

Views from the South

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The historicity of landscape: use and transformation of the natural environment in a Greek and an Albanian community

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1. Introduction

In this paper, we are going to look at the historicity of landscape, comparing two ethnographic cases, two communities with a quite similar historical background but with completely different recent histories. We are going to compare the villages of Aristi and Buliarati, belonging for centuries to what was at one time Epirus, which at the end of the Ottoman rule was divided in two parts, one belonging to Greece and the other to Albania (known as Northern Epirus). We will look at the transformations that the physical environment has undergone in these two local communities as a result of specific historical conditions in the recent past, conditions that radically changed, in the course of time, the local communities' relationship with their physical environment, especially concerning the use and management of the land and its natural resources, but also in respect to the symbolic aspects of the use of space and place.

This comparative study is of particular interest because the two communities have quite common historical backgrounds up to the 1940s, when the two countries, Greece and Albania, followed completely different political systems and new conditions brought about significant changes to both. That is to say, we have two spe-

cific examples which show how history and the wider political conditions affect or determine the relationship between local societies and their natural environment.

Let us begin with the historical background. The two communities belonged to a common geopolitical space during the whole period of Ottoman occupation, until 1913 when the major part of Epirus (Aristi included) was incorporated into the Greek State, while the Northern part of it, to which Buliarati belongs, was given to Albania, recognized at the same time as having a Greek minority after the final definition of borders between the two countries in 1921.¹ Despite the differences that the two communities present in the Ottoman period, due to local differentiation of the mode of subjugation to the central Ottoman rule,² both communities were characterized by an important mobility of the male population in a large geographical area. They engaged in commerce and other productive activities which contributed immensely to their evolution and differentiation, social and cultural, from other peasant villages, especially those remaining under strict *tsiftlik* relations.³

It is also worth mentioning that during the 18th and 19th centuries a significant part of the population of these two villages had settled in different places of the Balkans; those from Aristi settled mainly in Serbia and from Buliarati mainly in Constantinople. This continued even in the twentieth century, when they went to more distant countries, mainly to the USA. World War II and the events that followed constituted an important watershed concern-

¹ V. Kontis, *Sensitive balance. Greece and Albania in the 20th century* (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis 1994, in Greek), pp. 120-151.

² In Zagori, for example, a kind of local autonomy and self-government as well as absence of *tsiftlik* land relations characterized its subjugation, whereas in Dropoli, the area to which Buliarati belongs, *tsiftliks* and the presence of local beys (*tsiftlik* owners) marked local history up to the end of Ottoman rule.

³ F. Petsas and D. Saralis, *Aristi and Western Zagori* (Athens: Henōsē Aristēs-Vikou Zagoriou, 1987, in Greek); G.K.-H.K. Kalyvopoulos, *Buliarati-Deropoli* (Athens: 1975, in Greek).

ing this emigration process. At the end of the '40s national borders among the Balkan States were closed and the unity of the Balkan space ceased to exist, a unity that, interestingly enough, was in many ways maintained even after the Balkan war, which led to the formation of the modern national States in the area. Quite striking is the example of the emigrant community of Aristi people in Serbia (basically in the town of Pozarevats), which remains there cut off from the native village until the recent communist regime's collapse. Another characteristic case showing the consequences of the closing down of national borders in the Balkans is the Sarakatsan community, a large part of which remained outside the Greek border in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia (they used to move between the two sides of the border twice a year along their traditional transhumant routes).

The year 1949 constitutes a really important temporal limit, a watershed, because it is just after the crucial historical events in the aftermath of World War II which radically changed the fate of the Balkan peninsula. National resistance movements were followed by partisan struggles which led to the imposition of communist regimes in all Balkan States except Greece, where the civil war (1946-49) ended with the defeat of the left. Between Greece and the rest of the Balkans a big wall was erected, a barrier known as 'iron curtain', which expressed the isolation imposed, an isolation whose consequences were to be unprecedented for a population accustomed to a long historical period of common geographical space. Greece continued to be an 'open' country with a new orientation, but it also experienced a mass emigration movement this time directed to the industrially developed Western European countries and presenting a different character (mainly industrial workers). Albania chose an absolute isolationism, an introvert political orientation, banning communication with other countries, especially those of the capitalist world, as well as emigration, a fact that was to become quite decisive for local communities.

Thus, we adopt the year 1950 as a watershed for the comparative study of the two communities, examining in both cases changes that took place in the relationship between the local so-

cieties and their physical environment and focusing on the transformations of the landscape due to changes in land use patterns and the general trends of exploitation of natural resources.

