

PAWEŁ SENDYKA

**Once We Were Shepherds: Górale Ethnic Identity in Celebrations Revived and Reinterpreted**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The *Górale* of the Polish highlands are seen as a people apart from the rest of Poles. They are afforded this special status through the romanticisation as Poland's very own "noble savages" by the writers and travellers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was the time of Poland's search for nationhood (when its territory was occupied by Russia, Prussia and Austria). The *Górale* have always been described, even in those early accounts, as pastoralists.

During the season, when the sheep went up to the alpine pastures, the villages were almost deserted. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the pastoral system dissolution took place starting with the establishment of national parks after the Second World War. Further unfavourable developments decimated what was left of it since the late 1980s. As a result of the dissolution of the pastoral system the *Górale* chose to amplify their internal unity by strengthening the ethnic identity. The revival of pastoralism as it currently presents itself today, may be seen as yet another rallying call around *Górale* identity. It is a come back to the pastoralist "core" of the highland culture, while changing and re-inventing the tradition to suit new economic, social and political circumstances.

In the Polish pastoralist tradition there have always been two seminal community events which bracketed the winter season. There was the autumn event of "Redyk Jesienny" when the sheep brought back from the summer alpine pastures were given back to their owners and there was also a spring event of "Mieszanie Owiec" which literally means the Mixing of Sheep. Historically, they were very important events of the pastoral calendar, while the pastoral system itself has been crucial fixture and backbone of the social system of the *Górale* people. The paper examines how these traditions changed from old ethnographic

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descriptions and how they are being re-invented in the context of reaffirming the *Górale* identity today.

**KEY WORDS:** *Górale*, pastoral culture, ethnic identity, re-inventing tradition, celebrations

## Introduction

This paper will examine the celebrations of *redyk* and *mieszanie owiec* (literally the “mixing of the sheep”) as (re)affirmations of the *Górale* ethnic identity. While these two pastoral celebrations have already been (re)created to such a degree that they can readily be described by Hobsbawm’s term as an “invented tradition”, special attention will be paid to a third, new celebration, which is, without irony, called “tradition” by its organisers and participants. During *Święto Bacowskie* (The Day of the *Bacas*) in Ludźmierz the sheep are symbolically blessed and “mixed” as if by proxy, for the entire Carpathians. It is an example of what Frederic Barth described as political innovation concerned with the codification of idioms: “the selection of signals for identity and the assertion of value of these cultural diacritics, and the suppression or denial of relevance of other differentiae” (BARTH 1969:35). The paper will examine in some detail those elements of the *Górale* identity which the aforementioned celebrations bring to the fore with special attention being paid to The Day of the *Bacas* because of its purely invented origin. As Barth points out, what is being suppressed or denied importance is as important as what is being brought to the fore. Therefore, some of those “other differentiae” that are being suppressed or denied will be discussed later on in the paper.

The justification and glorification of the *Górale* identity has been facilitated in Poland for historical reasons which this paper will examine in some detail. As a result, the mainstream Polish culture did not seek to subjugate or impose on the *Górale* culture, but to draw from it. During the period of occupation (by neighbouring states of Russia, Prussia and Austria) and oppression, the culture of the Polish highlanders became glorified as a hidden away gem of Polish national qualities and values. Because of this glorification, the case of Polish *Górale* is also in an interesting juxtaposition to the classic literature on the subject of ethnic identity which frequently draws from the colonial examples (including Barth 1969). Following their “discovery”, the mainstream Polish culture did not try to impose on the highlanders their rules or values, but sought its own salvation and resurrection, to use the romantic language of the era, by trying to adapt the values of Poland’s very own “noble savages”.

Polish highlanders – *Górale* – lived in splendid geographical isolation and their characteristic traits were treated by many as some basic Polish, unpolluted, features. The highlands were thus treated as an ark of sorts in which the original (and best) Polish qualities survived to the modern times. Now, they could be used as a foundation for the future, re-born, nation. It all started when *Górale* were first described by the travellers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, at a time

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when Poland did not exist as a state, its entire territory being occupied by three neighbouring powers. It laid a foundation not just for the nation, but also for the special treatment of the *Górale* within that nation. In a way, the colonial story was reversed here, the *Górale* culture was found superior (or rather a superior “raw material” for the intellectuals to work with) to that of the lowlands.

