



## VI. Book Reviews

**Letizia Bindi, ed. 2022. *Grazing Communities. Pastoralism on the Move and Biocultural Heritage Frictions*. New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books. Studies in Environmental Anthropology and Ethnobiology. Vol. 29, 314 p.**

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As a livelihood system based on free-grazing animals, employed by communities in marginal areas, mobile livestock herding uses more than a quarter of the world's land area (Scialabba 2021), providing vital food, labor and income to millions of people. Transhumance has developed an entire cultural, social and economic system around it, encompassing knowledge and uses of landscape and bio-diversity. In the Anthropocene, extensive breeding and transhumance in Europe and across many rural regions of the world face a period of uncertainty and transformations, on the one hand, in relation to climate change risks which highlight an urgency for continuation and sustainability, but also under shifting policies and national and global institutions' articulation and implementation of notions such as *sustainability* and *environmental impact*, *human-animal welfare*, *land management*, *rural development*, and, central to this review, *heritage*. In this regard, it has become clear that, with the formal recognition by and subsequent policies of transnational entities such as UNESCO, the discourse on grazing practices/ pastoralism science has been propelled towards a new paradigm.

And this is the main topic of the volume

*Grazing Communities. Pastoralism on the Move and Biocultural Heritage Frictions*, published in 2022, edited by Letizia Bindi, with more than 20 authors of complementary backgrounds: the heritage-making processes surrounding pastoralism in the new global context. The book proposes to address these by reframing pastoralism as biocultural heritage.

As a research subject, pastoralism has been and continues to be a fertile terrain for a plethora of disciplines and studies. Some, as the book itself mentions employ "views from afar," or "close up views" (Chapter 10, 223). The theoretical anthropological concerns of pastoralism "have changed over time, from fitting it into evolutionary models of thought, to integration into cultural patterns, to exploring connections of social institutions of pastoral societies in relation to herding livelihoods, to investigating nomadic societies" (Galaty 2015, 577). But these views seldom remain segregated. In the twentieth century, ethnological and folklore studies discarded their nationalist frameworks and adopted more critical lenses, continuing with social and environmental disciplines feeding anthropology more systematically. More so, for contemporary times, "the need for a paradigm

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shift in pastoralism science and policy is pressing” (Manzano et al. 2021, 651); and this requires greater integration.

In the following, I inquire how the book meets the expectation of reconsidering the frictions experienced by grazing communities in the new global heritage scenario, in a more holistic view.

To begin with, the book is structured into a foreword, an introduction, two main sections, and an afterword. The first section is committed to providing a multifocal definition of different forms of pastoralism in Europe as a biocultural heritage issue (Chapters 1 to 6). The second part (Chapters 6–13) deals extensively with discontinuities and transformations, changes and challenges faced by various European pastoral communities as part of the heritage turn. The volume takes upon itself to develop a multi-sited analysis of the dynamics of transhumant practices across Europe: Greece (Chapter 1), Italy (2, 6, 7, 10, 12), France (3), Spain (4), Albania (5), Poland (8), Romania (9), Finland (11), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (13).

In the researched sites, pastoral practices under contemporary pressures and frictions unfold as multidimensional (cultural, social, environmental, economic) phenomena. As their complexity requires, they cannot be understood using a single focus but through a plurality of views. This is where the collective volume draws its strongest point from: facing the reader with a diversity of perspectives and stances. The chapters make use of complementary methodologies: ethnographic research (interviews, participant observation), policy analysis, local actors’ discourse analysis, history, geography, ethnobiology, visual methods, and more. Of these, I was particularly drawn to the method of role-play as a tool for engaged anthropology (Chapter 2) and the introduction of visual research methods (Chapter 13). The multisituated and pluridisciplinary perspective aims to bring all these dimensions together into a broader more holistic approach, capable of tying together multiple elements: the landscapes, the different breeds being raised, various techniques for transforming raw materials, and

the broader historical, environmental, and cultural value of pastoralism. Of these multiple viewpoints, I will dwell on five topics.

