

RECHERCHES

RESEARCH STUDIES

MOUNTAINS AS « LIEUX DE MÉMOIRE » HIGHLAND VALUES AND NATION-BUILDING IN THE BALKANS¹

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INTRODUCTION

Notions about shared history and the self-ascription of specific cultural and moral values are constitutive for the formation of nations and their continuity. While this is a common sense assumption, proven by extensive research also for the case of Southeast European nations, the spatial dimension of collective commemoration and of the construction of national identities have been much less considered. As Pierre Nora and his collaborators have shown, modern nation states require “places” onto which they can pin historical commemoration and imagination (*lieux de mémoire*). In the course of modernisation collective memory lost its organic nature and is no longer reproduced automatically. Collective memory is not any more transmitted orally from one generation to the other but rather has become the endeavour of professional memory-makers such as historians and intellectuals². In order to be comprehensible and meaningful to people, nationally significant historical events must be anchored in popular experience and consciousness. In this operation, locations and material items as well as rituals and other features of culture be-

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² **Nora (Pierre)**, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis*, Berlin : Wagenbach, 1990, p. 11.

come bearers of collective memory that cannot be fostered and disseminated by the intellectual endeavour of professional history alone. Places act as symbols of collective historical heritage, and the meaning of an event also rubs off onto the “place” on which its imagination is fixed. Nora studied these discursive operations for the case of the modern construction and imposition of French collective memory, focussing on monuments, cultural artefacts and manifestations, signs and symbols. Similar discursive strategies, which relate cultural features to things from other domains, are at work in the symbolic connection between national and ethnic identities and their corresponding values with specific landscapes.

Nations are intrinsically linked to territories since the very term “nation” implies a social group that aims at establishing sovereign government in and control over a specific territory. In the process of nation-building territory and space are instilled with cultural meaning so that the people who make up a nation feel an emotional attachment to the territory the nation claims for itself. Nations become related to specific landscapes which reflect the attitudes, values and sense of history of the members of the nation³. Once instilled with a specific national value, territories turn into cultural landscapes whose symbolism helps to maintain national identity among the individual members of the nation and to transmit it from generation to generation⁴. Landscapes are also linked with national history and symbolise particular events of the nation’s past, embodying “national spirit” and “national characteristics”.

Population groups inhabiting such cultural or “national” landscapes are then described as ethnically particularly pure by the ideologues of the nation. The presumed features of the natural landscape are seen by the members of the nation or an ethnic group as metaphors for the spirit and characteristics of the people from that territory⁵. In a second step, these metaphors are ascribed to a whole nation or ethnic group regardless in which geographical milieu it lives, an operation that recalls Fernandez’s concept of “metonymic” misrepresentation because a part of the social group is taken for the whole⁶. This discursive operation relates national history and identity to specific spaces in such a way that these places come to represent the whole nation, or at least its “pure” core. As Fernandez points out, one function of metaphors and metonyms in social life is to enable the movement of the subjects in culture⁷.

³ **White (George)**, *Nationalism and Territory. Constructing Group Identity in Southeastern Europe*, Landham : Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵ Cf. **Fernandez (James W.)**, *Persuasions and Performances : The Play of Tropes in Culture*, Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Hence, once national identity is constructed with the metonymic and metaphorical power of specific places and their people, it can be conferred upon all presumptive members of the nation.

MOUNTAINS AND THE NATION

In Southeast Europe, from all kinds of landscapes mountains seem to have played the most important role in the substantiation of national ideologies. This fact is not surprising given the mountainous character of the region which is even called after a mountain range (the Bulgarian *Balkan* mountains). Mountains generally play an important role in the epic tradition of the region as well as in the popular tradition⁸. In national histories and mythologies, mountains were often regarded as places where particularly important events of the national tradition took place and specific psychological features allegedly typical of the respective nation could flourish. Both lines of argument are closely related to each other, as in many cases it was the very character of the highlanders as shaped by their mountainous environment that caused nationally significant events to take place in the mountains and not in the plains or elsewhere. The geographic-topographical difference between mountains and plains was not only associated with different socio-cultural adaptation strategies to the environment, but also with the different positions of the particular population in the value system of the nation. Ecological habitats were therefore endowed with specific judgements about the cultural and national value of the population inhabiting them. Character traits such as honesty, sobriety, modesty, strength, love of freedom, solidarity, and steadfastness were regarded as the outcome of life under the harsh natural conditions in the mountains. Very often these features were associated with sheep-breeders, as (semi)nomadic or transhumant herding was the main economic strategy in many Balkan mountain societies. The roaming shepherd became an emblem of national freedom⁹, while this same current of national mythology in the Balkans showed a certain degree of contempt for agriculture.

⁸ Roglić (Josip), « Die Gebirge als die Wiege des geschichtlichen Geschehens in Südosteuropa », in Lauer (Wilhelm), ed., *Colloquium Geographicum*, 12 (*Argumenta Geographica. Festschrift Carl Troll zum 70. Geburtstag*), Bonn : Ferd. Dummlers Verlag, 1970, p. 234.

⁹ Josip Roglić makes the connection mountains – sheep-breeding – nation / state-building explicit when he writes that the medieval Southeast European kingdoms were “organically” related to the mountains because sheep-breeding was the most important occupation. In this author’s view, the strength of the medieval “nation states” was determined by their ability to control large areas of fertile summer pastures in the mountains, *ibid.*, p. 234.

In the Balkans people frequently speak of “mountain villages” and “plain villages” as though their residents differed from each other¹⁰. The difference is not regarded only as geographic, but also as cultural, and therefore gains social meaning. In his monograph on rural Greece, Irwin Sanders reports an interesting experiment in which a group of student social-workers in a college near Athens was asked to describe the characteristic features of people in the plains and the mountains¹¹. The students came from villages in every region of Greece and can therefore be viewed as quite representatives of Greek villagers’ way of thinking at that time.

Mountain villagers

Change slowly
 Physically tough
 More hospitable
 Stubborn
 Happier, more optimistic
 Have deeper thoughts
 More intermarriage of kin

Plains villagers

Accept change, adapt better
 Refined in manners
 More sophisticated
 Cunning
 Sad (Thessaly)

Sanders concludes, that « [d]espite their isolation, the mountain people are considered by many Greeks to be brighter and more active than those of the plains. Indeed, many mountain villages are thought to have been settled by the more liberal, strongly independent inhabitants of the plain who could not support the indignities of Ottoman rule »¹². But this discursive operation does not stop at associating mountain inhabitants with certain features of character, as in a second step distinctive values such as strength and independent spirit are often taken as representative for the whole nation.

