CHAPTER

1

TRANSLOCAL FOUNDATIONS OF A KOSOVO VILLAGE

INTRODUCTION

When I first met then 17-year-old Vlora in 2011, she spoke at length about her extended family network spread over Serbia, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Germany and Sweden. Very early on, I realized that her own life story and her vision for her future also stretched far beyond the bounds of the Opoja village, where she shared a home with her parents and her brother. Although she spent most of her leisure time at home, she was largely influenced and informed by her translocal environs, not least because the family was in regular contact with her uncles and aunts and cousins, via Skype or Messenger. Their interaction intensified during the summer months, when family members typically arrived one by one from several different countries for their annual visit to their village. This was also the time of the year when weddings, often of an Opoja migrant to a villager, were lavishly celebrated (see Chapter 6) and when the translocal community reaffirmed their Opoja village as their 'home base'.

As Vlora described the migratory movements of her extended family during a conversation, I realized my challenge was twofold. I sought to link the chronology of her family history with the historical developments in Kosovo to understand the different generational and gendered positionings therein. Like many heads of village households in the 1960s, Vlora's grandfather had worked in Belgrade[1] to support his family – his three sons, among them Vlo-

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ra's father – and subsequently their wives and children. Having begun work in Austria in the early 1970s, he finally returned to the village for good upon reaching retirement age in the late 1980s. Vlora was born around the time of the intensification of the ethnic conflict in Kosovo in the 1990s. That was when Vlora's father left for Austria to provide for his family; increasingly in the face of the escalating conflict and violence in Kosovo, entire families were leaving for Western Europe. Not too long after, Vlora, her siblings and her mother also sought to join her father in Austria. However, that plan took an unfortunate turn when their travel was interrupted in Hungary, and they were sent back to Kosovo within a few weeks.

With the end of the war in Kosovo, villagers widely abandoned agriculture in favour of employment, but at the same time, the ongoing neoliberal economic restructuring increased unemployment numbers. As a livelihood in the Kosovo village environs was difficult to secure even after the war, migration from Opoja to EU countries continued to be vital to the livelihood of the household. This trend did not abate after the declaration of an independent Kosovo nation state in 2008, and despite limited migration options to the EU, the emigration rates remained comparable to the years before 2000 (Kosovo Agency of Statistics 2012: 25). In Opoja, the percentage of migrants was slightly higher than the national average and reached nearly 25 per cent of the overall population in 2011 (ibid.: 19), and Vlora and her brother, like many of her other relatives and friends in that age group, were also looking for ways to migrate. Statistics show that for most Opoja migrants, Austria ranks the highest in the scale of preference for migration destinations, followed by Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, respectively. Furthermore, even rural regions in Kosovo, like Opoja, were increasingly inducted into the global trends of consumption and media flows, which in turn increased the desire to emigrate in order to better participate in consumer culture.

Underpinning these mobilities is the more general link between Opoja and the Western European destinations dating back to the 1960s, when international migration started to become integral not only to the social security of village households but also to the life course of villagers and the village culture in general. This phenomenon affected broader sectors, such as agriculture, economy and education, but within these fields also gender, family and community relations. In this chapter, I examine how after the war ended in 1999 these sectors were reconfigured in Opoja in line with the wide-ranging national and global transformations that Kosovo underwent but also in line with the long established 'culture of migration'. In particular, I pay attention to the ambivalent processes that these transformations unleashed in the form of 'rescaling' of village life – the repositioning of individual villagers within a new 'hierarchy of wealth and power' – and in relation to hegemonic notions of periphery and centre (Çağlar and Glick Schiller

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2011b; Duijzings 2013: 16). Last but not least, I show that these transformations affected forms of modernization and ideas about modernity within the Opoja locality: desiring to break with various historically grown values and practices, there was an active rejection of practices seen as outdated and, as a corollary, an active embrace of what came to be seen as progressive and modern, in part through the creation of new 'traditions'.

Following Doreen Massey (1991), who argues that 'places can be conceptualized in terms of their social interactions which they tie together', I argue that Opoja's social space combines village and global processes that link it to Western destinations. Together, villagers and migrants seek to re-create their locality and renegotiate the borders of their own community, in part because of an expanded, yet connected, social imagination (Appadurai 1996). They link to Western destinations as much through historical experiences and norms as through the larger phenomena of post-war, post-socialist transformations – which have entailed a strengthened move to a neoliberal culture of consumption, the foundation of the Kosovo nation state – and not least through globalization and the changing migration regimes of Western European states for migrants from Opoja. These processes transform the Kosovo society at a rapid speed and create new subject categories and intersectionalities (Binder und Hess 2011) while simultaneously also blocking other developments and transformations.

As described by Ger Duijzings (2013: 12), 'the end of socialism was a triumph for the neoliberalist project – an alternative future was eliminated'. In Opoja, local assessments of the transformations are, however, rather ambivalent, or even contradictory – mainly because local livelihoods no longer offer the security or not yet the desired 'modern life'. While most villagers claimed, for example, village life had changed profoundly since the end of the war, especially in terms of gender and intergenerational relations, others stressed that life had generally remained the same – that is, rather stable – especially with regard to gender relations. The latter is also mirrored outside the region, as Opoja is known for its 'traditional' family and gender relations throughout Kosovo. The concept of global assemblage (Ong 2006), which describes the multiple interlinkages of humankind, knowledge and technology, accurately reflects the modalities of the links between the Opoja region and the globalized world as well as the migrants abroad. Global assemblage, defined as such, not only contributes to the creation of a unique locality in Kosovo that stretches beyond the borders of the local village but also a highly diversified region that only at first glance seems homogeneous. While historical customary norms are still very influential and respected by the majority of Opoja inhabitants, there is a general embrace of what is regarded as 'modern', whereby definitions of modernity are personal and local and may also include the cherishing of 'tradition' as a way of positively relating to

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an imagined past. Moreover, the norms differ according to gender and age, education and social status.

Starting from Opoja and incorporating a diachronic perspective that goes back to the socialist era, the chapter traces the gendered and generational experiences, practices and positioning of the villagers. The elements of a translocal village analysed here include interconnected domains such as agriculture and economy, education and religion, and the use of new media. These elements constitute what Pierre Bourdieu (1993) called a 'social field', which villagers navigate by taking on particular social positions. In Opoja, this field is established as both transnational (Carling 2008) and translocal, as cross-border dynamics and relationships play an important role.

THE DE-AGRARIZATION OF VILLAGES

Village households ensconced in spectacular nature, with deep green meadows and hilly areas surrounded by mountain peaks, evoke the familiar image of a daily life deeply embedded in nature. However, in a trend that gained momentum during and in the aftermath of the 1999 war, most villagers were no longer engaged in agriculture and husbandry. At the time of my fieldwork, only very few families, mainly families with a joint household structure, still kept sheep. In comparison, more families kept cows and produced their own dairy and meat, and even more had a vegetable garden to reduce the household expenses, especially since families in Kosovo on average spend nearly half of their monthly income on food (Republic of Kosovo 2015).