### Mixing of the Sheep

At the beginning of May in 2015, the pastoral season in Ochotnica Górna started with a festive celebration of *mieszanie owiec* (“mixing of the sheep”). It began with a mass in a small chapel in the hamlet of Jamne (of the village of Ochotnica), next to a creek that goes deep into the Gorce Mountains (they lie just north of the Tatras, belonging to the broadly defined Podhale). There was a band, playing the local Highland music. They were dressed in their traditional, festive clothes that are iconic in Polish popular culture. After the mass, the priest, the *baca* (head shepherd) Jasiek, the sheep owners and villagers all walked from the chapel to the field across the road where, on fresh spring grass, a *koszar* – the wooden enclosure with the sheep – awaited. The priest and the *baca* walked together into the enclosure and took their hats off. The priest then thanked God for the mountains and the woods and the pastures on which these sheep graze until they are full and asked for them to be kept safe from danger and sickness in the forthcoming season. He then dipped a fir branch in a wooden bucket which *baca* Jasiek was holding and sprayed holy water on the herd. *Baca* Jasiek then took the fir branch from him and kept spraying the sheep with holy water while moving clockwise within the enclosure. He did this three times, circling with the sheep around a freshly cut fir tree stuck in the middle, as is the tradition. He then took burning incense made of herbs from the priest and circled the *koszar* with it three times letting the smoke waft through the herd. He did the same with a smoking *huba* (a type of mushroom that grows on dead and dying trees), known for its strong magical powers.

Everything was very traditional, except perhaps for the fact that it was not traditional at all. *Baca* Jasiek explained the most important departure from tradition:

*“I was the one to introduce the priest into it, because I don't feel myself a strong enough magician so that I would be able to do magic myself and so on... or to pray in a way that there would be strength in it. And such strength, in our times... I believe in God... is with the priest who has faith, and he is there to guide these people and set out certain things.”*

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**Figure 1:** Baca Jasiek with the sheep during the 2015 Mixing of the Sheep celebration. Photo: author

Historically, *Mieszanie Owiec* was an important event during which the head shepherd, or the *baca* had to use his magical knowledge to ensure that the big herd made up of sheep from the individual owners would keep together as one and produce enough milk to make their summer venture profitable. To do that he used magic spells and performed rituals taught by his predecessors. Today, the magical business of the *bacas* is increasingly replaced by the priests' prayers. It is already a significant modification of tradition as historically priests and *bacas* were frequently in opposition.

### **The Beginnings (and the Magical Beginnings)**

The word *Górale* derives from the Polish word *góra*, which means the mountain. As one of the *Górale* and Podhale creation stories goes, God created the world in seven days and then went on to make different lands. When he was about to make Podhale, a curious angel appeared and asked to be allowed to make this new land. While God moved elsewhere, the angel piled on rocks upon rocks to make the future land closer to the sun so it would be warm and fertile. But before long, a massive rain washed away the soil, leaving behind a barren wasteland. When God saw the result, he was horrified. The angel offered to fix this mistake

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by creating people who would make the best of this landscape, but God was too angry and chased him away.

*“And then God himself thought up the Góral: of towering built, fast, with legs as of steel, with sharp eyes as of an eagle, of clever, entrepreneurial, mind, and of great perseverance, energy and smarts – so that he would be able to succeed in making a living on this poor angelic land”* (ORKAN 1970:48).

Folktales such as this one have been told and retold in the highland villages many times, but what makes this version interesting is the fact that it has made its way into mainstream culture. The version quoted above comes from the 1970 edition of Polish folk tales for children (KOSTYRKO 1970) even though it is much earlier in origin, written down by Władysław Orkan a *Góral* writer and intellectual who died in 1930.

This fanciful origin story aside, the sheep and the practice of transhumant pastoralism were brought to Poland by Wallachian shepherds towards the end of the Middle Ages. Thought to have first originated in the Balkans, the exact reasons for the mass migrations of the era are a matter of conjecture. Possible causes were the turbulent events of 14<sup>th</sup> century: Turkish expansion (JAWOR 1997:53), power struggles between nobles in Wallachia and Moldavia (JAWOR 2014:26) and a need for new pastures as a result of the population growth (DOBROWOLSKI 1970:90). There are indications that this influx of people was at least in part sponsored and supported by the Polish state that sought, at the time, to make the mountains both productive and strengthened militarily. There are surviving letters of the ruler of Moldavia to the Polish king, which repeatedly called on him to put an end to recruiters coming to Moldavian villages and promising people more freedom and financial incentives should they decide to move and settle in Poland (JAWOR 2000:31).