However, not only are typically mountain values constructed and taken as representative for the nation, but also certain “typical” social institutions of the nation. This ideological operation rests on the widely held belief that the Ottoman occupation of the Balkans was followed by a retreat of the native Christian populations into the mountains. There, national culture supposedly survived because the Ottomans were never really able to achieve full control of the mountain regions. Later, during the period of “national awakening” and “national rebirth”, the national culture allegedly descended from the highlands figuratively and literally because people from the mountains migrated

¹⁰ Sanders (Irwin T.), *Rainbow in the Rock. The People of Rural Greece*, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1962, p. 29

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹² *Ibid.*

into the plains bringing with them a traditional way of life and “untainted” national characteristics¹³. Many of these ideas were born in the 19th century when the Ottoman Empire was in a process of gradual disintegration. In their efforts to establish nation states and to strengthen and spread national consciousness after eventual “liberation”, nationalist ideologists praised the mountain inhabitants who had allegedly fought for centuries to preserve their freedom and ethnic identity. Sanders writes : « Indeed, many mountain villages are thought to have been settled by more liberal, strongly independent inhabitants of the plain who could not support the indignities of Ottoman rule »¹⁴. There, high up in barely accessible mountain regions, closed and homogenous communities allegedly managed to maintain the most valuable features of their ethnic group. According to such a concept, ethnicity becomes closely connected with nature, supporting the essentialist interpretation of ethnicity because if nature does not change, then why should ethnic adherence ?

The probably most prominent representative of such a view was the eminent Serb human geographer Jovan Cvijić who in his famous study *Balkansko poluostrvo* (« Balkan Peninsula », first published in French in 1918 and in Serbian in 1922¹⁵) attempted a classification of Southeast European psychological types relating them to their natural environment. To explain psychological and cultural features by geographical facts was en vogue in the human and cultural geography of those days. However, Cvijić was not a simple geographic determinist but tried to substantiate his conclusions by extensive empirical research¹⁶. He nevertheless gave national meaning to the personality types in the Balkans he was determining, which must be seen in the context of his attempt to support the Serbian case against the opposing nationalist aspirations of his time. Cvijić was especially devoted to the so-called “Dinaric type” who lived in the Dinaric chain or had migrated from there to the plains¹⁷. The people of this type, who were Serb by origin, were described by Cvijić in the warmest colours. His portrayal focussed on their solidarity, archaic democracy, war-like spirit, love of freedom, national pride, honour, and sense of justice. Cvijić’s assumption was that « Dinaric people cannot live as servants as most

¹³ E.g. Roglić (Josip), art. cit., p. 231.

¹⁴ Sanders (Irwin T.), op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁵ Cvijić (Jovan), *Balkansko poluostrvo južnoslovenske zemlje. Osnove antropogeografije*, Beograd : Kraljevine Srba, 1922.

¹⁶ Kaser (Karl), « Anthropology and the Balkanization of the Balkans : Jovan Cvijić and Dinko Tomašić », *Ethnologia Balkanica*, 2, 1998, p. 91.

¹⁷ Cvijić’s enthusiasm for mountain-dwellers may have also been influenced by the fact that he was born into a family of Montenegrin colonists (Roglić (Josip), art. cit., p. 231). He must therefore have come into contact with Montenegrin folk culture and its high estimation of mountains at a young age.

people in the plains can »¹⁸. While the inhabitants of the plains accepted the mentality of the *reaya*, the “herd” who had accepted Ottoman subjugation and compromised with the oppressors, the highlanders never accommodated Ottoman rule. They had learnt their endurance from the environment, which had taught them a difficult lesson but had made them hard. By incessantly fighting the oppressor, the mountaineers had developed a specific *hajduk* mentality¹⁹, which became a standard topic of Balkan folklore. For Cvijić the *hajduk* mentality not only inspired resistance but also aimed at national independence as Cvijić stressed the state-building capacity of the mountain-dwellers²⁰. Similar views were widely upheld in Greece and Bulgaria, where the *klephtes* and the *haiduti* were presented as champions of nationhood. Mountain people were considered by many Greeks to be brighter and more active than those in the plains, having greater fortitude and a willingness to put up with stark conditions. People in the plains were, in contrast to the image of the highlanders, thought to have been dependent on their Ottoman absentee landowners and were despised by the more independent Greeks in the mountains²¹.

In the countries of former Yugoslavia, this discourse on the relationship between geography and national character still has its political and cultural repercussions. Especially in Serbia during the last decade, the cleft between highlanders and the residents of the plains was articulated with a political angle. On the one side stood those who cherished Cvijić’s characterisation of the Dinaric highlanders and regarded them as the “real Serbs”. In this line of argument, the Serbs in the mountains of Bosnia had kept their “Serbianess” more thoroughly than the Serbian inhabitants of the plains in the Šumadija and the cities. It is obvious that such an assumption was also meant to summon the support of Serbia proper for the secessionist Bosnian Serbs. In a 1991 essay, Nikola Koljević, a professor of English literature at the University of Sarajevo and one of the leaders of the Republika Srpska, contrasted the “agrarian tender souls” in Serbia proper with the Bosnian Serbs’ sense of national mission and fighting spirit²². These ideological currents, which praised the national spirit of the mountain Serbs, were opposed by liberal urban intellectu-

¹⁸ Kaser (Karl), art. cit., p. 92.

¹⁹ Cvijić (Jovan), Andrić (Ivo), *O balkanskim psihičkim tipovima*, Belgrade : Prosveta, 1988, p. 32.

²⁰ Živković (Marko), « Violent Highlanders and Peaceful Lowlanders », *Replika. Hungarian Social Science Quarterly*, special issue, 1997, p. 112. In contrast to Cvijić and other authors who emphasised the positive role of mountains for national values, scholars like the Croat Dinko Tomašić claimed the contrary. Tomašić associated all positive values important for the nation with lowlanders, while he considered the people from the Dinaric mountains unruly outlaws, mercenaries and political terrorists who could not contribute to nation-building in a meaningful way. Kaser (Karl), art. cit., p. 94.

²¹ Sanders (Irwin T.), *op. cit.*, p. 31f.

²² Quoted in Živković (Marko), art. cit., p. 15f.

als who deplored the aggressive nationalism of the highlanders (the Bosnian Serbs), making them responsible for the bloodshed in former Yugoslavia and the destruction of civilisation as exemplified by the shelling of towns such as Sarajevo, Dubrovnik, Mostar and Vukovar. In this interpretation, peaceful lowland farmers and cosmopolitan urbanites are set against savage, narrow-minded, and brutal highlanders²³. What had once been regarded as positive values in the context of nation-building was re-evaluated in the context of urban and farming societies that saw their achievements and peace threatened by violently nationalist mountain-dwellers.

Such a discourse on the “national” role of mountains was not confined to Serbia and former Yugoslavia, but was also an important element in the symbolical construction of other Balkan nations. In our analysis we will draw on Bulgarian and Albanian examples in order to reveal how mountains became significant for the nation by the ascription of national values, events, and social institutions to their people. The Bulgarian and Albanian cases demonstrate particularly well how mountains have been regarded as sanctuaries of the nation, contributing to form national values and institutions. Both examples also illustrate how metaphoric notions of mountains as symbols of the nation can be adapted to different ideological and political contexts and reveal how deeply they are inscribed in the collective consciousness. In our essay, we focus on different aspects of the national imagination of mountains : in the Bulgarian case, we emphasise the role of mountains in national mythology as sanctuaries for liberation fighters and as the environment that formed prominent personalities. In the case of Albania, we show how national discourse regarded mountains as the specific geographical and cultural milieu in which a set of common-law institutions and rules, the *kanun*, developed. The *kanun* was described as a particularly Albanian national institution. In both case studies the underlying principle of nationalist discourse is the same : mountains are imagined as having been instrumental in safeguarding, and even developing, the national and ethnic values of the two peoples concerned.

