

'Washing men's feet':

gender, care and migration in Albania during and after communism

This article compares the interrelationships between gender, family structures and intra-family care arrangements during two markedly different periods of Albania's recent history. The first of these, the communist era, was dominated by the autocratic state-socialist regime of Enver Hoxha. In contrast, the post-communist period that followed was characterised by a kind of reactive free-for-all capitalism and high rates of both internal and international migration, the latter mostly to Greece and Italy.

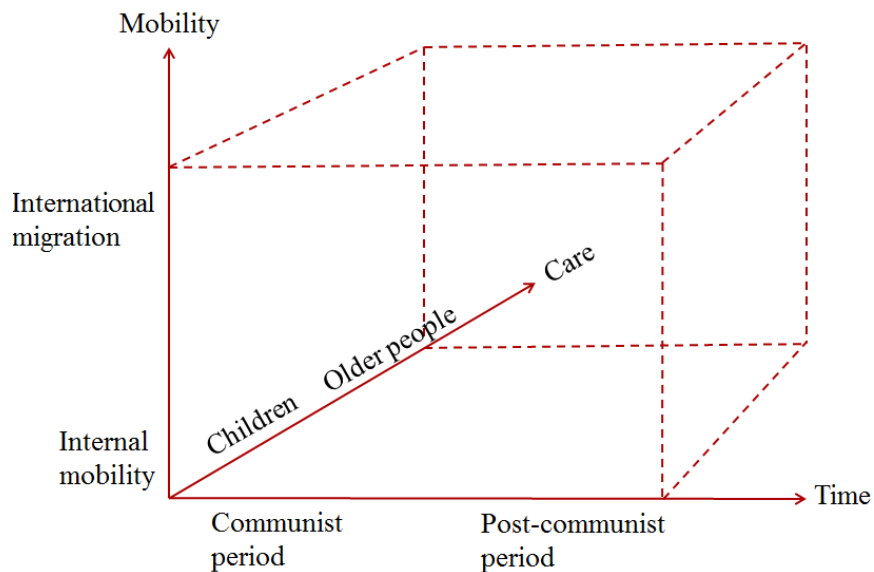
Families have been torn apart by this mass emigration, resulting in husbands separated from their wives and children, and older generations left behind by their migrant children. All this contrasts with family, residential and care arrangements during the communist period when not only were families generally living in close proximity, but also state welfare was available to support vulnerable and isolated individuals. Across these periods, however, the burden of care responsibilities fell almost wholly on women, despite the egalitarian ideology of the socialist era and the potentially modernising and empowering effects of post-socialist migration on the agency of women. The article provides a valuable lesson in historicising regimes of gender, family and care across dramatically contrasting social models.

Keywords: Albania; socialism; post-socialist Eastern Europe; migration; gender; care

Introduction

This article takes a diachronic perspective on the evolution of migration, gender relations and intergenerational care within families across two highly contrasting periods of social organisation: state socialism and neoliberal capitalism. The setting for this historical comparison is Albania, which experienced the extreme of both social orders. For nearly 45 years the country was in the grip of the most severe, orthodox-Stalinist and isolationist of the East European communist regimes. During this era, emigration was banned and regarded as an act of treason. Internal mobility was tightly controlled. After the 'democratic turn' of 1990–92, a free-for-all type capitalism was unleashed with dizzying speed. The main characteristic of the 'new Albania' has been mass migration, both abroad, chiefly to Greece and Italy, and internally, focused on the capital Tirana. Across these two contrasting eras – the relatively immobile world of Albanian communism, and the hyper-mobility of the post-communist period – we focus on three key aspects of how society was (dis)organised: family life, gender, and the administration of intergenerational care.

In the next section, we briefly describe the projects from which our empirical data is drawn, as well as the field and analytical methods used. Following that, we outline key features of the Albanian population and its (im)mobility across the two periods in question, and we delve into the conceptual fields of family structure, gender, and care drain. Then follow the two main sections of the article, corresponding to the two periods of Albania's history under discussion. For each period, we explore the interrelationships between migration and (im)mobility on the one hand, and changing gender roles, family organisation, and intergenerational care responsibilities and experiences on the other. Care relations are examined in two cross-generational directions: towards children and towards the older generations. Figure 1 summarises the research design. The conclusion stresses the importance of historicising regimes of family solidarity, gender and care across dramatically different social models.



Caption for Figure 1. Interaction of mobility and care over time

Source: Russell King

Projects and methods

This article draws from four projects which the authors have carried out over the past ten years. Although each project is distinct, they have overlapping research questions including a central concern with gender, family and care. They also share common methodological approaches: a reliance on in-depth interviews with 'ordinary' Albanians, migrants and non-migrants, who 'tell their stories' in the loose format of a personal life-history narrative.

