

Chapter 4

Balancing Opportunities and Constraints: The Experiences of Internal Migrant Women in Tirana



This chapter explores the trajectories of those participants who migrated internally to Tirana for reasons other than education. The data draws from interviews conducted with eight women, the majority of whom had already married when Communism collapsed. These women provide distinctive insights as they stand on the verge of and link the late communist years with the post-communist period. The narratives of the following eight women are discussed and analysed at length in this chapter.

Drita, 40 years old, was born in a village near Lezhë, a city in northern Albania. Her husband and his brother migrated to Greece in 1991. Shortly after, in 1992, Drita relocated to Tirana with her parents-in-law and sister-in-law (the wife of her husband's brother). At the time of internal migration to Tirana, Drita had no children. In 2007, her husband returned to Tirana. Drita has completed secondary education. Before moving to Tirana, she worked for a short period in the cooperative, and after that, she withdrew from the labour market for a long stretch of time. In Tirana, at the time of the research, she worked as a domestic care worker for a couple of young professionals. With her husband and son, who was born after Drita moved to Tirana, she shared the third floor of a house in Don Bosko, constructed with the remittances sent by her husband and his brother. Her parents-, sister- and brother-in-law reside on the same premises on the first and second floors, respectively.

Eli is a 39-year-old woman from a village near Fier in central-southern Albania. Her husband migrated to Greece in 1994, and four years later, in 1998, she relocated to Tirana with her daughter, parents-in-law and sisters-in-law (her husband's sister and the wife of her husband's brother and their two children). At the time of the research, in 2012, Eli's husband still lived and worked in Greece. She has completed lower secondary education and has never been employed in either Tirana or her place of origin. In 2012, she and her daughters (one born in Fier and the younger one in Tirana) shared a floor of a house constructed with the remittances sent by her husband and his brothers in Don Bosko. Her parents-in-law lived on the first floor of the house, and her brother-in-law's wife and two children on the second floor. On the third floor were two apartments, one for Eli's family and the other for another

brother-in-law. His apartment was empty most of the time because he lived in Greece and, as of 2012, had no plans to return to Albania. The sister of Eli's husband was married and lived with her husband in another neighbourhood of Tirana.

Manjola, 40 years old, is a native of the city of Vlorë, along the southern coast. Her husband migrated to Greece in 1997 after the collapse of the Albanian pyramid Ponzi schemes. In 2001, she relocated in Tirana with her children and her mother, who cared for the children. A couple of years later, Manjola's husband returned from emigration and joined the family in Tirana. In 2012, they ran a small trading business together. Manjola graduated from university with a degree in economics but had not worked before migrating to Tirana. She lived with her son, daughter and husband in an apartment they owned in Komuna e Parisit.

Arjana, 51 years old, is a native of the city of Fier. She migrated to Tirana with her husband and two children in 2004. A university graduate, she worked as an elementary school teacher in her hometown of Fier. In 2012, she worked as an educator in a private kindergarten in Tirana, and her husband had found work with a private company. In 2012, she lived in Komuna e Parisit with her son and daughter, who were both students at the University of Tirana.

Flutura, 55 years old, is a native of the city Shkodër in northern Albania. In 2002, she migrated to Tirana with her husband and their two daughters. A university graduate, in 2012, she worked in public administration, and her husband as a television journalist in Tirana; one of her daughters worked in Tirana, while the other was a student in Italy. Flutura lived with her husband and one daughter in an owned apartment in Komuna e Parisit.

Silvana, 55 years old, is a native of the town of Lezhë. Her husband migrated to Tirana in 1992, and two years later, in 1994, she joined him with their children. Silvana is a university graduate, and before moving to Tirana, worked in the local administration in Lezhë. In 2012, both she and her husband worked for the central public administration. At the time of the interview, she lived with her husband and one daughter in an owned apartment in Don Bosko. Her other daughter had migrated to France for study purposes. Later, I heard that the other daughter also migrated abroad.

Zhani, 50 years old, from the city of Fier, is a high school graduate. She migrated to Tirana before her husband and two daughters to facilitate their migration. They followed one year later, in 2004. As of 2012, Zhani was self-employed and owned a small shop. Of her two daughters, one was studying at university, while the other was unemployed as of 2012. Zhani lived with her husband and the two daughters in an owned apartment in Komuna e Parisit.

Eleni, 47 years old, is a native of the small town of Tepelenë in southern Albania. Her husband migrated to Greece in 1993, and after his return in 2003, they relocated to Tirana. Eleni has completed secondary education and in 2012 worked as a domestic care worker. Her husband was unemployed due to the crisis in the construction sector. She lived with her two daughters, son and husband in an owned apartment in Don Bosko. One daughter was pursuing university studies in Tirana. The son and the other daughter had already graduated; in 2012, the son was working as a

salesperson, but the daughter was jobless. As I heard later, the unemployed daughter had a master's in political sciences and worked in a call centre at the end of 2014.

These short descriptions of the interviewees' partners highlight that what is commonly subsumed under the concept of internal migration includes a variety of different, dynamic mobility configurations. Among these configurations, first, we see that of the husbands who migrate abroad, while the wives—with the children and parents-in-law—move to Tirana. Secondly, entire households move to Tirana at the same time. The third scenario consists of women being the primary migrants to Tirana, while the husbands and children follow. These configurations are explored in-depth in the following chapter.

4.1 Pre-migration: Life in the Cities and Villages of Origin

One of the most common configurations of the early 90s migration in Albania was a twofold one: the husband migrates abroad, and the wife—along with the children and sometimes the in-laws—migrate internally later.

