

CONCLUSION

Translocal Family Care



In the autumn of 2021, I visited the family with whom I had stayed during my field research; I had not visited for some time. As is customary in Opoja, I first inquired about the well-being of individual family members, and we talked about how quickly the children were growing up. Children best show how time passes and how relationships change in families and between genders and generations. At the beginning of my fieldwork in Opoja in 2011, the oldest child of my hosts was in primary school and had eagerly explained the customs of the region to me. Now she was a young adult and had enrolled at the University of Prishtina to become a professional caretaker. One of the younger children, who was not attending school at the time of my fieldwork, was now able to communicate excellently in English, thanks largely to young volunteers from an American Peace Corps who had stayed in Opoja for a few years and taught the children. Like her sister, she too wanted to study and become a physical therapist or even a doctor. Both envisioned possibly working in Germany. This indicates not only that migration still plays an important role but also that young women envision migrating for education and work and not just through marriage, and that gender relations have once again changed significantly and become more liberalized and emancipated.

Since the end of my fieldwork, a lot had changed in my host family, and one of the biggest changes concerned the construction of three new houses, which they had started in 2013 in a joint effort on the outskirts of the village – far away from the densely populated *mahalla* in the village centre. By 2020, two of the houses were completed, which then led to the separation of the joint household, the *familia e madhe*, which at the time included a total of fourteen members. The older couple had moved with the younger son and his family into the house that was completed first, and the eldest son and his wife and their children moved into the second, almost identical house a

little later. A smaller house was intended for the youngest son, Jetmir, who had spent most of the last fifteen years abroad and only occasionally visited for short periods. Nevertheless, the houses of the three brothers were in close proximity to each other, symbolizing a close bond between the family members.

Jetmir had lived in Germany for years and had had only limited residence rights. In 2016, he was granted a work visa on the basis of an employment contract, which became possible after Germany enacted the Western Balkans Agreement in 2016, which allowed labour migration even without recognized educational qualifications from Western Balkan countries – a step taken after asylum applications from these countries had increased enormously in early 2015, mainly for economic reasons. The new agreement was intended to reduce hopeless asylum migration and redirect it into migration that could be utilized in the German labour market. After an initial period, migrant workers could also apply for family reunification, and Jetmir fortunately succeeded in this and his wife was able to join him.

Other villagers and immigrants had also built new houses in Opoja, often very impressive in size and shape, making the village look quite rich. However, many of the houses were empty most of the time, as many owners lived abroad. In fact, not only Jetmir but also other young and not so young men in the *mahalla* had gone abroad on the basis of the Western Balkans Agreement or family reunification. In 2016 and 2017, pictures of passport pages with the visa stamp were posted on Facebook, one of which received more than 200 congratulations and ‘bon voyage’ greetings, as a visa represents new hopes for a better life and as such is celebrated in the village. Hoping to reunite with their husbands, young women whose partners had travelled abroad on work visas enrolled in a German language course in one of the neighbouring villages to take the qualifying examination for family reunification, and due to high demand, more language schools were opened in the region. In 2021, several women and their children had already moved abroad to join their partners and in 2022, I heard for the first time that women were also moving abroad on the basis of a work visa to take up professional care work, which is in high demand in Germany, and that their husbands were waiting to follow on the basis of family reunification. Here the gendered migration paths had reversed.

Still others – young men and women as well as entire families – had opted for internal migration. My host’s cousin, for example, had decided to lock up his house in the village and move with his wife and his sons to Prishtina, where they owned an apartment, which again resulted from labour migration: in socialist times, his father had worked in Belgrade and acquired ownership rights to an apartment there, which they then exchanged with an apartment owned by Serbs in Prishtina after the war ended, when Serbs

were leaving Kosovo in large numbers. Years after the Kosovo war, the family had barely been able to make a living in the village, and they hoped that they would find better opportunities than in Opoja to earn a living.

Reflecting on the news from my acquaintances in Opoja, it became clear that migration – and especially international migration – remains the most important path individuals and families in Opoja pursue to build a life and create social security. The importance of migration and the strategies that people from rural Kosovo come up with to go abroad are closely linked to local, global and national dynamics. Kosovo's high unemployment rate, especially among young people and in rural areas such as Opoja, and low and insecure wages make people even more dependent on migration, and many villagers want to emigrate, or expect their children to do so. The desire for international migration is fuelled not only by the many relatives and acquaintances living abroad who share their migration experiences within the translocal community and often paint an overtly positive picture, but also by media and virtual social networks that enable villagers to create spaces in which they can defy local hierarchies and norms and imagine an alternative future abroad.

People's plans and strategies were closely linked to the EU migration regime, which restricts the cross-border influx of 'undesirable' third-country nationals into the EU and which limited migration for many years mainly to family reunification. Starting in 2016, the Western Balkans Agreement created new opportunities for people to work in the German labour market, and those who have found work – often with the help of family members abroad – then often bring over their spouse and children on the basis of family reunification. This has led to a doubling of family reunification figures from 3766 persons in 2014 to 7806 persons in 2019 (BMBF 2021). As a result, the number of emigrants from Kosovo has increased in recent years. In Opoja, this is particularly noticeable in the local school, where the number of pupils halved between 2011 and 2022. The ongoing outmigration of young people and whole families poses new challenges for the local community, the family and family social security, so the impact of the Western Balkans Agreement on living conditions in Kosovo and on families abroad, as well as on translocal family relations would need to be further explored.