2. Aristi

Aristi belongs to Western Zagori, an area adjacent both to Konitsa and Pogoni. As a community it is the largest one in this part of Zagori (Vicos, a settlement some 2 km North-East, also belongs to the community of Aristi). Its main geomorphologic attributes are steep mountain peaks (Gamila, an imposing limestone edifice, is the most spectacular one), the impressive Vicos gorge and the river Voidomatis flowing through the gorge, passing by the village and meeting the river Aoos in the plain of Konitsa, from where both cross the Albanian border and flow into the Adriatic Sea. Geographically, the village, as a natural pass from North to South, is in a strategic location, due to which it has played a historically important role.⁴

Its territory stretches from the Vicos gorge, which is also a natural border to the East, up to the springs of the Kalamas river, an area of 29 square km, out of which 23 is grazing and only 2.3 arable (mostly infertile) land. Aristi is at an altitude of 650 m (Vicos 770 m) and is 50 km away from Ioannina, the administrative and commercial center of the region, and 15 km away from the main artery road leading from Epirus to W. Macedonia through Konitsa.

Today the permanent population of the village is about 100 inhabitants, but in the official census data it appears to be 209; this is because on census day, people from Aristi who live in urban centers all over Greece return to their native village, in order to register there, so that this village gains financial benefits from a larger population. There is also a seasonal fluctuation of the population between winter and summer time; in the summer it is almost tripled because a lot of people spend their holidays there.

⁴ Petsas and Saralis, *Aristi and Western Zagori*.

According to official censuses the population of Aristi since the beginning of the century presents the following picture:

TAB. 1. *Population in Aristi*

Year	Population
1905	871
1928	458
1940	424
1951	438
1961	329
1971	204
1981	227
1991	209

For the last two decades we have the following data concerning the prefecture of Ioannina as a whole and the Zagori region:

TAB. 2. *Population in the prefecture of Ioannina and in Zagori region*

Year	Population in prefecture of Ioannina	Population in Zagori region
1981	147,300	5,521
1991	157,214	4,694

Although for the prefecture as a whole there is an increase, in the Zagori region there is a significant demographic decline, despite the fact that these numbers do not correspond to the reality, as we noted earlier.

It is also worth mentioning the results of a research project we carried out in the area in 1991: in a sample of 51 villages we found out that, whereas the National Service for Statistics presented a population of 8,588, the real permanent population was 4,446. During the summer it went up to 17,880, due to holiday makers. Forty percent of the population is over 56 years, whereas under 40 years the percentage is 33.5%; obviously, we are talking about an excessively aged local society.⁵ A population stabilization observed

⁵ V. Nitsiakos, *The mountain communities of Northern Pindus* (Athens: Plethron 1995, in Greek), pp. 151-215.

the last decades is basically due to a small trend for tourist development, which is viewed by the people themselves as the only prospect for the community's survival in the future.

By and large, Aristi is a mountain community with a serious demographic problem and no productive resources to retain young people. It has, however, two other assets which can be exploited for tourist development, namely its natural environment and cultural tradition. In fact, a portion of the area in which Aristi is located has been designated a national park since 1973 (which means it is an area of unique natural beauty) and also Aristi, like almost all the Zagori villages, was designated a traditional settlement in 1979. As far as social and political structures are concerned, it is important to emphasize at this point that external relations formed along the 'rural-urban' schema are more decisive than the internal ones. The community itself is divided in two parts, one living permanently in the village, the other in urban centers (mainly in Ioannina); these are connected with each other through kinship, clientele, friendship and other bonds, in a way that makes drawing a dividing line quite a difficult, if not impossible, task. Suffice it to note that the community council (the headman included) consists entirely of people living in Ioannina, having, nevertheless, relatives and even their parents in the village.

1950, as already noted, was an important watershed for national as well as local history. The end of the civil war, in which Epirus was the main battle stage, found the region almost destroyed and its population emigrating to the urban centers of Greece and abroad, while numbers found themselves in Eastern European countries as political refugees. This rural exodus apart from the demographic depletion of the villages caused the disintegration of local economic and social structures. From this rule Aristi was not exempted. New political, economic, social and cultural processes led the community to decay, a situation that lasted up to recent years, when some signs of recovery appear basically due to attempts at tourist development.

All these events had important consequences for the local society's relationship with its natural environment and for the general

system of appropriation of the natural resources. Since the landscape is produced by such relations, is, in effect, made by history, this meant significant transformations in the landscape as stressed earlier on.

