



Older People's Contribution to Development Through Carework: The Role of Childcare by Grandparents in Migration and Development

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Abstract: This article applies a generational lens to understanding the role of older people in development, focusing primarily on older parents who stay in areas of origin while their adult children emigrate. An emerging body of literature from around the world demonstrates that older parents frequently provide childcare for their migrant family members, mainly in the country of origin, and sometimes through migrating themselves. This article goes further. It makes the conceptual argument that this carework should be regarded as development work. Drawing on research into Albanian families, located in Albania and Greece, the article asks how does carework by older people contribute to development and what are the relations of power around this? The analysis shows that grandparents provide significant support particularly for childcare but also for social reproduction and critically for building and maintaining productive assets and safety nets for migrants in their home country. In short, grandparent carers are the lynchpins in complex intergenerational strategies of migration and livelihood development. The analysis contributes to the literature on migration and development by bringing older people from the margins to the centre of these debates. Older people's childcare, together with other productive and reproductive activities that they undertake for migrant children in countries of origin, is central to invisibilized 'economies of care' that underpin migration's contribution to development. Moreover, this carework by older people contributes to development in home and host countries, thus bridging the Global South–Global North divide. Finally, older people's carework is gendered, with older women doing the vast majority. Taken together, these insights disrupt two dominant (economistic and Eurocentric) narratives that: (a) development in migration contexts only happens in the Global South and (b) the most significant drivers of this development are migrants' social and financial remittances from the Global North.

Key words: Albania, Carework, Migration and development, Older people in development

I. Introduction

Generally, development studies have not paid much attention to older people, and when they have, it has been primarily with an interest in social policy around pensions and healthcare. Even in some of the most progressive writings,

older people are seen as a 'burden' on society, stemming from the perception of them as frail, and needing ongoing care to address their deteriorating health, or alternatively, the focus is on their poverty (e.g., Desai, 2014; Razavi, 2012). A similar picture emerges when one looks at

the literature on migration and development, which has traditionally focused on working-age migrants. For instance, although older people are part of transnational migrant families, often this literature, including that on Global Care Chains, centres around the cross-border relationships between the working-age migrants—often mothers—and their ‘left behind’ young children. For example, when Nyberg Sorensen and Vammen (2014) link the literature on transnational families and the migration–development nexus, they only mention older people once or twice in passing. The last two decades, however, have seen a rapid increase of studies that investigate the experiences of older people from an agentic perspective. Initially, the focus was primarily on people participating in international retirement migration. This was followed by work that included other groups such as older labour migrants and people who remain in areas of origin when their younger family members emigrate.

This article explicitly centres on the role that older people play in migration along with their contribution to development, primarily through carework. It further argues that this carework should be seen as development work—one that benefits both the migrants’ countries of origin and their countries of destination. This carework is clearly gendered in that the vast majority of it, particularly childcare, is primarily performed by women and considered as ‘women’s work’. As such, it is often poorly paid and looked down upon as unskilled work. Moreover, childcare is often incorporated into circuits of production and reproduction that depend on a racialized workforce. When this gendered aspect intersects with the racial politics of care, these impacts are compounded, resulting in multiple layers of disadvantage and discrimination. As Chopra and Sweetman (2014: 413) have pointed out, drawing on the work of feminist economists, ‘Production depends on reproduction—that is, economic development depends on care.’ Yet, despite the huge contribution carework makes to our economies and societies both in

reproductive and productive terms, it is often sidelined and overlooked (see also Vera-Sanso and Sweetman, 2009).

This article also takes on the conceptual stumbling block that researchers and policy makers have in understanding the term older. There are two basic approaches. First, a bureaucratic one that requires a chronological age cut-off, irrespective of its fit with empirical reality. The second is rooted in the well-established knowledge that socio-economic context determines the rate of physical ageing and that age is a *relational* category that reflects people’s position within key stages of the life course in relation to work, family and community. Focusing on age as a relational category foregrounds the social relations of later life, opening up the possibility of analysing power relations based on gender, age and racialization at multiple scales. At the family and community scale, generational age is often more empirically significant than chronological age. It places grandparents in the category of older person or elder. This article follows this relational approach and highlights the value of work grandparents, especially middle-aged and older grandmothers, do in reproducing the economy in migrants’ sending and host countries.

I focus primarily on Albania, a country that has experienced large-scale outmigration since the fall of the communist regime there in the early 1990s, and draw on my longstanding familiarity with how older people figure in Albania’s migration and development history. In line with the widespread research on older persons made vulnerable by being left behind by working-age migrants, early research in Albania was focused on the impact of migration on older people, particularly the emotional toll of family separation for older people’s well-being, and issues of loneliness (e.g., King and Vullnetari, 2006; King et al., 2017). This reflected the urgent need of interviewees to communicate their experience of the near meltdown of the economy and society, following the country’s politically turbulent transition in the early 1990s from a one-party

centrally planned economy to a highly deregulated capitalist society. Follow-on research gradually revealed that older people were far from passive recipients of remittances, in need of 'care', feeling 'abandoned' and vulnerable. They had agency too, and staying 'behind' in the village of origin was not purely a passive situation out of their control but one where they exercised some form of agency, however limited by personal, family or broader structural constraints. Challenging the distorting 'vulnerability trope' by analysing older people's experiences of migration, whether as stayers or migrants, is imperative to recognize this agency (see King et al., 2014; 2017).