'Before the war, every centimetre of land was used', one villager explained to me, and agriculture and husbandry were – next to remittances – still the basic sources of livelihood for most households. Villagers kept sheep and cows and worked their small, scattered plots to grow wheat and vegetables for their own needs (Reineck 1991: 30). The socially-owned enterprise 'Sharr Prodhimi/Šar Proizvodi' established in Opoja during socialism helped private sheep breeders by marketing their farm products, and in that sense, private farming and the former socialist enterprises functioned symbiotically. The predominantly male labour migration did not lead to a cessation of farming and animal husbandry. Instead, land prices increased as many heads of families invested a part of their remittances in landed property – not least because the size of land ownership traditionally represented wealth and class. Yet, already under socialism, most migrants did not see a future in agriculture. They discouraged their children from deeper involvement in agriculture and encouraged education.

After the war, most village households finally (and rather suddenly) abandoned animal husbandry, and in 2011, only 3.5 per cent of all farms in the Dragash municipality generated produce for the market and only one per cent

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Figure 1.1. Landscape of Opoja in summer (© Carolin Leutloff-Grandits)

of the registered businesses in the municipality related to agriculture, forestry and fishing (UNDP 2012: 104, 115). This was in part because of the post-war and the post-socialist realities. Villagers fled without their livestock during the war and found a very small number of animals upon return. After the dissolution of the socialist enterprise, they furthermore lacked the facilities to market and process agricultural products in the Dragash area (ibid.: 109).

At the national level, Kosovo's weak position in agriculture (and production) was attributed not only to the neoliberal restructuring of the markets in Kosovo but also to migration's domino effect. As remittances from abroad greatly enhance the local purchasing power, imports rather than exports dominate international trade. Also owing to low import taxes, local products often cannot compete – a phenomenon known as 'Dutch disease' (Mustafa et al. 2007). A highly successful butcher's shop in Opoja, established in 1992, is a case in point. Although Opoja is surrounded by green hills and pastures, the local owner started to import meat from abroad, even from overseas, as there was not enough slaughter cattle available on the local market, not least because the price he paid for slaughter cattle was not attractive to the local farmers.

Since the end of the war in 1999, local inhabitants have been generally unwilling to invest in agriculture or buy new livestock for market production. They are even exultant to finally get rid of agriculture and husbandry. Instead, they invest in building new, individualized and 'modern-style' homes with an open-plan American kitchen mainly financed through remittances, savings and/or bank loans, despite the high mortgage rates.[2] House building activities, willy-nilly, often lead to the division of joint households into nu-

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clear ones (see also Chapter 4), and as younger women in the nuclear households are less inclined to engage in the malodorous job of caring for cattle, typically small-scale husbandry and farming are devalued or have been completely abandoned. Newly built houses thus no longer accommodate a stable for livestock. Other villagers explained to me that as they did not own enough land (often less than one hectare), it was no longer economic to work the land. While Janet Reineck (1991: 30) writes about an average landholding of 1.5 hectares per family in the late 1980s, this is reduced with the division of households and the simultaneous division of land among sons, who habitually receive an equal share of it.

Generally, this retreat from agriculture is regarded locally as a blessing in disguise and an escape from the challenges of village life. Internalizing the widely shared view of the urban inhabitants who pejoratively call them *katunarët* (villagers) (see Paca 2015: 3; H. Schneider 2017; E. Krasniqi 2017; Blumi 2003), as in other Southeastern European contexts (for Bulgaria, see Schubert 2020), villagers see abandoning agriculture as a pathway to becoming more 'civilized' and as a step towards 'modernization'. The intention behind a 'post-peasant' life (Duijzings 2013: 16) is to reduce the difference between urban and rural life – at least from the village perspective – and to move towards modernity (for Poland, see Pine 2007). This has enormous significance for everyday life. In our conversations, elderly women, for example, often stressed the hardships they went through in their youth. Women had not only performed household chores like cooking, cleaning and washing (often without home appliances), caring for the elderly and rearing children, often more than a handful, with men often on *gurbet*/*kurbet* (labour migration), they, and their children, also shouldered the highly labour-intensive responsibilities for their agricultural farms. Thus, the declining dependence on agriculture signalled progress. Especially middle-aged and elderly women seemed happy that their daughters(-in-law) could enjoy better living conditions without such encumbrances. But the retreat from agriculture and husbandry has created a parallel economic pressure – including on women – to take up wage work, whereby the lack of jobs in the region has fostered the pressure to migrate. This has led to wide-scale migration and the emergence of the 'post-peasant subject': 'that is, the rural inhabitant who tries his luck elsewhere and adopts a transnational identity' (Duijzings 2013: 16).

THE ASPIRATION OF OUTMIGRATION IN LIGHT OF THE ECONOMIC SITUATION

The desire for outmigration among young men and women alike stems from the meagre economic opportunities and the high unemployment rate at home. In Opoja, the unemployment rate rose above the country average of

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35 per cent in 2015, and unemployment among young people was generally even higher in Kosovo. This difficult economic situation dates back to socialism, or even earlier, and led many families to send at least one member abroad to receive remittances. Landholdings and husbandry alone could not ensure a livelihood, and with public institutions as the main employers, jobs were scarce. In socialism, the municipality of Dragash was among those with the lowest number of employees in all of Kosovo. In 1981, of the 35,054 inhabitants in Opoja, only 1,434 persons had formal employment. In 1982, a textile factory that opened in Dragash employed about 500 persons at low salaries, whereas the agricultural firm 'Sharr Prodhimi/Šar Proizvodi' employed approximately 200 persons (Reineck 1991; Reinmüller 2015: 43–44; Halimi 1999: 32). The dire economic situation in Opoja was also linked to a steady population growth until 2008, registering an increase of 300 per cent between 1921 (when demographic data first became available) and 1981, which reflected the overall situation in Kosovo. Since then, population growth has slowed down because of emigration and declining birth rates (UNDP 2012: 26). Prior and parallel to the trend towards international migration since the late 1960s, male inhabitants of Opoja took up work in other regions within Yugoslavia, particularly the northern ones, which were better developed, and in Belgrade, where they took up blue-collar jobs in socially owned firms, often in the construction sector. In many cases, the family remained in Opoja and the migrant ties to the home region remained strong.

Still, during the socialist era, there were some important achievements in the Opoja region, largely thanks to its geopolitical location. Owing to Opoja's proximity to the Albanian border, the villages in Opoja and Gora received an electricity supply as early as the 1960s, after the installation of the hydroelectric plant in Gora in 1953 – which happened later in other regions. The electrification of the Yugoslav border regions was a sign of the Yugoslav supremacy over socialist Albania, which pursued its own kind of socialism. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, most villagers received running water through a new water pipeline system. Roads also started to be paved in 1973, while other rural municipalities within Kosovo received their first paved roads only in the 1980s (Reineck 1991: 27–28). Apart from this, Opoja had a well-developed health care system with medical ambulances in various villages – for some as early as the 1960s – as well as a hospital in the small town of Dragash, the municipal centre of the Opoja and Gora region since 1969 (Reineck 1991: 28–29; Qafleshi 2011; see also Islami 1985 for the development of rural regions in socialist Kosovo).