During the period before 1950, which we refer to as the pre-war period from now on, the system of socio-economic organization prevailing in the village is generally the following: in the context of a relative self-sufficiency which characterized the households, every family owned and cultivated some land and fed a small number of animals. The income from these activities was complemented with remittances sent by men who were in other places far from their families. Land cultivation was not limited to grains, but they had also vineyards and gardens around and in the settlement growing vegetables for domestic consumption. All these were women's activities. It is quite characteristic that in Aristi in the 1914 census only two men are registered as cultivators and none as shepherd.⁶ The animals were joined in communal herds, which were taken to pasture by salaried shepherds, three in number.

It was a mixed economy, characterized by relative self-sufficiency and the income of travelling men. Land cultivation was the women's task; the tending of community herds belonged to salaried shepherds, while between these two productive activities there is a complementarity of functions, such as the use of cultivated land for pasture after harvest, a fact that ensured natural fertilizer for the fields.

In this period Aristi's area is characterized by pasture lands with clumps of trees whose foliage is used as fodder for animals in the winter (*kladhera*), grain fields, vineyards and gardens. The whole system of land use shows the relationship between the local society and its physical space and shows also the existing balance among different productive activities through which people make use of their natural environment. It is clear that an important part of maintaining this balance and in the reproduction of the community is played by the exodus of the male population itself, which functioned also as a mechanism of gradual social and cul-

⁶ Petsas and Saralis, *Aristi and Western Zagori*, p. 265.

tural differentiation of the local community. This exodus is quite a generalized phenomenon in Epirus particularly in the last two centuries of Ottoman rule and presents an interesting trend toward local specialization in various crafts and professions, a fact that was actually to contribute immensely to the formation of the historical character of the region.

In the aftermath of the civil war the whole system changes, because of the demographic, social and political consequences of the war, a fact that induces also fundamental changes in the ways people use their physical environment, i.e., in land use, which means a great transformation of the landscape itself.

First of all, depopulation leads to social disintegration and the collapse of the local productive system, as this was formed in the context of previous historical conditions. Grain cultivation is abandoned for three reasons: the dramatic decrease in the population, the general changes in agriculture with the introduction of new technologies and systems in the plains, and, of course, the low yield of those crops. Vineyards were also abandoned, while those left were destroyed by the disease *phylloxera* in the '60s. Gardens that were located in the periphery of the settlement were also gradually abandoned for the additional reason that water from natural fountains was brought into the central water-main of the village. Gardens still existing were located within the settlement, usually in the yards, with very few exceptions. The year that the fieldwork was carried out only two villagers had their gardens out of the settlement.

As a consequence of the abandonment of systematic cultivation, fields were transformed into pasture lands and animal husbandry turned to be the dominant productive activity of those who remained in the village. These days 32 people are registered as animal-breeders, of whom 10 live in the settlement of Vicos and 7 in Kallithea (a low altitude area where most of the fields were located in the past), both in the community of Aristi. In recent decades there has been no community herd, but quite a few households keep breeding domestic animals. The total number of animals in 1996 was 3,408 sheep and goats and 308 cows. The

availability and use of the community pastures is decided by the community council first and afterwards among the breeders themselves. This matter constitutes one of the main problems of the community today, since disputes arise quite often between the breeders and the council as to the way and the extent to which pastures should be exploited. This is certainly related to a different approach to natural environment linked to an ethos coming from outside, which evaluates nature more as an ecological and aesthetic value and less as a productive resource. It is tied, as well, to the demand for tourist development which exploits both the natural environment and the cultural heritage of the village, as we will see below.

Related to the above is a general trend to treating the natural environment in a different way, which appeared in Greece in the end of the '60s and led to the need for State intervention aimed at the protection of areas thought to be of special beauty and ecological interest. In this context the National Park of Vicos-Aoos was created in 1970 and a large section of Aristi's territory became a part of it, put under rules of absolute protection, while another section was defined as a 'zone for special uses'. This new reality assumed more importance in the following years, when another trend, that for 'returning back to the roots', became dominant in Greek society. This movement formed the basis for the development of folklores which, in combination with environmentalism, was to constitute an ideology put to various social uses, and of course exploited in the context of tourist development. Agro- and eco-tourism became central to local economic development and the natural environment and cultural heritage the basic assets for promoting specific projects. All this created a new situation concerning the relationship between the local society and its physical environment, since new ideas and concepts are introduced which are different and rather opposite to local ones: these ideas are imported from outside, express a different ethos and in general treat both natural and cultural environment as an object of other uses rather than the immediate productive ones. The Aristians of the diaspora have played an important role in the introduction of the

