people of Dhërmi/Drimades continuously reconstruct their place and how they shape it according to the dominant cultural forms such as the European Union and its regional policies (see Harvie 1994). By putting local people's discourses in the context of geographically, politically and historically shifting frontiers, the paper seeks to explore how these tendencies are related to the negotiations of regional identities and how they influence the visions of the future.

DHËRMI/DRIMADES

The municipality of Himarë/Himara, which stretches about 25 kilometres along the Southern Albanian coast, is also known as *Bregu i Detit*, meaning the coastal area. The municipality lies 42 kilometres from the northern city of Vlorë and about the same from the southern city of Sarandë. The Albanian-Greek border is 60 kilometres to the south. The local people of Dhërmi/Drimades, its neighbouring village Palasa and the municipal town of Himarë/Himara mainly use the local Greek dialect and partly the Southern Albanian (Tosk) dialect in their day-to-day conversations.⁸ The people inhabiting the other five villages of the Himarë/Himara area (Ilias, Vuno, Qeparo, Pilur and Kudhes) mainly speak the Southern Albanian dialect.

The official, Albanian name Dhërmi is mainly used by those inhabitants and seasonal workers who moved to the village from other parts of Albania either during the period of communism or after it. In contrast to Dhërmi, the local, Greek name Drimades is mainly used by the inhabitants who are believed to "come" from the village and thus declare themselves as *horiani* ("locals") or *Drimadiotes* or *Himariotes*. When asked about the meaning of the term *horianos*, many people of Dhërmi/Drimades explained that *horianos* means *apo ton topo*, "of the place". The indicative "of the place" is related to the referent's origin, which has to be either from Dhërmi/Drimades or the Himarë/Himara area. Their declarations as *horianos* are formed in contrast to that of *ksenos*, meaning newcomers, foreigners and outsiders. Sometimes they also use pejorative names for them, such as *Turkos* or *Alvanos*.⁹ Newcomers, who moved to Dhërmi/Drimades, often declare themselves according to the name of the place from where they have moved to Dhërmi/Drimades. During my stay in the village I never heard anyone declare himself/herself as either *vëndore* or local in Albanian language or as *fshatarë* or villager in Albanian language. In contrast to *horianos*, who are predominantly Orthodox Christians, the majority of the newcomers are Muslims.¹⁰

⁸ For detailed information about the language use see Gregorič Bon 2008: 63–71.

⁹ According to the *horianos* these pejorative terms of address point to the differences in place of origin, language skill, religion, financial position, social status and the possibility of unrestricted crossing of the Albanian – Greek border.

¹⁰ After 45 years of atheism in communist Albania, contemporary religious proclamations play a more important role in questions about ethnicity than in questions regarding ideological beliefs. Thus, many scholars of Albanian Studies when identifying religious ratios prefer to refer to the survey done

According to the official population census from 2005, the village of Dhërmi/Drimades is inhabited by approximately 1,800 residents, half of whom live as emigrants in Greece or elsewhere (mainly the United States and Italy). Because of the massive emigration of youth, mainly the elderly population (born between 1926 and 1945) and only a couple of young families live in the village of Dhërmi/Drimades. Besides them, the village is nowadays also inhabited by a growing number of families and seasonal workers from other parts of Albania. Many of them moved to Dhërmi/Drimades after 1990. While most of the year the place is rather desolate, in the summer months it bustles with tourists, among whom prevail the emigrants originating from Dhërmi/Drimades and other places throughout Albania. Tourists arriving from Vlorë and the capital Tirana, from Kosovo and sometimes from other parts of Europe, however, can also be seen.

BRIEF HISTORY

Throughout the centuries people living in today's Himarë/Himara area and its neighbourhood have been travelling to and from the area mainly because of trading, seasonal work, shepherding or due to their service in different armies (Winnifrieth 2002; see also Vullnetari 2007). In the early 19th century most of the area of today's Southern Albania and Epirus in Greece was part of the *vilayet*¹¹ with its centre in Ioannina. For the purposes of the tax collecting system the Ottoman administration divided all non-Muslim people into special administrative and organizational units, *millets*,¹² which incorporated people according to their religious affiliation, regardless of where they lived, what language(s) they spoke, or what the colour of their skin was (Glenny 2000: 71, 91–93, 112, 115; Mazower 2000: 59–60; Duijzings 2002: 60; Green 2005: 147). Although the area of today's Himarë/Himara was a part of the *millet* system (meaning that people had to pay taxes collectively), the people were granted a special status and kept their own local government¹³ until the foundation of the Albanian Republic in 1913. After that the Ottoman principle of organizing people and places was replaced with the nationalistic principle, which categorized people and places according to their language and territory. Discordances between the Ottoman and nationalistic ways of dividing people and places led to tensions

in 1939 (before communism) when about 70% of the population were perceived as Muslim (among whom 20% were followers of the Bektashi order), 20% belonging to the Albanian Orthodox Church and 10% to the Catholic Church.

