

**RUSSELL KING & JULIE VULLNETARI**

**INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN  
GENDER, CARE AND MIGRATION:  
ALBANIA DURING AND AFTER COMMUNISM**

Willy Brandt Series of Working Papers  
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Erica Righard

[erica.righard@mah.se](mailto:erica.righard@mah.se)

**Editor-in-Chief**

Pieter Bevelander

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## **INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GENDER, CARE AND MIGRATION: ALBANIA DURING AND AFTER COMMUNISM**

### **Abstract**

This paper compares the interrelationships between gender, family structures and intra-family care arrangements during two markedly different periods of Albania's recent history: the communist era dominated by the autocratic state-socialist regime of Enver Hoxha, and the post-communist period dominated by a kind of reactive free-for-all capitalism and high rates of both internal and international migration. Since 1990 Albania has accumulated a 'stock' of more than 1.4 million emigrants, mostly living in Greece and Italy. Families have been torn apart by this mass emigration – both husbands from their wives and children, and older generations left behind or 'orphaned' 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 compact and close proximity, but also a minimum of state welfare was available to support vulnerable and isolated individuals. However, internal migration was part of state economic and social planning, and some families which fell foul of the regime were split up and sent into internal exile. The paper provides a valuable lesson in historicising regimes of gender, family and care across dramatically contrasting social models.

**Keywords:** Albania, family life, migration, gender, care drain, inter-generational care.

## Introduction

This paper takes a diachronic perspective on the evolution of migration and intergenerational care within families across two highly contrasting periods of social organisation: state socialism and neoliberal capitalism. The setting for this rather unique historical comparison is Albania, a choice which could hardly be better suited to our purpose. The early 1990s were the pivotal years during which Albania swung abruptly from one extreme to another. For the previous 45 years it had experienced the most severe, orthodox-Stalinist and isolationist of the East European communist regimes, most of the time (until his death in 1985) ruled by the charismatic but paranoid ‘people’s dictator’, Enver Hoxha. 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 capitalist system replaced state socialism – although to regard this era as a ‘system’ is a misnomer for the economic and political chaos that ensued. The chief characteristic of the ‘new Albania’ has been mass migration, both abroad, chiefly to Greece and Italy, and internally, focused on the capital Tirana and its surrounds. Across these two contrasting eras – the immobile world of Albanian communism, and the hyper-mobility of the post-communist period – we focus in this paper on three key aspects of how society was (dis)organised: family life, gender, and the administration of intergenerational care.

Yet, to regard the socialist period as a time of total immobility is a misconception. For sure, external mobility was forbidden and almost impossible, but a fair amount of internal mobility, much of it forced, did occur. Hence family separation happened, leading to issues of care for children, spouses and older people which were only partly compensated by the system of centralised state support ‘from cradle to grave’. The post-socialist era was indeed a period of intense mobility in which families were torn apart, above all by the mass emigration of young Albanians under initially irregular conditions. The predominance of males in the early-mid 1990s mass emigration caused family separations, with wives, children and the elderly left behind. Later, family reunion and whole-family migration took place, leading to the further social and emotional isolation of the elderly, sustained by remittances but physically distanced from their children and grandchildren. Where Albanian migrants remained, or became, undocumented, return visits for hands-on and emotional care have been severely hampered. Later again, some older people migrated to join their children abroad, to support the earning capacity of sons and daughters(-in law). Throughout these sharply contrasting societal systems across socialism and post-socialism, gender roles and relationships are deeply imbricated in how society, family, care and mobility were organised and experienced.

The paper continues as follows. In the next section we briefly set out the four projects from which our empirical data is drawn, and we describe the field and analytical methods adopted to collect and process the material relevant to this paper's key themes. Next, we outline the 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, intergenerational care, and care drain, both with regard to the general literature on these topics and with respect to the Albanian case. Then follow the two main sections of the paper, devoted to each of the two key periods 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. The conclusion stresses the importance of historicising regimes of family solidarity, gender and care across dramatically different social models.

## Methods

This paper draws on material selected as part of four research projects which the authors have carried out over the past ten years. Although each project is distinct, they have overlapping objectives and research questions including a central concern with gender, family and care. They also share common methodological approaches, notably 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. The four projects evolved in a sequenced, chronological fashion as follows:

*Project 1: The impact of migration on older persons in rural Albania.* This was Vullnetari's MSc dissertation (2004) which in turn operationalised some ideas arising from a research note by King (2004) on field observations in Albania carried out as part of an Oxfam-funded project. Vullnetari's dissertation comprises ethnographic observations in a village in south-east Albania, including in-depth interviews with 13 older residents (couples and widows) with children abroad. This initial study can be regarded as a pilot project.

*Project 2: Links between internal and international migration in Albania.* This was Vullnetari's doctoral thesis (2008), supported by an ESRC post-graduate studentship, and subsequently published in a revised and updated form as a book (Vullnetari 2012). Family structures, gender and care were key themes emerging from the analysis of the two types of migration and their interlocking dynamics; however, the specific data relating to transnational/distant care of family members – older people and children – form only a

part of the overall analysis (see Vullnetari 2012: 150–53, 189–93, 217–20). For this project, 150 interviews were carried out in villages in south-east Albania, in Tirana, in Korçë (the regional capital for south-east Albania), and in Thessaloniki in northern Greece. Both migrants and non-migrants were interviewed. Based on interviews to older informants both from this project and the previous one, two papers were written which examined the phenomenon of the social isolation of older people ‘left behind’ by their migrating children (King and Vullnetari 2006; Vullnetari and King 2008).

*Project 3: Gender, remittances and development in Albania.* This project was part of a wider programme of cross-national research on gendering remittances and local development, funded by UN-INSTRAW (United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women) and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) across the period 2007–09. It involved ‘twinned’ fieldwork in three villages in south-east Albania (different from the ones in project 2) and in Thessaloniki, the Greek city where most of the internationally mobile villagers had moved to. Field research comprised a questionnaire-based household survey of remittance-receivers in the villages (n=350) together with 25 in-depth interviews with remittance-receivers/administrators (mainly spouses and parents of migrants in Greece) and a further 20 interviews with remittance-senders in Thessaloniki. Gender was at the forefront of our analysis in this project, combined with a major thematic focus on remittances. Issues of cross-border care, both for children and for older relatives ‘left behind’ by migration, surfaced in many interviews, less so in the household survey data. For the full results of this project see Vullnetari and King (2011).

*Project 4: Everyday life during the communist era in Albania.* Funded by the Leverhulme Trust for three years 2010–13, this project aims to build a ‘historical ethnography’ of daily life during the socialist era. Key themes of this research are gender, family, work, leisure, and (im)mobility. Fieldwork is recently completed: 120 oral-history narratives have been collected from older research participants in various locations in Albania, including major cities (Tirana, Shkodër), an industrial town (Bulqizë), and rural settlements corresponding either to former state farms or cooperatives. This research has yet to be written up: the present paper is one of our first outputs from the project.