(1) Transhumance as land practice and the interplays with rural development. Changes in local land management, difficulties in land security, and local (indigenous) processes of reconstruction emerge as common themes for Chapters 2, 3, and 12. Nomadic pastoralism suffers more and more from the logistical difficulties of extensive stockbreeding and the increasing physical and legal constraints of the territories involved. Spaces available for itinerant grazing become increasingly reduced due to the development of urban areas (Chapter 2). Clashes of pastoralism with other land uses such as industrial farming are discussed in Chapter 5. The framework of the “new rural paradigm” and the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are considered in relation to pastoralist traditional land use (Chapters 9 and 10). Chapter 10 devotes itself to in-depth analysis of seven differentiated models of use and management in the Alps of the FVG region related to property relations and usage rights. The book lists numerous innovative methods of use and enhancement of pastoral lands created by breeders who have a strong connection to the territory, but also by entrepreneurs (Chapter 12) who have decided to focus on forms of ecotourism or by shepherds who have returned to the countryside.

(2) Ecological approaches. From this viewpoint, pastoralism intersects with concerns for animal welfare, the debate around the sustainability of the land, and the natural/ethically produced food. Many pages are allocated to the nature/society dualism—grazing practices clashing with farmers of trampled lands and the territorial authorities that deal with nature conservation policies (Chapter 2) or with rewilding strategies, such as the bear reintroduction program, deeming it an “unsolvable paradox” and raising the question of a radical justice perspective (Chapter 4). Ecological benefits of grazing for the environment are debated extensively and put in dialogue with the defense of (rare)



natural habitats of animal or plant species (Chapter 3).

(3) Memory and nostalgia. Transhumance is seen as affording the re-articulation of the past/present relationship, a reconsideration of people's symbolic relationship with landscapes. As several chapters point out, the reenactment of transhumance by the local herders themselves, draws from an idealized order and human-animal community situated "beyond time." Nostalgic, Arcadian representations of traditional breeding are critically contextualized as modern products or "contemporary cultural memory" (Chapter 8). Central to the reenactment of transhumance are also narratives and representations of belongingness to local identities. These are expressed and reinforced in the new market contexts as local product branding, producing symbolic and social capital. Significant attention is placed by the authors on the proliferation of the "experience economy"—as in the case of transforming transhumant itineraries into roads of memory. *Their retracing*, for different segments of visitors, is to be understood both geographically and temporally. As "vestige of a vanishing past" (Tim Ingold, Foreword), transhumance becomes a consumer product of nostalgia and story-telling of *authentic*, untouched folklife, discourses often imbued with romanticizing or idealization (see Chapters 7, 8, 12, 13). The "structurally nostalgic" character of pastoralism is, throughout, a compelling argument for the new heritage scenario.

(4) Pastoralism-as-arena for decision-making processes allows for multiple insights. For one, within this arena, we are presented with a diversity of actors: shepherds, sheep breeders, "project managers in pastoralism," agents of national parks (Chapter 3), local action groups, regional initiatives, cultural associations (e.g., slow tourism projects), public-oriented small farms, networks of practitioners, activists, and experts (mapped in Chapter 7) together with their respective understandings on the necessity of pastoralism, actors who often emerge as opposing camps. This becomes even more evident at the level of national and

transnational agents versus the pastoral world: for instance, subsidies given by the Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture have determined many local breeders in Romania to give up sheep breeding. Therefore, the CAP payments from the European Union have had a considerable role in the change of animal husbandry type (Chapter 9). Constraints and regulatory restrictions or sanctions, lack of integration or strategic visions from public authorities, legal and political quarrels and debates over *tratturi* uses and permissions are quoted from the Italian cases too. And in Chapter 11, we learn how legislation enforced a system of clearly delineated cooperatives no longer allowing for the previous degree of flexible land use for indigenous Sami. Decision making becomes less flexible and more focused on equal opportunity rather than the community members' actual needs. Furthermore, in Chapters 2 and 3 we zoom in on disputes between shepherds and managers of natural parks or natural reserves (which fully or partly overlap with grazing areas). Pastoralism, therefore, seems to be caught up between the political lines of national governance strategies and the agendas of the major global agencies. "The reshaped and narrated pastoral field becomes a stage in which the tensions of an increasingly competitive agri-food market and various policies of local/rural development surface clearly" (Chapter 7, 169). A definite strong point is the depth of the analysis of the inherently conflictual nature of pastoralist sites—both biophysical and as landscapes of memory and representations. Transhumance, it becomes clear, is not at all a consensual object.

