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BLOOD AND SEED, TRUNK AND HEARTH:

KINSHIP AND COMMON ORIGIN IN SOUTHERN ALBANIA

Gilles de Rapper

The Ghegs of Northern Albania present the only true example of a tribal system surviving in Europe until the mid-twentieth century. In those remote valleys with very inadequate communications has survived a group of people whose whole life was organized in terms of kinship and descent. The clan, *fis*, was a group of people all of whom claimed descent from a common male ancestor, who may often have been fictitious. (Whitaker 1968: 254)

Studies on Albanian kinship system and social organisation have focused mainly on Northern Albania. Following pioneering work by Edith Durham (Durham 1909, 1928), much attention has been devoted to the “tribal” organisation that could be observed until the first half of twentieth century. This organisation was seen by Western scholars as a curiosity in Modern Europe, and also as representing a kind of survival from an archaic past of European societies. The central feature of this tribal organisation was the tribe or clan, in Albanian *fis* (Durham 1909: 20).¹

More recently, some scholars have started to question the “tribal” characterisation of Northern Albanian society which seemed to them to be the result of both an interest for

¹ See also Daniel, Odile 1989. Montagnes tribales et coutumiers. *L'Ethnographie* 106: 43-74, p. 50.

the exotic within Europe and a tendency to apply anthropological models elaborated in other societies, especially in Africa. Berit Backer thus criticised the lack of theoretical consistency of most works on the “so-called Albanian tribal society” (Backer 1979: 91-95), while Albert Doja deplores the fact that most publications on the subject consist of a “*compilation anthologique des mêmes données*”, without any attempt to understand the structural basis of this kind of social organisation (Doja 1999: 39).

In the media as well as in common representations the tribal and clanic organisation has however come to be an emblem of Albanian society as a whole: as Ian Whitaker had already suggested, some events of Albanian political recent history should be considered in the general frame of tribal organisation (Whitaker 1968: 282); and this is what is happening. Today, for instance, organised crime in Albania is generally presented as being clan-organised crime; this is also true of factions in Communist and post-Communist political life, which are described as the manifestation of a tribal mentality. Kinship is certainly a resource in political as well as in economic activities, in Albania as elsewhere². That organised crime and political factions should not be confused with traditional social organisation is however revealed by the use in Albanian of the recently borrowed word *klan* in the former context, instead of *fis* in the latter. From the Albanian point of view, they are two different realities and should be distinguished.

The word *fis* is used all over Albania. In Southern Albania it is commonly heard with the meaning of “kin” and it also designates the three generations patrilineage which is, together with the house (*shpi*), one of the effective social units based on kinship. Due to its use as “tribe” in the common as well as scientific language, working on kinship in Southern Albania necessitates some lexical precautions: the same individuals who make daily use of the word *fis* to talk about their close or distant kin are not always prepared to understand what a social anthropologist is doing there: “There are no *fis* here, you should go to the North to study them; that is where they are”. I soon realised that the word *fis* was highly polysemic and that the reality it covers in Southern Albania could not be understood without taking this polysemy into account.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to give an account of kinship and social organisation in less studied Southern Albania and, by doing so, to show how local conceptions of kinship and social organisation are embedded in wider representations of society in Albania.

The ethnographic material presented here has been collected during long-term fieldwork conducted in the district of Devoll from June 1995 to September 1996, and during later and shorter stays in 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2003.

² See for instance Schweitzer, Peter P. (ed.) 2000. *Dividends of Kinship* London-New York, Routledge.

Devoll: general presentation

Devoll is a district (*rreth*) located in South-eastern Albania, on the border with Greece. It consists of forty-two villages distributed around its centre, the small town of Bilisht (8000 inhabitants in 1995), which lies on the road coming from the city of Korçë and central Albania, and leading to the border post of Kapshticë/Kristalopigi and from there to Greece.

Most of the villages are situated on both sides of a large and relatively flat valley, in the middle of which flows the river Devoll. This part of the valley is locally called Fusha, “the plain”, or Devolli i poshtëm, “Lower-Devoll”. Villages are generally settled at the foot of low hills and mountains, between agricultural lands on the one hand and pastures and forests on the other, although some of them, said to be ancient *çiflig* villages, are settled in the midst of the fields.

The upper part of the valley, called Mali, “the mountain”, or Devolli i sipërm, “Upper-Devoll”, has much less arable land and more pastures and forests, and is occupied by villages generally smaller in size.

All villages (*fshat*) are fixed and compact settlements. They consist of at least two neighbourhoods (*lagje*), usually more, lying on both sides of the main street. Around the inhabited part of the village are gardens and small irrigated fields, where people grow corn, onions, beans and other vegetables. The more distant fields, which used to be irrigated at the time of the cooperative (before 1991), are in most cases left uncultivated for lack of water and mechanisation.

The population is mainly Albanian-speaking, with the exception of the village of Vërnik, which is part of the Macedonian minority of Albania. There is no evidence of Greek- or Arumanian-speaking population in most recent history, although some families say to descend from settlers arrived from parts of Macedonia which are today in Greece or from pastoral areas in the Pindus range, across the Greek-Albanian border. Until 1924 and the exchange of population between Greece and Turkey, a few villages on the Greek side of the border had close links with Devoll: they were inhabited by Albanian-speaking Muslims who were forced to move to Turkey. Before that time, they used to intermarry with Devoll, and Bilisht was their market town.

Most of the Devollis are Muslims, a minority being Orthodox Christians. With the exception of the town of Bilisht, Muslims and Christians live in separate villages or, as is the case in the few mixed villages, in separate neighbourhoods of the same village. They rarely intermarry and, although quiet and peaceful, their relations are marked by stereotypes and suspicion. As in most parts of Albania, even when the level of religious practice is low, people are nevertheless aware of their religious affiliation and origin (de Rapper 2002).