¹¹ *Vilayet* is a Turkish term used by the Ottoman administration to define the administrative division or province.

¹² *Millet* is a Turkish term used by the Ottoman administration to define the administrative and organizational units that divided people according to their religious belonging.

¹³ Because of their fierce resistance to the Ottoman army (Papadakis 1985) the people of today's Himarë/Himara area were granted a special status upon which they were allowed to keep their own, autonomous government. A similar status was held by the isolated villages of Mirdita in northern Albania, where many kept their own tribal laws which were based on the Lek Dukagjin canon (de Waal 1996: 177).

and territorial disputes, which have continuously appeared, disappeared, reappeared and blurred since then (de Rapper and Sintès 2006; Green 2005: 148–149).

Heightened political tensions, which were mainly provoked by the pro-Greek party, began in different places where both Greek and Albanian speakers lived. In accordance with the claims of the Greek-speaking people, the autonomous government of Northern Epirus with its centre in Gjirokastër was declared in 1914 by the pro-Greek party, which was in power in the south of Albania at that time (see Papadakis 1985; see also Clayer 2004). After the beginning of World War I (1914–1918) the government soon collapsed. When the war ended the tendencies to re-establish the autonomy of the territory known as Northern Epirus continued. In February 1922 the Albanian Parliament ratified the Declaration of Minority Rights proposed by Fan Noli. The Declaration recognised the rights of Greek-speaking people living in three villages in the Himarë/Himara area (Palasa, Dhërmi/Drimades, and Himarë/Himara) and in the villages of Gjirokastër and Delvinë (Kondis and Manda 1994: 16; Clayer 2004; de Rapper and Sintès 2006: 22).

"Exactly where Northern Epirus begins and ends is another one of those contested issues involving drawing lines on the map" (Green 2005: 15). While for some the Northern Epirus straddles the Greek-Albanian border, for others it also includes a part of Southern Albania, which is inhabited predominantly by a Greek-speaking Christian Orthodox population; and there are also others, especially the Albanian people, for whom Northern Epirus does not exist at all. The widest geographical and historical region of Northern Epirus is considered to consist of Southern Albania and Epirus in Greece, regardless of the Greek-Albanian border (ibid.). After the foundation of the independent Republic of Albania in 1913, Epirus was divided between Southern Albania and Epirus in Greece. According to the mainstream public opinion in Greece, the Greek-speaking people of Orthodox religion living in Southern Albania are called Northern Epirotes (*Vorioepirotēs*) (see Triandafyllidou and Veikou 2002: 191). According to the public opinion in Albania they are often referred to as *Greku* (Greeks in Albanian language) or pejoratively *Kaure* (non-believers in Albanian language¹⁴) or *Kaur i derit* (non-believer-pigs, i.e. Greek pigs in Albanian language).

During the communist dictatorship (1945–1990), the road, *to dromo*, which leads through the state border and which was used by the people living in Southern Albania for travel and trade, was closed following Hoxha's policy of suppression of free movement across the state borders. In the period of Hoxha's autarky the minority status acknowledged to the people living in Palasa, Dhërmi/Drimades and Himarë/Himara in 1922 was revoked with the explanation that there were not enough Greek-speakers living in the Himarë/Himara area (Kondis and Manda 1994: 21). The districts of Gjirokastër, Sarandë and Delvinë were confirmed as "minority zones" (Kondis and Manda 1994: 21; de Rapper and Sintès 2006: 12).

Despite the restriction and control of even the in-country movements, Hoxha's policy of unification and homogenisation of Albanian citizens forced many Greek-speaking

¹⁴ Originally *kaure* is Turkish word that means non-believer.

people to move to places in the northern or central part of Albania (Kondis and Manda 1994: 21; see also Green 2005: 227). In addition, many of Greek names for people and places were replaced by Albanian ones and the use of the Greek language was forbidden outside the minority zones (Kondis and Manda 1994: 21).

During the period of communism the minority issues and irredentist claims raised by the Southern Albanian pro-Greek party almost disappeared. They resurfaced again in 1990 after the declaration of democracy, the opening of the borders and the massive migrations that followed (Hatziprokopiou 2003: 1033–1059; Mai and Schwandner-Sievers 2003: 939–949; Papailias 2003: 1059–1079). Nowadays, because of economic (capitalism), political (democracy, the rise of new nation-states and the European Union), social and cultural changes (individuality), these issues are reflected upon in a somehow different way than they were before. In Dhërmi/Drimades and Himarë/Himara the main differentiation is advanced by the people who claim to be from the village or the area identifying themselves by the term locals (*horiani*). Except for some elderly inhabitants of Dhërmi/Drimades the declaration of being a Northern Epirot is nowadays rarely used in daily conversation. Following the massive migrations to Greece and the stereotypes created and spread through the national Greek media (Vullnetari 2007: 51; Green 2005: 229), which depict Albania as a backward place filled with backward people, *Vorioepiotes* are often perceived by people in Greece as being no different from Albanians.