Projects 1–3 thus deal with the contemporary period of mass emigration and internal migration which unfolded since 1990, project 4 with the preceding communist period of banned emigration and highly controlled internal population redistribution. Our current focus on project 4, which is still

ongoing, arose out of a kind of retrospective fascination about the nature of everyday life under Eastern Europe's most repressive and isolated society, but was also fashioned from the realisation from the interview narratives collected as part of projects 1–3, that contemporary migration was very much set against the history of immobility before 1990. In other words, post-1990 migration was partly stimulated by the kind of intense curiosity that arose out of this 'locked-in' condition: what was life really like 'out there'? (cf. Kapllani 2009: 3–4).

As socialism ended and the borders were at last prized open, few could imagine what price they would have to pay to satisfy their curiosity. Economic collapse and political instability throughout the early and mid-1990s gave a flavour of desperation to the migration to Greece and Italy: the migrants were 'economic refugees' (Barjaba and King 2005) whose welcome in these neighbouring countries was short-lived. Denied legal channels for entry, yet keen to access any type of work that would yield an income to support their families at a time of economic and infrastructural meltdown in Albania, the human and psychological costs of migration soon became apparent: separation from family and loved ones, persecution by the police and other authorities (especially in Greece), and stigmatisation as 'undesirables' and 'criminals' in the two main destination countries (King and Mai 2008). We explore these background migration dynamics in more detail in the next section.

### **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 fenced-in border, or successful escape, or even discussing the notion of emigration, were all regarded as criminal acts and subject to severe penalties. Those who tried to escape were imprisoned, exiled, or even executed; others were shot at the border and hence wounded or killed. For those few who did escape, retribution was meted out to their relatives, sent into exile for long years and condemned as having a 'bad biography'.

The story was different as regards internal migration. Movement was tightly controlled via an 'internal passport' system. People's freedom to relocate was minimal, except as part of planned population redistribution or through marriage. Throughout much of this era, 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 towns and to areas of land reclamation and agricultural intensification (for comprehensive overviews of the economic and demographic geography of this period see Hall 1994: 90–140; Sjöberg 1991: 41–134).

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 some uncertainty over how long these detentions would last (see, for example, Lubonja 2007), and by the difficulties of travel produced by a poor transport infrastructure – private car ownership forbidden, rudimentary public bus services, slow and tortuous roads, skeletal rail network etc. 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, not only by close proximity but also by a safety-net of health, care and nursery services.

The collapse of the communist regime in the early 1990s ushered in the era of mass migration. It was as if a pressure-cooker was suddenly released. The long-repressed desire to move, either abroad or to the Tirana area within Albania, caused large-scale population mobility, the contours and scale of which have been described in a now-extensive literature (for overviews see Carletto *et al.* 2006; INSTAT 2004a; 2004b; King 2003; King *et al.* 2005; 2011; Vullnetari 2007; 2012). The census residual method estimated a net loss due to emigration of 600,000 during 1989–2001 (INSTAT 2004a); in 1999 the ‘stock’ of Albanians abroad (including foreign-born children) was estimated at 800,000 (Barjaba 2000); and by 2010 this stock had grown to 1.43 million according to the World Bank (2011: 54). Given that the results of the 2011 census (INSTAT 2012) indicate an Albanian resident population of only 2.8 million (a significant reduction over 3.1 million for 2001 and 3.2 million for 1989), the increasing impact of external migration on Albania’s shrinking and ageing population is clearly evident. Indeed, no other European country (perhaps no other country in the world) has witnessed such a large-scale relative emigration in recent years, although Kosovo, Bosnia and Moldova run Albania close. Most emigrant Albanians are in Greece (600,000), and Italy (450,000), with the remainder in other European countries (UK, Belgium, France etc.) and in North America. The above data are round-figure estimates given the lack of systematic, accurate statistics and the fluid nature of the movement, with much back-and-forth mobility (especially to Greece) and some onward migration (especially from Greece and Italy to other European countries).

Initially, most emigration was irregular, crossing the mountainous border with Greece clandestinely or using smuggler-agents to be ferried across to southern Italy. Young males predominated in this early exodus, leaving behind their parents, wives, children and fiancées. In a gradually-evolving subsequent phase, starting in the mid-to-late 1990s and continuing through the following decade, the migration process matured and consolidated.



Regularisation schemes implemented in the two main host countries – in Italy in 1995, 1998 and 2002 and in Greece in 1998, 2001 and 2005 – enabled many Albanians to ‘get papers’ and bring over family members, or to get married and settle longer-term. The typical Albanian migratory unit in Greece and Italy nowadays is the young family: parents in their 30s and 40s with young or school-age children. In a minority of cases, an extended family-reunion has taken place, with older-generation parents of the migrants (usually the male migrants’ parents) joining the emigrant household to supply childcare, home cleaning and cooking for the dual-income working parents (King and Vullnetari 2006).

Most recently, the economic crisis, which has been especially severe in Greece, has destabilised this profile of Albanian migrant family 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, and hence household incomes have been squeezed. 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 a recent study of Albanian migrants in Greece by 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 been a time of intense internal migration: according to the inter-censal records for 1989–2001, 350,000 moved within Albania from one statistical district to another (INSTAT 2004b). The vast bulk of this movement was focused on the districts of Tirana and adjacent Durrës, with severe outmigration and depopulation of northern and southern mountain districts, some losing up to 50% of their population during the 12-year period due to a combination of internal migration and emigration. The large-scale internal migration has undoubtedly continued since 2001, but published figures are not yet available to quantify the scale.

The drivers behind internal migration are essentially twofold. First, there is the economic motive – the search for secure, or at least improved, employment prospects away from a rural economy which was collapsing with the often destructive dismantling of the agricultural cooperatives and state farms, as well as the sudden closure of many industries in mono-industrial interior towns. And second, people wanted to be able to access a more ‘modern’ urban lifestyle with better schools, health, entertainment and shopping facilities. Not all these aspirations were fulfilled, both because of the scarcity of decent-paying jobs and because many internal migrants

could only settle in peri-urban informal districts which remain, still today, somewhat disconnected from the city centre. Whilst some older people took part in this internal migration along with their younger-generation family members, others chose to stay in their rural homes. Many of these older people thus end up living on their own, with their children either abroad or elsewhere in Albania.

### **Key concepts**

Our study across two highly contrasting periods of Albanian societal organisation, involving both internal and external mobility/migration, and examining transnational/distant care obligations and experiences in two generational directions, towards children and towards elderly parents, mobilises the following concepts which have been widely discussed and theorised in the literature.

First, we are concerned with *transnational, multi-local families* which may be split within and across generations. Many Albanian families involved in migration experience separation both within and across national boundaries – for instance, between the village, Tirana, and Greece. Moreover, this translocal geographical positioning and distribution (cf. Brickell and Datta 2011) can be highly dynamic, as individual family members come and go, or move on, or return-migrate. A consistent finding from Vullnetari's doctoral research (2008; 2012) was that 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 some other important city (Durrës, Korçë etc.). Another common pattern is that whereby undocumented, male, temporary migration evolves into family settlement migration abroad, with the result that economic support (via remittances) and social support (regular visits, hands-on care etc.) of the older generations left behind in Albania gets reduced. This is to be contrasted with the much more compact, geographically static patterns of family life during the socialist era. Although certain types of (semi-)forced mobility and residential transfer took place during that period, travel distances were internal and translocal, not transnational.