Based on Vullnetari's (2004) ethnographic observations in one village and in-depth interviews with 13 older residents with adult children abroad, the first project, essentially a pilot, investigated *the impact of migration on older persons in rural Albania*. This was followed by Vullnetari's (2012) DPhil research on *internal and international migration in Albania* where family structures, gender and care were key themes to emerge. Ethnographic observation and 150 interviews were carried out in rural and urban Albania and in the Greek city of Thessaloniki. The third project analysed the *links between gender, remittances and development in Albania* (Vullnetari and King 2011). It involved 'twinned' fieldwork in three villages in south-east Albania and in Thessaloniki. Field research comprised a large-N

household survey of remittance-receivers together with 25 in-depth interviews with remittance-receivers/administrators (mainly wives and parents of migrants in Greece) and 20 interviews with remittance-senders in Thessaloniki. Gender was at the forefront of analysis in this project. Issues of cross-border care, both for children and for older relatives, were prominent in many interviews. Fourthly, the research project on *everyday life in communist Albania* has gender, family, work and (im)mobility as key themes. Fieldwork comprises of 120 oral-history narratives collected from older research participants in various locations throughout Albania.

The first three projects thus deal with the post-1990 mass migration while the fourth with the preceding communist period of banned emigration and controlled internal moves.

Albania: the migration background

The 45 years of the communist era were a prolonged period of near-impossible emigration for Albanian citizens. Attempts to exit the country by crossing the heavily guarded border were regarded as criminal acts and those caught trying to escape were imprisoned or internally exiled. For those few who did escape, retribution was meted out to their relatives, persecuted for the rest of their lives. Movement *within* the country was tightly controlled via an 'internal passport' system, borrowed from Stalin's Russia (Matthews 1993); a policy of 'rural retention' of population was implemented, so that cities grew only slowly since rural-urban migration was suppressed (Sjöberg 1994). Instead people were transferred to newly created industrial settlements and to areas of land reclamation and agricultural intensification.

The managed mobility of the Albanian population during the socialist period and the punishment regimes of imprisonment, labour camps and exile inevitably caused family separation. These were made all the more painful by uncertainty over how long these detentions would last, and by the difficulties of travel within a rudimentary transport

infrastructure. Nevertheless, for those families – the majority – who were able to live together in nuclear households and extended-family villages and neighbourhoods, family life and associated care were supported by close proximity and a safety-net of healthcare and nursery services.

The collapse of the communist regime triggered mass migration, the contours and scale of which have been described in a now-extensive literature (for overviews see Carletto et al. 2006; INSTAT 2004a; King, Mai, and Schwandner-Sievers 2005; Vullnetari 2007, 2012). For 2010, the 'stock' of Albanians abroad (including foreign-born children) was estimated at 1.43 million by the World Bank (2011, 54). Given that the 2011 census enumerated an Albanian resident population of only 2.8 million (INSTAT 2012), the impact of external migration on Albania's shrinking and ageing population is clearly evident. Micro-states aside, no other country has witnessed such a large-scale relative emigration in recent years. Most emigrant Albanians are in Greece and Italy, the remainder in other European countries and in North America.

Initially, most emigration was irregular, crossing the mountainous border with Greece clandestinely or using smuggler-agents to be ferried to southern Italy. Regularisation schemes implemented in Italy and in Greece in the late 1990s and early 2000s enabled many Albanians to 'get papers', bring over family members and settle longer-term. The recent economic crisis, especially severe in Greece, has destabilised this process of settlement, creating a new round of economic and existential instability. Amongst migrants, unemployment has increased, due especially to the contraction of the construction sector in which many Albanian men have been employed. Many Albanian women, working as home helps and carers to Greek and Italian families, have likewise lost their jobs or had their hours reduced. According to Michail (2013), one effect of the Greek crisis has been to force Albanian migrants into a more transnational lifestyle with some members, usually men,

going back to seek work or resume farming in Albania, whilst their wives and school-age children stay in Greece. Thus a new phase of family separation results.

The post-communist period has also seen intense internal migration towards major towns and cities, with severe depopulation of mountain districts. The drivers behind internal migration are essentially twofold. First, there is the search for better employment prospects away from a collapsed rural economy. Second, people wanted to be able to access a more 'modern' urban lifestyle with better schools, health, entertainment and shopping facilities (Çaro, Bailey, and van Wissen 2012; Cila 2006). This migration stream too was composed mainly of young and working-age family members. Many older people have ended up living on their own, their children either abroad or elsewhere in Albania.