According to the State Council¹⁵ the *Vorioepiotes* and Pontic Greeks¹⁶ are considered to be of Greek ethnic origin. Upon demonstrating their “cultural ancestry” (sharing “common historical memories” and/or links with “historic homelands and culture”), Greek descent (Greek Albanians have to prove that the birthplace of their parents or grandparents is in Northern Epirus), language, and religion they can be granted a Special Identity Card of *omoghenis* (co-ethnicity in Greek language) – *Eidiko Deltio Tautotitas Omoghenis* (Tsitselikis 2003: 7; Kondis and Manda 1994: 20–21). This provides them with Greek nationality and Albanian citizenship. Besides the legal status this special card gives them the right to reside in Greece, permits them to work there, grants them special benefits (i.e. social security, health care, and education), and allows them “free” crossing of the Albanian-Greek border.

While the Greek migration policy defines Greek origins on the basis of language, religion, birth and predecessors from so called “Northern Epirus”, the Albanian minority policy defines Greek origins according to the language, religion, birth and predecessors originating from the areas once called “minority zones” (i.e. the districts of Gjirokastër, Sarandë and Delvinë). As people who claim to originate from the Himarë/Himara area

¹⁵ The State Council (no. 2756/1983) is the Supreme Administrative Court of Justice in Greece (Triandafyllidou and Veikou 2002: 204).

¹⁶ In referring to Glytsos (1995), Triandafyllidou and Veikou define Pontic Greeks as “ethnic Greeks who either emigrated from areas of the Ottoman empire (the southern coast of the Black Sea in particular) to the former Soviet Union at the beginning of the 20th century or left Greece in the 1930s and 1940s for political reasons” (2002: 191).

do not live within the "minority zones" they are not considered to be part of the Greek minority by the Albanian state.

ENVISIONING PLACE AND SPACE

Especially in the first months of my fieldwork many villagers were asking me where I came from. My answer that I came from Slovenia was often followed by another question: "*Slovenia einai stis Europi?*" ("Is Slovenia in Europe?"). With this term "Europe" most of the villagers had its economic, political and socio-cultural meanings in mind rather than the geographical ones. Following their interpretations "Europe" is analogous to the European Union (EU), which according to their definitions conjoins the countries of the so-called "Western" Europe. The latter is often axiomatically related with "modernity", "civilization" and economic development. Their questions about Slovenia's inclusion into the EU were often followed with another question about the state's currency: "Do you use Euros?" Because at that time (2004 and 2005) Slovenia has not yet been included in the Euro area, my answer was negative. While some of the villagers curiously continued to question me about the planned year of Slovenia's inclusion in the Euro area, others were interested in its economic development, comparing it to Greece, while a third group only shrugged their shoulders and commented patronisingly that Slovenia was one of the most developed countries in ex-Yugoslavia already in the communist period. It seems likely that with these questions and comments the villagers wanted to check how well the country that I came from is doing according to "European" standards of modernisation, which were then compared to the economic wellbeing many of them have experienced while living as emigrants in Greece. As mentioned in the previous section (*Brief History*), the people of Dhërmi/Drimades as well as the municipality of Himarë/Himara continuously move and travel back and forth from the areas of present Albania, Greece and other places in Europe. Based on these movements and contacts with various people and places, they encounter different forms of modernisations which they value in accordance with the scales of nested hierarchies. "Europe" and/or the "West" are thus considered as the golden standard or the benchmark according to which other modernities are measured. Since both Albania and Slovenia were communist countries in the past and Greece was not, Greece was axiomatically seen as being more "Western" than Albania and Slovenia.

The idea of modern Greece appeared after the reopening of the Albanian-Greek border in 1990, which was followed by massive migrations of the Albanian population to Greece. Thus for example Janis, born in 1938 in Dhërmi/Drimades, who emigrated to Greece in 1990 and returned to his natal village twelve years later noted in one of our conversations:

In those times when my parents were young and my grandfather traded with Greeks the people living there were very poor. Many of them moved here as the Spanish

flu¹⁷ was spreading in Ioannina and many people died. The Greeks were very poor at that time and they were buying wheat here [in Southern Albania]. But now it is just the opposite: we are poor and they are rich.

Besides Janis many other local people remember too that in the times before communism the people living on the Albanian side of the border were far richer and better off than the people on the Greek side. Sarah Green (2005: 231) notes similar accounts on the Greek side of the border. But in contrast to the people from Albanian side of the border, they forgot that their northern neighbours were once better off than they are today. When the communist dictator Enver Hoxha closed the state borders the situation was reversed. Although Hoxha's policy aimed to develop agricultural and industrial economy in the country and promote the idea of "modern" industrial practices and the modernisation of agricultural production (Pollo and Puto 1981: 26; Biberaj 1990: 68 and also Green 2005: 228), the limited market economy and other economic and political restrictions left people in poverty compared to other countries in Europe. These differences became evident after the collapse of communism and reopening of the borders, when people living on the both sides of the border, Albanian and Greek, could compare their living conditions (Green 2005: 228).

