

CHAPTER

3

FAMILY ROLES IN CARE ACROSS TRANSLocal HOUSEHOLDS



INTRODUCTION

Although Bashkim has been living and working in Germany since the 1970s, he continued to be regarded as the head of the household in Opoja. With the money he had earned in Germany, Bashkim financed a new house in Opoja, several stories high, where his wife and two of his sons and their families live, to whom he was sending remittances regularly. Two other sons, who had joined him abroad in the early 1990s, where they also established their own families and households, were also considered an integral part of the household in Opoja. When they visited during annual holidays, they were given their own bedrooms. Indeed, more than a decade after the war in Kosovo in 1999, it was not uncommon for villagers and migrant family members to see themselves as constituting a translocal household based in Opoja, even if they had established their own families and a separate household abroad.

In order to shed more light on family care across geopolitical borders, this chapter takes a closer look at the translocal household as a joint economic and social unit of families. It zooms in on the gendered, generational and locational positionings of migrants and villagers within translocal families and households in Opoja after the 1999 war, and their caretaking roles across the borders as brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, or as sons and daughters (see King, Castaldo and Vullnetari 2011: 399; King and Vullne-

tari 2011; Thelen, Alber and Coe 2013). Many studies on remittances (see Hockenos 2006, 2010; European Stability Initiative 2009, 2014, 2015; for critical reflection, see also Mata-Codesal, King and Vullnetari 2011) focus solely on migrants' financial transfers to family members in places of origin and ignore non-monetary care arrangements. This chapter, however, also explores the instrumental and emotional dimensions of care and how they unfold across borders (see Franz and Keebeth von Benda-Beckmann 1994; Baldassar 2007b; Levitt and Deepak 2011; Thelen 2014). I ask if within a border-spanning family network the different care dimensions overlap with and reinforce one another or fall short, and how they are divided between various members and across locations. Finally, I ask if migrants perform 'normative duties' in caring for family members and how family care is seen: as a form of sacrifice, as a balancing act between family and individual goals, or an opportunity for self-realization.

The translocal household, as conceptualized here, refers to a comprehensive unit that also includes separate households established abroad by members who cooperate with the family in rural Kosovo in various activities, like production, consumption, investments, or childrearing and elderly care. A translocal household, whose members often have distinct roles according to gender, age and their cross-border location, has normative and practical dimensions. In Opoja, such a household is comprised of 'cooperating members', who are nearly always related through the patriline, with in-marrying women constituting affines. In rural Kosovo, the family establishing the household often goes beyond the nuclear family, and it can reach a certain level of complexity. Historically, parents established a joint household with their married sons and their families, which formed the basis of its size or complexity (Kaser 1995). Households, however, transform – expanding when children are born or when a grown-up son marries and shrinking when family members die, leave the household or as members decide to divide the household (Hareven 1982). Within the household – and the close family – the functions and roles of individual members change with time.

When considering transformations within households, the factors of historical, family and individual time must be given special consideration, not least because they may intersect. Historical time is marked by changes in society as well as in the migration regime, which 'affects the life experiences of different age groups' (Hareven 1994: 438), or as defined by Karl Mannheim (1928), certain 'generations' – i.e. people born in a certain time frame who share a similar age and may relate to historic experiences in a similar way. Family time registers changes within the family, like births, marriages and deaths. Within family time, shifts in intergenerational relations gain special meaning. Family time may also document household cycles – that is, the founda-

tion of a new household and its subsequent division. Finally, individual time concerns the individual life course. According to Hareven (1994: 438–39, see also 1991), individual time intersects with family time and historical time, as individuals make their decisions based on family considerations as well as changes in society. As such, individual life transitions are synchronized with collective family ones and they ‘impact on intergenerational relations’.

The type and quality of care that individual household members provide varies not only between individual caregivers but also within a life course, based on family and gender roles and priorities – for instance, as a result of parenthood or grandparenthood (Dannefer and Uhlenberg 1999; Drotbohm and Alber 2015; Coe 2015; Segalen 2016). Furthermore, within a family, the support given or received often has a reciprocal character, even if time delayed and not necessarily balanced, and is based on certain roles within and between generations linked through affinal or consanguineal ties (Kohli and Heady 2010). This means that the roles individuals take up may shift in a single lifetime from care-receiver to a caregiver, or vice-versa.

Migration often demarcates a turning point in the development of the household, as it is central to family-based household and care arrangements. Caring strategies within the household and the role of individual household members change with migration – even if migrants do not completely withdraw their household membership. Furthermore, migrants’ roles vary depending not only on the distance from home and the length of their absence. Their life contexts and positions abroad, which are framed by their legal status, their ability to bring over family members, their prospects, employment status and property ownership, also influence the roles they take on (Drotbohm 2014). The question of whether migrants envisage a possible return, are required to return or a return is not at all feasible, must also be taken into account (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001). Moreover, migrants tend to respond to new societal conditions within the social networks in which they are embedded (Massey 1991).

As Harper and Zubida (2014) have shown for temporary labour migrants in Israel, it makes a difference if migrants live with their nuclear family abroad, or if the nuclear family is still placed in the sending country, across the state border. In this context, I argue that the migration of a family member changes the family setup, and that normative visions of family and kinship support that have evolved over time need to be harmonized with individual perceptions of self-realization. This impacts family-based care, as it can bring about conflict and fragmentation within translocal family networks, leading to care gaps, which thus leaves some villagers – old and young – in precarious conditions. However, as I will show, this may also pave the way for new care arrangements along gendered and generational lines. Unlike in traditional caring norms and practices, women increasingly take

on care responsibilities within their natal family and their role of caretakers is valorized within translocal families and communities.