Kinship system

The two basic units of social organisation are the house (*shpi, shtëpi*) and the patrilineage (*fis*). The *fis* can be defined as a patrilineal descent group and an exogamous unit whose members used to own some property in common.³ Patrilineal descent is expressed by the concept of “blood” (*gjak*): all members of the *fis* share the same blood and, through blood, some physical and moral characteristics.

Marriage “within blood” (*brenda gjakut*) is forbidden. It is also forbidden with the mother’s *fis*: a lineage should not “take” (*marr*) from, or “give” (*jap*) to another lineage to whom it has already given or from whom it has already taken. There is however, as in other rural societies of Europe (Zonabend 1981), a tendency not to marry too far away: two lineages are not allowed to intermarry, but it often happens that three lineages favour, for one or two generations, exchange between them. There is also a tendency to marry inside the village, or inside a small group of villages close to each other and, of course, inside religious community.

Residence is virilocal. Wives come to live in their husband’s house, which is either the husband’s paternal house, either a new one provided by the husband’s father.

Property is inherited only by sons. Daughters receive a dowry (*pajë, prikë*) at their marriage. It consists of pieces of furniture and garments, but never of land or livestock. According to one informant in Miras, although land is transmitted “by the father’s will” (*sipas dëshirës së babait*) – who can chose to give land to his daughter, as part of the dowry she brings to her husband – “normally only sons receive land” (*si rregull vetëm djemtë*).⁴ Each son receives an equal share of property at the time when separation (*ndarje*) of the house, or from the house, takes place, either upon marriage of the youngest son or upon the death of the father. Every son – except the youngest – is however free to leave the house with his share of property at the time of his marriage or shortly after (especially if there is no space in the house for the new couple). According to several informants, cohabitation of two or more brothers in the paternal house long after their marriage and even after the death of the father used to be more frequent in the past, before the Second World War. The house was then divided into two or more equal parts, each with its own entrance on the street, and its own courtyard and kitchen. Each brother, together with his wife and children, formed a separate social unit, but the former unity of the paternal house was remembered through its labelling as a “brotherhood” (*vëllazëri*). Such combinations are rarely seen today,

³ After the end of collectivisation (1992), land has been returned on a familial basis without taking into account previous lineage property.

⁴ According to the existing law in Albania daughters and sons have equal rights over the family property. I have never heard however of female members of the family pretending to get use of the law and receive land: this would not be convenient when women leave their village of origin to live with their husband in another village. Most of all, people seem also to be reluctant to refer to the law: in 1995, a lady from Bilisht explained to me that it was better to share the property “within the family” (*brenda familjes*), i.e. according to the traditional mode, and that making use of the law would be interpreted by others as a sign of disunion within the family and, as such, as a shame (*turp*). At that time, there was nothing at stake in agricultural land, as selling and buying land was not permitted, so that family property was generally very small.

although old houses divided for the use of two separated brothers are still to be seen in some villages.

This is an instance of how family organisation is perceived by people as evolving: there used to be more solidarity between brothers, and between family members in general. Households are said to have been greater in size. “Thirty years ago, says a young man from Bilisht, families in Albania, including Devoll, did not split in small units as they do today. Brothers lived together, even after they were married and had children. Up to 40 people lived in one house.” Another man from Bilisht confirms about solidarity: “Sons have a duty of mutual aid towards their parents (...). This mutual aid used to extend up to the third cousins.”

The youngest son generally remains with his parents and inherits the paternal house (*trung*). His duty is to take care (*yzmet*) of his parents in their old days and he is thus called the “pillar of the house” (*shtylla e shtëpisë*). The father has the obligation to provide his older sons with a new house or at least with a piece of land (*truall*) where to build a new house. This is usually done by dividing the *truall* on which the paternal house was built, as long as such a fragmentation is possible.

As a result, neighbouring houses are generally inhabited by families closely connected by patrilineal ties. They form a *mëhallë*, a group of houses between which solidarity and daily cooperation are expected. As a neighbourhood, it should be distinguished from the *lagje*, which has no meaning of shared existence and which is more a spatial unit – defined by its position in the village and its topographic features and limits – than a social one.

The village territory is also perceived as changing: according to local discourse, there used to be fewer houses in each neighbourhood, and they used to be separated by gardens, cowsheds and barns. “In 1942, says a man from Miras, houses were much more distant one to the other: there might be only two houses in one neighbourhood. The rest was cultivated land”. Today, houses are built very close one to the other and gardens have been moved to the village periphery, with the exception of small courtyards (*oborr*) used as gardens. The densification of houses is seen as (and probably is) the result of the Communist period: villagers were not allowed to leave their villages to go and settle in towns, while the population kept growing. “This is another consequence of collectivisation, says an old lady from Çipan: cowsheds and barns disappeared. Livestock was gathered into large collective cowsheds. Where the sheds and barns used to be, they built houses. That is why today houses are much closer one to the other. It is a problem now that private livestock is back.”

At the same time, villages were not allowed to expand on their own territory: the village’s inhabited space was separated from its arable land by the “yellow line” (*vija e verdhë*), outside of which it was forbidden to build new houses. Moreover, restrictions put on the mobility of people from village to village or from village to town increased the demographic pressure on village land. In consequence, the fragmentation of land inscribed

in the devolution system could not be counterbalanced anymore by migration away from the village, nor by the buying and selling of vacant plots.