MOVEMENTS

Throughout the year Dhërmi/Drimades is mainly inhabited by the elderly population (born between 1926 and 1945) among whom the returnees, who emigrated to Greece after 1990 and returned to their natal village in the past few years, are predominant. Many of them posses Special Identity Cards of *omoghenis*, which allow them unrestricted border crossings (into those EU countries which are part of the Schengen Agreement), in addition to Greek pensions (provided by the Agricultural Insurance Organisation OGA) and health and social security benefits. In spite of the fact that in practice most of the villagers do not travel beyond Greece, they often emphasize their ability to travel "freely" to the countries of "Western" Europe. They often use this privilege to differentiate themselves from other citizens of Albania, whose travels are restricted by visas, which must be acquired through long bureaucratic procedures.

Green (2005: 223) asserts that documents such as visas and passports are policing separations and that they are means by which "the state continues to assert the power to name people and control movement in this transnational world" (see also Navaro-Yashin

¹⁷ The Spanish flu or influenza pandemic was caused by an unusually severe and deadly Influenza A virus strain between 1918 and 1920. By far the most destructive pandemic in history, it killed between 50 and 100 million people worldwide in just 18 months, dwarfing the bloodshed due to World War I. Many of its victims were healthy young adults, in contrast to most influenza outbreaks which predominantly affect juvenile, elderly, or otherwise weakened patients (<http://www.who.int/media-centre/factsheets/fs211/en/>).

2003; Goldsworthy 1999: 10). Following this presumption, it could be said that the Special Identity Cards of *omoghenis* in Dhërmi/Drimades also act as the means of politicizing the differences between local people (the Albanian citizens of Greek nationality) and the newcomers or "Albanians". Moreover, it could also be said that the political elite in Greece asserts its power through the Special Identity Cards to name people and control their movements across the Greek-Albanian border, which experienced massive emigrations of Albanians after 1990. As asserted by Gupta and Ferguson (2001), such state powers of control, organisation and definition of people and places are never simply enacted by the people, because they always reappropriate and reinterpret them. These kinds of state powers in Dhërmi/Drimades, mediated through Special Identity Cards, are thus reinterpreted and recreated through the everyday practices and movements of the local people. These movements include either actual (emigrations to Greece) or possible (the ability of unrestricted crossings of the EU borders) movements to and through the EU countries and present the basis for the local people's construction of social and spatial boundaries.

In numerous discussions, the local people put forth their right to cross the "European" borders. One of them was Janis, who told me the following:

I can travel freely throughout the European countries. I do not have to apply for visa like Albanians as I have the Greek card [Special Identity Cards of omoghenis]. I lived in Athens for many years and I never had problems understanding their language. Not like Albanians who learned Greek while living there. Many locals in this village speak Greek. My grandmother, for example, could not understand Albanian. People feel Greek here like the people from Kosova feel Albanian. It is the same. But nowadays many Albanians have moved to the village and so it got depraved. Albanians are breaking into the houses that have been left empty as the locals moved to Athens and they are stealing things. They don't know how to behave. They are not civilized.

Janis's narrative shows how the Special Identity Cards of *omoghenis* and free border passing as well as knowledge of the Greek code construct the social boundaries which Janis generates and manages within the framework of the state ideology. According to Green (2005: 124) the state ideology which is "definitional" and "legalistic" is insinuated through the political, bureaucratic and economic "teeth". In spite of Gupta and Ferguson's (2001) assertion that people never fully enact the mechanism of state power, the case of Janis shows how these state mechanisms (such as Special Identity Card *omoghenis* and visas) are being reinterpreted and reappropriated within the grip of the "teeth" of the state ideologies. In this manner Janis reconstructs the locality or "Greekness" in contrast to "Albanianness" as a synonym for uncivilized and unmodern.

The uncivilized "other" in contrast to the "civilized" us is also constructed through the oral stories recounted by the elderly villagers. In these stories they remember their ancestors' movements to places over the sea and the mountains (see Gregorič Bon 2007a; 2008a: 169–190). The stories about these movements date back to the period of communism. While the stories about the movements overseas relate Dhërmi/Drimades and

its people to Greece and Italy, civilisation, economic development and general well-being, the stories of the movements over the mountains relate the village and its people to Albania, poverty and lack of civilization. In order to illustrate these relations let me give an example of two stories, with the first describing movements overseas and the other movements over the mountains.

