

Storytelling as a spatial practice in Dhërmi/ Drimades of southern Albania

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ABSTRACT

This paper leads the reader to paths and places constructed by storytelling, remembrances, and the biographical contexts of the people of Dhërmi/Drimades in southern Albania. By following the people's movements and networks of connections between the individual places that construct the spatial relations, this paper explores the 'cartographic optic' as recounted in the people's stories. The underlying question is how different meanings of space and place, created by individual stories, construct the 'whereness' of Dhërmi/Drimades and how that 'whereness' constructs different meanings of space and place. The paper argues that through remembering their ancestors' movements and winding the stories around their paths the local people continuously shift the village's position and its boundaries and in so doing they reconstruct 'their' space where they seek to anchor their sense of belonging. This sense of belonging is informed by the notion of the nation-state as a hegemonic concept on the one hand and a sense of distinct locality on the other. Overall the paper presents the people's conception of space and themselves in it.

KEYWORDS: storytelling, spatialising, mapping, reconstructing 'whereness', southern Albania.

Introduction

Our character is similar to our place and its climate. On the one hand it is cold and wild, such as the mountains, while on the other hand it is mild and hospitable, as the sea. (Dimitris, field notes)

Especially in the first months of my fieldwork, a number of villagers of Dhërmi (the official, Albanian name) or Drimades (the local, Greek name) in southern Albania used words similar to those of the villager quoted above, Dimitris, to describe their character and relate it to their natal village. Later on I realised that this kind of ambiguous mapping of their place, and its claim of coherence with their character, is important for understanding the process of construction and reconstruction of space and place that I will analyse in this paper.

This paper aims to lead the reader to paths and places constructed by storytelling, remembrances, and the biographical contexts of the local residents of Dhërmi/Drimades. The stories are recalled by elderly people (born between 1926 and 1945) who are deemed to originate from Dhërmi/Drimades. They were collected during twelve months of anthropological field research in the coastal village of Dhërmi/Drimades in southern Albania between 2004 and 2005. Stories and conversations were noted and supplemented with other details on the same day the conversation was held. We spoke in the local Greek dialect, which I was learning along with the Albanian language before and during the field research¹. To maintain the anonymity of my interlocutors I have changed their names as well as some details of their life stories that are not relevant to the following discussion.

Construction of spatial relations through the people's movements and networks of connections will be the main focus here. The question is how different meanings of space and place, created by individual stories, construct the 'whereness' of Dhërmi/Drimades and how that 'whereness' influences the meanings of space and place. Short biographies of our four storytellers map their paths of movements through different places in Albania and Greece and their continual returns to their natal village of Dhërmi/Drimades. Biographies disclose their memories of ancestral paths which include travels over the sea and the mountains. I argue that through remembering their ancestors' movements and winding the stories around their paths the local people continuously shift the village's 'whereness' and in so doing reconstruct 'their' space, in which they seek to anchor their sense of belonging. This sense of belonging is informed by the notion of the nation-state as a hegemonic concept on the one hand and a sense of distinct locality on the other.

Dhërmi/Drimades

Dhërmi/Drimades is one of seven villages in the Himarë/Himara municipality in southern Albania. The village lies 42 kilometres south of the city of Vlorë (the capital of the Prefecture²) and about the same distance north of the southern city of Sarandë. The Albanian-

¹ When I moved to the village, my command of the Albanian and Greek languages was very poor. Though I had studied both languages for a few months before leaving to do fieldwork, I had many problems with understanding both languages. The Albanian language I learned in the village primary school and local Greek with one of the village ladies. In about two months my command of the local Greek improved to the stage that I could use it on a basic level. Some months later I was able to understand most of conversations but my speaking capability was still very basic. As the majority of my closest friends were locals, my knowledge of local Greek improved faster than Albanian. I was also more familiar with this language because of its use in scientific discourse (e.g. with the meanings of different words like *anthropos*, *gineka*, *andras*, etc.). In the last months of my fieldwork I was quite confident when using local Greek dialect. Several locals took my knowledge of the local language as a proof of their 'Greekness'. I often felt that my proficiency in Greek – in contrast to Albanian – gave me a kind of permission to enter their personal lives.

² The Republic of Albania is divided in 12 Prefectures or regions which are the territorial and administrative units, usually comprising several communes and municipalities 'with geographical, traditional, economical and social links and common interests. The borders of a region correspond to the borders of the comprising communes and municipalities, while the centre of the region is established in one of the municipalities. The territory, name and centre of the region are established by law' (see Albanian Association of Municipalities, 2001: 5, 17).

Greek border is 60 kilometres south. The Thunderbolt Mountains or *Malet e Vetëtimë*,³ also called the Acroceraunian mountain range, enclose the area on its northern and north-eastern side. The area opens up on its southwestern side with the mountain of Çika and descends towards the Ionian coast and the Greek Islands of Othonas and Corfu in the distance.

The official Albanian name Dhërmi is mainly used by those inhabitants and seasonal workers who use the southern (Tosk) or the northern (Ghek) Albanian dialects. Many of these newcomers and seasonal workers moved to the village from other parts of Albania during (1945-1990) or after the communist era. In contrast to Dhërmi, the local, Greek name Drimades is mainly used by the inhabitants who are believed to ‘originate’ from the village and declare themselves to be locals, *horiani* or *Drimadiotes*. They primarily use the local Greek dialect and partly the southern Albanian (Tosk) one in their day to day conversations, as is the case with the neighbouring village Palasa and the municipal town of Himarë/Himara.⁴ The people inhabiting the other five villages of the Himarë/Himara area (Ilias, Vuno, Qeparo, Pilur, and Kudhes) mainly speak the southern Albanian dialect.

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 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*.⁵ Newcomers often declare themselves according to the name of the place from which they came to Dhërmi/Drimades. During my stay in the village I never heard anyone use the Albanian words *vendës* or local or *fshatarë* or villager to describe themselves. In contrast to *horianos*, who are predominantly Orthodox Christians, the majority of the newcomers are Muslims.⁶

According to the 2005 official census, the village of Dhërmi/Drimades contains 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 young people,

³ Throughout this text the words in Albanian language are written in *italic*, words in the local Greek language are written in *italic and underlined*, and the terms signifying Ottoman Turkish administrative units are underlined.

⁴ For detailed information about the language use see Gregorič Bon (2008a: 63–71).

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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 in 1939 (before communism) when about 70% of the population were perceived as Muslim (among whom 20% were followers of the Bektashi order), 20% as belonging to the Albanian Orthodox Church, and 10% as belonging to the Catholic Church.

it is primarily the elderly (born between 1926 and 1945) and just a few young families who live in the village of Dhërmi/Drimades. The village is nowadays also inhabited by a growing number of seasonal workers from other parts of Albania. Many of them moved to Dhërmi/Drimades after 1990. Because of the continuous migration flows it is hard to determine the exact number of local people and newcomers in the village.⁷ Therefore I can provide only approximate proportions between them, based on data from my field research conducted between 2004 and 2005. According to this data the village is now populated by about 500 local people and about 300 newcomers. While most of the year the place is rather desolate, in the summer months it bustles with tourists, among whom prevail 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.