The recruiters were looking for new settlers that needed to have special skills to survive. This is because in the mountains and other difficult terrains, agricultural settlements had failed before because of poor soil quality. After the initial tax-free periods, these settlements were unable to support themselves and to pay their obligations (JAWOR 2014:26). The Polish state introduced a novel legislation to cater to the new Wallachian arrivals who settled, under this new law. The previous agricultural settlements, the co-called “German Law” (or *Ius Teutonicum* in Latin) was applied. It stipulated the rights and responsibilities of the settlers and the landowners; the settlers commonly paying rent in grain and/or money, as well as performing corvée labour for the land owners.

The new “Wallachian Law” (or *Ius Valachicum* in Latin) was different: corvée labour was very limited or completely abolished and the rent could be paid in pastoral products: sheep, fleece, wool and cheese. The settlers had more personal freedom, being allowed to leave the settlement without the landowner's permission. The Wallachians brought with them the sheep

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and the pastoral know-how which made the mountains economically profitable for the local landowners and the Polish state. They were also skilled artisans in carpentry, leather-work and blacksmithing. It was their ability to mix the proportions of pastoralism, small-time agriculture, and craftsmanship in a way best suited to local conditions that made them successful over large areas (JAWOR 2014:27). In time, as the Wallachians enmeshed with the local population, the meaning of the word Wallachian (or *Vlach*) was changing over time (and space). It included, amongst other meanings, anyone who would be living in the settlements under the new law. Grzegorz Jawor argued that while the structure of the *Ius Valachicum* came from the *Ius Teutonicum*, its substance was foreign in origin; that it was not so much of an adjustment of the law, rather a whole new paradigm. For people who would be signing up for such a settlement, it would mean breaking off with the past experience as agriculturalists and embarking on a whole new way of doing animal husbandry, and a change in lifestyle that went with an acceptance of a new set of values, often contradictory to those lived by so far (JAWOR 2000:27-28).

Pastoralism became *the* way to make a living in the mountains, for centuries. Yet, the initial encounters were not all auspicious. In 1406 the Wallachians burned down the city of Stary Sącz, committing many acts of pillage and murder. The chronicler relaying these events attributes to them such characteristics as violence and barbaric manners, he also calls them *schismatics*. This is because the Wallachians were not only Orthodox, but their “Wallachian faith” differed from Orthodoxy by a special worship of Saint Dymitr. Their oaths, as recorded in court proceedings, ended with the phrase of “so help me God and Saint Dymitr” (*Ita me Deus adiuvet et s. Dmytr* in Latin) (JAWOR 2000:19, 24). The Wallachians also gained a bad reputation as horse and sheep thieves. The old court records show that they were also accused of a variety of other transgressions: producing and distributing fake coins, beatings and other types of bodily harm, rape, arson and acting in cahoots with the highwaymen. This dubious reputation coupled with a different way of life and a different faith was causing a great mistrust of the locals. There would be panic and protests at a mere suggestion of a possible Wallachian settlement. In 1516 a local castellan had to assuage the fears of the Church officials in Kraków that the planned settlement in the woods behind Myślenice was to be settled with Christians and not Wallachians and it was to suppress the attacks by the latter (JAWOR 2000:164). This bad reputation persisted over the years (and centuries). It is important to bear in mind that the shepherds come from that Wallachian legacy of real and perceived violence, lawlessness and *schismatism*.

However, there was one enduring piece of the Wallachian heritage that remained firmly in place for hundreds of years: the pastoral system. Not much has changed in the recorded accounts when the *Górale* were first “discovered” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the ethnographic descriptions of the 1960s, when the anthropological interest in the pastoral *Górale* ways started to wane.

