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Once relatively neglected, pilgrimage has become an increasingly prominent topic of study over the last few decades. Its study is inevitably inter-disciplinary, and extends across a growing range of scholarly fields, including religion, anthropology, geography, history, literary studies, art history, archaeology, sociology, heritage and tourism studies. This process shows no sign of abating – indeed, it looks set to continue to expand.

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Crossing the Borders

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To Mario (Bato) Katić 1970–1992: lost in vain but never forgotten

Secular Journeys, Sacred Places: Pilgrimage and Home-making in the Himarë/ Himara Area of Southern Albania

Nataša Gregorić Bon

Movement and Pilgrimage

One of the first anthropological studies of Christian pilgrimages (Turner and Turner 1978: xiii) conceptualized pilgrimage as a 'kinetic ritual' where the journey and movement bring a temporary social and psychological transformation. During the 1990s, when scholarly work on pilgrimage shifted its focus from pilgrim sites to journeys to these sites, studies of movement through space and time gathered pace (Stanley 1992, Morinis 1992, Coleman and Elsner 1995, Coleman and Eade 2004). Coleman and Eade (2004: 3) gave pilgrimage studies contemporary relevance by conceptualizing them as an 'imitation' of contemporary transnationalism and shifting identities. Pilgrimage is no longer seen, then, as merely an instrumental 'object' of social processes but also as a constitutive part of those processes. In line with Coleman and Eade (2004) and Sallnow (1991: 148), who view pilgrimage as a kinaesthetic mapping of space, I argue that the emigrants through their pilgrimage to Stavri re-enact the routes of their ongoing return movements. Through these movements, they re-define their sense of home and belonging.

This chapter also explores how the emigrants, who are 'on the move', negotiate, manage and contest their locality, through which they seek to ensure their home and belonging. I focus on the processes of home-making that generate new meanings through which emigrants seek to guarantee their attachment to 'their' place. Contemporary studies of place have shown that place can no longer be thought of as a fixed and stable category but as a lively process (Massey 2005, Ingold 2009, Kirby 2009). Drawing on Ingold (2009), I conceptualize place in terms of movement and not by the outer limits set on movements. Accordingly, the meaning of home is a relational process since people in particular historical, political, economic, social and cultural contexts are continually involved in shifting its meaning. In today's fast-changing economic and political relations, the meanings of home and locality can be fruitfully related to a given group's sense of rootedness in a particular locale, as well as to the perpetual movements and migrations.

The Context

Albania used to be one of the few European countries where religious atheism did not fall within the domain of communal or individual choice but was regulated top-down by national rule enforced by the Communist leader, Enver Hoxha. In order to suppress religious differences between Muslims, Christians and Catholics that were seen as dividing the Albanian population – and allegedly inspired by Pashko Vasa, an Albanian writer, poet and one of the promoters of the Albanian National Awakening – Hoxha declared Albanianism to be the only religion of the Albanians (Dujizings 2002: 61–2). Following the methods of China's Cultural Revolution, he officially forbade any kind of religious practice in 1967, and as we have already seen, numerous churches as well as mosques were closed. As a proponent of Stalinism, Hoxha also sought to establish equality among the Albanians and promulgated nationalism as the backbone of the Albanian people (ibid.). Although religious differences revived after the collapse of the regime, they did so in a much more tolerant religious atmosphere (de Rapper 2012).

This chapter will address precisely the continuum between the discursive differentiation between religions, on the one hand, and tolerance and sharing at the level of practice on the other. I will focus on relations between two different religious traditions (Christian Orthodox and Muslim), ethnic groups (locals (*horiamos/vëndasit*) and the majority of Albanians (*Albanos*), as well as local groups (emigrants and locals) in the Himarë (the official, Albanian name) or Himara (the local, Greek name) area of southern Albania.² I will examine, in particular, the Orthodox pilgrimage to Stavridi, which is undertaken every 14 August on the evening before the Feast of the Assumption (the Panayia or Mikri Pashka, Dormition of the Theodokos), one of the most important Orthodox festivals. This particular pilgrimage is interesting from an ethnographic point of view because it brings together the local population with emigrants, who are originally from the Himara area but mainly live in Athens in Greece and seasonally return to their native land to attend this pilgrimage to the mountain plateau of Stavridi. The chapter will also explore the role played by the relationship between the pilgrimage and micro-politics (locality constructions³) in the following processes: past and present movements, locality constructions, and sacred and secular place-making in the Himara area.

After the fall of the Communist regime, the monastery of Stavridi (its name means the 'Cross' in Greek) soon became one of the more important

¹ As the people living in the villages of the Himara are bilingual, I will refer to the Albanian southern and the local Greek dialect.