The lineage and its northern mirror

This description clearly inscribes kinship and family organisation in Devoll within the wider frame of “Balkan patriarchy” (Halpern *et al.* 1996). It is neither an isolated case inside Albania and shares most of its features with neighbouring areas. As southerners, Devollis nevertheless claim to be different from northerners as regards family organisation in Albania. They consider northerners to be much more “patriarchalist”: northern family is marked by “patriarchalisms” (*patriarkalizëm*) which are condemned as a form of “fanatism” (*fanatizëm*). This is the case for instance concerning the number of children per couple, or the male solidarity between brothers and between father and sons, which are both said to be higher than in Devoll. The inferior position of women is also frequently stigmatised as something that makes northerners “fanatics” (*fanatik*): Devollis who have lived in or travelled to Northern Albania like to tell stories of how women are kept hidden from foreigners or confined to a role of servant of the men.

All these representations about family life in the North come together with general representations on North and South in which the South, and Devoll in particular, from Devollis’ point of view, appear as having “culture” (*kulturë*) while the North lacks culture and has to acquire it by learning from Southerners and imitating them (de Rapper 2004).

At the same time, Devollis look at Europe, and more specifically at neighbouring Greece, as a model of “culture” that should be imitated, or at least as a model to which they are becoming closer, willing or not willing. This model bears however its own dangers: while northern family organisation is stigmatised as marked by an excessive form of solidarity, “European” or “Greek” family is seen as lacking solidarity: children leave their old parents alone, brothers and sisters fight each other, couples divorce. In contrast to the northern women kept to a servile position, Greek women are seen as liberated beyond measure: they spend their time at cafés and bars and forget their family and house duties. The same contradistinction between lack of modernity and excess of modernity has been noted in Greece, and Alexandra Bakalaki analyses it as a product of a dialectic of modernisation, between the will to get away from traditional behaviour and the risk of producing “*copies non conformes*” of modernity (Bakalaki 2005: 318).

This does not mean that everything Devollis perceive about their family organisation is just “socially constructed” by their position within a web of power relations between a backward North and a modernised Greece. I would like here to look at four structural differences between Devolli and northern kinship and social organisation: (1) lineage generational depth, (2) segmentary organisation, (3) lineage as political and military institution, (4) patrilinearity.

(1) Although kinship ties are well known and abundantly commented by people (the first thing to do when meeting a foreigner is to locate him in terms of kinship), their knowledge is generally limited to three or four generations before Ego. I collected genealogies among 48 lineages in the villages of Menkulas, Miras, Sul and Vidohovë. In nearly half of those genealogies (48%), informants were able to give the name of their great-grand-father. In 29% they did not even recall their great-grand-father's name. In the remaining 23% of cases, informants were able to trace their genealogies back to four, five or six generations before Ego. I found no cases of deeper genealogical knowledge.

Devolli lineage is clearly a three generations lineage comparable to the Greek *genia* described by Maria Couroucli in Corfou (Couroucli 1985). Although long term presence in the region can be claimed as a source of prestige, there seems to be no interest in remembering kinship ties beyond three or four generations. Ancestors' collaterals are rapidly forgotten as being "separated" (*i ndarë*) from the lineage and forming new lineages. "At the beginning of the lineage (*fis*), says a 70-year old man from Menkulas, were three brothers: Alush, Sali and Alil. Alush was my grand-father. Their father's first name is not known. Their first cousins form another lineage (*soj*)." Actually, there seems to be interest in forgetting distant relationship in order not to prevent marriages between lineages issued from the same stem. This is in sharp contrast to the long genealogical lists collected by ethnographers of Northern Albania (Durham 1909: 69, Zojzi 1977: 195). There also seems to be no trace of ancestors' cult in Devoll.

(2) Lineage organisation in Northern Albania and Kosovo has often been described as a segmentary system in which a *fis* is divided into several "feet" or "legs" (*këmbë*), each starting with one of the founder's sons. Each *këmbë* is divided into several "brotherhoods" (*vllazni*) who in turn are made of several "bellies" (*barkë*), divided into "houses" (*shpi*). Each level has its own territorial counterpart and its own headman.⁵

Such a description does not fit the situation observed in Devoll: the *fis* is made of a certain number of houses, but no intermediary units are recognised between those two levels. The word *degë* ("branch") is used to refer to a segment of lineage, but has no reality in the way the lineage actually functions. In fact, when such a branch does acquire a reality in the eyes of lineage members, it splits and forms a new lineage: the branch takes a new family name, generally formed on a close ancestor's first name, and is not considered as a segment of the original lineage anymore. After one or two generations, members of the two lineages can even intermarry. This is the case for instance in one of the largest lineages of Menkulas: the head of one of the branches (he was the son or grand-son of the 'founder') chose a new family name, probably in the 1920s; one of his grand-sons later married a third cousin (before the Second World War) who still had the original family name, but whose father changed it for a new one in 1944 (**fig. 1**). The woman's brother,

⁵ See examples in Daniel, Odile 1989. Montagnes tribales et coutumiers. *L'Ethnographie* 106: 43-74, here p. 54. Some authors have used Evans-Pritchard's terminology to describe lineage organisation among Kosovo Albanians: see Backer, Berit 1979. *Behind the Stone Walls. Changing household organization among the Albanians in Yugoslavia*. Oslo, PRIO-Publication: 133-35; Reineck, Janet Susan 1991. *The Past as Refuge: Gender, Migration, and Ideology Among the Kosova Albanians*. Ph. D. in Anthropology. Berkeley, University of California: 43-46.

from whom I collected the genealogy, did not mention the marriage as a ‘third cousins marriage’ (which is normally forbidden), but as a regular marriage between two lineages, although he knew very well that both lineages once had the same name and were issued from the same ancestor.