In the past, especially before the communist era, marriage in Dhërmi/Drimades tended to be endogamous (see Gregorič Bon 2008a: 94–95). During the communist era, when private property and the foundation of agricultural cooperatives in 1957 were collectivised, numerous locals did not see any future in staying in the village and working for the cooperative. A good number of them enrolled in a technical school in Vlorë and trained in mechanical engineering, while others went on to study at the Universities of Tirana or Shkodra, as this was almost the only opportunity for migrating into urban cities. Because of these movements within the country, the number of intra-village marriages declined. Today, with the growing number of village's youth immigrating to Greece and with land tenure issues becoming important, the number of intra-village marriages is on the rise again.⁸ Many of these marriages take place in Greece, where young couples continue to live after the wedding. The majority of them do not consider a permanent return to their natal village, because they do not see any future for their children there. The main reasons for this are the lack of jobs, poor education, undeveloped infrastructure, daily water and electricity cuts, etc.

Throughout the centuries people living in Dhërmi/Drimades and other villages of today's Himarë/Himara area and its neighbourhood have been travelling to and from the area primarily for trading, seasonal work, shepherding, or due to their service in different

⁷ The number of inhabitants of Dhërmi/Drimades is comprised of the number of seasonal workers immigrating from other areas throughout Albania; the number of local youth immigrating to Greece; the number of elderly local inhabitants who spend their winters in Greece with their children, returning to the village each spring; and the number of local people who live in Greece but in summer come back to the village in order to run local bars and restaurants or rent out rooms or apartments. Therefore the number of inhabitants continuously shifts.

⁸ Intra-village marriages are based on the need to keep the ownership of the land within the village and to preserve the Christianity and the language (the Greek dialect) of the area. In a departure from village 'tradition' which usually did not consider women as potential heirs, and especially when the owner does not have any male heirs or when his daughter's future husband's parents do not have a lot of property, today a woman can inherit the land. Because she takes her husband's surname and because the social organisation in the village follows the patrilinear principle, many local people note that in such cases the land is not 'retained within the village' as it is given to her husband's or 'foreign' family.

armies (Winnifrith 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 vilayet⁹ of Ioannina. For the purposes of the tax collecting system the Ottoman administration divided all non-Muslim people into special administrative and organisational units, millets¹⁰, which incorporated people according to their religious affiliation, regardless of where they lived, the language(s) they spoke, or the colour of their skin (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 government¹¹ until the foundation of the Albanian Republic in 1913. After that the Ottoman principle of organising people and places was replaced with the nationalistic principle, which categorized people and places according to their language and territory. Discor-dances between the Ottoman and nationalistic ways of dividing people and places led to tensions and territorial disputes which have continuously appeared, disappeared, reappeared, and blurred since then (de Rapper and Sintès 2006; Green 2005: 148–149).

During the communist dictatorship, the road (*to droma*) leading through the state border, 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. The villages populated by the Greek-speaking people in the districts of Gjirokastër, Sarandë, and Përmet were confirmed as 'minority zones'; the people from Himarë/Himara, including its seven villages, were left out of these 'zones' (Kondis and Manda 1994: 21; Clayer 2004, 2006; 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 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 Greek names for people and places were replaced by Albanian ones, and the use of the Greek language was forbidden outside the minority zones.

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). Today, because of economic (e.g. capitalism),

⁹ Vilayet is a Turkish term used by the Ottoman administration to define an administrative division or province.

¹⁰ Millet is a Turkish term used by the Ottoman administration to define the administrative and organisational units that divided people according to their religious belonging.

¹¹ Because of their fierce resistance to the Ottoman army (Papadakis 1985) the people of today's Himarë/Himara area were granted a special status which allowed them 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 based on the Lek Dukagjin *kanun* (de Waal 1996: 177). Given this special status, the people of Himarë/Himara never submitted to Islam and managed to retain their Christianity.

political (e.g. democracy, the rise of new nation-states and the European Union), and social and cultural changes (e.g. individualism), these issues take on a different character than they did before. In Dhërmi/Drimades and Himarë/Himara the main differentiation is advanced by the people who claim to be from the village or the local area, identifying themselves by the term locals (*horiani*). The term is now conceptualised either in terms of the nation-state as a hegemonic concept or in terms of a distinct region.¹²

While the Greek migration policy defines Greek origins on the basis of language, religion, birth, and ancestry from so called ‘Northern Epirus’, the Albanian minority policy defines Greek origins according to the language, religion, birth, and predecessors originating from the villages which were once part of the ‘minority zones’ (i.e. the villages of Greek-speaking people in the districts of Gjirokastër, Sarandë, and Përmet). As people who claim to originate from the Himarë/Himara area do not live within the ‘minority zones’ they are not considered to be part of the Greek minority by the Albanian state. In contrast, the Greek official policy and different Greek organisations (OMONIA, The Union of Human Rights Party¹³ and other smaller organisations) acknowledge the people of the Himarë/Himara area as being of Greek descent, or Northern Epirots. According to the Greek Ministerial Decision all members of ‘Greek descent’, are allowed to apply for the Special Identity Cards of *Omoghenis – Eidiko Deltio Tautotitas Omoghenis* (Tsitselikis, 2003: 7). This special card gives them a right to reside in Greece, permits them to work there, grants them special benefits in social security, health care, and education and allows them a ‘free’ crossing of the Albanian–Greek border, which has become hardly passable for other Albanian citizens due to reactions to recent, massive emigration.¹⁴

The contestations in the Himarë/Himara area increased when the post-communist decollectivisation of property was made possible by Law 7501 on Land, which passed in the Albanian parliament on 19 July 1991. The law stated that land taken from private owners by the communist government and managed by the agricultural production cooperatives should be divided equally among the members of the cooperative. This meant that each member of the cooperative should get a portion of the land, with the size determined by the total size of the land that used to belong to a particular agricultural production cooperative unit. The ownership that existed before communism was nullified. This kind of division was considered to be the most rightful by the socialist government of the Socialist Party of Albania (*Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë*, the legal successor to the

¹² For a detailed discussion on local construction of regionalism see Gregorič Bon (2008b: 83–106, and partly 2008c: 44–54).

¹³ In 1992, OMONIA was not represented in the Albanian parliamentary elections because the Law on Political Parties (passed in July 1991) disqualified parties with a religious, ethnic or regional basis. For this reason, in 1992, the Union of Human Rights Party was founded which protects the rights of the Greek minority as well as the rights of other national minorities and ethnic groups in Albania (Bos and UNPO Mission, 1994: 2).

¹⁴ Since the massive migrations that took place in 1990, most of the receiving countries strengthened their migration policies. This made the emigrations from Albania to most of the countries (except to Macedonia and Kosovo) much more difficult.

Albanian Labor Party), which came to power in March 1991. In some areas, Mirdita (de Waal 1996: 169–193) and Himarë/Himara, for example, this law caused a great deal of discord between local people. Namely, in the case of Himarë/Himara, the law did not take in consideration that the area had been subjected to in- and out-country movements throughout the centuries; that the membership of cooperatives tripled because of the pro-natalist policy of the communist government; and that the classification of the land (e.g. agricultural, pasture, and coastal land) later changed in meaning and economic value (see Çakalli, Papa *et.al.* 2006: 217–236). Therefore the land could not be returned to the small proprietors who owned it before the communist era. Because of that the Association of the Himara Community, together with the local intellectuals and the Himarë/Himara municipality, decided to abrogate the Law on Land (no. 7501) and implement the consensus reached by the population of the Himarë/Himara area.