² I will use the local name in the rest of this chapter.

³ Because in modern Greek the term 'ethnicity' derives from the word *ethnos*, which linguistically incorporates the entire range of terminology for nationhood and nationalism (Herzfeld 2005: 113, see also Green 2005: 266 fn. 12), I will instead use the term 'locality constructions'.

pilgrimage sites in the Himara area. The emigrants' seasonal returns home could be figuratively seen as sacred journeys, imbued with nostalgia and 'romantic' memories of the home-place (Delaney 1990). Numerous scholars (Morinis 1992, Coleman and Elsner 1995, Bauman 1996, Clifford 1997, Coleman and Eade 2004) see pilgrimage as a trope of modernity and a contemporary mode of dwelling that includes various movements, upon which the emigrants graft their feelings of home and belonging (Rapport and Dawson 1998).

Unlike most of the year when most of the villages in the Himara area are depopulated, summertime sees the coastal plains crowded with tourists, the majority of whom are emigrants originating from this area but now living in Athens. Over the last ten years, they began reconstructing their old houses and building new ones, as well as creating tourist facilities along the village coast. Throughout the summer season (from May to September), they run these tourist facilities but then return to Greece to work as manual labourers. Return migration, repossession and re-management of the coastal plain have brought about social differentiation and arguments over land, all of which inform the emigrant's sense of home and belonging.

The pilgrimage to Stavridi and the consecration of, or dedication to, the holy icon of Saint Mary (Panayia) are two of the main events that the emigrants take part in when they return home. In his comparison between the pilgrimage (hajj) made by Turkish villagers in Anatolia to Mecca and the homecoming of Turkish immigrants in Europe, Delaney claims that 'hajj seems to be precisely the journey home and the journeying home can be interpreted as pilgrimage' (1990: 515). Inspired by Delaney, I view the pilgrimage to Stavridi as a process of homecoming and a material expression of homemaking. The notions of home (*to spiti/shëpi*), and a material expression of homemaking. The notions of home (*to spiti/shëpi*), and a material expression of homemaking (*kano to spiti/bej* homecoming (*paq sto spiti/vij në shëpi*) and homemaking (*kano to spiti/bej shëpi*), I suggest, have ontological meaning and they give the emigrants-pilgrims a feeling of emplacement in the locality of the village, a place that is itself shaped by movements and migrations.

Through their pilgrimage to Stavridi, the local people and emigrants develop their social networks and reconstruct mutual relations. To paraphrase Eade and Sahlnow (1991b: xii, 5), the pilgrimage is a social event and represents a basis for social interactions. It is the place of social cohesion and reaffirmation of existing social networks and reconstruction of social boundaries. Drawing on Coleman (2002), the pilgrimage to Stavridi could be seen as the arena where *communitas* as defined by Victor and Edith Turner (1978: 15) and the contestation paradigm (Eade and Sahlnow 1991a) continuously overlap.

The Himara Area – From Past to Present

The latest INSTAT report (2011) estimated that Albania is populated by 56.7 per cent of Muslims, 2.1 per cent Bektashis, 10.0 per cent Catholics, 6.75 per cent Albanian Orthodox, 0.14 per cent Evangelicals, 0.07 per cent other Christians,

5.5 per cent believers without denomination, 2.50 per cent Atheists, and 0.20 per cent others. Since 13.8 per cent of the respondents did not answer the questionnaire and 2.4 per cent gave irrelevant answers, the questionnaire was not very reliable. Yet, what is striking here is not only the percentages of non-respondents and irrelevant answers, but also the numbers themselves given for particular religious groups. For example, the Orthodox proportion had fallen by almost 14 per cent since the last census conducted at the end of Communist rule in 1989.⁴ This has triggered several political and media disputes and exposes not only the unreliability of the latest census, but also draws on the contestations between two religious traditions or ethnic groups (Muslims and Orthodox), which need to be understood in their historical context.