MOUNTAINS AND BULGARIAN NATIONAL IMAGINATION

« The Bulgarian people’s 1 000-year past and its survival are closely connected with the [Balkan] mountains. There the decisive events took place that lead to the Bulgarian state of our days »²⁴. This statement by a non-Bulgarian

²³ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 116.

²⁴ Roglič (Josip), art. cit., p. 234.

author is quite representative for the Bulgarian imagination of the role which mountains played in Bulgarian national history. Already in the 19th century, Bulgarian nationalist discourse praised mountains for their particular significance for the nation. Mountains were said to have been the stage of important events in the liberation of Bulgaria, and to have never betrayed the nation. Mountain people were considered the “purest” Bulgarians. Of all mountain ranges in Bulgaria, the Balkan chain (*Stara planina*) certainly was ascribed the biggest stake in national history²⁵. Bulgarian literature and folk poetry portrayed the Balkan mountains as witnesses of the historical fate of the Bulgarians, as protectors of the Bulgarian nation, as shelters for hermits, as comforters of the subjugated people, and as a hiding-place for those who took revenge on the foreign intruders and fought for freedom. « Therefore the Bulgarians’ love for the mountains is a love historically imposed by needs, it is an everyday love, and not the effect of some contemporary tourist or sport propaganda »²⁶.

The idea of the Balkan mountains as protectors of the Bulgarian nation was elaborated above all by one of the eminent Bulgarian historians of the first half of the 20th century, Petăr Mutafčiev. In his (unfinished) collection *Book for the Bulgarians*, written mainly between 1928 and 1936, he devoted a chapter to the historical role of the Balkan Mountains in Bulgarian history, « *Balkanät v našata istorija* »²⁷. In this chapter, Mutafčiev describes how the Byzantine Empire’s various attempts to occupy the Bulgarian kingdom to its north failed because Byzantine troops had neither been able to pass the mountains nor to successfully circumvent them. Bulgarians were therefore described in Byzantine historiography as “Barbarians” living in the Balkan Mountains, which had to be conquered in order to subdue their wild inhabitants. According to Mutafčiev, the Byzantines became increasingly terrified of the Balkan Mountains and even the most experienced Byzantine generals did not dare to cross them²⁸. In the war of 1195, the capital of the Second Bulgarian kingdom, the mountain town of Veliko Tărnovo, already lay defenceless before the Byzantine troops but was nevertheless saved because the Byzantine general in charge refused to venture into the Balkan Mountains²⁹.

In Mutafčiev’s view, the Balkan chain was therefore responsible for the survival of the Bulgarian kingdom – until it was overrun by the Ottomans –

²⁵ Cf. **Daskalov (Roumen)**, *Building up a National Identity : The Case of Bulgaria*, Florence : European University Institute (EUI Working paper SPS No. 94/11), 1994, p. 22.

²⁶ **Deliradev (Pavel)**, *Planini i narod*, Sofia : Biblioteka « Niva », 1945, p. 53.

²⁷ **Mutafčiev (Petăr)**, *Kniga za bălgarite*, Sofia : Bălgarska Akademija na Naukite, 1987, pp. 65-89.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

and the Bulgarian nation, as otherwise the traditional Byzantine enemy from the south would have wiped out the Bulgarian people. Although the Byzantines took Bulgarian lands south of the Balkans, this was not decisive as long as their campaigns stopped at the mountains. In Mutafčiev's description, the mountains are not only a place where certain historic and heroic events took place but they even acquire the capacity of a significant actor :

Ever so mysterious and silent, he [the Balkan mountain ; in Bulgarian *balkan* is male³⁰] has borne a fateful role in determining our future since the very beginning of our national life. And he not only watched over these events like a genuine, old soldier, but with his powerful body he protected this people, born and raised in his paternal fold. The medieval Bulgarian state would have remained an ephemeral and long-forgotten episode without the Balkan Mountains. Without the Balkan Mountains, but later and generally without the mountains in our lands, here in Europe's South East the people that had lived for so many centuries under the name of Bulgarians would not have survived, indeed not even have come into existence³¹.

Bulgarians and mountains become inseparable in Mutafčiev's text, whereas the Byzantines and other adversaries of the Bulgarians, such as the Pechenegs, are associated with the sea and the plains³². It is not by accident that the First Bulgarian Kingdom was not defeated by an attack from the south – that is through the mountains – but from the north, when troops under Svjatoslav from Kiev defeated the Bulgarians in 968. The Balkan chain, « like a genuine soldier on guard, did not betray his duty as a defender of the Bulgarian state against his mighty neighbour »³³.

In historical as well as popular discourses, mountains retained their role as a sanctuary for the Bulgarians also in the period after the defeat of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom against the Ottomans in the late 14th century that resulted in almost half a millennium of Ottoman domination. In respect to the Ottoman period, the Balkan chain and other Bulgarian mountains were not portrayed as a line of defence against an external adversary, but as an internal refuge against foreign occupiers. It was not independence that was defended by the mountains but "Bulgarianness", that is the cultural purity of the Bulgarian nation. This myth is related to the catastrophic interpretation of Ottoman occupation dear to Bulgarian historiography and still maintained by

³⁰ It is significant that the Balkan chain is referred to as "he" not only in the sense of grammatical gender but also in terms of notions of masculinity, whereas other peaks are usually female in Bulgarian.

³¹ Mutafčiev (Petăr), *op. cit.*, p. 66.

³² A later author, Pavel Deliradev, wrote that for Bulgarians the mountains were the most important geographical factor, while for Greeks it was the sea and for Romanians the plains. Therefore, the Romanian (Valachian) minority in Bulgaria settled above all along the Danube and the Greeks on the Black Sea, but « the mountains are mainly Bulgarian ». Deliradev (Pavel), *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³³ Mutafčiev (Petăr), *op. cit.*, p. 89.

many a mainstream historian. In this view, the geographic opposition between the mountains and the plains becomes central for the course of events during Ottoman rule : firstly, these historians allege that the Ottomans destroyed Bulgarian towns and drove the Bulgarian population from the fertile plains in order to colonise them with Turkish settlers³⁴. According to this assumption, which is also commonplace in other Southeast European historiographies, the Christian population was forced to retreat to the mountains where it found harsh living conditions, but developed a staunch love of freedom and retained its ethnic particularities. This interpretation of history, however, can easily be deconstructed. Research by scholars of Ottoman history, as well as earlier studies such as those of Felix Kanitz, concluded that this view is flawed. The depopulation of the fertile plains mainly occurred during the perpetual feudal strife and civil wars of the 14th century, well before Ottoman conquest³⁵. Bulgarians were not driven into the mountains, but were rather attracted to mountain villages by tax advantages enjoyed by certain population groups who fulfilled specific duties for the Sultan. One of these privileged groups were the so-called *derbendji* (Guards of the Passes) who maintained control over vital routes through the mountains. In return for their services, they had the right to carry weapons and to pay fewer taxes. Due to the mountainous character of much of Bulgaria, there were dozens of *derbendji* villages, in particular in the Balkan chain and the Sredna Gora, such as Kalofer, Koprivštica, Panagjurište, Elena, Žerevna, Gabrovo, Kotel, Teteven and Trjavna. These places « developed in the course of time into the leading Bulgarian craft and trade centres with an independent, enterprising and self-determined population » whose wealth was based on sheep-breeding, cloth and garment production, as well as on trade³⁶. Ironically, the emergence of an independence-seeking, affluent Bulgarian petty bourgeoisie was the long-term effect of privileges granted by the Ottoman government as well as of government orders for the supply of its army and cities, rather than the result of harsh suppression and assimilation attempts as claimed by mainstream Bulgarian historiography.