I met Pavlos, born in 1938 in Dhërmi/Drimades, in the summer when I was working in one of the cafeterias situated on the coast. Pavlos is a widower who nowadays lives in Tirana. In 1958 he moved to Tirana to study geodesy and he lived there with his family until 1990, when they all emigrated to Greece. In 2001 he and his wife returned to Tirana where they bought a house and Pavlos started a business. Two years later Pavlos's wife died. Every summer – in July and August – Pavlos moves to Dhërmi/Drimades where he owns a part of his father's house which he shares together with his brother. Occasionally he goes to Greece in order to visit his children, who were all married in the village of Dhërmi/Drimades. As he lived for some years in Athens he told his story of the sea and trading:

[...] Muço, Papajani, Duni, and Zhupa were some of the prosperous families who used to own large boats. In Drimades boats were rare. There were approximately three or four of them. They were wooden and imported from Greece or Italy. Because of the Jaliskari port, there were also some warehouses built on the coast. People used to keep valanidi, kitro and olive oil over there. [...] We have always had contacts with the outside world. Therefore we are more civilizuar [civilized in Albanian language] than the people living in other parts of Albania. Our forefathers have seen a lot of other places in Greece and Italy. Compared to the rest of the places to the north and to the east, we were wealthy. However, later during the times of the system, when the state closed the road [otan o kratos eklise to dromo], we were forbidden to move around.

In the late afternoon in August, Aspasia and I sat on a grass hill, a couple of metres away from my home, where she usually pastured her goat every day. Aspasia, who was born in 1933 in Dhërmi/Drimades, recalled the mountains with the following words:

[...], our mothers used to walk to the places behind the mountains [...] They walked up there burdened with goods that they wanted to exchange. They carried olives, olive oil, oranges, clothes and sometimes some pieces of furniture or souvenirs which our fathers or uncles brought from outside. They used ropes to tie these goods and carried them on their backs; in rain, cold or snow [...] It did not matter as there was great famine. Especially in areas that are not fertile enough to grow wheat. In those times we only ate corn bread; without yeast. It was hard to eat. Therefore we often wanted to eat the normal bread from wheat which we could only get by exchange in the places behind the mountains. [...] Sometimes they came back empty-handed because they were robbed on their way back. There was poverty everywhere and the people living behind the mountains stole food in those days ... They were bad people!

Aspasia lived in the village for her entire lifetime. She married relatively late to a widower ten years older, who came from the same village. He already had four children with his first wife and later Aspasia bore two sons. During communism both she and her husband worked in the agricultural cooperative. Today she is a widow and lives on her own, as her sons live as emigrants in Greece.

In the stories presented the storytellers reconstruct the village as a place that stretches between the sea and the mountains or better, between Albania, Greece and Italy (see Gregorič Bon 2007a; 2008a). It seems that Dhërmi/Drimades is at the same time a place of wealth and poverty, civilizedness and uncivilizedness, modernity and non-modernity. The stories illustrate how the political and economical divisions and the social production of differences contribute to placing the village on the geopolitical map of Europe and the world. As the stories and the historical background (see the section *Brief History*) show, the people of today's Southern Albania, Epirus and Corfu in Greece traded among themselves in the times before communism and so created a common space between them. The closing of the borders in 1945 stopped these travels and changed the perception of the space, which began to be redefined also by planned relocations across Albania and emigrations of people to Greece, Italy and elsewhere. The villagers experienced the state border between Albania and Greece (or the "road closure" in Pavlos' words) as a delineating mark, which defined who and what belongs to the Albanian nation-state or to the Greek nation-state. After the end of communism, when the "road" was opened again, at least for Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians, massive migrations shattered again the perception of borders and the differences reappeared again. They were no longer defined on the basis of the nation-states, but also on the basis of global economy and politics, which are today the major forces that define the power and hierarchy of places. In the scope of this kind of hierarchy, some places and states are considered as "Western", meaning "civilized" and "modern" countries, while others get labelled as "Eastern", meaning "uncivilized" or "not modern" countries.

The stories also describe how the story-tellers use the hegemonic geopolitical and economical hierarchy of places and states to construct and redefine their own private hierarchies, which influence their sense of the "whereness" of Dhërmi/Drimades. The mountains define the boundary between the places behind them and the village in front of them. The sea strait is seen as another boundary, which is in contrast to the mountains perceived in a positive way. The village thus stands in between. The stories try to resolve this ambiguity by relating the village to its connecting places. In general, the story-tellers use the remembrances of their ancestors' paths to reconstruct the past and recreate the present, which serves to define their belonging to the place – the village.

MODERNITY AND MODERNISATION

While in the previous section I showed how the village's in-betweenness is constructed through the local people's narratives, in this section I explore how this in-betweenness is created through their debates about modernity and modernization. The terms of modernity and modernization are defined according to Green (2005: 230), who relates modernity to economic wealth and general development and defines modernization as the yet absent modernity accompanied with discussions about the need to modernise.