This article focuses on middle-aged and older grandparents' participation in childcare both within Albania and in the country to which their adult children have migrated, Greece, in order to address the following questions. First, how do older people doing carework in migrant-sending countries contribute to development? Second, what are the relations of power (and inequalities) around these contributions?

The article is structured as follows. The Introduction section is followed by a discussion around carework and its place in migration and development, drawing on the concept of 'invisible care economies' by Shah and Lerche (2020). A brief overview of the context of Albania is presented next, with specific focus on migration and development as interlinked, and the role older people and grandparents play in these processes. The article then goes on to critique the migration–development debates, returning to the theoretical starting point that older people both contribute to, and benefit from, development in complex ways that are mediated by relations of power. The section that follows provides an account of the methodology through which data for this research were gathered and analysed. The next part of the article then moves on to the findings that are organized around two key themes: childcare provision from grandparents and the wider range of carework older people

are involved in, as part of wider 'economies of care' (Shah and Lerche, 2020). The final section concludes.

II. Recognizing Carework as Development

While care is central to all societies and to life itself, that is, to 'our individual and collective survival' (Lawson, 2007: 5), it continues to be marginalized in both academic research and public policy. Its marginalization in social theory, and more broadly in Western canonical thought, Nguyen et al. (2017: 199–203) argue, is down to the dominance of the political economic ideologies of neoliberalism, which centre rationality, market efficiency and personal autonomy (and in turn responsibility). Economic rationality, in this context, goes against the emotional and affective that are constitutive parts of care. Moreover, neoliberal economic theory associates rationality with the masculine and the public domain, whilst relegating the affective (and therefore care) to the private/domestic sphere. While much feminist scholarship has shown the fallacy of this public–private, masculine–feminine binary thinking, the dominance of the economic perspective on life has not been fundamentally shaken. This may be partly due to the dominance of Western thought in social sciences, and its reliance on (Cartesian) binaries. The dominant ideological and economic model remains focused on the autonomous, if not independent, self-sufficient individual, and consequently, care is understood as being needed by dependents (children, the elderly, the sick and frail), who are often looked down upon for so long as they are thought to be unable to contribute—either through their labour or consumption—to capital accumulation (Nguyen et al., 2017). Postcolonial and decolonial scholars, on the other hand, have proposed alternative ways of understanding the social world, which centre on the coexistence of multiple perspectives rather than the dominance of meta-theories and on relations of interdependence rather than unilinear dependence.

Neoliberalism has underpinned much scholarship and policy interventions in the fields of migration and development. Its dominance is evident in both widely critiqued theoretical perspectives, such as the Neoclassical Theory and the New Economics of Labour Migration (Abreu, 2012), and the disproportionately high emphasis on financial remittances. In contrast, the scholarship on care migration has developed separately and is often focused on the work of (working-age) migrant women serving the care needs of Global North societies. However, despite the increasing recognition of the contribution this migrant carework makes to societies, it is rarely visible in development discourses, with some notable exceptions (Raghuram, 2009). For example, Dumitru (2014) advocates for the recognition of carework as a skilled occupation that should be included in migration–development debates alongside the discussions of conventionally recognized occupational skills, such as medicine or technology.

The centrality of care is also overlooked by traditional conceptualizations of development as a ‘developing country’ concern. Critical researchers point to the continuity of unequal power relations underpinning colonialism to contemporary development discourses in which development is presented as ‘a promise that is [never quite achieved and] perpetually deferred’, with the ‘developing’ countries in the global South in a state of perpetual transition to this promised land (Biccum, 2005: 1,009, author’s emphasis; see also Andreasson, 2005; Kothari, 2006). This underlying logic influences how migration–development debates are framed in ways that obscure carework and its contributions (see also Sampaio, 2022). While migrants’ immense financial, demographic, political, social and cultural contribution to societies in the Global North is acknowledged in a wide-ranging literature, rarely is this considered the development of the Global North, with some exceptions, such as Raghuram (2009). As a result, the migration–development literature perceives the development that

arises from migration as taking place *only* in the Global South—through remittances, return or diaspora interventions from migrants located in the Global North.

Shah and Lerche (2020) provide a valuable alternative framework for understanding the relationship between production, care, development and migration. Their research on internal migration in India clearly demonstrates how the economic development of the country’s richer regions and urban areas is underpinned by migrant labour exploitation. Employers offer migrant labour worse pay and working conditions than local workers, effectively outsourcing the costs of their social reproduction to rural areas of origin. In rural sending areas, entire economies of care, relying on the family and kinship relations, are working to reproduce the ‘productive’ migrant workforce that generates economic value for the wider economy. Shah and Lerche (2020) draw on a long history of Marxist and Feminist thought, as well as a more recent ‘revival’ of the Social Reproduction Theory that sees ‘economic production’ and ‘social reproduction’ as co-constitutive elements of capitalist economy and society (Fraser, 2014 in Shah and Lercher, 2020: 721). Shah and Lercher (2020) show that there is an ‘intimate relationship between [economic] production and social reproduction’ that spans areas of origin and destination, underpinned by ‘invisible economies of care’ across translocal households. They further argue that an intersectional analysis that goes beyond a gendered analysis of care to include racialization/ethnicity and age (generations) is essential to understanding the role care plays in economy and society.