To grasp the changing household and the caring roles of individuals whose families are dispersed between two or more states, this chapter, firstly, analyses the diversity in configurations of the village households in one *mahalla* and the migrants' place in them. It then turns to the migrants' perspectives and explores the conditions under which migrants provide care for relatives across national borders and how that impacts the caregiving roles of those back home. Here I differentiate certain inter- and intragenerational family roles – as a parent, sibling or child – and link the roles of caregivers to their individual life course, their position within the family and to larger societal developments. The viewpoints of villagers who chose to cut ties with their family members in Opoja after going abroad are not presented here. Their behaviour is regarded locally as shameful, and they were not spoken about in the village, and so it proved difficult to establish contact with them during my research. For the villagers, not mentioning these people also ensures that those who cut contact with relatives do not receive attention and therefore cannot be role models for others in the translocal community.

HOUSEHOLD PROFILE OF A *MAHALLA* IN OPOJA

In order to evaluate the impact of migration on caring relations within families in Opoja, I conducted a survey of all households within one *mahalla* (a neighbourhood in which households are mostly related by patrilineal kinship – at least in rural settings in Kosovo). I have taken a single *mahalla* as the unit of analysis and focused on the households therein to survey the differences in their complexity and structure, their translocal activities, their income sources and economic status. My thinking was that an in-depth analysis of household structures and the helping relations among its members could highlight specific problems and challenges prevalent within families across rural Kosovo today that would otherwise remain overlooked. Still, one single *mahalla* is not necessarily representative of an entire village.

The *mahalla* I selected in 2011, compared to others in the region, was of medium size and consisted of twenty-four households with 193 members. This makes a mean household size of 7.7 members, which exceeded the average household size of 5.5 persons for Dragash municipality at the time (UNDP 2012) as well as the national average in Kosovo of 5.9 (Kosovo Agency of Statistics 2011). The mean household size in 1981 (the last available census that included the Albanian population before the outbreak of war in 1998) was 6.9, which showed that it had since diminished (Latifi 2015: 77). For Opoja, Janet Reineck (1991: 27) even spoke about a mean house-

hold size of approximately ten members in the late 1980s. Thus, in the 1990s and the new millennium, the mean household size in Opoja had considerably dropped. Likely, this was because of a lower fertility rate and a faster rate of household division among brothers.

Within the *mahalla* I selected for my survey, the household sizes were very diverse and ranged between three and twenty-two members.¹ They included members living abroad still considered household members. In fact, about 60 per cent of all households (14 out of 24 households) had members abroad, and in three of these households, all members lived abroad for the most part. More specifically, 51 out of the 193 household members of this *mahalla* lived (more or less) permanently abroad. Representing a little over 25 per cent of all members, this is higher than the national average of about 20 per cent (Havolli 2009: 2). Twenty-five family members were living in various locations in Germany (from 6 households), eleven in Austria (from 5 households), ten in Italy (from 2 households), and five in Sweden (from a single household).

As for the structure of the households, six of the twenty-four households in my *mahalla* sample constituted a joint or complex household. Also called *shtëpia e madhe* (the large house) or *familja e bashkuar* (the joint family), they consist of two or more married brothers (aged 30–50 years) and their children, and the elderly parents. During my fieldwork, the joint households ranged from seven to twenty-two members. However, five out of these six joint households were translocally constituted, which means that one or several household members resided abroad for most of the year. In Opoja, they were considered a part of the village household, even if it did not constitute a joint economic unit. Unless migrant family members dispute being part of the Opoja household still, villagers consider even those who relocate, either to a town in Kosovo or abroad, as members as long as the male family members hold landed property in the village collectively. Several male migrants who lived abroad with their own nuclear family said that they were happy to remain part of the village household as long as their father heads it. For migrants, remaining in a household is a sign of respect towards their father and brothers and is a way of following the patrilocal tradition without it necessarily having financial consequences for them and their families abroad.

In fact, villagers did not mention sharing resources such as income as a necessary criterion for such a translocal household union of the *shtëpia e madhe* or *familja e bashkuar*. On the contrary, they reported that often those members with a household abroad had full authority over their own money. Thus, the local understanding of a *shtëpia e madhe* or *familja e bashkuar* is based primarily on the existence of an immovable property, such as a family house and land, jointly held among the male members of the family. That continues to apply even though the landed and residential property in the

paternal village represented security and a good life to a greater extent in earlier times than today. A good life has increasingly become contingent on gaining a secure and well-paying job (often service-oriented) through good education or connections but more often through migration. Still, landed or residential property in the paternal village has a social, emotional and symbolic value and underscores one's belonging to a place and within a family. This holds especially true for migrants who live abroad with their families, and who use their village home only during the annual holidays. As Jasna Čapo Žmegač (2009: 282) has claimed for Croatian migrants in Germany in the 1990s, 'it might be hypothesized that precisely because it is dispersed across long distances the family needs to construct its unity (emotional if not physical) and therefore presents itself as integrated and reconfigured.'

In the patrilocal, descent-based conception of Albanian kinship, the house (*shtëpia* or *shpia*) is regarded as the physical locus of the patrilocal family. Patrilocality refers to a kinship system in which the father is habitually seen as the transmitter of name and blood (*gjak* in Albanian). Habitually, sons establish their families within the confines of the parental household and remain within the household for an extended period, whereby women marry into this household. The house is often named after the eldest male member, the *zoti i shpisë* (household head), and is, in Albanian language, often synonymous with the patrilocally headed household. The joint household structure was historically widespread in various regions of the Balkans and was not based on religious or ethnic affiliation but rather on a largely pastoral economy and patrilineality (Kaser 1995, 2000).²

In earlier times, and often still in the new millennium, once households were divided, the sons, as co-owners, received an equal part (*hise*) of the immovable property, and new households were often built in the immediate vicinity and formed the basis of patrilineally organized *mahallas*. Daughters historically neither inherited property nor received a dowry – that is, a material transfer to the daughter by her parents at marriage (Kaser 2000). This trend persists in Kosovo despite conflicting with Kosovo laws stipulating that daughters also inherit (Krasniqi 2014a). This is due to underlying gender relations and traditional family values, in which men are seen as the material providers and women as the social and emotional caregivers of the family. This system also leads to early marriages and the (relative) universality of marriage. Finally, it also leads to the relative complexity of households, as parents remain in a household with married sons – at least for some time. The household thus builds a strong base of inter- and intragenerational relations – between parents and children (in-law) and between siblings, especially brothers, as well as cousins who grew up in the same household. The complexity of the household depends among others on how long parents and married sons remain in a common household, but also at what point

a joint household is regarded as divided. The latter is open to interpretation. When I asked villagers about the number and names of households at the time of my fieldwork, they named some households after the household head even after he was deceased and the household had been divided among the sons. This indicates that mindsets about the composition of a household are slower to change than the practices within households and families.