Ariadne's question about the "whereness" of the village and her furious criticism of the electricity blackouts already tells us something about her conceptualisation of modernity and modernisation. She relates them to the unreliable living conditions and non-modern life in Albania, which is defined in contrast to reliable and modern life in Europe or the EU. The latter she equates with Greece, to where she emigrated together with her family shortly after the end of communism. She constructs her image of modernity based on past experiences of her life in Greece. When complaining about the uncertain life in Albania, she forms a difference between the way things are and the way things ought to be. On the one hand Ariadne sees the village as not sufficiently modernised, while on the other she asserts some parallels with modernisation. Moreover, her question, "Where are we? Europe or Albania?" could also be understood in terms of nested hierarchies, where she discerns various modernities by positing "Europe" or Greece as the standard for other modernities to be measured.

After some years of living in Greece, Ariadne and her husband Kosta returned to their natal village of Dhërmi/Drimades. With savings from Greece and remittances sent by their children still living there, they built a new house in the village and a restaurant on the coast. Nowadays, besides olive oil production and Greek pensions, tourism represents one of the most important sources of income to many villagers of Dhërmi/Drimades and the Himarë/Himara area. Because of this, many owners of tourist facilities are trying to improve the village infrastructure, and trying to enable the rebuilding of the road, the water supply, the organisation of municipal services, etc. In achieving this, people's aims are based more on individual than common actions (see Gregorič Bon 2007b, forthcoming 2008b). Thus Ariadne, for example, often emphasized her individual efforts to remove the rubbish from the area close to her restaurant by criticizing the insufficient organisation of the municipal rubbish disposal service. Here she complained about the unreliable local as well as state authorities, who only promise to solve these problems and do not actually do anything. In one of the late mornings of early June in 2005, when she was showing me her garden behind the restaurant, Ariadne complained:

When Kosta [her husband] and I began to build this restaurant this place was full of rubbish and broken glass. We put a lot of effort into removing bottles. As there is no municipal rubbish disposal service we had to take care of it on our own. The local officials promised to solve this problem and organise regular rubbish disposal for the summer months when the coast is full of tourists who leave a large amount

of rubbish behind them. But they only promise while often they do not do anything [...]. But what would you expect? This is Albania. Only lies. Today they say this and tomorrow the contrary.

According to Ariadne the village has not been sufficiently modernised. For this she blames the local and state authorities, who are careless and irresponsible. In contrast to them she constructs an image of herself as responsible and modern, aiming to improve and modernise the village.

Similar views about modernisation are described by Anastas, born in 1970 in Korçe. His parents came from Dhërmi/Drimades, from where they moved to Korçe during the communist period. Anastas owns a small hotel on the coast. In December 1990 he emigrated to Greece together with his parents and two sisters. In 1994 Anastas moved to Athens where he studied tourism and management. After completing his studies he worked as an agent at a tourist agency in Patras. In 2000 he moved to Dhërmi/Drimades. He expressed his aims to modernise the village as follows:

Because Himara is a politically problematic municipality, the state policy is not to invest into its infrastructure. This is the reason why the roads are full of holes and rocks. It is a similar case when it comes to electricity blackouts and rubbish disposal. We also lack proper medical service in this area, thus we can not guarantee safety to our tourists. Another problem is the unreliability of the public transport system. Traffic safety is also an issue. These are all important reasons why we cannot offer our place and services to foreign tourists. Basically, the municipality of Himara never gets sufficient funds from the state budget, thus we cannot afford to develop proper tourist facilities and services. The money we get is not sufficient to deal with all of the problems at the same time. The development initiative is left to us, i horiani, it depends on our work and cooperation. I prefer to cooperate with my troublesome neighbour than let the state take my land away from me. I hope that better times will come soon, as we are promised help from certain international institutions. For example, in 2007 the World Bank plans to implement a pilot project of renovating old houses in Drimades. We cannot expect this kind of help from the state, as they don't like us because we are Greeks. This is something they cannot tolerate.

Anastas, who holds a degree in tourism and management, lists infrastructural inadequacies that impede the development of tourism on the coast of Dhërmi/Drimades, based on his past experiences of working in tourism in Greece. Similar to Ariadne he blames the political elite to be responsible for the insufficient development of the area. Here he exposes the ethnicity issues of the area which he sees as the main reason for the government's lack of investments in the infrastructure of this area. This he expresses already in first lines of his narrative, when he names Himarë/Himara along with Dhërmi/Drimades as a "problematic municipality". Here he refers to the continuity of the minority issues that have appeared, disappeared and reappeared again over the past centuries. In his views about the development of tourism Anastas forms differences between the Albanian politi-

cal elite or the “state” (in his words) on the one hand and the local community (*i horiani*) on the other. Like Ariadne, Anastas also puts forth his own, individual responsibility for cleaning the coast. He does not expect or hope to receive financial help from the “state” and rather sees a solution in “local” responsibility as well as in international funding sources such as the World Bank.