Second, our study is located within the social context of a society shaped by strong elements of *family solidarity and patriarchy*. Whilst it is true that these characteristics are being reshaped and modified through the experience of migration, as well as by the wider dynamics of a society undergoing rapid urbanisation and modernisation, nevertheless the behavioural norms and customs of the Albanian family remain to a certain extent intact, and have a strong influence over household formation and gendered care obligations. For the earlier period under study, 'traditional' family structures were subject to different and contradictory influences (Hall 1994: 82–90). The

communist ethos sought to break down patriarchy and the clannish power of extended families (with their association with blood feuds in northern Albania), and succeeded to some extent. Nevertheless, within the private sphere of the household space, patriarchal relations and gender-role divisions of labour and responsibility remained. Therefore, women endured a double burden: responsible for child-rearing, cleaning and cooking within the family sphere, but also expected to contribute their full share of labour in the fields or factory. According to statistics compiled by Hall (1994: 84), over the period 1970–90, women consistently made up 52–53% of the agricultural workforce, 44% of the industrial workforce, 51–53% of the workforce in education, and 78–80% in the health sector. Meanwhile, in the post-socialist era there has been, in some areas and in some social groups, a rejuvenation and reworking of ‘traditional’ patriarchal practices in the wake of the melting away of state power and its sudden replacement by a neoliberal or, rather, free-for-all grab-capitalism in which guarantees of employment, welfare and social protection have disappeared (Schwandner-Sievers 2001).

Several studies have documented the rather particular nature of the Albanian family structure, part of a wider ‘Balkan’ family system, with significant local variations (e.g. Backer 1983; Kaser 1996; Mitterauer 1996; Shryock 1988; Whitaker 1981). Although some of these accounts tend to end up in hyperbole and exaggeration, the key features of what can be called the ‘traditional’ Albanian family system are its patriarchal hierarchy where age and male gender confer status, power, privilege and decision-making; where sons are exalted over daughters; and where unmarried females are first ‘owned’ by their fathers before being passed into the ‘possession’ of their husbands upon marriage. Despite the ‘corrective’ measures of the socialist era and the ‘modernising’ ethos of recent decades, strong elements of this patriarchal system survive to this day (INSTAT 2004c; Murzaku and Dervishi 2003; Nixon 2009).

In terms of *care duties*, marriage switched the direction of responsibility of women to care for their husband’s family (notably his parents) and not her own parents, who would be looked after by the sons of those parents, and more specifically those sons’ wives. Particular responsibility was vested in the youngest son to ultimately take care (again, with his wife bearing the brunt) of elderly or sick parents. The youngest son is thus known as the ‘son of old age’. We shall see in our empirical material how these lines of care responsibility were discharged under different regimes of co-presence and family separation through migration.

Our final key concept to be briefly discussed here is *care drain*. A somewhat parallel concept 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: 144). In the analysis of our interview material, we examine the strains put on care capacity by international and internal migration, both towards migrants' children and their elderly parents.

Much care drain research has focused on Southern European societies such as Spain, Greece and Italy where very low birth rates and weakening family structures have dramatically diminished the traditional family-based model of adult children caring for their parents in the latter's old age (Bettio *et al.* 2006; Ferrera 1996). Ironically, this care gap is plugged by migrant women coming from Albania (and many other countries – the Philippines, Peru, Ukraine etc.) whose migration as care and domestic workers helps to fill one gap, but only creates another care gap in their own countries, since they have to leave behind their own children and parents. Thus are created *global care chains*, a string of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid and unpaid work of caring (Hochschild 2001). Such chains need not be global, however. The ability to care can just as easily be removed by more local-scale moves such as forced family separation due to imprisonment or exile, or internal migration from remote villages to distant towns driven by economic need – both circumstances evident in Albania. Hence in the empirical data which makes up the remainder of this paper, we seek to enrich the established research on the transnational and distance-based challenges to aged and child caring pioneered by – amongst others – Baldassar (2007; also Baldassar *et al.* 2007), Carling *et al.* (2012), Gardner (2012), Mattingly (2001) and Parreñas (2005).

### **Socialist Albania: family, care and mobility**

*Replacing patriarchal orders: from collectivisation through migration to communal living*

Today, this long-standing social evil [i.e. unemployment] which afflicts all the capitalist and revisionist countries without exception, has been done away with forever in Albania (Anonymous 1982: 343).

Thus starts the chapter 'Everything for man' of the book *A Portrait of Albania*, published in English by the communist propaganda machinery aiming to publicise the achievements of socialist Albania to the wider world. Like unemployment, emigration too was portrayed as a thing of the past, given that its root cause was seen to be that 'social evil' [i.e. unemployment] 'forcing' Albanians to 'leave their homes to seek a livelihood in foreign lands'

(1982: 343). In socialist Albania emigration was no longer necessary because of the system's guaranteed 'right to work'. Therefore, any desire, intent or attempt to leave the country was presumed to have some ulterior motive of subversion, constitutionally punishable with severe penalties for the escapee and their family.

While not entirely banned, internal mobility was very restricted and aimed to serve specific economic and political needs within the ideological framework of the time. As such, newly graduated cadres such as teachers and healthcare workers were appointed to work for several years in remote and mountainous areas, while recruitment drives to attract labour to newly created or expanding industrial zones gave an opportunity to young village dwellers to settle in cities and towns. However, as the expansion of industry slowed down and the urban population was 'supplemented' sufficiently to meet industry's labour demands, rural-urban migration was severely reduced from the 1960s onwards. On the other hand, forced internal exile was used as an instrument to punish political adversaries as well as to 'cleanse' urban areas, especially Tirana, from 'delinquents and hooligans', particularly when they were repeat offenders. Both groups were often sent to live and work in collective and state farms, some of which were infamous because of their appalling conditions.

Young and Rice (2012: 164) 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 inaccessible highland areas. Other measures, however, had radical effects on patriarchy and large families. One of the most significant of these was the land reform. In the first instance a redistribution of land took place according to which 'surplus' land and farm animals were confiscated from wealthier peasants and given to their poor or landless neighbours. In the second stage, all land was collectivised in Soviet-style cooperatives, leaving very little for families in the form of private ownership. Thus, large rural families had no choice but to split up given that their economic base had now been undermined. While such families were more numerous in the north of the country, they existed in the south as well. In the following long passage, Lule, 62, living in rural south-east Albania, reminisces about her childhood in one such family:

My father was a tradesman, he had a large apple orchard and lorries travelled from Yugoslavia to buy our apples. We were a large family, 25 people, I was the last child. When we split up I was 14 years old [around 1964]. [...] 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 was the smarter of the two older women in the family, so she organised the work of the women and kept the day-to-day accounts and the running of the household: this is how much was produced, this is how much was spent, and so on. 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. We used to make the bread ourselves. The family had a large wood-burning furnace and we baked bread for four or five days at a time 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 the children ate separately in another room, where they also played with one another, but they never went to the room where adults took their meals. Our house was a large two-storey building and had four rooms on each floor. In the underground area we stored the apples. [...] 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.