Although care and social reproduction are often used interchangeably by some scholars, including Shah and Lerche (2020), other feminist scholars, such as Kofman and Raghuram (2015), conceptualize social reproduction as offering a much broader scope for analysis, as care has, in the past, been used narrowly to refer only to careworkers and the ‘traditional’ care sectors. I adopt Nguyen et al. (2017)’s

position here that, although related, care and social reproduction are separate and distinct. This perspective offers a broader conceptualization of care that sees emotions and affect as essential to care and points to the ways in which 'affective' care-giving and care-receiving produce emotional and 'bodily' responses that create, as well as undo, social relationships (Nguyen et al., 2017). For Nguyen et al. (2017: 202, drawing on Tronto, 1993) care is an ongoing set of social 'processes of creating, sustaining and reproducing bodies, selves and social relationships—dialectical processes in which aspects of competitiveness and solidarity, anxiety and solicitude are interchangeably present and continually struggle with each other' (Nguyen et al., 2017: 202). Critically, this perspective insists that care, in (re)producing interpersonal social relationships, is saturated with unequal (and dynamic) relations of power.

Within the migration literature on care, care is often given by working-age migrants and, in the transnational migration literature, received by children both in host countries (from migrant nannies, for example) and in areas of origin (from stay-behind female relatives, such as grandmothers and aunts, and from migrant mothers performing their parental role from a distance). As above, older people are often absent within migration and development debates, unless described as the 'left behind', the recipients of remittances and care from their working-age migrant relatives (often sons and daughters) or as retirees returning to their areas of origin (which Cerase (1974: 251) called the 'return of retirement'). However, research examining the role of older people in these migratory contexts, especially 'transnational grandparenting' where grandparents periodically move abroad to provide care for their grandchildren in destination areas, is increasing and has emphasized how older people can also be *caregivers* (Bastia, 2009; Plaza, 2000; Schröder-Butterfill, 2004; Silverstein et al., 2006; Vullnetari and King, 2008). However, once again, it is rare for these

studies to conceptualize this care contribution as development, either for the country of origin or the country of destination.

Drawing on my research in Albania on internal and transnational migration, I argue that the acknowledgment of older people's active contribution to development through care, and recognition that this development benefits both the country of origin and the host country, are long overdue.

III. Migration, Development and Older People in Albania

Albania is one of the most emigration-intensive countries in Europe and globally (in terms of the share of the resident population who migrate). Since the transition in the early 1990s from a one-party political system ruling a centrally managed economy, to a free-for-all form of capitalism, Albania has seen unabated levels of emigration of its working-age population. Combined with large-scale population relocation internally within the country, especially towards urban and coastal areas, the results are depopulated rural mountainous areas and a significant greying of the population overall (Vullnetari, 2012). Most, if not all, families in Albania have been touched by migration over the last 30 years. Even where families have not directly migrated, they have been impacted indirectly, for instance, through the multiplier effect of financial remittances. Remittances have been essential to the survival of many Albanian households, especially in the early 1990s when the economy was on the brink of collapse and IMF-imposed fiscal and economic reforms that led to the closing of factories, rapid price increases and slashed public provisions caused considerable hardship for the population. Throughout the 1990s, migrants' remittances shored up the economy, constituting between 10% and 20% of the country's GDP and covering nearly 90% of the country's trade deficit (King et al., 2011: 279). Although less significant, they continue to be important beyond that first mass migration decade, constituting significant portions of recipient

household budgets (13% according to some estimates from Frashëri et al. [2018: 22]).

Migrants have generally been working-age adults, although in the early 1990s many young children and teenagers made dangerous journeys on foot to neighbouring Greece, or on inflatable boats to Italy. Older people generally stayed behind, keeping the household economy running and visiting their migrant sons and daughters abroad when visa regimes permitted (King and Vullnetari, 2006). As more routes to legal emigration opened up to key destination countries such as Greece and Italy, but also further afield, some older parents became transnational migrants, spending significant amounts of time throughout the year with their migrant sons and daughters abroad (Vullnetari and King, 2008). As young children grew up and started school and grandparents aged, migrant families became less reliant on them for childcare, so many older parents returned to Albania to spend the last years of their life in their villages and towns of origin (King et al., 2014). When older parents still living in the villages were widowed, some joined their migrant children abroad. Through these stayings and goings, older people have played a key role in enabling the mobilities and maintaining the moorings not just of their own families but also of others in their social and spatial networks. This role and its contribution to migration and development, more broadly, have not been sufficiently recognized. This article contributes to remedying this oversight.

IV. Sites, Methods and Data

This article draws on my research in Albania during the summer of 2004 and in 2005–06. The first small-scale fieldwork in Southeast Albania investigated the experiences of older parents ‘left behind’ by their adult children who had migrated internally or abroad (Vullnetari, 2004). The second longer fieldwork in the same village and three further villages in Southeast Albania, as well as three urban areas in Albania and Greece, focused on the links between internal and international migration from a development

perspective (Vullnetari, 2012). Further details of both are provided in the supplementary materials. Both studies used a convenience sampling strategy. Starting with my existing social networks, supplemented by the snowballing techniques, I sought multiple entries into the communities to ensure a wide range of views was collected. In both studies, in-depth semi-structured interviews were supplemented by participant observation, which, as part of extended stays, enabled me to contextualize the interview data within a more immersive ethnography of these contexts.