Key concepts

Our study draws on the following concepts which have been widely discussed and theorised in the literature. First, our analysis is located within a social context of *family solidarity and patriarchy*. Several studies have documented the 'typical' Albanian family structure, part of a wider 'Balkan' family system (see Backer 1983; Shryock 1988; Whitaker 1981). In this system, the family constitutes 'a basic socio-cultural value', with patriarchy ordering and organising the lives of both men and women 'with consequences that have no parallel in Western societies' (Kaser 1997, 151–152). These differences are even more accentuated in the Albanian context – arguably the most rural and conservative society of the region. Some of this literature on Albania veers towards hyperbole and exaggeration. Nevertheless, the 'traditional' Albanian family has certain key features that serve as a starting point for our analysis. First, patriarchal hierarchy confers status, privilege and omnipotence to age and male gender. Second, sons are exalted over daughters. Third, unmarried females are first 'owned' by their fathers before being passed into the 'possession' of the husbands upon marriage. As in other societies, *care duties* are usually shouldered by women. Unlike many

other societies, however, marriage switches the direction of female responsibility to care for the husband's family (notably his parents) and not her own parents, who would be looked after by their sons and more specifically those sons' wives. Particular responsibility is vested in the youngest son to ultimately take care (again, with his wife bearing the brunt) of elderly or sick parents.

The communist ethos sought to break down patriarchy and the clannish power of extended families, with mixed results. The post-socialist migratory experience alongside a society undergoing rapid urbanisation and technological modernisation had additional effects in reshaping these gender roles and relations. Nevertheless, patriarchal norms and customs continue to have a strong influence over household formation and gendered care obligations (INSTAT 2004b; Murzaku and Dervishi 2003; Nixon 2009). In some areas and amongst some social groups, a rejuvenation and reworking of 'traditional' patriarchal practices took place in the wake of the melting away of state power (Schwandner-Sievers 2001). A common feature of post-socialist transformations throughout the Eastern bloc, women's retreat into domesticity was to some degree a backlash against the 'worker' identity imposed on them throughout the socialist years (Einhorn 1993; Funk and Mueller 1993; Kligman 1992; Pine 2002).

In a context of hyper-mobility and large-scale emigration, many Albanian households are split in multi-localities both internally and transnationally – for instance, between the village of origin, Tirana, and Greece. Moreover, this *translocal geographical positioning* (Brickell and Datta 2011) can be highly dynamic, as individual family members come and go, or move on, or return-migrate. For example, many rural families send young men abroad for a number of years in order to finance a subsequent transfer of the family base to Tirana or another important city (Vullnetari 2012).

Another key concept grounding our article is *care drain* (Bettio, Simonazzi, and Villa 2006). Somewhat parallel to 'brain drain', care drain denotes the loss of care capabilities in

societies where demographic and economic changes – in our case the physical removal of the erstwhile carers through migration – have eroded the ability of relatives to provide care to those family members in need, such as young children, the elderly and the sick (Vullnetari and King 2008). Care is also an arena through which we question practices and politics of power, and the production of inequalities at a range of scales: from the personal, to the family, in local communities and globally (Lawson 2007). The need for critical geographies to engage with such concerns becomes even more pressing in the face of an increasing extension of market relations into the 'caring realms' accompanied by reduced public provision of social support (Lawson 2007; see also review in Popke 2006). Our historical perspective from Albania in this article presents an instructive illustration of such contemporary societal shifts that have reproduced geographies of inequality, and changing key social relationships and values. The analysis of our data draws on and enriches the established research on the transnational and distance-based challenges to aged and child caring pioneered by – amongst others – Baldassar, Baldock, and Wilding (2007), Carling, Menjivar, and Schmalzbauer (2012), Mattingly (2001) and Parreñas (2005).

In this article we use a gender analytical lens, according to which *gender and generation/life cycle 'organise' individuals' behaviour and thoughts 'through an array of social institutions from the family to the state' which are axes 'around which power and privilege revolve'* (Mahler and Pessar 2001, 442–443). As Gal and Kligman (2000, 117) assert, such a perspective is key to understanding the dynamics of socialism and post-socialism.

Socialist Albania: replacing or preserving patriarchal orders?

One of the most frequently asked questions about socialism is, 'did socialism emancipate women?' Massino (2008, 3) argues that until recently most scholarly research presented life under socialism as universally oppressive. A nuanced interpretation of the pace and quality

of change in gender relations during these years needs to take into account two broad considerations. First, there was indeed an overarching framework – the Marxist-Leninist doctrine – which provided a kind of ideological compass for all socialist societies, forming the base for what is known as 'socialist gender order'. Broadly speaking, its key features as played out in 'actually existing socialist societies' (Verdery 1996) included an attempt by the state to erase gender inequality (along with ethnic and class differences), alongside the creation of 'socially atomized persons directly dependent on a paternalist state' (Gal and Kligman 2000, 5). Against this overall framework, there is the specificity of each socialist society – in terms of historical, geopolitical and socio-cultural context – our second consideration. Although women in the Eastern bloc countries, like those in Western Europe and the United States, had been considered second-class citizens lacking political, legal and economic rights well into the twentieth century, women's position in Albania lagged far behind, as if enclosed in a medieval time capsule. We provide just one illustrative example: on the eve of World War II, 90 per cent of females were illiterate, the country had only 21 female teachers, and less than 3 per cent of secondary school students were girls (Hall 1994, 83).

