

Tales from the Greek-Albanian Borderland:
Memory of Violence and Displacement in Western Epirus
*Zgodbe z grško-albanskega obmejnega območja:
spomin na nasilje in razseljenost v zahodnem Epiru*

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Abstract:

The border between Greece and Albania has a chequered history. Its establishment in 1913 ceded to Albania a territory conquered by Greece during the Balkan wars and left outside Albania a large part of the territories claimed by Albanian nationalists since the League of Prizren in 1878. This is the case of a small region of Greece, that is presented in this text, called Thesprotia in Greece and Chameria in Albania, where the historical turmoil has not been without effect on its population, massively affected by the powerful polarization movements resulting from the application of national discourses on the field. Throughout this period and until now, the heterogeneous groups that formed the border society had to position themselves according to political turbulences, sometimes despite other long-term realities, and their discourses of belonging were gradually reshaped by these changes. What is more, these transformations have had important consequences for the presence of several communities whose fate has been turned on end by the new realities of this contested border, like the Chams, a large Albanian-speaking community, which disappeared from the Western section of the Greek-Albanian border in the aftermath of the Second World War in circumstances that are still debated. In the last decades, the reactivation of cross-border relations following the fall of the Albanian communist regime, and the intense migration of Albanian workers to Greece, has questioned their memory within local society, in sometimes surprising ways.

Keywords: Albania, Greece, border, landscape, memory

Izvleček:

Meja med Grčijo in Albanijo ima pestro zgodovino. Z njeno vzpostavitvijo leta 1913 je bilo Albaniji dodeljeno ozemlje, ki ga je Grčija osvojila med balkanskimi vojnami, zunaj Albanije pa je ostal velik del ozemelj, ki so jih albanski nacionalisti zahtevali od Prizrenske lige leta 1878. Tak primer je tudi v tem besedilu predstavljena majhna grška regija, ki se v Grčiji imenuje Thesprotia, v Albaniji pa Čamerija, kjer zgodovinski pretresi niso ostali brez vpliva na prebivalstvo. Izjemno so ga prizadela močna polarizacijska gibanja kot posledica uporabe nacionalnih diskurzov. Vse do danes so se heterogene skupine, ki so tvorile obmejno družbo, morale pozicionirati v skladu s političnimi turbulencami, včasih kljub drugim dolgoročnim realnostim, njihovi diskurzi pripadnosti pa so se zaradi teh sprememb postopoma preoblikovali. Še več, te spremembe so imele pomembne posledice za prisotnost več skupnosti, katerih usoda se je zaradi novih razmer na sporni meji obrnila na glavo, npr. Čamov, velike albansko govoreče skupnosti, ki je po drugi svetovni vojni izginila z zahodnega dela grško-albanske meje v okoliščinah, o katerih se še vedno razpravlja. Ponovna oživetev čezmejnih odnosov po padcu albanskega komunističnega režima in

intenzivno priseljevanje albanskih delavcev v Grčijo sta v zadnjih desetletjih na včasih presenetljive načine postavila pod vprašaj njihov spomin v lokalni družbi.

Ključne besede: Albanija, Grčija, meja, pokrajina, spomini

This text is dedicated to the memory of Michalis Pasiakos (1959-2023), a wonderful person, a free thinker, an open mind and a researcher of the nooks and crannies of the history of his region, Thesprotia, which he knew better than anyone, the most generous person who never hesitated to share with me his knowledge with as much warmth and kindness as he offered hospitality at his home in Sagiada, food from his garden and a meal at his table. The contents of this text owe much to his erudition, like a precious gift he would have entrusted to a visiting outsider.

May his name never be forgotten.

זכר צדיק לברכה

Introduction

The border between Greece and Albania has a chequered history. Two hundred and eighty-two kilometres long, it was fixed by the European “Great Powers” with the signing of the Treaty of Florence in 1913, a codicil to the Treaty of London. However, between the two states, the delineation of this border seems to raise several questions. The treaty ceded to Albania a territory claimed and conquered by Greece during the Balkan wars, Northern Epirus, but some Christian Epirotes rejected this international decision and formed an autonomous government calling for it to be attached to the Greek state. At the same time, voices were raised in Albania to claim certain regions that had remained in Greece, inspiring the irredentist and nationalist idea of a “Greater Albania”. In fact, the establishment of the borders of the new Albanian state left outside them a large part of the Albanian-populated territories that had been claimed by Albanian nationalists since the League of Prizren in 1878: within Greek territory, these were the Chameria region, from the

border to the town of Preveza, and part of Macedonia around the towns of Kastoria and Florina (De Rapper 1998, 621–624). This latent dispute between these two states has been present for a long time in people’s imaginaries today, as can be seen from the streets dedicated to “Northern Epirus” in many Greek towns, or to “Chameria” in Albanian towns.

This issue became one of the main sources of tension between the two countries in the first decade of the post-Cold War era. In the spring of 1993, the expulsion by Albanian authorities of Archimandrite Chrysostomos, accused of preaching *enosis* (unification) between Southern Albania (“Northern Epirus” in Greek nationalist vocabulary) and the Greek “motherland”, led to violent incidents against Greek-speaking minority groups and, in response, to the mass expulsion of Albanian migrants who lived and worked in Greece. The following year, violent actions were even carried out by a group that took the same name as the Greek-speaking resistance in Albania during World War II: MAVI for *Μέτωπο Απελευθέρωσης Βορείου Ηπείρου* (Front for the Liberation of Northern Epirus). In addition to the car bomb attack that killed the Albanian ambassador in Athens in 1984, this group claimed responsibility for an attack on an Albanian border post, which resulted in the deaths of two Albanian soldiers near the village of Peshkëpi in 1994, in the Gjirokastrë region. While Greek domestic security quickly put an end to the activities of this group, some ecclesiastical authorities expressed support for it, demonstrating the sympathy that this type of stance could garner among some segments of Greek public opinion (Michas 2000). After this period of high tension, the period that began in 1995 appears to be one of normalization, likely a consequence of the isolation that these diplomatic positions had led Greece into regarding the Yugoslav wars. Furthermore, starting with the sign-

ing of the Dayton Accords, conditions were created for the establishment of bilateral relations between Greece and Balkan countries, provided that any sensitive issues were resolved. In 1995, the visit to Albania by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karolos Papoulias, as well as the release of the leaders of the Greek Party of Albania suspected of covering the activities of MAVI in the country, showed signs of easing tensions between the two neighbours. During the tenure of Konstantinos Simitis (1996-2004), Greece even defined a new political doctrine in the region, presenting itself as the advocate of regional stability through the use of the capabilities provided by its status as an EU member. Diplomatically, this led the Greek government to adopt a more consensus-based approach during the Kosovo crisis, providing logistical support during the military operations in 1999, and especially participating in KFOR and post-war reconstruction programs in Serbia thereafter.