Let us first turn to the husband's decision to migrate abroad and the role the women play in these decision processes. Drita says:

I was unemployed...Before demokracia¹, we were all employed in the local cooperative. We were penniless, just like everyone else... After that, things became more difficult. I was too young to grasp the situation entirely. I recall my parents-in-law and my husband being anxious because suddenly we found ourselves with no income. I was very young... Then my husband emigrated. Everybody was trying to leave, in fact. What else was there to be done? We had nothing... If I remember correctly, a group of men left first. My husband told me he had no other choice: either emigrate or steal so that we would be able to live. It was tough for me as we were a young couple, but there was nothing I could do. It was the only way. We had no hope. I just told him to be careful and to keep in contact if possible. That was all I was able to say.

Not only did Drita find her husband's departure difficult, but she also expresses a feeling of being powerless, of not being unable to prevent her husband from going abroad. She recalls that at the time, she was very young and could not grasp the complexity of the situation. Drita was living in her husband's household, along with her parents-in-law, brother-in-law and his wife and child. The literature (Ekonomi et al., 2004; Kaser, 2014; King & Vullnetari, 2012) describes such extended patrilocal families, of which Drita was part, as following a particular hierarchy, which might partly reflect the dynamics of this migration decision process. In such patrilocal households, where wives move after marriage into the house of the husband and the parents-in-law (and sometimes the husband's brother) (Kaser, 2014), hierarchies are organised by age, gender and generation (King & Vullnetari, 2012). In the

¹Some of the women interviewed use the term *demokracia* [democracy] to refer to the post-1991 period in Albania. This usage frequently occurs in everyday communication in Albania, where many people also refer to this period as *tranzicioni*, the transition.

decision-making processes, the oldest man—here, the husband's father (sometimes with his wife)—has the most say within the household (Gjermeni, 2004). The sons have some weight, while wives and daughters are less involved in decision-making processes. This combination of seniority, individual (age) and family factors were decisive in Drita's husband's decision to leave the household and migrate and explains her de facto non-participation in her husband's migration decision.

Eli describes a similar process:

The situation was dire before coming to Tirana. ... We [Eli and her husband] were living with my husband's parents. ... He [Eli's husband] had already discussed with his father and his brothers.... I didn't know what was going on when suddenly my husband said one day, 'We're going to Greece with a group of young men. They know the route, but you should stay here with my parents'. That was more or less what he told me, and then he left for Greece that very same day in 1994. I recall that I cried all night all night long, feeling lost. We were facing many challenges. We had a little daughter, and it was so difficult for me, and us all, because we were poor. When he left, I felt shattered. His two other brothers left too. I was living with his parents, a younger sister and a sister-in-law.... We were trying to survive there in the village doing our everyday work.

We see that in both cases, migration was—as has been abundantly shown in studies (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Root & De Jong, 1991; Lauby & Stark 1988)—a household decision rather than an individual decision. Again, Eli, similarly to Drita in these patrilocal household configurations, was excluded from the husband's decision-making process to leave for Greece. However, the process is more complicated than this. The interviewees reveal that these decision-making processes cannot be reduced to traditional patriarchal culture, and respectively to the structure of extended families. Instead, it seems that the economic collapse of the immediate post-communist period reinvigorated such power patterns within households. International migration was and is considered to be a solution to improving the challenging financial situations in which these migrants live and can be viewed as a diversifying, risk-minimising household strategy (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Stark & Taylor, 1991).

After the fall of communism, not only men but also women, like Drita, who previously had a paid job, found themselves jobless. At the same time as many state factories and enterprises closed, the social services provided by the state deteriorated. In rural areas, cooperatives shut down, and under Law No. 7501 of July 1991, the land was distributed to the inhabitants of the villages, allowing them to become landowners (Stahl, 2012). Nevertheless, these residents were destitute and did not have the means to work the land and reap its benefits. The situation in the villages was difficult for both men and women as they had no opportunities other than their recently acquired plot of land, as was the case for Drita and Eli. Drita describes the situation in rural areas:

Some time after my husband's emigration, I remembered that we had become owners of a piece of land as the cooperatives had ceased to exist. My parents-in-law and I worked the plot so that we could have something to eat; after that, I worked in the house. My sister-in-law worked more inside [the home] as she had a small child. She had to take care of the baby, too.... it was so tricky because you cannot work the land like that, with no means and by yourself.... I just cannot fathom how we managed to live at that time.

Women's situation in rural areas became more challenging due to the rapid post-communist decline of social services, including child care and health care structures (Danaj et al., 2008; Gjermani, 2004). Regarding social services in the early nineties, there were no more nurseries or kindergartens, both in rural and urban areas. In 1990, more than 1 in 2 three- to five-year-old children was enrolled in preschool; in 2004, the numbers were less than 1 in 3 (Social Research Center, 2004). Migrating, in any form, was viewed as a solution to the economic and social difficulties of this period. Given this situation, extended households based their decision-making processes on revitalised ideas of gender and seniority.

Women in urban areas faced similar conundrums. Eleni describes her circumstances:

When demokracia came, we were laid off because my husband was working in the cooperative adjacent to the city (Tepelenë), and it suddenly ceased to exist. The factory where I was working at was closed down as well. I didn't know the reason, but we just learned that there were no more factories. How could we live like this? Yes, you shut down the factory, but where should we go?! Whom could we ask for explanations? Everybody was like us, laid off. And above all, we had three little children. Only the older child was of school age. The others were younger, so they were staying at home. It was not even a home. It was just a room because we resided in a shared apartment with another family [a couple with two children with no kinship relations to Eleni], and we had one room. The other family was living in the other. Until 1993, we managed to survive and to have food because my husband continued to work in the village. He was able to have some money from time to time. My family [Eleni's mother and brother] back in the village also helped with food, mostly with milk. I was at home with the children.

Eleni explains that in the early 1990s, she found herself constrained within the house to care for the children, since kindergartens no longer existed, and the factory where she used to work closed down. In other words, the collapse of the communist system—with its feminist perspective on governance—confined women to their role of caregivers and took them out of the labour market.