new ethos and the engagement in tourist enterprises by local people tends to enhance it, since tourism is based mainly on the exploitation of urban ideas and perception of nature and tradition, a fact that changes gradually even the local views on nature and cultural tradition from something that one lives with to something that one thinks of, knows about, enjoys, and by and large makes into an object of ideological use that can also form the basis for other 'meta-uses'. Environment becomes a space of consumption rather than of production, a place for protection and culture, an object of preservation rather than an integral part of present real life. Knowledge about these two gains ground over living within them. As S. Green has noted:

Making museums or visiting them, learning about past cultures, traditions, costumes, or studying ecology and being an advocate of nature is one thing; living in the museum and the 'nature' which results is another.⁷

This essential difference is the source of recent social tension in the community, since clashes arise all the time around the use of space and place, which apart from their practical character have serious ideological and political dimensions. The space and the place, the land and its natural and symbolic resources, constitute a subject of negotiation, and this reality is depicted on the landscape. A very characteristic example is the European project for the restoration of a lake, where the two attitudes concerning the natural environment came in conflict. On one side are the community authorities expressing the 'urban ethos' ('to restore nature to its initial state, to protect and enrich it and finally to utilize it in the context of tourist development') and on the other the breeders

⁷ S. Green, G. King, and V. Nitsiakos, 'Landscape perception in Epirus in the late 20th century' in *The Archaeomedes project: understanding the natural and anthropogenic causes of land degradation and desertification in the Mediterranean basin* edited by S.E. van der Leeuw (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1998), p. 18.

who simply need this land for pasture and resent the prospect of flooding it again.

By and large, a general transformation of the landscape took place, characterized by the abandonment of formerly cultivated areas which are now pasture lands and at some point the inclusion of a part of the community's territory in the national park, an area protected by national law. Present tendencies seem to favour uses related to environmentalism and folklorism in combination with tourism rather than productive uses of the primary sector.

3. Buliarati

Let us move now to the other example, the community of Buliarati in South Albania. Buliarati administratively belongs to the prefecture of Gjirocastër while culturally it is a part of Dropul, which constitutes an eparchy of Gjirocastër. Dropul is the most well-known group of villages belonging to the Greek minority of Albania, due to its geographical position (it is the area we cross first when entering the Albanian territory from Kakavije) as well as its local history and traditions. This is a geographic unit defined by a big plain and the surrounding mountains. The plain of Dropul, known locally as 'Dropoli kampos', stretches about 40 km from North to South and up to 8 km West to East, from the town of Gjirocastër to the mountains of Stugara and Murgana on the Greek-Albanian border. This plain stretches even beyond Gjirocastër reaching the Tepeleni pass, but the villages of the Greek minority are located at South of Gjirocastër.

Dropul's plain, crossed by the river Drinos and its tributaries Suha and Xeria, is encircled by inaccessible mountains to the East and West, so that communication with areas on the other side is possible only through some straight passes, a fact of great geopolitical and strategic importance, since this plain constitutes the main pass from the North-West to Greece through Epirus. This is the historical route Tepeleni-Kakavije-Kalpaki, very well-known from the Greek-Italian war of 1940. To the South, as already men-

tioned, are the mountains of Stugara and Murgana; to the West, all along the plain, the mountain range of Platovouni (the Akrokeravnia of the ancient Greeks) rises, separating Dropul from the area of Delvina; and to the East there are the mountains of Makrikampos and Zonaria, forming the border with the Pogon area, which is divided in two parts, one belonging to Albania and the other to Greece. The main pass to Greece, Kakavije, is a pass to Pogon, but there is also another one, along the Suha River, which connects the Pogon villages that belong to Albania (seven in number) with Dropul.

The villages of Dropul are situated on both sides of the Drinos river on mountain slopes, near one another and in a way that gives every village the ability to use a zone of cultivable land both in the plain and in the mountain area, so that the whole plain is divided into similar vertical zones stretching from the plain to the mountain peaks and having in their centre the village settlements. Thus, all the villages can combine land cultivation with animal husbandry, using both the plain and the mountain areas of their territory.

Buliarati is one of these villages, located on the West side of the plain, almost in its geometrical center. Like most of the other villages its location is at the foot of the mountain and its territory constitutes an oblong zone stretching from the low fields of the plain up to the mountain peak. On the basis of this ecological reality productive activities were historically developed and organized in the village, exploiting in the optimum way its natural resources.