Stories as spatial practices

For the analysis of people's stories I will, besides the general approach that goes hand in hand with writings of Tilley (1994) and Ingold (2000), rely upon de Certeau (1984: 115–130) and his concept of spatial operations and on Green's (2005: 16) conceptualisation of 'whereness'. Spatial operations such as storytelling and remembering, for example, disclose the ongoing transformation of places into spaces and vice versa. Stories for de Certeau are spatial trajectories that involve temporal movements and spatial practices. 'Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice' (de Certeau 1984: 115). These practices include everyday tactics such as the use of spatial indications ('Over there is Greece. From here we see Corfu and Othonas'), place names ('Jaliskari, which means the port.... They passed *Ag. Pandeleimona*'), adverbs of time ('when the state closed the road ... there was great poverty in the period between both wars'), memories ('It used to be a port where my grandfather kept his ship ... I remember her telling us stories ...'). These 'narrated adventures' (de Certeau 1984: 116) simultaneously produce the geographies of actions which organise spaces. Spaces are continuously transformed into places and back to spaces again. Through such a process the space is continuously recreated and it is never the same as the one shortly before. Therefore, instead of space (sing.) I discuss the reconstruction of spaces (pl.) or better, spatialisation.¹⁵

Following de Certeau I will focus on these kinds of transformations, differentiating between space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*). Space occurs as the effect produced by operations. It 'is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts' (1984: 117). In contrast to polyvalent space, place is more ordered. It is an 'instantaneous configuration of positions' constituted by a system of signs (*ibid.*).

¹⁵ For detailed discussion on the notion of spatialisation see Muršič (2006).

The ‘underlying trope of movement’ and distinctions between places as discussed by Green (2005: 89) are particularly pertinent here. These distinctions between ‘here’ and ‘somewhere else’ were, among Green’s interlocutors in Kasidiaris on the Greek-Albanian border, discussed in terms of differences in status and power: the power ‘to ascribe different meanings to places’, the power ‘to ignore some places altogether’, and the power ‘to enable, force, or constrain movements across, through and between places’ (ibid.). The very process of exercising such powers, which are based on political, economic, and bureaucratic ‘forces’, defines the shifting people’s and places’ ‘whereness’ (Green 2005: 216). Throughout history the drastic flow of changes induced various movements, divisions, separations, and reorganisations of people and places. On the basis of these movements and spatial divisions, a plurality and diversity of ‘whereness’ of places and people were constituted. Green points out that ‘it is the *where*, not the *who*, that is important’ (Green 2005: 16, italics in the original). Compared to the situation at the state border between Albania and Greece, ‘the where’ in Dhërmi/Drimades is similarly related to the ‘manner in which people travelled or failed to travel’ the distance between Albania and Greece, and ‘the aesthetics of topography and landscape, or the way the places were subdivided, appeared, and disappeared in administrative accounts of the region’ (ibid.). In order to explore different forms of marginality and ambiguity, Green questions ‘how the where is constituted and how that it is both different and the same across a range of scales (geographical, temporal, metaphorical, disciplinary)’ (ibid.).

Following the above-mentioned similarities between the two areas, which lie only about 60 kilometres apart, I explore differences and resemblances of the ‘where’ in Dhërmi/Drimades and question both how the ‘where’ defines the spatial hierarchy and how the spatial hierarchy defines the ‘where’ of the village. I will address this question later in this paper; in the following section I present the people’s stories.

Storytelling, remembering and mapping

Between the 15th and 17th centuries, maps were shaped according to itineraries and travels (de Certeau 1984: 120–121). Today, with the advancement of technology (aerial and satellite photography, global positioning systems), cartographers do not need to travel across places to map them because they can do so without actual physical movement. Modern cartography, while relying heavily on political and geographical maps, excludes the movements of people and thus creates an impression that the structure of the map depends solely on the structure of the material world (Ingold 2000: 234). Ingold uses the expression ‘cartographic illusion’ (ibid.) when arguing that modern maps create an illusory impression of the stability of places and borders. In this manner modern cartography is actually moving away from the peoples’ daily practices, physical movements, and dwelling habits (ibid.). The opposite of cartography or mapmaking in this sense (showing a certain structure and excluding movements) is the term mapping. A traveller or a storyteller, who doesn’t create or use a map, is ‘quite simply, mapping’ (Ingold 2000: 231). Mapping is a process which never ends, which leads us over places, simultaneously differentiated and connected, thus creating spaces.

In the Greek language and the local Greek dialect of Dhërmi/Drimades the word *istoria* means at the same time ‘story’ and ‘history’. Numerous *istories* (pl.) about the sea and the mountains speak about history and people’s remembrances. They uncover things long gone, or in de Certeau’s terms, the ‘presences of diverse absences’ (1984: 108).

Similarly, Tilley (1994) notes that ‘memories continually provide modifications to a sense of place which can never be exactly the same place twice, although there may be ideological attempts to provide ‘stability’ or perceptual and cognitive fixity to a place, to reproduce sets of dominant meanings, understandings, representations and images’ (1994: 27–28). In Ingold’s terms memories are forged with words. They are not only represented and passed on in oral accounts, but they are also practices of remembering, embedded in the perception of the environment¹⁶ (Ingold 2000: 148). Ingold suggests that remembering is a process through which memories are generated along with the individual trajectories which each person lays down in the course of his or her life. These trajectories are never laid down solely by the people themselves but are always embedded in a historical and political context.

Stories of the sea and the mountains

Stories of the sea

I met Pavlos, born in 1938 in Dhërmi/Drimades, in the summer when I was helping in one of the restaurant situated on the coast. Pavlos is a widower now living in Tirana. His father, who lived in the village and worked in a cooperative, arranged a wedding for him with a woman originating from the village. After their wedding they both moved to Tirana in 1958 where Pavlos studied geodesy. They lived there until 1990, when they immigrated to Greece with their two sons and a daughter. In 2001 they returned to Tirana where they bought a house and Pavlos started a business. Two years after their arrival 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, sharing it with his brother. Occasionally he goes to Greece in order to visit his children who were all married to villagers from Dhërmi/Drimades. On one summer noon, when Pavlos was the only guest in the restaurant, we entered into a conversation about the image of the village coast in the past and about the changes that ensued. As he lived for some years in Athens he told his story of the sea and trading in a more ‘Athenian’ accent than other locals used:

[1.1]¹⁷ Can you see those rocks over there (*eki*)? (*He pointed towards big rocks stretching in the distance which were connecting the coast and the sea*). [1.2] Those big rocks which stick out from the sea?

I said yes and asked him how they are called. He answered:

¹⁶ Ingold defines the environment as ‘the world as it exists and takes on meaning in relation to me [*the human, NGB*], and in that sense it came into existence and undergoes development with me [*the human*] and around me [*the human*’ (2000: 20).