The mass privatisation that followed in 1992 brought enormous changes to the structure of the labour market. Women withdrew from the labour market in significant numbers (UN Albania, 2004), and men began to adapt to the new market economy through migration and entrepreneurship. In these challenging economic and social conditions, the decision to migrate seemed inevitable for men, even more so once migration became a mass phenomenon and reinforced what Stark and Taylor (1991) call relative deprivation. In this situation, people and households migrate not only to maximise their total incomes but also to improve their position relevant to other reference groups. Such comparisons and the desire to improve one's relative position are significant elements in the decision-making process to migrate.

International migration was seen mostly as men's affair, while women stayed at home caring for the children. The risky and illegal ways emigrants used to leave Albania, as described by Vullnetari (2012), furthered masculinised perceptions of immigration. Men migrated to Greece mostly by crossing the borders through the mountains on foot (Vaiou, 2002; Vullnetari, 2009, 2012). A heroic narrative of migration as dangerous and exhausting, qualities often associated with masculinity, may be seen in Eleni's narration:

Then, in 1993, he [Eleni's husband] took the mountain route to Greece, seven days and seven nights walking in the mountains. They were not aware of anything at that time, where the roads led to, nothing. We had no other choice, except for him to emigrate. Where would we be able to find the money to live?!!! ... If he didn't leave for Greece, we would have nothing at all. No other ways were possible to obtain income.

Eleni participated in the decision-making process regarding the potential migration of her husband. However, she recurred to traditional gender representation of the man's role as the breadwinner and the woman's as the care-giver.

International migration by husbands and internal migration by families was not unique to the early 1990s. Another significant migration movement followed the crash of the financial pyramid schemes in 1997, as shown in the research of Korovilas (1999) and Musaraj (2011). Manjola recounts:

It was like the destruction of all hopes. It was like a rupture with what we had hoped and dreamt before 1997. It was like 'boom'. ... Everything disappears, and you start from zero. ... My husband had worked in the municipality of Vlora. I was not working because our son was two years old, and I was pregnant again. ... My parents were in sound financial standing as they were both working and saving all the time, as parents usually do [laughs], so they were helping us. ... They lost a lot of money in the pyramid schemes, thankfully, not all of it. Then, after the events in Vlora in 1997, we thought that migrating was the best thing to do. I could not leave at that moment because of the children. That was a period during which people from the south were moving because of the mess. We thought, 'The time has come. Let us try something else other than here.... Agron [Manjola's husband] left in October of 1997.

Like Eleni, Manjola was involved and engaged in the decision-making process regarding her husband's choice to go abroad as they lived in a nuclear family structure. However, again, the outcome of the process—a configuration in which women care for the children and men migrate abroad to become breadwinners—shows how migration is embedded in gender representations. After a period of feminist governance enacted by the communist regime in which most women were engaged in paid work, a remobilisation of 'traditional' division of gender roles occurred in Albania.

Nevertheless, this remobilisation of 'traditional' gender roles is nuanced, as demonstrated by women's experiences while their spouses were abroad. These experiences differed by what sort of economic activity they were involved in, social relations and family structure, among other factors. Although women were responsible for taking care of children, housework and, in many cases, their husband's families, their statements do not reflect the same heroism they ascribe to their husbands' migration. Eleni says:

He [Eleni's husband] was sending money, and I was taking care of the children. The children were very young at that time. I was taking care of everything, dealing with all the issues that arise from having children. I was alone. ... My mother and brother lived in a village near Tepelenë. It was impossible to visit with them often—the same with my husband's parents and brother. I could only rely on the neighbours, the majority of whom were also people from the villages around Tepelenë. They were poor people like us. Sometimes they helped out with children, sometimes with food. We helped each other as much as possible.

This quotation shows that Eleni took care of everything related to the household and had to overcome any difficulty by herself while her husband was away. Men could migrate because women took charge of caring for the family and housework. Social relations, in this case, neighbour networks, were generous support.

We go back to Eleni:

I sometimes did handcraft. I worked at home and then sold the work in Gjirokaštër [the city adjacent to Tepelenë, a more central hub]. My neighbour from a village in Gjirokaštër helped me sell some of the handcrafts. Little things, very little money, but better than nothing.

In the case of Eleni, neighbour networks allowed her to generate some additional income in a time of acute economic constraints for herself and her children. Her story also shows how Eleni tried to adjust to the new economic opportunities by mobilising her skills of handcrafting, an activity that women in Albania usually do for free as a “female” hobby. This change illustrates how women’s skills gained new value in the market environment and provided new income opportunities, as found by Gal and Kligman (2000) in the case of the multiple entrepreneurial initiatives undertaken by women in the post-socialist space.

In addition to neighbour networks, women’s parents often took on new roles while husbands went abroad, as the case of Manjola illustrates:

It would not have been wise for me to stay at home alone with my son while pregnant. I thought it was better to go to my parents; they had enough space for me. At first, I thought of staying only for a few months following the birth of my daughter. But I changed my plans along the way [laughs] ... as it was very comfortable for me to stay there. My parents were helping me all the time.

Sometimes, women also mobilised these networks to find additional ways to earn money. For instance, Manjola stated in her interview that she found an opportunity to rent their apartment (her and her husband’s). She decided to live with her parents for longer than planned so that through the renting of her apartment, she could have some income in addition to her husband’s earnings. As both cases illustrate, women not only had to deal with all the difficulties that taking care of their children and households presented, but they also make efforts to improve their financial situation, even though their husbands abroad were in charge of earning money for their families.

4.2 Moving to Tirana

The interviews show that social networks played a highly significant role and provided a wide range of social support in these women’s move to Tirana. The time when women migrated to Tirana was an essential factor in this regard. Internal migration in the early 1990s was characterised by a lack of knowledge about the place of destination, fewer social networks in the destination and consequently more insecurity about what would happen in this new location. For instance, Drita,

who migrated to Tirana in 1992, talks about how the villagers and cousins of hers who had already relocated to Tirana, shared the information she needed about the land where to construct a house and other practical advice:

... Some cousins of my mother-in-law told her what was most necessary to take with us and to sell the rest of the things (clothes and furniture) because the money would be quite useful in Tirana... I had no idea where we were going to live and how it would be there.