Although Fan Noli founded the Albanian Autonomous Church in 1922, most people from Himara declare themselves as *hristiani* and members of the Greek Orthodox Church. Similar declarations can be found among the officially recognized national Greek minority in Saranda, Gjirokastra and Delvina (Berxholi 2005). In contrast to the people living in these areas, the bilingual residents (who speak Greek and Albanian) are not considered members of the official minority. According to Greek national politics and mainstream public opinion, they are *omogheneis* or co-ethnic Greeks living in Albania. The status of 'co-ethnicity' gives them the right to apply for the Special Cards for Aliens of Greek Descent, which allows them unrestricted passage across the Albanian-Greek and other European Schengen borders. In spite of the fact that, in practice, most of the villagers do not travel beyond Greece, they frequently 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 border-crossings, notwithstanding the liberalization of the visa regime in December 2010, are still controlled but not fully restricted.⁵

Along with the political (the fall of Communism), economic (privatization) and social (migration) changes, the tensions for minority rights in the Himara are reflected in people's claims to 'locality' which, in turn, gives them a sense of autonomy and a belief in the distinctiveness of their area. Despite the fact that the European Union is now undergoing a substantial economic and fiscal crisis, many people in the Himara region continue to want to find their place within Europe

⁴ This census estimates that in 1989, Albania was populated by 70 per cent Muslims, 20 per cent members of the Albanian Orthodox Church and 10 per cent Roman Catholics. It is noted that percentages are only approximate because they were compiled after the research done in 1989 <<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/facebook/geos/al.html>>. One of the main reasons for the uncertainty in the estimate of the various percentages is related to the atheism promulgated by Enver Hoxha since 1967.

⁵ Despite the liberalization of the visa regime, the Albanian citizens must present a reference letter of a physical person or a legal institution when they cross the Schengen border. Besides this, they must prove onsite that they carry enough money with them (at least 50 euros per day for the duration of their stay).

and benefit from its support for the regionalization of Europe and the gradual accession policy for the countries of the so-called 'western Balkans'. 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'. They see this as an opportunity for them to consolidate and enforce their locality as well as preserve their 'authentic' Himara tradition (Gregorić Bon 2008).

Many people living in the villages of Himara area declare themselves to be locals (*horiani/vëndasit*) or 'of the place' (*apo ton topos/nga vëndit*). This indicates several specific claims about being 'rooted' to the place of their native origin, their language (the local Greek dialect), and their Christian Orthodox religion. Their self-declarations are formed in contrast to the newcomers of *ksernos/muqj*, meaning newcomers, foreigners and outsiders. Sometimes, they also use pejorative names for them, such as *Turkos* or *Alvanos*.⁶ They either moved to the village during the Communist period or, more typically, arrived after its demise for economic reasons. They are either Muslims or atheists, and they often introduce themselves according to the name of the place from which they have come.

The struggles for distinctiveness and locality in the area should be understood in their proper historical context. For centuries, people living in today's southern Albania and Epirus in Greece have travelled to and from the area mainly because of trade, seasonal work, shepherding, or due to their service in different armies (Winnifith 2002, Vullnetari 2007). In the early nineteenth century, this area was part of the *vilayet* with a centre in Ioannina. For purposes of tax collection, the Ottoman administration divided all non-Muslim people into special administrative and organizational units (*millet*s), which incorporated people according to their religious affiliation, regardless of where they lived, what language(s) they spoke, or what was the colour of their skin (Glenny 1999: 71, 91–3, 112, 115, Mazower 2000: 59–60, Duijzings 2002: 60, Green, 2005: 147). Religious differences were thus politically defined. Moreover, religion became a major source of identification (Duijzings 2002: 60). After 1913, the Ottoman principle of organizing people and places was replaced by the nationalist principle, which categorized people and places according to their language and territory. Disjunctions between the two systems of dividing people and places have since led to tensions and territorial disputes, which sporadically break out, and blur the boundaries between the two (de Rapper and Sintès 2006, Green 2005: 148–9).

According to my discussions with the people of the Himara, the border between Albania and Greece was quite irrelevant to the people living in southern Albania and Epirus in Greece, since they continued to travel back and forth until the end of the Second World War. Those from Pogoni in Epirus took the same view (Green 2005: 57). Green notes that for many inhabitants in that area, the Albanian town of Gjirokastra was considered to be far better off than Pogoni at that time (*ibid.*).

⁶ According to the local people (*horiani*), 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.

During the Communist dictatorship (1945–90), the road (*to dhomo*) which led to the state border and was used by the people living in southern Albania for travel and trade, was closed following Hoxha's policy of suppressing free movement across state borders. During his rule, the minority status, which had been granted to those living in two villages (Palasa and Dhërmi/Drimades) in the Himara area and the municipal town itself in 1922, was revoked with the explanation that there were not enough Greek-speakers living in the area (Kondis and Manda 1994: 21). Despite the restrictions and control of internal movement, Hoxha's policy of unification and homogenization of Albanian society forced many Greek-speaking people to move to the northern or central part of Albania (*ibid.*, see also Green 2005: 227).