Still, despite those achievements under socialism, most villagers I met regarded the overall development during socialism as slow and complained that jobs at all levels had been scarce in the Opoja region. Only people aged over forty, who were young during the era of Tito, the president of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from its founding in 1944 un-

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til his death in 1980, embraced a somewhat positive image of socialism and cherished Tito's achievements in the education, labour and health sectors. However, as the population in Kosovo is mainly comprised of people under thirty, who do not have first-hand experience of socialism under Tito (as they were not yet born or under the age of 10 at the time of his death), the positive vision of socialism was not very widespread. Instead, they mainly remembered the brutal and ethnically discriminatory government of Slobodan Milošević from the 1980s (Schwandner-Sievers and Ströhle 2007), when many Kosovo-Albanians were dismissed from their state jobs and experienced long-term unemployment. From the 1980s on, but especially in the 1990s, a considerable number left Kosovo to escape political pressure and economic deprivation. In Opoja, jobs in the public sector were then taken over by the Slavic-speaking Gorani, an autochthonous group living in the neighbouring region of Gora.

With the end of the war in 1999, this situation was partially reversed. While the inhabitants of Opoja largely regained their jobs, Gorani became unemployed and experienced discrimination. Still, with time, interethnic relations improved again in the Dragash municipality, partly because of international pressure.[3] However, unemployment could not be solved in Opoja and other regions of Kosovo. In fact, it actually peaked a few years after the end of the war as the privatization process of the former socially owned industry gathered speed, leaving the manufacturing industry in shambles (UNDP 2012: 103).

Since then, the main employer in Opoja, a former socially owned textile factory, has massively reduced its workforce, and the agricultural industry has perished. In 2012, the number of available, albeit poorly paid, jobs was a modest 380 (with an average income of 200 euros per month; see UNDP 2012: 103) – significantly less than in the 1980s. Some villagers also commute daily to Prizren for work. Moreover, in large parts of Kosovo, and especially in economically weak areas with a tight local state budget such as Opoja, there is a lack of major state-led economic investment, and the public sector remains the main employer (UNDP 2012: 111).

In addition, many villagers run diverse small private enterprises, like carpentries, mechanical workshops and hairdressing salons, as well as restaurants, shops, café bars and construction-related services. While some were established in the 1990s, when private entrepreneurship (especially in trade and services) became the main form of income-generating employment next to agriculture (Clark 2000: 113–14), many private businesses opened only after the war, in the new millennium. Like before, however, most of these businesses and services continue to be male-dominated, and almost all their employees are from within the family circle. Many operate seasonally, mostly in the summer when migrants return, ready to exercise their purchasing power. Even the construction of new buildings and the interior

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Figure 1.2. Landscape of Opoja in early spring (© Carolin Leutloff-Grandits)

architecture, for which local construction firms and carpenters are engaged, is mainly commissioned by migrants, not just in Opoja but all over Kosovo, where 'foreign direct investments fuelled construction activity' (IMF 2011; see also Behar and Wählisch 2012: 16; see also Chapter 4).

As Vlora's story revealed to me, village life gathers pace in summer months, when migrants visit. They invite their relatives to coffee bars and restaurants that burgeoned after the war (see also Chapter 5). Furthermore, migrants largely also finance huge wedding celebrations in the region (see Chapter 6), which provide an occasion for everyone to get together and where cooks, hairdressers and musicians find seasonal employment. If only seasonally, the circulation of migrants' money keeps the local economy running, and for a limited time Opoja seems to become the 'centre of the universe' for the translocal community. As Ger Duijzings (2013) observes for rural locations in various places in post-socialist Europe, these translocal connections have played an important role in 'rescaling the locality'. 'They led to the blurring and partial collapse of spatial categories such as "centre" and "periphery", "rural" and "urban". These distinctions have become fuzzier and continue to fade as travel and communication become easier' (Duijzings 2013: 17). In the ebb and flow of economic life, the pace of life in the villages slows down enormously in the winter months, and the villages seem to fall into a slum-

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ber. When snow falls, it may even become difficult to reach villages located at 1,000 meters or more above sea level. That is when Opoja again gains distance to the cities and the migrant destinations across the national borders, and peripheralizes again.

While most migrants invest mainly in real estate 'back home' (see Chapter 4; Havolli 2009), some also look for possibilities to open businesses that might enable families to return or facilitate opportunities for close relatives to earn a livelihood. Recently, the local authorities also started to support (migrant) entrepreneurship by offering investors landed property for commercial investments and access to infrastructure, like electricity supply. However, many migrants maintain that the support of the local government is minor or too slow (e.g. the instalment of electricity may take years), or they do not see the potential for economic investments. Thus, the number of such businesses founded by migrants remains insignificant compared to their other investments, and in a sense, they do not resolve the dire economic situation. In the private sector, many employees work without a formal contract, receive low wages (in the textile factory, for example, 170 euros in 2012) and might not be paid at all. Approximately 40 per cent of Kosovo's employment is informal – often because the low income that the firms generate cannot pay for the legal costs (UNDP 2012: 110). Jobs in the public sector are more secure, and salaries are often better – police officers or teachers were, for example, earning up to 350 euros a month in 2012. Thus, employers in Kosovo prefer public-sector employment.

Generally, despite or maybe because of the emergence of the neoliberal order, they need connections to secure a job, a phenomenon Čarna Brković (2020) discusses in the context of post-war, post-socialist Bosnia-Herzegovina. In short, a considerable segment of the population in the Dragash municipality, but also in other parts of Kosovo, lives on a relatively low income and has significant job insecurity. In many cases, villagers are convinced that the situation is not necessarily improving for the better and attribute this to the dysfunctional state, which does not care enough for its citizens, and to the widespread existence of corruption and clientelism in Kosovo as well as the ongoing neoliberal transformations, which have marginalized large parts Kosovo's population, especially in rural areas.

Under these circumstances, translocal, family-based support becomes very important. In fact, the share of the population relying on remittances is substantially higher than those receiving social assistance from the state. Remittances received by rural households all over Kosovo average 2,800 euros per household (1,500 euros in urban areas) – that is three times higher than the average financial support from social protection schemes by the state (UNDP 2012: 109–10). Thus, when remittances shrink, or a household 'lacks' a family member abroad, the only economic option is outmigration,

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either of a household member or of the complete household. It goes without saying that young people with a better educational background also want to start a better life in Prizren or in Prishtina, where they expect to have more economic opportunities as well as more liberties compared to the Opoja village life.

EDUCATION

The idea of education as a means of modernization and a possibility to socially upgrade was not only strongly supported by the socialist state but has also influenced villagers in Opoja for decades. While illiteracy in Kosovo stood at 62.5 per cent in 1948 (Schmitt 2008: 238), with a much higher percentage in the rural parts, after the Second World War, four-year primary schools were built in Opoja as a part of the great alphabetization campaign of socialist Yugoslavia. At that time, schools began to offer instruction in the Albanian language. In interwar Yugoslavia, instruction within Kosovo's schools was generally in Serbian only, except for the very small percentage of religious schools. In socialist Yugoslavia, schooling was also supposed to include girls – a position not shared by all villagers at the beginning but which became increasingly widespread thereafter. Gradually, larger villages began to offer eight-grade schools, and in 1969, a secondary school was founded in Dragash (Qafleshi 2011: 196). Higher education in the Albanian language became possible with the opening of the University of Prishtina in 1971 (Schmitt 2008: 239), and thanks to the state-supported education system, which included merit-based scholarships from the state, a limited number of talented Albanian-speaking students, even from poorer families, were able to attend university (Kostovicova 2005).