(3) A third feature of the lineage system described in Northern Albania is its existence as a political and military organisation in a specific territory, clearly marked and defended. Although command and military organisation have been related to the Ottoman *bayrak* rather than to the Albanian *fis* (Backer 1979: 92-93), the Northern Albanian lineage seems to have had political functions on a bounded territory, as appears in customary law (Doja 1999: 44).

Given the limited genealogical depth of Devolli lineage and the fission process by which new lineages are constantly appearing, the *fis* can hardly be associated with a stable territory larger than a small group of houses and a share of the village’s fields, woods and pastures. Indeed, all villages are inhabited by several lineages, and although some of them have a specific relationship to village territory (as founder of a new neighbourhood, for instance, or as “old lineages” arrived a long time ago), none of them claim the village or neighbourhood as its own.

There are no traces of a military organisation, although carrying weapons seems to have been common up to the Second World War, and the political organisation is communal: neighbourhoods send a representing elder (*plak*) to the village council and elect the village head (*kryeplak*). Different lineages are competing to gain access to political functions on the village territory, but those political functions are not imbedded into the lineage structure.

(4) Finally, although the Devoll lineage is a patrilineal descent group, as its northern counterpart, it does not exclude recognition of kinship, in terms of blood, through women. The distinction between “blood” and “milk” is not known in Devoll: blood (*gjak*) alone is the principle of kinship, and it runs through male as through female lines. Genealogies are known on the father’s side as well as on the mother’s, through males as through females, on at least three generations. Thus for instance those two men from Miras, Abaz and Nesdan, who present themselves as cousins (*jemi kushërinj*) and add: “we are even cousins on both sides” (*bile jemi kushërinj nga dy anë*). Actually, their mothers are first cousins, while Abaz married Nesdan’s patrilineal cross cousin’s daughter (**fig. 2**). This is also the case of Bedri and Elona in Bilisht who both claim to be related to Sami, mainly through female lines: Sami is Bedri’s mother’s maternal uncle, and he married the daughter of Elona’s mother’s maternal uncle (**fig. 3**). Those two examples reveal the generally precise knowledge of relations through female lines on at least three generations. It probably comes along with the ban on marriage in the mother’s lineage: parents have to be located on both sides in order to avoid marrying someone belonging to the same “blood”.⁶ This is

⁶ See also below on exogamy.

in contrast to what has been reported from Northern Albania on the absence of reckoning of kinship through women.⁷

Devollis are thus probably right when they state that their family organisation differs from what it is – or what they *think* it is – in the North: the clanic and tribal image generally associated with Northern Albanian society does not apply to Devoll. This does not mean however that we have to do with two radically different societies: before coming to the definition and functioning of the Devoll lineage system, it is worth considering a feature who illustrates similarities between northern and southern social organisation.

In Devoll, as a result of lineage fission, internal migration and inheritance system, inhabitants of a given territory (a village for instance), as well as their lineages, are classified according to their relation to this territory. First come the “big lineages” (*fiset e mëdhenj*) or “old lineages” (*fiset e vjetër*); they claim at the same time the longest presence in the village and the role of founders of a neighbourhood upon their arrival from another area in Southern Albania or Northern Greece. The *vendali* (“local”, from *vend*, “country, place”) are the ones who have no memory of an external origin; they generally form the majority of the population. Finally are the most recently arrived (*i ardhur*), whose arrival one or two generations ago is still remembered (de Rapper 2000: 458-459).

This categorisation of individuals and lineages on the basis of territory reminds of the one reported from Northern Albania. The population of a given territory is said to consist of three different stocks: “dominants” (*pushtues*) who arrived from another place and conquered the land; “natives” (*anas*) who were subdued by the conquering newcomers; and finally the most recently arrived (*të ardhur, ardhacakë*), who are maintained in a position of inferiority (Kostallari 1965: 38; Zojzi 1977: 188). Despite the differences of vocabulary and context, the conceptualisation of three distinct categories of people in a given territory appears to be the same in both northern and south-eastern ends of Albania.

The lineage: semantic horizons

In order to understand what is meant by *fis* in Devoll and what it reveals of kinship system, I suggest exploring three different meanings of the word and looking at other words expressing more or less the same notions in local language. The three meanings are: (1) principle of kinship, (2) descent group, and (3) (noble) origin. In this respect, the notions invoked by the word *fis* are by no way unfamiliar in the context of European and Mediterranean societies: they give the image of a patrilineal society, in which blood is a metaphor for kinship and where belonging to social groups is acquired by birth. It is worth noticing that the origin of the word itself is not clear. Gustav Meyer first suggested a Modern Greek etymology from *physis*, “nature, character” (Meyer 1891: 105). This etymology was later accepted by Eqrem Çabej, who confirms that the borrowing must have

⁷ Durham, M. Edith 1909. *High Albania*. London, Edward Arnold: 21; Coon, Carleton S. 1950. *The Mountains of Giants: a Racial and Cultural Study of the North Albanian Mountain Ghegs*. Cambridge, Mass., Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology: 23.

occurred after the eleventh century, but who points out a semantic evolution, especially in the North, from the meaning of Latin *gens* to *tribus*, i.e. from a limited descent group to a political organisation based on actual or fictitious common descent (Çabej 1996: 194). This reflects more or less the differences between Northern and Devolli lineages presented in the previous section. The change from “nature” and “character” to “*gens*” remains however unclear. It might indicate that members of a descent group are perceived as sharing common features, both physical and moral, which is, as we shall see, actually the case. It should also be noted that the root *gens* do exist in Albanian, especially through the borrowing of Byzantine Greek *genea*, which gave Albanian *gjini*, *gjiri*, “kin, related” (Çabej 1996: 332-33). Contrary to *fis*, *gjini* has no stress on patrilinearity. It is often associated with *gjak*, “blood”: *gjak e gjini* seems to designate all cognates (Latin *consanguinitas*). It is, however, not used in Devoll.