Nevertheless, this relationship between the local society and its natural environment was affected and many times determined by the broader socio-political conditions characterizing different historical periods. For example, the exodus of the male population, what is called locally 'travelling', during the late stage of the Ottoman rule, did not appear simply as a result of a demographic crisis, from an impotence of the land to 'breed its population', but from the specific historical conditions imposed on the area by Ottoman landowners who established their dominance in the villages and turned the local population into a kind of tenants. Traces of this historical reality are, among other things, to be found on the

place itself and on place-names, starting from buildings, which belonged to the land-owners, such as *koulies*, their castle-like houses and *kotsekia*, barns where taxes in the form of agricultural produce were collected. These buildings, symbols of a historical period, were brought down by the local people in recent years (in Buliarati the *kulia* was destroyed in 1944), but place-names still exist as reminders of those past conditions.

Let us have a look at Buliarati's social history, in order to define the historical watershed, and, on that basis, examine the transformation of the landscape, according to our initial proposition. It seems, from historical sources, that the village became a fief of a *bey* in the beginning of the Ottoman occupation of the area. Its inhabitants became tenants and all the land was under the *bey's* control, except that owned by the church which retained its previous status as *vakif* (land belonging to the church). This meant the beginning of a new period of social depression and economic exploitation, a situation that was to change to a certain extent in the middle of the 19th century, after the Crimean war. In 1800 the village belonged to Tahir Bey from Gjirokaster and according to some evidence it seems that he registered the houses of the village. This registration was found in 1928, the year of the village's repurchase, and the houses registered are 80.⁸

At the last phase of the previous historical period, around 1800, it is assumed that the forests of the village were also destroyed because of the timber policy of the *beys* of unrestrained felling, a process that was to continue in the years that followed even due to fire. During the first decades of the twentieth century the *chiftlik* system began to fall apart and villagers repurchased their villages together with the estates. In this transitional period, until World War II and also after it, the last symbols of the previous system were gradually eliminated while the whole model of space organization was reformed. According to the available historical sources, in 1940 the estates belonging to Buliarati people amounted to 200 acres, whereas this period was characterized by intense conflicts between the villagers on the one side and the *beys*

⁸ Kalyvopoulos, *Buliarati-Deropoli*, pp. 63-85.

on the other about land ownership and the use of pastures. Things changed in 1946, when Enver Xhotza's Labour Party promoted agrarian reform. In the initial stage land was distributed to its tillers, according to the political slogan 'land belongs to those who till it' and on the basis of the principle of social equality. This practice lasted until 1956, when land passed on to the co-operatives. Initially each village had its own co-operative, while, later on, unions were promoted on wider geographical scales (the villages of Dropul had finally two co-operatives).⁹

Adopting as a watershed these historical events, we can examine how the whole system of land use changed and what sort of changes this produced in the landscape itself. The management of the natural environment in the pre-war period was basically characterized by the principle of complementarity between agriculture and animal husbandry, using both the plain and the mountain area, but also by self-sufficiency of the households, which usually also cultivated vineyards and gardens to meet their basic domestic needs. There was also, as already noted, the possibility of male mobility, a phenomenon that functioned always as an outlet in difficult economic situations, preventing at the same time an exhaustive pressure on the available natural resources of the village. This model produced a specific landscape, which can be easily described in a schematic representation. The area belonging to the village is a long zone, stretching from the mountain peak down to the center of the plain, in the middle of which the settlement is located. In the plain, the agricultural zone was fragmented: the number of parcels was considerably larger than families' parcels (each family had fields in different locations), thus presenting a variety of crops and a diversity in the agricultural landscape itself. At the upper part of this zone and near the village settlement itself the vineyards were located in a sunny and dry place, while around

⁹ O. Sjoberg and L.M. Wyzan (editors), *Economic change in the Balkan States: Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), pp. 5-104; K. Pata and M. Osmani, 'Albanian agriculture: a painful transition from communism to free market challenges', in *Sociologia ruralis* 1 (1994): 85-89.

the settlement itself gardens, threshing floors and some tobacco fields were to be found. At the mountain foot East of the settlement was the meadow (*livadhi*), a good pastureland belonging to the church of St. Elias, used for sheep in the winter and for cows in the summer. Beyond the settlement and the zone of gardens and threshing floors and up to the mountain peak on the border with other villages were the community's grasslands.

As soon as the co-operatives were founded and land passed on to them, except for 0.1 acre per family that remained private, the whole system changed and so did the organization of space, as a result of which the landscape itself was finally transformed.