Within socialism (and beyond), however, the prospects for higher education depended also on various factors within the families: the degree to which individual families valued education, the established family and gender roles as well as family and household solidarity. Owing to lack of funds and the societal and family expectation to marry 'in a timely manner' (early twenties) and take on family responsibilities, in the 1970s and the 1980s, nearly all young women and most young men were not able to pursue education. Young women were expected to work in the household and take care of their children after marriage, and young men sought paid employment – partly abroad – to finance the costs of lavish wedding celebrations and to support the family.

Some enjoyed better prospects to complete their education. Among them were those whose family members (often fathers or older brothers) worked abroad and (co-)financed their higher education and their wedding. *Gurbet-*

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gji (labour migrants) from Opoja believed they could achieve progress and modernity by educating their children – mostly sons – or brothers, as education would give them the tools for upward mobility and a better life. As such, labour migration from the late 1960s onwards was also linked to a rise in the education profile of the Opoja villages. However, as the availability of highly skilled jobs was very limited in Opoja, educated villagers often moved to the urban centres, such as Prizren and Prishtina, in many cases with their entire families. Especially from the 1980s onwards, it was not rare for a family living in Opoja to have relatives that worked in blue-collar sectors in Western countries but, due in large part to the financing from the labour migrants, also educated relatives who were teachers, medical doctors and lawyers in Prizren and Prishtina. Family members were both geographically dispersed and had diverse social, educational and professional profiles.

The growing economic and political crisis within socialist Yugoslavia started with the death of Tito in 1980 and was followed by the escalation of the ethnic conflict in Kosovo from the late 1980s onwards, which interrupted the social upswing. As Albanians were excluded from schooling and university education at the University of Prishtina, the only university in Kosovo at that time, schooling and education began to be privately organized and paid for – largely also through remittances. While the primary school buildings available in the villages of Opoja could still be used, as the villages were inhabited more or less exclusively by Albanians, the secondary schools were located in the ethnically mixed towns of Dragash and Prizren and could no longer be used by Albanians, so classes had to be held in private houses. Thoughout the 1990s, the quality of the education was poor, and the dropout rate for girls from school, even elementary school, was especially high. After socialism under Tito propelled gender equality, the rise of Slobodan Milošević within the 1980s and the emerging ethnic conflict led to a reverse development. While in the late 1970s, about 40 per cent of the pupils in secondary school were female, by the late 1980s, this number dropped to 4.5 per cent. Barely one in five girls who began primary school in the rural areas of Kosovo in the 1980s finished the eighth grade (for the general picture in Kosovo, see Vickers 1998: 252; Clark 2000: 99; Pichler 2008; for Opoja, see Reineck 1991: 167–68). Moreover, Albanian pupils have not been taught Serbian at school since the exclusion of Albanians from public education in Kosovo in the early 1990s. Thus, during my fieldwork, mostly only men over thirty-five could speak Serbian, the lingua franca in socialist Yugoslavia, which they had learnt at school and used during their military service in the Yugoslav People's Army.

After the end of war in 1999, (higher) education assumed greater significance again, not only in Opoja but in Kosovo in general, and in 2012, 8.2 per

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cent of the population (and 3.2 per cent of women) had a university degree (UNDP 2012: 39). With the reopening of the University of Prishtina – with instructions offered exclusively in the Albanian language – and with the emergence of various public university campus sites and new private universities across various towns, among them in neighbouring Prizren, the percentage of students among young Kosovo-Albanians – including women – rose steadily. In 2010, women even made up 51 per cent of the student population, pointing to their emancipation (UNDP 2012: 39; World Bank 2012: 2). In Opoja, new school buildings, including a secondary school, were opened after the war (Qafleshi 2011: 197–99). Like elsewhere in Kosovo, girls here were increasingly inducted into higher education, although the percentage of females finishing secondary school in Opoja in 2012 stood at 37 per cent (UNDP 2012: 91, 154). While the Serbian language is no longer spoken among the younger generation, German is the most widespread foreign language spoken in this area – due to migrants returning from German-speaking countries but also because young people are interested in moving to a German-speaking country abroad. Some teenagers even manage to learn the language via TV, without having travelled abroad.

According to a survey I conducted in 2011 among ninth-grade learners at the elementary school in Opoja, in which I asked students to write about where they envisioned themselves ten years from now, almost all – boys and girls alike – said that education constituted the basis for a good life, with many having concrete professional goals. Albana wrote:

> We need to plan our goals carefully so that we can realize them. We need to be attentive to our past, because it makes the days still ahead of us more secure. We all have the wish to achieve a lot of success in our life. But success can be manifold; it can appear as short- and long-termed. What we can do is only learn, and then our future is secure. . . . I have always dreamed of continuing with school, to become a dentist so that I can help others and secure my own life. The place I want to receive education and live in is Prizren. If we want something that we never had, we need to do something we have never done. After 10 years, we must have made a good choice, and we must be secure about the choice we have made and must be able to earn a living with it. . . . The future of a person depends on the life she/he has – as soon as we have an education, we will have a happy life. To conclude: One needs education in order to have a better life.

In this essay, the pupil expresses her attentiveness to the past to build a good future but regards education as key to realizing her plans. The fact that teenage girls very confidently want to take up professions such as dentist and doctor and earn their own living shows that gender images have changed again since the war. A considerable number of these young people also asserted in their writing that they planned to go abroad temporarily, a goal among the youths throughout Kosovo as well as in the neighbouring coun-

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tries (for Serbia, see Erdei 2011). For many young people from Opoja, temporary migration is linked with their plans to travel and study abroad before returning to Kosovo to take up a good job, although at that time maybe only a handful from Opoja were actually studying abroad, and visa restrictions made travel to the EU nearly impossible. Fifteen-year-old Valon wrote this:

> My life will look very different in 10 years, as I will have finished studying my electives. I like studying engineering or architecture the most. These professions, I think, suit me best. One of these subjects I will finish studying in a European country. As others say it is better to study there. After ten years, I think I will live in Prishtina as this is the capital of Kosovo. But when I have the possibility, I could also see myself living in another European country. I will definitely marry, but not before I finish my bachelor's and master's degree. I also like the German language. Together with my study, I want to learn the German language. These are my most important goals.

Like Valon, various other pupils said they wanted to start a family only once they had finished their studies and were able to support one financially. These new visions raised the marriage age to a new average of 29.8 years in Kosovo in 2016 (males 31.6 years and females 28.1 years) (Kosovo Agency of Statistics 2016a). While in the parent generation an early marriage (early twenties) for men and women alike was regarded 'a must', for the younger generation, especially men, achieving a level of education and financial security through gainful employment has become a precondition for marriage. Agon, father of teenagers, declared: 'Here, they also have started to marry only after completing schooling, university or securing a workplace.' In numerous families, the parents, and other family members also, financially support their children in their effort to gain higher education – often with the help of remittances from relatives abroad. But not all families can afford these costs, as Opoja pupils in the middle and secondary schools need about 50 euros a month to cover public transport and snacks, which makes it especially expensive for families with two or more children. For students studying in Prizren or Prishtina, costs for commuting or lodging are much higher. However, given the high unemployment numbers and widespread clientelism where employment decisions for university graduates are not based on merit, some young people are also ambivalent about the value of higher education. As one of the pupils expressed in his essay, some finish education only to fulfil the wishes of their parents. Especially male teenagers imagine themselves working abroad, no matter if it was in the blue-collar sector, as 'good money' can be 'made' compared to what could be earned in Kosovo. Citing cases of highly educated migrants whose qualifications are often not recognized abroad, forcing them to take on blue-collar jobs, they argue that education is not a precondition to finding work and income opportunities abroad.