Apart from the joint households, nine of the twenty-four households in my *mahalla* survey comprised a married couple, living with at least one parent and possibly children and/or a sibling. In scientific literature (Mitterauer 1990; Kaser 2012b), such households are also called stem family or extended households. In various cases, the household had been divided relatively recently (often after a son's marriage), and one son had remained with the elderly parents. Of the four families that were 'translocally' established, three lived abroad with all members for most of the year but they owned and maintained a house in the village.

Finally, there were also nine families in the surveyed *mahalla* comprising parents with mostly one or two unmarried (and in one case also divorced) children, called *familja e ngushtë* or *familja e vogël* (close family, small family) in Albanian. Often, after property division, elderly parents decide to live with one of the sons, allowing the other married sons to establish a nuclear household. In these households, it was common to hear about one or several members having been in Western Europe for different lengths of time, but as they had been granted only temporary residency permits (if at all), they had returned. In other families, the migration of a family member was in the works.

In the village household, having relatives abroad is often considered key to social security and family prosperity, as state-provided social welfare is almost non-existent in Kosovo, and families thus seek to send additional family members abroad. Only families with a successful business setup in the Opoja region, or in Prizren, or well-educated professionals, such as doctors or advocates, do not depend on migrant remittances. Families from different social backgrounds rarely interact, except if they have close kinship ties, which in the case of patrilocal kinship often relates to having grown up in the same household or *mahalla*. In the broadest sense, the family views the household and the *mahalla* as essential for cultivating kinship belonging and where solidarity and cooperation balance out economic differences.

PARENTS AND SPOUSES AS CAREGIVERS ACROSS BORDERS

According to Tamara Hareven (1994: 448–49), who studied families in the United States in the early twentieth century, during the era of industrialization:

the family was the most critical agent in initiating and managing timing of life transitions. . . . Mutual assistance among kin, although involving extensive exchanges, was not strictly calculative. Rather, it expressed an overall principle of reciprocity over the life course and across generations. Individuals who subordinated their own careers and needs to those of the family as a collective unit did so out of a sense of responsibility, affection, and familial obligation, rather than the expectation of an immediate gain.

While this generally also holds for translocal families across the Kosovo borders, responsibilities are allocated based on gender and generation, whereby the role of migration therein is critical. In Opoja, in the 1990s and later, a translocal household, following a patrilocal pattern with its nerve centre in the village, could only be maintained on the strength of gendered caring roles. Frequently this meant that couples remained geographically separated – often for a long period. At the time of my fieldwork, several male migrants who had gone abroad in the 1990s were the proverbial breadwinners while their wives took on multiple caring tasks in the parents-in-law's household (see Chapter 2).

Ilire, aged sixty, who was living with her divorced daughter in a house in Opoja at the time of my fieldwork, is a case in point. It was the only house in the village where, locally, only female members were present. During my first visit, however, Ilire clarified that the household was nominally headed by her husband Artan, who had migrated to Germany in the 1970s. The geographic distance required dividing up care responsibilities. Where Ilire's husband sent remittances from abroad, thus providing financial care, Ilire took on the responsibility of providing instrumental and emotional care for her parents-in-law and the five children, only occasionally visiting her husband on a visitors' visa. In the mid-1990s, when her only son followed his father abroad and subsequently all four daughters had been married off, her care responsibilities were directed solely to the fragile and ill parents-in-law. After the death of her parents-in-law, she was obliged to remain with her daughter-in-law, a young woman from a neighbouring village, who had moved into Ilire's house after the wedding, as was the custom in rural Kosovo, and was waiting for a legal permit to join her husband. After three years, in 2002, when her daughter-in-law finally received her papers through family reunification and moved abroad, Ilire could have joined them abroad but had to postpone her outmigration when one of her daughters returned to her parental home after her divorce. Again, she saw it as her task to stay with her. In our conversations, she said:

I feel better in Germany because my husband lives there. My life is there. If I did not have to care for my daughter, I would stay most of the time in Germany. But I cannot leave her on her own. . . . It is a bit difficult. But we are patient. I hope that my daughter will marry again. I have to wait for my husband for two months, or five. When I was young, I even had to wait for ten months; he would not come home for 10 months.

The care of her daughter/-in-law was not the only obstacle to her joining her husband abroad. In our conversation, Ilire stressed that while she was looking forward to joining her husband and son and moving there for good, she had limited options to do so on the basis of family reunification as this required her to pass a German language test despite her advanced age and limited schooling (see Chapter 7). She thus feared being left on her own in Opoja. Ilire said:

I hope that my husband returns. He can return as soon as he retires, which would be in two years. My son lives in Germany, too, but I hope that my husband returns. As soon as he returns, we would commute between Germany and Opoja. I do not know how this will work out, but I hope that is how it happens.

Ilire knew deep down her husband would not return for good as he had been abroad since the 1970s. However, she hoped that she and her husband would remain mobile and maintain a bi-local household. Ilire's case shows that once women finally reach a point when their caring obligations in Opoja are fulfilled and they could in principle join their husband and children abroad, they risk facing legal barriers that hinder family reunification (see also Chapter 7). Because of that, they can only join their husbands for shorter periods on a visitors' visa, and mobility becomes a permanent modality of living for various household members. More generally, due to structural barriers and the often decades-long gendered and generationally divided caring tasks across borders, family reunification remains partly incomplete and cross-border mobility and bi-locality become a part of life, even for couples in advanced or retirement age.