For this article, with its focus on childcare, I draw on a subset of data using a generational, rather than age, lens. Therefore, the subsample consists of grandparents who had provided childcare—either at the time of interview, or at some point in the past—for at least one adult son (or daughter) *and* talked about it in their interview. A total of 34 interviewees were selected in this way. Of these, 15 were looking after grandchildren at the time of interview, either in the villages of origin, or in the urban areas in Albania. Most others—18 grandparent interviewees—had provided childcare for their migrant sons and daughters, *at some point* in the past (prior to the interview), either in the village or by moving to the destination country for several months to a year. One grandparent in her mid-fifties was preparing—at the time of interview—to emigrate to the USA to help both of her married daughters who had settled there, with childcare. Of the 15 grandparents providing childcare at the time of interview, 7 were solely responsible for their grandchild (ren) whilst parent(s) were abroad, whilst the others had daughters-in-law who lived with them in Albania. In addition to the subsample of 34 interviewees, the interviews of another group of 11 older grandparents were included to inform the broader conversation around childcare. They did not mention having provided childcare themselves. However, their conversations were useful to understand the extent to which childcare provision is spread more widely in these communities, as they

gave examples of other people in their kinship and social network who had done so. They were further instructive as, in a few cases, they discussed why they could not provide childcare for their adult migrant children and the repercussions of this for their migrant family members. Of the 34 interviewees in the subsample, only a small number (5) mentioned providing childcare for their daughter's children, with most talking about providing childcare for their son's children.

The grandparents in the subsample ranged in age from 50 to 75 years, except one who was 45 years old. Those who were providing childcare at the time of the interview were often in their fifties (although one exceptionally was 75 years old).

While focusing centrally on the older grandparents' views, I also present some working-age migrants' perspectives to underscore the importance of childcare for household economies. A total of 27 working-age migrant interviewees were included, 17 of whom had childcare provision from their parents (in-laws) either at the time of interview or in the past. Some had left their children to be looked after in Albania, whereas in other cases, grandparents had travelled to Greece to help with childcare there; in other cases, the childcare provision was in Tirana where the migrants had relocated either directly from the village or upon return from Greece. The remaining 10 of the total sample did not have childcare provision, but their views were included precisely to understand the reasons behind this, and consequences for the household economy, and particularly migrant women. All migrant interviewees ranged in age from 23 to 42 years. Over half of them lived in Greece, with the others being returnees from Greece, excepting one who lived in Italy.

Grandchildren were generally of pre-school age when sent or 'left behind' to be looked after by their grandparents in Albania. Sometimes they had been left from as young as six months and often for several years. In a handful of cases, the children were older: in three cases,

the children were early teens, and in two cases, they were enrolled in primary school. The former were children from a daughter's or son's previous marriage and either lived with the grandparent because it was expected that they would (re)join their parent in the near future or because their parent's new partner did not accept them as part of the new family. Most often grandparents looked after one child at a time; although there were some instances of caring for two children, grandparents rarely cared for more. Grandparents noted that it was difficult to look after more than one child at a time when both the children's parents were away. At times, siblings were split up and sent to different sets of grandparents to ease the 'burden' of childcare or where siblings were from different marriages. The duration of care varied from a few months at a time to several years. The general pattern was to support working-age migrants in the early years of migration so that they could put some money aside. Those who followed this strategy fitted the typology known in migration literature as 'target earners': that is to say, they emigrated in order to fulfil a desired purpose in the origin country (Albania), for which a certain amount of money was needed, with a planned return upon successful achievement of this aim (de Haas et al. 2019: 75, 383). Often the target for the working-age migrants in my subsample was to work in Greece for something like five years, save as much as possible, and then return to Albania to invest in a house in the city and/or a business. Migrants who did not have such clear immediate plans for return, continued to live with their children in Greece and their focus was to give their children as many opportunities in Greece as possible, such as after-school classes and other investment in their education.

The interviewees lived in rural areas prior to migration, and my analysis speaks to their profile as migrants (and stayers) in rural communities. Whilst some had higher education and 'skilled professions', the vast majority did not. The key employment sector throughout

the communist years in these rural areas had been agriculture, which involved highly manual and backbreaking work. Most migrants had completed primary education (eight years of schooling) and some also secondary (four additional years), most of which was also oriented towards the agricultural sector. The majority migrated to Greece where men worked predominantly in agriculture—especially in the early years of migration—and construction, whilst women worked predominantly in domestic services such as cleaning, childcare and care for older people. Both also worked in tourism. In addition, some men and women worked in small factories in urban areas.

The interviews were conducted in Albanian. They were audio-recorded with the participant's permission and transcripts, in turn, analysed (also in Albanian). I analysed the subsample of interviewees (of grandparent carers for migrants' children and the working-age migrant parents whose children were being cared for by grandparents) in relation to the two research questions, paying attention to emerging themes, and similarities and differences within these. In reporting the data, I use pseudonyms for all interviewees to safeguard participants' anonymity in line with their wishes.

V. Older Parents and 'Invisible Economies of Care'

The data analysis revealed two key ways through which migrants' 'older' parents contribute to development: first, through childcare provision; and second, by acting as the lynchpin of multi-generational socio-economic strategies for migrant households across space and over time. Taken together, these contributions are central to 'economies of care' which are invisibilized in contemporary debates and policies about migration and development but which are significant for the well-being of migrant families, and for the development of local and national economies and societies in both origin and destination areas. In other words, although overlooked by policymakers

and scholars, these contributions of 'older' parents are key to the financial 'success' of many migratory projects. I discuss each theme in turn in the following sections.