During this period, the minority issues and irredentist claims raised by the southern Albanian pro-Greek party almost disappeared. However, they resurfaced in 1990 after the declaration of democracy, the opening of borders and the massive migrations that ensued (Hatziprokopiou 2003: 1033–59, Mai and Schwandner-Sievers 2003: 939–49, Papatlias 2003: 1059–79). Nowadays, these issues are reflected upon in a somewhat different way. In the Himara area, the main differentiation is advanced by those who claim to be from the village or the area identifying themselves with the term 'locals' (*horiani/vëndasi*), or 'of the place' (*apo ton topo/nga vëndi*).

Religion in the Himara Area

In spite of the formation of the Albanian Autocephalous (autonomous) Church in 1922 and its recognition by the Patriarchate in 1937, there have been very few subsequent translations of religious literature⁷ (see Wynnifirth 2002: 135). There is an Albanian translation of the New Testament, used in Greek minority areas and all other areas that managed to hold onto Christianity under Ottoman rule and the threat of Islamization. Except for the officially recognized Greek minority areas and the Himara area, where the liturgy is celebrated only in Greek, Christian communities hold services partly in Albanian and partly in Greek.

During the totalitarian regime when many religious buildings were destroyed, the churches in the Himara area were preserved, especially those dating back to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. The church doors, however, were sealed at that time and no one dared to enter. Many local priests were put under special surveillance and were not allowed to perform any religious practices. Important festivals such as Easter (*Pasha/Pashk*), Christmas (*Hristinghenia/Krishindje*), or the Dormition of Theodokos (*Mikri Pasha/Pashk e Vogel*) were nevertheless secretly celebrated, according to the local people.

⁷ The only translations of the religious literature were done between 1910 and 1940 (Jacques 1995: 313–15).

In the Himara area, religion is not only rooted in people's lives (the Christian names, religious feasts) but is also grounded in its topoi. In every neighbourhood of the village's central hamlet, there is a small chapel that was built by its inhabitants. People in the neighbourhoods belong to a cluster of patrilineal or patrigrups (*soifis*).⁸ They hold Mass in these chapels, usually on the name-days of saints after whom the specific church or one of the members of the *soifis* is named. Massive emigration has caused many neighbourhoods to be left to the ravages of time. Despite this, the small chapels are at least partly preserved in contrast to the surrounding buildings. A few village women take care of the chapels, churches and monasteries and clean them for their patron saint's name-day feast and other religious feasts some days before. This is also the case for the Stavridi monastery, which is annually visited on the eve before the Feast of the Assumption (*Mikri Pasha/Pashk e Vogel*).

Pilgrimage to Stavridi

Departure from the Village

In this section, I will describe the pilgrimage which I joined with the teenage girl, Eleni, and her aunt, Zaharula, on 14 August 2005. It was four o'clock in the afternoon when we set out on the journey towards the monastery. We were walking along the pebble-stone path winding through the valley and slowly ascending towards Stavridi. During the journey, Zaharula was telling me about her relations and ties to Dhërmi/Drimades, her home-place. Although she has been living in Athens for several years now, she will never forget her village which she loves and where her home (*spiti/shëpi*) and roots (*trizes/trëngjet*) are. Here they have a house and a piece of land and people know where they belong.

Zaharula and her husband, Dimitris, are emigrants who migrated with their children to Athens after the collapse of Communism in 1990. They were both born in Dhërmi/Drimades. Almost every summer, they return to their native village. In the meantime, their children have grown up and are now married with their own apartments in Athens. According to Zaharula, they cannot wait until August, when they can return to the village and meet their relatives and friends whom they have not seen for a year or more. 'Every time I walk up the hill from where my house is, with a view on the entire village, the mountains, and the sea, I remember that my roots are here in Drimades', noted Zaharula in one of our conversations. She continued:

⁸ According to my conversations with the local people of Himara, *soifis* consist of patrilineal descendants who share the common ancestor, surname, the 'same blood' or *ema*, and some plots of land such as forests and pastures.

I can feel my heart beating very fast, like in those days when I was young and in love. Though nobody, except loads of work, is waiting for me in this house, I still crave to see and smell it. This is my *spiti/shëpi* [home/house]. Though I have a home in Athens too, this home is different as here are my roots.

Zaharula continued describing the work she must do in the house every time she returns. In a sad voice, she noted that this year she has not even had time to visit her mother, who lives together with her brother, as she normally does, since she had so much work. She continued complaining that she is working very hard in Athens and because of that she did not have the time to buy presents for her mother and her brothers' family. Consequently, she decided to give some money to her nephews instead and she also has some Greek coffee and fruit juice to take with her. She could hardly find time to buy food and other provisions to take with her to Albania. Since this made me give her a slightly questioning look, she paused to explain that she buys everything in Athens – from milk, spaghetti, to vegetables, and so on. 'This is what we learnt,' she added smiling, and explained that since the 1990s she does not trust Albanian products anymore, although today you can find similar imported stuff from Greece or Italy in the village shops.