However, simultaneously with the development of the economic crisis in Greece from 2008, tensions have been rekindled between Greece and its neighbouring countries, demonstrating how these geopolitical border issues are also sensitive to the broader context of regional stability. In April 2009, Greece and Albania signed an agreement on the delimitation of their territorial waters, in which Albania pledged to cede 225 square kilometres of continental shelf to Greece. This agreement was annulled in January 2010 by the Albanian Constitutional Court because it was deemed contrary to the nation's interests due to the alleged presence of hydrocarbon deposits in the area ceded to Greece. Despite this, Greece did not oppose Albania's integration into NATO in 2008 or the signing of an ASA with the European Union in April 2009. Nevertheless, the renegotiation of this agreement could add fuel to the fire between Athens and Tirana, and Albanian authorities seem to be pressuring Athens to renegotiate or seek international arbitration. In 2014, tensions escalated when Greek authorities opened up maritime exploration in the Ionian Sea, which, according to

Albanian media, included the area that Albania had previously ceded to Greece. On March 22, 2016, during a meeting in Athens aimed at opening negotiations to end the state of war still in effect since 1940 in certain aspects between the two countries, the foreign ministers of both countries identified the issue of territorial waters as one of the obstacles to progress in the dialogue. On June 6, 2016, during a joint conference in Tirana, these same ministers listed the points of tension between their countries: (1) the ongoing state of war, (2) the issue of territorial waters, (3) Athens' accusation of discrimination against the Greek-speaking minority in Southern Albania, and (4) the fate of Albanian Muslim Albanians (the Chams) expelled from Greece in 1944-45 on charges of collaborating with the Italian and German occupation armies.

The latter issue is perhaps one of the most tangible reasons for the continuation of the state of war, as there is no longer an agreement between the two countries regarding the fate of their properties or the possible compensation for the refugees. Since 2011, a party (the PDIU of Shpetim Idrizi, which has had 4 seats in the Albanian parliament since 2013) has been advocating for the recognition of the wrongs committed by Greece against this group and demanding reparations. These activists march to the Greek border every year to demonstrate their support for a resolution by the Albanian parliament on this matter. The resurgence of this issue on the international agenda even led to a statement by European Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn, who in September 2016 identified the fate of Albanian speakers in Greece as one of the unresolved issues between the two countries, triggering anger in Athens, which considers the matter closed, occasionally accusing Albania of irredentism on these borderlands. In the years that followed, tensions continued to escalate, to the point that in May 2023, Greece even threatened Albania with complicating its accession to the European Union if this issue was not quickly resolved.

On the Greek side, the massive investment in the Northern Epirus theme by the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn, which has seen numerous electoral successes since the start of the financial crisis, has also led to protests in the border region. In September 2013, a Greek neo-Nazi MP, Christos Papas, declared during a blockade of the Kakavia border post between the two countries: “We have come to this artificial border to affirm our struggle for the liberation of Northern Epirus” (i.e., Southern Albania). In 2013, members of this same party tried to establish a branch of their movement in the city of Himara in Southern Albania, where the presence of a Greek minority is subject to debate, sparking a strong reaction from the population and the police. On all of these points, solutions do not seem to have been found yet, and public opinion appears to be increasingly sensitive to them. This same distrust is reflected on the border from the start of the migrant crisis in the summer of 2015 since, starting from March 20, 2016, and at the request of the authorities in Tirana, Italian police officers came to reinforce their Albanian counterparts on the country’s southern border due to the anticipated uncontrolled flow of migrants from the Greek-Macedonian border to Italy through Albania. Although these transfers did not materialize, largely due to the significant reduction in entries into Greece, this Italian-Albanian collaboration is indicative of the tension with Greece on the border issue.

Research Problem

Obviously, these historical developments have not been without effect on the populations living in the regions around the Greek-Albanian border. They have been massively affected by the powerful polarization movements implied locally by the application of national discourses. In this perspective, the Greco-Albanian borderland is an illustrative case of what Michel Roux (2001) calls “identity capture”, i.e. the alignment of local particularities through the simplification/structuring of discourses of belonging around binary oppositions between nations. Through-

out this period, the heterogeneous groups that formed frontier society had to position themselves according to political turbulences, sometimes despite other long-term realities, and their sense of belonging was gradually reshaped by dominant simplifying discourses. What is more, these transformations have had numerous consequences for the presence of several communities whose fate has been upturned by the new political realities of this contested border. This is the case, for example, of various Albanian-speaking groups from Epirus who found themselves in Greek territory from 1912 onwards, and whose stories will be discussed in this text. In this way, this Greco-Albanian example was a good illustration of a “world of sovereign states [...] divided by boundaries” (Taylor 1993, 164), where states play a dominant role in the territory homogeneity, and borders are a key medium for exercising territoriality, practicing sovereignty, and maintaining socio-spatial control (Agnew 2009). Furthermore, the border serves as a powerful tool for the process of “spatial socialization” (Paasi 1996), meaning the imposition of identity discourses as it is a crucial element of state territory. From this standpoint, the border landscape is the instrument and expression of the territoriality used to govern state spaces (Paasi 2012), reinforcing the national community as a distinct and enclosed entity.

However, nowadays, the development of cross-border and transnational processes that are increasingly significant questions the links between national spaces and people’s identities (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). As Massey (1995) stated, borders are more and more crossed in the current world characterized by connections. This perspective suggests that borders are not anymore to be found only in border areas, but they are located in broader social practices and societies, and increasingly even in the global space (Amilhat Szary and Fourny 2006; Häkli and Kaplan 2002; Newman and Paasi 1998; Popescu 2011; Wastl-Walter 2012; Wilson and Donnan 2012). But, on a local level, people who live in relation to borders are highly determined by

elements related to them. The hypothesis I make here is that the phase of border opening (*debordering*), which is seen as the first consequence of this new world of connections, is accompanied by a renegotiation of boundaries between groups, often relying on the reinterpretation of discourses on the past. For this reason, the Greco-Albanian border could be a referential case for the current issues of identity and memory politics, and the related appropriations and re-alignments, presented in contested border areas.

Methodology

The text presented here is the result of a fieldwork carried out in Greece on the western side of this border, in the administrative region of Thesprotia, north of the town of Igoumenitsa, in 2010 and 2011. At that time, relations between Greece and Albania seemed to have best improved. Although the end of the state of war had only been partially signed between the two countries in 1987, their good relations had been confirmed a few years earlier by the signing in 1996 of a “Friendship, Cooperation, Good Neighbourliness and Security Agreement”. In this region, the appeasement manifested itself in 2004 with the opening of a new border crossing point at Mayromati (in Greek) or Qaftë Botë (in Albanian), which facilitated contact between the two sides of the border. However, this region remained a special case, the subject of a long-term geopolitical controversy surrounding the presence in Greece of a large Albanian-speaking community, which disappeared in the aftermath of the Second World War in circumstances that are still debated. But, since that date, this region found itself back in the diplomatic spotlight, as it became one of the main points of contention between the two countries. This current situation leads to a renewed polarization of positions that was not yet noticeable a decade ago, during my stay. The return to the situation of the 2010s that I propose in this text is a way to present when it was most visible the modalities of the resumption of cross-border relations and the various challenges that this resumption presented

locally in terms of identification for the different groups living in the region.

The present contribution reports the results of a fieldwork that involved a total of two months spent in the region. During this period, I conducted 73 interviews, with most of them being semi-structured due to the sensitive nature of the questions. Out of these, 45 interviews were conducted *impromptu*, mostly in the villages of Sagiada, Kastri, Smerto, Asprokklisi, and more broadly in the region of Filiates and Igoumenitsa in Greece, as well as in Konispol, Albania. The interviewees primarily included individuals involved or interested in the preservation of memory, local authorities, as well as ordinary residents who were eager to share their perspectives on the historical transformations in their region. Notably, a significant portion of the interviewees were survivors of World War II, serving as witnesses to the events during and after the war, which significantly influenced their perceptions and reflections. The primary objective of the fieldwork was to identify the discourse surrounding memory and the dynamics of identity transformation and realignment in response to changes in this border region.