VI. Grandparents' Childcare as a Contribution to Family Well-being and National Development

The provision of childcare by middle-aged and older parents for their adult migrant sons and daughters (and/or in-laws) is a crucial contribution to the socio-economic and emotional well-being of migrant families, as well as to the wider development of local and national economies in both the country of destination and the country of origin.

Economic Contribution to the Migrant Household

At a micro-level, the childcare provision is a twofold economic contribution to migrant families. First, it allows both working-age migrant parents (or more precisely the migrant woman who would have to provide this care otherwise) to take up paid work, thus doubling the earnings of the migrant household. Second, it enables the migrant family to make relative financial savings by not having to pay for childcare, which in some Global North migrant host countries can be a significant portion of the household income.¹ The financial knock-on effects of this contribution are that migrants are able to accumulate savings and achieve their economic targets (e.g., saving to build a house or setting up a business) faster. As migrants' wages were generally very low, many migrants in Greece also worked overtime or during weekends, something that they could not do as much, or as often, if the children were in Greece too. Migrants emphasized how important this childcare provision was to this overall migratory project. Without childcare by grandparents, migrants had to rely on only one income—usually that of the migrant man—and struggled financially, leading to worse material living conditions in Greece and prolonged stays to save enough to meet their migration targets.

These views were prevalent amongst the subsample. For example, Luan and Kela were working in Greece, whilst their five-year-old daughter lived with Luan's older parents (in their mid-fifties) in their village in Albania. Kela told me:

We have this plan in mind, that we want to work hard, save money and return to Albania, buy a house and live there. There are others who are focused on living here [in Greece], so they have their children with them here, and live normally [...], with all things needed, and don't save money.

Another couple, Berti and Mira, also working in Greece and who had left their son with Berti's parents in Albania for four years, expressed the same sentiment. In Berti's words:

If the wife doesn't help you a bit it [the migration] is in vain. If you don't have two workers [*krah pune*] in the household, here with just one salary you can only cover the everyday living costs – food, rent, (bills) electricity, water, only these.

Finally, in the words of Goni (35) who had returned to Albania together with his wife after an extended stay abroad: 'If my son lived with us there [in Greece], I would have not been able to make the money to invest and build this house [in Tirana].'

Similarly, middle-aged and older grandparents in Albania told me that childcare was a key way in which they were helping their migrant children. The migrant children for whom they provided childcare included those who had migrated abroad, those migrating internally from the village to work in towns or cities, as well as those who had migrated abroad and then settled in towns or cities on their return to Albania. Consequently, some grandparents cared for grandchildren in the village, whilst others migrated to Tirana to look after grandchildren there, and some went to stay temporarily with their migrant children's families abroad. For example, Safet, a middle-aged grandparent (53 years old), lived in the village with his wife (50), his mother (80) and a young son (16). When I interviewed him in

2005, they were also looking after the two pre-school daughters (aged 5 and 6) of his eldest son who, together with his wife, lived and worked in Greece. The little girls were running around in the courtyard, and he was trying to keep an eye on them as we talked. It emerged that Safet was himself a migrant worker, working seasonally in agriculture in rural Greece not far from the Albanian border, and that it was his wife who looked after the granddaughters, his older mother and the household economy when he was away, with some help from the teenage son. He explained:

We have been looking after them [his granddaughters] here for five years now. Now he [his eldest son] will come to take them as they will be enrolled in school there in Greece. [...] This son is separated from me [has a separate household economy], so I look after them, my wife looks after them, because I [we] like to [i.e. not because he has an obligation according to Albanian custom when parents usually have joint economy with the youngest son]. We do this to help them a bit so they can put some money aside. This is how we can help them. [...] so both wife and husband are able to work in the factory.

Similarly, older grandparents Marika and her husband (both 72 years) lived in the town of Korçë with one of their daughters (they had no son). Initially, only the daughter's husband was working in Greece, but Marika told me:

So our son-in-law called and said [to his wife] 'come here so we can earn a bit more and put some money aside because the pay there [in Albania] is very low'. So my daughter had to go [*u detyrua* – expresses a sense of force, compelled to go, because of the economic circumstances]. They left their son and daughter here with us. Our granddaughter was then in the first grade (6 years old) and our grandson hadn't started school yet, was still in the kindergarden. 'I will look after them', I said. So they went. They have to service the mortgage of this house here [in Korçë], little by little, because they can't pay it all in one go. And so we decided to stay here. They are in Greece, because without Greece here is nothing [the economy].

There, they work and earn, so they can put some money aside. [...]

Economic Contribution to Migrants' Origin and Destination Countries

At the macro-level, this childcare work that migrants' parents provide is an important contribution to the local and national economies of origin countries. As a form of unpaid domestic and care work that is generally carried out by women—and in this context older people, mostly older women—it is invisibilized by being excluded from the country's economic value generation (GDP), and thus devalued. This economic contribution both directly amplifies, and is indirectly amplified by, the remittances and savings that are sent or brought back to Albania. It amplifies remittances because grandparents' childcare enables more labour migration and longer working hours by migrant labourers than would be possible without it, enabling more remittances to be accrued over shorter periods of time. It is amplified by remittances and savings because when children are looked after by grandparents in Albania, migrants send *additional* money to cover their childcare costs and visit Albania more frequently than would have otherwise been the case, again injecting more money into Albania's local and national economy. The significant, and positive impact that financial remittances have had on the household economy of Albanian families and at a national scale are well documented (de Zwager et al., 2005; Vullnetari, 2012; Vullnetari and King, 2011). Both migrants and their stay-behind parents in my subsample emphasized how financial remittances raised their families' living standards and boosted the Albanian local and national economies.