During the period of “national rebirth” in the 19th century and also afterwards, Bulgarian historiography and poetry made the mountains their favourite stage for relating the Bulgarians’ struggle for independence. This narrative strategy is mainly related to the myth of the *haiduti* (the Bulgarian version of the Serb *hajduci*) who were described as rebels against Byzantine and Ottoman domination, as well as to the Bulgarian revolutionaries of the

³⁴ For examples, see **Kiel (Machiel)**, *Art and Society of Bulgaria in the Turkish Period*, Assen / Maastricht : Van Gorcum, 1985, p. 33.

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 33-54.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 43.

third quarter of the 19th century before final “liberation”. Aside from this, mountain towns were also given the credentials of being the cradle of the Bulgarian “Renaissance” (*vázraždane*). Mutafčiev, again, writes, « in his [the Balkan’s] breast the seeds of our (new) rebirth were laid »³⁷. The significance given to mountains for the survival and revival of Orthodox Bulgarian culture also resulted from the fact that most monasteries in which the Bulgarian literary tradition was maintained were located in mountain regions, such as the famous Rila and Bačkovsko monasteries³⁸.

The classic national image of mountains in this context can be found in the poetry of the writer and revolutionary Georgi Rakovski who was born in the town of Kotel in the Balkan chain in 1821. He is credited with the first “all-national” programme for the liberation of Bulgaria, drafted in 1858, and a plan for an uprising in 1861³⁹. Rakovski, who lived much of his politically active life in exile, tried to inflame national rebellion with his poetry. In his poems he not only deplored the cruelty of the Byzantines and then the “Barbarian Turks” as well as the deviousness of the Greeks under Ottoman rule, but also praised Bulgarian heroes fighting foreign domination. These *haiduti* were invariably associated with the mountains to which they had retreated to take revenge on the Byzantine or Ottoman oppressors. « [B]ut some bold *vojvodi* [leaders of insurgent bands] upheld Bulgarian liberty in inaccessible parts of the ancient Balkan Mountains », where they preserved the typical features of the “old Bulgarians”, resisting all attempts at assimilation⁴⁰. The harsh life in the mountains led them to acquire particular moral characteristics, such as a warlike spirit, courage, endurance, honour, self-sacrificial devotion to the cause of Bulgarian liberation, honesty, love of freedom, and masculinity. These qualities became intrinsically linked to the environment, which in turn was thought to transform ordinary people living in the mountains into freedom-loving, “real” Bulgarians. Nature and the nation were thus dialectically linked to each other. The hero of Rakovski’s poem « *Gorski pätnik* » [Mountain traveller] goes into the mountains in order to prove his worth as a true man of the mountains (*gorsko momče*)⁴¹. For these heroes, the mountains also represent a

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66. This assumption rests, however, on historical fact. The man who is commonly credited with being the father of the Bulgarian national revival movement, the monk Paisij Hilendarski, was born in the mountain town of Bansko, and wrote his influential « History of the Slavo-Bulgarians » in the Hilendar monastery on Mount Athos. Other ancestors of Bulgarian nationalism, such as Sofroni Vračanski, Ilarion Makariopolski, and Neofit Rilski were also born in mountain towns.

³⁸ Deliradev points out that there was only one “real” monastery in the plains, Iljanci near Sofia. **Deliradev (Pavel)**, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

³⁹ **Bälgarska Akademija na Naukite**, ed., *Istorija na Bälgarija, tom 6 : Bälgarsko vázraždane 1856-1878*, Sofia : Izdatelstvo na bälgarska akademija na naukite, 1987, pp. 204 ff.

⁴⁰ **Rakovski (Georgi)**, « Bälgarski haiduti », in : *Säčinenija*, vol. 3, Sofia : Bälgarski pisatel, 1984, p. 415.

⁴¹ **Rakovski (Georgi)**, « Gorski pätnik », in : *Säčinenija*, vol. 1, Sofia : Bälgarski pisatel, 1983, pp. 138 f.

place that enables them to break with their past, an opportunity for purification. There they become "Men of the Balkans", a qualification associated with the notion of politically active and staunch Bulgarians, while people from the plains are considered more eager to co-operate with the occupiers⁴². Not by chance, Rakovski regarded the Montenegrins a shining example of a people who had managed to expel the Ottomans. « Every Montenegrin is a soldier », he wrote. « Generally, Montenegrins are bold fellows, hospitable and honest people. They have almost the same character as the Bulgarians of the old Balkans ». Montenegrin women were, of course, « diligent at housework, have a strong sense of shame, and are friendly »⁴³.

Aside from Rakovski, other revolutionary poets such as Ivan Vazov, Hristo Botev and Penčo Slavejkov also praised the importance of mountains for the liberation of Bulgaria⁴⁴. Ivan Vazov, Bulgaria's most important writer of the second half of the 19th century, held mountains in particularly high esteem as illustrated by his descriptions of his trips through the mountain ranges, such as « In the Heart of the Rhodopes », « The Magnificent Rila Desert », « One Part of the Stara Planina », and « Musala ». The significance of mountains for rebellions against occupying forces is also evident in Bulgarian expressions such as « to catch to the Balkans » or « to go into the Balkans » which, in Bulgarian historical-political language, mean to take up arms and to join the partisans.

The figure of the *haidutin* flourished in Bulgarian literature and even more recent authors felt attracted by it. One of the best-known modern Bulgarian writers, Nikolaj Hajtov, for instance, published a literary-historical essay on several *haiduti* of the 19th century whose existence was allegedly historically proven. Although Hajtov claimed that his actual aim was to deconstruct some legends on the *haiduti*, he in fact enhanced the notion of *haiduti* as bold and just fighters for freedom. According to Hajtov, only few mountain people (*balkandži*) were able to endure the harsh living conditions among the peaks where they had often been confronted with a lack of food and shelter. But those few who dared stay in the mountains were large and strong, and preferred fist fights to armed battle. The famous *haidutin* Angel Vojvoda, for instance, was able to jump over a horse loaded with two chests. Hajtov also rejected the claim that the *haiduti* had been, in fact, nothing more than bandits. According to the author, real *haiduti* were honest and gave the money they robbed from their enemies to the poor and to schools, monasteries and the church. Hajtov also provided the conflict between the *haiduti* and the Ottomans with a spatial dimension : « From their shelter in the mountains,

⁴² **Gălăbov (K.)**, « Čovekăt na kavala, čovekăt na ribnija bukvar, čovekăt na Balkana », in : *Životăt na rodinata. Kulturniijat păt na bălgarina. Literaturni opiti*, Sofia, 1930, pp. 7-10.