Toma, an 87-year old man from northern Albania, tells a similar story about his own family which counted 33 members just before the collectivisation (in 1967).<sup>1</sup> There were five brothers with their wives and children, as well as older parents and unmarried sisters. Despite having to pay heavy taxes in kind to the state, the family lived relatively well. Men looked after the farm animals – 300 sheep, as well as cattle and horses – while women took care of the household such as cooking, cleaning and looking after the children. The social organisation was similar to that narrated by Lule above and fits quite well with the model of the traditional Albanian household described by Backer (1979), derived from her pioneering ethnographic work in Kosovo in the 1970s. For Toma, as for many other families, living in such large households had the advantage of securing a certain level of wealth through economies of scale and hard work; the important thing was that ‘all [family

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1 Collectivisation was a staged process which was rolled out gradually in the country, in southern areas – where support for the communist party had been strongest – first, followed by the north.

members] had work, worked for their own family, and did not need to be *argat* [day labourer] at someone else's'.<sup>2</sup> However, such large patriarchal families were considered a threat to the party's power. As such, they became prime targets of the 'war against the remnants of the past' which were said to 'hamper social progress' in the country. Toma remembers how they were under pressure to split because 'the party doesn't want large families'. The split eventually came about as a result of collectivisation, after which the family 'became poor and alone [and] two brothers could not live together anymore after marriage'.

Paradoxically, as large traditional patriarchal multi-family households were being dissolved in rural areas, new patriarchal multi-family households were springing up in cities and industrial towns. Rapid urbanisation through rural-urban migration in the 1950s was not supported by adequate accommodation. This resulted in overcrowding of existing housing stock, including the practice of communal living similar to *kommunalka* in the Soviet Union, whereby two households, which in themselves could be multi-family, shared the same flat.<sup>3</sup> Shpresa, 69, living in Tirana since the age of 12, when she migrated from the rural south to work in the huge 'Stalin' textile plant, recalls:

When I went there [joining her husband's household] there were 13 of us living together and we shared the flat with another family. We [both families] cooked in the bathroom. We kept our turn. But there were no quarrels. [...] Then after some years we [only with her nuclear household this time] moved to another flat where we lived three families in three rooms and a kitchen. [...] Each family had a room of their own while the kitchen/living room, bathroom, hallway and balcony were in common. We all cooked in the bathroom but there were no quarrels. I can tell you there was no envy between us then, we had perfect relations. Everyone cooked, had their meal and retired to their own room. [...] One family had eight [people] – parents and six children; the second family had seven – parents and five children; and then there were my husband and I and our two children. [...] We lived there for two years before moving to a flat of our own.

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2 *Argat* is likely derived from the Greek *ergatis*, meaning worker/labourer. The Albanian word has a strong pejorative connotation of servitude and perhaps exploitation attached to it.

3 The Soviet *kommunalka* or communal apartment was instituted after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. For a more detailed account see: <<http://kommunalka.colgate.edu>>.

*Washing men's feet: negotiating gendered power in the household*

Whether in rural or urban areas, in large patriarchal or nuclear families, in the south or the north, gendered roles within the confines of the home were very similar across the board. In other words, it was women who continued to perform, almost exclusively, all tasks in the household related to housekeeping and looking after the children, men and the elderly. The following quote from Eli (F60, Tirana) is a typical example:

Men didn't help at all [in the housework], absolutely not at all [...] Women had all [the work], men were there to give orders. [...] In Tirana, men, men didn't work [at home]. 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: 'Wash his feet for he has come home tired from work. If you don't do it, it's a shame, he is your father after all'. 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, until we finished. All of us seven children, he didn't know. He would come home from work, have something to eat, watch telly, and then go to bed. He didn't even know how many children he had, where they were, what they did during the day, how they got on at school, nothing. All he did was bring the money home – that he did well.

In this case the wife stayed at home as she had eight children to look after. However, increasing demand (for labour from the state), need (for income from the family) and available opportunities to take up waged work, meant that increasingly more women carried out these household and care duties in addition to working outside the home. Zana, 51, also living in Tirana, had worked in the 'Stalin' textile plant:

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



at the time, it was terrible. [...] Good thing we were young and strong, but one faces life as it comes. 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.

However, major changes benefiting women did take place in the field of women's education and participation in public life, including politically as voters and leaders. The expansion of basic primary education throughout the country helped raise hopes and expectations amongst women. Yet, for many of them, especially in rural areas, achieving further education was a battle against patriarchy, first and foremost in their own homes. This is illustrated quite well with Lule's quote below:

I started secondary education when I was much older, 22 years old. Because my father didn't want to let me. 'Why do you need to go to school, he would say, even the boys are quitting, they are not going any more'. This is how the mentality was at the time. [...] So a long time passed, I always cried in the house. 'Why did you leave me without schooling?', I would say to my parents. Because I was the best pupil in my class. And I used to tell my mother 'if I die, cry for not having let me go to school, nothing else'. She would feel pain for me and say 'please don't say those [hurtful] things'. And I started school only because she managed to convince my father to let me go.

This quote is also a good example of the complex position of women in Albanian society at the time, under the tutelage of the all-powerful alpha-male of the household, yet at the same time resilient and able to negotiate concessions even in the most unlikely situations. We came across many such situations in our conversations in various parts of the country. The story of Dila, 48, from Kelmend in the far north, is equally dramatic and painful, and reveals the complex mechanisms of negotiating one's position as a young female within the household:

I completed the primary school [eight-year cycle] with good results, because my parents had promised me that if I studied hard they would allow me to continue further education. I had a great desire to continue education, it was the only thing I dreamt of in my life at the time. This was because I saw how people who had no schooling suffered every day in the most difficult jobs. So when I completed

the primary school a scholarship came to my village and the rule was for it to be given to the best student, but they had to be of ‘good biography’. So I was offered this scholarship and we discussed it in my family. But my brother who was older – he was 20 at the time – decided not to agree for me to go on; he said ‘sister is a grown-up woman now’ [she was only 14!]. [...] My father listened to my brother. That’s how it was at the time, the son was listened to when he was older, so my father accepted this, although with regrets, and for me everything finished! My world went upside down. I was given a flock of 150 sheep to look after and it went on like this for three months. I cried all the time and stopped eating. Every day I was alone as my parents and siblings went to work or school so they didn’t notice [that she was losing weight dramatically]. [...] One day my sister came along with me and saw I was not eating and after asking me many times I explained everything to her, that everything for me was over, my life was over now. [...] When we returned home she told our grandmother who took me aside and asked me to explain to her, which I did. I told her that I didn’t want to create conflicts in the family, that’s why I had not insisted. My mother had tried to pacify me and convince me to accept my fate for the same reason – not to cause any conflict between my father and my brother. After she [grandmother] made me promise her I would study hard and be a good girl [i.e. good morals], she spoke to my father in private and changed his mind.