The other interviewees left later in the nineties and early 2000s and could rely on a broader network of social relations and information. In the case of Eli, her husband and brothers-in-law had moved to Tirana to settle their families' accommodations and other matters, and the rest of the family followed them later:

They [Eli's husband and brothers-in-law] came back for a few months to arrange things with the house, and so on. They were staying in Tirana and first built a tiny house so that we would not have to live under the open sky. After some time, they came back to Fier, and we moved all together to Tirana. A few days later, they left again for Greece as they had to work, and we also needed money to live and to add some rooms to the house.

Another striking result from the interviews, which corresponds to the results drawn in the previous section, is that women living in nuclear families were far more knowledgeable about the city. They had gathered information from family and social networks or gone there themselves to evaluate the situation. Manjola is an illustrative case:

I thought of buying two small apartments, one to live in and another on the first floor to use as a small shop, as we needed income. ... My parents were caring for my children as I was going to Tirana to deal with the search for apartments and all the procedures to follow, and a cousin of mine drove me back and forth as I wanted to go in the morning and return to Vlora on the same day.

Manjola organised the entire process of the family's move to Tirana, handling not only logistical matters but also preparing a strategy to settle down fully. She relied on her mother, who took care of her children, and on her cousin, who drove her. This assistance again illustrates how deeply migration decisions were embedded in broader family networks. However, to find a job in Tirana, Manjola needed social networks that she lacked at this time. Thus, she found another way to overcome this obstacle: by turning to self-employment. She used her available financial resources, given her lack of social networks in the destination place. With the money she had saved from renting her apartment in Vlora and from the remittances sent by her husband, she bought two small apartments, one to live in and one to turn into a shop, which she still ran with her husband at the time of the interview in late 2011.

Other women prepared for migration to Tirana by asking for the direct and indirect support of their kin and friends. These persons—friends, cousins and parents—were crucial for access to living spaces, apartments, houses and even investment opportunities. As Flutura states:

He [Flutura's husband] found an apartment through the friends and acquaintances he had in Tirana. It was not as big as the apartment we had in Shkodër, but here [in Tirana], it was more expensive, and we could not afford a better one.

Zhani speaks of similar issues:

I had some cousins in Tirana who had found a space for rent on the first floor of a building. They asked if we wanted to join and share the rent and space as I had a shop in Fier; and they knew that we were planning on going to Tirana. I could have my shop now in Tirana and continue the same activity.

In addition, Zhani speaks of how her cousins in Tirana hosted her until she could find an apartment for herself and her family. In this case, kinship networks served to appease and share the risks of economic investments and the internal migration process. Silvana recounts a similar situation, showing the role that family and relatives played in accessing living spaces in Tirana:

The search for a house to live in turned out to be problematic as apartments in Tirana were very expensive compared to Lezha. Even if we had sold our apartment in Lezha, the money would not have sufficed. But my family [Silvana's parents] was willing to host us for an undetermined period until we could find an apartment.

Discussing internal migration to the municipality of Kamza, Çaro (2011, 184) highlights that migrants relied on their resources throughout the process and received little support from municipalities or other state structures. Gjermeni (2004) and De Waal (2005) describe similar situations. Moving to Tirana was organised through the mobilisation of social networks to obtain housing and employment, as frequently highlighted in this chapter and the following ones. Furthermore, the population growth on the peripheries of Tirana (that were mainly empty spaces before 1990) and the overpopulation of Tirana did not lead to the appropriate development of road infrastructure, schools, health care centres or laws. For instance, for a long time, migrants to Tirana or its peripheries could not register in the Offices of Civil Registry, so they could not enrol their children in school or benefit from the services of the labour offices (Social Research Centre, 2004).

4.3 Balancing Opportunities and Constraints: The Experiences of Internal Migrant Women in Tirana

Analysing the experiences of internal migrant women allows us to explore the opportunities and the constraints these women faced in Tirana. These included the challenges of beginning the settling process and the strategies and the resources the interviewees mobilised to meet their new social reality in Tirana. When settling in a new place, there are challenges that arise from having to adapt to a new and unfamiliar environment, the nostalgia one feels for their city or village of origin, not to mention the need to adjust to new everyday life practices, as well as structural challenges. In the early period of their settlement in Tirana, the living conditions were often not as good as expected, and for some, this engendered a significant sense that they had been deceived. As Drita explains:

The initial time in Tirana was very challenging. Our first house was terrible. I could have never imagined living in such a place. Why had we moved here to live under these condi-

tions? However, after a few months, things started to change as we had begun construction on a new house. My husband and his brother had contracted some workers here in the area to build our home. They were migrants like us, but they were working here, not abroad.

At the beginning of their stay in Tirana, many internal migrants had to contend every day with the lack of infrastructure that accompanied life in newly populated areas. Eleni describes one such situation:

I was climbing eight floors every day, even twice a day, carrying water and food. ... The building had a place for an elevator, but the owner never built it. The builder said he was going to solve this, and then he asked us for money. But we were all newcomers in this building, and if we had money, we would have found another building, not this one. ... In the beginning, the electricity was unsteady as there were no regular electricity lines but wires that were connected messily by the inhabitants themselves. ... I had to wash clothes by hand, but we didn't even have water.

The disillusionment many women experienced at the beginning of settling is also explored in Gjermeni's (2004) research on internal migration to the area of Bathore, next to Tirana. A lack of adequate infrastructure, electricity and water and the presence of many muddy pathways were most problematic for women in charge of reproductive work. A similar situation of women overburdened by a lack of facilities, such as water and electricity, is also reported by Danaj et al. (2008), who held focus group discussions with women in Tirana and other urban areas of Albania. Despite inadequate infrastructure and facilities, some areas did improve, such as the newly created municipality of Kamza, a former periphery of Tirana populated by migrants (Çaro, 2011). Nevertheless, the continuous internal migration to Tirana has spurred ongoing construction in Don Bosko and Komuna e Parisit, hindering the improvement of the infrastructure in these areas.