In general, both Ariadne and Anastas speak about modernisation rather than modernity. When they complain about the irresponsibility of the government they construct themselves as being modern but living in a place that has not been sufficiently modernised. In their critical views of the Albanian government they construct the locality in contrast to the “state”, both defined as fixed and closed entities *per se*. In their views and representations of the development of coastal tourism they generate and mediate ideas about the homogeneity of the local people or *horiani*, which they define similarly to the ideas about the nation-state.

The debates about modernity and modernisation show similarly to the stories about their ancestors’ travels over the mountains and the sea how the “whereness” of the village is constituted according to the nested hierarchy and vice versa. As I have mentioned earlier (in *Brief History*), different administrative, political and economical delineations of people and places have influenced their lives over centuries and the people have also continued to reproduce them themselves. With the opening of the Albanian-Greek state border and the ensuing massive migrations, these delineations were exposed not only in terms of national differences but also in terms of economic and infrastructural differences between both countries. This led to the widespread assertion on the both sides of the border, the Greek and the Albanian, that Greece is more modernised than Albania.

EUROPEANISATION AND REGIONALISM

When differentiating between themselves and the “Albanians” or themselves and the “state” local people continuously form their identity. They declare themselves to be locals, *i horiani*, a concept which some of them see akin to “Greekness” or “European-ness” and in opposition to “Albanianness”. Others conceptualise the “local” and locality as a distinct identity, often calling the local people Himariotes – using the name of the municipality. Thus for example, Anastas noted the following about the Greek perception of his identity in one of our discussions:

I was simply tired of being seen as a poor and miserable Greek from the Albanian side in the eyes of the Greeks. Therefore whenever they asked me where I am from I told them that I am Himariot as I come from Himara. And most of them did not pose any further questions.

Anastas’ statement tells us that after being upset by Greeks’ reaction to him, he began to tell them something different – that he is Himariot, coming from Himarë/Himara. As a

result, Anastas reports, people presumably altered their reaction to him. It could be said that with this statement he was ensuring that I do not see him as a "poor and miserable Greek from the Albanian side" as well as demonstrating that he has agency and that the people who do think that way about him are "ignorant" people.

Along with the fall of communism and massive migrations from Albania, stereotypes appeared in the Greek media which depicted Albanians as dishevelled, "uncivilized" and not "modern" people. Following these stereotypes, the people who declared themselves to be Northern Epirots were seen by many people in Greece as no different from Albanians (see Green 2005: 228). As a result of such stereotyping the local people who once declared themselves to be Northern Epirots took things into their own hands by creating their own distinct identity. Simultaneously with the process of identity formation they redefine their place as being neither Greek nor Albanian, but the "autonomous" region of Himara.

In the last couple of years many books and articles appeared which try to reconstruct the past of Himarë/Himara (see Gregorič Bon 2008a: 115–165). Many of them were written in response to the contemporary work of historiographers (Memushaj 2003, Nasi, Prifti, et.al. 2004, Frashëri 2005), which follows the pro-Albanian view of Himarë/Himara and its people as being a part of the Albanian nation and nation state historically. Local intellectuals and historiographers (Rusha 2001; Jorgji 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, Koçi 2006; Gjipopulli 2006) have responded with a number of works trying to prove the pro-Greek or pro-local view. They try to define the origin and belonging of the people of Himarë/Himara on the basis of their historical, political, social, cultural and territorial distinctiveness.¹⁸ They emphasize the autonomy of their government and trading relations with people and places overseas, which the local people managed to maintain until the communist period. Based on this the historiographers locate and redefine the local people and the area of Himarë/Himara as an autonomous locality which is, according to written as well as oral history, related to Greece and/or the European Union.

Around 2006, some intellectuals (members of the Himarë/Himara community) defending the local interests set up an Internet website (www.himara.eu). The website provides general information about the villages of Himarë/Himara and their history, offers a tourist guide and a possibility for discussion and gives basic information about visa applications for moving to the United States. The information is given in three languages: Albanian, Greek and English. The tourist guide states the following:

The region [periohi/krahina] of Himara, named after the country town [kompoli/qënder] Himara (Heimarra) on the shores of the Ionian Sea, historically commences at the village of Nivitsa to the south and the Logaras mountain ridge on the north. On the one hand lies the deep blue of the Ionian Sea and a continuous series of peninsulars [...]; and on the other side lies the mass of the Akrokeraunia mountain range [...] This strip of land between the mountain peaks and the sea is the beautiful and historic land of Himara, with its villages and their old, stonebuild houses the Byzantine churches and monasteries, the castles and other monuments, as well as the

¹⁸ For a detailed information on this see Gregorič Bon 2008a: 104–168.

people of Himara, hospitable and proud, who have remained unbounded throughout the history [sic.] (the Municipality of Himara 2006).