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This Wallachian-inherited pastoral system formed the backbone of making the living in the mountains for centuries and it is important to note that although the sheep belonged to individuals, sheep herding was a collective endeavour. The success of the yearly venture required the cooperation of a head shepherd (*baca*), who gathered the sheep from many owners (*gazdowie*) and guaranteed their well-being with his reputation. In the event of one of the owners missing a sheep at the end of the season, the *baca* compensated him with one of his own. The *gazdowie* and the shepherds (*juhasi*) were paid in cheese. The amount on the cheese paid out to the owners depended on the milk yield of the sheep which was measured at the beginning of the season (for an in-depth description of the pastoral system see KOPCZYŃSKA-JAWORSKA 1958, 1969, 1981). The amount of the milk produced by the sheep was measured one week after the sheep had reached their summer pasture. This was to prevent “cheating” by *gazdowie*, who could feed their sheep grain or try other tricks to temporarily increase the milk yield, before releasing the sheep to the *baca*. This would result in them being paid more throughout the season. *Mirowanie* was therefore a very important event. Sheep cheese, which was then fermented and salted to form *bryndza*, was a very important food source for the *Górale* during the winter months. One must bear in mind that the soil of the Podhale was infertile with meagre crop yields. The previous, purely agricultural settlements had failed there. The pastoral enterprise and the sheep cheese were therefore essential to the community’s long-term survival. Since the obligations between the *baca* and the *gazdowie* are now settled with money (which usually comes in form of an EU subsidy) and the sheep cheese is no longer necessary for survival, is no longer practiced today.

### **Górale Ethnic Identity and Its Origins**

Nowadays, when it comes to an objective analysis of what makes the *Górale* an ethnic group, the supporting body of evidence available is rather scant: their origins, language and religion, in and of themselves, do not amount to much.

The local dialect is a variation of standard Polish while their religion is Roman Catholic like the rest of Poland (whereas the legendary Wallachians were a rather exotic shade of Orthodox, one of the much suppressed ‘differentiae’). However, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Poles were in search of their national identity and, given their peculiar stateless situation, they wanted to establish their rightful place on the map of Europe.

When the *Górale* were ‘discovered’ and described by travellers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the culture of Poland’s very own ‘noble savages’ (who lived in splendid geographical isolation) became ideal material in order to promote the nation-state. The highlands were treated as an ark of sorts in which the original (and best) Polish qualities survived into modern times.

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The *Górale* were used as a building block for the future re-birth of the Polish nation. This great awe of all things *Górale*, such as their physical toughness, folk wisdom and intelligence, continued to be discussed in travel descriptions and laid the foundation for not just the nation, but also for the special treatment of the *Górale* by the rest of the Polish population, hence the position of the *Górale* in Polish culture is a privileged one. This special relationship between the lowlanders and the highlanders continues in many ways to this day, as there tends to be a special, unspoken covenant between the *Górale* and the rest of the Polish people, which has put the *Górale* and *Górale* culture on a pedestal and thus helped to keep it separate and distinct from the rest of Poland.



**Figure 2:** The traditional highland clothes are an important part to the pastoral revival celebrations and festivals. Source: [www.redykarpacki.pl](http://www.redykarpacki.pl)

This special *Górale* status can afford them some advantages as long as they act (or dress) the ‘*Górale* way’. As one shepherd and pastoral activist, *baca* Krzysztof, stated:

*“When we go to see the minister for example, or to take care of some official business, we dress in Górale clothes. If we go to some important conference or discussion, we dress the Górale way. If the meeting is less important than I take just a shirt and a hat.”*



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*Górale* identity, from the very first travel accounts, were very closely linked with pastoralism. The spring time and the accompanying celebrations, when the sheep were being taken up to the high alpine pastures, made a special impression on the Romantic era writers and travellers:

*"It is in those last days of May that the pastoral trek of the Górale begins and flows into the deep Tatras and the surrounding country. This beautiful movement underscores further the budding young life of nature"* (GOSZCZYŃSKI 1853:143).

The sights and sounds of that trek, the sheep bells, the creaking of the carts, the seeming connection of the "pastoral trek" to the cycle of nature, affected this young poet and many others who followed him. Pastoralism was at the core of that connection, which all that, it shaped the *Górale* physically (as they are tough, strong and fast to withstand the elements), intellectually (since they are smart for they had to face nature's adversity) and also spiritually:

*"This steady pastoral life, divorced from the rest of the world, is very well liked by the Górale. And there is no arguing, that when the weather is good, in the nature full of incredible vistas, it has an unspeakable appeal, well understood by Górale. This wondering around with sheep on the steep crags with all its dangers, requires a strongly built body, and a daring, enterprising spirit. This is truly a poetic side of the life of the Górale"* (ZEJSZNER 1845:12).