4.3.1 Accessing the Labour Market in Tirana: The Double Face of Informality

Involvement in economic activity was a significant concern for some interviewees as life in Tirana imposed on them new financial constraints. This subsection scrutinises the experiences of the interviewees who attempted to find jobs in Tirana, noting the main challenges they faced and the ways they overcame them. The interviewees make important points about accessing the labour market, especially navigating its informal nature in Albania. Labour market informality became tangible in two main ways. First, most Albanians found their jobs through informal connections (e.g., kinship, friends and acquaintances), as mentioned by the interviewees. Second, available jobs often lacked regular contracts and social insurance. Let us stop and analyse in depth these two points.

First, social networks, consisting mostly of relatives and friends, played a significant role in job finding. All the interviews show this pattern, although the types of

connections mobilised and the types of the job found differed. Silvana's story is illustrative of this pattern:

I moved to Tirana after having found a job. It was a job in the public sector, not very well paid, but somehow more secure than the jobs in the private sector. It was made possible through my relatives in Tirana who themselves had found suitable employment in public administration and had many essential acquaintances.

Unlike Silvana, who found a job in Tirana that was similar to what she had been doing in her city of origin, Arjana could not find a place as a teacher. However, through her friends' network, she managed to secure employment as a kindergarten educator.

I had been a teacher in Fier, and I knew that it would be hard to find a job as a teacher again. ... After some months, I found a career as an educator in a private kindergarten through some friends of ours who had moved to Tirana earlier than us. It's not a teaching position, but to be honest, it pays better than being a teacher; thus, I don't care.

It is worth noting that what Arjana emphasised about her new job in Tirana was its salary. It shows that she placed more importance on the income than the type of position she could get, whether it was the same as the job she had held pre-migration. Money holds more significant value in times of economic insecurity such as those experienced in post-1991 capitalist Albanian society.

Some women had been unemployed before migrating or had withdrawn from the labour market to care for their children and home and/or because their previous employment structures (e.g., factories and cooperatives) had shut down. Most women, such as Eleni, Drita, Eli and Manjola, had long relied mostly on the income sent by their husbands for their livelihood. Their spouses' return from abroad and the mounting financial costs of living in Tirana, meant families needed more revenue which, in turn, made it necessary for the women to enter the labour market. (Re) entering the labour market in Tirana was difficult for these women as long-time unemployment decreases women's human capital and makes them less competitive in the labour market (Kligman, 1996; Miluka, 2009). To increase their employment opportunities, the internal migrant women resorted to their available resources and adapted to the demands of the labour market in Tirana. These resources included skill they had learned without necessarily expecting to make money out of them, such as Eleni's handcrafting and tailoring:

I had been without a regular job since 1993 when my husband left for Greece. When we moved to Tirana, I stayed at home for three months, and then I found a job in a small tailoring business. I have this gift for tailoring...

The interviewees fit in with the broader context of the Albanian labour market where jobs, for both migrants and non-migrants, are found primarily through kinships and other connections, not through institutional channels (Danaj, 2014). However, we may assume that non-migrants possessed more connections than later arrivals to Tirana and thus held an advantage in finding better jobs.

Second, the interviews show that most of the jobs available for internal migrants existed in the informal sector of the labour market. In this context, it is hard to

ascertain what constituted a better job; for some, it was the security of a regular contract and paid insurance, and for others, it was a good salary. For instance, Arjana and Eleni state that a fair wage compensated for the lack of social insurance and formal contracts, despite the possible consequences for their health and their future pension once they retired.

Arjana: Social insurance contributions are paid only by some employees at work. We [the others] are not declared [to the social insurance institutions], ... but the salary is excellent.

Eleni: Now I have a good salary, but I have no insurances.

In other cases, the absence of social insurances was accompanied by low salaries. Consequently, these jobs were precarious, putting women in vulnerable, unstable financial situations. As Eleni says about her first jobs after migrating to Tirana:

Ah, in the beginning, they told us that we would have a good salary with social insurance and contracts and everything. Then, nothing of that sort happened. I changed several tailoring shops. The pay was meagre, without contracts, without insurance, nothing. Only some people were insured, most of them were family members of the owner, while the others were not. ... Then, I stayed one and a half year at home with no job at all until I found a career as a babysitter.

In 2012, Eleni, as well as Drita, worked as domestic care workers. In their interviews, they mention that they found these jobs through their networks of friends and acquaintances who were also internal migrants working as domestic care workers. More details about this emerging informal sector of the labour market in Tirana follow in the next section.

4.3.2 Domestic Care Workers and Complex Care Chains in Tirana

Within the growing city of Tirana, a new sector has emerged: that of domestic care workers, who take care of cooking, cleaning, caring and the full range of activities that domestic work and care may involve. The experiences of domestic care workers illustrate the informality of the labour market highlighted in the previous section: accessing the informal labour market through informal channels. Domestic care work was often underpaid, undertaken with no contract or social insurance coverage to speak of. Furthermore, those who took on these positions often found them through informal channels, i.e., through friends and family, or other internal migrants. These cases also provide insight into the complexity of care chains and their intersection with migration. This section first discusses some elements of domestic care workers' jobs and then the complex care chains connecting these domestic care workers and other migrant women.

The emerging sector of domestic care work in Tirana employs mostly internal migrant women, as illustrated by Eleni:

I found a job as a babysitter, where I am still working. ... This is the second family where I have worked. ... Another domestic worker, an e ardhur [internal migrant] too, helped me to find this second family, so I wouldn't stay jobless after my first child grew up.