The traditional bastion of patriarchy in Albania was the large extended family, comprising up to 50 individuals in some areas. While such households provided a certain level of wealth through economies of scale and division of labour, they were underpinned by a strong patriarchal hierarchy fitting the 'Balkan' family type defined by Kaser (1997). They functioned as autonomous reproductive and productive units which the (communist) Party considered a threat. Indeed, some families in the north of Albania resisted the communist rise to power through armed opposition. The post-war government was keen to break them down and they became prime targets in the 'war against the remnants of the past' which were said to 'hamper social progress' in the country. Toma, an 87-year-old man from Kelmend, remembers how his family, which by 1967 comprised 33 members, was under

pressure to split because 'the Party didn't want large families'. The land reform was one tool to achieve this goal. Between 1945 and 1967 land and cattle were first confiscated without compensation from large landed estates and wealthier families and distributed to poor or landless peasants. In a second stage these were collectivised in Soviet-style cooperatives. Large rural families had no choice but to split up given that their economic base – whether land or farm animals – had been undermined. In the following long passage, Lule, 62, reminisces – with a degree of nostalgia – about her childhood in one such extended family in rural south-east Albania, revealing interesting details about the gendered division of labour:

My father had a large apple orchard ... lorries travelled from Yugoslavia to buy our apples. We were a large family, 25 people, I was the youngest child. [...] In this large family my father was the household head. [...] He managed the commerce and the financial side, and the work of the other two brothers who were younger than him; whereas the wife of one of my uncles [...] organised the work of the women and kept the day-to-day [financial] accounts on the running of the household. It was perfect organisation. And we got on well. We used to work in shifts like this: my mother would cook for the entire family, for 25 people, for three days: bread, pies, everything. The other two women did the work around the house and looked after the cattle and sheep. Then it was the turn of one of the other women to take responsibility for feeding the family for the next three days, and then of the other one. The family had a large wood-burning furnace where bread was baked for the entire family. So the family was well-organised, all was done in agreement, there was no envy, how can I explain, all worked honestly as brothers and sisters. [...] As for the children, each mother looked after her own children – feeding, washing, putting them to bed. [...] Men and women ate together in one room whereas all children ate separately in another room, where they

also played with one another [...] Then the cooperative came along and all the land and cattle were taken away, so we found it difficult to live well in such a big family.

In urban areas too, gendered hierarchies were deeply ingrained into the fabric of everyday life, even in the most 'modern' part of the country, as this quote from Eli (F60, Tirana) shows. Women's subdued status was reflected in the expectation to wash men's feet when the latter returned home after a hard day's work.

Men didn't help at all [in the housework], absolutely not at all [...] Women did it all, men were there to give orders. [...] The man would come home [from work] and give orders: he wanted everything ready, he wanted his shirt washed and cleaned, he changed [his clothes] every day, he wanted his trousers ironed every day, his shoes polished and his socks changed. We used to wash men's feet. [...] My mother washed my father's feet. Later I started doing it as well, because she would tell me 'If you don't do it, it's a shame'. These were the customs. Men ruled over women. Women in fact suffered a lot, they had all the burden of the household, the burden of the children, they took them to school, looked after the children, made sure they did their homework. My father didn't even know what school and what class we attended ... all of us seven children, he didn't know. He would come home from work, have something to eat, watch telly, and go to bed.

Negotiating gendered power in the household

Similar to other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, women's position in Albania during the socialist years reflected a dual negotiation of Marxist theory and contextual practicalities (Penn and Massino 2009). While Marx himself is best known for his writings on class-based economic and social domination, Engels is recognised as more directly engaging with gender, the family and the 'woman question'. Engels ([1884] 2010)

argued that women's subordination is a fruit of capitalist relations of production and ownership, and that women's lack of participation in paid labour made them dependent on the family's patriarchs. Women's liberation and equality to men would thus come from increased participation in the labour force, which socialism promised to deliver. Albania's intensive post-war industrialisation created increasing demand for labour, which in turn provided pressure and opportunities for women to take up paid work outside the home; by 1989 nearly half of all women were employed (Tarifa 1998, 269). The pace of women's increased participation in paid labour was hardly matched by men's uptake of domestic and care work, resulting in women's 'double burden'. Their shift in the collective or factory was followed by a second shift of household and caring work at home (Corrin 1992; Einhorn 1993; Gal and Kligman 2000). The scarcity of basic consumer goods aggravated the situation, so work had to be done manually. Meanwhile, the state's efforts to socialise aspects of family life such as childcare fell short in many ways, whether in quality or quantity of provision (Penn and Massino 2009). The following quote from Zana, 51, a former worker in Tirana's 'Stalin' textile plant, describes a day in her life in the late 1970s:

The first shift started at 7 am, and ended at 3 or 3.30 pm. The second was until 11 pm and the third until 7 am. [...] When I came home in the afternoon [after the first shift] I had to prepare lunch – well, after-lunch as it was past 3 – I had to clean the house, wash the clothes. Clothes were washed by hand, we didn't have a washing machine, it was terrible. [...] Good thing we were young and strong. We didn't go to bars, because it was shameful for us women; men, yes, they did go out for a drink. We women had all these [things to do]: prepare food, wash, do the chores, everything. Then we went again to work the next day, very tired after only five or six hours of sleep.