Barriers to outmigration are not only faced by married women. Middle-aged male migrants are sometimes unable to bring their children over through family reunification (see Chapter 2). When grown-up children who remained in Opoja are unable to earn their livelihood independently, most fathers not only send remittances but also seek ways to establish a stable source of livelihood for their children in line with gender norms. That could entail setting up a home business for their sons or investing in the children's education (less so their daughters') or renewed attempts to relocate them abroad, often via marriage, as this was among the few available options to permanently resettle abroad. For daughters, parents often regard marriage – within the region or abroad – as the main means of social security. They assume that within marriage they will be cared for financially by the husband and his family. Still, especially the son's marriage is regarded as an important achievement in which parents are willing (and expected) to invest (see Chapter 7).

Endrit, aged forty-four, remained undocumented for many years after arriving in Germany in the 1990s. That meant that his wife and children could

not join him via family reunification and had to continue living in a joint household with Endrit's parents, his older brother and the brother's family in Opoja. Endrit sent remittances and was considered a household member. After the war, Endrit and his brother divided the joint household, because it had gotten too big, as he put it. Endrit then financed the construction of a new house for his wife and children in the direct neighbourhood of his brother's house, but he remained abroad to earn money for the family members. A new challenge came up when his wife got seriously ill and eventually died. As Endrit's brother and his wife lived next door, they cared for the daily needs of his four children, aged between ten and nineteen, while Endrit stayed abroad. On his part, Endrit continued to finance the village household where his children lived and made arrangements to ensure that his eldest son would marry soon. He reckoned that the new daughter-in-law would then run the household and care for his youngest children. Endrit financed his son's costly marriage, paid for his university education in Prizren, and bought him a nice car, which raised his social status, also allowing him to commute to the town. Endrit also took into consideration the future of his daughters and supported their plans to marry. All the care he provided depended on his enduring absence from Opoja. As Jasna Čapo Žmegač (2009: 278) writes in her work regarding Croatian migrants who care for relatives at home, a migrant

may take satisfaction in what he perceives to be his very successful role as breadwinner and caretaker and takes pride in the way he has fulfilled his parental duties, which he sees as catering for his family's material welfare and security . . . This demonstrates a cultural system in which the father's physical absence from the family household is accepted and the parental (paternal) role fulfilled in securing a house and generally material welfare for the family.

On the flipside, border-spanning family relations in these bi-local households, with their main residence in Opoja nominally headed and financed by a migrant, could also become tense. The continued dependency of family members in Opoja on remittances sent by members abroad re-perpetuates cross-border relations without necessarily strengthening emotional ties and the respect between distant family members. In fact, it may have the opposite effect. This became clear to me on one of my visits to Opoja, when Desa, a young woman with two small children, whose husband was unemployed, spoke about her father-in-law, who had migrated to Germany in the mid-1990s and continued to send remittances to his wife and his four children. In her opinion, Agim, her father-in-law, had 'no better way' to spend his money than on his family, suggesting that the family was very much in Agim's heart but also that Agim's help was taken for granted by dependent family members in Opoja. When I met him during his visit to Opoja, he mentioned being

fed up with his family's apathy and complained that he was expected to solve all problems at home every time he returned.

This case echoes the tenuous relations among fathers living abroad and their grown-up children/-in-law in Opoja. While the latter partly fail to acknowledge the support of their father/-in-law and show little motivation to become independent, migrants, on the other hand, feel somewhat overwhelmed by their never-ceasing responsibilities and are unhappy about the lack of recognition. They argue that family members in Opoja are too passive to take their future into their own hands and should work harder to supplement their household income by, for example, taking up seasonal work in the construction business, instead of expecting to live on the constant flow of remittances. Thus, expectations within family networks could differ on both sides. While receivers might take financial remittances and material gifts for granted, the senders sometimes perceive the care responsibilities as a burden and as unrealistic (see also Drotbohm and Alber 2015). This could strain the relations among translocal family members and their notions of belonging and solidarity, sometimes also leading to the termination of remittances and cross-border care.

SIBLINGS AS TRANSLOCAL CAREGIVERS

Translocal care within a family can be intergenerational and intragenerational. In the latter case, caring relations across borders may develop especially between siblings. As Cati Coe (2013: 124) writes, intragenerational care can in particular be found 'in communities where sibling relationships have conceptual and practical importance' historically. In rural Kosovo, shared values of patrilinearity and relatedness, especially among brothers – and male cousins – are cultivated when growing up together. For brothers, sharing a joint household even after marriage, at least for a certain period, is not uncommon. When a male member migrates, the roles of brothers may be considered complementary. While the migrating brother is expected to send remittances for daily expenses, and as such to financially care for family members at home, the brother who remains in Opoja is expected to take over other aspects of care for the (elderly) parents and possibly also the brother's wife and children in return, at least temporarily. This again strengthens the patri- and virilocally organized household structure. But shifts in the possibilities for and the motivations of migrants abroad partly alter the normative framework and the remittance and care practices among the brothers. When migrants who left in the 1990s managed to bring over their spouse and (most of their) children, remittance payments often terminated and intra-familial cross-border care patterns risked breaking down. That gave rise to conflicts

within translocal families and new forms of vulnerabilities and poverty, especially when remittances represented an important financial source.

While the scientific and policy advisory literature (Hockenos 2006, 2010) address the problems associated with shrinking remittances, they do not account for the resulting emergence of new care patterns that are accepted and recognized by family members in the village as well as abroad. As highlighted by Tatjana Thelen, Erdmute Alber and Cati Coe (2013), kinship relations, and especially relations among siblings, may change within the life course. They may fragment, but they may also assume new forms of solidarity and reciprocity. As I argue, this is especially the case when family members live in two or more states. When migrants send less remittances, other forms of care and support across borders might be found and integrated into the family cycle that may contribute to harmonizing family relations.

The story of Veton and his brother Yll, both born in 1960s, illustrates this point vividly. In Opoja, they jointly own a house built by their father in the early 1970s and consider themselves a joint village household, although at the time of my fieldwork in 2012 fifty-year-old Veton lived with his wife, two adult sons and a daughter in Duisburg, while his brother Yll, a few years younger, lived with his wife and three teenage sons in the parental home in the village. Over the past twenty-five years, there had been dynamic changes in the household situation and spatial arrangement. The changing societal conditions had transformed their lives and impacted relations within the family and towards each other.