⁴³ **Rakovski (Georgi)**, « Černa Gora », in : *Săcinenija*, vol. 2, Sofia : Bălgarski pisatel, 1983, p. 317.

⁴⁴ **Deliradev (Pavel)**, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

they attacked the *çiftliks* of the begs [Muslim notables], robbed and killed travelling Turkish noblemen, and punished corrupt judges and cruel *spahis* »⁴⁵. The Ottomans / Turks were thus associated with the plains, while the *haiduti* were attached to the mountains.

During the rebellions and revolutionary activities of the 1870s, mountains again played a prominent role in the actual events as well as the popular mythology. In reflections on the past, historiography, literature and material culture objectified their significance. Several leading national revolutionaries and intellectuals, such as – aside from Rakovski – Ljuben Karavelov, Hristo Botev, Vasil Levski, Hadži Dimităr, Filip Totju, and Angel Kăncev came from mountain towns, that is why today monuments in their native towns and wherever else in the country they supposedly fought for Bulgaria's freedom commemorate their lives. Mountain towns therefore boast a particularly large number of monuments devoted to the national struggle pointing to their important position in collective memory. The central role of the mountains in Bulgarian liberation is also highlighted in the commemoration of the April Uprising of 1876. This badly organised and notoriously unsuccessful uprising against Ottoman rule failed to liberate the country, but it managed to mobilise the support of leading European politicians for the Bulgarian cause on the basis of alleged or actual Ottoman atrocities. From a geographic point of view, the uprising was had its epicentre in the mountains. Its main centres were the towns of Panagjurište and Koprivštica in the Sredna Gora chain. In Oborište near the town of Panagjurište, the insurgents took an oath to liberation. « In Switzerland Rütli, in Bulgaria Oborište », writes Deliradev, indicating the significance of this location for Bulgarian national mythology⁴⁶. According to a map in the official « History of Bulgaria » published in 1987, the two other regions of « armed struggle on a massive scale » were the northern slopes of the Rhodope Mountains around the towns of Batak, Peruštica and Peštera, and the central Balkan mountains east of Veliko Tărnovo⁴⁷. Commemoration of those events is therefore automatically linked to the mountains not only as a geographic fact, but also as carrying certain mythological notions about people breathing the spirit of freedom. As Deliradev writes, « the pride of the mountain-dwellers was never broken like that of the villagers in the plains »⁴⁸.

But the imaginary, and to a certain extent real, role of mountains for the liberation of Bulgaria did not stop there. On the contrary, it reached its climax two years later when the Russians fought the Ottomans in the Russian-

⁴⁵ Hajtov (Nikolaj), *Haiduti. Očerci*, Sofia : Izdatelstvo otečestvo, 1985, pp. 5-9.

⁴⁶ Deliradev (Pavel), *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁴⁷ *Bălgarska Akademija na Naukite*, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 392.

⁴⁸ Deliradev (Pavel), *op. cit.*, p. 66.

Turkish War of 1877-1878. The decisive battle of this war took place at the Šipka Pass in the central Balkan chain, where in June 1878 the Russians defeated some 23 000 Ottoman troops, taking more than 20 000 as prisoners. Hence the Šipka Pass became a cornerstone of Bulgarian historical imagination, one of its most important “places of memory”. Regular celebrations at the huge monument, built on the top of the pass, pay tribute to the Russian “liberators” and secure the place of the mountains in collective memory. The story of the Šipka battle is frequently recalled in the press on its annual anniversary. The battle for Šipka also evokes gender images because it is portrayed as the struggle for a woman (*Šipka* is female in Bulgarian) representing the “mother nation” and being liberated by Bulgarian soldiers and their Russian brethren from brutish alien forces.

For the historical representation of the “post-liberation” period, i.e. after 1878, the role of mountains for national ideology changed, as they were no more the stage of important events and in reality saw a period of decline as they became the social, economic and political periphery in a centralising state. But they retained their prominent position as “the friends of the people” in collective memory⁴⁹. As such, they acquired particular significance in urban discourse on “original values” and “moral purity”. For city people, mountains became a favourite place for rest and recreation, where people sought purification from the ambiguities and seductions of modern urban life. This led to the founding of the first Alpinist societies as early as the 1880s. Society members were predominantly well-educated, well off, and were young people of the professional classes⁵⁰. Significantly, writers Ivan Vazov and Aleko Konstantinov belonged to the pioneers of the Alpinist movement in Bulgaria.

Communist ideology, which imposed itself as the dominant discourse after the Communist takeover in 1944, continued the line of reasoning that presented the mountains as a “pure” alternative to the corrupt and unhealthy ways of urban life. But Communist ideology also revived the idea of the role of the mountains in the fight for liberation. This was due to the ideological significance of the partisan struggle during World War II, which served as one of the mainstays of the legitimisation of Communist rule by presenting it as home-grown and not imposed from outside. Partisan fighting was said to have taken place mostly in mountain regions. In one of the most important Bulgarian post-Second World War novels, Dimităr Dimov’s “Tobacco” (*Tjutjun*), the partisans, whose struggle occupies a good part of the book, live almost exclusively in the mountains from where they stage assaults on German troops and native fascist forces. The author not only portrays mountains as offering

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

the most appropriate shelter for partisans due to their inaccessibility, but he also clearly sets the freedom, purity and spirit of the mountains against the dull, corrupt and exploited life of workers in the plains⁵¹. In the post-war period, peaceful activities such as Alpinism and skiing rather than partisan warfare were thought to be the perfect school for young Communists : « [There] several other personal traits valuable in the struggle for national liberation as well as in national state and economic construction are strengthened, such as initiative, steadfastness, spiritedness, self-command, and endurance »⁵². Activity in the mountains also provided the necessary passion for the more dramatic challenges of personal and social life⁵³. The mountains would confer their intrinsically heroic qualities upon young Communists in the very same way they had done for the *haiduti*, the Bulgarian revolutionaries of the 19th century, and the partisans in their fight against fascism. Mountains became not only symbols of national pride but also of essential Communist values. First of all, Deliradev imagined mountains taught industriousness, as « active recreation in the mountains makes people active ». Mountains made people tough because there they learnt to resist harsh conditions. Aside from this, « in the mountains the spirit of solidarity is cultivated least artificially. Also the spirit of self-sacrifice »⁵⁴. Young people could learn the important Communist value of community spirit in the mountains, too. Hence in Communist discourse mountains became the place where the real communist would acquire features deemed essential for Communist morality.

This notion of the “purity” of mountains and their inhabitants was also responsible for the academic interest of scientists in communist Bulgaria in upland communities. In particular ethnography and dialectology perceived mountains as folklore museums where ancient Bulgarian habits and idioms could be observed⁵⁵. What were actually the linguistic and cultural consequences of the isolation and backwardness of mountain communities became special proof of authentic Bulgarianness. Academic endeavours therefore reproduced established patterns of the perception of mountains and their contribution to the nation. This discursive operation was also used to declare a Bulgarian-speaking Muslim population, the Pomaks in the Rhodope Mountains, “true” Bulgarians. Bulgarian nationalists claimed that the Pomaks were part of the Bulgarian ethno-nation, although Pomaks themselves often

⁵¹ **Dimov (Dimităr)**, *Tjutjun*, Sofia : Bălgarski pisatel, 9th edition, 1979.