For example, I interviewed Fatime (59 years) in 2005 in Tirana where she lived with her family. Originally, they had lived in the village, whilst her husband migrated to Greece, first alone, and then with their two sons. They used the money they made in Greece to buy a plot in Tirana and started building a house there. They relocated the family there in the

1990s, whilst the sons continued to live and work in Greece, together with a daughter-in-law. The sons 'would send the money, because we needed [it] to pay the traders and builders'. Fatime says that '[w]e would spend some to cover everyday expenses, and others to invest in the house'. They gradually built a three-storey house 'little by little' and later furnished it. They rented out the ground floor and set up a small grocery shop beside the house, which Fatime ran, to generate income locally. However, Fatime emphasizes that 'this house, hasn't been built with income earned in Albania'. Although the migrants (sons and daughter-in-law) returned in 2004, having lived and worked for a decade in Greece, they were unemployed at the time of my interview, and their savings were running out fast.

In the same way as grandparents looking after their grandchildren for migrants contributes to the economic development of origin countries, it also contributes to the local and national economy of migrants' host countries too. This contribution is also invisible, not only, as in the origin country, because it is unpaid domestic work generally carried out by (older) women, but also because it is usually being done outside the host country. Again, the consequence is that grandparents' carework for migrants is excluded from the country's economic value generation (GDP), and thus devalued. Besides its intrinsic value to the host economy, this childcare also increases the pool of labour available locally and nationally by increasing the availability of working-age adults with children for formal work and migration. Where grandparents move temporarily to the host country, the pool of labour is also increased by bringing them in to work informally as carers. In turn, multiplier effects lead to an increase of fiscal contribution through taxation of formal work whilst also alleviating pressures for childcare provision that would have to otherwise be resolved by a struggling 'state' or through the 'market'. Therefore, this contribution of middle-age and older parents through childcare—wherever it is provided—needs to

be recognized also as an economic contribution to the development of host countries.

Social, Emotional and Cultural Contributions

In addition to the economic contribution of grandparents' care work in home and host countries, their childcare was also important socially, culturally and emotionally, on various levels. Where childcare was provided, especially by middle-aged or older parents in Albania, young migrant couples were able to enjoy more free time. This allowed them, at times, to take on a second job, travel around Greece and/or socialize a lot more. When migrant fathers were working in Greece while their wives and children remained in Albania, they felt that they had more freedom to socialize. They had peace of mind that their family was well looked after, and many felt a little like they were still single. Migrant couples often experienced periods of separation because of the length of time it took to secure legal papers for family reunification with their wife and children in the host country. Although some couples took risks and arranged clandestine entries to Greece, this strategy confined women to domestic spaces as they could not work and were often afraid to go out for fear of being apprehended by the immigration authorities (which would result in being sent back to Albania, with a ban on re-entry for many years).

Childcare by grandparents also had significant social, emotional and cultural value to interviewees because it facilitated the maintenance of inter-generational intra-family connections, helping both children and the older generations to bond and improve their overall emotional well-being. This is particularly significant from the perspective of older people in this part of Albania who see their role as grandparents as essential to their *social identity* and as giving meaning to their life. This is often expressed in the saying that grandchildren are the 'sugar of the sugar', that is, grandchildren are even dearer to them than their own sons and daughters. In addition, becoming a grandparent, even in middle age,

means being seen as belonging to the older generation with consequences for your status in society. Where grandparents were unable to perform this role because their grandchildren were born abroad, they said that it impacted negatively on their emotional well-being. In part this is because grandparents are usually responsible for socializing the younger generation into the culture and language of their home country. Migrant parents are also often keen for their children to learn their ancestral language and culture, especially when they grow up in host countries and are immersed in that host country's culture through the education system, media or local networks (Vathi, 2015). In addition, both grandparents and migrants felt that having a grandparent to look after grandchildren at home enables a warm family environment that stimulates the child's personal development and well-being, thus contributing to a healthier future for this young generation. Likewise, as loneliness is becoming one of the most concerning issues in post-industrial societies, especially amongst older people, such warm intergenerational relations may go a long way to enable well-being in later life.

Of course, not all families were happy ones, and not all parents were able to provide childcare, even if they wanted to. Some of the migrant women interviewed in Thessaloniki recounted their conflicts with their mother-in-law, which meant that they could not rely on them for this support. In other cases, parents were much older or in poor health, so again this support was not forthcoming. In these cases, local networks—other Albanian women—were used extensively for support. These often included other young migrant women who were looking after their own children and who would take in other children to look after for a small fee (3–4–5 euros/day at the time), which covered some of their everyday costs such as nappies and food for the children. At other times, middle-aged grandparents living in Greece provided these services for several migrant families.

Migrant labour has been key for many families in Albania who have managed to raise their material standards of living and start a new life in the city. It was also crucial to the local and national economy in both Albania (through remittances) and Greece (particularly in construction and tourism sectors that rely heavily on migrant labour). This migrant work force in Greece was enabled, and supported, by social reproduction carework of the sort that Fatime and her husband provided 'back home': both through childcare, but also by their management of the house-building project funded by remittances. The significance of these functions was apparent in Fatime's interview and was reinforced by her eldest son when he joined the conversation. This is a clear example of the complex ways in which migrant families pull resources together across space and generations, where the older generations act as lynchpins of the entire household migration strategy. This is explored further in the following section.

