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## Negotiating between patriarchy and emancipation: rural-to-urban migrant women in Albania

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It is essential to explore the role of gender while analysing internal migration in Albania to account for the differing experiences of men and women. Quantitative studies suggest that Albanian internal migration is pioneered by men, with women merely acceding to their wishes. This article addresses the undervalued role of women in the academic discourse concerning migration in Albania. Utilizing ethnographic research techniques, it explores the role of women migrating from rural to urban areas as part of a larger household and examines the coping and negotiating strategies used for survival in the city. Our findings reveal that women actively participate in the rural-to-urban migration process, including the initial decision to migrate and the choice of destination. Women's narratives provide evidence of specific emancipation strategies through which they express themselves and their new ways of living. Women adjust to and challenge their new urban environment through gaining paid employment and expanding their social networks, as well as experience emancipation through daughters and by changing their appearance, achieving varying degrees of personal and social prosperity.

**Keywords:** emancipation; women; migration; rural-to-urban; Albania

We are between the devil and the deep sea. Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed. One shuts us up like slaves in a harem; the other forces us to circle, like caterpillars head to tail, round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property. It is a choice of evils. (Woolf 1938)

### Introduction

This research contributes to a better understanding of the effects of urbanization on migrant women's lives, addressing the role that women play in the migration process, with particular focus on strategies of emancipation used by rural women in the city. The work forms part of a wider investigation of migration within Albania and is situated in the context of an emerging suburban region in Tirana.

In the literature, migration is increasingly reported as a process which men and women experience differently (e.g. Bilsborrow 1993; Boyle and Halfacree 1999; Chant 1992; Chant and Radcliffe 1992; Piper 2005; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Silvey 2006). In recent

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decades, especially, 'since feminist voices have become more audible in geography' (Bondi 1990, 438), 'feminist ethnographers' have contributed substantially to bringing gender into focus in migration studies (Donato et al. 2006; Mahler and Pessar 2006, 30).

According to Curran and Saguy (2001), men and women migrants differ in terms of the motives, risks and norms related to the migration project. A migration decision-making process is regarded as a family project (Curran 1995), with migration studies in Albania showing that the decision is pioneered by men and followed by family reunion (e.g. King and Vullnetari 2003; Bonifazi and Sabatino 2003; King and Mai 2004; Cattaneo 2009). Given that migration has the potential 'to change the dynamics of the interplay between position, status and power' within or outside the household (Rao 2009), the interaction between migration and gender may be heavily influenced by the evolving positions of each person in a household and their power relationships (Curran 1995; Lauby and Stark 1988). According to Hugo (2000), when women move from rural to urban areas there is an increased potential for empowerment, as they are often separated from the extended family and can engage in paid employment outside the home. As a result of migration, women thus experience an increase in 'autonomy, self confidence and agency' (Ghosh 2009, 36). The benefits of migration can, however, vary for migrant women depending on their motivations, expectations, educational level, background characteristics, social status and the presence or otherwise of their husband in the household.

Since the demise of the communist regime, when restrictions on the freedom of movement were lifted, Albania has experienced massive flows of internal and external migration. Between 1990 and 2005, over one million Albanians emigrated and over 400,000<sup>1</sup> are estimated to have moved within the country (Government of Albania 2005; INSTAT 2001). The focus of the literature has mainly been on the unpredictable<sup>2</sup> rates of external migration. Internal migration, despite being considered one of the most important processes in post-communist Albania, remains little researched (Bërxfholi 2005; Bërxfholi et al. 2006). In relation to the role of women in the migration process, increasing attention is being paid to international migration (e.g. Vullnetari 2009; Stecklov et al. 2008; King et al. 2006; Iosifides et al. 1998), rather than internal migration.

In the case of southern Europe (Hatziprokopiou 2006; Athinas and Lazaridis 2000; Campani 2000) and the western Balkans, the study of urbanization through internal migration is an important way to better understand attitudes to gender issues and the changing positions of women and men in society (Skålnes and Holm-Hansen 2005). In the case of Albania, there is an emerging need to analyse internal migration and urbanization as a gendered process (King and Vullnetari 2003). In this article, we argue that while international migration is determined by men, internal migration is often initiated by women and then conceived as a family project.

Taking an ethnographic approach, the research is informed by the body of literature on women and migration. Focusing on mothers and daughters within the context of emerging urbanization, this research aims to (1) explore the role of women in the migration process, (2) detail their emancipation strategies following migration and (3) compare the strategies and experiences of mothers and daughters. Two key areas for enquiry emerged through the women's narratives concerning how women participate in the household migration project, and the types of emancipation strategies migrant women employ in the new environment.

To contextualize this work, some brief background information on gender relationships within Albania will initially be discussed, followed by an introduction to the Municipality of Kamza (MoK), a fast growing suburb in Tirana, Albania, where the research took place. The empirical part of the article explores the neglected role of women in the migration process, arguing that women are not simply passive participants in these

projects, and identifying their main emancipation strategies. In the final section, we determine some issues for future research.

### Gender in an Albanian cultural context

... Ne shoqëri me struktura fisnore statusi superior fitohet jo ne baze te aftesive, por ne baze te organeve gjentiale. [In a patriarchal society, superior status in the household is based on genitals and not on skills.] (Aliu 2009)

Many societies, especially patriarchal ones, function according to social and cultural norms that determine the level of women's participation in the migration process and the nature of gender relationships in the new settings (Ghosh 2009). To understand the social position of women in Albania and whether migration can influence this, it is essential to recognize that gender and migration are embedded in historical, regional and cultural settings, and that gender relationships in Albania are steeped in a strong patriarchal tradition.