Zaharula's homecoming, like those of other emigrants, could be interpreted as a pilgrimage involving repetitive and emotional performances and ritual acts in their native villages. These performances engaged Zaharula's feelings towards her *spiti/shëpi*, her preparations for the journey home (buying presents and other things to take with her), driving in bumper-to-bumper traffic, cleaning houses, visiting relatives, and so on, through which they constitute their presence in their social absence from the village community and reconstruct, time and again, their sense of rootedness and belonging.

Although many emigrants return to the village after retirement, Zaharula thinks that she herself (or she and her husband) might not return, despite the fact that everything depends on her husband who differs in his opinion about this. Zaharula continued that living in the village does not offer as many possibilities as living in Athens. Due to continuous electricity and water reductions throughout Albania, along with bad infrastructure, and inadequate social and health support, village life is not as comfortable as life in Greece. Furthermore, life in the village has changed a lot. There are many *ksenoi/ë huajt* (newcomers or those who moved from other places throughout Albania), whom you cannot trust:

People used to be friendlier than they are now; they were not fighting over the land as often as they do today. Many locals gossip about their neighbours and relatives and do not take care about the village surroundings. This is partly the reason why the old houses are desolate and slowly falling apart and the village surroundings are full of rubbish.

Later on, when we were alone, Eleni complained that Zaharula exaggerated in many ways. She did not live in the village and was no longer one of the locals.

When comparing the past of her native village with the present-day situation, Zaharula draws on social distinctions between 'locals' and 'foreigners' or 'newcomers'. In her idealized description of the village's past and allegedly existing friendships between the members of the village community, she generates an idea of a place through which she then defines her sense of home and belonging. As an emigrant, who had already moved to Vlorë during the Communist period, from where she then migrated to Athens, she compares the past and the present from her village, while reconstructing existing social relations. In her nostalgic journey to the past home-place (cf. Seremetakis 1991), Zaharula seems to be compensating for her feelings of estrangement and displacement.

While Zaharula, Eleni and I were talking, the path began to ascend gradually, and the twisting curves multiplied and narrowed. The landscape was slowly changing from the Mediterranean bushes to green deciduous trees. On the way, we were meeting other pilgrims who were walking in groups; they went to Stavriði either on foot or by car. As the narrow path became rougher and steeper, the cars had to speed up in order to reach the top of the hill. The honking and the speeding of cars left the pilgrim's path in clouds of smoke and dust as well as noise.

Arrival at Stavriði

After an hour of walking, we reached the monastery, which was hidden behind a high stone fence. Some pilgrims had already gathered in the courtyard. Many of them were waiting to enter a small church in order to light a candle and dedicate (*proskimna*) it to the icon of Saint Mary. Others were setting out mattresses in the courtyard, greeting each other and chatting. With dusk arriving, the place was crowded with pilgrims, most of whom were elderly village women, emigrant families and young people. The courtyard, desolate for most of the year, suddenly became alive with the pilgrims' chatter. While the elderly pilgrims and young families were setting out the mattresses where they later slept, youngsters greeted each other and chatted loudly.

At nine o'clock, it got dark and the evening Mass started with only a few pilgrims, mainly older women, attending. After that, dinner followed. Despite the fact that religious orthodoxy dictates a strict fast, forbidding all meat and dairy products, oil and wine, only very few pilgrims – the majority of whom were elderly women – were fasting. Numerous other pilgrims ate food they had brought with them, such as spinach pie, roasted paprika, tomatoes, olives and bread and drank water or brandy (*raki*). Some of the youths had brought their own alcohol with them and drank beer or other liquor.

While eating, I chatted with two young families who had also walked to Stavriði. I was told that they attended this pilgrimage almost every year and enjoyed the landscape and the company. Marko, a man in his thirties, who migrated to Athens when he was a teenager, commented that Stavriði is a place where they can meet other locals who also hailed from the area but now lived in Greece. He added that his colleague sitting next to him was a friend from his youth; they used to

live in the nearby coastal city of Vlora, where their parents had moved during Communism. Every summer they spent their holidays at one of the villages in the Himara area, enjoying the sun and the beach. Marko said that he misses the village a lot. To my question about whether he would return, he responded negatively: like Zaharula, he thought that life in the village did not offer much for a young family like his. However, he continued that although he has a house (*spiti*) in Greece, he will not forget his origins and roots. 'The locals know me here', he said, and went on to explain:

I will never forget an old woman who stopped me when I was walking down to the village one day. Though I never saw her in my life she joyfully greeted me and said that I must definitely belong to the Duni family. She was talking very highly about our family. She knew that the Duni used to be very prosperous and that they owned a ship which was used by my ancestors to trade with people in Greece and Italy. I live in Athens for many years now and I have lots of friends there but nobody knows my family and its history like this local woman does. Therefore, I know that my roots are here in this village, neither in Vlora where I grew up nor in Athens where I live now.