VII. The Lynchpins of 'Invisible Economies of Care': Older Parents and Their Role in Migrant Households

Data analysis revealed the complex multi-generational and multi-sited strategy operating across rural, urban and international contexts to create a home and livelihoods in which the older generations are the lynchpins. Although childcare is at the heart of the role migrants' older parents play, they also contributed to a range of other carework, giving rise to what Shah and Lerche (2020) call 'economies of care'. As noted earlier, these care economies are invisibilized by economic systems that overlook carework and social reproduction that are essential for the economy's, and indeed society's, very existence.

In the study areas, these economies of care consisted of productive and reproductive work, often with migrant's older parents at their heart. The older generations often maintained 'assets that enable a livelihood and a safety net' in the areas of origin for the

migrants (Shah and Lerche, 2020: 722). This included: looking after the house they shared with migrants in the village; looking after migrants' houses in urban areas if they lived separately; continuing to work the fields and maintain these for subsistence production; and looking after and maintaining livestock, the forest (for firewood) and the broader local ecosystem. Almost all the older grandparents who remained in the villages, as well as some of the younger grandparents who had moved to the city but travelled back and forth to the village, did this work.

Maintaining these productive assets was especially important as a safety net for migrants in situations of precarity and insecurity, as prevailed throughout the 1990s when migrants were generally undocumented in Greece. This precarity continued even after immigration regularization programmes in Greece in 1998, 2001 and 2005, because permits were temporary, of short duration and could be rescinded arbitrarily by the Greek authorities. These productive assets and the safety net they provided were also central to return migration strategies. Many migrants planned to return to Albania eventually as they felt that making a future in Greece was impossible due to the anti-Albanian racist discrimination, the difficulty of sustaining hard physical work for long periods of time and the emotional toll from family separation. However, return to Albania was also a distant prospect that was intrinsically beset with insecurity, given the abysmal state of the country's physical and legislative infrastructure, the continued lack of adequate employment and investment opportunities, lack of access to adequate healthcare and quality education, and a culture of disrespect from authorities and civil servants. Consequently, looking after migrants' assets was particularly crucial during particular periods of migratory lifecycles, such as when family members were emigrating abroad but retained or were building up assets in Albania.

Crucially, these examples show how economic production is closely intertwined with

social reproduction: the former give migrants the security they need to take on (precarious) employment in producing economic value which they reinvest in Albania, whilst at the same time, the latter expands the pool of cheap labour producing economic value for the Greek economy.

The central role of the older generation in these complex extended family migration strategies is well illustrated by Fatime's family (discussed earlier). To recap, Fatime and her husband looked after their grandson in Tirana, whilst their two sons and one daughter-in-law migrated to Greece. They sent back remittances that Fatime and her husband invested in building a three-storey house and developing local income generation streams. This strategy evolved over time. Rina, their daughter-in-law (27 years), told me that 'at the beginning, [...] I used to think like this 'we will stay there [in Greece] to work', and at the time we thought of taking our son with us, because we could see a future there. After some years went by, we changed our mind, as we saw that life wasn't for us there [...].' Having made this decision, Fatime's and her husband's role providing childcare and managing productive investment of remittances became critical. Their son, Goni (35 years) emphasized that 'I was able to invest here, I came to this thinking and build this house, because my father was here' and highlighted that '[i]f my son lived with us there [in Greece], I would have not been able to make the money to invest and build this house'. The role that older parents play in these strategies is strongly gendered, and significantly Goni attributed this work to his father when in reality Fatime took the main responsibility for both caring for her grandson and for managing the house-building project. With respect to the latter, she said: 'We'd build a floor, work was being done, stairs, other things. I was the one dealing with these, I was like a manager. They sent the money, I would do the work here.'

Providing support for social reproduction and migration often led to complex arrangements for grandparents. For instance,

Zija (70 years) and his wife, Lavdie, whom I interviewed in 2005, have two sons. They live in the village with the family of their youngest son. Until shortly before the interview, their eldest son had been migrating seasonally to Greece whilst living with his family in the regional town of Korçë (where he had bought a flat with his earnings from migration). Zija and Lavdie provided extensive carework to support the youngest and eldest sons, requiring one of them to stay in the village and the other to visit Korçë, alternating roles every two weeks. While the eldest son worked in Greece, Zija or his wife would stay with the daughter-in-law and the children in Korçë because she was a full-time teacher and so was often absent from home. The older grandparent in residence would make the children breakfast, get them ready for school, drop them off and pick them up, and do some small grocery shopping in between. When Lavdie was there, she also did some cooking. Meantime, the grandparent remaining in the village supported their youngest son's family with childcare and overall household chores. Although Albanian tradition is for grandparents to direct their caring responsibilities towards the youngest son's family because they will care for them in old age, Zija stressed that they gave support equally to both sons. He explained that '[w]e helped them [the eldest son's family], because they were in hardship, the children were young and ... the open market [for shopping] was far from them.' He continued '[b]ecause it's one family, there is mutual help. And one feels of course love for one's family [*te dhimbset*, the word expressing a deep feeling of love and care to the point of hurting], for one's own daughter-in-law, son, and grandchildren [my emphasis]. And so of course we will help ...'; Lavdie added 'for as long as we're capable'. The eldest son and his family had at the time of the interview emigrated to Canada through the skilled migration scheme. After they moved, Zija lived in the son's house in Korçë to maintain and guard it until it was sold.