The tourist guide then presents the history and tourist attractions of the Himarë/Himara area, which has changed constantly in size and number of existing villages. In the 18th century there were 16 villages in the area, spread from the Lloghara mountain pass on the north to the village of Nivitsa in the south of Albania (Gregorič Bon 2008a: 44). Although there are only 7 villages officially included in the area now, many local historians, intellectuals and politicians combine it with the municipality of Lukova in the south and declare them an administratively independent region (www.himara.eu and Gjikopulli 2006: 195). They ground these claims in the history of the area, emphasizing its autonomy and special status in the period of Ottoman domination. They also see the Christian religion and historical legacy in general as important for the establishment of the distinctiveness of the region.

Local tendencies for the establishment of an autonomous region transcend the actual state borders on the one side, but generate and redefine the meaning of the locality on the other (e.g. defining locality on the cornerstone of national ideology). They are striving to find their place in the Europe of regions (Harvie 1994). The project for united European regional communities appeared in 1980 in “Western” Europe and ten years later in its “Eastern” part, also known as the Balkans (Parkin 1999). Therefore many local intellectuals and members of the local community in general see the virtual space of their region as being in the EU – as in “www.himara.eu”, which is an opportunity for them to enforce their locality and preserve their “authentic” tradition of Himarë/Himara. This shows how regionalisation as a basically bureaucratic reform (Parkin 1999) in Himarë/Himara gradually became reinterpreted in socio-cultural terms.

CONCLUSION

Many people of Dhërmi/Drimades travel back and forth not only between and within rural and urban places in Albania but also in Greece and elsewhere in Europe. When moving through and within places the people of Dhërmi/Drimades reconfigure and redefine their own localities and the meaning of their village. In this process of ongoing reconfiguration the localities and the meanings of both the village and people are often ambiguous and lead to negotiations and conflicts over their belonging and locatedness. When faced with social, political and economic changes, people of Dhërmi/Drimades situate their village on the geopolitical map, which includes Greece or European Union on one side and Albania on the other. People’s movements are not something new, although they have been facilitated by a new road system, modern transportation and changes in the availability of passports and visas. Migrations took place in Dhërmi/Drimades for many centuries due to considerable erosion of the terrain, lack of land suitable for cultivation, and different economical, social, and political changes (see Gregorič Bon 2008a). While

on the one hand these movements brought about a multiplicity of connections between people and places, on the other hand the administrative (Ottoman period) and political divisions (formation of nation-states) caused divisions of people and places according to the nested hierarchies principle.

Nested hierarchies indicate how the local people of Dhërmi/Drimades subvert negative stereotypes which are present in public and media discourse in Greece (labelling them as "poor and miserable Greeks from the Albanian side") on the one hand and in Albania on the other (as being *Kaur* or *Greku*) and reinterpret them by ranking each other according to hierarchies. Along with the formation of social hierarchies and differentiations, which are formed by people's movements, debates about modernity and modernisation and claims over the regional identity, the local people continuously reconstruct their village and locate it on the geopolitical map of EU. According to their negotiations and perceptions, Dhërmi/Drimades as well as Himarë/Himara lie in between the EU and Albania, or between modernity and non-modernity. As I argued earlier in this paper, the local people negotiate their social and spatial boundaries and reconstruct their belonging to a distinct region through continuous differentiations between "us" and "them".

The paper shows how the people of Dhërmi/Drimades rhetorically construct "themselves" as locals. Moreover it showed how they position and contrast themselves against two groups of "others". One group of "others" is defined in terms of power, as being "above" them, including EU authorities and states like Greece and other Western European countries. The other group of "others" is perceived as being "below" them and includes newcomers, seasonal workers and Albanians. The conceptualisations of all three groups are interrelated and they depend on the social and cultural background of the speakers.

The main focus of this article was given to local perceptions and discourses about the notions of modernity, modernisation, regionalism and "Europe". Their discourses illustrate the ways in which local people reappropriate and redefine these notions within the grip of the "teeth" of the state as well as supra-state ideologies. When setting their discourses in relation to the politically and historically shifting frontiers, one can find shifting labels, such as "EU" and "Albania", which reflect the economic and political development or non-development of the area, region or state. The differences between "Europeanness" and "Albanianness" are porous and blurred as they continually shift according to social, cultural, political, economic and historical contingencies. Continuously shifting meanings constitute the space as being fractal, not corresponding to the borders of the Euclidian space. This fractality often gives an image of complexity and fragmentation rather than relation (Green 2005: 136). Based on this, the social and spatial differences that the local people rhetorically constitute are relational rather than complex, as they are grounded in social connections rather than differences. In general the paper tries to illustrate how the local people's discourses about modernity and the EU tend to rally for the official recognition of their specific interpretations of the past and present and different identity narratives deriving from them.

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