¹⁷ In order to analyse Pavlo’s and Aspasia’s statements in the following section I numbered them consecutively.

[1.3] Jaliskari¹⁸, which means the port. [1.4] It used to be a port once (*tote*), where my grandfather kept his boat. [1.5] But nowadays *i Alvani* (the Albanians) spoiled everything and turned it into a bar. [1.6] They really have no taste!

[1.7] Muço, Papajani, Duni, and Zhupa were some of the prosperous *soia*¹⁹ (pl.) who used to own large boats. [1.8] In Drimades boats were rare. [1.9] There were approximately three or four of them. [1.10] They were wooden and imported from Greece or Italy. [1.11] Because of the Jaliskari port, there were also some warehouses built on the coast. [1.12] People used to keep *valanidi*, *kitro* and olive oil over there. [1.13] It was very hard to bring the imported goods up to the village. [1.14] They were carried either by donkeys or by the village men. [1.15] A cobblestone path, made by the village women, led from the coast to the village. [1.16] The women were the main collectors of stones for the village paths and houses. [1.17] The Himara women are known as extremely hard working. [1.18] They worked a lot. [1.19a] They took care of the family, the house and the garden, they brought water [1.19b] and collected stones for building new paths and houses; above all they did all the cleaning. [1.20] To a certain extent this remains the same today. [1.21] Except that today they are old and tired and cannot do everything. [1.22] But still they are of a hard working nature. [1.23] They worked all the time, while their men used to sit in the shade of the vine leaves or in the *kafeneio*, playing cards and drinking *raki*. [1.24a] Some of them were fishermen [1.24b] and those who originated from rich families traded with the outside world (*ihan kani emporio okso*). [1.25] We have always had contacts with the outside world. [1.26] Therefore we are more civilised (*civilizuar*) than the people living in other parts of Albania. [1.27] Our forefathers have seen a lot of other places in Greece and Italy. [1.28] Compared to the rest of the places to the north and to the east, we were wealthy (*plusii*). [1.29] However, later during the times of the system (*keru tou sistema*), when the state closed the road (*otan o kratos eklise to dromo*), we were forbidden to move around.

Eleni was born in Dhërmi/Drimades in 1944. At the age of 15 she enrolled in the

¹⁸ The Greek word *Jaliskari* written as *Gialiskari* is compounded from two words: *gialos* which means seashore, and *skari* which means port.

¹⁹ According to my conversations with the local people of Dhërmi/Drimades, *soi/fis* consist of patrilineal descendants who share a common ancestor, surname, and some plots of land such as forests and pastures. The meaning of *soi/fis* can be initially compared to *venia* of Inner Mani, which includes ‘all patrilineal descendants of an apical ancestor as well as other blood and fictive kin assimilated into the line of descent’ (Seremetakis 1991: 25). For a detailed discussion on family, lineages, and clans in Dhërmi/Drimades see Gregorič Bon (2008a: 80–100).

pedagogical school in Elbasan. Four years later she returned to Dhërmi/Drimades from where she was relocated to Himarë/Himara, working there as a teacher for three years. In 1966 she married a fellow villager and they were relocated to Saranda, where her husband, who was trained as a mechanic, was given a job while she was employed as a teacher. Eleni gave birth to four daughters with whom they immigrated to Athens in 1993. In 2000 their daughters went to live on their own. Three years later Eleni and her husband returned to the village, where they have built a new house on land where Eleni's father-in-law used to have a garden. Eleni and her husband built the house with their savings from Greece and the pension they have been receiving from the Greek government. Their daughters who are married – two within the village and two within Himarë/Himara area – still live in Greece and visit them in the summer months. Eleni and her husband visit them almost every year, usually for the Christmas and New Year holidays or on occasions when they have to prolong their Special Identity Card of *omoghenis*.²⁰ On one of my visits to her house, where we often sat on the terrace with a view over the village's coastal plains, she described to me how she spent her day. Like many of her village colleagues Eleni also spent her day by working in her garden and around her house. She compared her working spirit with the assiduity of Bregu women which is known from times past:

Bregu women are known by their working spirit; especially our mothers who worked a lot. They worked in the house and the garden while the men sat in *kafenja* (pl.) or went fishing. We were really poor at that time. The only good food we ate was fish and occasionally meat. But we had some nice things from outside (*okso*) that my uncle, who left on a boat to America between the wars, has sent to my family. He sent a nice veil (*barbuli*) for my aunt's wedding. Later I inherited it. It was a really a nice *barbuli*. Besides, we also had some furniture in our house, which my grandfather, who traded with his ship, brought from Greece. We had very nice cupboards, a table and chairs. Similar furniture could also be found in other houses. Although we were often hungry, we were *civilizuar*. Do you understand what I am saying ...

Therefore I was quite shocked when I attended the practical training for teachers in Elbasan. As a student I stayed with the teacher's family. I was shocked as I had to eat on the floor, from the same pot as the rest of the family, for they did not have any plates. We slept in the same room as we ate; all together in a single room, on the pillows that the house-lady laid on the floor. There were no beds. At that time I realised what sort of poverty could be found there. We were poor, but we had certain possessions (*pramata*). We had them because our fathers and grandfathers traded with Corfu and Venice.

²⁰ The Special Identity Cards of *omoghenis* were valid for a period of five years until 2004, when the period was extended to ten years.

Stories of the mountains

On a late August afternoon, Aspasia and I sat on a grass hill, where she often pastured her goat. As the location of her pasture was only a few metres away from my home I often joined her and spent many afternoons chatting with her. Along the grass hill where we sat the village houses were scattered, leading down to the road and further to the evergreen landscape of the Ionian coast. In the distance the Çika Mountains were visible. Aspasia, born in 1933, recalled the following story about them:

[2.1] My mother went up there (*ehi pai apo apano*) on a number of occasions. [2.2] Sometimes she would go with her fellow locals, sometimes on her own and sometimes together with my sister. [2.3] Those times ... there was poverty, my daughter. [2.4] They went all the way up there [*she pointed her finger towards the mountains*], to the places behind the mountains (*piso apo ta vuna*). [2.5] They passed Ag. Pandeleimona ... [2.6] Have you ever been there?

I answered negatively and added that I heard about the chapel from my friend Dimitrula who promised to take me there one day.

[2.7] Oh, you know ... [2.8] Yes, our mothers used to walk to the places behind the mountains ... [2.9] They walked up there *zhalomenes* (burdened) with goods that they wanted to exchange. [2.10] They carried olives, olive oil, oranges, clothes, and sometimes some pieces of furniture or souvenirs which our fathers or uncles brought from outside. [2.11] They used ropes to tie these goods and carried them on their backs; in rain, cold or snow ... [2.12] It did not matter as there was great famine. [2.13] Especially in areas that are not fertile enough to grow wheat. [2.14] In those times we only ate corn bread, without yeast. [2.15] It was hard to eat. [2.16] Therefore we often wanted to eat the normal bread from wheat that we could only get by exchange in the places behind the mountains (*piso apo ta vuna*). [2.17] Women sang old songs while they were walking through the mountains, to feel at ease. [2.18] Many of these songs have since been forgotten. [2.19] What things they had to go through. [2.20] Sometimes they came back empty-handed because they were robbed on their way back. [2.21] There was poverty everywhere and people living behind the mountains stole food in those days ... [2.22] They were bad people!