Throughout different stages in Albanian history, gender relationships and the position of women have been regulated by traditional rules. Until the end of the Second World War, the state could only regulate gender relationships in the public domain. In the private domain, families would function according to their own rules. The situation started to change during the socialist regime (1945–1990), when one of the main goals was the empowerment of women and gender equality (Fullani 2000). During this period, women won the right to vote, to join the labour force, to undertake higher education and to campaign for equal pay (Gjonca et al. 1997). According to Occhipinti (1996, 14), the emancipation of women in socialist systems was related to collectivism and 'socialist patriarchy' rather than individualism as is the case for western countries. While there has been very little systematic research done on gender relationships during the communist period, it is generally recognized that during the period, the patriarchal structure continued unchanged for the most part, especially in the private domain (Nixon 2009).

The transition from socialism towards democracy significantly affected gender relationships in Albania. Extensive urbanization, a market economy and political freedom have led to some uncertainties concerning the respective roles of men and women (La Cava and Nanetti 2000, 22). At present, the patriarchal system coexists with more modern attitudes, although women continue to find it difficult to position themselves in a society (INSTAT 2005; INSTAT and UNICEF 2006; UNDP-Albania 2005). Moreover, there are complex cultural and traditional variations in different regions of Albania. These disparities are reflected in the situation of women who live in these different regions (UNDP-Albania 2002, 2005). In northern Albania, in the more rural areas, there is a conservative and strong clan-based tradition (INSTAT 2004a, 2004b; King et al. 2006; Smith 2009). In this environment, men are seen as 'Zot i shtëpisë' (God of the house)<sup>3</sup> and have total authority over all members of the household. In the southern and central parts of the country, these traditions are more flexible. The north of Albania mainly functions on the base of *Kanun*,<sup>4</sup> an assignment of 'rules, measures and norms' amounting to law (Tarifa 2008) which has been practised for centuries. *Kanun* established rules to regulate all aspects of life in Albania, including gender relationships and the role of women in society and the family (see also Nixon 2009). According to Post (1998), the main elements of the *Kanun* which have actual implications for women in the north are (1) assumed patriarchy, (2) clear division of rights and duties between husband and wife in the family and (3) the exclusion of women from family inheritance, so they must be subservient, endure their fate and have children (INSTAT 2005).

In this research, patriarchy is regarded as the system of social structures and practices in which men dominate and exploit women (Walby 1989; Erman 2001), while modernization is considered as development from a traditional and rural society to an urban modern society. This concept is related to the urbanization process and the way the urban residents create their social structures (Kendall 2000).

In the new urban environment, rural women find themselves trapped between patriarchy and modernization, with elements of patriarchal societies often being transferred to the new destination. The current research remains mindful of this phenomenon, focusing on a group of women who had moved from the rural northern region, and detailing both the rewarding and problematic aspects of the migration project.

### Situating the research: suburban Kamza

Internal migration patterns in Albania indicate a distinctive regional trajectory, with people moving from rural areas of the northeastern regions towards urban and rural locations in Tirana. According to recent estimations, the Tirana agglomeration holds approximately 75% of the country's total urban population (World Bank 2007). Kamza, a suburb of Tirana, represents a unique case of urbanization in Albania (MoK 2007).

In 2008, on entering the MoK a large billboard with the slogan 'Koha për Kamëz' (it is time for Kamza) could be seen. Only 1 year later, the billboard slogan was 'upgraded' to 'Kamza po ndryshon' (Kamza is changing), as if designed to stimulate our curiosity about the changes taking place in this emerging urban and economic region of Albania. As a new suburban area emerging on the outskirts of Tirana, Kamza has experienced an impressive population increase in recent decades (1989–2009) and has been referred to as 'the most dynamic community' (Ypi 2006) of Albania. In the early 1990s, Kamza was an agricultural farm owned by the state with approximately 6000 inhabitants (MoK 2002). After freedom of movement and land reform were introduced, Kamza experienced a massive increase in squatter settlement and a general population influx. As such, the population of Kamza grew 10-fold to 60,000 inhabitants in 2002 (Aliaj 2002) and to an estimated 100,000 inhabitants by 2009 (MoK 2002, 2009; Figure 1). Subsequently, Kamza is no longer considered to be an agricultural area. The few remaining agricultural activities fulfil family needs only and are limited to plots no bigger than 1–3 ha (MoK 2009).

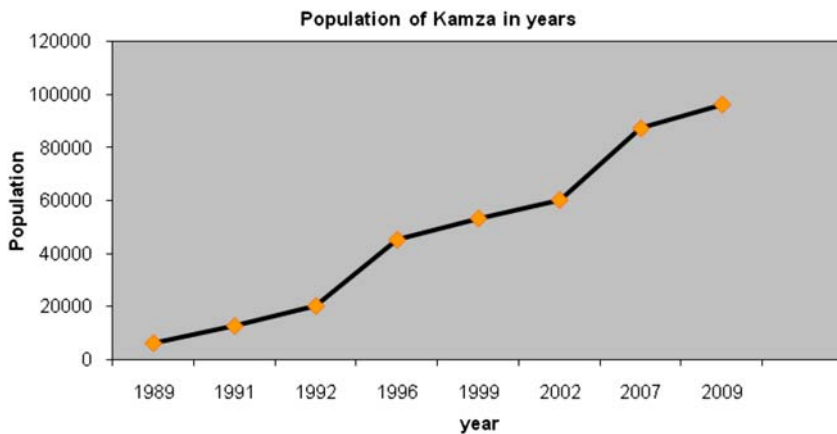


Figure 1. Population of Kamza, 1989–2009. Source: MoK (1996, 2007, 2008, 2009).