Most domestic workers have no contracts but only verbal arrangements setting the work schedule, holidays and other rules of the job. Eleni states that she worked informally, with no contract and no social insurance but had a good relationship with her employer:

I have had a good understanding with both families where I have worked. I am like this. I want to have good relations with people. They are highly educated people, very gentle, so if they need me to stay some extra hours, I remain, and if I need to take a day or some hours off, they allow me.

She also adds that she had a good salary, and her employers gave her three weeks of paid summer holidays. Moreover, at the time of the interview, Eleni says that her current employers were using their connections to help her daughter find a job. The connections of Eleni's employer thus became a resource for her daughter, too. Bonizzoni (2016) analyses the mobilisation of informal employers as a resource to solve various issues in the case of migrant domestic workers in Italy. Such collaboration with informal employers arises in the case of international migrants employed as domestic workers in Greece (Chap. 5). So far, there are no official or unofficial data on the sector of domestic workers in Albania, leaving this area almost entirely unexplored.

Consequently, the working conditions, salary and participation in the social insurance scheme for domestic workers are almost unknown (Ekonomi & Arqimandriti, 2012). Nevertheless, the interviews show that many women are involved in such work and help each other by sharing practical information, such as average salaries in the sector and families needing domestic workers or babysitters. Possibly, internal migrants adopt a form of solidarity in the face of the constraints of the labour market in Tirana.

As mentioned, and according to the interviews, it is mostly 'të ardhura' (internal migrant), women who perform these jobs. These internal migrants working as domestic workers are involved in various care chains (Hochschild, 2000), which brings us to the second part of this section: the complex care chains to which these internal migrant women belong. The first care chain configuration consists of internal migrant workers who take on the caregiver role for other women in Tirana engaged in the paid, productive workforce.

Drita: I work two hours per day. I work as a cleaning lady for a young couple here in Don Bosko. He is a lawyer, and she works at XX [a mobile corporation]. I clean, and sometimes I go grocery shopping for them.

Eleni: Where I work now, we are three women, one in charge of the cooking, me as a babysitter, and another woman who does the cleaning and all. We are all from different cities; one of them is from the south, the other from the north, and the employers are from the town of Fier. I don't know what they do exactly, but they are quite wealthy, they both run their business, and as long as they give me a good salary, I am thrilled.

Eleni reveals a second element of the care chains: the female employers may be migrants themselves. Thus, internal migrant women work for other internal migrant women. These care chains account for the relationship of inequality between women, as Parreñas (2001) emphasises in the case of the international migration of domestic workers. Some women, in our case migrants and natives of Tirana, can enter productive work as they are able to hire other women—mostly less wealthy internal migrants—to take care of their household work and members. Furthermore, the internal migrants employed as domestic workers transfer their caregiver role to other family female members, as in the case of Drita, whose mother-in-law took care of her son when she started to work as a domestic worker.

And here is the third link of the care chain: intra-familial solidarity. The interviews with the women discussed in this chapter show that they sought support mostly from female relatives to perform their caregiving duties and allow them to enter productive work. For instance, Zhani migrated alone to Tirana as her daughters could do the housework. This was also the case for Drita, as mentioned, and Manjola, who says:

I was working all day at the shop to put things in order and have a successful business. ... My mom stayed with us during our first months in Tirana as someone had to take care of the children. There were no kindergartens in the neighbourhood at that time.

This quote again emphasises the significance of intra-familial solidarity—the support that mothers, mothers-in-law and daughters offer by taking over reproductive care work so that Manjola, Drita and Zhani could find employment or be self-employed and bring money home.

These women's cases reflect a set of complex care chains (further expanded in Chap. 5), but they are not only about migrant women's various experiences with their role as caregivers. What they also show, is that the post-1991 political and social upheaval did not result in new gender arrangements that replaced traditional gender roles: men do not take on the caregiver role; rather, women transfer these roles onto other female relatives or employees.

4.3.3 Relations in Extended Families: Shifting Toward a Nuclear Family Life

Research on internal migration (Çaro, 2011; Gjermeni, 2004) shows that internal migration in Albania is often followed by a shift from life in an extended family to the creation of a nuclear family. The interviews illustrated this pattern too. Internal migration was indeed accompanied by the nuclearisation of the family structure, which had far-reaching consequences for gender issues.

This nuclearisation affected different domains. First, the nuclear families within an extended family often still lived in a shared building (in the form of owned houses) but organised their physical space within the home into separate

apartments. Drita and Eli, the two interviewees who lived in extended families before migrating to Tirana, describe this physical separation:

Drita: Within a year [of migrating to Tirana], the house was finished, and now we each [nuclear] family has our part of the house. This is what I wanted [laughs].

In this excerpt from Drita, *nuclear family* refers to a number of nuclear families: that of her parents-in-law; herself, her son and her husband (even if initially he was still in Greece); and her brother-in-law's family. In their new house in Tirana, each family lived in a separate apartment on each of the three floors. Drita adds that while in the village, she often dreamt of living alone with her husband and cooking what she wanted, watching some television or sleeping a little more in the morning. She states that she could not do these things while she was living with her in-laws as there was much work to do and only a small television in the dining room primarily 'reserved for the father-in-law'.

That brings us to a second point concerning this nuclearisation process. The physical separation of living spaces in Tirana affected a number of other aspects of life among nuclear families. Eli describes how the household economy was split, giving her more responsibility and power:

[In the big house,] I live with my children, my parents-in-law and the family of my brother-in-law. I live with my kids on the third floor, and the parents-in-law live on the first floor as they are old and cannot go up the stairs. ... We live off the money my husband sends. ... In the beginning, when we came here, it was my father-in-law that was managing the money. But over time, and especially after having built the three floors of the house and separated the floors into apartments [each for a nuclear family], we are managing money separately. ... I feel relieved as I don't have to ask them [Eli's parents-in-law] for money...