⁵² **Deliradev (Pavel)**, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-112.

⁵⁵ For similar efforts in the Alps see **Viazzo (Pier Paolo)**, *Upland Communities. Environment, population and social structure in the Alps since the sixteenth century*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989.

showed a clear lack of Bulgarian national self-identification⁵⁶. National ideology required that ethnographers and linguists prove the Pomaks' Bulgarian ethnicity, and in this effort researchers often referred to particular consequences of the Pomaks' mountain existence. They were, for example, said to speak a Bulgarian idiom close to the language of Cyril and Method. This was taken as undeniable evidence of their Bulgarian ethnicity. Historians claimed that the Pomaks, although having converted to Islam, had resisted all assimilation efforts by the Ottomans and retained their pure Bulgarian because they were protected by the inaccessible nature of their mountain environment. But Pomaks had not only managed to preserve their own Bulgarian character but also that of the mountains which otherwise would have been de-Bulgarianised. In this way, mountains and ethnicity were again linked (to each other).

MOUNTAINS, CULTURE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY IN ALBANIA

A common notion in Albanian historiography is that of the centuries of occupation of the country by foreign powers. Only the remote and inaccessible mountain ranges were regarded as areas where the Albanian people could retain a degree of political autonomy. Additionally to their political independence, the Albanian people allegedly preserved their original culture and ethnic identity in these isolated zones. The people developed particular customs which « served as an important means of self-government and union of the people against foreign domination »⁵⁷. These customs were given the name *kanun*⁵⁸. In the 19th and 20th centuries, many of these local *kanun* laws were collected and codified. The newly set up scientific institutions of the communist state intensified the study of traditional culture. The *kanun* was treated as a depository of national history which shed light on the « originality of the ethnic consciousness, on the noble feeling of national sovereignty and the pride of the not oppressed peasant masses, especially those of the highlands »⁵⁹. It was a primary aim of those studies to counteract authors from abroad who tried to deprive the

⁵⁶ For the discourse on the Pomaks see **Brunnbauer (Ulf)**, « Diverging (Hi-)Stories : The Contested Identity of the Bulgarian Pomaks », *Ethnologia Balkanica*, 3, 1999.

⁵⁷ **Pupovci (Syrja)**, « Introduction », in Buda (Aleks), *et al*, ed., *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit mbledhur dhe kodifikuar nga Shtjefen K. Gjeçovi*, Tirana : Academy of Sciences, 1989, p. 585.

⁵⁸ The term *kanun* is derived from the Greek *kanon*, which means "rule", "norm". In the Turkish language it was transformed into *kanun*. *Kanunname* were the law codes enacted by the Sultan, in contrast to the *şeriat*, the law which is derived from the Koran. In the Albanian language, the term *kanun* designates the local customary law.

⁵⁹ **Pupovci (Syrja)**, art. cit., p. 592.

kanun of its ethnic Albanian originality, regarding it as a mere imitation of the Roman, Byzantine, Slav, or Langobard laws. Albanian linguists argued that the Slavic influence on the *kanun* was only of peripheral significance. The basis of the *kanun*, the majority of its regulations and legal institutions were and are regarded to be of Albanian origin⁶⁰.

Albanian scientists always conceptualised the mountains as fortresses having preserved the « language and ethno-culture [of the Albanians] in general, and their national consciousness for such a long time. [The] cultural wealth of the mind and the spirit of the Albanians has been the cause but also the consequence of survival »⁶¹. Mountains thus serve as the protectors of the group as well as of national identity. The concept of isolation and seclusion is closely related to the idea of a stable and unchanged social world. Given the fact that the *kanun* is regarded as an Illyrian heritage, elements of Illyrian ethno-culture were presumably handed down to the descendants of this people, the contemporary Albanians. The principle elements of the *kanun* law are thus regarded as « sacred, supernatural, untouchable and unchangeable »⁶². The idea that ethnic groups have character traits or particular psychological features which differ from other people and are inherited from generation to generation is often mentioned in texts on the *kanun*⁶³. The stress on the stable and homogenous character of Albanian culture is aimed against foreign, especially Serbian, assumptions that the “Albanian culture” is amorphous and far from stable and consolidated⁶⁴. Especially during socialism, Albanian ethnographers did extensive work to prove that the most important institutions of the upland communities were of pure Albanian origin. One of these was, for instance, the *kuvend*, a village, tribal or regional assembly of males, which can be found in all the variants of Albanian customary law. One legal expert has argued that the institution of the *kuvend* in the Albanian uplands, though similar to comparable institutions of other customary laws in neighbouring countries, was first of all an element of the Albanian ethno-culture with distinctive Illyrian roots. The same is claimed for other social and economic institutions such as ownership patterns, family organisation and rituals and ceremonies in mountain communities⁶⁵. The outstanding aim of this kind of

⁶⁰ **Elezi (Ismet)**, *E drejta zakonore penale e shqiptarë dhe lufta për zhdukjen e mbeturinave të saj në Shqipëri*, Tirana : 8 Nëntori, 1983, pp. 68f.

⁶¹ **Tirta (Mark)**, « The Cult of Several Ancient Customs in the Albanian Ethnical Survival », paper read to the conference *The Role of Myth in History and Development in Albania*, London, 11-13 June 1999, pp. 1-2.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶³ **Elezi (Ismet)**, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74. See also **Elezi (Ismet)**, *E Drejta Zakonore e Labërisë në Planin e Krahasues*, Tirana : Libri Universitar, 1994.

research was to construct the image of a homogeneous and cohesive culture on the base of shared ethnic origins. This is rather astonishing, given the fact that in communist Albania, Marxism-Leninism was the official scientific paradigm and therefore materialist explanations of society and culture could rightly be expected. During Socialism, studies on the traditional institutions and habits of the upland communities indeed devoted considerable space to the crucial influence of economy and geography on social structures, but ultimately these studies concluded that ethnic origin determined social and cultural patterns. Culture and ethnicity were seen as two sides of the same coin and were regarded, at least in their “core”, as stable and unchangeable. In the mountainous areas, economic, social and political developments could not destroy this “core” which exhibited the main traits of the ethnic group. Studies of Albanian customs in the mountains are characterised by the aim of portraying the Albanian people as sharing a uniform complex of principles, norms and rules, exemplified by the *kanun*. At the same time, the differences to the ethnic “other” are emphasised. The numerous social and economic differences between northern and southern upland communities are often neglected as the emphasis rests exclusively on aspects of conformity⁶⁶. In his study of the Albanian upland village Progonat, the historian Muharem Xhufi states that the people

became a stable and continuous community through the ongoing struggle against foreign invaders. They developed a war-like tradition, high moral virtues and abilities, such as patriotism, a defiant will for freedom, courage, pride, friendship, generosity, and hatred of all enemies. These are characteristics of the people of Progonat as well as of all the people of Kurvelesh and all Albanians⁶⁷.