Kamza represents a case of indiscriminate urbanization fuelled by large, mainly illegal migration flows from the rural north. It has also become a ‘melting pot’, where different backgrounds, traditions and cultures come together (Aliaj et al. 2003). Such characteristics identify Kamza as a ‘laboratory for internal migration studies in Albania’ (Bërxfholi 2008, pers. comm.).<sup>5</sup>

### **Methodology**

This article focuses on the rural-to-urban women migrants of Kamza. Research was conducted at four sites in Kamza Municipality, three of which were located in Bathore and the other in Koder Kamza. These sites were chosen through connections with gatekeepers based in social centres. The main activities of the social centres are the provision of social and professional support for those in need in the migrant community, especially women and youths. Guided by the experimental framework of a 3-month pilot study (August–October 2008), the field work was carried out between March and October 2009, during which a series of personal interviews were conducted and participant observations made. The adoption of qualitative methods allowed the researcher (the first author) to gain essential access to the lives of migrant women and also facilitated the identification of change through women’s narratives.

### ***In-depth interviews***

In-depth interviewing is considered a *privilege* whereby the researcher is able to communicate extensively with the study participants and learn about detailed aspects of their lives (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). During the field work, 25 in-depth interviews were conducted with women.<sup>6</sup> All the participants came from rural areas, mainly from the north. The women were interviewed in social centres and in their homes, though they showed a strong preference to be interviewed in the social centre, where there was no risk of the husband arriving (see also Smith 2009). The women had various levels of education, were better and less well-off and were from different age groups. This range enabled us to obtain a wide variety of opinions and at the same time to allow for some comparison. Three women were key informants. They introduced me to the social centres, neighbourhoods and acquaintances. The informants were identified using a snowballing technique, starting with the help of social workers operating in the area. The in-depth interviews were carried out in the Albanian language and tape-recorded with the oral consent of the respondents. They were later transcribed and analysed using Atlas.ti software. The transcriptions were conserved in their original language with the aim of preserving originality, including metaphors and idioms. The quotations used in the findings were later translated into English.

### ***Participant observation***

In order to establish rapport, it was necessary to engage in extensive participant observation. According to Schensul et al. (1999, 91), ‘participant observation represents the starting point in ethnographic research’. The research was carried out through daily visits and by temporarily residing in Kamza. I (as first author) rented a room in the house of one of the key informants and lived there for 2 months, spending each day in the community, mainly with women and youth (the men were either working or did not agree to a group discussion with a woman researcher). Following DeWalt and DeWalt (2002), I took part in daily activities, rituals, interactions and the events that the women migrants

were involved in to become acquainted with and learn about their culture and daily customs. I visited women in their homes, where we had coffee and chatted about a variety of topics. Frequently, women invited me to their home to try traditional dishes after which I would be offered some of the food to take home. I was also invited to participate in the women's informal gatherings and social activities. Settling into the community and living at close quarters to these women in this way enabled me to understand the mechanisms of their lives, including the ways they thought and behaved, their mentality, the interaction between them and other aspects of their lives and personalities.

### *Visual methods*

This study includes photographs taken by the researcher. Visual images are increasingly used by ethnographers as a means to study various aspects of social interactions and the cultural context (Pink 2001; Rose 2007). The photographs, taken in both private and public spaces, are used to represent the life of migrant women in their new settings. Visual analyses are based on a shared representation of the lives of these women. The full consent of the participants was obtained before taking their photographs (see Figures 2–4).



Figure 2. Women carrying water in Kamza. 'I had to go to take water two hours walk from home. I had to come back carrying everything by hand. I cannot describe you the suffering ... I do not know how have managed ... where I found the strength to deal with everything. I would never do it today. I remember I was tying up myself with strings to carry all the bottles of water. My hands were falling apart from the heaviness. But I did not care of that, I was more concerned of going home to home as a beggar to ask for water ... it was so humiliating. Today, I would not do it ... I could not do it. But when you are in difficulties, you can do all the imaginable sacrifices'. (Albana, 39). Source: Çaro (2008).



Figure 3. Daughters-in-law living with mothers-in-law. Vjollca's (30) husband is in Afghanistan. She is living with her three children and her mother-in-law, Farie (65), in a big house. Farie comes to the women's gathering but I had never seen Vjollca there. I finally met her when Farie invited me to her house. Vjollca stood up immediately as we entered. After we sat, I asked her to take a seat as well. But Farie answered, 'No, she has to prepare the coffee' and then pointing at her, 'Do the coffees with milk and not as the one you did this morning ... it tasted horrible'. Vjollca brought us the coffees while Farie was persistently asking her to bring water, the photos, prepare the bread ... In her presence, it was difficult to build a conversation with Vjollca as most of the times Farie was eager to answer the questions. Source: Çaro (2009).



Figure 4. Women during social activities. Source: Çaro (2009).



### **Migratory trajectories and life in the city**

In the narratives of the migrant women, we explored their participation in the household migration process and five core changes occurring in the city. The areas studied are (1) women's participation in the rural-to-urban migration process, (2) women in the city: between patriarchy and modernization, (3) transition from extended to nuclear households, (4) changing from unpaid domestic work to paid work, (5) emancipation through female networks and (6) emancipation through daughters.

Migration as a gendered process can imply contradictory outcomes for rural-to-urban migrants in general and women in particular. In general, the women's narratives indicate feelings of being caught between the modern and the traditional, the patriarchal and the autonomous, the dependent and the empowered. However, while certain aspects of the traditional patriarchal gender relationships may continue in the same form (INSTRAW 2006), the new environment may provide the stimulus for women to explore their own power and instrumentality. This is in line with work by Murzaku and Dervishi (2003) which emphasized the idea that women, especially in urban areas, have more agency and are less oppressed.

### ***Women's participation in the rural-to-urban migration process***

Although the majority of the literature deals with the migration of the heads of households (i.e. men), we wanted to focus on migrant women. We recognized the migration process as a family project, which is built up and undertaken by the whole family, with women being present at all the stages of the process. This accords with the observations of Vullnetari (2009) on the role of women in migration decision-making in the case of international migration from Albania.

Through women's narratives we can recognize their active, yet veiled role in the migration decision-making process of the household. Women often provide the impetus for the move to the city. While the men usually leave first and settle in the city, followed by the women, the narratives revealed that they were a persistent force in the migration process. Women are aware of their influence, yet the decision-making process has to be *sold* as a 'male thing'. In their narratives, women reinforce the strong male identity (Boeschoten 2007) while *giving birth* to a female identity.