Landscapes and Memories of Violence in Thesprotia

The region described in this text surrounds the lower valley of the river Kalama and its delta (see Figure 1). Today, the population is concentrated in large villages that make their living from commercial mandarin farming (such as Asprokklysi and Sagiada), while the mountains that rise further east, separating Thesprotia from the rest of Epirus, have largely been emptied by emigration abroad. The settlement dynamics observed in this region often refer to the period of the Second World War and the Greek Civil War, which largely explain the current population distributions and the formation of today's human landscapes. During this period, large-scale population movements took place, leading to the abandonment of many villages and the founding of new ones. In detail, these situations are quite



Figure 1: Location map of places mentioned in text (source: Sintès (2019))

varied, but they all led to a classic movement in the Mediterranean context: the conquest and the intensive exploitation of the plains, and the abandonment of mountain areas and traditional farming methods.

A society Shaken by War

Most of these displacements were the direct result of the violence of the 1940s. In Sagiada, for example, it was the partial destruction of the village by the Germans on 23 August 1943 that led the population to abandon the village. The inhabitants then crossed the border en masse to take refuge in neighbouring Albanian villages, where the strength of the resistance kept the Germans away. When they returned in the winter of 1943, they were confronted with the last turmoil of the war and the beginnings of the civil war. In January 1948, a raid by partisans who wanted to forcibly conscript young men from the village prompted the inhabitants to take refuge on the shore. The authorities sent them to the island of Corfu, from where they did not return until the very early 1950s (between 1952 and 1953) to set up the new village of Sagiada, between the plain and the shore (Tsogas 2009). These move-

ments reveal the key factors that determined both the departures and the relocations of the populations: the violence that drove the inhabitants from their villages of origin, but also the intervention of the State, which sought to control those who might willingly or unwillingly reinforce the Communist troops during the civil war. This objective of controlling populations through relocation can be found even more explicitly in the neighbouring village of Asprokklysi, where a large proportion of the inhabitants, sometimes coming from very distant areas, were settled during the civil war in order to limit the movements of groups that were still very mobile until the 1940s: the Kalatzidès (καλατζήδες) of Murgana (tinsmiths with itinerant work) or the Sarakatsani or Aromanian Vlachs, pastoralists from Pindus. These stories indicate a desire on the part of the authorities to control the mountain populations and keep them away from areas of conflict where they could provide aid to the communist army.

These relocations took the inhabitants through different phases, ranging from spontaneous settlements in temporary dwellings to the erection of permanent houses and participation

in the planned conquest of the surrounding agricultural land. The domestication of this new territory involved a development project orchestrated by the public authorities, for which progress seemed to be the main driving force. If we take the example of Sagiada, the people returning from Corfu initially settled in huts, mostly on the beach, with no running water, surrounded by livestock. The public authorities then organized the stabilization of these low-lying areas with the construction of houses and roads, the arrival of water and electricity, and finally the building of the Kalama dam in 1962. This kind of project was a clear statement of the need to modernize by rationalizing land development and farming. All this was complemented by the gradual opening of the region. These coastal areas of the lower valley, which had previously been related mainly to Corfu, from where seasonal workers came during the agricultural seasons, were in a way linked to the mainland, but above all to the rest of the country, by the construction of the dam, as the Kalama River had previously been an impassable obstacle.

But the interpretation given locally to these major transformations almost never refers to the great modernization movement that seized the plain after the war. Instead, today's residents systematically refer to the resolution of a violent conflict that had plagued the region's society since the inter-war period. The redistribution of land in the 1960s is presented as a kind of restitution to the Greeks of the property they had lost during the Ottoman period, and which had then been appropriated by Muslim groups - here entirely Albanian-speaking - referred to locally as Turks (*Τούρκοι*), but also more regularly as Chams (*Τσάμηδες*), or Albano-Chams (*Αλβανοτσάμηδες*) or Turko-Chams (*Τούρκοτσάμηδες*) (Baltisiotis and Embirikos 2007). During the war, these Muslims are said to have sided with the Italians and Germans to regain the dominant position that the region's attachment to Greece in 1913 was causing them to lose (Margaritis 2005; Manta 2004). Such a stance was fatal for them as, like all Mus-

lims in the region (see Table 1), they were driven out by the nationalist forces of Napoleon Zervas or, at the very least, left after learning of the violences committed against their co-religionists in the towns of Filiatès and Paramithia (Meyer 2007; Péchoux 2002; Péchoux and Sivignon 1989).

Table 1. Albanian-speaking groups in Epirus in the 1940 and 1951 Greek censuses

	Orthodox		Muslims		TOTAL
	No.	%	No.	%	No.
1940	32,712	65	16,890	25	49,632
1951	22,207	98	487	2	22,736

Source: National Statistical Service of Greece (1946; 1958)

Numerous sources attest to the inter-community violence that bloodied the region in the broadest sense, claiming many victims, especially between 1942 and 1945. Books published in Greece by witnesses, activists, improvised historians, and academics relate these events to a greater or lesser extent. However, they all agree on the same version of the story. These Chams Muslims were said to have sided with the occupying troops, going so far as to wear their uniforms. They committed atrocities against Christian populations in preparation for the attachment they wanted for Chameria (*Çamëria/Τσαμουριά*), i.e. present-day Thesprotia, to Albanian territory. Some authors went so far as to draw up an exhaustive list of their victims. This is the case of Giorgos Sarra's (2001) work, *Μνήμες τις τραγικής περιόδου 1936–1945*, which mentions for the eparchy of Igoumenitsa alone, more than 80 murders perpetrated by Chams during this period. It provides the most detailed circumstances of these murders, based on accounts gathered in the field. Without going into such a detailed account, due to the fragility of the sources on this subject, the historian Eleftheria Manta (2004, 137) describes in a monograph on this issue, based on Italian and especially Greek diplomatic archives, the uncertainties that gov-

erned the lives of the inhabitants at that time. She also gives a detailed account of the destruction and atrocities committed during the occupation of Thesprotia.

In the villages affected, the memory of these violences is vivid and the various generations are still able to recount them easily and in great detail, often revealing the circumstances of the murders as well as the identity of the murderers: "During the war, after the Italian offensive but especially during the German occupation, the main leaders of the Muslim villages in the region, former landowners whose advantages had been threatened by the annexation to Greece in 1913, carried out atrocities against the Christian population" (interview 1), explains a local historian living in Sagiada. Moved by stronger passions and resentment, the other testimonies describe horrific crimes that are inexcusable in the eyes of those who recount them: "My uncle was shot dead in front of his house. His body was dragged by a horse around the village before being thrown into the Kalama" (interview 2 in Smerto), or "The Muslims raped a young girl in the village and killed her" (interview 3 in Ragio) and again "I lost my father at the time. It was a 'Turk' called Hassan from the neighbouring village who beat him and threw him into the river with his hands tied. His name is now inscribed on the monument in front of the church" (interview 4 in Kestriini). These various testimonies clearly reveal the permanence of this memory among the inhabitants.