Before describing these changes it is useful to make some general comments. First of all, it is important to note that by the union of co-operatives on a supra-community basis new spatial unities were formed beyond the traditional communities and new relations were promoted contributing to the formation of different attitudes, of a different 'consciousness' as well. Then, the closing of the national borders and the emphasis put on agricultural production led to an intensive exploitation of the land, a fact quite characteristically expressed by the Party slogan 'let us sow even on stones'. Intensification of production reached a peak in the '60s all over the country by the implementation of projects for draining, deforestation and making terraces on mountain areas for cultivation, a reality depicted quite well on the landscape.¹⁰

In Upper Dropul (the area to which Buliarati belongs) a co-operative union was created. This part of the plain became its agricultural land and so the whole structure of landed property, the organization of the fields as well as their qualitative attributes, changed. Land re-allotment projects, large scale irrigation works and the re-organization of production on collective principles brought about fundamental changes to the whole model of agricultural production and organization of rural space. The diversity of the previous system, described earlier, was substituted for by mono-culture and land fragmentation by large agricultural units, a

¹⁰ Sjoberg and Wyzan (editors), *Economic change in the Balkan States*, pp. 82-93; Pata and Osmani, 'Albanian agriculture': 98.

fact that changed the whole structure as well as the aesthetics of the landscape. Land cultivation, specializing basically in grains, was extended even in places used previously as pasturelands, such as the *livadhi* of Buliarati, which was all ploughed but not 'fruited', as the people themselves say. The rest of the pasturelands were also given to the co-operative union which had the management of the communal herds. It is worth noting that a pasturelands co-operative was also founded which oversaw the pasturelands, clearing them of bushes or other plants systematically, in order to increase its feeding capacity, a fact that had its own effect on the morphology of the landscape but also on the quality of the pasturelands. It should also be mentioned that even in the most mountainous pasturelands, where there was a possibility of cultivating, of making 'bread-places' (*psomotopous*), as they said, land was ploughed, as for example in Selloma and Grava, two places on the mountain. In these cases terraces supported by stone-walls were used, a system well known from other parts of the Mediterranean. As far as the land owned by the church, the *vakifs*, these were also included in the co-operative's estate, while some of the chapels became army camps, e.g., St. Elias and St. Athanasios, since the regime at the end of the '60s became atheist.

Each family, as mentioned above, had the right to possess 0.1 acre of landed property, which usually contained a garden with a threshing floor and a barn near the house or in the periphery of the settlement. By cultivating this parcel of land the basic needs of the household were met (vegetables, tobacco, fruit trees, vines etc.). According to local views this piece of land became an important factor for their survival after 1967, the year that the collectivization process was completed in Albania. We must also stress the symbolic and sentimental dimension of this kind of private property left to local people, since it was the only thing that remained in their possession and it was usually located next to their paternal house, a symbolically important place. The limitation of private property virtually to the domestic domain and the expropriation of the rest of landed estates also radically changed the relationship between the private and the public space, between the 'inside' and

the 'outside', between the *dhiko mas* (ours) and *xeno* (alien). The public space is extended at the expense of the private and above all becomes a space of intense social control on the part of the State. All this means a strict division between the 'inside' and the 'outside', where the 'inside' becomes a 'resort' for the people and to an extent a place of practicing secret functions of symbolic importance concerning their identity. For example, women secretly kept icons in their houses, so that they could continue certain religious practices which were forbidden by law.

By and large, the communist regime, by gradual agrarian reforms, abolishing landed private property and creating big co-operative unions which constituted also spatial entities, imposed a completely different organization of space, creating new symbolic elements to promote the new ideology and establish a new social and political control, thus radically transforming the whole landscape. Of course, in the same context a systematic attempt was made to eliminate from the place whatever symbolized previous beliefs and practices as 'reactionary'. Churches, icons and other holy places, for example, were among the things that suffered serious destruction. Often army camps, cultural centers and even barns took their place, changing at once the practical as well as the symbolic uses of space and transforming also its aesthetics. The constructed space is getting more and more square, losing its variety and reflecting the logic of a totalitarian system trying by every means to impose the principles of 'a new socialist society'. It is quite understandable then that as soon as the regime collapsed in 1990 people's anger was first directed at these public buildings, many of which suffered serious damages.¹¹

¹¹ V. Nitsiakos, 'Place, Locality and Identity. The case of the Greek Minority of Albania', *Ethnology* (1996).