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GENDER ROLES AND FEMALE EMPLOYMENT

As Reineck (1991) observed in the late 1980s, parents in Opoja tended to marginalize their daughters where higher education decisions were concerned because of financial constraints as well as the patriarchal gender and family values. This prevented many women from taking up employment and rendered them dependent on their natal families, husbands and in-laws. A rapidly dropping fertility rate since the late 1980s, from an average fertility rate of 6.7 children per woman in rural households in 1981 (Malcolm 1998: 332) to an average of about two children in overall Kosovo in 2011 (see KAS 2013 and Latifi 2015: 13) and even less than two children per woman in 2019 (Kosovo Agency of Statistics 2020), probably also contributed to the lowering of the dropout rate of girls in school. Nevertheless, at the time of my fieldwork in Opoja, various parents and husbands did not want their daughters or wives to seek employment. They were convinced that female members of the household taking up employment would damage their reputation, as men outside the family circle might approach them, or female employment might create the impression that they had been pressured to work because of the family's difficult economic situation.

In regard to his then eighteen-year-old daughter, who recently graduated from secondary school, Agon remarked: 'It does not make sense for her to work, she will only lose; she cannot gain anything (with work).' Based on these notions, it is still common for female teenagers and young women in Opoja to stay home, especially after finishing the nine years of elementary school, at age fifteen, or after the twelfth grade in secondary school – at age eighteen. That is different in other rural regions of Kosovo, where a larger percentage of girls were undergoing higher education already in the 1970s, and a far higher percentage of women were employed at least from the 1980s onwards. In this sense, Opoja is more conservative than other regions in Kosovo – especially the urban centres.

In Opoja, gender relations are also spatially pronounced. Boys and young men meet for soccer or basketball in the yard of the primary school. Often, they can also be seen lingering or chatting in the streets. Alternatively, they congregate in a coffee bar, where they have access to the internet and TV. At the time of my fieldwork, most *vajzat*, the Albanian word denoting adolescent unmarried girls, were discouraged by their parents and the *rrethi* (the social circle) from being seen by themselves in the streets or coffee bars. Twelve-year-old Valentina said, for example, that girls are not supposed to sit in a café: 'I take the coffee home. I could go to the café, but this is embarrassing, as the others ridicule me. The adults have always said we should not sit in the café.' However, gender relations and gender positionings are far from clear cut in Opoja. For instance, on festive days like the day of *verza*

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(celebration of the start of spring), teenage girls are even 'expected' to dress up and team up in groups to take a stroll up and down the village street, to attract the gaze of young men. Some male teenagers do the same but in neighbouring villages, as village exogamy is still the rule. Most young men get a ride in a friend's car to visit a neighbouring village, where they check out other girls on the stroll, call out to them and try to involve them in short conversations from the car windows.

Female teenagers and young women in Opoja who stay home after finishing school spend time on the internet, help their mothers with household chores, or also concentrate on needlework to make their marriage trousseau (*qejz*), a practice that has a long tradition in the region. The *qejz* is, among other things, an assortment of intricately embroidered tablecloths. The female guests of the family usually inspect the needlework to express their appreciation for the girl's diligence and skilfulness. But the village community also accepts that girls who pursue higher education lack the time or interest to engage in needlework. Thus, life worlds and gender roles and values in Opoja are gradually becoming more diverse, and young women striving for emancipation live alongside those who conform to patriarchal role models.

Given the practice of village exogamy and the expectation that sons will remain in their parents' household for at least a short period after marriage, women are often integrated into this household and are expected to adapt to their role as newly in-married woman, which follows certain patriarchal rules. Customarily, this also happens on a symbolic level. Once married, parents-in-law – and often also other family members of the groom –refer to the newly in-married woman as the 'bride of' the groom (e.g. *nuse Agonit*, or *nuse Valonit*). At the time of my fieldwork, married women were often more or less confined to the house and the yard, and various young married women told me that it was considered improper to walk the street without an escort.

Many young women – and men – regard this control over married women as 'unmodern', 'outdated', 'fanatical' or even 'uncivilized'. They highlight the many recent transformations towards more egalitarian gender relations and/or are convinced that such transformations will take place in the region within a few years or decades. Most young women still feel incapable of transgressing these boundaries set by the *rrethi* as they do not want to provide fodder for village gossip, which could reflect negatively on their families. As soon as they leave Opoja, however, for instance for a shopping trip in the town of Prizren, which not only has an old bazar but also large shopping malls with 'modern' coffee bars, women from Opoja walk alone freely and enjoy stopping by for a coffee and spending some leisure time there. This double standard that splits the village as a patriarchal community space from the city environs, which are largely freed from such confinements, is common and accepted.

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Figure 1.3. Village street in Opoja (© Carolin Leutloff-Grandits)

Most married women, however, are not as free to leave Opoja, and they spend their time mainly in the company of other women from within the household or the *mahalla*. Apart from their household chores and caring tasks for the children and the elderly, many commit much of their leisure time to needlework and embroidering intricate flower decorations on blouses as well as the headdress to match the *dimia* and *dallama*, the traditional costume worn at wedding ceremonies (see also Chapter 6). Married women often also take orders for these hand-embroidered vestments from migrants. With this, they could earn up to 1,000 euros for a hand-decorated blouse – the work of several weeks – which they may use, amongst other things, to finance their children's education or buy them clothes. This means that even in the patriarchal setting of many Opoja households women can become economically active.

According to UNDP (2012: 41), the number of 'economically active' women in Opoja was still small in 2011 – about 25 per cent of the overall female population of working age – which reflected the overall picture in Kosovo (but it is not clear if women who sell embroideries are included in this number). The number of employed women, amounting to only 3 per cent, was even smaller. In various cases, the opportunities were seasonal. A female hairdresser, whose husband supported her work and helped her set up a beauty salon in the yard of the family home, operated the salon only during the summer months to serve women planning to attend wedding celebrations, as the demand was otherwise low. Of the very few women in the region with salaried jobs, some worked as primary school teachers and

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Figure 1.4. Handmade tablecloths in Opoja (© Carolin Leutloff-Grandits)

nurses – thus in fields that reflected the national standard.[4] More recently, village women have begun to work in a textile factory and as cashiers in a large, recently opened modern supermarket in Dragash – which is different from the relatively small village shops in Opoja, where only men work. This indicates a (renewed) shift in the acceptance of women as part of the general workforce. So far, however, women who work in public administration in Dragash are not from Opoja but from the town of Prizren and often do a daily commute to their workplace, underlining the gap between urban areas and the rural region of Opoja in terms of gender roles.