While these various murders are classically presented as the result of age-old hatred between antagonistic religious communities present in the region for centuries, various interviews also seem to show the extent to which the Second World War was a key moment in the polarization of local society, to some extent completing the structuring of this society into national communities on the basis of faith-based differences. This period seems to be a kind of culmination of the transition that began at the time of annexation by Greece, which led to the gradual transformation of social relations but also to a radi-

cal change in the dominant ethnic structures. Even if other lines of force ran through this society (social differences, political trajectories), they would all have disappeared in favour of a single polarity opposing Christians and Muslims, Greeks and Albanians. The burning of the old village of Sagiada mentioned above is a revealing example of this. In local memories, it is the Muslim inhabitants of the neighbouring village of Liopsi who are identified as having played an active part in this destruction, rather than just the German troops. From then on, they became irreconcilable enemies. A resident of Sagiada remembers his relations with them, whom he still calls the "Turks", but also the events surrounding the burning of the village (interview 5):

Did we have a good relationship with the Turks from Liopsi? Relations were very much like ... enemies. Not with all of them, of course. It was their leaders who were against us. There were a lot of *Agas* who made life hard for us. But it was during the war that the relationship deteriorated even more because their leaders sided with the Germans. Of course, we're not talking about all the inhabitants. We can't say that they were all bad, but their leaders ... The Germans burnt down the village in 1943 and at that point the Turks helped them. They took everything they could from our houses. They loaded it onto the animals. They brought it back to their village. They came up behind the Germans and took everything. We saw them from the mountains where we had fled. The Turko-Chams arrived with the Germans and took everything. Even when the Germans left, they carried weapons and did what they wanted. They even killed people in Sagiada at the time. But after the German army retreated from Greece, they left too. They no longer felt safe. They feared retaliation from the Greeks here. On the other hand, you can't say that the partisans [*Αντάρτες*] of Servas didn't drive them away, so they were right to be afraid. When there's hatred, anything

can happen. Then their village fell into ruins. Now it's more than ruins.

This disturbing impression of civil war is even more present in this account (interview 6):

One morning, we were all ready to go and work in the fields when we heard cannon fire from the village of Smerto towards Sagiada. Then the Germans arrived, followed by Chams from here, Liopsi and other villages in the region. The Germans arrived in the village and burnt down the houses. And what did the Chams do, the local Muslims [οι ντόπιοι μουσουλμάνοι]? They took everything they could from our houses. The Germans only burnt a dozen houses. But they took horses, donkeys, and anything else they could get their hands on. I saw them from a distance. They had found a wedding dress and they dressed up a guy, a simple shepherd, and sang him Sagiada wedding songs to make fun of it. When they returned to their village, an old Muslim man said to them: "Where are you from? Did you burn down Sagiada? You wretches! You burnt down your own houses!"

It seems, however, that these neighbours were not so unanimously hostile during the previous period. As an old lady in Sagiada told me, "Some were good, others were not." (interview 7) Even so, one resident recalls distant relations with the children of Liopsi: "We met them sometimes. We were children and we used to meet their kids when they came to Sagiada to do their shopping. But we didn't have any friends there, we lived separately" (interview 8), while another, more used to working in the neighbouring village, says, "They were Turks of course, but we like each other" (*ήμασταν όλοι αγαπημένοι*). He concedes, however, that the war was a powerful moment of polarization (interview 9):

After they took part in the burning of the village, there was no question of going to work for them. Ten days or a week after they burnt down the village, the Chams killed my father-in-law because he had some sheep

that he had hidden by taking them to Albania. They went to Sopik and found him. They killed him and stole his animals to eat.

Another confirms this rapid transformation (interview 10):

Before the war, relations with the people of Liopsi were very good. The inhabitants of Sagiada were traders, while those of Liopsi were agricultural producers. They didn't compete. But it was with the war that relations deteriorated. People from the Tchapouni family had already killed 2 or 3 people from Sagiada in the fields and then helped to set fire to the village. That's when we broke off for good.

He added:

It's a good thing that the EDES came afterwards to drive them out, otherwise we would have had a minority here like there is in Thrace.

A border Narrative Embedded in Places and Landscapes

These stories of violence are echoed today by the presence of singular monuments (see Figures 2–5), which highlight the way in which this history has left its mark on the construction and symbolic appropriation of the territory, and how this in turn feeds memories. These monuments were erected at the very scenes of the crimes (crossroads, roadsides) or in symbolic places (in front of a building where the victim worked, such as the former prefecture of Igoumenitsa, or on the peribolos of a church, as in Kestrini). These are steles commemorating the dead by name, but often also by age and sometimes by nickname. These people are not presented as having been killed by the regular armies of the occupying Italians or Germans, or by the belligerents in the civil war, but rather by their hostile neighbours. The aggressors are clearly identified in explicit terms reported on the monuments: they are "people of another religion" (*Αλλόθρησκοι*), therefore non-Chris-



Figure 2: Memorial to the victims of intercommunity violence of the 1940s, in Igoumenitsa, Greece. (photo: Pierre Sintès, 2011)

tian, as the headstones often bear a cross, or else Albano-chams (*Αλβανοτσάμινδες*) or Albanians (*Αλβανοί*). This terminology clearly identifies the murderers as the Muslim Chams who inhabited the region until 1945.

Compared with the more official monuments commemorating the victims of the various conflicts, erected in public squares or cemeteries in Greece, these small steles mentioning the specific violence perpetrated by Muslims in the region tell the local story in their own way. They bear witness to the painful memories of the families affected by the murders. Certain elements make them appear to be private monuments: they bear signs of closeness to the deceased, such as the names of the orphans left behind or the nickname used during their lifetime. Sometimes, the names of those who commissioned the stele appear on its base, confirming the family origin of the initiative. These features bring them closer to the private chapels or small



Figure 3: Memorial to the victims of intercommunity violence of the 1940s, in Kestriini, Greece. (photo: Pierre Sintès, 2010)

structures that commemorate the death of a person in a road accident in the region today. But by their very presence and the details they provide about the murder, these monuments also seem intended to carry a message beyond the victim's family circle. Indeed, while the space is thus invested with a private sentiment, it also becomes the public medium for remembering what may appear to be a sacrifice that grieves the whole community, which may feel that it has been targeted because of its religion or nationality. These steles can therefore also be presented as the material component of the oral testimonies mentioned above which, by explicitly identifying the murderers, also convey a political and national message, in the broadest sense of the term, about these past events.

By their very presence, these small commemorative monuments also fulfil the expected role of marking the national territory. They establish places of remembrance and help to make



entire Muslim villages that have been abandoned since the departure of their inhabitants in 1944-45, which are present on old maps and whose ruins are still visible in the landscape, but which are, on the contrary, completely absent in recent signage or cartography (see Figure 4 and 5). For example, while the former Orthodox village of Sagiada is indicated by a makeshift sign, the nearby abandoned Muslim village of Liopsi are not mentioned in the signage; other villages that are still populated have been renamed, leaving only Greek-sounding names. If "history is written by the victor", as the bookseller in the small town of Paramithia placidly told me during the survey, he also writes the names of the places and selects the victims to be commemorated. To find a different version of this story, it is necessary to cross the border. Just a few kilometres away, in the central square of the small Albanian town of Konispol, stands another monument, built in the 1990s. It bears no name, just the words *Memoriali i kushtohet martirizimit të shqiptarëve të çamërisë prej gjenocidit të shovinizmit grek* ("Memorial dedicated to the martyrdom of the Albanians of Chameria whose genocide was perpetrated by Greek chauvinism"). Unlike the stelae described on the Greek side, this monument serves as a memorial to a group of anonymous victims: those of the "Cham genocide" as officially recognized by the Albanian state since 1994. However, as it stands in the last Albanian town before the border, it also acts as a landmark, activating the representation of a space crossed by a front line. The decorations that flank it also tell stories of victims: the stylization of a traditional female headdress characteristic of the Chameria and stuck to the top of the monument, or the representation of a woman lying next to her child on a bas-relief, take up the stories of murders that are found in descriptions of the massacres of the Muslim populations of Thesprotia in 1944-45 (Kretsi 2007). This monument goes hand in hand with the introduction in Albania in 1997 of a day of commemoration of the memory of the Chams every 27 June. Its discourse contrasts with that of Greece's neigh-

bouring region and is undoubtedly a witness of the transmission of a still disputed memory.