Veton had left Kosovo as a young man in his late twenties in the early 1990s. His wife and his three children remained at home with his parents along with his younger brother and his wife and children. Attributing that move to intensifying political pressure, which left him without a job at home, he sought job prospects abroad to support the household in Opoja. Even when Veton brought over his wife and his two teenage sons in 2005, when his father had already died, he continued to financially support his unemployed brother and his family, not at least because Veton's daughter, who was too old to be eligible for a family reunification visa, had to remain in the village household with her father's brother and his family. When she finally married a migrant and moved abroad, the two brothers continued to be regarded as a joint household in the village, as they still had not divided the parental property. In preparation for the wedding of his first son in Opoja, Veton also financed the joint family house renovations in Opoja to give it a modern appearance and a new interior, all of which improved the living conditions for Yll and his family.

Veton's sons' weddings represented an important turning point in the care arrangements between the two brothers. Faced with a bank loan to cover high wedding costs (see Chapter 6) and the costs of his sons' higher

education in Germany, Veton stopped sending remittances to his brother. This suddenly left Yll in a difficult situation, as he had relied on his brother's remittances to support his family for years. Forced to make ends meet, Yll and his teenage sons began to run a small shop owned by another family in the *mahalla* for a total monthly salary of 200 euros. But it soon became clear that working at the shop all day long left no time to prepare for school, and this job offered no prospects.

Although the remittances had dried up, the brothers remained in touch and continued to cooperate. In my conversations with him, Yll expressed his compassion for his brother having to divert his resources to support his sons. Veton also continued to visit with his family in Opoja for four weeks every year, when both families shared the house and re-established their joint household. Yll's sons still maintained close relations with their cousins, with whom they had grown up in a joint household before moving abroad. As is customary for first grade cousins in Kosovo, they call each other brother (*vëllai*). As also shown by Pauli (2013: 31) for sibling relations in Namibia and México, growing up together and sharing childhood memories strengthened their connection. The cousins often also chat on Messenger, and each summer, Veton invites his nephews to spend their seaside holidays with him and his sons. As shown by Lumnije Kadriu's work (2017) on migrants' relations to family members in Kosovo, the joint holidays at the seaside, for which migrants invite family members from Kosovo, enhance the attachment between family members.

However, lacking earning opportunities in Opoja, Luan, Yll's oldest son, considered taking up an undocumented job abroad. His aim was to create enough savings for a future back home, and although aware of the risks this entailed, he stressed that he had no alternative and other family members shared this view. Eventually, he managed to cross the EU's Schengen border when hundreds of thousands of Syrians and migrants from other war-affected countries took the so-called 'Balkan route', which formed a kind of open corridor in autumn 2015 – only to be strictly controlled again shortly afterwards. Once abroad, a new form of caring relation emerged between the two families across borders, as Luan stayed with Veton and his family. The care provided by his uncle can be seen as a time-delayed pattern of reciprocity, as Luan's father had cared for Veton's sons and daughter when Veton was abroad – and Luan's parents still care for them when they come home in summer. More broadly, Luan refers to his uncle and cousins as family – not differentiating between kinship grades.

This case illustrates that over time care relations and arrangements within various translocal families shift during the life course with changing geopolitical realities. As stated above, while remittances among brothers may dry up, new forms of care and solidarity may be integrated. Here, again, it is im-

portant to look at various dimensions of care. While reports from think tanks such as the European Stability Initiative (Hockenoes 2006, 2010) tend to foreground financial remittances and highlight the drying up of remittances, especially among brothers, there are other forms of care relationships that could renew solidarity across borders, including support for emigration, and intergenerational dimensions need to be looked at more closely as well. This again can sustain the local model of migration as family-based care, as it enables a new family member to migrate abroad in order to earn money and send remittances to family members back home. In Veton's case, for instance, the focus shifted from sending remittances to his brother and his family in his home village in Kosovo to financing the education and wedding of his own children. But that did not mean the end of brotherly solidarity, as he offered accommodation and connections abroad when his brother's son chose to migrate.

These new forms of support, which develop over distances and over time, affect family and kinship relations. While these new forms support the continuation of the 'culture of migration' as a form of family care, some of them also challenge traditional family roles. Different from male migrants who extended financial support mainly to their brothers in Kosovo in the 1970s, 1980s and often also in 1990s, migrants now also support their sisters' education to enhance their prospects. Support is, thus, based more on emotional ties and migrants' own personal convictions about family care and a good future and is not dictated purely by their normative duty. This shift in emphasis from duty to personal ties and convictions has led to subtle shifts in gender and generational roles in Opoja.

Furthermore, not just male migrants but increasingly female migrants take care of their siblings and their nieces and nephews in Opoja. A case in point is Teuta, aged thirty-five, who lived with her husband and three small children in Linz and supported her married sister in Opoja financially from her earnings as a part-time cleaner. She also bought valuable presents for her sister's children, such as quality school bags, which were difficult to buy in Kosovo. Compared to women who have married within the Opoja region and remain largely without a salaried job, women who have married abroad and have taken up a job may obtain a special position within their family of origin, especially as they can send valuable gifts. This has challenged the gender-specific roles within the family in Opoja. Migrants and especially female migrants can thus act as transformers of gender relations and care models 'back home', which can be decisive for the education and social advancement of siblings who live there (for rural China, see Obendiek 2013). As observed by Mirjana Morokvasic (2004: 7), for many migrants from former socialist countries in 'post-wall' Europe, i.e. after the fall of the Iron Curtain, migration is meant to 'improve or maintain the quality of life at home'. This

is surely also the case for many villagers from Opoja who migrated in the 1990s and the new millennium. While it does not necessarily imply a plan to return, it is at least directed at sustaining ties with and extending care for their family members, and here especially parents and siblings – back home.