Progressive change was generational and driven by two main factors: first, post-war industrialisation stimulating rural-urban migration; second, the expansion of basic primary

education. Nascent industries became locations of employment for many young rural women (and men). From the 1960s onwards, however, such migration was strictly controlled through an internal passport system. As a result, marriage to – and therefore dependency on – an urban, often much older, man became the primary means of escape from rural isolation for many young women. At the same time, universalisation of primary education helped raise girls' hopes and expectations. By 1989 female literacy reached 90 per cent and more than half of all university students were women (Tarifa 1992). Similar trends were observed in other socialist countries such as Bulgaria (Brunnbauer 2000). Yet, for many Albanian women, especially in rural areas, prolonging education was a battle against patriarchy, first and foremost in their own homes. The story of Dila, 48, reveals the complex mechanisms of negotiating one's position as a young female within the household:

I completed the primary school [eight-year cycle until age 14] with good results, because my parents had promised me that if I studied hard they would allow me to continue my education... it was the only thing I dreamt of. This was because I saw how people who had no schooling suffered in the most difficult jobs... A scholarship came to my village; I was offered this scholarship and we discussed it in my family. But my brother, who was 20 at the time, was against it; he said 'sister is a grown-up woman now'. [...] My father listened to my brother ... and for me everything finished! My world went upside down. I was given a flock of 150 sheep to look after... My mother tried to pacify me and convince me to accept my fate and not to cause any conflict between my father and my brother... I cried all the time and stopped eating. Every day I was alone as my parents and siblings went to work or school. [...] One day my sister... told our grandmother who asked me to explain. I told her [everything]. After she made me promise I would study hard and be a good girl [i.e. with good morals], she spoke to my father in private and changed his mind.

A number of analytical points are illustrated here, the most important of which is the forms that women's resistance took, which de Certeau ([1984] 2011) calls everyday 'tactics', illustrated here by Dila's 'hunger strike'. Coupled with that is female solidarity negotiated within patriarchal gender-age hierarchies. Older married women – in this case the grandmother, a respected figure because of her age and position in the family – negotiate behind the scene with the men – in this case her son – on behalf of younger women. Third is the generational power shift – from the older patriarch to the younger man in the family. Despite his age, Dila's brother had gained an important position within the family through the regular income he earned as a truck driver, a profession which had given him an opportunity to work outside of his native village and travel widely in Albania. Finally, similar interviews reveal that the state's policy to strongly promote women's education had important impacts on changing attitudes and behaviours. Dila went on to complete a science degree and her younger sisters were able to follow in the trail she blazed.

'Geriatrization' of social reproduction, grandparenting and care in older age

Although large patriarchal families were becoming a thing of the past, creating the ideal nuclear 'socialist family' as promoted by the Party-state proved difficult, not least because of a shortage of accommodation. In rural areas low incomes coupled with strict regulations on building meant that it took several years before a newly-wed couple could split from the core family. Restrictions on out-migration increased population pressures in the countryside. Albania was unique amongst East European socialist countries in its efforts to limit urban growth to natural increase by preventing rural-urban migration (Sjöberg 1992). Young and Rice (2012) argue that, contrary to the ethos of 'progress' espoused by the communist regime, limitations on mobility actually helped to preserve traditional family relations and gender roles, especially in highland areas.

Women interviewed for the research had mixed feelings about their new realities. They certainly enjoyed the opportunity to leave the house and go out to work, and the income they earned gained them some influence in nuclear-family decision-making. Yet working hours were often long, especially in rural areas during peak times of planting and harvesting. This meant that parents hardly saw their children during the day. Dava, 53, recalls how children in the kindergarten where she worked 'were brought in generally no later than seven in the morning and were often picked up at seven in the evening when the parents came home from work'. Women's participation in the labour force was facilitated by the state-run network of crèches, kindergartens, public laundries and eating halls, as part of the overall framework of socialising reproductive activities. These, however, fell short of demand, especially in rural highland areas (Penn and Massino 2009). Some women had no option but to leave their children with older siblings – more specifically girls – looking after younger ones. Mrie, 64, recalls the time when she switched to working as a milkmaid, since this earned more than other farming jobs. Her house was very far from her work and her parents-in-law – who traditionally provide childcare in Albanian families – did not live nearby. Mrie's husband was a shepherd and spent most of his time out in the pastures. Childcare responsibilities fell to her eldest daughter – who was only 13 at the time.

I started work and I left my daughter to look after the younger ones. I worked and often it was midnight before I could get away. [...] I had to walk all the way home at night, in the rain, snow or storm. Honestly, I often found the children all huddled together in a corner because the snow had blocked the chimney and they couldn't light the fire. [...] They had covered themselves with whatever was at hand – we had no blankets then – and were shivering from the cold.