Aspasia had lived in the village all her life. She married relatively late to a widower ten years her senior who originated from the same village. He already had four children with his first wife. After their marriage her husband moved to the house where she grew up. This house originally belonged to Aspasia's mother. Aspasia delivered two sons. During the communist era both she and her husband worked in the agricultural cooperative. Today she is a widow and lives on her own, as her sons have immigrated to Greece. The eldest married within the village and the youngest within the Himarë/Himara area. Feeling lonely, Aspasia bought a goat, which she usually pastures on the land that used to belong to her *soi*.

It was an August afternoon when I spoke to Thodoris, born in 1928 in Dhërmi/Drimades. We were standing on the terrace of his new house, from where we had a view on the mountains. We were talking about Ag. Pandeleimona, the chapel that is located in the Çika Mountains. My plan was to visit this area one day. When I asked him if he had ever gone to see the chapel, Thodoris recalled the following story:

I used to look after the sheep in those mountains (*sta vuna eki*). I used to know all the paths. I was a shepherd when I was around 13 years old. My brother was also a shepherd. That's how we earned our daily bread as our family was very poor in those times. Because our father died when I was twelve and my brother was ten, we were forced to earn some money. Our mother was not capable of taking care of three boys. The eldest stayed at home, but my brother and I left. We worked as shepherds for the wealthy families, here in Drimades. Our father died very young because he got a lung disease, because he worked in the mine in Lavrio for almost twenty years. That is where he met our mother and they got married. Our mother is Greek. But at the time there was a Spanish flu epidemic in that area, therefore my father and his new wife returned to Drimades. They did not have a house of their own and they had to live with his brother until they built a new house close to his birth house. It was around 1940 or 1941 ... Yes, 1941 when I was 13. I remember I left home and went to work as a shepherd. I was working for one of the richest families in the village. They were very good to me and they never left me hungry. They were nice and educated people. They had a huge house next to the road. But in those days it was not paved and it was narrower. I used to look after the sheep down by the coast during the winter and up in the mountains during the summer. I remember that I used to go up there in August when it was very hot. I was there, far away in the mountains, close to the church of Aghios Pandeleimona. In those days I used to sleep up there as it was the only cool space around.

In 1946 Thodoris married a woman several years younger than him, also originating from the village. After the marriage Thodoris went into the civil service in Elbasan. A year later he returned to his natal village, from where he and his wife applied for relocation to Vlorë. Thodoris worked there as a mechanic and was later promoted to the job of driver. His wife was a sewer in one of the state factories. They have three children: two daughters and one son. While the eldest daughter and the youngest son married Orthodox Christians from Vlorë, the middle one married a fellow villager. In 1994 Thodoris and his wife immigrated to Athens, where they lived together with their son and his family. They took care of their grand-children. In 1999 they sold their apartment in Vlorë and began to build a house in Dhërmi/Drimades. Besides the money they received from selling their apartment, they built the house with money saved from pensions they received from the Greek government and the money sent by their son to whom the house will belong in the future. They moved into the new house in 2000.

During my stay in Dhërmi/Drimades I heard only three stories from village men about pasturing sheep. According to their memories there were not many sheep in the village in the past, although some written sources contradict their recollections. They claimed that there was not a lot of demand for shepherds and that this kind of work was done either by young boys from the poorer families or by newcomers from Labëria or villages in the vicinity of Vlorë. It was more common for them to work as shepherds during the communist era, when they took part in the work performed within the cooperative, than between the world wars (1918-1939) or during the Second World War (1939-1945). During the communist era, while men were working as shepherds, women would pick medicinal and other herbs in the mountains, such as herbs for *çaj mali* (the mountain tea).

From places to spaces – movements and pause

..., if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is a pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place (Tuan 1977: 6).

These stories, which refer either to the sea or the mountains, show how the locations where my conversation with the storytellers took place defined the stories' contents. Eleni, for example, who during our conversation sits on her house terrace overlooking the sea, and Pavlos, who sits on the terrace of the beach restaurant, talk about the sea. Aspasia, who during our talk stands on the hill, and Thodoris, who is questioned about the chapel of *Ag. Pandeleimona*, talk about the mountains.

These storytellers tell us about actions, movements, and travels: trading, fishing, transporting and exchanging goods, sailing, and walking. Through these actions they establish connections between different places and map the paths. Stories in this kind of association represent a series of paths which connect Dhërmi/Drimades with different cities (Athens, Lavrio, and Elbasan), islands (Corfu, Othonas), and countries (the United States, Greece, Italy, and Albania). Connections establish the space which stretches between places located 'over the sea' and 'behind the mountains'. The constant transformation from place to space, as discussed by de Certeau, is particularly relevant here.

Stories unfold in the places or locations of their storytellers. Their memories lead through spaces, occasionally stop at particular places, and then move through the space again. The story of Pavlos starts from a place that he describes as 'those rocks over there'. By determining this position (see [1.2]), by naming it (Jaliskari), by explaining the name (see [1.3]), and by placing it into the past (see [1.4]) Pavlos defines the place. By naming the wealthy *soia*, who had their boats anchored in Jaliskari, he continues to determine the place, namely the village (see [1.7; 1.8; 1.9]). With the description of boats, which were '... imported from Greece or Italy', he connects the village port of Jaliskari with places over the sea, with Greece and Italy. Later on he recalls the path that leads from the coast to the village (see [1.15]). He maps the village space again by mentioning this path and different activities associated with it (transporting goods, paving it with stones) (see [1.14; 1.15; 1.16; 1.19b]). Descriptions of working village women and their different activities (such as taking care of the family, gardening, bringing the water, washing, and collecting the fire-

wood and stones) ‘take’ Pavlos into the village and its pub. There the men, in contrast to their working wives, are sitting, drinking, and playing cards. In the last part of his story he mentions fishermen (see [1.24a]) and trading done by men from wealthy families (see [1.24b]) and so returns back to the shore, to trading with places over the sea, which are seen as being ‘outside’. In contrast to the ‘outside’, there are places that are ‘in’, that is, inside the village. In his opinion, the connections with places ‘outside’, in Greece and Italy, make villagers more ‘civilised’ than other people in Albania. By demarcating Dhërmi/Drimades from other places in Albania, Pavlos conceptualises civilisation²¹ as social and economical development. His story, therefore, continues to distinguish people of Dhërmi/Drimades as richer than people in northern and eastern Albania. Pavlos also ends his story with the beginning of communism (or ‘... the times of the system ...’), when the ‘state’ (the communist party) of Enver Hoxha strictly forbade any crossing of state borders. Any attempt at unlawful crossing was harshly punished. The road, which enabled trading and movements of people for centuries, was in 1913 first restricted – when the borders of the Republic of Albania were formed – and later, in the communist era, made impassable (see [1.29]).