(1) The word *fis* is first used to express the principle of kinship, the very fact of being kin or parents. *Jemi fis*, “we are related”. At this stage, *fis* does not apply to any descent group in particular; it is not even strictly patrilineal, even though the general patrilineal coloration of the kinship system is more often present than not. In this context, *fis* can be replaced by the word *gjak*, “blood”: *jemi gjak* (*nuk jemi gjak*), “we are (not) related”.

The word *gjak* has been linked with the Slavic root *sok-*, “sap”, and with other Indo-European words (Çabej 1996: 311-12). In Albanian, apart from the family context, it also means a kind of blood sacrifice (it is then a close synonym to *kurban*); it also means “blood feud”.

Contrary to what occurs in other societies, the blood as principle of kinship does not come along with other anatomic metaphors: there seems to be no particular conceptualisation of veins. It is neither associated to other corporal humours, contrary to what occurs in kinship conception in Northern Albania. In Devoll, for instance, blood is not opposed to milk; the “tree of milk” (*lisi i tamblit*) and “tree of blood” (*lisi i gjakut*), as appearing in customary law (Gjeçovi 1993: 122), are unknown to the Devollis, who use, as most Southerners, the word *qumësht* for milk, instead of *tambël*. Parents on the mother’s side are not called the “tree of milk” in opposition to the “tree of blood” formed by parents on the father’s side. They are called “mother’s lineage” (*fisi i mamasë*) or “mother’s brother’s lineage” (*fisi i dajos*) and they do not differ in nature from parents on the father’s side.

As a principle of kinship *gjak* and *fis* are exogamous: you have to marry “outside blood” (*jashtë gjakut*, *jashtë fisit*). In this context, as already mentioned, parent’s on the mother’s side belong to the same blood and should not be married: “In order to marry within the village (*brenda fshatit*), says a man from the Christian village of Qytezë, three generations must pass on the mother’s side, and four on the father’s side. Up to the third cousins, we are the same lineage (*soj*)⁸; we share the same blood (*gjak*), the same family name (*mbiemër*)”. In the Muslim village of Miras, Muharem gives the same explanation: “According to religion, you have to marry outside your lineage (*jashtë fisit*) for five

⁸ See below.

generations. (...) When a man gets married in a lineage, his children, girls and boys, are not allowed to marry in their mother's lineage. The whole mother's lineage is considered as "maternal uncle" (*dajë*). A new marriage is possible only after four generations have passed, to avoid consanguinity (*bashkëgjakësi*).⁹ The number of generations that have to pass before marriage is possible varies according to informants, generally from three to six.

The point is that contrary to what seems to be the case in Northern Albania where, according to customary law, "blood goes endlessly" (Gjeçovi 1993: 122), blood has its limits in Devoll, which are the limits of collective memory. "We do not marry within the lineage (*brenda fisit*), within four generations, on both sides; more – five or six – when the grand-parents are still alive. For the oldest know who is related to whom; they are still there to say: 'those two are related (*i kemi një soj, i kemi një gjak*), they cannot marry!'" Other examples confirm that blood goes as long as you remember it. Even when a common family name makes a common origin probable, blood relation is not effective as long as knowledge of the actual common ancestor has been lost: "Twenty families share our family name, says a man in Miras, but they are not related (*nuk janë gjak*). The great-grand-father probably had a brother or a cousin [from whom the other families descend]."

(2) What distinguishes *gjak* from *fis* is that the latter also applies to an actual descent group, identified by a name, by its relations with other similar groups, and by its relation to a specific territory.

Each *fis*, understood as a descent group, is identified by a name. This name is the lineage members' *mbiemër* (literally "surname") or *llagap*. The identification of a lineage by its name is visible for instance in the fact that the number of lineages present in a village is generally expressed as a number of *mbiemër* (plural *mbiemra*). Naming is also involved in the founding act of a new lineage: members of the separating branch choose a new *llagap* and are thus recognised as a distinct group from the original lineage. This new name is generally formed on the first name or nickname of a common ancestor; this is why it is called *llagap*, a word deriving (through Turkish) from Arabic *lakab*, "nickname". In this respect, there also exists a kind of "name exogamy": people bearing the same family name should not marry, even if the memory of a common origin has been lost. When such cases occur, however, people insist on the fact that they are not *fis*, even though they have the same family name. Here for instance in Miras, where the name of the dominant lineage of a neighbourhood is adopted by another lineage living in the same neighbourhood: "Faik's wife had the same family name as her husband, Muçka, but they are not related (*nuk janë gjak*). Her family used to be called Luke, but they took the name Muçka from the neighbourhood (*lagje*) where they lived, at the beginning of communism⁹. Faik married a girl from his neighbourhood and who has the same family name, but who is not of the same lineage (*fis*)."

⁹ After the war and the takeover by Communists, some families that had fought on the wrong side or belonged to lineages categorised by Communists as 'enemies' changed their surname in order to avoid political stigmatisation.