I found numerous examples where support with carework was similarly extended equally

to all sons despite cultural norms. The same latitude did not appear to be afforded to gendered norms about reciprocal care obligations with the interview data indicating that daughters still had to look to grandparents-in-law when they needed support with childcare. Generally, grandparents only looked after their daughter's children when they had no sons, or when these children were born from a daughter's previous marriage and the new partner was not keen to take this child into the new family.

In contrast to the usual assumption in migration and development thinking that the older generations tend to provide support to one family only (usually that of the youngest son in the Albanian context), in my subsample most grandparents played a central role in supporting several families. The families they supported certainly included those of their adult children, but, at times, they also included those of other migrants, including adult children in the extended family. Furthermore, at the community level, grandparents' carework also included various activities that sustain an active community life in the villages of origin, keeping village infrastructure alive and maintaining networks of kinship, neighbours and friends. Part of this work involves searching marriage partners for their unmarried sons and daughters abroad or helping other older people to do so for their children. Older people also become key nodes in translocal and transnational spaces for transmitting important information from and to the diaspora about village life but also diasporic spaces where their adult children live. This information is important for migrants, especially in their decision-making about returning, for instance, with respect to the local investment climate, available opportunities and the nature of local politics.

VIII. Conclusions

This article has sought to demonstrate the importance of childcare as one form of carework to household economies and national development in the context of migration and

to shed light on the role that older people, specifically grandparents, play in such migratory projects and development processes. Drawing on Shah and Lerche's (2020) concept of 'invisible economies of care', Nguyen et al.'s (2017) conceptualization of complex intergenerational interdependencies, and on empirical data from Albania, the article shows the relational processes by which families marshal their resources to secure beneficial outcomes across multiple generations, often combining internal and international migration.

Migrants' older parents are engaged in a range of productive and reproductive activities that include subsistence farming; running small-scale family businesses; managing assets, investment portfolios and construction projects; childcare provision and other reproductive carework, all of which together make a significant contribution to household economies, and by extension, to local and national economies of both origin countries like Albania, and migrant host countries such as Greece. The data have shown that the older generations are *typically* critical to not just one, but to multiple sons' (but rarely daughters') migration strategies, with their roles shifting in response to evolving family opportunities and needs. These 'economies of care' enable migrants to work long hours in destination countries but are invisibilized in national accounting and development policy and marginalized even in academic scholarship.

Many destination countries, such as Greece, are structurally reliant on migrant labour, especially in key sectors of the economy, such as agriculture and tourism, that are highly seasonal, not fully mechanized (in agriculture) and which require a labour force that can be mobilized at short notice for high intensity and almost round-the-clock work. Migrants would not be able to meet the demands of this labour market if they had to care for small children and, consequently, this childcare is outsourced to other family members—generally migrants' parents or parents-in-law—often in countries of origin such as Albania.

In turn, many migrant origin countries such as Albania have become structurally reliant on remittances. Indeed, most of the migration–development literature focus on migrants' contribution to development (mostly through financial remittances) in (developing) origin countries. There is an abundant literature demonstrating the significance these external financial resources have for origin countries' economies (e.g., de Haas et al., 2019 and Carling, 2020), including in Albania (e.g., de Zwager et al., 2005; Frashëri et al., 2018). These economies can benefit in this way from 'unfettered' labour migration that generates economic value that counts towards the GDP because of the work provided 'for free' by older people—migrants' parents. By making visible the labour of older people, this article supports the case for recognizing the value of this work that underpins development in origin and destination economies (see also Bastia et al., 2022 and Sampaio, 2022). This calls for the qualification of the narrow focus in migration–development debates and policies on financial remittances as the main driver of development of countries of origin.

This article also demonstrates, in line with a long history of work from feminist scholars, that carework is gendered, with women—older women in this case—providing the vast majority of carework, especially of childcare (e.g., Folbre, 2006; see also Judd, 2009). This is not a new feature of post-communist society. Even during the communist years (when there was little external migration), older women were shouldering the bulk of reproductive work in households up and down the country. Verdery (1994: 231) argued that feminized social reproduction—such as caring for grandchildren, standing in queues, cooking, cleaning and so on—was carried out largely by pensioners (in her terms 'geriatrized') under socialism too. The significance and gendering of older people's carework in post-communist Albania is, therefore, a continuation of that process.

In addition to centring older people's role in development and recognizing the value

of their carework—especially childcare—in development, this article extends the scholarship by also arguing for this contribution by older people to be included in the call for the recognition of value of carework across the global South–North divide. This article supports the assertion that migrant carework makes a significant development contribution to (developed) host countries too (Raghuram, 2019) and, additionally, argues that older people's carework is an important component of that development contribution.

Finally, the empirical material presented here, although historical, relating to the period 2004–2006, and context specific, offers valuable insights into relational intergenerational processes across space and over time. The analysis of the macro-level impact of older people's carework for migrant children on host and origin countries remains relevant, not least, because carework continues to be overlooked in writings on migration and development, and related policy. The empirical material reveals the way in which family migration projects are intergenerational projects and, hence, has contemporary relevance for conceptualizing how older people contribute to development in both the Global North, the Global South and in transitioning economies.

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Note

1. For instance, a recent Guardian article sounded the alarm that '[F]ull-time nursery for children under the age of two is costing a parent almost two-thirds of their weekly (take-home) pay' (Topping 2022).

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