In her story about the mountains Aspasia recalls memories of her mother. It takes the reader to places ‘... up there, to the places behind the mountains.’ It was there where her mother used to walk together with other village women. Aspasia locates the village in opposition to the mountains and places behind them. Women in her story map the paths between the village and places behind the mountains. With their journeys recalled in the narrative they construct the space. Aspasia mentions great poverty as the main reason for journeys across the mountains. Then she ‘returns’ from the description of space to the description of the place in mountains: *Ag. Pandeleimona*, named after Saint Panteleimon (see [2.4; 2.5]). From the church the story maps the path further on, to the places behind the mountains. By describing their actions (see [2.10; 2.11]) the story strengthens the old paths, which lead across the mountains. The series of activities and pertinent paths then return back to the place, to the village. In the last part of her story Aspasia, similarly to Pavlos, focuses on the description of the village, where wheat does not grow as well as it does in places behind the mountains (see [2.12; 2.13; 2.14; 2.15; 2.16]). In conclusion Aspasia ascribes a negative value to the places behind the mountains. Bad people, who often robbed the village women during their journeys back to the village, are located there (see [2.20; 2.21; 2.22]).

²¹ Gilles de Rapper (2008, this issue) in his paper *Religion in post-communist Albania: Muslims, Christians and the idea of ‘culture’ in Devoll, southern Albania*, similarly defines the notion of ‘civilisation’ in Devoll. Yet in contrast to the people of Dhërmi/Drimades who usually refer to it with term *civilizuar*, the people of Devoll refer to civilisation with the term *kulturë*, which is according to de Rapper, defined by the ‘series of four components on the one hand, and by its functioning on the other’ (2002: 194). The four components are: language, knowledge, contacts with the outside world, and technology (*ibid.*). Moreover, *kulturë* is related to everything the local people deem to ‘originate’ from Western Europe and Northern America and consider it as synonymous with ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’ (see this issue). For a detailed discussion on civilisation and its relation to ‘modernity’ and ‘modernisation’ see Gregorič Bon (2008b).

When the stories above are analysed according to de Certeau's theoretical framework of stories as spatial practices, his notion of 'geographies of actions' is confirmed. Stories continually organise and transform the space into places or 'stops' and vice versa. Stories are thus not a passive illustration of spatial transformations, but are actively involved in the transformations of spaces, places, paths, and borders.

The sea and the mountains are defined as spatial boundaries, simultaneously separating and connecting the village with other places in Greece, Italy, the United States, and Albania. The storytellers' memories of their ancestors' paths construct the social maps in which village is represented as a central place and all other places are seen as being related to it. These spatial arrangements are distinct and redefine and shift the village's 'whereness'.

The 'whereness' of Dhërmi/Drimades

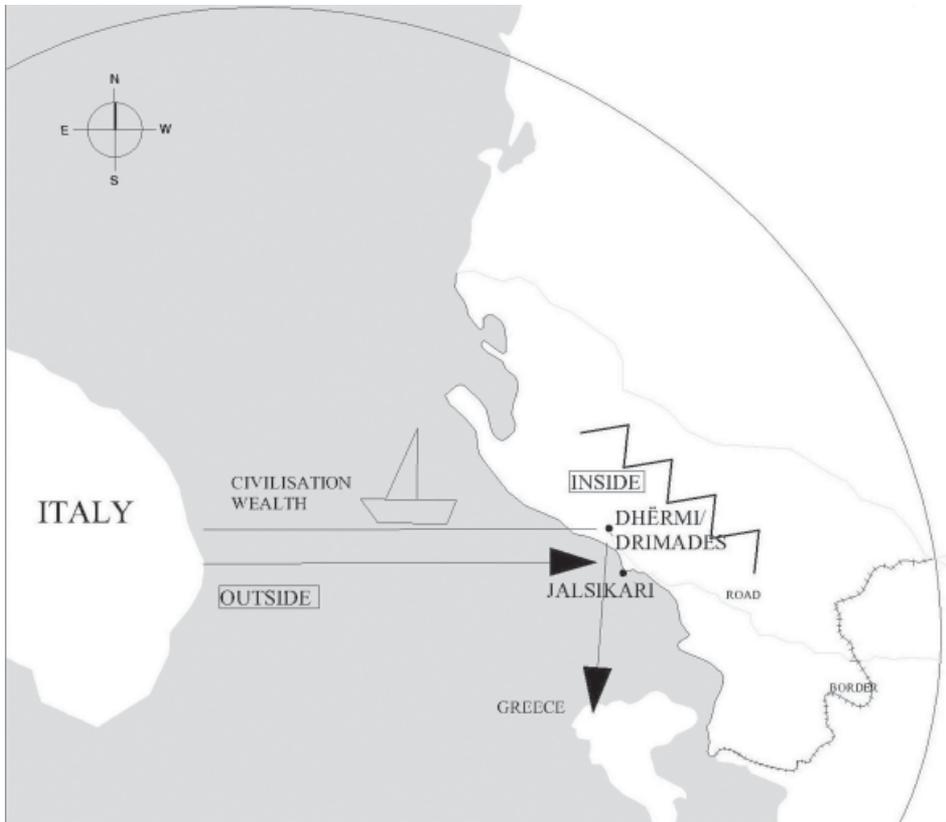


Figure 1: Paths and places from the story of Pavlos, born in 1938.

The figure above (see Figure 1.) shows the construction of space in Pavlos' story. It includes the village's space beside the sea strait. Pavlos maps the space similarly to others, mapping the locations around different time points: before, during or after the communist era. He begins his story with a critique of the transformation of the village's anchoring place, *Jaliskari*, into a beach bar, which is now owned by the 'Albanians'. He sees a difference between the '*Alvani*' and the locals (*horiani*). His story continues to map the space into the period before the communist era, when seaways used to lead to places in Italy and Greece. All these places are, in relation to Dhërmi/Drimades, in the 'outside' (*okso*) position, while only the village is thought of being 'inside' (*mesa*). By describing the transport of imported goods over the cobblestone path, Pavlos continues to map the *mesa* part of the space, placing the 'whereness' of the village in between the coast and surrounding mountains. The meanings of different 'whereness' are constructed