This study focused on the existing links between a locality in rural Kosovo, migration and the family after the war in 1999, but before the Western Balkan Agreement came into force in 2016, while considering the historical development of family-based care across state borders. It examined the reconfiguration of a fragile yet highly adaptable family network, especially in terms of care provided within it, and shed light on the opportunities but also the challenges of relationships between dispersed family and kin members living in different countries in Europe, who continue to link to Opoja,

a region in Southern Kosovo. In contrast to a narrow conceptualization of care that is mainly understood as practical or hands-on and aimed at the elderly and children, and as such is unidirectional and assumes a common locality, this study worked with a comprehensive concept of care in a translocal setting. It explored not only hands-on care but also the financial dimensions of care in an entangled perspective, taking notice of the fact that the outmigration of family members can create a gap of hands-on care in the local community, while it provides financial resources. Rather than reducing caregiving to specific forms and norms that are often Western-oriented and highly compartmentalized, this study aimed to provide a more holistic perspective and highlight what is relevant to villagers and their relatives across borders. Thus, it forced us to rethink family care by considering a translocal framework that includes cross-border relationships, and by including a variety of often unconsidered forms of care that may take on a special significance when other care practices are lacking. In addition, the study focused on the family and the specific family relations related to caregiving. Rather than taking for granted the patriarchal family relationships that are traditional in rural Kosovo and relating family caregiving patterns to patriarchal family norms, a close look was taken at these relationships to identify where gender and generation play a role and how these relationships change.

The translocal ethnography pursued here has helped in the development of a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the impact of neoliberal times and European border regimes on the living conditions of families in rural Kosovo, as well as the transformation of migration strategies and the kind of care provided within the family and across state borders. By exploring the links between the family, migration and care, the study linked micro-processes to larger societal processes that frame translocal families and impact on the relations between family members. At the same time, the study focused on the strategies of families and their individual members across borders. As Alison Shaw (2000: 17) noted in the context of migrants from Pakistan entering the UK, the more the EU restricts the entry of non-EU citizens, the more important the family becomes in migration issues. This is especially true in regions such as Kosovo, where the state provides very little social security and unemployment is high. Over time, Opoja translocal families not only followed a 'migration culture' in order to provide remittances for the families at home, but also developed a kind of 'migration autonomy' through a mix of conventional and innovative solutions to support relatives in the migration project – by financing the journey and/or helping them to obtain information, housing or access to work abroad.

Migration within family networks is determined not only by economic motives but by a variety of family and gender norms and considerations. While certain values and practices upheld in the region can be classified as

patriarchal and are often seen as customary in this region, they are also rapidly changing – but not necessarily in a linear direction. They include simultaneous – and seemingly contradictory – processes of individualization and support of family unity, (re-)patriarchalization and emancipation, as well as modernization and (re-)traditionalization.

Within the framework of translocality, the study delineated the interaction of individuals living in different locations across borders and connected within a family and kinship network. Along the intersecting categories of gender and generation, and with reference to education and legal and marital status, it underscored the agency of individuals in their embeddedness in different and sometimes contradictory power geometries. This also allowed us to rethink central assumptions underlying hegemonic discourses that divide Europe not only geographically, economically and politically but also culturally as ‘progressive’, ‘modern’ and ‘emancipated’ on the one hand and ‘backward’, ‘regressive’ and ‘patriarchal’ on the other.

The study showed that within the cross-border kinship and family relations, the Opoja region takes on a special significance and has remained the centre of translocal family and kinship care, despite women and children having migrated in greater numbers since the 1990s, following their husbands and fathers. Translocality is, however, not a given fact but needs to be reinforced. Migrants’ ties to their relatives in the home region in Kosovo are maintained through support, routines, rituals and material manifestations. These include the regular migrant visits that enliven the villages in the summer, as well as the lavish wedding celebrations and the construction of large and modern houses by migrants in the region. Translocality is also based, in part, on the maintenance or restoration of bi-local or patrilocal households and, in particular, on the care expressed in these relationships.

In fact, despite the outmigration of (some) family members, many migrants do not simply stop caring for family members and relatives ‘back home’. One can even state that with outmigration, many male migrants start to financially support their parents and sometimes their brothers in Opoja, and continue this often over a long period of time. They do this in part because they grew up together with them and often lived with them in the same household after they married, forming close relationships that have endured across borders. In this way, they also conform to the family and gender expectations arising from patrilocal and patrilineal norms that apply within the village *rrethi*. This contributes to social cohesion and family unity across borders, as well as the maintenance of the village communities in Opoja.