Beside the uniformity of the various *kanun* laws, Albanian scholars claim that the *kanun* of the mountains is evidence for the ability of the people to govern themselves on the basis of their own principles and institutions. The *kanun* was treated as a kind of unwritten code that « secured a normal life and regulated social relations. [It] especially arranged the life and the social relations of the free peasant communities, which constituted the nucleus of the autochthonous population of the Illyrian-Albanian soil »⁶⁸. Some authors even compared the *kanun* with a « constitution for the Albanian people » in times of suppression and foreign domination⁶⁹. In this respect, the ideal of a well-organised and coherent internal organisation of upland communities is empha-

⁶⁶ Luarasi (A.), Zaganjori (Xh.), Elezi (I.), Nova (K.), « E Drejta Zakonore Shqiptare », in Omari (Luan), Luarasi (Aleks), eds., *Historia e Shtetit dhe e së Drejtës në Shqipëri, Pjesa 2*, Tirana : Shtëpia Botuese “Luarasi”, 1994, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Xhufi (Muharrem), *Mbi Historikun e Progonatit*, Tirana : Elena Gjika, 1995, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Pupovci (Syrja), art. cit., pp. 596-597.

⁶⁹ Luarasi (A.), Zaganjori (Xh.), Elezi (I.), Nova (K.), art. cit., p. 5.

sised. A well-developed democratic consciousness, social equality, mutual assistance and solidarity belonged to those principles that allegedly characterised mountain communities. Particular moral values, such as *nderi* (honour), *besa* (the given word) and mutual help, were regarded as constitutive elements of the culture of mountain people. These values, on the one hand, « contained elements of the class resistance of the masses against social oppression and exploitation » and, on the other, served as important means of raising « the masses of the people to a position of opposition against foreign occupation, violence and feudal arbitrariness »⁷⁰.

However, these notions can hardly be maintained in the light of historical anthropological research on the social fragmentation of tribal societies. Relations within the household were actually not based on democratic but rather on hierarchical relations. Solidarity was very much confined to the inner circles of the family and the kin-group. Kinship hostilities, suspicion and constant rivalries were therefore endemic. It was the very segmented character of those mountain societies that prevented the development of a well-ordered and functioning community. In their studies, Albanian historians and ethnographers took notice of the frequent conflicts, the numerous victims of vendettas and disputes over honour, but interpreted those phenomena as consequences of the class character of the society. They neglected the fact that the praised moral values such as solidarity, mutual assistance and social equality were confined primarily to kin. Only in rare cases, when the honour of the community was at stake, did unrelated men stand together against neighbouring tribes, villages or others. But even then, the sovereignty of the family was not swayed. Between families unrelated through kinship and marriage, constant competition for social prestige took place. This was formalised in the concept of honour that was of utmost importance for Albanian society. This concept is a typical form of self-redress and constantly competes with the efforts of the state to establish a monopoly of power and legitimate violence⁷¹. Thus, it is not surprising that the first communist initiatives and provisions immediately after the Communist take-over concerned the abolition of the traditional institutions of the northern mountain communities, the prohibition of the customary law and the establishment of new administrative centres in the tribal areas. Very soon, the Communist government set up schools and obligatory courses for adults with the aim of spreading literacy and through literacy, ideology. They knew all too well of the impact of the written word, and felt an urgent need to encourage literacy in order to be able to disseminate their ideology. This ideology did

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 585-586.

⁷¹ **Giordano (Christian)**, « Der Ehrkomplex im Mittelmeerraum : sozialanthropologische Konstruktion oder Grundstruktur mediterraner Lebensformen ? », in **Vogt (Ludgera), Zingerle (Arnold)**, eds., *Ehre. Archaische Momente in der Moderne*, Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp, 1994, p. 172.

not only contain standard Communist elements but was also addressed to the national feelings of the people. Historiography and ethnography were required to provide facts for textbooks that would foster national identity and solidarity. One of these facts was the existence of the *kanun*, which was portrayed as a pillar of ethnic singularity. Hence, at the same time as the Communists put considerable force behind the effort to replace the *kanun* with written state law, they declared it an essential element of the national character and turned it into something of the past. A similar process was under way as that observed for French collective memory by Nora, in that the *kanun* lost its lived and organic nature and was reborn as a fact of national imagination and history. As a consequence, the *kanun* lost its social and economic meaning and instead became the subject of academic discourse. The new regime rendered the old system of reference, related to the patriarchal and tribal order of Albanian mountain societies, illegitimate by replacing it with the concept of modernity and reform. The *kanun* was treated as a reliquary of the past and served as a contrasting image to « the profound emancipating process carried out by the Party through the triumph of the People's Revolution and the tremendous transformations performed in the socio-economic relations of our country »⁷². But despite the colossal efforts of communist politics to change the socio-economic relations in the country and impose modernity, a set of traditional values was also integrated into the concept of nation and identity. These traditional values were characterised by particular longevity and pertinacity. They had first been articulated by intellectuals in the period of the so-called *Rilindja* (national rebirth) in the late 19th and early 20th century. During the inter-war period they enjoyed particular prominence, and they continued to flourish during and after the Communist period. Under Communism it was said that these values had helped to preserve the ethnic identity of the Albanian people despite foreign domination and had inspired resistance against foreign occupation. In the eyes of the Communists, the main chapter in this continuous resistance against alien domination was the partisan struggle during World War Two, officially labelled the "National War of Liberation". The victory against German occupation was allegedly achieved due to the « brilliant patriotic and fighting traditions, the rich experience acquired by the Albanian people through the centuries in their struggle for freedom and independence »⁷³. The myth of persistent resistance became part of the official memory of the Communist nation state, such as was the case in other Socialist countries. This went hand in hand with the development of a « grammar of competitive behaviour and values ». Partisans were described as particularly capable of fighting. They were endowed with « inex-

⁷² Pupovci (Syrja), art. cit., p. 591.

⁷³ Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies at the Central Committee of the Party of Labour, ed., *History of the Party of Labour*, Tirana : 8 Nëntori, 1971, p. 239.

haustible strength, courage, self-sacrifice and noble heroism ». Here we rediscover the « defiant will for freedom », « courage and endurance » and « sacrifice for the ideal of the nation and the Fatherland »⁷⁴ as part of the character of the Albanians, values which derive from the image of the mountain people and their concept of honour. The drawing upon elements from the moral code of the *kanun* for the national self-imagination did not necessarily mean the appropriation of the alleged bearers of these norms. Particularly the tribal areas in the north - the core-areas of the *kanun* - fiercely resisted the communist take-over of power. So those people who best represented the heroic image of the mountains became regarded as politically unreliable and potentially dangerous⁷⁵.

On the other hand, the myth of tireless resistance and its concomitant heroic values contributed enormously to the Communist rulers' paranoid fears that the country was surrounded by a hostile world and should be kept isolated and in a continuous state of vigilance and readiness to fight in order to defend the motherland against pending threat from the outside world. This position is best reflected in Enver Hoxha's paradigmatic text on the foundations of "renewed" Albania after four decades of Communist rule :

Today, looking back over more than four decades, we Albanian communists feel proud that ever since the days of their creation, the Democratic Front of Albania and our people's state power, under the leadership of our glorious party, have performed their tasks and mission for the people of the motherland with honour, have been tempered in the sternest battles and trials, have withstood and defeated the plans of all internal and external enemies and have been turned into impregnable fortresses of triumphant socialism and of the fine new life flourishing in Albania⁷⁶.