Young women from the village who finish vocational training or even university education in Prishtina or Prizren often do not return but remain in the urban environs to take up employment there – for instance, in the banking sector. Women from the Opoja villages have also increasingly been taking jobs in Dragash. However, owing to the lack of childcare facilities in the Opoja villages and in the town of Dragash, married women with children (which many have soon after marriage) who work outside their home depend on the support of their in-laws or other family members, but their way of life is seen as disentangled from the local community. Liridona, for example, whose in-laws take care of her children, has a distinct place in the village community as she is the only woman in the village who works for an international organization in the local municipal town. While she contributes part of her income to the joint household expenses, she keeps some for herself as savings in case they move again and want to buy a flat or build a house somewhere else, as she explained to me. Liridonra's way of life is ac-

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cepted among villagers, but some middle-aged villagers do not consider her a role model for women in Opoja. They explained that she originates from a different region and met her husband during their study years in Prishtina and does not follow the regional customs or local values of the village *rrethi*.

Liridona's way of life has not strongly influenced other women of her age – not least because Liridona does not socialize much with other village women – owing to time constraints. Still, women from Opoja who study and work in Dragash, Prizren or Prishtina, sometimes also after marriage, and even if they are no longer in regular contact with their village peers at 'home', as well as those who move abroad and take up salaried work there, are gradually managing to change people's opinions about gender roles. With this, they contribute to women in Opoja imagining new roles for themselves. Based on family status and education, or to what extent one is perceived as an in- or outsider, accepted gender roles in Opoja could be very diverse. As such, there is no palpable uniform or homogeneous 'moral code' within the village but rather several relational codes that inform gender, kinship and local relations in a translocal space.

ISLAM AS A FACTOR OF CHANGE

Questions about the impact of Islam on family relations that were posed by a largely Western audience when I presented my fieldwork findings revealed stereotypical ideas about Islam being based on 'backward' 'patriarchal' family values. Those who knew about Islam in Kosovo highlighted the fact that Opoja has been known for its religiosity throughout history. Given that Islam had re-entered the region with new force in the 1990s, first with the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia and, subsequently, after the war in 1999, and that fundamentalist Islamic streams from abroad (e.g. Sunni Islam from Turkey but also Wahabism from Saudi Arabia) gained influence in Kosovo (Bougarel 2005: 11; Hening and Bielenin-Lenczowska 2013: 1; Elbasani and Roy 2015), they wondered why I had barely mentioned the role of Islam and its impact on family relationships.

Contextualizing the role of Islam in Opoja, its long-standing influence is evident in the visual appearance of the villages, as each has a mosque with a minaret, which was built before Kosovo became part of socialist Yugoslavia (Qafleshi 2011: 162–63). In the 1990s, keeping with the trend all over Kosovo, almost all mosques began to be renovated, a process that lasted well into the new millennium. After the end of war in 1999, now keeping with the trend of mosque building, a new, large mosque with four minarets funded mainly through migrant remittances was built in one of the villages. But what was the significance of Islam on the ground – was it based on a new

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form of religiosity that emerged in Kosovo and Opoja after socialism, or was it primarily a marker of identity? And in what ways did it influence gender and family relations and family care?

During my fieldwork, the role of Islam was hardly mentioned by my interlocutors. Only when I asked them directly did they tell me that they considered themselves Muslims, often without distinguishing between different Islamic directions or emphasizing that they, like the majority of Kosovo Albanians, followed the Hanafi (Sunni) school of Islam. They saw Islam as part of their local identity and considered it important that their spouses were Muslims, too.[5] Still, many stressed the need for tolerance and openness towards Christians and often highlighted in our conversations that Albanians are not all Muslims but also Catholic or Orthodox Christians (although, in Kosovo, the number of non-Muslim Albanians is less than 5 per cent) (see US Department of State 2012). Others even stressed that their own ancestors had been Christians who had converted to Islam during Ottoman rule.[6]

For my interlocutors, Islam did not necessarily have practical implications for family life and gender roles. For this reason, I did not use it as a category of analysis (see Brubaker 2013). The way Islam is practised in everyday life varies, however, from village to village, from family to family and person to person. As Islamic prayers are in the Arabic language and public schools do not offer religious education, even after Kosovo's independence was proclaimed in 2008, the knowledge about Islam is limited and not all families have preserved the age-old tradition of chanting prayers. Although the local *hoxha* offers voluntary religious education for girls and boys in the *medrese* (Islamic school linked to the mosque) during the summer break, only a small number of pupils attend. The number of men who attend the daily mosque services tends to be small, too, while women only frequent, if at all, the new mosque, which has a special section reserved for women. Still, some women and men pray daily in the privacy of their homes, and women teach and encourage their (grand-)children to pray and the girls to wear a headscarf during the prayers.

Islam is more influential in the month of Ramadan, when especially the women observe fasting from dawn to sunset, and no weddings are celebrated during that month. For the *iftar*, the breaking of the fast after sunset, relatives are occasionally invited. In recent years, the imam has always invited male community members to a joint *iftar* outside the mosque. Family members, and especially women, normally meet up for a joint meal (*syfyr*) shortly before sunrise, at which time a procession of boys beating drums goes through the village. For the main Islamic festival of Bajram at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, numerous migrants travel to Opoja, and those who cannot attend the festivities communicate with their families digitally.

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During my fieldwork, the headscarf (Arabic *hijab*), which is known as the *havale* in Kosovo (Reineck 1991: 103) and is a prominent symbol of adherence to the Islamic faith, was hardly seen in the larger towns in Kosovo, although it has become more fashionable again for some of the younger women. In Kosovo, as elsewhere, the meaning of the headscarf has changed throughout history – not least owing to its politicization (Ghodsee 2008, 2010). While the headscarf had been an omnipresent feature in Kosovo in the pre-socialist era, under socialism, the Yugoslav state had forced women to get rid of the headscarf, which was also seen as symbol of 'backwardness' and female oppression (Popovic 1986; Clayer 2010; Clayer and Bouragel 2013; Sadriu 2015). This was not completely successful – as photos from the time of socialism document. In today's Kosovo, the main political parties also partly reject the headscarf, arguing that it does not fit into Kosovo's notion of an Islam that is 'soft', 'European' and 'modern' and that rejects patriarchal values (Bougarel 2005, 2007; Clayer 2010; Sadriu 2015). In accordance with the constitution, which prescribes state secularism, the wearing of headscarves has been banned in public institutions. Still, in today's Opoja, most elderly women habitually wear smaller headscarves and long coats when they step out of their home.

Younger women have partly started to wear the headscarf in adherence to more orthodox notions of Islam in terms of patriarchal norms that ascribe different roles to men and women in public and private realms (Kaser 2021: 66). But the wearing of a headscarf does not necessarily have to clash with notions of modernity and education. Young women from Opoja who wear the *havale* consider this practice modern and not regressive. These women, as well as the men, see the *havale* as protecting women from being seen as sexualized objects, a trend they believe is especially prevalent in Western, capitalist societies. Within this logic, some women emphasize that wearing the *havale* is consistent with the emancipated role of women, as the headscarf would give them more freedom to be active in public spaces.