Indeed, the link between the *Górale* culture and pastoralism was very strong. The life of the highland communities was built around the important dates of the pastoral calendar which stretched from the spring *mieszanie* to the autumn *redyk*. During the summer season there were many other celebrations and festivals taking place in the *hale* (alpine pastures), as songs were sung and dances were danced. Many of those customs and songs then remained petrified in the form of folklore and music. However, as the pastoral economy went into a decline after the Second World War and then again in the 1990s, there was a growing disconnect between what was performed on stages and what the actual everyday experience of life had become. As one of the activists and practitioners of the revived pastoralism, *baca* Krzysztof, explains:

*"The source of Górale culture is the traditional sheep economy. If this is cut off, all that will remain, I say, will be an open-air museum, with dressed up fakers."*

*Baca* Krzysztof was first a musician in one of the local folklore bands before deciding to become a head shepherd. He felt that re-creating the sheep-related celebrations and rituals without sheep created a disconnect from what he feels is the 'source' of *Górale* culture. Given the amount of soul-searching and conscious reflection that goes into the current effort to revive the pastoralist culture, there are a number of *bacas* for whom pastoralism is still a way of life handed to them by their fathers. While I have met many of them during my fieldwork, the *bacas* are a small group. There are only around 40 of the *bacas* officially qualified to make the iconic, PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) certified, *oscypek* cheese in the

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whole of Poland (IJHARS Kraków 2015). But some of the most vocal, publicly and medially active members of that small community are the ones who, like *baca* Krzysztof, came to this profession from other walks of life. They see pastoralism as more than just a way to make a living. They treat it as their mission, to bring back that, which was once fundamental to the *Górale* way of life.



**Figure 3:** *Being a juhas is still, a tough 24 hour job. A juhas with his flock and dogs.* Photo: author

Since the popularity of the *Górale* image in Polish popular culture is still very strong, the image has been used by the advertising industry to promote a variety of items: margarine, milk, sauces, medicines, paints, blankets and linen and even cars and their parts. But the most problematic product is, of course, alcohol. The use of the *Górale* image by advertisers is what Kazimierz Sikora calls a ‘cultural appropriation of national symbols for the purposes of economic activity, marketing and increasingly ruthless competition for customers’ (SIKORA 2007:417). The male *Góral* portrayed in the Harnaś brand of beer (just one of many such ‘highland’ beers on the market) has all the qualities listed by Orkan in the Legend of Podhale. He has a towering build, with superhuman strength and agility. The entrepreneurial mind is, somewhat problematically, being fuelled by alcohol. The image of the male *Góral* is used because of its overwhelming, culturally conditioned, positive connotations. These positive

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connotations also help encourage public appeal in favour of the pastoralist revival. Although one has to wonder if the current use and overuse of the image by the advertising industry will eventually tarnish these positive perceptions, which is a matter of concern for the region's intellectuals. Furthermore, modern times have brought such changes to the peasant way of life that most rural regional cultures have by and large disintegrated, with the *Górale* as an exception. Their culture has not only survived but thrived, thanks to the combination of historical events described above. Whether the *Górale* will be able to maintain their difference is up for debate. In this paper, I argue that the pastoralist revival is a way of re-asserting their separateness by re-claiming the *Górale* image from others through modifying their identity completely from how it was portrayed after the Second World War.

### **Disconnecting from “the Source” after the Second World War**

After the Second World War, the establishment of the Tatra National Park gradually put an end to pastoralism in the Tatras. This directly affected the economic system of the highland life, but also, and perhaps equally or more importantly, the social system based on pastoralism. Melcher Extromer (1987:20) asserts that the pastoral socio-economic system existed independently, parallel to the official system (EXTROMER 1987:20). The post war era coincided with the establishment of the new communist regime in Poland. Many felt that this assault on the existing social structure was a deliberate attempt to dismantle it (MISZTAL 1996). In any case, it was a deadly blow. Yet, as James Clifford points out that:

*“Groups negotiating their identity in contexts of domination and exchange persist, patch themselves together in ways different from a living organism. A community, unlike a body, can lose a central “organ” and not die. All the critical elements of identity are in specific conditions replaceable: language, land, blood, leadership, religion. Recognized, viable tribes exist in which any one or even most of these elements are missing, replaced, or largely transformed” (CLIFFORD 1988:338).*