In the ensuing debate, Marko talked about the trading relations that some of the prosperous families, which were 'autochthonous' to this area, used to have with Greece and Italy. 'But this was in times when the road was open (*otan to dhromos itame aniktos*) [referring to the Albanian-Greek state border]', noted Marko. To my question what 'autochthony' means in this context, Marko responded that it means to be a local (*horianos/vendore*) or to be 'of the place'. He continued:

It is a pity that more and more newcomers are moving into this area nowadays. They are foreigners, coming from different parts of Albania and have different habits and customs. Some of them speak northern Albanian dialect which is hard to understand for the locals. They are not 'of the place' – and they do not take care about our village and its surroundings.

The emigrants, in a range of settings, seek to create social boundaries in order to protect or build their home and sense of belonging to their native place. It demonstrates how social boundaries between the 'locals' (those 'of the place') and 'foreigners' (those 'out of place') are continuously shifting according to the context. When Zaharula and Marko, for example, complain about newcomers and their irresponsibility towards the village surroundings, they construct the social boundaries between themselves or locals, and newcomers or foreigners. These social boundaries are differently conceptualized by Eleni, who does not see her aunt, Zaharula, as one of the locals either. Since Zaharula does not live in the village but in Athens, Eleni thinks that she does not have 'roots' in the Himara area. Thus the meaning of such labels as 'local', 'foreigner', Albanian, Muslim,

Christian and emigrant are complex and shift according to the interlocutor's position in the network of social relations.

While the differentiations are constituted and contested at the rhetorical level, they become irrelevant in terms of practice. Although most of the pilgrims were predominantly Christians, one could find also some Muslims among them. One of them was the village teacher, her daughters and cousin who come from a village in north-eastern Albania but moved to Himara during the Communist period. The teacher explained that she came to Stavridi because her daughters wanted to take part in an overnight party that lasted until dawn. Even though social distinctions between the *horiani* or *hristiani* and *ksenoi* or *Turki* are rhetorically constructed by the villagers as well as newcomers, the village teacher's presence can none the less be said to illustrate a continuum between various exclusionary competitive discourses, on the one hand, and the pilgrims' practical experience of social cohesion, on the other.

Gupta and Ferguson suggest that 'identity is a "meeting point" – a point of suture or temporary identification – that constitutes and re-forms the subject so to enable that subject to act' (2001: 13). In their pilgrimage to Stavridi, pilgrims redefine their identity through their links or 'meetings' with other people. Local people and emigrants reconfigure distinctions between 'us' as being 'of the place' (*apo ton topos/nga vëndi*) and 'others' as being 'out of place'. Their distinctions are points of temporary identification, which allow the emigrants to compensate for their feelings of displacement. Identification is thus spatially constituted and related to the processes of homemaking and vice versa.

During our conversation, what started out as pilgrims' chatting away with each other developed into a party; this was especially true for the side of the courtyard where young emigrants were gathered. Some of them were drinking alcohol and talking modern Greek music played on the radio, some were drinking alcohol and talking loudly, while others were playing different games, like cards and so on. While the youngsters parted into the early morning hours, most of the elderly women and some families with young children went to sleep in the open air. At around five o'clock in the morning, when the first rays of the sun touched the monastery, the preparations for the morning Mass started. Everybody was awake, packing up the mattresses and cleaning up the place. At six o'clock, the church ceremony began. All the pilgrims gathered around the small patio by the church, where the Mass was held. There were around 200 pilgrims present, many of whom had arrived during the morning. Some of them were too tired from all-night partying to listen to the Mass; they stood in the background and quietly carried on chatting.

Secular Journeys

Except for the holy moment of consecration (*proskimna*) to the icon of Saint Mary (*Panayia*), the pilgrimage to Stavridi is a secular event that should be understood in the context of everyday life. As such, it reflects current social relations that are

continuously being reconstructed. It acts as one of the nodal points of social and spatial differentiation around which the local people and emigrants of Himara are able to define their locality. In line with Coleman and Eade (2004), who define pilgrimage as the kinaesthetic mapping of place, the emigrants and locals through their journeys to Stavridi (whether by car or on foot), their socializing with friends and relatives, partying and their participation in the morning service, generate a sense of place which they define as part of a distinct region. Due to the minority issues present for the last twenty years, as well as the increasing migration to and from Greece, many emigrants locate the Himara region within the geopolitical map of the European Union.