Like in the previous example, here too older married women – in this case the grandmother, who is also a respected figure because of her age and position in the family – negotiate behind the scene with the powerful men on behalf of younger women. Negotiations continued – again behind the scenes – when the father went back to the discussion table with his son and managed to convince him to agree to Dila’s schooling. Dila continues:

That’s how it was at the time, very few girls went to school and so my brother was afraid of what would happen to me, also because even at 14 I had a developed physique and looked older for my age. [...] There was another girl from my village whose parents said she could go to school *only* if I did, and so we went together.

Dila went on to complete a science degree and her younger sisters were able to follow in the trail she blazed.

### *Childcare and welfare: female solidarity*

In traditional patriarchal families – large and small – children were looked after by the female members of the household together; lack of childcare was hardly an issue. Likewise, older people were an integral part of families and received as well as provided care (for children) within households. With the break-up of multiple family households and women's obligation and need to work outside the home, these care arrangements changed. Care institutions such as crèches, kindergartens and schools were set up to facilitate women's wage work, without affecting men's roles in these tasks. As the socialist years progressed, the social organisation of Albanian families gradually transformed into one where both parents were out working every day of the week, including Saturday and sometimes even Sunday. A working day was particularly long for those engaged in agriculture, pressured to perform given tasks and to deliver target quotas of output. Thus, children spent the best part of their day in an institution: crèche, kindergarten or school. In urban as well as rural areas most parents often started work at 7 o'clock in the morning, which meant that their children had to be taken to one of these institutions before that time. In the cooperatives, a working day often went from dawn to dusk, and usually the fields were far from the village. Dava, 53, from Kelmend relates that mothers who had to work often left their children in the care of family or friends – always other women:

For example you would ask your uncle's wife who lived nearby, you mainly left your children with kin. If they were not available, then ask a friend who lived nearby – she would look after him/her as if it was her own because another time it would be my turn to look after hers, it was mutual [support].

But as more women went out to work, they found they had fewer peers to turn to for support. Thus, Dava found herself looking after more and more children and, after conversations with the local health and council authorities, turned one room of her small house into the village's nursery. She reminisces:

Some women had no one to look after their children, they were required to go to work, what could they do with their children? Then they came to me and asked me if I could look after them. [...] They brought everything from home for the children – blankets and so on. There were no beds, no chairs, the children slept and ate on the

floor. They were given food with them and we fed them for breakfast, lunch and sometimes if anything was left over, for supper too. [...] They were brought in generally no later than 7 in the morning and were often picked up at 7 in the evening when the parents came home from work.

This support was possible where communities were densely populated. Especially in urban areas, crèches and kindergartens were well-equipped materially and with trained staff, at times even providing lunch for the children. However, in more remote hamlets – especially in some neighbourhoods of the highlands in the north where houses were far away from each other and from the centre of the village – children were left on their own and older children looked after younger ones. Mrie, 64, also from Kelmend, recalls the time when she decided to work as a milkmaid – at her husband's behest – since this job earned more than in agriculture. Yet, 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. The solution for childcare was found in her eldest daughter – who was only 12–13 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. You saw how far it was from Dobri [where her work was] to come here [home], 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. 'What are you doing?' They had covered themselves with whatever was at hand – we had no blankets then – and were shivering from the cold.

Lida, who spoke earlier, had herself looked after her siblings when her mother died at the age of 32 from a long-term illness she had contracted when fighting with the partisan formations during the war:

My mother died when I was 13. [...] I had a brother who was 12, another brother who was four and a sister who was a year and a half. [...] I had just finished primary school then and I was asked [by the local authorities] to continue my studies to become a teacher because I had very good grades. But I couldn't go because I had to bring up the children. My father was 45 years old but he did not marry again. So I stayed at home and looked after them. I didn't know how to look

after myself properly, let alone others. I was a child myself. [...] The little girl was ill and she would cry a lot. I would put both her and the young boy in cradles, I would sit in their middle and rock them. And I would cry. I didn't cry for my mother who had died but I cried because I wanted to go out and play with my friends, such was my age. I suffered a lot.

Some children in urban areas experienced similar situations of having to look after themselves as both parents were at work and there were not many adults around who stayed at home. Often seen with their house key hanging on a string around their neck, an entire generation of children and young teenagers grew up looking after one another and supplementing care and housework that their parents – more specifically their mother – was expected to do. Zana remembers:

I would just work as fast as I could and then run home because my son was alone. My son was three or four years old and sometimes it happened that my husband and I were on the same shift. He used to work in the 'Enver' factory [*uzina 'Enver'*], and then at the auto-tractor plant, and he worked on a three-shifts rota too, like me. Sometimes it happened that we were on the same shift and it was a real nightmare. We left our son alone, on the third floor [of the multi-storey housing], we locked him in the flat and he would shout [to women on the street] from the balcony 'Aunty, have you seen a woman with long hair?' looking for his mum. 'Wait there love, mummy is on her way to you', they would reply. My son was alone, 4 years old, alone!

### *Caring (for) grandmothers*

Stimulating the nuclear family by top-down measures such as collectivisation, social engineering of urban areas, mass media propaganda and the like had brought about dramatic changes to individuals' lives and their households. Intra-gender hierarchies and power relations in traditional patriarchal families made way for more independence for young and newly married women. Yet, no matter how good, the network of public welfare institutions such as kindergartens and schools could not replace the warmth the grandmother provided for the grandchildren in the family. Despite the mother-in-law versus daughter-in-law conflicts, interviewees often appreciated having a 'grandmother' in the family to look after the children when younger women were at work, or free them to enjoy more leisure time after work. In turn, grandparents themselves enjoyed being useful and fulfilling their *raison*

d'être in later years in life – spending time with their grandchildren. Despite the 'modernisation' of the Albanian family, 'old' mentalities continued to prevail, and the universal expectation was that older people would be looked after in their old age within the family. The position of the state vis-à-vis this issue was indicated by two factors. First, no care homes for the elderly were built in Albania during the socialist years. And secondly, legislation enshrined in the 1976 Albanian Constitution stipulated that 'children are duty bound to care for parents who are disabled and lack the necessary means of livelihood'. Old-age pensions were indeed provided as part of the welfare system, but in rural areas – where the vast majority of the population, and especially older people lived – these were not introduced until the mid-1970s. Although some internal migration took place, by and large the vast majority of households in Albania were compact and families and kin lived geographically close to each other. Marriages often took place either within the same village or within the same district. Therefore, visiting relatives meant crossing relatively short geographical distances, despite the reality that often distances stretched in time because of the poor transport network (Vullnetari and King 2014).

### **Joining the global chains: remitting and caring 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. Under such circumstances, previously compact families built on solidarity and geographical closeness were torn apart, fragmented and scattered. Initial migration was seasonal and short-term, involving several months of work away and return home for the winter. However, as time went by and migrants immersed themselves into the economic, social and cultural fabric of host societies, temporary migration gradually turned into longer-term stays and permanent settlement. Family structures had to undergo adaptation and change, especially in terms of care provision and emotional impact. As men migrated first, they were separated from the rest of their family: wife, children and older parents. In a second stage of family reunification abroad following migrant regularisation and longer-term job security, wives and children also emigrated, leaving behind elderly parents on their own. 'Orphan pensioners', as some left-behind elderly label themselves, thus became a widespread feature of post-socialist Albanian society (King and Vullnetari 2006). Some of them describe this emigration as a catastrophe that has 'befallen' them. Qazime (80) lived on her own at the time of interview (she has passed away since), as her sons

with their wives and children have migrated long-distance internally and abroad. Her only daughter who lives with her husband and children in a nearby village – having moved there upon marriage according to virilocal tradition – came to visit her frequently and provided help. Yet, Qazime was inconsolable that her youngest son was not honouring his social obligation of reciprocal care.