Changing Narratives in Tune With Our Times

The key features of these narratives, and the marks they leave on the territories, are the product of an eventful history. They were forged at key moments, when antagonisms were asserted, or when they were revealed. They have been transmitted from generation to generation through family histories and official narratives. However, the form of these narratives should not be seen as inert material, frozen from the moments when the events took place. It must also be understood in relation to the dynamics of the present and the characteristics of the moments when these memories are expressed. This is why it seems important to examine them in the light of the general context of this survey, and the trajectory of a region undergoing rapid transformation at the beginning of the 21st century.

The Border and the Issues of the 2000s

When discussing relations between Greece and Albania in the 2000s, it is impossible not to mention the strong migratory flows that have linked the two countries since the early 1990s. Having long been a country of departure, Greece has gradually become a host country for many international migrants. At the time of the 2001 population census, international migrants accounted for more than 760,000 people, or 7% of the country's total population, compared with less than 1.5% in 1991. Such a figure is enough to understand that this period marked the beginning of a new phase in the country's history. It was the fall of the Eastern European regimes in the early 1990s that was the main cause of Greece's transformation into a land of immigration. Large groups of migrants from Eastern Europe came to Greece. Albanians are by far the most numerous foreigners in the country (over 57%), followed by Bulgarians (5%) and Romanians (2.9%). These migratory flows affect every region of Greece, from the smallest village in Crete or Argoli-

da to the suburbs of the major cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. Their presence has also fuelled several debates about the possible dangers they pose to national identity, rekindling fears of Albanian irredentism or an existential threat to uncertain national cohesion. Such concerns are perceived at all levels, from the feeling of dispossession of the localities where Albanian migrants have settled *en masse*, to the more global vision of a massive and worrying presence in the whole country. These debates, and the various fantasies about their (inevitably) huge numbers, are fuelled by the irregular nature of migration in the early years, since the first mass regularization campaigns only began in 1997. Subsequently, part of this flow remained irregular because of the slowness of the Greek administration, which was poorly adapted to this type of circulatory mobility (Sintès 2010), but also because of the massive need for irregular workers to sustain Greek growth in the decades that followed. These illegal migrants often cross the border on foot, risking their lives (mountain borders are increasingly guarded). This is why, due to its easy topography, the coastal section of the border in the Thesprotia region has been particularly affected by illegal crossings by Albanian migrants since 1990. At that time, the villages of Kalama were in the front line in receiving migrants who went to the bus station at Igoumenitsa to continue their journey to other towns in Greece, or who stayed in the region for a while to take up daily agricultural jobs.

Another important factor in understanding the situation of this region is that new geopolitical concerns also arose in the early 2010s. After several decades in Albania, the descendants of the Chams are now making their voices heard. For several years, the fate of the region's Muslims had been perceived in Albania as an injustice that had a lasting effect on relations with Greece. According to some, the violence of the 1940s even tore a piece of "Albanian land" from the country, and today more and more activists are demanding that Albania return Chameria to the national territory. They have even come to-



Figure 6: Kotsikas: ruins of ancient Muslim village in northern Thesprotia (source: Sintès (2010))

gether in a political party, the PDIU (Party for Justice, Integration and Unity), founded in 2011, whose ideas are now also defended by the Aleanca Kuq e Zi (Red and Black Alliance), founded in 2012, which is calling (among other things) for a referendum on the union of Kosovo with Albania, and campaigning for an ethnic Albania that would extend "from Pristina to Preveza". Every 27 June, the anniversary of the commemoration of the "Cham genocide", as recognized by the Albanian government, they take the opportunity to demonstrate in Tirana and the towns of southern Albania to reiterate their vision of this page in Greek-Albanian history. Since 2011, there has even been a march near the Greek border and the Mavromati border crossing. In such a context, it is easy to imagine the fear of seeing a new Albanian/Albanian-speaking presence emerge in the border region for the Greek authorities, given the high level of political activity concerning this issue in Albania. These various



Figure 7: Liopsi: ruins of ancient Muslim village in northern Thesprotia (source: Sintès (2010))

movements have regularly influenced relations between the two states. In 2005, the President of the Hellenic Republic, Karolos Papoulias, had to cancel a meeting with his counterpart Alfred Moisiu in the Albanian town of Sarandë because of hostile demonstrations by people demanding that the Cham issue be re-examined. During his term in power, Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha even went so far as to declare, during festivities to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Albania in November 2012, that the area of Albanian settlement extended “as far as Preveza”, provoking strong reactions from the Greek authorities, although his cabinet immediately corrected itself: “The Prime Minister’s words should be seen in the historical context of the declaration of independence. Today, Albania has no territorial claims on its neighbours to the south, east or north.” A few years later, in November 2016, it was the turn of his successor, Edi Rama, to give a lengthy interview on Greek public television, in which he devoted a long and controversial section to the issue of these Muslim groups from Thesprotia. Edi Rama spoke about the human situation in which the Chams find it impossible to cross the border:

How is it possible that 80-year-old women and men who were forced to leave their homes don’t have the right to go there again? How is it possible that these Albanians are

not allowed to cross the border of a neighbour, a big European country like Greece?

But he was also questioned about the arrest in Greece of two drivers from the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs who had been commissioned to distribute Albanian school books to Albanian children living in Greece, giving rise to suspicions of irredentist activities on the part of the Albanian government itself:

I don’t think it is irredentist to tell children that there was an area called Chamëria where Albanians lived [...] I challenge you by stating that there is no map of Greater Albania in any Albanian schoolbooks.

The increasing visibility of this issue in relations between the two states therefore seems to be linked to the gradual rise of the PDIU in Albanian political life (5 seats in parliament since 2013, 3 since 2017, a member of Edi Rama’s governing coalition since 2015). However, other factors must also be taken into account to understand the resurgence of the Cham issue in Albania in the first decades of the 21st century: These include migration, which has brought Greeks and Albanians into contact once again; the economic crisis in Greece since 2009, which has led to the return of many migrants to Albania and the dissemination of an image of Greece that is not always very positive; and, finally, the role of movements that are notorious for accompanying globalization, such as the primordialism evoked by Arjun Appadurai (2005), which seems to encourage references in social and political discourse to more radical identities that may stem from a history that is sometimes conflictual.