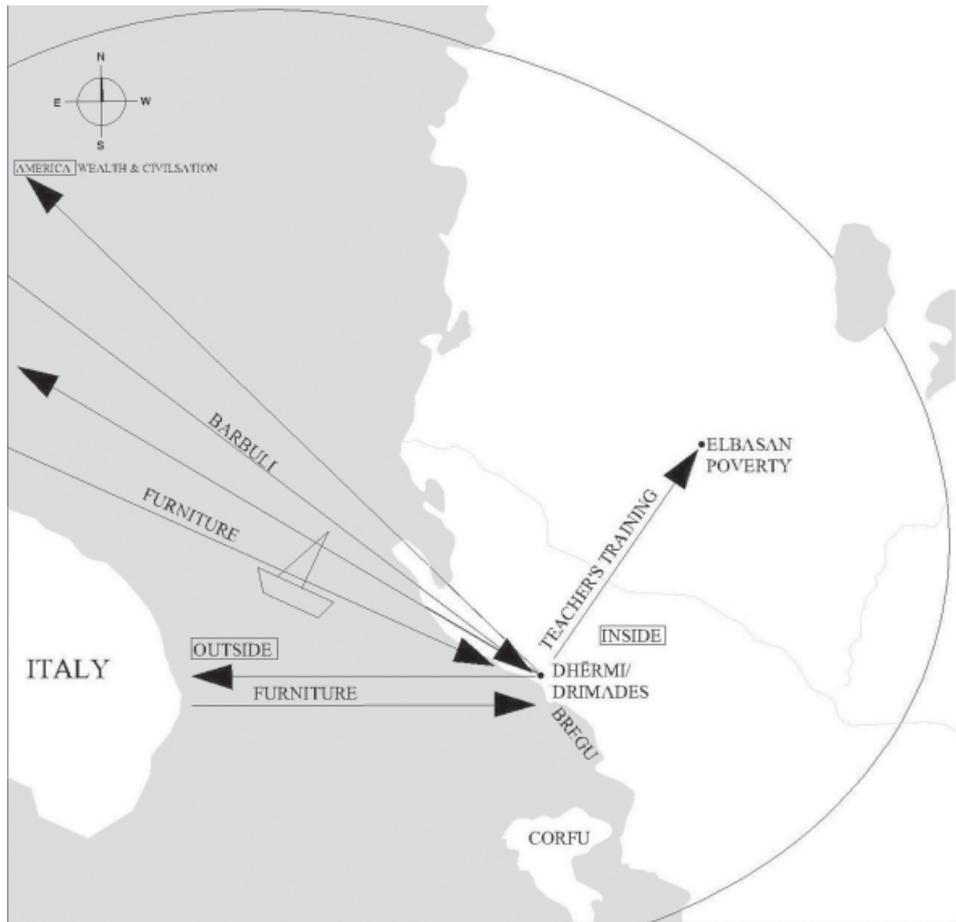


Figure 2: Paths and places from the story of Eleni, born in 1944.

according to spatial hierarchy. The ‘outside’ places are important, and powerful in economical and social sense, while places ‘in Albania’ are weak, uncivilised, and poor. The village stands in between and is in this regard ambiguous. Pavlos attempts to break down this ambiguity and to pin down the ‘whereness’ of the village by relating it to Italy and Greece, with civilisation and richness. In doing so his narrative differentiates and separates the village from Albania. This conceptualisation stands in contrast to later periods, when during the communist era the ‘whereness’ of the village was no longer constructed through overseas connections, due to restrictions of movements inside the country and over its borders.

Eleni’s biography is much richer in the number of places through which she moved during her lifetime. She locates the village according to her grandfather’s trading relations with Corfu and Venice and her uncle’s immigration to the United States between the two World Wars (see Figure 2.). All these places are located ‘outside’ (*okso*) and understood as a connection to civilisation and wealth. When describing the poverty that prevailed after World War II, during the communist era, she situates the ‘whereness’ of Dhërmi/Drimades according to its relation to Elbasan in central Albania, where she performed her practical work during her studies. She again ascribes meaning to ‘whereness’ in accord with spatial hierarchy, relating ‘outside’ places with economical and social power and places in Albania

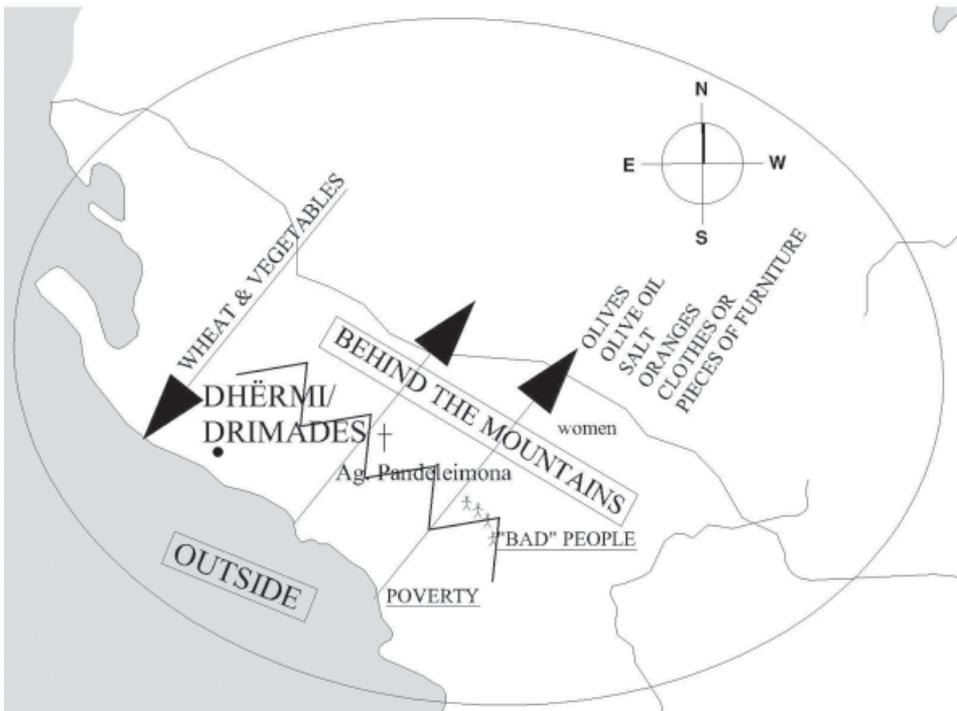


Figure 3: Paths and places from the story of Aspasia, born in 1933.

with weakness. The ‘whereness’ of the village is again placed in the middle, between wealth and poverty.

Stories about the sea primarily locate Dhërmi/Drimades according to the association of village men to people and places in Italy, Greece, or the United States, while stories about the mountains rely on the connections of village women with places ‘behind’ the mountains.

Aspasia has lived in Dhërmi/Drimades for all of her life. She maps the village according to her mother’s travels in ‘those times’ (*tote*), when poverty prevailed in the village (see Figure 3.). Aspasia especially differentiates the village from the places behind the mountains where she locates the ‘bad’ people. Her story again constructs the village’s ‘whereness’ according to spatial hierarchy, which is this time conceptualised more in social than economical terms. People behind the mountains are, despite wheat and other food, considered in a negative light because the village women often were robbed of their produce.