A NEW GENERATION OF TRANSLOCAL CAREGIVERS

Like Luan, various young men went abroad after the 1999 war, while their fathers and other family members remained at home. The extent to which newly migrating sons are able and willing to support their families in their home region varies, depending on economic opportunities as well the extent of the constraints they faced abroad. Furthermore, it also depends on the needs and goals of family members in Opoja and if migrants are willing to direct their actions towards those needs; if they can harmonize both individual and family goals. The use of remittances ranges from financial support for living expenses or medical treatment of family members in Opoja to financing one's own wedding, that of a brother, house renovations or construction projects, or other material investments. Again, obligations towards family members in Opoja may shift with time and changing family constellations. For example, after Artan started studying medicine in Prishtina, he got engaged to a young woman, and his parents urged him to marry sooner rather than later. As Artan's father, a seasonal worker, could not cover all the wedding expenses, Artan interrupted his studies and took the help of a cousin in Italy to organize a job for him. After a year, his wedding took place in his parental home. Still, after his wedding, Artan went abroad again to pay off some loans his parents had taken up for the renovations of the house, and to finance the education of his younger brother, who also planned to marry soon. Artan's wife had initially remained in the household of Agim's parents and siblings, but after living apart for a year and a half, Artan was allowed to apply for family reunification and could bring over his wife and his then nearly one-year-old daughter. That was also the time when responsibilities towards relatives at home reduced, as Artan's brother also went abroad and managed to find work there, if only to cover his own wedding costs.

What becomes clear is that some of Artan's savings goals were aligned with both individual and family interests – and that included his plan to marry. In other instances, such as when he financed his brother's education, he placed the interests of his parents and siblings in the village home ahead of his own individual goals. When he pursued more personal goals, bringing his wife and child over via family reunification and setting up a separate household abroad, Artan still sent remittances to his parents regularly, which enabled his parents to pay back the home renovation loan. He was un-

certain if he could hold on to his job in Italy or would have to return sooner or later, which may also have factored into his readiness to send money. But the practice of sending remittances was not purely 'strategic'. Artan's remittances were also an expression of his emotional attachment to his family and home region and his wish to return one day. More generally, the size of the remittances is negotiated to create a balance between individual and family considerations, which transform within the life course and with changing family constellations as well as with normative duties in the community and affective ties.

Legal security abroad could even give rise to an increased engagement of migrants with their home regions. This finding is also supported by a comparative study on Bosnian and Eritrean refugees (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001) and on immigrant communities on the East Coast of the US (Portes 2001). Alban, for example, who went to Germany through marriage and managed to secure a good job abroad, also supported his family by contributing towards repairs and renovations of the parental house. Although his parents declared they did not want to interfere in his life, Alban stressed that he was prepared to financially assist his parents in their old age, given the meagre pension they drew in Kosovo. But beyond taking care of material needs and expectations, Alban maintains strong emotional relations with his parents, with whom he speaks two or three times a week via messenger and visits every summer.

However, the normative expectations of the village community, which Alban cannot escape when he visits his parents, threaten to undermine these relations. During one of his visits, neighbours asked Alban if his car was a gift to his father, which he had not intended as such. Alban, feeling pressured to provide certain forms of parental and family support and burdened by the expectations of others, had reduced the frequency and duration of his visits to two or three weeks in the summer every year. Alban is not alone here, as such strategies of avoidance and distancing by minimizing visits are not rare. Alban was also convinced that he will not have to (nor does he want to) rely on his own child(ren) for economic support in his elderly years, as he plans to continue to work in Germany and will be able to live off his pension and his savings. The system of time-delayed reciprocity in terms of financial care for elderly parents, passed down from parents to children, and from generation to generation, has thus become fragmented (Hareven 1994: 454). This may have also contributed to his refusal to adhere to the expectations of the community, at least partially. In fact, migrants with legal security abroad and who are less dependent on the family at home have greater scope to refuse certain obligations or find creative solutions.

As said, with the outmigration of in-married women and children, women have also started to provide financial support to family members in Opoja,

especially to their parents and siblings. However, as also identified by Russel King, Adriana Castaldo and Julie Vullnetari (2011), who study remittance behaviours in neighbouring Albania, female migrants from Opoja seem to still play a rather marginal role as remittance senders. Remittances sent by female relatives to parents and brothers might, however, also remain invisible, as the receivers may downplay the contributions or do not acknowledge them, as such remittances may carry the implication that the male relatives are unable to provide for their family. Still, in connection with the patrilineal family norms that prevail in Opoja and more generally in rural Kosovo (and in Albania, as observed by King, Castaldo and Vullnetari 2011; King and Vullnetari 2011), the financial support provided by female migrants to their own family members back home may be interpreted as an altruistic gift, or a 'gift of love' (Read 2009), as it is not based on the expectation of receiving time-delayed compensation in the form of, for example, inheriting the family property. But as already observed by Mauss (1968 [1923/24]), even 'free gifts' do not remain without a counterpart, as the support provided is a way of maintaining valued relationships (Heady and Ou 2010) and also enhances the status of the giver, as is the case in Opoja, which has an impact on local gender relations.

THE GAP IN ELDERLY CARE

In Opoja, and more generally in Kosovo, intergenerational caring relations are also challenged by a strongly declining birth rate. While the fertility rate in rural Kosovo averaged 6.7 in 1981 (2.7 in urban areas) (Malcolm 1998: 332) – in part owing to the widespread conviction that a large number of children, especially sons, would signal the strength of the family and serve as old-age security – in 2003, the fertility rate started to sharply decline, reaching an average of 2.9 (urban and rural), an average of 2.2 in 2011, and an average of only 1.97 in 2019 (see Kosovo UNFPA Country Office 2017; Kosovo Agency of Statistics 2013). During my fieldwork in Opoja, parents explained that they wanted fewer children because it was financially challenging – their material desires and educational needs having increased exponentially. While nowadays many families in Opoja are content to have just one son, families continue to believe that children, and especially sons, are essential for old-age security, as state-based social security – financial but also physical elderly care – is largely absent throughout Kosovo (Vathi and Black 2007: 6; Jerliu et al. 2012). As basic pension adds up to 75 euros per person per month, most elderly people rely on their children's support to supplement their pension. Furthermore, couples without a son fear they will lack the necessary physical and instrumental care in their old age, as daugh-

ters sooner or later marry and then move to their husband's home and care for the husband's parents. This view continues to put pressure on women to give birth to a son – with consequences for women, their daughters and the entire family.³ Based on a noticeably higher proportion of male births (1.06 male to 1.0 female children in 2014, and 1.08 male to 1.0 female children in 2020), some couples likely opted for selective abortion after finding out that a daughter was on the way and not a son (see Latifi 2014: 196, 2015: 89; Kosovo Agency of Statistics 2020).