In this case, the central organ was the pastoralist system which provided a framework of organisation that was of paramount importance to the unity of the *Górale* communities. The system provided not only an economic basis for the well-being of its society, but also was a backbone around which the social life of the *Górale* was organized. During the pastoral season, the villages were depopulated, because everyone was up on the alpine pastures with the sheep (and goats, cows and oxen). It was also a time of festivities and merry-making, singing, dancing and a time when suitable marriages were arranged – Extromer reports how the informants in the villages spoke with great regret about these times (EXTROMER 1987:21). Indeed, the nostalgia for this by-gone era is still alive today, thirty years on from Extromer's fieldwork. Frequently, the families who used to graze the *hale* (alpine pastures)

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in the Tatras still go there once a year (with the blessing of the Tatra National Park) and spend time merry-making and telling their children and grandchildren stories about their forefathers' way of life. *Tygodnik Podhalański*, the local newspaper, reports on these nostalgic events every year.

The pastoral system was also independent of that of the Polish state, as it provided a different set of goals and career paths within the *Górale* community. While in other parts of Poland, children might engage in universal dreams of becoming a fireman, policemen, an engineer or a teacher, the young *Górale* boys aspired to be a *juhas* and then a *baca*. This was also a "career path" which also promised financial security, as illustrated by the all adage "*kto ma owce ten ma co chce*" which literally translates to "he who has sheep, can have everything". Indeed, the jobs of *baca* and *juhas* had very high social standing. This past respectability and prosperity is reflected in the biographies of people who were still *juhasi* in the 1980s. *Baca* Antek from Podhale, for example, told me how, as a young man, he worked as a *juhas* for three years. His earnings allowed him to buy a few hectares of land, build a house and get married. But later on, working as a *juhas* for three seasons could not provide anyone with a foundation for life. Being a shepherd was no longer as lucrative, nor was it perceived as a desirable occupation for a young man. The professions of *baca* and *juhas* lost their standing in the turbulent 1990s and only in 2010 have they been re-entered into the official jobs register (DROST 2010). That said, they still have a long way to go to garner the respectability they once had.

The effect on the *Górale* after the post war shock to the pastoralist system was studied in depth by Extromer. Losing its connection to the "source" the *Górale* society tried to defend itself by amplifying the internal unity through defining themselves as an ethnic group founded on what he called "(fictitious?) *Górale* ethnicity". Based on the fieldwork conducted in 1981 and 1984, Extromer concluded that what happened after the Second World War in the Tatras effectively amounted to the dissolution of the pastoral system. To consider this event as only economically conditioned would be, he concluded, "a vulgarisation". It was, he argued "a threat to the social structure, anchored in the ideological superstructure that is most strongly experienced" (EXTROMER 1987:21). The adaptation of the pastoral society to the new mode of production offered might, as the colonial examples have shown, lead to peripheralization of the society, with the economic and social degeneration to follow. The society could try to construct a new economic base to ensure its continued existence, but it may also try to keep the social structure by consciously trying to amplify the internal unity. The way the *Górale* society dealt with it, Extromer argued, was to strengthen ethnic identity by identifying itself as an ethnic group founded on what he believed to be largely tenuous *Górale* identity. Extromer studied marriage and inheritance patterns and concluded that the *Górale* strove to keep the land – with which they identified themselves – within the group. Marrying an outsider from the city or even from another village in the region was frowned

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upon (EXTROMER 1987:23). What supported this move economically was the widespread economic migration to the United States, where money earned there during two years of hard work amounted to a fortune back home. It was an economic basis for making the *Górale* society feasible again which allowed it to maintain the social structure funded on the pastoral system with its old patterns of inheritance and marriage. Ethnic identification also legitimised this way of life (EXTROMER 1987:25). However, within this rearranged value system, those wanting to pursue higher education found that they had no place within the socioeconomic structure of the villages and had to look for jobs elsewhere (EXTROMER 1987:26). While nowadays, those with higher education are at a forefront of this renewed push to reconnect *Górale* culture with its pastoralist core.