Now is the time when I need my son to look after me. Until yesterday 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 this befell us, and my son left, we are destroyed.

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

Actually, it was not that solidarity stopped, it simply took on other forms as families developed mechanisms of adaptation and resilience through resourcefulness. Transnational care has become a pervasive strategy to address the challenges brought about by migration and involves a number of techniques. First, long-distance communication through mobile phones lessens the effects of loneliness and separation. Developments in technology such as the advent of Skype and the transmission of visual data have brought families located in different parts of the world closer to each other, enabling them to share the intimacy of each-other's lives. Skype technology has enabled families to celebrate together in virtual space important occasions such as birthdays, the New Year or religious festivities, as well as share moments of sadness and loss. For example, Burbuqe (F64, rural south-east Albania) is keen to explain how she knows her son's house in the US inside out even though she has never been there to visit.

There is a difference now with then [i.e. early 20<sup>th</sup> century migration]. I have all these video tapes here [showing] from the moment Shpend [her son] enters the door. I know all the places in his house, he has recorded everything. Upstairs and downstairs, their bedrooms. [...] I know everything. And I ask him: 'where are you my love?' 'Well, he tells me, we had our meal downstairs and now we are upstairs'.

Remitting, the second transnational practice of intra-family care, tends to address 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). Although remittances are much appreciated, most older parents value geographical closeness and togetherness above remittances. On the other hand, there is acceptance that migration was

necessary for the needs and future prospects of the younger generations. Migration thus involves much sacrifice on the part of families, as the following extract from a conversation with Burbuqe and her husband Serjan reveals:

Burbuqe: We get sad [...] Look, we have a grandchild who is born abroad and we haven't been able to see him [...] but we would not be happy for them to be here either.

Serjan: If they are here and you watch them suffer every day, it is worse.

[...]

Burbuqe: I tell them 'when you get rich, we won't be here anymore'. 'Don't say this, mother', he [son] tells me. And he then says 'every time I pick up the phone, I remember these words'. He calls, even just to say: 'how are you, where are you, where are you sitting now that you are talking to me'? [...] What I'm trying to say is that we miss them and they miss us very much. We had not experienced this before in Albania. We were used to having our children here in the house all the time. I used to say: how will I cope when he goes in the army [as a conscript]? And I used to cry. Little did I know he would go all the way to America.

The third element of transnational care constitutes proxy visits which help break the isolation and reinforce wider solidarity beyond the family circle as migrants visit their friends' parents as well as their own each time they are in Albania. Comfort through shared experiences helps soften the pain. Fourth, care provided across transnational space involves visits from the migrant children themselves, when documents and work-agendas permit. These are particularly important times for closer hands-on care and for keeping the oldest and youngest generations of the family connected.

#### *Gendered living and gendered dying: migrating in older age*

Fifthly, the migration or transnational living of the elderly parents is another very effective strategy, developed particularly in the last few years as migrants have been able to regularise their immigrant status abroad – either through periodic regularisations in Greece and Italy, as we saw earlier in the paper, or through more permanent stays and host-country citizenship in places such as North America and the UK. There is a further categorisation within this strategy reflecting the age and living situation of the older parents, and the immigrant status and financial situation of the migrant part of the



family. Younger grandparents – those in their 50s and 60s – often want to join migrants abroad. The aim is primarily twofold: first, in order to spend time with the grandchildren, thereby fulfilling their social ‘role’ as grandparents in older age, and second to help the migrant family move ahead financially. The latter goal is accomplished in two ways. First, by providing much-needed childcare, grandparents free the migrant woman to take up paid employment alongside her husband, given that paid childcare is very expensive in most host countries. The second way is by bringing income to the household themselves, men working in construction, petrol stations or as security guards, and women looking after local older people, the children of local professional mothers, or the children of other migrants. However, once this stage has been successfully completed and grandchildren start going to school, the elderly feel they need to return back to their village of origin. Thus for some their stay abroad is quite instrumental and does not promote any integration into the local society. Moreover, they suffer isolation because of their inability to communicate in the host language and a high level of dependency on their migrant sons and daughters in terms of mobility, entertainment and so on. A sense of burden replaces the feeling of usefulness and the decision is taken to return ‘back home’. The idea that if they stay they will have to face living in an old people’s home completely terrifies them: not only is this practice socially unacceptable, considered to reflect a neglect of duty from sons towards parents, but there is also a high financial cost involved, which will have to be borne by the migrant children again. These difficulties and dilemmas are illustrated through the extract from an interview with another elderly couple from the rural south-east, Sali (69) and Sanie (64), who live alone since both their sons live with their wives and children in the USA. The elderly couple lived in the US for a year and then returned to Albania. Note how, for this age group, gendered decision-making – at least in public appearance – is clear: the man decides.

Sali: We went there because the grandchildren needed looking after while they [migrant couple] went to work. So did I have the time to go out? [...] [besides] all people were busy with work there. Even if you are not busy, we didn’t speak the language. If you don’t speak the language, you shut up... Imagine what you could enjoy [when you go out]. Or you just watch TV; what? Nothing. Listen to a radio programme, nothing. So it’s not easy. [...] You go and play dominoes there, who will you play with? You want to play cards, there is no one to play with. You want to go and have a coffee, who will you go out with? [...] [the future] depends on the life situation of our children. I will tell you...

Fatime: For the moment, for as long as we are in good health, we can't decide about this.

Sali: I will tell you. Maybe you can't decide, but *I decide*. I will tell you. Wait, I decide and you will be convinced, as will whoever will listen to this. This one year as tourists that we [together with his wife] spent there, we went mostly because he [his son] has two children and his wife was staying at home looking after them. This created many [financial] shortcomings and they couldn't meet their needs. And he needed us to stay with the children so that they both could work. And now they are transiting this situation. This is linked to where we will go. So after they have raised their children, shall we go there as two children [meaning they would need looking after at this age]? Can they look after us with the situation that they have? That is why I said it depends on the economic situation. [...] When we will need help, despite the pensions we receive now which amount to nothing [...] especially if we were to receive them and spend them in America. [...] They are struggling hard to raise their own children, let alone look after us. If these conditions change in the future, perhaps. [...] It is a different environment there. Children there get married and mind their own business. What do the elderly do? [...] Those who have some income can afford to be looked after in a care home. We, with the sort of income we have, [...] wouldn't last there for a day. [...] So it's not easy. And so we think this way and that way and for as long as we are together, both of us, one for the other, it will be fine. When one of us will be left alone, we don't know then...