The pilgrimage to Stavridi is an imitation of sorts of the contemporary world of movement and migration – in this case of the local people and their seasonal homecoming. It should be understood in terms of a continuum between the *communitas* and contestation paradigm. While at the level of rhetoric, the pilgrims continually constitute social differences, it is precisely these differences that are then transgressed at the level of practice. The pilgrimage place is thus a crossroads where people from different religious traditions meet and a place of religious tolerance.

Despite Stavridi's religious architecture (the church and the monastery) the pilgrimage site is, in fact, experienced (with the exception of *proskimima*) more as a secular than a sacred place. Hence, in 2012 when the priest (who had conducted the church ceremonies in Stavridi) left the village, the pilgrimage site was relocated to the monastery of Ag. Theodorou, where the church service was taken over by another priest. This pilgrimage was also attended by many emigrants from the Himara area.

Homecoming and Homemaking

It is hard to say where the boundary between the sacred and profane exactly lies. Instead of conceptualizing them as distinct though interrelated 'fields' or 'dimensions' (Canni-Rayer and Frégosi 2012: 282–3), it is perhaps better to understand them as a continuum. Thus, when Zaharula in her nostalgic memories travels back to her village's past, she is sacralizing her home-place. However, when she complains about its present-day relations with its surroundings, she is making her home-place profane. Something similar could be said for the pilgrimage. When the pilgrims are partying on Stavridi, they constitute it as a secular place but in their devotional activities performed in the church, they are sacralizing it. The boundary between the sacred and profane is, therefore, permeable.

The sacred–profane continuum is constituted by the act of 'sharing' which precedes it. In contrast to Courouçli (2012a: 6), who ascribes the act of sharing only to the sacred nature of the pilgrimage, the pilgrimage to Stavridi with its profane journeying to the mountain valley illustrates that sharing is also experienced at the level of everyday, profane practice. While walking or driving to Stavridi,

the pilgrims, who are mostly emigrants, reconstruct their relations with fellow villagers and constitute feelings of home and belonging. The notion of home is of special significance here – not only because of its broad semantic meaning, but because the *spiti/shëpi* has ontological meaning for emigrants from the Himara area and for Albanians in general.

In Albanian as well as in Greek, there is no distinction between 'home' and 'house' (Dalakoglou 2009: 63 fn.). They use the word *spiti* (Greek) and *shëpi* (Albanian) for both. *Shëpi*, alongside the term *fis* (patrilineage), refers to one of the core units of Albanian kinship (de Rapper 2012: 81). In the Himara area, the *spiti/shëpi* is the basis of the individuals' mode of 'dwelling' (Ingold 2000). Jackson (1995: 148) in his study of Warpiri in Australia writes that 'sense of home is grounded less in a place *per se* than in activity that goes on in a place.' Thus, for example Zaharula and Marko in their return journeys to their home-place and with their pilgrimage to Stavridi generate their *spiti/shëpi*, which is grounded in the set of activities such as nostalgia⁹ and longing (see also Rapport and Dawson 1998: 8), individual activities (cleaning and rebuilding the house) as well as communal practices (visiting relatives, gift-giving, pilgrimage). Although none of them plan to return on a permanent basis, they define their home-place of the Himara as the *topos* of their roots (*rrëzës/rrënjë*). Homemaking is thus 'a dynamic social process in which relationship to places and persons are produced' (Jansen 2007: 16).

Homemaking is also a material manifestation of the migrant's perpetual state of homecoming and their claims to a definite locality (see also Dalakoglou 2010: 733). The expression *kano* or *ftachno* to *spiti/bej shëpi* (to make a house) instead of *hizo* to *spiti/ndërtoj shëpi* (to build a house) is more commonly used by the Himara people when they refer to house-making in their everyday conversations.¹⁰ In the Himara, as well as elsewhere in Albania, the building process is often performed by the owners themselves and it tends to go on for a number of years, even decades, and in numerous cases, it is never completed. Unfinished two- or three-storey skeletal houses, where the lower floor is completed while the upper floors and the roof are missing, are quite common sights throughout Albania. As Dalakoglou notes, "house-making" by Albanian migrants is not only a simple house-building process; it also ensures a constant dwelling and dynamic "proxy" presence for migrants in their community of origin' (2010: 761).