At the same time, an increasing number of aged parents whose sons and daughters-in-law are abroad lament the lack of physical and instrumental care. That includes cooking, washing and other household chores and help with keeping appointments and accessing services for them – traditionally the responsibilities of the daughter(s)-in-law (Krasniqi 2014a), based on the patrilocal residence patterns and gender norms. While this system worked until the late 1990s, when women did not join their husbands abroad – partly because they were expected to care for the elderly – with the outmigration of their daughters-in-law joining their husbands, the situation of elderly care had become a pressing issue (for Albania, see Vullnetari 2004; for Moldova, see Grant, Falkingham and Evandrou 2009). The need to financially support parents has bolstered youth outmigration and at the same time intensified the problem of physical care. While elderly parents hope or even expect to be taken care of by their children, especially by their sons and daughters-in-law, and most are willing helpers, these expectations cannot be fully met owing to geographic separation. This also leads to many conflicts and disappointments.

In most cases I observed, elderly people who are fragile and needy mostly still have a son and a daughter-in-law at home to take care of them, even if other sons have migrated – either to urban areas in Kosovo or abroad – and daughters have married out. In contrast to the established norm in Kosovo, according to which the youngest son cares for the parents and in return also inherits the house after household and property division among the sons, care practices have become more flexible and are based on factors such as time and physical presence as well as closeness and intimacy. In various cases I observed, it was the youngest son who had moved to the town, or abroad, while the older one stayed back with the parents. But sometimes when all sons – or increasingly due to falling birth rates the only son – migrate(s), a 'sudden' need for care of the elderly parents presents a challenge. This often also creates concerns for the children, who worry about their parents' situation. Fifty-year-old Saimir migrated in the mid-1980s and had recently bought a house in Switzerland and planned to take his parents in. However, his father refused that offer and remained in Opoja. Saimir was conflicted as he wanted to remain close to his sons in Switzerland and their wives and children. His case illustrates not only the bind that many migrants

in Western European countries find themselves in but also the widening care gap across Kosovo when the elderly stay behind or return to an empty nest. Beyond isolation and loneliness, this gives rise to a lack of physical care.

Werner Schiffauer's study (1991) of Turkish migrants in Germany and Austria since the 1970s argues that bringing their families over put migrants in a kind of sandwich situation, having to live up to their parents' expectations back home and cater to their children's future abroad. This is what may have led to a break with relatives in rural Kosovo or, conversely, also to increased – even uncontrolled – financial support for them. Geographical remoteness and extended periods of physical absence make it difficult to respond to parents' needs and expectations, which migrants usually compensate for with material care. Various Opoja migrants sent remittances to relatives at home while investing in their own children's education abroad for extended periods. Others, however, overburdened by this situation, chose to focus on their own nuclear family.

The problematic situation of the elderly in the village whose family members are abroad is exacerbated by the fact that there are no alternative providers of care for the elderly in rural Kosovo, as private caregivers outside the family circle are unheard of. The only public nursing home in Kosovo, in Prishtina, carries the stigma of sheltering only those elderly who are abandoned by their families – a stigma that would also be attached to other public residential care homes if they were to be built in Kosovo. Ultimately, elderly people who cannot rely on relatives are left to provide for themselves. It can, therefore, be said that the lack of state care in Kosovo has in some cases led to deficient family care. That is very different from Western Europe, where state social security provision functions as a kind of catalyst for kin-provided care, enabling families to fulfil other dimensions of care and thereby strengthen intergenerational relations (Kohli 1999).

In Opoja and across Kosovo, various migrants have tried to come up with new solutions for elderly care. In some cases, married daughters living in a neighbouring village are asked to visit the parents daily and cook and care for them in addition to taking care of other household chores. Thus, daughters sometimes replace the absent daughters-in-law. That, however, does not necessarily change widely practised 'customary' inheritance rules, according to which daughters are excluded from inheritance (Voell 2004; Bardoshi 2011; Krasniqi 2014a; Latifi 2015: 100).⁴ In individual cases, brothers financially compensate their sister. If daughters only provide such services on a somewhat irregular basis – for instance, only when the parents are ill – they do not see it as an obligation for which they need to be compensated but rather as a 'gift of love' (Read 2009). Such 'gifts of love' are made to parents in need, whom they regularly visit after marriage, if good relations persist. Sometimes, women in Opoja are also involved in caring for the households

of brothers in need – for instance, when the female members of the household become ill or incapable. Again, this is seen as a ‘gift of love’ – but it could also relate to ensuring that they will find the doors of their parents’ and brothers’ house open, as a customary right, if they want or need to return home – for instance if they split from their spouse (Krasniqi 2014b; Bardoshi 2016).