Life back in the village continues with support through the other channels of transnational care until – as the last sentence of the quote notes – the other dreaded moment arrives: the death of one of the partners. In contrast to the preference for males at birth, the preference at the end of life is for females to survive longer. Men are considered to become a burden to the rest of the family because they cannot look after themselves. Women, on the other hand, are deemed capable to look not only after themselves but after their husband as well. It is this logic that explains a higher rate of re-marriage after the death of a partner for men than for women when the stage in life corresponds to having completed the duty of raising the children. 'Three days and in the ground' (*tri dit e dë dhét*) is a frequently recited wish amongst older people, meaning that their wish is for them not to be bed-ridden for more than three days – death is better in comparison. Several of our interviewees struggled with the dilemma of what their life would be like – and where – when one of the partners died. Since 2004–06, when our

research on this particular topic took place, several of our interviewees have sadly passed away; often the emigration of the lone partner to join their emigrant children abroad followed.

In a society where care for one's older parents continues to be considered as an obligation, especially for the younger son and his wife, being able to perform these filial duties reflects personal interest as much as altruistic motives. While performing transnational care reflects a sense of love and duty – at least by the sons and daughters – it also helps maintain and boost migrants' personal social status in origin communities.

*Joining the global care chains: female solidarity, force of habit or force of money?*

One of the most common and effective ways of care provision for the elderly left behind when they are at an advanced age is to request the assistance of relatives living locally and neighbours. Like the wider global care chain, this local segment of care also always constitutes women. Qazime tells of the people who provide day-to-day care for her:

There are many [village] girls [nearby] – the girls of Alime, those of Vera, of course they help me. Thank goodness for these people. [...] The wife of Vani called on me the other day [...] their garden is here close to mine and she comes to see me whenever she comes to inspect her vegetables. [...] She told me that she had seen a TV programme about all these older people who have been left alone.

As the quote indicates, locals use diverse strategies of support, the one here being to widen the perspective by placing personal drama into a wider national context, thus helping older people bear their situation better. On the other hand, that mass media has taken an interest in the phenomenon is an indication of the extent of its occurrence in the country. Perhaps what is more interesting in our case of gendered care is what our interview with Qazime further revealed: shifting care duties from the absent daughter-in-law – who as a migrant looks after older people in Greece – to the daughter who lives locally. The latter in turn passes on her own obligations to other females in the family. Qazime explains how such local female care chains work:

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.

Like other aspects of Albanian society, proxy care too is very much a gendered affair with women providing day-to-day care with the household tasks and men helping in other ways. For example, a local shepherd looked after Qazime's seven sheep so that she could have a continuous supply of milk until she decided to sell them.

Until recently such care has remained in the realm of mutual social support. In recent years, however, and as fewer young relatives remain behind, there has been an increasing tendency in Albania to commercialise care and associated social relations. In rural areas where elderly care institutions are absent, such arrangements involve local women who are paid by migrants to provide daily care to migrants' older relatives, for example preparing a warm meal for them, doing their washing, cleaning around the house and so on. To be sure, relatives and other proxy carers in the past were given 'gifts' in return for their services, often clothes and jewellery, and sometimes money 'for a coffee' (cf. King *et al.* 2011). Entering a commercial relation with a non-relative is a more depersonalised and formal stage of care. Despite this, rural areas still provide a social safety-net of some sorts for lone elderly, and certainly an environment to meet friends and roam around the village.

In contrast, urban areas have become more insecure and solitary places for older people in the last two decades. During the socialist years, low geographical mobility for much of the urban population meant that, like in the villages, in towns too individuals and families lived as neighbours for generations. All of that changed rapidly with the large-scale post-1990 population movements whereby the vacuum left by emigration from smaller towns, either abroad or to larger centres such as Tirana and Durrës, was rapidly filled in by in-migration from surrounding rural and more remote mountainous areas. Tirana in particular has a high degree of population turnover, especially in the recently built-up areas with high-rise flats that have sprung up in its periphery in the last two decades. Single youth, students and older people share these flats, but contact between the generations is minimal. Reports of lone older people being found in their homes days and even weeks after they have died have become more frequent in the local media, raising serious concerns about the way contemporary Albanian society is caring for its most vulnerable groups. Certainly migrants are worried about their parents in Albania, as the following quote from Mirela (35), living in the Greek city of Thessaloniki and ironically looking after an elderly Greek couple there, illustrates:

My mother is 64 whereas my father is 71 years of age. Now they have health problems, like most people of their generation. I am worried about them because they are alone. Even the neighbours

who used to live in the same flat next door, when I lived there, are not there anymore. They 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. If they need to go to a hospital or something like that, there is no-one there to help them.

Mirela 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. Like in rural areas, here too support for care is often sought locally through a combination of reliance on relatives living nearby and paid help. Live-in care as an option is still in its infancy, care being provided mostly through visits to the older person's home. Once again the local care chain consists of women – daughters, daughters-in-law and female paid carers.

Interestingly, in the course of our research we also came across families taking into their households more distant older relatives, for example the wife of an uncle who is alone and has no children. Altruism is combined with self-interest: in rapidly declining former industrial towns such as Bulqizë, with high unemployment and poverty rates, an old-age pension, meagre as it is, may be the only income a household has.

Urban areas are also the places where institutionalised care for the elderly is proliferating. The existing public, but mostly private day-care and residential homes are struggling to meet demand, despite the social unacceptability of the practice as discussed earlier.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Coming full-circle: glocal chains of (child)care*

We conceptualise transnational care as another transnational practice similar to remitting which leads us to investigate it in a bi-directional mode. That is to say, care flows not only from migrants abroad to their relatives left behind, but also in reverse, often through the very same channels of transmission as have been outlined so far. Love, concern and emotional support, but also advice and guidance rendered during phone calls, sending

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<sup>4</sup> According to an interview on the BBC Albanian Service with Mrs Denada Seferi, Director of the Social Services Policies at the Albanian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, there were 25 public and private residential and community (day-care) institutions in Albania by early 2011, serving around 1700 older people. However, demand for social services in such centres was on the increase. 'The Third Age in Albania', BBC Albanian correspondent in Tirana, Aleksander Furrxi, 20 January 2011, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/albanian/news/2011/01/110120\\_extremes\\_albania.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/albanian/news/2011/01/110120_extremes_albania.shtml).

of gifts, overseeing investment projects, managing savings in bank accounts, house-sitting if migrants' property investment is in close proximity; these are some of several such 'reverse' transnational care practices. In this last part of the paper before concluding we pay attention to how children of migrants are cared for by grandparents in Albania and the reverse process.