This is an important change taking place, because up until now, while the *Górale* culture had its privileged position in the general Polish culture, the *Górale* themselves were not its gatekeepers and custodians. It was the learned ethnographers and ethno-musicologists who stood on guard and decreed what was and what was not *Górale* culture. They were the ones who made decisions on which works of local art were museum-worthy and which bands played the true *Górale* music. Janusz Barański describes a situation in which a young member of a folklore group almost cried when he realised, after the fact, that during a stage performance of the “traditional” *Górale* wedding, he missed an important invocation and was certain that the juror had noticed it (BARAŃSKI 2013:41). These specialists took on a role that the old people “who remembered how these things were done” once had in the community. Barański refers to this as a home (as opposed to foreign) colonisation effort (BARAŃSKI 2013:44). This fault line separates the centre, (the city) from the periphery, (the village). Or in more frank terms it separates the elites from the riff-raff where the members of the elite stand guard over “traditional” rural values at the expense of peripheral interference.

But even in the 1980s when Extromer studied the effects of the post-war dissolution of the pastoral system, events occurred that ensured the survival of its remnants. By the late 1980s it became apparent that, without sheep, the high mountain pastures would revert to forest with a significant loss of local biodiversity, as well as the deterioration of the landscape (SKAWIŃSKI 2014:9). The argument of cultural loss was also raised. As a compromise, in 1981 a bill was passed that allowed for the “cultural grazing of sheep and cows” in the Tatra National Park thus acknowledging not only pastoralism's environmental benefits, but also its cultural importance for the people of the region (CIURZYCKI 2003:81-82). As the name suggests “cultural grazing” has a cultural component. Apart from setting limitations on the number and type of livestock shepherds may graze, it requires them to use traditional utensils for making cheese, as well as to dress in traditional costume and speak in local dialect for the benefit of the park's visitors.

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The fall of the communist system in 1989 marked a period of yet another radical change for Polish pastoralists. I call it the second and final dissolution of the pastoral system which survived beyond the Tatras. With the end of the centrally planned economy, state dairies no longer acted as the main buyers of their output, forcing shepherds to find a new, private clientele. Furthermore, in 1990 the world wool prices halved due to Australian wool producers' ill-conceived reserve price strategies. Sheep numbers fell from around 4 million in 1980s (GORZELAK 2010) to 250 000 in the new millennium (Eurostat n.d.) with only a gradual decline in later years. There were 227 000 sheep in 2015 (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2015:3). With the number of sheep sharply dropping, so too did the number of pastoralists. Since then, Poland joined the European Union with its system of subsidies which changed the social and economic landscape of pastoralism. It also provided additional money for cultural and environmental measures of which pastoralism could become a part by getting involved in programs, such as Owca Plus (Sheep Plus) in Silesia. These efforts have brought about a renewed interest in pastoralism and a (re)invention of old customs. Frequently, the Wallachian origins are being played up, which is something new and unique to these new efforts. It was not something that the highlanders, especially of Podhale identified with. But since this Wallachian heritage has no heirs, as the Wallachians have dissolved into the local populations (see KOCÓJ 2015 for a discussion), it is readily appropriated to form a pan-Carpathian pastoral link. As part of that selective revival effort, as Barth pointed out, "a great amount of attention may be paid to revival of select traditional culture traits and to the establishment of historical traditions to justify and glorify the idioms and the identity" (BARTH 1969:35).

## Conclusions

As Barth points out, maintaining ethnic identity depends on the existence of another ethnic identity. In the case of the Polish highlanders, part of the boundary maintaining mechanism was that unspoken covenant between the rest of Poland and the *Górale* people whose culture was treated as the building blocks for the 19<sup>th</sup> century establishment of the Polish nation. This usefulness is part of the reason why this boundary remained stable over the years. Interestingly, unlike in the colonial examples, the "prized goals" were not "outside the field organized by minority's culture and categories" (BARTH 1969:31). The source of the highland culture, the old pastoral system used to provide those for the *Górale*. The system was so robust that, for a while, it functioned parallel to that of the state. It was only when it was dismantled after the Second World War that the *Górale* had to find different ways to avoid becoming marginalised socially and economically. They did this by defining themselves as an ethnic group, founded on the *Górale* ethnicity.

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Today, after what I called the second and final dissolution of the pastoral system (the shock of the late 1980s and early 1990s), the *Górale* ethnicity and identity are being played up again. These efforts are visible in the celebration new and revived around the source of the highland culture – the traditional sheep economy.

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