I said to him [husband] lets take a piece of land near Tirana and lets build our home. I cannot stand it here any more, I want to go away. He was very insecure because he did not want to disappoint and let down his parents but he didn't want to disappoint me either. In the end he decided to go. He knew that I was right. (Liljana, 30)<sup>7</sup>

The migration of men and women is determined by diverse motivations. In their narratives, women express altruistic motives such as a better future for their children, better opportunities and a desire for city life, as well as more personal reasons such as personal well-being, escaping the patriarchal system in the north and freedom from the control of their in-laws (see also Cila 2006). Men were more concerned with economic aspects, difficulties in the village, lack of job opportunities and absent infrastructure. It appears that women were attracted by the lure of Tirana, while men felt pushed by perceived difficulties in the village. When women spoke about their first impressions of their destination,<sup>8</sup> it became clear that they were a crucial part of the family decision-making process:

I wanted to leave the village ... I wanted to come to the capital ... and when I saw where we came, I asked him [her husband], where is Tirana? I did not sign up for this! This is not what we discussed ...

Migrants are diverted from central Tirana to the periphery (Sjöberg 1992) because of cheap and free land in Kamza (see also Cila 2006). Apparently, it was the men who determined the finer details of the destination, and the only essential information provided to the women was that ‘we are moving near Tirana’. It appeared that the dreams of women to move to the city in search of a better life motivated their migration from deprived rural areas. The husband would leave first to find a place to live, often accompanied by the eldest son and one daughter. The role of the son was to help the father, while the daughter acted as the caregiver (Williams and Crooks 2008). Back at home the wife knew only that they would move somewhere near Tirana. However, Kamza remains a poor peripheral suburb still under development and when the women first reached their destination they were clearly often disappointed. More often than not, the women had never heard of Kamza before they arrived and the reality they faced did not meet their expectations. Hasime (60) remembers:

My god when I first came here . . . pupupu!<sup>9</sup> What I faced . . . I felt dreadful. It was the wrong place to be. My dreams and hopes were not in front of me.

The settling process also proved difficult. Women were afraid to show their true feelings out of fear that they would provoke irritation and violence from their husbands, as well as being ignored in further decision-making. According to feminist researchers, fear is seen as a force which structures women’s everyday life in a city environment (Kern 2005). As a coping mechanism women hid their actual emotions, such as disappointment and loneliness, while expressing *fake* feelings such as happiness and contentment. We recognize the perpetuation of forms of patriarchy in the city in this falsification of feelings motivated by fear.

What could I have said to my husband, that I wanted to come here but now I do not like it? No way. With him I tried to look happy, active . . . always. If you ask him today how I was feeling at the beginning he will say ‘better than all of us’. The truth is that I was horrified with the idea that it was a mistake, that it was not a good choice for our children. (Lena, 35)

### ***Women in the city: between patriarchy and modernization***

In Albania, internal migration often takes the form of chain migration (Çaro and van Wissen 2007; Vullnetari 2007). Potential migrants from a particular area plan to follow their relatives and friends to the same destination area. Chain migration is defined as a ‘movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities and have initial accommodation arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants’ (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964; Massey 1990). As a result, social networks and norms and values of the people who move can cluster together in the new environment. Women described a change in geographic position yet the continuation and reproduction of village life in the context of the city, and that gender relationships remained intact. Women, who expressed strong aspirations to adjust to the new city way of life, still felt restricted by their subservient position in the household (see also Murzaku and Dervishi 2003). More highly educated women, particularly those who had been working before migrating, had higher expectations and were not satisfied with the migration process.

For me what I found here is not what I was searching for. Not all the women were living the same way before coming here. I have a university degree. In the village I was not working in the field but as an economist in the state farm. I was used to friends, activities, social life. For some it is much better here while some others, like me, were expecting more. It all depends on the previous conditions. (Liria, 46)

From the women's narratives, we propose that their contradictory social position and personal ambivalence had implications for how they felt they could negotiate the power relationships in the household and the new community. Women who come from remote villages in the north, and who have lower levels of education have lower expectations of the migration process compared with better-educated women, and their satisfaction level continues to rise as their living standards improve. On the contrary, higher educated women, regardless of an improvement in living conditions, express lower satisfaction levels. Conversely, they benefit most from the migration process, as despite a continuous struggle to find suitable jobs, they participate more in the household decision-making process, undertake joint initiatives to establish businesses and make decisions concerning the education of their children.

In terms of personal liberation, changing their appearance was the most visible act of migrant women in the city, and was spoken about as a key element in their emancipation. Wearing modern clothes, cutting and styling their hair and wearing make-up are all perceived as synonyms of being an urbanite and part of the city. The following was based on an observation made on a bus to/from Tirana:

The first thing that catches your attention in the bus from Tirana to Kamza or back is the appearance of women. It feels that the bus may be going to a wedding or a celebration. I like to stand in the bus and to examine what they wear. The shoes always match the bag, usually bright red coloured. All of them wear lipstick and eyeliner. The hair is styled and coloured while the accessories are never missing. Before the last stop in Tirana centre many of them take out a mirror from their bags and reapply the lipstick, adjust the eyebrows and give a smile at themselves in the mirror. However, this is not the practice when they arrive in Kamza. (Observation, July 2008)

The women spoke vividly about these changes.

When women came to the city, they were wearing skirts and pants together, had long-braided hair and a scarf on their heads. Now you can see that women pay attention to the way they look, they put on modern clothes, make-up and style their hair. These are not strange anymore; they [women] say why can't we be like the girls in Tirana. (Fatime, 39)

Nowadays you cannot see a woman wearing a scarf on her head, while 16 years ago you couldn't see a single woman without one. (Zana, 37)

These changes have not been without effort. For women coming from rural areas, especially from the north, changing their appearance involves defiance of their own cultural traditions and norms, and represents a direct challenge to the patriarchal structures within society. It is a chain transformation based on the female support network, which allows women to exercise their agency not only within the household but also in the community. For example, according to Rukie (55), in the north the scarf<sup>10</sup> embodies their culture and norms. Taking off the scarf means to oppose the patriarchal traditions and the adoption of a more modern way of life.