NEW MEANS OF STAYING CONNECTED AND THEIR EFFECTS ON VILLAGE LIFE

While (out)migration has become more permanent since the 1990s, the start of the new millennium heralded the era of 'new communication technologies' and thus increased possibilities for staying connected. This has helped villagers to maintain links with dispersed relatives. At the time of my fieldwork, nearly every household with relatives abroad also had a computer, often bought by the migrants, with internet connectivity that allowed them

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to stay in touch without spatial mobility, and nearly free of cost (Levitt 1998; Vertovec 2004). In Opoja as well as abroad, the computer is often placed in the living room and connected to the internet all day long, showing the importance of staying in contact with relatives abroad and their willingness to communicate throughout the day. I also variously observed villagers use an integrated computer camera so relatives abroad could see children of the family at play or virtually take part in family gatherings. This also included me: when I stayed in Opoja, family members introduced me to relatives abroad during a digital conversation and similarly when I sat with migrants from Opoja in their living room in Germany or Austria who were using Skype I got to meet family members from back home.

The use of social media like Facebook to remain in contact across territorial distances delocalizes the village while at the same time creating a translocal space within which various localities bundle. Villagers as well as migrants upload photos showing their children or newborns, or they post about graduation parties, engagement ceremonies or weddings. More generally, the virtual connections, and the information and pictures shared, became 'the social glue' of translocal relations, to use Steve Vertovec's expression (2004; see also Levitt 2001: 22–23; Baldassar 2007b: 389).

The villagers emphasize that this possibility to stay in contact with migrants abroad is a big difference from pre-war times, when telecommunication was a rarity, and calls were very expensive. In 1953, the first public telephone was installed in one of the villages, followed by another village and Dragash in 1974, but private phone lines were never installed, not even after the war in 1999. Apart from sending letters, Opoja villagers relied on relatives living elsewhere, mainly in the town of Prizren, for a private telephone connection. Vlora's father Agon said that during his stay abroad in the 1990s his sister-in-law's parents in Prizren were the only ones with a home phone, so he was mostly only able to stay in contact with his brother and mother and not his wife. With the introduction of internet connectivity and later, around 2010, of smartphones, virtual lines provided more privacy to geographically distant family members and made it possible for villagers and migrants to maintain intimate relations over long distances. Some households have more than one computer, and young people whose partners are abroad are supplied with a laptop or a mobile phone to facilitate close contact and ensure privacy. Again, villagers evaluate this in positive terms, and especially women see this as a big advancement.

Visits to Kosovo have also become easier since the end of the war for a variety of reasons. In the 1990s, many migrants with pending asylum cases could not travel back and forth (see Chapter 2), and many male migrants additionally feared military drafts and even persecution as soon as they entered Kosovo. Since the 1990s, and even after the 1999 war, most Kosovo-

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Figure 1.5. Buses en route from Austria to Opoja near the Serbian border (© Carolin Leutloff-Grandits)

Albanians have sought to avoid potential conflict with Serbian authorities or extremists by travelling to Kosovo through Northern Albania. As the streets in the mountainous regions of Albania were in a very bad state, travelling was considerably dangerous and took days. With the completion of the new highway from Albania's coast to the border with Kosovo in 2010 (see Hemming 2014), most took advantage of this more expedient route. From 2011, when ethnic conflict was calming down and Serbia started accepting identity cards for adults and birth certificates for children from Kosovo as travel documents (Republika e Kosovës 2011), Kosovo-Albanian migrants started travelling to Kosovo via Serbia again, the easier and faster way. Progress was also been made when a highway was finished in 2013 in Kosovo, linking Prishtina to the south of Kosovo and the border with Albania. From Vienna, Opoja is now reachable in less than fifteen hours instead of the forty plus hours it previously took via Albania.

Apart from the necessary road infrastructure and legal conditions, new bus connections have created an easier link between villagers and migrants. Several bus companies in Opoja offer daily rides to Belgrade and once or twice a week to various Austrian towns – based on the seasonal needs –

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Figure 1.6. A local bus company operating between Opoja and Austria (© Carolin Leutloff-Grandits)

and since employees and travellers often know each other, the service has a rather intimate feel. Migrants and their families who 'return home' for a visit use these buses particularly in the summer months, when schools in the migrant destinations are closed. Not only passengers but also goods travel in both directions. Migrants send envelopes with money and parcels with clothes and other items to family members back home, while the villagers send homemade dishes. Most common are *flia*, a very labour-intensive national dish cooked in a pan on an open fire that requires stacking several layers of pancakes with yoghurt and buttercream spread between them, or *pite*, puff pastry with a filling.

The irrevocable introduction of the internet in village households, and its widespread use after the war, has unsurprisingly also affected the life of children and the youth. From pre-school age, most village children are acquainted with YouTube videos and films, as well as computer games. Boys often play motor races and other action games and girls play with digital Barbie dolls, which they dress following the latest American fashions and styles, or with digital 'dress-up' houses consisting of numerous rooms, among them children's rooms, which they can furnish with Western housing equipment. The virtual reality to which they are now accustomed is a lot different from the world in which they live, as numerous children do not have their own room, for example, but sleep either with their parents or grandparents, or, when older, also in the living room. Nevertheless, the declared aim is to own such materialities and create these living worlds.

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As most children and especially teens have their own social media accounts, they use digital platforms to create their personal identity, express their dreams and link up to the globalized world. As a lot of people do in social spaces across the globe, they curate their digital profile with personal photos and a variety of links to music and images, as well as comments, which they often post daily (see also Krasniqi 2017; Chapter 4). Expecting responses from peers in the village as well as abroad, girls, for example, publish pictures of high heels, IKEA bedrooms and wedding dresses – both tying themselves into the increasingly universal world of consumption while assuming gendered roles. Male teenagers share photos of international soccer teams, glamorous cars, 'cool' guys and 'hot' girls. Both also share photos of romantically involved young couples, swimming pools in Kosovo or wellness spas and beaches in Albania and around the world, as well as actors of famous telenovelas or Hollywood films and proverbs, slogans and images they consider 'cool' or humorous. The internet thus contributed to what Beck, Giddens and Lash (1996) call 'a reflexive modernization', in that certain notions of Western modernity, but also notions of modernity in other places in the world, such as Turkey, became an integral part of the life worlds of villagers from Opoja and shaped their gender roles. This happened, though not always consciously, through multiple flows in a translocal realm, of which the internet was only one of many.

In the digital age, Opoja villagers, especially teenagers, have succumbed to the global phenomenon of digital addiction. Images jokingly disseminated online among young people include a gravestone of a teenage friend, who, according to the inscription posted online, died of Facebook withdrawal. No different from Western Europe, many parents complain that school children, particularly those in their teens, 'waste time' (*hup kohë*) in front of the computer or phone instead of learning, but they are often not resourceful enough to offer them alternative leisure activities.

The visual as well as virtual spheres have taken on more importance because they open up alternative spaces where divisions and hierarchies can be more easily suspended and new social relations can be created that impact real life worlds and influence personal communications and styles in the village, especially among young people. A growing acceptance of the 'power' of teenage self-determination is one of the developments that has convinced the older generation that everything has indeed changed since the war. Children, and especially teenagers, dress up to be seen as fashionable and attractive by their peers. Many teenage girls today have taken to wearing tight trousers and shirts and wear make-up – often for school as well. Schools are considered a meeting point where teenagers may fall in love with a prospective marriage partner. Some parents, therefore, only allow their daughters to use make-up and wear certain clothes after they

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graduate from school, as they do not want them prematurely engaging in a love affair.