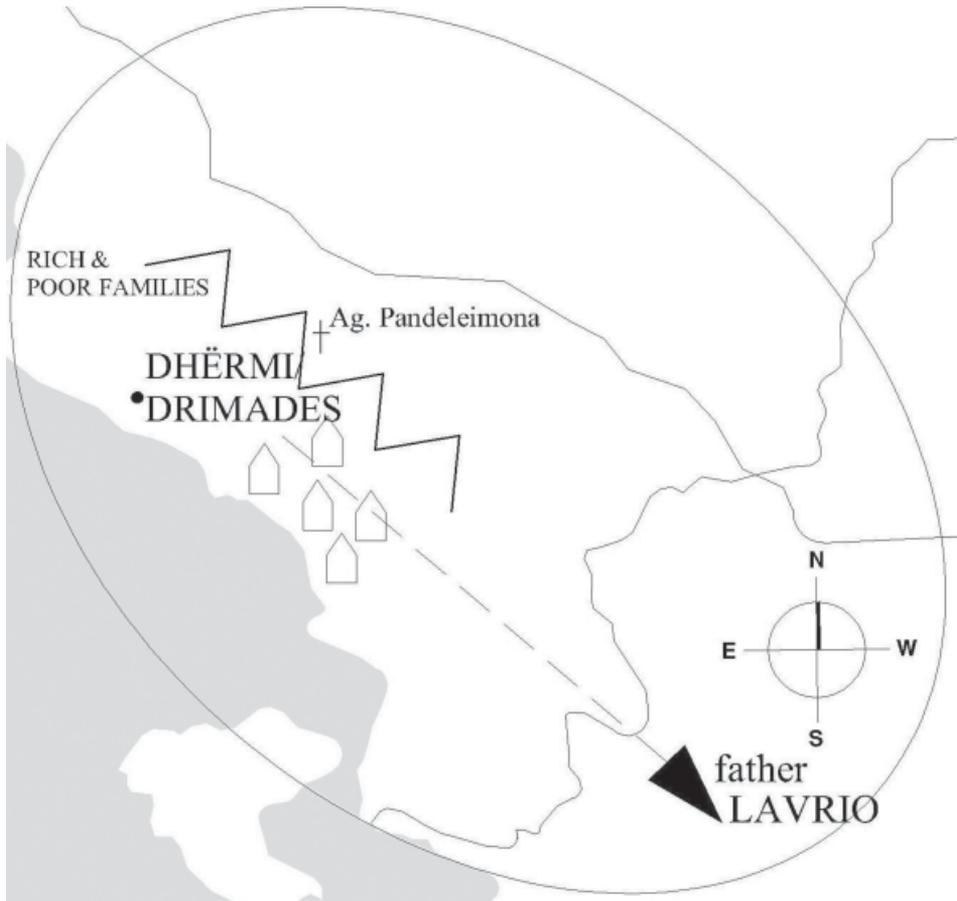


Figure 4: Paths and places from the story of Thodoris, born in 1928.

The last figure (see Figure 4.) shows the mapping of space in Thodoris' story. During his childhood he worked as a shepherd in the mountains. His experience places the 'whereness' of the village according to his journeys up to the mountains and down to the coast. His mapping includes Lavrio and Greece, where his father met his mother when he was working as a contract worker. Because of the flu epidemics they moved to the village shortly after their marriage.

The figures drawn above illustrate how people in their stories perceive and conceptualise the 'whereness' of their village. This 'whereness' is constructed according to their own and their predecessors' movements and restrictions during the communist era, to geopolitical divisions, and to the topography of landscape. When dealing with sameness and difference that both constitute and are constituted by this 'whereness', the maps show the direction of movements and the position of places taken into account in the constitution of 'whereness'. The emphasis on difference is present when looking at the relationships between the villagers and the people and places 'outside' or 'behind the mountains'. On the other hand, it is the emphasis on sameness that comes forward when the 'whereness' of the village is placed on the geopolitical map of the nation-states (e.g. Italy, Greece, Albania, etc.).

Conclusion

In the stories and remembrances recounted by the elderly, the sea and the mountains enclose the village and define it as an intermediate space, characterized by its ambiguities. It seems that Dhërmi/Drimades is at the same time a place of manhood and of womanhood, wealth and poverty, civilisedness and uncivilisedness. These ambiguities concur with Dimitris' statement that the sea is hospitable and mild while the mountains are cold and wild. As I suggested in the introduction, these ambiguities are the basis for the construction of the 'whereness' of Dhërmi/Drimades, which is, as shown in the figures, changeable and vague.

The stories illustrate how political and economical divisions and the social generation of differences contributed to placing the village on the geopolitical map of Europe and the world. As the stories and historiography show (see section *Dhërmi/Drimades*, and Gregorič Bon 2008a: 104–168), the people of today's southern Albania and of Epirus and Corfu in Greece traded among themselves before the communist era 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 by planned relocations across Albania. 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 again shattered the perception of borders. Differences reappeared. They were no longer defined solely on the basis of 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 'the West', as 'civilised', 'developed' countries, while others get labelled as 'the East', as 'uncivilised', countries of the 'Third World' or 'the Balkans'.

The stories also describe how storytellers 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 names of the places in Albania thus get omitted, except in the story of Eleni. The Thunderbolt Mountains define the boundary between the places behind them (*piso*) and the village in front of them (*brosta*). Instead of places in Albania, storytellers speak about countries and places outside Albania, which are located outside (*okso*) of the village and represent its connection with civilisation and wealth. This means that the sea strait is seen as another border, which is, in contrast to the mountains, perceived in a positive way. The village thus stands in between. Stories try to resolve this ambiguity by relating the village to its connecting places.

This paper illustrates how the movements and migrations of storytellers are in many ways a duplication of their ancestors’ movements. Through their remembrances, which are, in Ingold’s terms (2000), forged with words and embedded in the perception of environment, people constantly reconstitute environment and at the same time their own memories. In his view the stories reveal the storytellers’ perception of the environment and themselves in it. Stories are constituted in this interrelation and develop together with the environment and the story-teller.

Referring to de Certeau (1984), Ingold suggests that the storyteller maps the process of (be)coming in the very act of recounting the story. I exemplify this process of (be)coming through the stories told by the elderly villagers. To show the continuity and irreversibility of the process I analysed them according to de Certeau’s theoretical perspective of continuous transformation of places to spaces and vice versa. I also analyse the process of (be)coming and the construction of places and spaces through Green’s (2005) conceptualisation of spatial hierarchy and its interrelation with ‘whereness’. The figures were drawn in order to illustrate the mapping of the village and other places in time and space. The figures show different variations of ‘whereness’. The ‘whereness’ of places appears changeable, with borders and boundaries being porous and fuzzy. This goes for local boundaries that map the landscape, as well as for state borders that divide Albania, Greece, Italy, or the United States. Overall, the story-tellers use the remembrances of their ancestors’ paths to reconstruct the past and recreate the present, serving to define their belonging to the place – the village.

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POVZETEK

Vsebinska prispevka vodi bralca po poteh in krajih, ki jih domačini Dhërmija/Drimadesa v južni Albaniji tkejo s pripovedovanjem zgodb in spominjanjem v okvirih svojih biografskih kontekstov. Z opisi potovanj, selitev in povezav med posameznimi kraji in ustvarjanjem prostorskih interrelacij med ljudmi, se v prispevku razkriva 'kartografski pogled', ki ga domačini rišejo v svojih zgodbah. Pri tem postane pomembno vprašanje, kako različni pomeni kraja in prostora, ki jih pripovedovalci ustvarjajo, vzpostavljajo položaj Dhërmija/Drimadesa in kako recipročno položaj vasi ustvarja različne pomene prostora in kraja. Avtorica trdi, da domačini v spominih na potovanja in selitve prednikov ter v svojih biografskih kontekstih nenehno premikajo položaj in meje 'svoje' vasi. Na ta način poustvarjajo prostor in kraj, v katerega umeščajo svojo pripadnost. Slednja je po eni strani prežeta s pomenom nacionalne države kot hegemoničnega koncepta, po drugi strani pa z raznolikostjo in lokalnostjo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: pripovedovanje, konstrukcija prostora, zemljevidenje, vzpostavljanje položaja, južna Albanija.

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