If a woman leaves home without a scarf on her head one must know that in that *natural* action there are hidden tears, arguments, shouting, uncertainties, doubts and shame. (Lule, 45)

### *Shifting from an extended to a nuclear family*

According to Murzaku and Dervishi (2003), migration may trigger changes in the household relationships, creating certain flexibility. In line with this, the majority of women in this study experienced a transition from an extended to a nuclear family, which enhanced their role in the household (see also Smith 2009). It should be noted that this was not a deliberate transition or adoption of a city way of life. It has its roots in the illegality of

the migration process in Kamza, where there was an abundance of free land that could accommodate the newcomers, with few landownership conflicts (Aliaj 2002). The idea was to occupy as much land as possible and for this reason the migrants arriving as extended families scattered further afield into nuclear families. The in-laws might still live in the neighbourhood, but they do not have the same influence as when they were living in the same household. In the village, Luljeta (42) lived with her in-laws. She expresses her sense of liberation resulting from living in a nuclear family:

Now I live in my small family, with my husband and children. We are not suffocated as we used to be when we were living with my in-laws and others. When I remember now ... all together in that house I wonder how I could ... where did I find the strength to keep on ... I could not go back now ... ever. (Luljeta, 42)

Elderly women (the women's mothers-in-law) are the real followers in the migration process. They follow their sons to the city out of fear of remaining alone in the village. Elderly women spoke of nostalgia for the original village and social networks left behind. They feel insecure in the new environment, with the power relationships in the household shifting. In some cases, the mother-in-law lives with her son's family. This type of family is seen as nuclear, the daughters-in-law claiming that they are just taking care of the elderly, as the traditions demand, positioning themselves once more between tradition and modernization (see also Vullnetari and King 2008). In one of our informal gatherings with women the theme of the discussion was mothers and daughters-in-law. Tonia (38), living with her mother-in-law (or, as she likes to put it, her mother-in-law is living with her family), talks about shifting power relationships in the household.

Before [in the village] she [mother-in-law] was the boss but now I am the boss. She used to dictate at home. She made me suffer like a dog. I was like her servant, doing all she asked me. But here she cannot give orders anymore ... nobody listens to her. The time when she had the power is over! Here she depends on me. (Tonia, 38)

Anila (43) who experienced the transition from an extended to a nuclear family adds:

When they [mothers-in-law] came here it was not their natural habitat. Here they feel dependent on us [daughters-in-law] and cannot give orders. They feel insecure so they keep quiet, and accept the new role assigned. I love it here [laughs in group]. (Anila, 43)

However, in the gatherings of women it was not usual for mothers and daughters-in-law to be present at the same time. According to mothers-in-law, their *nuset* (brides) had to take care of the household chores and the children. Only in such circumstances can they come to these women's gatherings displaying an authoritarian attitude. The in-laws retain this authority in cases where their son is living abroad. Women living in the city in extended households with absent husbands remain dependent on their in-laws and are consequently more vulnerable.

### ***The transition from unpaid to paid work***

Moving from a rural and traditional society towards a more modern one, there may be opportunities for women to 'upgrade' the nature of their economic activity from unpaid family chores to paid work (Tienda and Booth 1991; Hugo 1993). As such, women may take on more responsibilities both within and beyond the household and their levels of autonomy and self-confidence may increase, as they have the chance to work, enjoy social activities and participate in household decision-making. Thus, gender roles shift as less attention is paid to patriarchy and traditions.

As mentioned above, settling in the city can be difficult. Confronting the new environment can be devastating for women and difficult for men. The household must adopt various coping strategies to make a living in Kamza. Everyone's contribution is needed, women and children included. In their aspirations to come to the city, women have shown a great ability and strength integral to these coping strategies.

Women work here, because the family needs her help. In the city to make a livelihood it costs much more than in the village. In the village the husbands' work was enough but here it is impossible to survive. Women have to work in order for the family to survive. (Fatime, 39)

Women spoke about starting work, having to fight their husbands to attain their goal. For example, Anila (43) had been working for 6 years, but recalls how difficult it was to convince her husband to let her work.

I was so frightened to ask him that I wanted to work. He is the *God of the house* and has the absolute power. I do not know where I found the strength to ask him. Somehow I felt powerful, I convinced him, but it was like a war. I did not listen to him, I went to work; he was coming to take me away ... beating me at home. The next day I was going again ... even with bruises. I said to him 'I will not stop working because you do not have a brain. Others would kill for this job. If you do not trust me, come and stay there with me. I will not quit this job'. In the end he surrendered. (Anila, 43)

Women use their agency to seek out employment, and they perceive paid work as a way to achieve emancipation and to have a say in the use of economic resources within the household. They have opportunities to interact with other people outside their immediate family and adopt new behaviours while still reinforcing their position in the community and household.

When a woman goes to work, experiences modernization, sees new things, she slowly starts to change. She is motivated to get up in the morning. If she works she is also *forced* to take off her scarf, the old traditional dress, because she feels ashamed to go to work dressed like that. He [husband] has to accept it. (Anila, 43)

Working women negotiate their economic freedom within the household more defiantly, exercising a stronger influence on the use of the economic resources of the family, including using part of their income to fulfil their needs. We found that women often take care of the everyday expenditure within the household, such as groceries and necessities for the house and children. However, in line with Vullnetari (2009), Smith (2009) and King et al. (2006), this is seen as a *caregiving* activity (Williams and Crooks 2008), and women often have to report all the expenses to their husbands.