Earlier we emphasised that one of the key reasons for grandparents, particularly grandmothers, to join their migrant sons and daughters abroad is in order to provide childcare for the migrant couple until the children reach school age. Looking after grandchildren is considered by grandparents as their key social role in later life and privation from this due to migration caused tremendous anguish and pain for elderly interviewees. Most often our research found that such care took place in the country of immigration, following the 'migrating grannies' trajectory (King and Vullnetari 2006). However, we also came across several situations where the grandchildren were being looked after in Albania, which caused the separation of these young children from their parents. Four key factors were behind this decision, quite often in combination. First, it made economic sense for grandparents to stay in Albania where the cost of living is lower than in industrialised host countries and where they can contribute to the overall family livelihood strategy through childcare and subsistence farming. Second, this option was often adopted where the documentation status for the migrants was problematic, especially in Greece and Italy. Hence grandparents would have found it nearly impossible to join them there as well. Third, this decision was taken when the grandparents – in their 50s and 60s – could not leave Albania as they had their own much older parents – in their 70s and 80s – to look after. For example, Barije (50) lives in rural south-east Albania where she looks after her 80-year-old mother-in-law and two small granddaughters from a son and daughter-in-law who work in Athens. Her husband is a seasonal migrant who works in rural Greece and comes home for part of the year to help out with agricultural work such as planting, harvesting and so on. The grandchildren have been looked after in the village since they were born but soon it will be time for them to go to Greece and start school.

The final reason behind such a decision is to reduce the loneliness for grandparents, especially if there is only one person left, by having grandchildren around, as the quote from Selvije's (65) interview illustrates:

I am here alone with my two granddaughters. [...] I am not very old, but the difficulties of life, and my husband died and left me to deal with everything. Because, in any case, when your husband is by your side it is different. You have someone to talk to. They are only children, what do they know. [...] Yes, they are well-behaved. I don't

know what I would have done had I not had them. [...] Because they [her migrant daughters] work and they don't have anyone to look after the children, so I help them.

In the area of childcare too, commercialisation has made headway, particularly in the last ten years. Once again urban areas are at the forefront of this trend as it is there that professional couples live, who are also the ones generally making use of paid childcare. Needless to say, it is again other women who provide this care. Their profile is often that of a 'grandmother' figure: a woman in her 50s or 60s who, given the universality of marriage and childbirth in Albanian society, will have raised children and grandchildren of her own, hence she will have experience as well as the 'grandmother' warmth. This age and stage in life reduces potential concerns of 'misbehaviour' between her and the male partner of the employer couple. The carer can be an in-migrant from another area of Albania. Amongst the emerging affluent groups of businessmen and politicians, Filipina babysitters are now the preferred choice, thought to have been introduced to Tirana's society by the foreign personnel of diplomatic staff and international agencies working in Albania.<sup>5</sup> Besides being an important status symbol, the Filipina's English language skills are useful to prepare the children of this affluent group from a very young age to adapt to their future education in European schools and universities, those in the UK being preferred. Thus, the globalisation of the care chain comes full-circle.

### **Conclusion: capabilities to cut chains**

This paper has taken a diachronic and comparative perspective on the evolution of intergenerational care within families across two highly contrasting periods of social organisation: state socialism, during which migration and overall mobility were limited and controlled; and neoliberal capitalism and the 'era of mass migration'. The setting of Albania is unique given that during its phase of 'actually existing socialism' (cf. Verdery 1996) it followed a very orthodox Stalinist path of development, which swung to the other extreme of free-for-all capitalism after the regime's demise in the early 1990s. Women were considered a key factor in the 'building of socialism' and measures were thus taken to facilitate and maximise their participation in the labour force. A network of crèches and kindergartens set up around the country was meant to help mothers undertake wage

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5 According to data provided by the Government of Albania, there were 54 Philippine citizens with a work permit in Albania in 2010. The number of immigrants from the Philippines nearly doubled in 2010 compared to 2009 (GoA 2010: 20; 29). Sex-segregated data are not easily available from published reports.

work outside the home, and in so doing extend their emancipation through work. Yet, the key role of women's informal networks of support needs to be recognised as being just as important to the building of socialism. This was an informal care network that included other working women, female children and the much-loved grandmother (and sometimes men), all mutually supporting each other in solidarity. Given that women's 'burden' of household work and care was not shifted equally to men, many of our female interviewees felt that, despite the job security socialism provided, the long working hours had been detrimental both to their quality of life and to their ability to care adequately for their children. As such, many had welcomed the 're-traditionalisation' of society in the 1990s, when they could stay at home and enjoy being a homemaker, while their husband went out to work. For some, however, freedom from the requirement of the state to go to work was replaced with the requirement by their husband to stay at home.

Yet, the much-vaunted liberalisation and commodification of many aspects of life in the post-socialist era brought in new challenges. Several of these challenges resemble those of the socialist time, with the added qualification that insecurity is the new certainty in life. As mass internal and international migration have ruptured formerly close-knit families across space, women and men have been inventive in the array of strategies they have adopted to address these challenges. Intra-family and inter-generational care across borders has taken various shapes and forms, building on previous experiences and new resources in Albania and abroad. As Albania's decades of isolation made way for global incorporation, its place in the global chains – of mobility, money and care – has been very unequal. It has so far been primarily a supplier of people, affection and care in exchange for monetary compensation. As in socialist times, women – whether young or old – are a key force of building the society, this time capitalism, through their paid and unpaid work and especially the care that they most often provide and less often receive. Unlike in socialist times, however, female networks of solidarity, albeit framed and bound by patriarchy, are increasingly making way for commercialised and commoditised care. Under conditions of post-socialist welfare-state policies which focus on cuts rather than capabilities, true freedom from chains has a long way to go.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Russell King** is Professor of Geography at the University of Sussex and Founding Director of the Sussex Centre for Migration Research. Prior to moving to Sussex he was Lecturer in Geography at the University of Leicester and Professor of Geography at Trinity College Dublin. He has also been Visiting Lecturer or Professor at the University of Malta, Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Israel, the University of Trieste in Italy, and Cornell University in the United States. He has wide-ranging interests in the study of migration, including labour migration, refugee migration, return migration, international retirement migration, international student migration, and the relationship between migration and other forms of mobility. Regionally, his interests are mainly in Europe, especially Southern Europe and the Balkans. He has published extensively on all the above topics. His most recent book (joint with Julie Vullnetari) is *Gender, Remittances and Development: Albania's Society and Economy in Transition* (I.B. Tauris, 2011) and his next forthcoming book (joint with Anastasia Christou) is *Counter-Diaspora: The Greek Second Generation Returns 'Home'* (Harvard University Press, 2014). He is also the editor of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. From January 2012 to June 2013 Russell King was Guest Professor in memory of Willy Brandt at the Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare, Malmö University.

**Julie Vullnetari** is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex, where she is researching with Russell King a project funded by the Leverhulme Trust on everyday life in communist Albania. She holds degrees of MSc and DPhil in Migration Studies, also from the University of Sussex. Her doctoral research examined the links between internal and international migration from a development perspective, paying particular attention to the impacts these links have on migrant communities and places of origin. Her other areas of interest include migration, ageing and care, particularly for elderly parents left behind by their migrant children; remittances and their gendered economic and social impacts on communities of origin; the migration of Romani of Eastern Europe; development in socialist societies, with a particular focus on everyday life; and border communities, especially in former socialist countries. Geographically, Julie's research has focused in Albania and the Balkans with periods of fieldwork in key Western European cities. In addition to many articles in academic journals, chapters in edited books, and commissioned reports, she has published two books: the one on *Gender, Remittances and Development* mentioned under Russell King's bio statement above, and *Albania on the Move: Links between Internal and International Migration* (Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

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