A nuclear family meant more freedom for young women vis-à-vis the control traditionally exercised on them by their mother-in-law (see also Çaro, Bailey, and van Wissen 2012). As the above quote suggests, however, it also meant paying the price of not being able to rely on this support for childcare and other help. Despite mother-in-law versus daughter-in-law conflicts, interviewees often appreciated having a 'granny' in the family to look after children when younger women were at work, or free them to enjoy leisure after work. Verdery (1994, 231) argues that socialism brought about the 'geriatisation' of social reproduction, which itself was feminised. In other words, unpaid domestic work such as caring for grandchildren, standing in queues, cooking, cleaning etc., was increasingly carried out by pensioners. Given that most of these tasks were considered as women's work, older women carried the brunt of them (for similar observations in Ukraine, see Tolstokorova 2013).

At the same time, we must not neglect the emotional dimension of these social relations, riddled with contradictions as they are (Lawson 2007). While pensioners' unpaid household work subsidised the building of socialism, they themselves enjoyed being useful and fulfilling their *raison d'être* in later years in life – spending time with their grandchildren. Furthermore, their pride and dignity depended on these arrangements, given the universal expectation that older people would be looked after in their old age within the family. The culture in which such gender and generational relations are practised is thus crucial for an understanding of how they are negotiated and transformed. For example, Silverstein, Cong, and Li (2006) show how in China ageing parents gained status and respect if they lived with an adult child. The Albanian socialist state's policy regarding care in older age reflected this culture – and arguably helped preserve it – as indicated by two factors. First, care homes accommodated only single frail elderly who could not provide for themselves, as was the case in other socialist countries (Tolstokorova 2013). Second, legislation placed the duty of care for older parents on their children, especially when older people lacked 'the necessary

means of livelihood'. Old-age pensions were provided as part of the welfare system, but in rural areas – where the vast majority of older people lived – these were not introduced until 1972. This alleviated the strain on families and narrowed the incentives for having many children in order to secure one's livelihood in old age. Although some internal migration took place, by and large the vast majority of households in Albania lived geographically close to each other.

Negotiating care and emotions across borders in an era of mass migration

Albania's emergence from four decades of autarchy and isolation in the early 1990s unleashed emigration of epic proportions as men, and later women, moved internally or abroad to seek economic survival, escape social oppression or simply satisfy their curiosity. Whilst migration after the fall of the Berlin Wall was a dominant feature of most CEE societies (Black et al. 2010), Albania represented the extreme case with high intensity over a short period of time. One of the impacts this large-scale exodus had on Albanian society was rupture and fragmentation of previously compact families built on solidarity and geographical proximity. As men migrated first, they were separated from the rest of their family: wife, children and parents. In a second stage, following migrant regularisation and longer-term job security, wives and children also emigrated, with the result that social support (regular visits or hands-on care) of the older generations left behind in Albania was reduced. 'Orphan pensioners' thus became a widespread feature of post-socialist Albanian society (King and Vullnetari 2006).

The rising demand for care – whether for older people, children, family members with disability or those in ill-health – and the shrinking pool of carers due primarily to emigration abroad of working-age women, has created a 'care gap', a trend observed throughout CEE (Tolstokorova 2013, 38). Ironically, most of these migrant women are employed in care services in their host countries – whether domestic or institutional (Bettio,

Simonazzi, and Villa 2006). Thus nowadays, inter-generational and gendered contradictions and dilemmas regarding care duties are experienced and negotiated within transnational families. Our interview data show that, beyond economic survival, the longer-term rationale for emigration is focused on enhancing life-chances for the younger generation – the children. Yet pursuit of the well-being for one generation can come at the cost of another. For example, in their study of Ukrainian and Moldovan migrant women in Italy, Marchetti and Venturini (2013) suggest that as mothers pursue their children's well-being through emigration, older family members left behind experience a worsening of their situation, at least emotionally. Similar emotional losses suffered by the older generations left behind are recorded in research on emigration from Tajikistan (Falkingham et al. 2009). Such feelings are heightened in situations where care practices are interlinked with social standing in society. In a study of Italian migrants in Australia caring transnationally for their parents back in Italy, Baldassar, Baldock, and Wilding (2007) concluded that the obligation to provide care is a product of cultural expectations and filial responsibilities. Similarly, 'cultures of care' were found to be crucial to actualising duties and practices of care towards left-behind elderly parents amongst Estonian migrant women in Finland (Zechner 2008).

In Albania, we find that the deeply entrenched expectation by older parents to be taken care of by their children in older age affects their feelings of loneliness and abandonment. Furthermore, the specific 'culture of care' is key to how various types of care are perceived and experienced. The following quote from an 80-year-old widow illustrates this well. Sadet lived on her own in a southern village, as both her sons and their families have emigrated. Her only daughter, who moved to a nearby village upon marriage according to the virilocal tradition, visited her frequently and provided help. Yet, Sadet was inconsolable that her youngest son was not honouring his social obligation of reciprocal care, a situation that she experienced as catastrophic.