The work of women is important and you can feel the difference in the economic situation at home. Women here bring real income and not like in the village where they worked all the day but at the end there was not money coming so it did not count. Now women get paid for what they do. They bring money home and they gain more respect, they can decide what to do with the household income because it is their money also. When you get the money in your hands it gives you a huge independence feeling. You feel more powerful ... like you have wings. (Nexhi, 37)

However, this is more the case for economically progressive women. In comparison, the spending of women who do not work is strictly controlled, even though in many cases the household has a higher social status. For example, Monika (26) lives in a wealthy extended family and her husband is in Greece. She talks of being unhappy with her situation, but that she sees no way out.

We have enough money ... I cannot ask to work ... what for? He [husband] would never allow it. I cannot even ask for pocket money ... what for? He say 'when you need money ask me' but when I ask he wants to know everything and even has to choose the stuff [clothes] with me. It's better not to ask at all. (Monika, 26)

It is worth noting that the majority of working women are employed in factories where men do not work. These factories provide free transportation to and from work; hence women gather and travel in groups. One woman, Leta (33), said she goes to work because her neighbour (52) and two daughters also go. Her husband allowed her to work because her older neighbour could accompany her. As such, older women are *assigned*, by the husbands or in-laws, to 'watch over' younger women (see also Erman 1997; Davies 2009). Therefore, whether working or socializing, there is a persistent level of authority stemming from their husbands and the wider migrant community (see also King et al. 2003). One way to escape the social control is to gain support from a social network of women. The development of female social networks, not only connected to factory work but also to social centres, is shifting traditions and norms in the migrant community. Women are more active in the city and for the migrant community this has become commonplace rather than the exception.

### ***Social activities and female networking***

Compared to their rural existence, in the city women are inspired to be socially active: to meet as a group, organize excursions, attend courses and celebrate together. The women spoke of occasions when they met and went to the cinema, ate at a restaurant or attended birthday celebrations.

Here in the city you see women everywhere, going to the shop, running to catch the bus, coming and going from work, going to the social centres. (Dava, 43)

Socialization with other women appears to provide some personal compensation for the accumulated stress and everyday preoccupations. They feel more involved and less isolated and are able to talk about common problems, frustrations and solutions.

One day we [group of women] went to the cinema. I really enjoyed that day. Next day I felt content, fulfilled. Time to time you need to have a break from the routine of everyday; it helps you to keep going mentally. Women are freer here. They have friends, go to work, and go out. They live quite decently. (Shqipe, 32)

In the city, women tend to create a support network (Erman 1998, 2001), as it is not easy for them to negotiate certain personal freedoms alone. To succeed, they embed their emancipation in a broader context which is more readily accepted by the household or wider community.

Women have changed tremendously here. I work for this social centre here. Everyday there are courses, activities, celebrations and women always come. Some years ago they were fewer while now I see new faces everyday. I have experienced the change. From this change I have changed myself. We have changed each other, we have learned from each other. (Fatime, 39)

Women take initiatives to work, go out and attend courses and social activities. Using their agency, they continuously challenge their husband's dominance. From their narratives, we can see that women's strategies for emancipation have changed and developed over time. In the beginning, women needed to reinforce their position in the household. Then they gradually positioned themselves within a broader context, such as in public and in work spaces. In general, women demonstrated an increasing awareness of their place in society and ways they could decide what was best for them. The same emancipation strategy is apparent in their broadening of social networks, first within kin and neighbourhood, and later in the social centres and the work place. Nonetheless, living in a closed community can act as a barrier to these changes and to the development of networks in the host society. When women start to work, go out or change their appearance, rumours and general gossip can arise.

I have understood that everybody should do what is the best for her/him and not what is the best for the others, if I like something, I do it and don't care what the people say. If I stayed at home the people would say, look at her, all day at home not doing anything . . . if I go out they will say where is she going? Why? . . . on both occasions the people talk so I decided to do what I think is good for me and stop worrying about the others. (Ana, 27)

Nowadays, women often simply *inform* their husbands when they intend to take part in any social activity out of the house, whereas before they had to ask and wait for permission. Nevertheless, during interviews some women became anxious at the length of the discussion due to their concern that they would not be home before their husbands. Women attempted to hide this anxiety – mainly from the more emancipated women – and justified their behaviour in relation to their roles as housewives.

### *Emancipation through daughters*

This research revealed that younger women especially were trying to break free of the patriarchal gender relationships with their parents. They felt trapped between the traditional migrant community and modern urban life, and were struggling to extend their social networks and move up the 'social ladder'. The daughters were better educated and enjoyed more freedom than their mothers, not only within their close neighbourhoods but also in public. They spoke of feeling more urbanized and not wanting to be controlled and looked down upon within the household. These women nevertheless struggle to renegotiate their position within the family unit and also in society. They want to undertake higher education and marry for love. Education is perceived as a successful strategy for liberation and an opportunity to find a better job. Conserving and perpetuating a patriarchal lifestyle is perceived by young women as not only ruining their future but that of the whole migrant community. It is interesting to highlight the growing alliance between mothers and daughters to achieve emancipation for both generations. Mothers want their daughters to have what they could not have in the village: freedom, education and choices.