As shown by Anja Peleikis (2003) for Lebanon and Miller (2012) for Trinidad, the use of social media creates new spheres of freedom and intimacy and accelerates transformations in social relations. Teenagers in Opoja can now exchange intimate thoughts and arrange secret dates with someone they like. Even parents who want to restrict the use or possession of a mobile phone, especially for their daughters, cannot really curb this trend because of their teenagers' peer pressure. During my fieldwork, I observed the rapid dissemination of mobile phones, and in summer 2013 nearly every household member from the age of fifteen upwards, including female teenagers and unmarried women, had their own mobile phone. At about the same time, smartphones became extremely fashionable, and male teenagers as well as male adults were the first to receive a phone as a gift from relatives abroad, as only a handful in the region could afford them.

Last but not least, a very important technology that links the village to the globalized world is still the 'old-fashioned' television. Television was introduced to the village during socialism but is now a common household item in the main living room, often on permanently on mute, and household members and visitors may view it passively to pass time. Very popular are telenovelas from Turkey and other places around the world with Albanian subtitles, but also entertainment series like 'Big Brother Albania', which is watched across gender and generational lines. Among the youth, furthermore, American and German TV channels like Nickelodeon or KiKa are popular. Male teenagers and men also watch international soccer games on big flat screens in the nearby café bars.

Even elderly and middle-aged villagers use social media like Messenger and Facebook to remain connected to children and relatives abroad, but also for internal village concerns, such as to announce their visits or exchange news. At the local family-owned store, the computer is a multifunctional tool, used for calculating the purchases of customers, but also for entertainment – for instance, music and wedding videos on YouTube, or online chess – to shorten the long working hours (8.00 AM to 10.00 PM). Furthermore, it enables the shopkeeper to receive orders from customers via Facebook and Messenger, which he then delivers to the customer. That this has a gender dimension became clear to me when the local shopkeeper, after having invited me for a cup of coffee in his nearby bar, called my attention to this service. He added that I would no longer need to physically visit the store, which was, in his view, especially inconvenient for women, as it entailed walking through the village. In fact, in Opoja, the use of social media could lead to an emergence of emancipatory spaces that could foster the transformation of gender relations and positionalities towards more gender equality, but, as already observed by

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Miller (2012) for other parts of the world, social media are also used to exercise a certain degree of social control, as they set norms and a code of conduct and even re-establish patriarchal relations and role models.

CONCLUSION

Opoja has been affected not just by the war, which ended in 1999, and the declaration of Kosovo's independence in 2008, but also by post-socialist, neoliberal transformations, ongoing globalization and, finally, the decade-long migration processes that have expanded kin networks and households beyond state borders. This has led to the emergence of 'global villagers' (Levitt 2001), who not only rely on translocal connections but are also perpetually linked to a translocal locality no matter where they live. As this chapter has shown, there are very ambivalent and internally differentiated dynamics that unfold in different spheres within the Opoja region, like in agriculture, economy and education. These dynamics impact the livelihoods of villagers, their social security strategies and life perspectives, as well as the structuring of gender relations. Villagers link these dynamics to their own notions of modernity and progress as well as tradition and backwardness, according to which they shape their life trajectories and future visions.

Since the end of the war, many households are no longer economically bound to agriculture and/or husbandry, because dependency on such economies is largely considered regressive, and especially younger people want to embrace a modern lifestyle, which they actively express through fashion and house building and decorating styles. With this, the binaries of urban and rural, as well as centre and periphery, are largely dissolved. In line with the parental generation, most young people also believe in the progressive force of education to enhance employment opportunities, even though education is no longer the guarantor of achieving a better life, as evidenced by the high unemployment rates even among the educated and the widespread clientelism. All this, however, has also increased the dependency on remittances and migration as a source of livelihood and results in an ongoing outflow of village migrants to Western European countries. With this, the differences between the centre and the periphery are simultaneously re-established.

The diverse regional interconnections with a globalized world, including the massive use of social media such as Facebook and Messenger, have given rise to a common refrain among Opoja villagers that village life has changed enormously and created new living worlds in which various localities are integrated. This includes the redefinition of gender and generational relations, even if these changes are not always clearly visible. Even as girls in increasing numbers complete secondary education and aspire to wage employment,

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most women remain at home, not least because villagers continue to adhere to various patriarchal norms that influence gender and family relations as well as community life – even if they largely regard these norms as outdated. At the same time, women – and men – also use alternative digital spaces that may intersect with or influence real life worlds. Young women who have completed education and/or taken up wage employment follow more emancipated gender norms and lifestyles – which in turn is accepted in the village context. Other women leave the region for higher education or opt for international migration. As a result, divergent life worlds exist next to each other in Opoja, sometimes creating a larger impact on each other.

As the old and new life concepts mix or simply coexist, Opoja can be seen as taking a new position in relation to hegemonic notions of periphery and centre. This also blurs the boundaries of centre and periphery, rural and urban. While these boundaries take on a distinct meaning situationally, and in some contexts, Opoja seems more peripheral than ever, in other contexts the distance between the centre and the periphery, as well as modernity and backwardness, has narrowed, and it is not clear who sets the scale and how it is measured.

NOTES

1. For labour migration from Kosovo to Belgrade and other towns in Serbia in the 1950s and 1960s, see Vickers (1998: 159).
2. Those who found their houses damaged by the war also received donations from international organizations. In the Opoja region, this affected only a small number of families.
3. This can be seen in the re-establishment of the common municipality of Gora and Opoja, where the Gorani occupy about one-third of the seats in the local parliament and the employment share of Gorani and Albanians in public sector employment mirrors approximately the ethnic structure in the municipality (36 per cent Gorani and Bosnijak, 59 per cent Albanian) (UNDP 2012: 38; Schmidinger 2013; Reinmüller 2015: 80–85). However, about 62 per cent of the registered inhabitants of the Gora region lived abroad in 2007 (UNDP 2012: 35). Still, the relatively good interethnic climate is an example of good practice in Kosovo, as in other regions interethnic cooperation is barely attainable.
4. During the violent conflicts of the late 1990s, a nursery school opened in one of the villages, and the women working as nurses enjoyed a good reputation in the community, as they achieved power and status based on their earnings and their work for the community. Thus, not only in urban areas but even in rural Opoja, the conflict years created a space for emancipation for at least some women – although in general, the conflict tended to foster patriarchal gender norms as a byproduct of nation making (Luci 2005, 2014). This is, however, not specific to Kosovo but was observed also in other war regions in former Yugoslavia and beyond (see, for Croatia, Basić 2004). Currently, the most important sector for female employment in Kosovo is

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education (21 per cent), trade (18 per cent) and health and social work (15 per cent) as well as public administration (13 per cent) (UNDP 2012: 41–42).

5. For religious tolerance and diversity in (pre-)socialist Kosovo and its politicization in the 1990s, see Duijzings (2000), and in the border region of Albania and Montenegro from the 1990s also Tošić (2017) and Hysa (2015), who observed and analysed interethnic marriages between Serbian men and Albanian women in the Albanian Montenegrin borderland.
6. For more insights into the history of Opoja and Gora from medieval times onwards, see Qafleshi (2011). For information about the historical roots of Christianity in Kosovo, see Vickers (1998: 159).

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