Each *fis* has also its own history and its “elder(s)” (*plak, pleq*) who are the bearer of this memory. The lineage history consists of migration from another place to the village presently occupied by the *fis*, of settlement and expansion in one of the village neighbourhoods, of separation and fission, and also of participation of its members in the events of local or national history which are worth remembering. Included in this historical memory of the lineage are its relations with the other lineages of the village: who came first, who was more powerful, who was on the right side or on the wrong side during the Second World War, etc. Connected to this history are also physical and moral features which are defined as lineage features rather than individual ones. One is supposed to resemble his male ancestors, whose blood he has inherited. This is also true of some sorts of professional activities: “As a lineage, we are traders” (*si fis, jemi në tregti*), i.e. “my father and grand-father were traders”.

Finally, each *fis* is associated with a specific neighbourhood, even though all its members do not actually live in this neighbourhood and even though members of other lineages live in the neighbourhood.

In all these contexts the word *fis* cannot be replaced by *gjak*: a *gjak* has no name, no history and no territory. As a descent group, *fis* can be replaced, with some restrictions, by other words meaning “a community based on common origin” or “a group of people existing and acting as descendants of a common ancestor”. These are *farefis*, *racë* and *soj*.

The word *farefis* is evidently composed of *farë* and *fis*. In Devoll, *farë* is used alone with the meaning of “specie, kind” and also “seed”; it is however used in other parts of Albania as well as in some regions of Greece and among the Arumanians with the meaning of a more or less extended descent group, from a household to a lineage and to the gathering of several lineages or “tribes” (Çabej 1996: 142-45). Despite this generally accepted etymology, in Devoll the word is sometimes understood as formed on the adverb *fare*, meaning “entirely, totally, completely”, and the word *fis*, giving the latter a wider extension: *farefis* is the “all-*fis*”; it is, as one informant puts it, something like *fis*, but “wider” (*më i zgjeruar*). Indeed, the uses of *farefis* reveal a much less patrilineal conception of kin: it is not a synonym of “blood” (*gjak*) and includes all parents on the father’s as well as on the mother’s side.¹⁰

The word *racë* means in Albanian a wide group of people having a common origin. It is frequently used as a synonym of “nation” (*komb*); one can hear talking of “the Albanian race” (*raca shqiptare*) or of “the Greek race” (*raca greke*) in the sense of “nation”. Both words also apply to religious communities, Christian and Muslim, as they are generally perceived as “natural” communities, to whom one belongs by birth rather than by choice: it is not uncommon to hear about the “nation of the Turks” (*kombi turk*), i.e. “Muslims”, or about the “Christian race” (*raca e krishterë*), i.e. “Christians”. Both the nation and religious communities are conceived as blood communities. This meaning is found in the kinship

¹⁰ In the scientific language, kinship as a field of social relations is expressed by the words *farefis* and *farefisni*; “kinship system” is *sistem farefisnor*. Contrary to *fis*, *farefis* has no “tribal” connotation.

context to express common origin and blood community of several lineages. In the village of Sinicë for instance, one informant explains the links between three lineages, saying that “the *fis* Guta and Damo are stemming from the Panos; they are the same *racë*, the same *fis*.”¹¹ As such the word *racë* reminds us of the use of *ratsa* in Greek for a group of lineages (*genia*) who share the same last name without being able of tracing their links back to a known common ancestor (Couroucli 1985: 68). As we have seen however, in Devoll, such relations between lineages are not conceptualised: there is no word for instance for the different lineages who share the same family name, and a *racë*, contrary to *fis*, is not identified by a name. In the kinship context, the word *racë* is also used to stress the size of a family or lineage and to insist on their numerical importance. On the returning of her brother from migration in Greece, where he has been living for the last five years, a women from the village of Miras tells that she spent all the afternoon at her parents’, where the whole family was gathering for the occasion: “Children were running everywhere, she says, you could hardly go from one room to the other. Actually, I have almost not seen my brother at all! The race was gathered (*ishte mbledhur raca*): he had not come back for three years now.” Clearly, the exceptional value of the event and its crowd like manifestation call for the use of *racë* rather than *fis*: a *fis* might be small or large, while a *racë* is a multitude.

The last word used to designate a group of blood related persons is *soj*. It comes from Turkish *soy* (literally “bone”) which means a patrilineage, in opposition to the “flesh”.¹² It is in use in Greek as well as in South Slavic.¹³ Generally speaking, in Devoll, *soj* is interpreted and used as a synonym for *fis*. Like *fis*, *soj* is based on blood, has a limited genealogical depth, and is identified by a name: “up to the third cousins, we are one *soj*, we share the same blood (*gjak*), and we have the same family name (*mbiemër*).” Like *fis*, *soj* is also the bearer of moral values which are transmitted to individuals. The compounds *sojli* and *sojsez*, borrowed from Turkish, are thus synonyms to *pe fisi* (“of lineage origin”) and *pa fisi* (“without lineage”), which express nobility and respectability, and the lack thereof.¹⁴

The Devoll Macedonians, in the village of Vërnik, make use of the words *soj* and *fis*, with the meaning of “family, kinship”; they however consider *fis* to be borrowed from Albanian, while *soj* sounds more Macedonian to them. The contrast between the exteriority of *fis* and interiority of *soj* is also appearing in the way Albanian Devollis use both words. Indeed, despite their often equivalent uses, *fis* and *soj* are two different things, or rather two different aspects of the same reality. For instance, it will never be heard that a village consists of a certain number of *soj* (the word is hardly used in plural), but always that it is made of several *fis* (plural *fise*). In order to identify someone unknown, one of the questions possibly asked is: *Pe ç’fisi është ky?* (“From which *fis* is he?”); in this case, *soj* has little chance to be used. On the other hand, *soj* is used in contexts where the descent group is conceived

¹¹ Note the two meanings of *fis* in the same sentence.

¹² Gokalp, Altan 1987. “Le Dit de l’os et du clan”. De l’ordre segmentaire oghouz au village anatolien. *L’Homme* 102: 80-98.