Ghosts of the Past ... and Their Heirs

In the field, being aware of such a context makes it possible to understand some of the elements observed in relation to the memory of these cross-border disputes. For example, if we look again at the war memorials, those in the villages and cemeteries all seem to have been built in the immediate post-war period, whereas

those commemorating the victims of violence perpetrated by Chams are much more recent. Some even bear dates of construction in the 1990s or 2000s. This characteristic raises further questions about the function of such monuments, since the period in which they were built is marked by the strength of the migratory flow described above. Alongside the Albanian workers crossing the border in Thesprotia, there are also reports of the arrival of descendants of the Chams who were curious to find out about their family's places of origin. Visits to ghost villages even seem to have become a recurring motif for the inhabitants of this region over the last few decades. They have no difficulty in recounting the visits of Albanians in search of their ancestors' homes, and even the exchanges they have had with them. One of the new inhabitants of the border village of Kotsikas explains, "In the village, some old Albanians came and cried when they saw their house. I took them in and they stayed for 10 days. It was easy to talk to them because they knew Greek. They had come from Fier in central Albania to see their old homes!" He also met an Albanian from Kotsikas who lives in Italy and comes to Greece for all his vacations "because he feels at home here" (interview 13). But not all these returns go so smoothly. An Albanian from Konispol recounts how one day, while visiting the village where his father was born in Greece, he was told: "This is your home, but we're going to get you out of here." (interview 14)

It is true that sometimes these visitors can cause the Greek inhabitants a deep anxiety, as Christos, an inhabitant of Sagiada, expressed to me (interview 5). His parents and grandparents were born there, as were previous generations. They even owned fields there, whereas people like him (Orthodox) often worked for Muslim landowners until the region was annexed to Greece in 1913 and, more importantly, the Second World War and the eviction of the latter. However, in the early 1990s, two "Turko-Chams" from Albania came across him in his field and told him: "this field is ours."

I told them "You're wrong, it's been in my family for several generations, my father's and my grandfathers before him. The village above is yours, but not this field."

He continued:

It all points to a certain state of mind ... they think everything here is theirs! Is that a big problem or a small one? I don't know ... I think it's a big problem. And it's true that they had a lot more property here than we did. But why did they have them? How did they get it? It wasn't the result of their work. They didn't have them because they had worked hard like us. We've been here for so many years, what are we going to say to them? Come and take everything! Take the fields! Even though they were a minority here, they had the best fields. It's not right. They say we chased them away, but it's also because they were afraid of what they'd done to us. It's certain that they couldn't have stayed because our relations had seriously deteriorated during the war.

What better way to affirm the Hellenic character of the grounds to visitors from Albania than to remind them of the antagonism between Greeks and Albanians? One of the steles pictured above is right on the border, between the two customs posts (figure 4). It welcomes migrants as they enter Greece, reminding them of the sacrifices made by the Greeks to protect themselves from Albanian irredentism. As for the other steles in Thesprotia, they all point towards Albania, where the alleged murderers fled ... but where the migrants now come from, too.

But there is another hypothesis to consider, one that can be constructed in the light of the social and identity dynamics of the 2000s: that such monuments are also addressed to the local inhabitants themselves, to remind them of the contours of their common belonging. It is true that the history of these regions is at the root of the very heterogeneous nature of the populations that have settled there since the Second

World War. This diversity could also be identified as one of the elements presiding over the functioning of these spatial markers. Until the last few years, the various groups, whether indigenous or settled by the authorities after the war, formed very closed, endogamous social entities where “everyone stayed in their own group” (ο καθένας στο σόι του, as heard in Asprokklisi, Interview 11). These inhabitants (Aroumanians, Arvanitès, Gypsies, Greki), while they are all now Orthodox since the departure of the Muslim Chams, are not necessarily speakers of modern Greek in their domestic practices, even if they recognize themselves without any hesitation in this national identity. Recalling the crimes of the Muslims by means of these monuments would thus serve to distance them once and for all from the Albanians, to strengthen the ties that unite them as inhabitants of the same place, by linking them with the fate of the Greek nation. The assignment produced by such monuments would thus be turned towards the viewer, anchoring in their mind the difference that separates them from the murderers as well as the links that unite them to the victim. These steles would therefore be part of a twofold movement of assigning identities, national by default, when the reality is much more labile, especially since linguistic (and even ethnic) borders have been called into question once again since the reopening of the border in 1990 and the reactivation of old relations.

These narratives have become more complex because of the Albanian migration that has taken place throughout the region since 1990, which has led to the reactivation of various lines of tension that ran through border society before the war, and which the national narratives had not completely erased. As noted elsewhere (Sintès 2008), the Aromanian Vlachs of Asprokklisi, who were moved to the plain by the authorities in the 1950s, were able to reunite with relatives or friends who had remained in Albania after the war. But what is most original here is the way in which migration or the new “life on the border” can now be based on memories of the coex-

istence of the inter-war years. For example, the traditional “good relationships” between the Sagiadini and the inhabitants of the neighbouring Albanian town of Konispol were revived in 1990. It is even said that in the early days of migration, when the Greek police were pushing back illegal immigrants, the people of Sagiada intervened to ensure that the migrants from Konispol were left in peace in the name of the friendship that tied their ancestors together. Even today, in addition to the many cross-border commuters who travel across the border every day to work in Greece throughout the year, the winter period of intense work on the mandarin trees sees most of the working-age inhabitants descend from Konispol to the Greek villages of the Kalama valley. On this occasion, they cross the border and work every day on the plain, in the name of the trust that has traditionally been placed in them.

But, more generally, older people still remember the close relationships or mutual aid that may have united members of different religious or linguistic communities now located on either side of the border, and which could potentially be reactivated today. These links can take many forms: family relations resulting from inter-community marriages, cultural relations based on a linguistic community, memories of old neighbourly relations interrupted in the 1940s. The cross-border links that can be mobilized are also based on interpersonal relationships. This is the case, for example, of an octogenarian woman from Sagiada who, since 1990, has been reunited with her parents’ Albanian-speaking Muslim shepherd, who had been expelled from the neighbouring village of Liopisi at the end of the war (interview 7). Their old friendship continued until his death in 2010. They visited each other regularly and supported each other through the trials of life, such as the death of their spouses.

This kind octogenarian told me how she had so enjoyed going to Albania since 1990:

You know, I had friends on the other side of the border, an old man of my age who died this year. We met when we were young. He

was 16 and was my parents' shepherd. We have always been friends. He came from the 'Turkish' village next to ours and my father took him on as a shepherd. He fled after the war, when the people of our village went to burn down his village. They took everything they could, but I only took two hens.

When they found each other after 1990, she said to him: "The two hens I took from you, my friend, will be replaced a hundredfold." The first time, he came on horseback through the mountains. He found his friends again, even though he had not seen or contacted them since the 1940s.

My husband took him to the store and gave him everything he could, everything that the horse could carry back to Albania. Since that time, we saw each other constantly. He came to visit us and we went to Albania. His house consisted of two small rooms and a lounge with a fireplace. He had taken nothing from his former village in Greece when he fled. He was only a shepherd and had a very simple life. After 1990, we saw each other every Easter. Initially he would come over here, but later we had to meet up at the border as he did not have the papers he needed to cross into Greece. I always prepared some brioches [χουλουράκια], sweets [γλυκά] and lots of clothes for him at Easter, and he brought us a lamb. We used to call each other and meet up at the border crossing-point to pass on clothes to his children that our children no longer wore. He could no longer come here for lack of papers. In 2002, my husband died. My friend found out about it and came over. Anyway, he stayed all night long with his forehead resting on his friend, crying while softly speaking words in Albanian to him. He took part in all aspects of the funeral even though he was 'Turkish'. He went to the church and sat down with us at the meal that is prepared for the dead.

From then on until he died in 2010, they met at the border crossing-point twice a year:

at Christmas and Easter. Once a border guard asked him: "Do you want us to let you pass and take you to your old village so you can see your house again?" He replied that he did not: "The past is the past. I do not want to have a heart attack. Now only stones remain, nothing else [πέτρες να μένουν]! Let me just see this lady. I ate bread in her house for several years and we 'Turks' do not forget when we eat bread in another's house."