(5) Resilience. The book successfully highlights a common concern: the perishability of pastoralism observed across the various researched sites, fragile in their marginality. The endangerment of these livelihoods becomes a leitmotif across the chapters, with a more evidently sympathetic approach permeating the final pages (Afterword)—in the form of a desiderata for its continuation. The abundance of historical data conjures a vivid tableau of resilience, rich in ethnographic data,



immersing the reader in the challenges and difficulties of survival. Specifically, Chapter 6 offers insight into modes of survival of these marginal economies through an example of alternative food networks in the Alps coming forward as renewed cultural foundations for the communities. New models of pastoralism emerge as responses and adaptations to local, national and global frictions, and we are presented with the consequences of the diversification of pastoral livelihoods. Recovery of seasonal routes, new forms of cooperation and solidarity-based agriculture shape a “poetics of staying” (Chapter 7, 168).

The phenomena of progressive disappearance of long transhumances and reorganization of Indigenous herding coupled with sedentarization are understood as a result of intersecting factors. The authors clearly identify local, regional and national drivers of these changes, be they economic, social or political. Emigration is often invoked in the chapters, as well as the general aging of the herding population. On the other hand, the mechanization of the countryside, the construction of modern infrastructures, and technological innovation come into play, for instance towards a change to ranching economies, which in turn reflects a change of the relationship to both land and animals. The reorganization of the agricultural system in different areas through new forms of business planning and production, the “New Peasantries” mode (Chapters 11, 12) and the dependence of shepherds and farmers on the dynamics of global markets are covered in detail.

Concerning the book’s core concept, the re-signification of transhumance in the heritage turn, we are led to identify a common thread of emerging phenomena. The revitalization of transhumance and pastoralism via the tourism of experience and transhumance as cultural market product (Chapters 6 and 13): transhumant pathways repurposed for tourists, educational farms, experiential workshops unfurl as ways of representing and “packaging” transhumance, an approach

based on a revived articulation between past and present (Chapters 8 and 12). The concept of transhumance as cultural and touristic heritage (Chapter 13), which uncovers the process of creating heritage, since “part of the local population took the initiative to switch from shepherding to catering” (p. 289) was of particular interest. “Transhumance-as-an-event” encompasses the memory of traditional practices and the local knowledge, and Chapter 5 reveals how it creates symbolic landscapes that participate in the foundations of the territory’s own cultural identity—“living cultural landscapes” (p. 110). The dialectics of “continuation and disruption” of customs and pastoral practices is discussed in Chapter 9, dealing with the disappearance of rituals, which are progressively losing their collective role, as traditional pastoral practices and worldviews begin to fade. The decontextualisation of transhumance practices is questioned in Chapter 12, unveiling how heritagization emphasizes the diminishing of the actual practice, emptying it of its practicality. On the other hand, reverse processes are observed under the new heritage frame, as shepherds return to pastoralism and even reappropriate post-disaster lands (Chapter 7). Chapters 4 and 7, with their more critical heritage stance, point out the hegemonic character of heritage, a crucial argument made by the book: “Heritage has been defined as a hegemonic idiom since it not only articulates ‘hegemonic and counterhegemonic projects,’ but also frames ‘conflicts in terms that, by concealing their connection with broader issues of political economy, are advantageous to dominant groups’ (Franquesa 2013!: 347)” (Chapter 4, 81). The communities’ participation in these heritage-making processes reveals discrepancies with the external dominant/authority discourse on pastoralism as heritage: frequently, the UNESCO recognition/emblem serves only symbolically, rather than practically, in the actual valorisation and safeguarding of pastoralism. More than often, it produces spectacular forms of “mise en scene,” with subsequent programs and funds

still relying on a mirage of economic growth.