I wanted to study but there in the village we [women] were not allowed to. Why should my daughter experience the same as me? When we first came here my mother wanted me to study but the beginning has been very difficult . . . then I got married and all the dreams faded away. I want these dreams to come true for my daughter. I want her to have the opportunities that I missed to make the choices that I could not take. I will fight for this. (Monika, 26)

I can see that my daughter is more open-minded than me. She might say and do whatever she wants. You can beat her but she will do what she thinks is right. It is useless that we scream orders to her. Girls here are brave. To be honest, I have encouraged this attitude in my daughter. I tell her stop standing up to serve food to your brother. It is not that I tell her loudly because her brother might go and tell his father and then all his anger would come up against me. But it is a behaviour that I have encouraged and she does not serve her brother anymore. In the beginning she was beaten by her father but now nobody touches her anymore. (Nexhi, 37)

Maintaining the traditions of the village means that girls cannot go to school or leave home until they are married. In this scenario, a daughter should find a good husband (rich and an emigrant to Greece or Italy), get married and have children. This is a scenario predetermined by the family (primarily the girl's father) as a patriarchal system which young women cannot easily escape. Many of the young women have attempted to break out of this regime, with some success. Women with higher education especially have high expectations of finding good jobs, having an active social life and enjoying the city's attractions, but their new surroundings rarely meet their expectations and dreams (see also Post 1998). Leda (28) came to the city with a university degree and many dreams:

I came here with so much hope in me. I wanted to break the typical female stereotype of the village ... What did I get... rejection, problems, disappointment and gossip. I am unmarried, I have no children, and I barely have any income. But I do not give up; I know that one day all my struggles will be rewarded. Sometimes I think it would be better if I had made other choices. But I have these thoughts very rarely. (Leda, 28)

Ana (27) came to Kamza from a village in northern Albania with dreams of being like girls born in Tirana, wanting to study, work, go to the theatre or a bar, wear modern clothes and be happy and independent, but:

Everything remained just a dream ... a beautiful dream inside my heart that more than a dream is now a heavy burden that I cannot bear anymore ... I do not have money to even buy the school books, I do not have the money to eat in the bar of the university with my other friends but I take two pieces of bread with a bit of cheese and eat in a classroom alone with the fear that somebody will see me. (Ana, 27)

The benefits of migration vary according to the diverse expectations, personal capital and the characteristics of the women migrants. Women who came to the city with higher education feel more disappointed than others as a result of the lack of networks and the difficulties they face finding suitable jobs. Some women who were already highly educated were forced to down-skill to gain employment, further challenging the adjustment process. In contrast, gaining higher education in the city is perceived as beneficial because, apart from social status, networks and freedom, it is associated with better opportunities which, together with the need of women to work, become a safe path towards emancipation. Migrant women who have attended university in Tirana have more friends within the host society and frequently find a job in the city through these networks.

The emancipation of daughters is generally apparent and encouraged by mothers. Women are aware that liberation can occur and continue to work towards negotiating their power relationships within the household. Daughters now challenge their fathers directly, while mothers conduct their revolt indirectly through daughters.

## Conclusion

Migration can trigger the emergence of new gender roles and hence can no longer be approached with the notion of the 'feminisation of migration' alone as it promotes significant developments for men and women migrants (Rao 2009; Ghosh 2009). This article qualitatively explored internal migration as a gendered process in the context of rural-to-urban migration in Kamza, Albania. While migration can have significant effects on the living conditions of all Albanians, women are vulnerable in two ways 'as migrants and because of their gender' (INSTAT 2004a, 2004b). Although there are some qualitative studies that look at gender and international migration from Albania (e.g. King and Mai 2004; Hatziprokopiou 2006; King and Vullnetari 2006; Boeschoten 2007; Styliou 2006; Vullnetari 2009), work on internal migration and gender is rare and although the majority of research shows men to be the key figures in migration (Lazaridis 2000; INSTAT 2001, 2004a; Carleto et al. 2005, 2006; Cila 2006), this study reveals that women are actively involved.

This article argued that the patriarchal organization of the Albanian rural household starts to break down after the migration process (Vullnetari 2009; INSTAT 2000, 2002). The concept of patriarchy is used as a synonym for tradition, and emancipation for the negotiation of women's positionality in relation to the private sphere. Both concepts are linked more to a family framework and less to 'state patriarchy' (Harvey 2002) and the macro level of the public sphere. We consider emancipation a means to change the traditional patriarchal social structures. In their migratory trajectories, rural women struggle to change the patriarchal



framework within the household. Migrant women consider emancipation to mean control over their own bodies, appearance, free time and income (see also Harvey 2002).

This study individualized migrant women's voices and presented their experiences, framing them in a macro cultural and traditional context. From the perspective of women migrants, real emancipation includes men as well. This accords with Harvey's work on women and their emancipation in Eastern Europe (2002), where she claims that emancipation, more than the superficial concept of state-promoted gender equality, is a continuous trial of women to achieve status through emancipation of men. Moreover, the recognition of social and gender differences embedded in an emotional, cultural and psychological context is important for achieving gender equality (Anthias and Lazaridis 2000; Kiss 1991; Farkašová and Kiczková 1993). In line with these studies, the migrant women in our study acknowledged the differences between men and women while negotiating their position with regard to these differences. The analyses of women's narratives revealed complex negotiations between household members, where the outcomes depended upon both the cultural expectations of men and women and the relative power and status of each household (Curran and Saguy 2001).

We found that migrant women play an important, yet veiled role in the migration decision-making process and destination choice of the household. This conclusion emerged through an ethnographic approach, as rural women in Albania are grounded in a patriarchal society and would rarely openly admit their significant role in the migration process. Their narratives challenge the 'traditional' model of Albanian migration (King et al. 2006; Cila 2006), where women are regarded as subservient followers. Migrant women demonstrated that they have the agency to promote their ambitions through hard work, social achievement and a willingness to adjust to city life, showing a strong preference for the city, where they feel they can be more open-minded, independent and better informed compared with their life in the village. In the village, women experienced a tough life, working all day under male dominance. Women see the city as an opportunity to improve their lives and to renegotiate their position in both the household and wider community. Hence, they play an active role in the decision to move to the city, often breaking through the patriarchal barriers and risking being stigmatized by their own migrant community.

None of the women in this study, despite their economic situation and position, wanted to return to live in their village. Although all came from rural areas, their lives varied, and the benefits of migration differed according to their different socio-economic backgrounds, diverse positions and experience of various power relationships in the household, as well as their differing levels of education.