This situation changed Eli's relations with her parents-in-law, and she felt more comfortable now that she did not need to ask them for money. Beyond not having to discuss money with her parents-in-law or other members of the extended family (e.g., sisters-in-law), Eli also shares that in living in an apartment with her children only, she could now cook whatever they wanted.

We eat quite often together with the parents-in-law, especially during lunch, but in the evening, we stay at our apartment, and I can eat and cook what my kids and I want. I like this. I can cook other things that the others [members of the extended family] don't like.

This example further illustrates that life in Tirana was organised differently than life in villages, focusing on the nuclear family rather than the extended family.

However—and that is the third aspect of the nuclearisation process raised in the interviews—these transformations that gave the women more power were negotiated and did not arise automatically. Eli describes her situation:

He [the husband] is the man; he has to know everything about what we do or if something has happened, how girls are doing in school and if they have had any problems. When he returns, it will be more comfortable. I will be relieved as I won't have to carry the responsibility for everything. If something happens, I won't have to give explanations to others; I will be responsible only to him. My daughter fell very ill once, and I wanted to take her to the hospital. The hospital is nearby, and I was terrified as I didn't know what to do to cure her. So, I told my parents-in-law that we had to bring her to the hospital, but my mother-in-

law kept saying that it was nothing, my daughter would be well soon, and we didn't need to spend a lot of money on the doctors. I didn't want to argue with them, so I called my husband and discussed it with him. He also agreed with me that we had to take her to the hospital, and he talked to his father, and we took a taxi and went to the hospital.

In this case, we see that Eli did not want to challenge openly the position of her parents-in-law but used another tactic to accomplish her goal. In this family, husbands were the ones who made serious decisions, and Eli mobilised this in her favour even though she was operating in an unfavourable context. Eli's experience shows how women display agency in the practices of everyday life (De Certeau, 1984) as Eli challenged the authority of her parents-in-law by instrumentalising the role of the husband. The following sections present similar situations when women used various tactics to negotiate gender roles.

As Gjermeni (2004) and Çaro (2011) report, this shift to nuclear families represents a change for women, giving them a 'sense of liberation', in the words of Çaro (2011, 113). The interviewees emphasised this very experience. Having separate apartments led to positive changes for Drita and Eli in their everyday lives.

4.3.4 Negotiating Gender Roles and Relations Within the Nuclear Family

Internal migration to Tirana has frequently triggered transformations in the gender roles between spouses. The economic situation in Tirana is a significant factor contributing to this redefinition of spouses' gender roles. Finding a job in Tirana is difficult for men and women and, as shown, primarily requires mobilising social networks. Additionally, the economic crises experienced by Albania since the late 2000s have hit specific sectors of the labour market harder than others, especially construction. These crises have limited the employment opportunities available to male migrants returning from Greece, who mostly work in this sector. This crisis had direct consequences for Drita and Eleni, whose husbands returned from Greece after working in the construction sector for many years. Once in Tirana, they continued to do the same work, as the construction sector was doing very well at first. However, the growing crisis in this sector changed things. Drita talk about how her husband:

came back [from Greece] five years ago, and he has been, working in construction. Now it is complicated to find jobs in construction, and he has to move a lot in the south or in the coastal areas where construction is continuing.

Eleni tells a similar story, and at the time of the interview, her husband had been unemployed for the past three years.

Now we live off my job. ... We are living off my salary as a babysitter.

This new gendered family configuration with men unemployed or holding unstable jobs as in the case of Drita and women as breadwinners does not abruptly transform the spouses' share of productive and reproductive work. Eleni illustrates this:

He [Eleni's husband] had been working for so many years, and now he is sick. I cannot ask him to help me with the housework. He is depressed because of not having work. I can't add to this depression.

Eleni continues to perform both the breadwinner and the caregiver role. Other cases beyond Albania present the same configuration. For instance, Camille Schmolli (2006) reports that Tunisian circular migrant women work as traders and are their family's breadwinners through circular migration to Italy. Yet, they also continue to be in charge of the reproductive sphere. Despite 'the inverted roles in the productive sphere, migration does not generate significant ruptures in the family order' (Schmolli, 2006, 9).

However, Schmolli (2006) adds, women, do gain respect and legitimisation for their productive work. Eleni's experience illustrates a similar dynamic, although in her case, the respect that she receives comes mostly from her children:

Now that my husband is not working, it's me who brings the primary income in the house. ... And the children often say, 'Fortunately, we have you because otherwise, we would have starved to death'. But I tell them it is because of your father that we are here, because he worked hard in Greece, and now he is sick. I don't want him to be hurt because of this situation.

However, this added respect for women's role as breadwinners, coupled with other financial constraints, lead to a crisis of masculinity, as Eleni's words indicate. In a study on poverty in Hungarian households, Fodor (2006, 15) finds that 'one of the major gender differences in the experience of poverty is that men often find themselves in a gender role crisis when they are too poor to function as successful breadwinners. Women, on the other hand, tend to feel their roles as caretakers intensified and thus avoid a conflict with (newly) hegemonic ideals of femininity'. Fodor (2006, 14) adds that women help their husbands by alleviating this role crisis and the 'gender shame' derived from it. Accordingly, Eleni recounts of how she protected her husband in front of their children who questioned his role as breadwinner.

Another final point worth analysing is how Eleni, conscious of the transformation of the gendered configurations within her family, attempted to preserve and not destabilise them. She chose to cope with the weakening of her husband's breadwinner role by not upsetting relations within the family. Such behaviours, as Kabeer (1999, 448) writes, 'reflect a certain degree of caution on the part of women—a strategic virtue in situations where they may have as much to lose from the disruption of social relationships, as they have to gain'. At the same time, women are conscious that gender relations within the family have changed.