Now is the time when I need my son to look after me. Until yesterday [this word is used metaphorically] it was my turn to look after him... I raised him so I could have him for this age [i.e. to care for her in old age]. [...] But my son left, and I am destroyed.

The gendered and socially embedded nature of care is demonstrated by the role assigned to the youngest son symbolically and authoritatively, and his wife practically. Yet daughters 'belong' to their husband's family, hence the care they provide is not symbolically rewarding. The exaltation of sons over daughters shown in this example is also changing, however, reflecting new realities.

Skyping, remitting, (not) visiting, migrating: transnational care strategies

The renegotiation of care roles and responsibilities across transnational spaces involves members of the extended family in multiple locations, including internally within Albania. Such 'compensatory strategies' (Piperno 2007, 64) are manifold and include the use of technology such as mobile phones, Skype® and more traditional ways such as visits by adult migrant children and proxy visits by their friends to elderly parents, as well as visits of parents abroad (see Baldassar, Baldock, and Wilding 2007). Skype® technology has enabled families to celebrate in virtual space important occasions such as birthdays, New Year or religious festivities, as well as share moments of sadness and loss. For example, Lida (F64, south-east Albania) explains how she knows her son's house in the US inside out even though she has never been to visit.

I know all the places in his house ... upstairs and downstairs, their bedrooms. [...] I know everything. I ask him: 'where are you my love?' 'Well, he tells me, we had our meal downstairs and now we are upstairs'.

Remitting, a very important transnational practice of intra-family care, addresses the economic hardships of parents left behind who would otherwise live in poverty on their meagre old-age pensions and subsistence farming (King and Vullnetari 2006; Falkingham et al. 2009). Yet remittances are not always possible, especially if only the migrant man is working. Therefore, the decision may be taken for the parents to join the migrant family abroad, which is more feasible for the younger old – in their 50s and 60s. Intra-family mutual care strengthens the position of older people as they are not simply care recipients, but also care providers (Vullnetari and King 2008). They look after their pre-school grandchildren, freeing the migrant wife to take up paid employment. These migrant grandparents may even find paid work in the informal economy to boost the family's finances. Yet, emotional fulfilment through the realisation of their social role as grandparents is countered by wider social isolation. They do not speak the local language and have restricted mobility, increasing their dependence on their younger family members. For those who return at this stage, or who never migrated, care practices are provided in their origin villages or towns, through a reorganisation of networks of kin and friends (for similar findings in Ukraine and Romania, see Piperno 2007, 2012).

Care chains transformed? From the girl next door to the global nanny

The organisation of care for older people in place usually relies on help, support and hands-on action from various members of the extended family who live locally. Increasingly, neighbours are called upon as well. Historical care patterns are maintained in terms of gender roles. Those involved in hands-on tasks such as washing, cooking and doing the household chores are almost exclusively women. Men are engaged in such tasks only to a minimum, if at all, reflecting the persistent conceptualisation of care as women's work. Their field of activity relates usually to outdoor tasks. Sadet lists individuals involved in her day-to-day care – all women:

There are many [village] girls [nearby] – the daughters of Alime, those of Vera, of course they help me. Thank goodness for them. [...] The wife of Vani called on me the other day [...] their allotment is close to my garden and she comes to see me whenever she comes to inspect her vegetables.

Yet, Sadet's interview continuing below also reveals that a social shift has taken place. Care duties are passed from the absent daughter-in-law, who as a migrant looks after older people in Greece, to the daughter who lives locally. The latter passes on her own obligations to other females in the family:

My daughter also comes to see me [...] every four or five days [from a nearby village]. [...] What would I have done had I not had her to look after me? She comes and stays with me for two or three days during the winter, as the opportunity presents itself. She has her daughter-in-law at home and her own daughter.

Until recently such care remained in the realm of mutual social support and often within the family. As the pool of female carers has shrunk due to emigration there has been an increasing tendency in Albania to commercialise care, as has happened in other CEE countries (Tolstokorova 2013). In rural areas where elderly care institutions are absent, local women provide daily care to migrants' older relatives – often lone men – for a fee, often preparing hot meals for them, doing their washing or cleaning around the house. Generally villages continue to provide social and physical safety.