In other cases, elderly parents move in with a son who has migrated either to the city or to a Western European destination (in the latter case, only temporary based on visa restrictions). Describing this phenomenon, Vullnetari has called them the ‘zero generation’ (Vullnetari 2004; Vullnetari et al. 2014) because these migrants are the parents of first-generation migrants. In such instances, the patrilocal care pattern is abandoned, and the son’s neo-local residency gains in importance. This challenges the concept of sedentarism, of being locally rooted, as even elderly villagers start to have a mobile life, spending some months abroad with (one of) their child(ren) and grandchildren, and some months in the village family house. While abroad, they can receive better medical care and hands-on help from their children(-in-law), but they can simultaneously also act as caregivers to their grandchildren. This has manifold benefits: once the elderly are in good health, migrant couples with young children can work full-time. As such, elderly mobility feeds into the increasing relevance of grandparenting in contemporary Europe (see Thelen and Leutloff-Grandits 2010; Rubić and Leutloff-Grandits 2015; Segalen 2016). In families whose members are dispersed across borders, grandparents can encourage the use of Albanian as a family language while caring for their grandchildren and cultivating close relations with them (Vullnetari et al. 2014). Thus, the elderly become active agents in the migratory project, and the customary notion of intergenerational care can again be upheld (*ibid.*: 132) and family values can be passed on, which may expand the Opoja culture across the borders. Still, that does not always work out as smoothly, and elderly persons who move in with their children (on a temporary basis) partly also suffer from loneliness, extreme dependency and helplessness, being in an environment where they will likely experience language barriers and have no acquaintances other than their immediate family.

CONCLUSION

Within translocal family networks stretching from Opoja to migrant destinations, family-based care practices and care moralities are in constant transformation, leading to a diversification of migrants’ caring relations towards family members in the village. The special mix of care provided by single family members – ranging from financial to physical and emotional – is in-

fluenced by gendered norms, needs and legal and economic circumstances. The household survey shows that Opoja has a remarkable variety of household forms, and members abroad are often a viable source of livelihood, although it is not always possible to avoid care gaps. The migrants' position within the household in Opoja and the migrant households' composition abroad matter and impact the special mix of care provided. A gendered and inter- as well as intragenerational perspective, starting with the translocal household in Opoja as the main angle of analysis and then differentiating the various positionings of single family members in Opoja or abroad, also in terms of the timing of migration, has proved to be especially fruitful for learning about household and family dynamics as well as care provision in a translocal social field.

Even after the end of the war, remittances from male migrants have remained crucial, often over extended time frames, especially where several or at least one of the sons or unmarried daughters live in the common household in Opoja. Wives, on the other hand, who did not leave the local Opoja household, often have multiple and extended roles as physical and emotional caregivers, towards children (-in-law) and parents-in-law. Family care across borders also carries ambivalence. Remittances sent over extended periods increase the likelihood that relatives in Opoja will depend on them. At the same time, such caring arrangements from a distance do not necessarily strengthen emotional relations between couples and generations. While migrants often attempt to invest in solutions that will eventually allow dependants to become self-reliable, expectations on both sides can diverge, leading to intergenerational or also partnership tensions.

Not only married couples but also brothers cooperate across the borders, often for an extended period and by taking up complementary roles. Especially when they regard themselves as a joint household, family care may range from sending remittances to emotional and practical care for dependent family members, depending on location and needs. Still, caring forms have tended to be very diverse, changing with time and over different life stages. Remittance amounts reflect not only the needs of the family in Opoja but also the life situation of the migrants and their families abroad, including their prospects for staying abroad and the marriage or higher education of the children – which may be reasons for the termination of remittances. But the termination of financial support among brothers does not necessarily mean the termination of caring relations in general, for migrants keep emotionally connected and offer logistical support when other family members outmigrate. Care practices thus shift rather than end, creating a new mix and new family relations.

Sons who move abroad tend to follow established family norms and offer their parents and brothers back home financial support, more so when they

themselves have received help from family networks, or when they need a place to return to because of an insecure legal status abroad. Those with a secure legal position and financial security in the receiving state have more freedom. Yet, this does not necessarily lead to a general abandonment of care for parents and brothers, as they may actively decide for whom to care and how. They may choose to support sisters in their pursuit of higher education and thus positively impact local gender relations and open up prospects for young women in Opoja. Due to the increasing outmigration of women who join their husbands or parents abroad, women have become remittance senders too but on a smaller scale compared to men. Their care decisions are based on their emotional relations to members of their own natal family, which has transformed local gender norms. Outmigrating women can, however, no longer fill their role as instrumental caretakers for elderly parents-in-law in the village. This can lead to a care gap for the elderly in rural Kosovo but also to new forms of care based on the redefined role of daughters, who partly assume the responsibility for their parents' instrumental care. It may also lead to the temporary and cyclical relocation of elderly parents into the households of their sons (and daughters-in-law) living abroad.

In short, the care that migrants provide to relatives at home in a translocal context can by no means be easily classified as 'lacking' or a leftover tradition. This chapter has shown a more complex picture of translocal caring relations, which entail a special mix of financial, instrumental and emotional care, while also taking a closer look at the changes that have transpired in gendered and generational relations. While migrants foster their relations to Opoja through the care provided to family members, they also maintain the 'culture of migration' and mobilities from Opoja to Western European countries. However, the nature of such care practices and mobilities is changing, in effect, to include migrant women as well as the elderly, and individualized forms of care alongside customary ones.

NOTES

1. More specifically, there were twelve households that had three to six members, eight households that had seven to ten members and four households that had fourteen to twenty two members.
2. In the scientific literature on family relations in the Balkans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, joint patrilocal households were also referred to as 'zadruga' and often depicted in an idealized and exoticizing manner (Vickers 1998: 111). A new generation of anthropologically oriented historians gathering around Karl Kaser, like Ulf Brunnbauer, Hannes Grandits, Sigfried Gruber, Gentiana Kera, Enriketa Pandelejmoni and Robert Pichler, expanded on his findings by concentrating on micro-studies and combining qualitative and quantitative approaches (see Pichler 2002; Grandits 2002; Brunnbauer 2004; Gruber 2004; Kera and Pan-

delejmoni 2008; Kaser 2008; Papa-Pandelejmoni, Kera and Hemming 2008). They showed that in Southeastern Europe family and household organization underwent both macro and micro economic and ecological transformations.

3. This also describes the situation in Armenia and other Caucasus states, as well China, which leads the list of countries with gender-biased abortion practices (see Cassano 2017).
4. Although this is illegal by state law, women often give up their rights to inheritance, especially if it requires going to court to make a claim (Latifi 2015: 100–1) This, however, is not only prevalent in Kosovo but in other parts of the Balkans too; for example, in rural Croatia (Leutloff-Grandits 2006).