4.4 Conclusion—Discussing the Findings

The women interviewed in this chapter are internal migrants in Albania. At their age, they have lived through both late communism and the succeeding post-communist period. They provide a vantage point for exploring the fissions in gender regimes unleashed by the collapse of communism and the new gender regimes that emerged during and following the aftermath. In this section, I highlight four main findings and compare and contrast them with the current research on gender and migration to find where they overlap and undermine each other and where my results depart in fundamental ways from recent contributions on the intersection of migration and gender.

First, the interviews show that migrating in any form is seen as a solution to the economic and social difficulties experienced at any given moment, particularly by the rural population, which accords with Çaro's (2011) findings on internal Albanian migration more specifically. However, the migratory response to difficult economic and social conditions is gendered: international migration is mostly considered to be a male affair, and internal migration is reserved for women. While the husband migrates abroad, the wife, children and other family members migrate internally. In this context, interviews show that families pick Tirana as their destination for multiple reasons: it offers the best economic, social and educational opportunities for internal migration, and it is the most feasible option for a family migration project, balancing the needs of all family members and offering support from already-established social networks in Tirana (as elaborated in the second main finding).

The interviews also show that migration is a household-wide decision, not an individual one, confirming the findings of extensive international research (Root & De Jong, 1991; Lauby & Stark 1988). However, these researches neglect to consider that household decisions regarding migration are gendered. Interestingly, both the migration decision-making process and the preparation for the move to Tirana assign different positions to women living in extended and nuclear families. Women in nuclear families have greater negotiation power in migration decisions and often lead the preparation for the move to Tirana. Whereas, the women in extended families lack this negotiating power.

Second, the internal migrant women interviewed in this chapter talk about how they rely heavily on the social network systems built during communism and how they expand and renegotiate those networks anew after communism. The interviewees give accounts of chain migration; people migrate to other cities where they have kinship or friendship networks, a feature of internal migration in Albania highlighted also by other studies (Çaro, 2011; Vullnetari, 2014). Internal migrant women have no choice but to rely on their kin and social relations in the absence of internal migration policies to facilitate free movement in the labour market, infrastructure and various services and in the context of a weak welfare state. While family and kinship networks appear to have the central role during the entire internal migration process by married women, these women create new social relations upon their arrival in Tirana. One such case is that of domestic care workers who create social

networks with similar women to exchange information about job vacancies, average salaries and other matters. These new social networks evidence women's agency in adapting to their new social realities in the place of destination. This adaptation is illustrated by the informal professional network of internal migrants working as domestic workers. Such 'solidarity' networks of mutual support among migrant women are also prominent among Ukrainian female migrants working as domestic workers in Italy (Vianello, 2009). Schmoll (2006) also stresses how Tunisian migrant women use different types of solidarities throughout their migration process to Italy.

I now turn to my third main finding in this chapter on married internal migrant women: the transformation of the family structure and the new negotiations of gender relations. It is interesting to note that in many cases, internal migration parallels a nucleation process, in which extended families that used to live together in their place of origin, separate and live in nuclear families in individual apartments in the same building following their internal migration. The decline in extended families is not a recent, post-communist phenomenon in Albania. Contrary to the common belief, the number of nuclear families was already significant before the communist period and grew more after 1944, under the communist government's modernising policies (Kaser, 2014). Internal and international migration further contribute to this nucleation process, as shown by the few cases in this chapter. The nucleation of extended families seems to affect gender relations within the family, although it does not necessarily lead to a reorganising of gender hierarchies. The husband remains the head of the household, with the most decision-making power in the home. Nevertheless, the interviews show that women view nucleation as a positive change in their everyday lives. The physical separation in housing is followed by a reorganisation of economic responsibilities, giving women more power and driving new negotiations of gender relations within the extended household.

Gender relations within the nuclear household are also renegotiated. As shown, the nuclear family sometimes faces a crisis of masculinity. For instance, women discuss their husbands' state after being laid off. Even while unemployed and out of the sphere of paid, productive work, men do not perform domestic work. Furthermore, when women become the primary breadwinners in the family, they still go to great pains to maintain the façade of the man being the head of the household in front of the children. New negotiations of gender relations within the family take place amid this destabilisation of gender roles. Paradoxically and despite evidence to the contrary, the women interviewed work to maintain and not disturb gender hierarchies neatly. No significant ruptures in the existing gender arrangements within households appear. This brings us to the matter of care chains in which some women pass on their caregiver role to other women.

Thus, in my fourth point, I discuss the issue of care work. The cases here confirm findings on the complex post-1991 dynamics of care in Albania for both children and ageing parents through intra-familial support and paid, employed care providers. Vullnetari and King (2016) explain that paid childcare providers in Tirana have increased in number, where domestic care workers may be Albanian internal female migrants as well as Filipina immigrants. The interviews in this chapter illustrate the

entanglement of these complex care chains with migration. First, as in some of the cases discussed in this chapter, women's internal migration becomes possible as their care-giving duties are transferred to their parents or shifted around, passed on from mothers to daughters. The intra-familial care chain, or family solidarity, frees women to migrate. Second, women living in Tirana who enter the labour market employ internal migrants to take care of their children, ageing parents and domestic tasks.

Interestingly, the women who employ internal migrants as domestic care workers include both non-migrants and other internal migrants. In Chaps. 5 and 8, I develop further the dynamics of care for children and ageing parents and the intersections between internal and international migrant care workers. Third, as Hochschild (2000) investigates, the number of links in any care chain may vary. Internal migrant women transfer their mothering and caregiver roles to other female family members so they themselves can be employed by other women as domestic care workers. These cases illustrate the entanglement of multiple care chains with internal migration in the particular space of Tirana.

The 'marketisation of care' (Hochschild, 2000, 133) seems to have influenced the emergence of the informal sector of domestic workers in Tirana. The invisibility and informality of this new sector, which employs mostly internal migrants, does not help at all domestic care workers. They are stuck in a precarious job situation, lacking regular contracts and excluded from the social security scheme. This is a developing yet under-researched sector that demands future in-depth investigation.

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