This account helps us to understand the fluid nature of ethnic designations, which is also reflected in the many ways in which the groups that make up the frontier society refer to themselves, no doubt reflecting the adaptation of pre-national affiliations to the dominant discourses of the following period. Leonidas Embirikos and Lambros Baltisiotis have clearly shown how the term "Cham" can be highly significant in this respect, as it is used to designate realities that are sometimes quite diverse (Baltisiotis and Embirikos 2007). Similarly, the recent adoption of the term "Arvanitès" (*Αρβανίτες*), rather than "Cham", to designate the Albanian-speaking Christians still living in what is now Thesprotia speaks volumes. Usually used to designate Albanian-speaking Orthodox groups from old Greece who have been present in Attica or the Peloponnese for centuries, this term seems to be used here to neutralize the question of linguistic otherness in this border region, by turning it from a transnational issue in relation to Albania into an internal Greek question. The linguistic group of Albanian speakers in Thesprotia is therefore split in two as a result of these distinct names: on the one hand, the "Arvanitès", i.e. Albanian-speaking Orthodox with a Greek national consciousness, and on the other, the "Turco-chams" or "Albano-chams", who are understood to be Muslim Albanians who are historically linked to the Albanian nation-building process.

In the field, this dissociation is operated and endorsed by the radicality of the memorials. In Kestrini, it is a person "of another religion" (*Αλλόθρησκος*), therefore someone who is responsible for the death of the person honoured.

The most explicit monument on the identity of the murderers is the one in the village of Kastri, which mentions “murdered by Alvano-Cham” (*δολοφονηθέντων από Αλβανοτσάμηδες*). It is perhaps interesting to note that the two cases mentioned here, which are the two most explicit designations of the ethnic identity of the murderers, were found in villages where there are many Orthodox Albanian speakers, confirming that these monuments are part of a desire to “invisibilize” the linguistic difference or, at the very least, an exit-strategy to separate and distinguish these Orthodox Albanian-speaking groups still living in Thesprotia from the “Chams”, understood here as Muslims hostile to Hellenism. However, the term “Cham” was sometimes presented to me in more unexpected ways, going well beyond the simple designation of the Albanian-speaking Muslims. In private, a Sagiadini tells me that he is “Cham” to designate his regional belonging “to Thesprotia, which is a recent name for a region that everyone here knows by its other name ... Chamouria [*Τσαμουριά*] of course!” This terminology, that cannot be used in all circumstances, has proved to be accepted at times as an autonym by all the inhabitants of the region. These inflections around place names and linguistic, religious, and regional affiliations are of great interest. They mark the places, engraving them with a paradoxical mechanism that highlights the distortions between the plural reality of border society and the discourses constructed by nation-states on the past and space.

This is how today, and on various occasions, the inhabitants of Thesprotia sometimes make their differences heard once again, for example when it comes to establishing the legitimacy of each having been allocated land on the plain in the 1950s and 1960s. On this occasion, the Sagiadini can point to their ancient presence and their complete loyalty to the canons of Hellenism: orthodoxy and Hellenophony, which is why they are referred to by the other inhabitants as Gréki. The inhabitants of Smerto or Kestrini, descendants of the tenant farmers who sometimes came from Agios Vlasios or Kastri near

Igoumenitsa, are reputed in the region to speak an Albanian-speaking dialect, called arvanitika or alvanika, depending on the context, as well as being Orthodox - which means that they are sometimes referred to as Greeks (*Έλληνες*), while others refer to them by their skin colour: black (*μαύροι*) or gypsies (*γύφτοι*), giving them an ethnonym that speaks volumes about their supposed origins (Egypt, according to some). The current inhabitants of Asprokklisi, on the former lands of the village of Liopsi (the ruins of which can be seen from the road leading to the Mavromati border post), are divided into three distinct groups: Gréki, who came from a village called Asprokklisi in the mountains of Mourgana and are thought to have been displaced during the civil war; Aromanian Vlachs, who used to winter on the land they rented from the Agas of Liopsi; and Sarakatsani, whose transhumance lands were located quite far from coastal Thesprotia (Grevena and central Thessaly) but whom the Greek state had decided to settle in the region. The issues of land redistribution, the re-composing and repopulation of villages, therefore provide an opportunity to express a kind of hierarchy between different groups that made up the society of these border areas. Nevertheless, other dividing lines run more discreetly through it, such as those activated during the civil war between the nationalists and the communists, even if we noticed during our interviews that they were adapted to the already existing compositions by opposing sedentary and transhumant, villages in the hills and villages in the plains, and so on.

Conclusion: Towards a (Re)Fragmentation of Border Society?

These few examples from the Greek-Albanian border illustrate the extent to which the population of this small border region continues to be crisscrossed by lines of tension demarcating different categories of inhabitants. This reality has recently been put to the test by the mass migration of Albanian citizens to Greece, which has undoubtedly helped to update the different

registers of identification that had been incompletely erased by the dominant discourse of nation states since the post-war period. This process has taken place more generally by confronting the topicality of cross-border relations with the permanence of the conflicting memories that are present. In fact, despite the great diversity of the accounts gathered, it seemed that the position of each of the inhabitants in the interplay of local affiliations led them to look at the new Albanian migrants differently, depending on their experiences of the border. Some people, for example, were able to express a great closeness to the descendants of Chams who left after the war while indicating that one day, with the economic crisis that has been raging in Greece since 2009, it would not be out of the question for migrants from the 1990s to help them find work in Albania. This surprising inversion suggests a certain relativity, or even reversibility, in the discourse of belonging, which has been subject to powerful logics since the region became part of Greece in 1912.

Although it cannot be said that migration is the sole factor in the (re)fragmentation of local society, it does seem to have played this role in terms of certain discourses and practices of some of the region's inhabitants. At the same time, however, the reactivation of cross-border relations is today affected by the return to the diplomatic agenda of the inter-state dispute over the historical legitimacy of this border, making it difficult to conduct fieldwork on the complex dynamics of belonging in the region. It is this context of diplomatic and migratory tensions that led to the suspension of my investigations in the region in 2011. The many questions about cross-border experiences that I asked my interlocutors did not always leave the people I met indifferent, and some ended up preferring not to see me again, or no longer responding to my requests. During my last investigation in July-August 2011, it was two young men claiming to be police officers who, after having stopped my car on the side of a mountain road, politely suggested that I spend the end of the summer at the

beach rather than continuing my investigations in the border villages. Such was my success that I was photographed by many strangers whenever I went into public places. I decided that I did not want my presence to disturb the developing processes any longer, so I decided, for a while, to leave my investigation on the fragmentation of border societies in this very special region.

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Table of the interviews quoted in the text

Interview number	Date of birth	Date of interview	Meeting place
1	1959	06/08/2010	Sagiada
2	1940	11/07/2010	Smerto
3	1952	14/07/2010	Ragio
4	1924	5/08/2010	Kestini
5	1935	06/08/2010	Sagiada
6	1924	14/07/2010	Sagiada
7	1928	06/08/2010	Sagiada
8	1930	12/07/2011	Sagiada
9	1923	13/07/2011	Sagiada
10	1916	14/07/2011	Sagiada
11	1925	07/08/2010	Asproklisi
12	1943	08/08/2010	Filiatès
13	1937	07/08/2010	Filiatès
14	1982	09/08/2010	Konispol

Summary

The border between Greece and Albania has a chequered history. Its establishment in 1913 ceded to Albania a territory conquered by Greece during the Balkan wars and left outside Albania a large part of the territories claimed by Albanian nationalists since the League of Prizren in 1878. This is the case of a small region of Greece, that is presented in this text, called Thesprotia in Greek and Chameria in Albanian, where the historical turmoil has not been without effect on its population, massively affected by the powerful polarization movements resulting from the application of national discourses on the field. Throughout this period and until now, the heterogenous groups that formed the border society had to position themselves according to political turbulences, sometimes despite other long-term realities, and their discourses of belonging were gradually reshaped by these changes. These transformations have had important consequences for the presence of several communities whose fate has been turned on end by the new realities of this contested border, like the Chams, a large Albanian-speaking community, which disappeared from the Western section of the Greek-Albanian border in circumstances that are still debated.