In contrast, older people feel increasingly isolated in urban areas as post-socialist intense and rapid population movements have fragmented neighbourhoods. Tirana, in particular, has a high degree of population turnover, especially in the flatted blocks that have sprung up in the last two decades. Single youth, students and older people share these flats, but contact

between the generations is minimal. Media reports about lone older people being found in their homes several days after they have died reflect a grim reality that needs attention. Fear of dying in loneliness was prominent also among older people interviewed by Falkingham et al. (2009) in Tajikistan, suggesting that this group is among the hardest hit by post-socialist capitalist individualisation. Certainly our migrant interviewees are worried about their parents in Albania. Zamira (35) lives in the Greek city of Thessaloniki where, ironically, she looks after an elderly Greek couple; her parents live on their own in Albania. Domestic work is the sector where most Albanian migrant women have been employed in Greece and Italy. The demand for care work, especially to look after older people in these countries, has been a key factor in the feminisation of migration (Bettio, Simonazzi, and Villa 2006; Cangiano 2014). Zamira comes from a daughters-only family and her sisters are away and married, either elsewhere in Albania, or in Greece or Switzerland. She laments that she has no brothers who would take on the duty of care for her parents. She cannot bring them to Greece since her mother-in-law takes precedence according to tradition. As Zamira's ailing parents live in an urban area, it is difficult to organise care locally for them as their 'old' neighbours have left and 'others have come in their place, strangers, people we don't know. So my parents do not have any support from anyone, they only have each other... there is no-one there to help them'. Institutional care is – at least for the time being – excluded from discussion because of the negative connotations it retains. Supply of such care is still in its infancy, although demand has been on the rise: 25 public and private residential and day-care facilities catering to 1700 people in 2011.

It is in the realm of childcare that commercialisation has developed the most, a trend observed throughout CEE (Piperno 2012; Tolstokorova 2013). Yet, in contrast to these other countries, care for children left behind in Albania by migrant parents is provided almost exclusively within the family. Commercialised childcare is usually undertaken by local professional couples living in urban areas. Care providers are once again other, usually older

and married women, often in-migrants from rural areas. Among the emerging affluent groups of businessmen and politicians, Filipina babysitters are the preferred choice, thought to have been introduced to Tirana's society by the expats. From the girl next door to the global nanny, global care chains serve to unevenly incorporate peripheral areas such as rural Albania into the global economy.

Concluding discussion

We agree with Mazzucato and Schans (2011) that a deeper understanding of social transformations in societies necessitates embedding the studies of transnational families in the wider cultural context of norms and regimes that guide family. Our article does just that. Taking a two-stage historical perspective to the socialist and post-socialist transformations of Albanian society, we have examined how the interrelations between gender, generations and care are understood and practised in situations of (im)mobility. In so doing, we have firmly embedded our analysis in a socio-economic, cultural and family context. 'Traditional' patriarchy in Albania has undergone – relatively speaking – significant change, due to a mixture of factors such as the socialist policies and necessities, post-socialist large-scale migration, inter-cultural influences, and capitalist realities. These historical conditions and institutions have in turn produced different needs for care (Lawson 2007). 'Traditional' inter-generational care within the family made way for state-run collective care during socialism – particularly for children – as women were required to join the labour force and build socialism. Yet collectivised care was often inadequate. Older women and sometimes young girls bore the brunt of domestic work and childcare, thus subsidising building the infrastructural edifice of socialism. The 'woman question', therefore, remained unresolved during socialism (Penn and Massino 2009).

Large-scale migration internally and abroad after 1990 necessitated a renegotiation of cultures and practices of care. Physical distance is bridged through the use of various tools

employed translocally and transnationally, especially facilitated by computer-related technology. A number of other power shifts, roles and expectations have taken place too, most often seen as intra-gender. A typical example is the practical transfer of care for an older parent from the daughter-in-law to the daughter. These women's networks of care stretch vertically to encompass grandmothers who provide childcare for their migrant sons' (and sometimes daughters') families, whether in Albania or abroad. They also link horizontally across space with migrant female relatives who provide care for (often affluent) families in host countries. These care chains are key corridors that connect peripheral Albania to global capitalism (Hochschild 2000; Parreñas 2005). Two issues of importance need to be singled out here. First, the often ignored role of children and particularly elderly as carers, in the wider (transnational) care literature. Second, and related to the first, women's role in shaping care and caregiving as a social practice (Popke 2006).

What is men's contribution to care in strong patriarchal societies such as Albania? Although gender relations have undergone significant change through the socialist and post-socialist decades, Albania remains a strongly patriarchal society where care continues to be regarded as women's work. Exigencies of rural-urban migration have helped change mentalities, but habits die hard (for Romania see Piperno 2012).

Finally, what of the emotions of care and older age? Transnational care practices have indeed been renegotiated across borders, as this article has demonstrated. We argue that more attention needs to be paid to the emotional realm as a key element in the construction of care as a social relationship. Being cared for in older age by a son while also providing care such as looking after grandchildren are experienced by Albanian older people as crucial to their emotional well-being. These practices offer social standing in the community and self-fulfilment in older age, especially through the social role of grandparenting. They are often sacrificed for the benefit of other older people and families in more affluent countries who can afford to pay for care. Thus, by focusing on specific sites and social relationships we

begin to understand how care needs produce, and are shaped by, geographies of inequality at a range of scales: within the family, locally and globally (Lawson 2007).

The Albanian case illustrates well the ways in which 'historical and institutional relationships produce the need for care', and how care and caregiving is at once a social and political relationship (Lawson 2007, 1; Popke 2006).

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