'House-making' is also the major manifestation of the materiality of migration in post-Communist Albania (Dalakoglou 2010: 772, see also Gregorić Bon 2014). *Spitali/shëpisë* (houses) stand in as the material presence of absent migrants because they *materialize* the relationships between the migrants and the *spiti/*

⁹ According to Seremetakis (1991), the etymological meaning of 'nostalgia' derives from the Greek word *nostalgos*, where *nosto* means to return or travel back to one's homeland, and *algos* means desire or longing for something with a burning pain to undertake the journey back.

¹⁰ Something similar is observed also in Gjirokastra in southern Albania, where Dalakoglou (2010) has studied extensively the material expression of houses.

shitepi they have left behind. They also bring the 'migrant worlds' (Basu and Coleman 2008) closer. The *spiti/shitepi* not only eradicate the spatial distance between Athens and the Himara area, but also temporally merge the past with the present and the future.

This temporal merging is also present in the emigrants' processes of homecoming, which seem to culminate in their pilgrimage. In their nostalgic memories of their past home-place, they idealize social relations while at the same time transgress both their mundane, harsh realities of their migrant lives in Greece as their host country, and Albania as their home country. In this manner, they reconstruct their home, experienced and described as sacred. Like the Muslim pilgrims for whom 'Mecca is not only a religious centre but also an image of home' (Delaney 1990: 515), those visiting the pilgrimage sites of Stavridi or Ag. Theodorou see them also as images of their home-place. While the latter is often sacralized through nostalgia and idealization of the past, the former is desacralized through activities such as partying.

In the local Greek dialect of the Himara, no words exist that would directly correspond to the meaning of the English word 'pilgrimage'. Whenever pilgrimage is discussed, local people and emigrants use descriptive terms such as 'going to Stavridi' (*pame yia Stavridi/shkojmë në Stavridh*). Only a few of the emigrants referred to the word *proskhima*, which, in a literal translation, stands for a set of devotions performed when entering the church (Winkelmann and Dubisch 2005: xiv). Dubisch, (1995: 95) in her study of pilgrimage in the Greek island of Tinos, writes that the pilgrims do not, even temporarily, break off from their locality – it remains part of their everyday life. Likewise, the pilgrimage to Stavridi does not relate so much to the set of devotional practices, such as consecration of the holy icon of Panayia – it refers more to the pilgrims' journey and the processes of construction of social networks between the emigrants and the local population. In other words, their journeys to Stavridi are not so much spiritually religious as they are imbued with a sense of home-place and nostalgia through which past and present belonging are re-created. Homecoming can be interpreted as a pilgrimage in that it embodies a journey imbued with sacredness (cf. Liebelt 2010: 263).

Conclusion

Coleman (2002: 362) contends that a pilgrimage should be analysed in a broader context. In the Himara area, this context pertains to movements and migrations that occurred throughout different historical periods and generated shifting meanings of people and places and their feelings of home.

The social and spatial boundaries that are constituted through the pilgrimage to Stavridi have a history. Religious affiliation was an important source of the divisions between Muslims and Christians during Ottoman rule in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Relative autonomy, autonomous government and the preservation of Christianity in the Himara region shaped the construction

of social boundaries throughout the centuries. With the foundation of the nation state, the religious differences and categorizations took on territorial connotations. Discordances between Ottoman and national ways of dividing people and places led to numerous tensions that in the Himara area can be seen in constructions of locality and struggles for local distinctiveness. Thus, the pilgrimage to Stavridi is a reflection of a much wider social, political and historical context.

Emigrants' homecomings can be understood as a pilgrimage and vice versa. This pilgrimage provides a link to past movements of their ancestors, as well as the prosperity and autonomy of their area throughout history. Pilgrimage to Stavridi is one of the processes through which emigrants establish their relations to their native village to which they keep seasonally returning, even though they have no intention to ever return for good. The ethnographic material illustrates how emigrants reconstruct their sense of rootedness, constitute their identity and reinforce their attachment to the place. The pilgrimage can be interpreted as the trope of a route, with its temporal and spatial dimensions related to the process of place-making. It exemplifies how the emigrants, through their routes and roots, construct the village's place as a set of encounters and translations.

The meaning of locality is influenced not only by the emigrants' sense of roots to their native village, but also by their routes to and from their village. When managing and negotiating their feelings of belonging, they expose their past and present movements, and in the process constitute their locality as a form of 'dwelling-in-travel' (Clifford 1997; see also Gregorić Bon 2010: 19–20). The meaning of pilgrimage is not only grounded in the sacred and the secular – the *communis* and the contestation continuum – but is also built on the continuous interplay between mobility and rootedness.