¹³ Greece: du Boulay, Juliet 1984. The Blood: Symbolic Relationships Between Descent, Marriage, Incest Prohibitions and Spiritual Kinship in Greece. *Man* 19, 4: 533-556; South Slavic: Stahl, Paul H. 1979. *Sociétés traditionnelles balkaniques. Contribution à l’étude des structures sociales*. Paris, EHESS: 191.

¹⁴ See below.

in its more practical and concrete dimensions, as a community of existence or work. For instance, members of the lineage who are daily appealed to in domestic or agriculture work, or occasionally for the preparation of familial events such as weddings and burials, are said to belong to the same *soj*. In this respect, *soj* is the actualisation of lineage solidarity and mutual help. It has less to do with identity and common origin, than with the manifestations of identity and common origin. When *fis* is an outward community, always considered in relation with and opposition to other *fis*, *soj* is an inward community; it is the intimate facet of the lineage.

(3) Each *fis* has its own history and, in most cases, its known origin, even if it is not far removed. The origin is generally linked with the appearance of the *fis* name (*llagap*, *mbiemër*) and with its settlement on its *truall* or in the house still occupied by members of the *fis*.

In this context, *fis* is often heard together with the word *trung*. Deriving from a Latin word (*truncus*), the word means a tree trunk or a stump. In kinship context, it designates the married couple – usually the speaker’s grand-parents or great-grand-parents in male line – who is the origin of the lineage (*fis*) or of the “blood” (*gjak*). Male children of this couple form the beginning of “branches” (*degë*) which themselves divide in a process of “ramification” (*degëzim*). As one informant puts it: “The grand-father and grand-mother are the trunk; then come the branches” (*gjyshi dhe gjyshja janë trungu, pastaj janë degët*). It is also heard that the trunk represents the farthest known ancestor and that each of his sons form the beginning of main branches. The phrase “familial trunk” (*trungu familjar*) means a married couple with children, as a potential depart of a new lineage.

The word *trung* also applies to a building, rather than to persons. It thus means the most ancient house of a neighbourhood, the one which was built and inhabited by the common ancestor. In this context, one can hear of a specific house as the *trung* of the *fis* and of the *lagje* in which it stands. As houses in general are destroyed and built again every two or three generations, in order to gain in size and comfort, it often occurs that the house designated as “trunk” is not the actual house built by the ancestor, but the one which stands on the same plot (*truall*) and which was inherited through youngest sons.

Lands that one inherits as member of a lineage (paternal lands) are said to come “from the lineage, as trunk” (*nga fisi, si trung*): they come not only from the father, but beyond the father, from the common ancestor of the *fis*, who first took possession of these lands.

If every married couple is a potential *trung*, the birth of a son and the beginning of a new branch make it a real *trung*. For the birth of a son is what makes you sure that the house will perpetuate: “When a son is born to you, says a young father in the village of Miras, the *trung* does not go out (*trungu nuk shubet*), it continues to have flames (*flagët*) and smoke (*tym*)”. In this case, the tree image of a *trung* with its branches is contaminated with another metaphor of common origin, the one of the house hearth with its ever burning log: the *trung* is also what is burning and what should not be extinguished. The image of the fire is invoked as the place of common origin; the lineage is identified with an original fire

(*zjarr*). “A *fis*, says an elder from Miras, is one blood (*një gjak*); they are the ones who come from the same fire (*pe një zjarr*).” Together with the fire comes the reference to the “hearth” (*oxhak*) and “fireplace” (*vatër*) where the fire is burning. The metaphor of the hearth is also invoking another aspect of the fire, not only as primeval fire, but also as a place of common existence and commensality. The censuses of the Ottoman era were made on the basis of the household, understood as a group of people living and eating around the same fireplace; in other parts of the Balkans, the smallest social units were thus designated by words meaning “hearth” or “smoke” (Cvijic 1918: 225). Today in Devoll, the size and relative importance of villages are still expressed in terms of number of houses (*shpi*) or “smokes” (*tym*), while the use of the word *oxhak* is kept to the metaphor of common origin. Indeed, the fact that the house is generally inherited along the same “blood” means that it often constitutes the very place of common origin; the fire that is still burning in the fireplace is the same as the one that was originally burning, at the time of the grand-parents, and which was lit upon the birth of a son. Hence the phrase “a son in the house opens the chimney” (*kur ke djalë në shpi, u hap oxhaku*).

Finally, the words *oxhak* and *fis* are used to express a sense of nobility and excellence attached to some important lineages. The phrases *pe oxhaku* (“from the fireplace”) and *pe fisi* (“from the lineage”) mean “of good lineage, of high birth”. When parents come to think of marrying their son, they consider potential brides and look for information about their lineages: are they “from a good lineage” (*nga fisi i mire*), “from the fireplace” (*pe oxhaku*)? Already in the seventeenth century, Latin *nobilis* and *nobilitas* were translated by Albanian *fisnich* and *fisnichia*, which are today *fisnik* and *fisnikëri*, all derived from *fis* (Bardhi 1932: 66). To sum up the “good things” that make the “honour of the house” (*nder i shpisë*), an informant from the village of Menkulas uses the phrase “oak wood [in the fireplace] and a woman of high birth” (*dru pe lisi, grua pe fisi*).

The review of the various meanings taken by the word *fis* in Devoll thus reveals that it designates more than a lineage: although the lineage observed is a relatively limited descent group, composed of people descending through male line from a common grandfather or great-grandfather, the word *fis* is also used for more abstract concepts such as kinship and common origin.