Nowadays, the interpretation given locally to these major social and ethnic transformations always refers to the resolution of a violent conflict that had plagued the region's society since the inter-war period. In the villages affected, the memory of these atrocities is vivid, and the various generations are still able to recount them easily and in great detail, often revealing the circumstances of the murders as well as the identity of the murderers. These stories of violence are echoed today by the presence in the Greek side of the border of singular monuments, which highlight the way in which this history has left its mark on the construction and symbolic appropriation of the territory, and how this in turn feeds memories. By recalling the atrocities of a group closely associated with neighboring Albania, these monuments designate the Albanians as enemies of the Orthodox Greeks, and bear witness to the long-standing hostility between the two countries, feeding present-day resentments with the violence of the past. On the other side of the border, around the small Albanian town of Konispol, stands a number of monuments commemorating the victims of the "Cham genocide", officially recognized by the Albanian state since 1994. These various monuments on the other side of the border also act as landmarks, activating the representation of a space

crossed by a front line and go hand in hand with the introduction in Albania in 1997 of a day of commemoration of the memory of the Chams every 27 June. Its discourse contrasts with that of Greece's neighboring region and is undoubtedly a witness of the transmission of a still disputed memory. But, if the key features of these narratives, and the marks they leave on the territories, are the product of an eventful history, the form of these narratives must also be understood in relation to the dynamics of the present and the characteristics of the moments when these memories are expressed. However, other factors must also be taken into account to understand the resurgence of the Cham issue in the first decades of the 21st century (migration and geopolitical issues). But locally in this new context, the reactivation of cross-border relations following the fall of the Albanian communist regime, and the intense migration of Albanian workers to Greece, has questioned the memory in this border region, in sometimes surprising ways. It illustrates the extent to which the population of this small region continues to be crisscrossed by lines of tension demarcating different categories of inhabitant. This reality has been put to the test by the mass migration of Albanian citizens to Greece, which has helped to update the different registers of identification that had been incompletely erased by the dominant discourse of nation states since the post-war period. This process has taken place more generally by confronting the topicality of cross-border relations with the permanence of the conflicting memories that are present. At the same time, however, the reactivation of cross-border relations is today affected by the return to the diplomatic agenda of the inter-state dispute over the historical legitimacy of this border, making it sometimes difficult to do fieldwork on the complex dynamics of belonging in the region.

Povzetek

Meja med Grčijo in Albanijo ima pestro zgodovino. Z njeno vzpostavitev leta 1913 je bilo Albaniji dodeljeno ozemlje, ki ga je Grčija osvojila med balkanskimi vojnami, zunaj Albanije pa je ostal velik del ozemelj, ki so jih albanski nacionalisti zahtevali od Prizrenske lige leta 1878. Tak primer je tudi v tem besedilu predstavljena majhna grška regija, ki se v Grčiji imenuje Thesprotia, v Albaniji pa Čamerija, kjer zgodovinski pretresi niso os-

tali brez vpliva na prebivalstvo. Izjemno so ga prizadela močna polarizacijska gibanja kot posledica uporabe nacionalnih diskurzov. Vse do danes so se heterogene skupine, ki so tvorile obmejno družbo, morale pozicionirati v skladu s političnimi turbulencami, včasih kljub drugim dolgoročnim realnostim, njihovi diskurzi pripadnosti pa so se zaradi teh sprememb postopoma preoblikovali. Še več, te spremembe so imele pomembne posledice za prisotnost več skupnosti, katerih usoda se je zaradi novih razmer na sporni meji obrnila na glavo, npr. Čamov, velike albansko govoreče skupnosti, ki je po drugi svetovni vojni izginila z zahodnega dela grško-albanske meje v okoliščinah, o katerih se še vedno razpravlja. Dandanes se lokalna razlaga teh velikih družbenih in etničnih preobrazb vedno nanaša na rešitev nasilnega konflikta, ki je družbo v regiji pestil od obdobja med vojnama. V prizadetih vaseh je spomin na ta grozodejstva živ in različne generacije o njih še vedno zlahka ter zelo podrobno pripovedujejo, pri čemer pogosto razkrijejo okoliščine umorov in tudi identiteto morilcev. Zgodbe o nasilju danes se odlikavajo v edinstvenih spomenikih na grški strani meje, ki poudarjajo, kako je ta zgodovina zaznamovala izgradnjo in simbolno prilastitev ozemlja ter kako to posledično napaja spomine. Z opominjanjem na grozodejstva skupine, ki je tesno povezana s sosednjo Albanijo, ti spomeniki Albance označujejo za sovražnike pravoslavni Grkov in pričajo o dolgotrajni sovražnosti med državama, ki današnje zamere napaja z nasiljem iz preteklosti. Na drugi strani meje, v okolici majhnega albanskega mesta Konispol, stojijo številni spomeniki v spomin na žrtve »genocida nad Čami«, ki jih albanska država uradno priznava od leta 1994. Ti različni spomeniki na drugi strani meje delujejo tudi kot mejniki, saj aktivirajo reprezentacijo prostora, ki ga preči frontna črta, in gredo z roko v roki z uvedbo dneva spomina na Čame v Albaniji leta 1997, ki se obeležuje vsakega 27. junija. Njihov diskurz je v nasprotju z diskurzom v sosednji grški regiji in nedvomno priča o prenosu še vedno spornega spomina. Če pa so ključne značilnosti teh pripovedi in sledi, ki jih puščajo na ozemljih, produkt pestre zgodovine, je treba obliko teh pripovedi razumeti tudi v povezavi s sedanjimi dinamikami in pa z značilnostmi trenutkov, ko so ti spomini izraženi. Da bi razumeli ponovno oživetev čamskega vprašanja v prvih desetletjih 21. stoletja (migracijska in geopolitična vprašanja), je treba upoštevati tudi druge dejavnike. V tem

kontekstu sta na lokalni ravni pomembni ponovna aktivacija čezmejnih odnosov po padcu albanskega komunističnega režima in intenzivna migracija albanskih delavcev v Grčijo, ki včasih na presenetljive načine postavljata pod vprašaj spomin v tej obmejni regiji. V tem prepoznamo, v kolikšni meri je prebivalstvo te majhne regije še vedno preprejeno s silnicami napetosti, ki ločujejo različne kategorije prebivalcev. Ta realnost je bila na preizkušnji ob množični migraciji albanskih državljanov v Grčijo, ki je pripomogla, da so se posodobili različni identifikacijski registri, ki jih prevladujoči diskurz nacionalnih držav od poveljnega obdobja ni v celoti izbrisal. Ta proces se je odvil skozi soočenje aktualnosti čezmejnih odnosov s trajno prisotnimi konfliktnimi spomini. Obenem pa na oživitev čezmejnih odnosov danes vpliva vračanje meddržavnega spora o zgodovinski legiti-
mnosti te meje na diplomatski dnevni red, zaradi česar je včasih težko izvajati terensko delo v zvezi s kompleksno dinamiko pripadnosti v regiji.