Hence, the whole nation is envisioned as an isolated, well-protected mountain fortress guarded by alert and freedom-loving mountain people.

The mountains, the people and their social and cultural institutions acquired a multifunctional meaning which is best reflected in the representations of the *kanun* as a typical mode of organization in mountain communities. In this discourse, the mountains supplied self-interpretation in the sense that they were turned into proof of the pristine ethno-culture of the Albanian people. Their images stimulated the myth of ongoing resistance against others and thus also served to legitimise Albanian communist politics of isolation and seclusion.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ The image of the mountaineers further deteriorated with the breakdown of communism and the concomitant migration of thousands of farmers from the north to the urban centres. People from these areas are called *malok*, a term which designates "primitive" behaviour regarded as typical for people from the mountains.

⁷⁶ **Hoxha (Enver)**, *Laying the foundations of the new Albania. Memoirs and historical notes*, Tirana : 8 Nëntori, 1984, pp. 5-7.

CONCLUSION

The cases drawn from Bulgaria and Albania reveal the symbolic meaning of mountains and their inhabitants for the process of nation-building and the articulation of nationalist ideologies in Southeast Europe. Mountains serve as cultural landscapes that inspire collective commemoration of the heroic past of the nation. National values are derived from upland communities and their particular social organisation, which actually emerged as a socio-ecological adaptation to the mountainous environment but is interpreted with a romantic and ethnic twist. Mountains become both metonyms of the nation and metaphors of its characteristics. The purity of nature is associated with the purity of ethnicity, and the ethnic group is imagined to be as close-knit as an isolated mountain community. This kind of discourse endorses the essentialist and premordialist interpretation of ethnic identity, supporting those who declare ethnic boundaries unchangeable and impervious. Once substantiated by nature, ethnic claims become mutually exclusive. But “mountain values” also supply ethnic and national identity with a special quality because they are linked with violence and war as legitimate resistance against foreign intruders. This gives qualities such as fighting spirit and bellicosity a positive meaning and was one of the reasons why violence met with such high approval by nationalist ideologies in Southeast Europe. These characteristics also enhance the importance of masculinity in national ideology that draws on deeply rooted images of mountain communities as a specifically patriarchal milieu.

Using “natural” arguments to substantiate ethnic and cultural features is also part of the wider discourse on *Balkanisation*, or how the Balkans are imagined⁷⁷. The interesting point here is that the *Balkanisation* discourse in the region itself refers, etymologically correct, to mountains (*balkan* in Turkish means forested mountain range), while in the perspective from outside the notion of “Balkan” refers to the whole region. But on closer view, the exogenous view apparently also believes that authentic Balkan culture is found predominantly in the mountains. Thus the word “Balkan” has not only come to represent the whole region, but the culture of the mountains – or better, its distorted representations – is taken as typical for the culture of the whole region. Romantic authors such as the German Karl May suggested a link between the mountains of the Balkan peninsula and the ferocity of their inhabitants but in the Romantic vision the presumed savagery of the Balkan people was associated with positive values. The British imagination of Montenegro in the 19th century was filled with “noble savages” who lived in the mountains and re-

⁷⁷ **Todorova (Maria)**, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York / Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1997.

lently fought for their autonomy. David Norris even suggests that Walter Scott's mythological image of the Scottish highlanders influenced the ways that Balkan mountain inhabitants were perceived in Victorian Britain. « [T]he same epithets of independent spirit and of a natural innocence which Scott applied in his novel can be found again in the texts about Montenegro ». This discourse was part of a Romantic vision that connected images of mountains, nature and freedom⁷⁸. John Reed, who reported from Serbia in 1915, also reiterated these images. Of the Serbs he wrote, « the strong, virile stock of a young race not far removed from the half savagery of a mountain peasantry, intensely patriotic and intensely independent »⁷⁹.

However, the evaluation of mountain values by outsiders experienced significant shifts. What was seen in the eyes of Southeast European nationalists and Romantic European writers as a positive mountain mentality, became regarded from the outside more and more as part of the “wild”, “unruly” and “brutal” character of the many ethnic groups inhabiting the Balkan peninsula. As Todorova emphasises, most western descriptions of the Balkans refer to the patriarchal mentality of its people who are often regarded as « uncivilised, primitive, crude, cruel, and, without exception, dishevelled »⁸⁰. The mountains now posed a potential threat should those mountain men descend from the peaks. Their assumed savagery was bound to disrupt lowland ways of life. During the 20th century, the mountain-dwellers' closeness to nature was re-evaluated and took a more sinister appearance than previous notions of “independence” and “innocence”. What had been hailed as positive in the Romantic version of the European discourse on the Balkans became disguised as uncivilised, barbaric and brutal behaviour. The same sign system was now invested with negative values. This change became recently obvious in the way the Serb *soldatesca* was portrayed by Western media during the Bosnian War. The anthropologist Marko Živković, for instance, cited the 1992 BBC documentary “Serbian Epics” as an example for this shift in the metaphorical relation between mountains and violence. In this documentary, images of the Dinaric limestone peaks were juxtaposed with images of Bosnian Serbs listening to their epics performed on a *gusle* while covering besieged Sarajevo with gunfire⁸¹. Živković also quotes from an article in the New York Times that appeared in 1992. The author of this article drew the readers' attention :

to the rocky spine of the Dinaric Alps, for it is these mountains that have nurtured and shaped the most extreme, combative elements of each community : the western

⁷⁸ Norris (David A.), *In the Wake of the Balkan Myth. Questions of Identity and Modernity*, Basingstoke / London : Macmillan Press, 1999, pp. 26-28.

⁷⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁸⁰ Todorova (Maria), *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁸¹ Živković (Marko), *art. cit.*, p. 110.

Herzegovinian Croats, the Sandžak Muslims, and, above all, the secessionist Serbs. Like mountaineer communities around the world these were wild, warlike, frequently lawless societies whose feuds and folklore have been passed on to the present day like potent home-brewed plum brandy that the mountain men begin knocking back in the morning⁸².

As before, Serbs are described as mountain men, but not as noble but rather as bestial savages. As David Norris observed, « [t]he Bosnian war nearly became an archetypal battle between civilization and non-civilization, between mountain and city, in which one headline reads “Sarajevo repels the mountain menace”, relying on a sign system in relation to the Balkans and the Serbs which has been periodically reinvented over the last 170 years, since the Romantics first turned their attention to the folk epics »⁸³.

So, all essential features ascribed to Southeast Europe by the *Balkanisation* discourse have become focussed on the mountains. However, its apt criticism of Western imaginings of the Balkans should not obscure the fact that much of this imagining is mirrored by equivalent discourses in the region itself. Of course, Western imagination can draw on much more political, economic and discursive power in order to impose itself, and Western misrepresentation thus has impact on the lives of the people of Southeast Europe. On the other hand, indigenous discourses – “Self-Balkanisation” – are not less relevant and have shaped regional social reality as well. We therefore believe that the deconstruction of the discourse on “Balkanisation” should not stop at the critical analysis of Western intellectual constructions, but rather consider the dynamics of indigenous and exogenous discourses and the transformations of meanings floating between these discourses.

⁸² Quoted in *ibid.*

⁸³ Norris (David A.), *op. cit.*, p. 38.