As we have seen, the book's premise for a more holistic understanding is based on its "biocultural heritage" frame, expected to bridge the split between livelihoods-centered approaches and economy-centered approaches to transhumance through a critical heritage lens. Though the concept is not new (for instance, a definition of "Collective Bio-Cultural Heritage" was developed as early as 2005<sup>2</sup>), the originality of the book consists of its effort to promote a more holistic approach to pastoralism. Unfortunately, this is not fully accomplished by the end. Operating from the biocultural heritage stance is envisioned to allow for new, integrated approaches to heritage, nature conservation, landscape planning, and development goals and, more importantly, to become a potential negotiator in the conflicting arena of pastoralism. However, despite the arguments provided throughout the chapters, the reader is still left to form their own model using their own critical lens. While the reasons why this framework of biocultural heritage is necessary are all laid out in the editor's Introduction and they are inextricably interconnected, their theoretical integration does not actually transform into an explicit theoretical model, as one could have perhaps expected towards the end of the volume. This is also because the red thread of heritage is discontinuous across the chapters: not all of them are subsumed to the critical heritage lens, with several chapters allowing for little engagement with the heritage dimensions of pastoralism.

Now, coming back to the book's main inquiry, as stated in the Afterword: "Could we implement a more composite approach to transhumance?" (p. 303), while they certainly bewilder with their plurivocal analysis across the 314 pages, the study cases are, nevertheless, confined to Europe, specifically to both applicant countries and those already on the UNESCO ICH list. The choice of sites could have gained significantly by incorporating extra-European perspectives or comparative views.

Secondly, given the array of gazes presented, as with most of the literature on the theme, I must note the lack of engagement with gender approaches to pastoralism. Except for a brief mention in Chapter 8 on the intensification of the role of women in shepherding farms in Poland, we are not informed on how these complex challenges and shifts in current practices affect the genders differently. Thirdly, the considering of nonhuman voices in the arena of pastoralism, as formulated in the Foreword by Tim Ingold, fades into the background, without being taken up again, except for the case of reintroducing bears and restoring shepherding practices in Central Pyrenees (Chapter 4). While multispecies heritage has recently become established as a field of research of more-than-human communities, the overwhelming majority of cases in the book have little to no engagement with emic perspectives of other forms of life. The knowledge remains human-centered.

Nevertheless, the book aligns with the current trend in studies on pastoralism (for an overview, see Galaty 2015) by being highly committed to the need to understand the dynamic responses of the grazing communities to climate change and environmental stresses, in conjunction with global institutions and their policies. It is excellent in providing in-depth descriptions of the numerous challenges transhumance in Europe faces today: security of land holding, new market relations, the growing pressures of governments, and the "more diffuse processes of social change and modernization" (Galaty 2015, 577), including accelerated capitalism, the crumbling of the social body, and a collapse of traditional village structures, as well as the crisis of tradition and modernity. Therefore, the collective volume can be undoubtedly considered a foundational read in pastoralism/transhumance studies, with its dense descriptions, theoretical standpoints, and diverse methodologies.



## NOTES

1. The title cited is: Franquesa, Jaume. 2013. "On Keeping and Selling: The Political Economy of Heritage Making in Contemporary Spain." *Current Anthropology* 54(3): 346–69. <https://doi.org/10.1086/670620>.

2. The concept of "biocultural heritage" emerged in recent literature with the holistic aim to bridge rifts between natural

and cultural conservation, attempting to formulate a more unified methodology on landscape that takes into account the complex interplay of biological, social and bio-cultural relationships, both in their invisible and material aspects. For more research and a proposed model, see Krystyna Swiderska and Alejandro Argumedo (2017).

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**Laura Jiga Ilescu. 2020. *Biserica de alături. Câteva rituri necercetate ale ciobanilor din Carpați. Studiu de etnologie asupra religiozității pastorale* [The church next door. Unresearched rites of the Carpathian shepherds. Ethnological study of pastoral religiosity]. Iași: Institutul European, 226 p.**

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**D**ue to the environment in which it operates, pastoral life is not easy to understand. Shepherds constantly make physical effort. They are always on the move, whether during transhumance or on a daily basis when they take the sheep up to the mountain plateau in the morning and bring them down to the sheepfold before sunset.

Similarly, those who want to really know shepherd life have to leave their comfort zone for a while. This is not the case for ethnologist Laura Jiga Ilescu, who sees shepherding life as a source of constant curiosity and amazement and an original field of research due to the diverse topics it covers. In the introduction of the book, the author classifies her research as