

BOOK REVIEW

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Book review of *Grazing Communities: Pastoralism on the Move and Biocultural Heritage Frictions* edited by Letizia Bindi

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Pastoralism has long offered a privileged field of research for producing contextualised ethnographies on mobile communities living on the fringes of society. These ethnographies described pastoral systems of specific communities with a feeble orientation towards the connection of the local anthropological observations with more universal theoretical and political debates. Times have changed. Anthropology has begun to approach more systematically other social and environmental disciplines which has contributed to a shift in pastoralism studies in recent years. Thematic publications are now increasing with the aim of connecting local pastoralism to global (economic, social, cultural, or environmental) challenges from a transdisciplinary lens. *Grazing Communities: Pastoralism on the Move and Biocultural Heritage Frictions*, edited by Letizia Bindi, falls positively within this modern anthropological movement. From a multi-disciplinary perspective, it brings a diversity of ethnographic cases of pastoralism in Europe to establish a global narrative on intangible heritage frictions related to transhumance.

Each book chapter explores the dynamics of transhumance in a different mountain region of Europe: Albania (Chapter 5), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Chapter 13), Finland (Chapter 11), France (Chapter 3), Greece (Chapter 1), Italy (Chapters 2, 6, 7, 10, and 12), Poland (Chapter 8), Romania (Chapter 9), and Spain (Chapter 4). As a whole, the case studies permit first to strengthen the critical argument that pastoralism holistically shares

mobile convergent trajectories of livelihood embedded in nature and confronted with environmental injustice and social subordination. This argument is the baseline for establishing the bridge between particular pastoral cosmology and the universal pastoral materiality. Second, the diversity of cases presented also reminds the reader that, beyond structural regularities, pastoralism is above all grounded in specific cultural and environmental contexts with which multiple localised pastoral agencies are associated. I was, for instance, quite intrigued with the status of transhumant pastoralists in Kelmend, Northern Albania (Chapter 5), wherein shepherds are still today the most respected individuals, contrasting with the generalised historical, negative social image of pastoralism in most regions of the world (e.g. Chapter 2).

Certainly, *Grazing Communities* is not the only publication going in that direction, although its geographical focus in Europe is most welcomed. Many publications endeavour to bring together contextualised case studies to establish a thematic narrative on pastoralism, mostly related to environmental and economic issues. The originality of *Grazing Communities* resides primarily in its intangible heritage viewpoint under the framework of critical heritage studies. It reads transhumance as a biocultural heritage element, i.e. a system of knowledge and values in a cultural landscape of livelihood, confronted with heritagisation issues after its inscription on the UNESCO 2003 Convention Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity.

The analytical starting point of *Grazing Communities* is, therefore, the 'heritage-turn' of transhumance in Europe. Unsurprisingly, the presented case studies are largely from countries involved in the 2019 original ICH

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nomination file of *Transhumance, the seasonal droving of livestock along migratory routes in the Mediterranean and in the Alps* (Austria, Greece, and Italy) and its current extension proposal (Albania, Croatia, France, Romania, and Spain). *Grazing Communities* posits that the heritagisation of transhumance is accompanied by a process of touristification of pastoralism and commodification of its products and landscapes moulded in ideas of ancestralism, exotism, and essentialism. Expectedly, chapters address topics related to tourism-driven changes in traditional pastoral systems with mixed effects regarding the safeguarding of transhumance in Europe.

The heritage-turn triggered a re-signification of transhumance, which is being reconverted into an experiential entertainment of memory roads. Transhumance is evolving towards folkloric storytelling of nostalgic pastoral itineraries to the detriment of its original productive function (Chapter 7). The old paths travelled by humans and flocks become products to be offered in diversified market segments, such as hiking or equestrian tourism (Chapter 12). The market base is a form of structural nostalgia associated with an idealised narrative of a life in harmony between humans and nature along transhumance travels (Chapter 8). The transhumance tour package is thus appealing to urban dwellers in search of picturesque and authentic experiences of what seem to be untouched pastoral realities (Chapter 13).

Undeniably, the new heritage approach to transhumance seems to have some positive effects in terms of safeguarding as you read the book. Once abandoned transhumance roads are being reactivated by pastoralist families. Shepherds return to pastoralism (Chapter 4), and heritagisation turns out to be a potential vector of dynamism for decayed territories (Chapter 7). Furthermore, the heritagisation process appears to act also at a symbolic level. It fosters the local reappropriation of cultural practices related to transhumance and permits locating them within a more shared, global transhumance movement. It strengthens the sense of community belongingness and internationalism (Chapter 5). The price of heritagisation is nonetheless a decontextualization of transhumance that slowly loses its productive orientation (Chapter 12).

The decline of productive transhumant systems in Europe began before the heritage-turn (Chapter 10), but the new, induced revival process of decontextualised transhumance practices is questioned. Heritagisation is affirmed to produce practices and landscapes from a perceived crystallised past by a dominant historicism. The discourse of heritage would thus be a hegemonic pastness idiom that orders nature and society under a presentism bias (Chapter 4). It seeks to reify an idealised state within the urban and global market values as emphasised from

the introduction of the book. This argument is central in critical heritage studies that approach the heritage discourse as a (dominant) socio-political instrument to redefine cultures.

My main disagreement with *Grazing Communities* lies here. Heritage might be used to reinvent cultures, produce traditions, and recreate landscapes. The literature abounds with heritagisation process cases for recreational, economic exploitation, political domination, or appropriation purposes. These situations nonetheless distort the spirit of the UNESCO 2003 Convention and reflect mainly its instrumentalization by dominant interests. ICH is by definition a community's identity dynamic element entangled in nature and history for which the safeguarding efforts must prevent decontextualization, commodification, misrepresentation, and misappropriation developments that affect its viability, i.e. the continuity of its identity meaning for the communities concerned. *Grazing Communities* failed to make this distinction, between the concept of heritage and its political uses.

This shortcoming might be related to the feeling of unfinished work towards understanding transhumance through the critical heritage study lens after closing the book. *Grazing Communities* did not fully achieve its heritagisation approach ambition. Several chapters do not specifically address heritage issues and most of them are not grounded on critical heritage study frameworks. *Grazing Communities* is nonetheless a pioneer and a book worth reading. It reminds the reader that pendular movements of humans with their animals still go on in the mountains of Europe and gives us empirical and analytical keys for a critical understanding of the modern dynamics of transhumance in the continent, including in the edge of its general heritagisation.

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