It is often argued that in the case of Tirana we should talk more of the ruralization of the city rather than an urbanization of the migrant community (Çabiri 2002; UNDP-Albania 2000). According to Bërxfholi (2008, pers. comm.), the city has failed to absorb the migrant population. However, we found that there is an increased willingness at the individual and household level to adjust to the urban way of living while negotiating the rural and patriarchal traditions of the village. Migrant women employ different strategies to break the bonds of the traditional rural community, yet there are many obstacles along the way to emancipation and integration. The patriarchal character of gender relationships in Albania may persist in the new destination. The stereotype of a wife, daughter and/or sister is forcefully protected and transferred through generations, while the male identity continues to be strongly constructed. Both the migrant community and wider institutional context may further strengthen the patriarchal system, reinforcing the stereotypical identity of women as subservient housewives and of men as dominant and the breadwinners of the household. According to Gjermeni et al. (2003), this social pressure upon women can have strong implications for gender equality and the role of women in society. This makes it more

difficult for women to succeed in their aspirations for emancipation. The women's narratives revealed a subtle yet ambivalent discourse concerning both a desire to improve their assigned place and a feeling that they belonged there. However, once they had moved to a more urban environment women began to question their role. It was encouraging to see women starting to be aware of the fact that the system is not fair. This rising awareness, triggered by the migration process, started to challenge the traditional roles of men and women in the family. What we found was that challenging the patriarchal traditions is a gendered process embedded in generations. It is a process of revolution that implies a set of decisions taken following a *silent* rebellion occurring among generations, genders and ideologies as a step towards emancipation.

This study focused on the experiences of migrant women coming from rural areas in the north and settling in Kamza near Tirana; however, this is not the only migratory trend. Thus, while our results do not represent all migrant women or the whole of Albania, this article provides valuable understanding and evidence of the role of women in the internal migration process. Migration can potentially be an advantage for women, yet in Albania there remains a need to implement gender inclusive policies to enhance their situation in particular and the socio-economic conditions of all migrants in general. Finally, in order to contribute to a better understanding of migration and gender, comparative exploration from a male perspective is important.

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### Notes

1. The population of Albania is 3,169,087 (World Bank 2010).
2. The mass migration anticipated in some earlier studies on the transition process did not follow the same trends and levels everywhere in post-communist countries. According to Castaldo et al. (2005), most of the countries in eastern central Europe experienced generally modest population mobility compared to original expectations. From the data available, Albania proved to be an exception in the former communist bloc, experiencing one of the greatest migration flows in the two last decades in Europe (Carletto et al. 2004).
3. God of the house 'Zot I shtëpië' is often used to identify the head and the decision-maker of the household (see also King and Vullnetari 2009).
4. 'For all their habits, laws and customs, the people, as a rule, have but one explanation: It is in the Kanun of Leke Dukagjini', Edith Durham (1909).
5. A term used by King (2005).
6. In total, 40 in-depth interviews were conducted with men and women.
7. The real names of the participants have been changed in order to conserve their anonymity.
8. They migrated to Kamza which is a peripheral and suburban area of Tirana, the capital of Albania.
9. An Albanian popular expression used to show astonishment.
10. In the Albanian context and particularly in that of northern Albanian society, the headscarf is related to culture, customs and traditional clothing. However, the headscarf can be seen as a symbol of Islam and considering that most of Albania's population is thought to be – at least nominally – Muslim, it is important to note that in the case of women from northern Albania, the headscarf is not a religious symbol.

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## ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

### **La negociación entre el patriarcado y la emancipación: mujeres emigrantes de áreas rurales a urbanas en Albania**

Para analizar la migración interna en Albania es esencial explorar el rol del género para poder dar cuenta de las distintas experiencias de los hombres y las mujeres. Estudios cuantitativos sugieren que la inmigración interna en Albania es iniciada por los hombres, y las mujeres solo acceden a sus deseos. Este artículo trata el tema del subvaluado rol de las mujeres en el discurso académico respecto de la inmigración en Albania. Utilizando técnicas etnográficas de investigación, explora el rol de la inmigración de las mujeres desde áreas rurales a urbanas como parte de un hogar más grande y examina las estrategias de negociación y supervivencia utilizadas para sobrevivir en la ciudad. Nuestros resultados revelan que las mujeres participan activamente en el proceso de inmigración rural hacia la ciudad, incluyendo en la decisión inicial de migrar y en la elección del destino. Las narrativas de las mujeres proveen evidencia de las estrategias específicas de emancipación a través de las cuales se expresan ellas mismas y a sus nuevas formas de

vivir. Las mujeres se ajustan al nuevo ambiente urbano y lo desafían consiguiendo empleos pagos y expandiendo sus redes sociales, así como también experimentan la emancipación a través de las hijas y cambiando su aspecto, adquiriendo variados grados de prosperidad social y personal.

**Palabras claves:** emancipación; mujeres; migración; rural a urbano; Albania

### **在父权与解放间协商：阿尔巴尼亚的城乡移民女性**

分析阿尔巴尼亚的境内迁徙时，探讨性别角色对于解释男女的差异化经验而言至关重要。量化研究主张阿尔巴尼亚的境内移民主要由男性做为先驱，而女性仅只是迎合男性的意志。本文则致力于阿巴尼亚移民研究的学术论述中受到低估的女性角色，运用民族志研究技巧，探讨女性从乡村随家户迁徙至城市区域中扮演的角色，并检视其为了在城市中生存所运用的应对与协商策略。我们的研究结果揭露出女性实则积极参与至城乡移民的过程，包含最初的迁徙决定以及地点的选择。女性叙事为展现自我及新生活方式的特定解放策略提供了显著的证据。女性透过取得受薪工作和扩展社会网络，适应且挑战其所身处的崭新都市环境，并透过女儿的角色与改变自身的外表获得解放，以此获致不一而足的个人及社会成就。

**关键词：**解放、女性、迁徙、从乡村至城市、阿尔巴尼亚