Based on material coming from too different sources, the comparison we drew between northern and southern lineage systems has only a limited purpose in this chapter: to point out the structural differences between both systems and start an examination of the southern lineage from its distinctive features. One of the main differences is that the southern system perpetuates through fission rather than through a segmentary principle; new lineages are created by fission and engage into intermarriage as exogamous units whose common origin is forgotten or at least made irrelevant. In a way, the system tends to transform parents into allies.

Although not effective in those marriage arrangements, the concepts of kinship and common origin beyond the lineage are also expressed by the word *fis*. There are however contexts in which those concepts are made relevant: the recognition of kinship is not only a

matter of perpetuation of social units through marriage and devolution system, it is also dependant of the use of kinship as a social resource. It would thus be interesting, although beyond the scope of this chapter, to look at what becomes of the limit between kin and non-kin in the political context of “class struggle” (*lufta e klasave*) as understood in Communist Albania. People frequently refer to it as a principle according to which political stigmatisation of an individual automatically extended to all his or her *fis*. “If you did something wrong towards the Party, all your *fis* was to be punished”. This is another example of how family and kinship organisation are embedded into wider representations of society, as already mentioned regarding the way Devollis perceive themselves as Southerners in opposition to Northerners.

Figure 1. Marriage between branches of a lineage

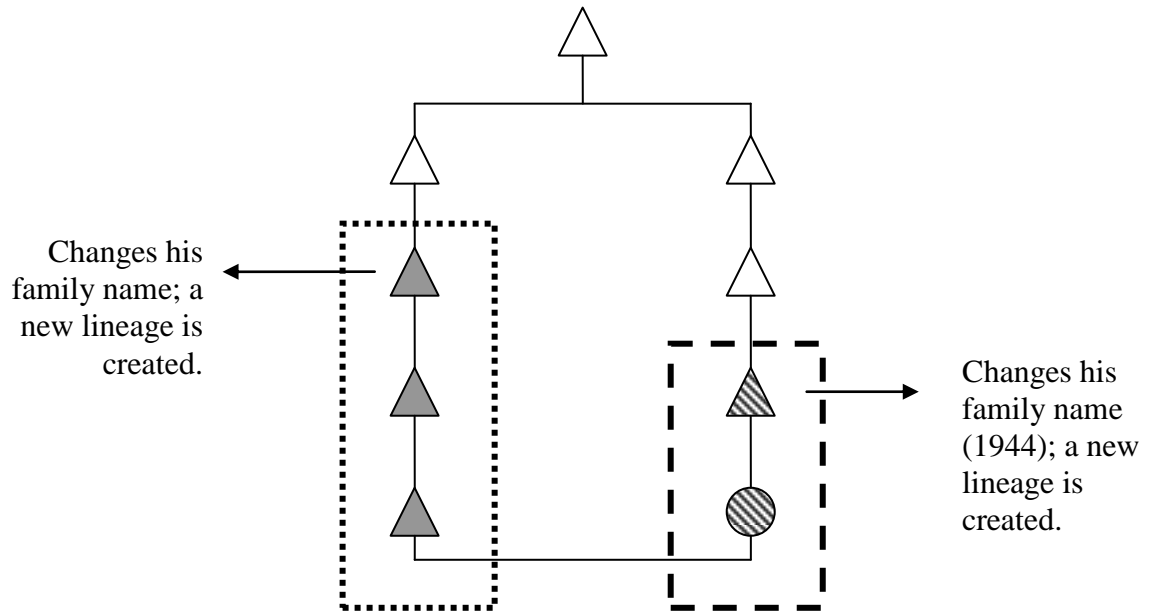


Figure 2. Abaz and Nesdan

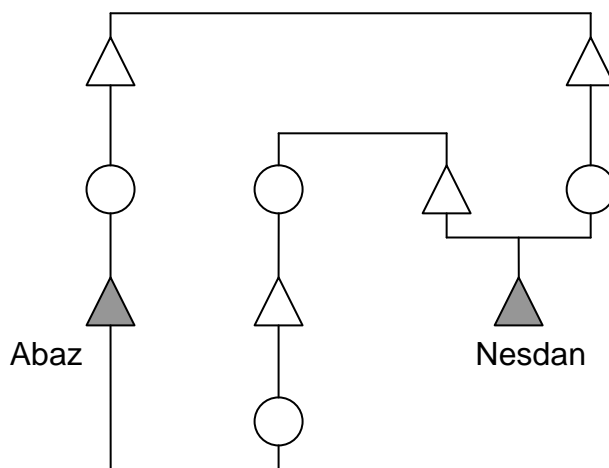
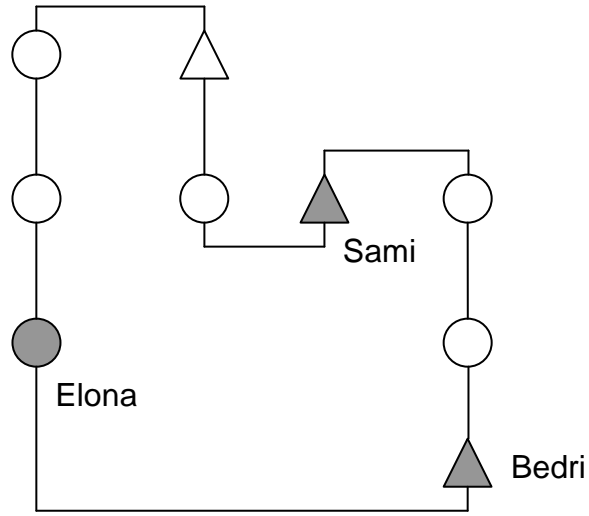


Figure 3. Elona, Bedri and Sami



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