The legal status of migrants also affects translocal family relationships with relatives ‘back home’ – but not always unambiguously. Migrants with uncertain or, in some cases, no legal status abroad often show a high willingness to stay in touch and send remittances to their families back home because they

face the prospect of being sent back by state authorities. However, migrants without a work permit also face enormous difficulties in finding steady work and thus struggle with sending regular amounts of money home and getting to a position where they can have other family members – whether spouses or children – join them. In addition, they are often unable to visit family in Opoja because they cannot easily cross state borders without the necessary documents. This can lead to alienation from family members ‘back home’ and an inability or unwillingness to send remittances. On the other hand, secure residency abroad, or even higher education, does not necessarily reduce or weaken the commitment of migrants to family members ‘back home’ in providing translocal care. Rather, a secure base abroad is seen as an advantage, and migrants sometimes even invest more in translocal family networks or might even think of opening a business in Opoja.

Nevertheless, financial support from migrants living abroad to their relatives in Opoja is often temporary. Rather than seeing this as a clear sign of reduced cross-border family support, this study showed that it is important to view support within the migrant’s life course as well as the family and household cycle, and to view financial support in the context of other support as well. Migrants may stop financially supporting the brother and his family as soon as they approach a son’s marriage, as the latter is a major investment. Families in Opoja then find themselves forced to send an additional family member abroad to financially support the household. However, they often resort to the help of other relatives abroad. Migrant family members provide not only the necessary financial support to relatives and family in Opoja – for example, to finance household expenses or the education of individual household members – but also practical support in terms of help with important contacts – among others to employers – for those who want to migrate or have migrated abroad. This means that we need to look at different forms of care, taking place in two or more places, across borders, that can be vital for families in Opoja, but that are often ignored by social scientists who either focus on a special form of care – be it remittances or hands-on care – only or on one locality. In addition, we need to consider the particular mix of care relationships, including on a temporal basis. As shown in this book, migrants’ care relationships with their relatives back home did not necessarily deteriorate after the Kosovo war in 1999 but rather diversified and changed.

Moreover, care provided in cross-border family networks is also not unidirectional. While migrants’ care for villagers is often emphasized in migration studies, the care described in this study also shows villagers’ care towards family members abroad – although it is not always balanced. For example, they stay in touch with migrants abroad via Skype or other social media and sometimes send them home-cooked meals as a sign of emotional connection and caring. Most importantly, they give them a special status when they

come to visit Opoja, rewarding the care they have received from them. This suggests that care provided by migrants to relatives at home is not purely altruistic or a 'free gift' but that migrants also gain something in return when providing care, and might have a self-interest in it. When migrants feel that their care is not recognized, relationships can become strained.

An important focus of this study was to explore the gendered dimensions of translocal family organization and family care. Within translocal families described here, gender relations are far from clear-cut but rather ambivalent and sometimes even contradictory. Families in rural Kosovo historically had a patriarchal family structure, following the principle of patrilineality and patrilocality based on seniority, male inheritance and equality among brothers, with clearly defined gender roles in the household. Newly married women were not only excluded from property and inheritance but often had less of a say until they became mothers and (in-)laws and had authority over their children and children-in-law. According to Janet Reineck (1991), male labour migration, which was widespread in the 1970s and 1980s, perpetuated the patriarchal pattern of families in joint household structures. With the outmigration of women and children, which accelerated in the 1990s, the roles of individual family members in the newly formed households abroad shifted. In some cases, men have become more involved in the household and women have become (secondary or primary) breadwinners.

By analysing the shifting migration patterns from a historically informed perspective, the study showed that also cross-border care relations among family and kin members are shifting. Various (male) migrants support not only their brothers' but also their sisters' or nieces' university education, and thus enable their social advancement and help them to step out of patriarchal gender roles. Increasingly, women who have migrated also tend to send remittances to family members in Opoja but in a more selective manner and often to members of their own family of origin, be they parents, brothers or sisters. This has contributed to a shift in caregiving and gender relations and has increased the social standing of these women in the translocal community. However, the outmigration of women has challenged local gender roles from another perspective. Since daughters-in-law traditionally provided hands-on care for the elderly, their migration has created a gap in elderly care in Opoja. In this situation, parents sometimes rely on their biological daughters when they need care, while in other cases parents go to their son abroad. These dynamics, therefore, challenge the long-practised gendered concepts of care and their link to patrilocality and patrilineality.

In order to maintain a translocal family culture that connects family members living abroad to Opoja, the symbolic and material levels are particularly important, as they help to restore translocality and renew family ties that provide the basis for family care. At the symbolic and material levels, the

dynamic tension between what is seen as modern and traditional, patrilocal and emancipated, individual and collective, as well as Western and local is particularly pronounced. In exploring the translocal family networks linking Opoja to EU countries, my study has paid particular attention to the house building projects of migrants back home in Opoja. After the end of the war in 1999, after a decade of conflict in which investments were put on hold, housing projects experienced a new boom, and many of these houses were built and are still being built by migrants who emigrated several years or decades ago and have resettled their families abroad. The construction of houses in the village reflects the migrants' sense of belonging and emotional attachment to their home region, as well as their wish to materialize this. The houses signal their plans for a return and thus represent a vision of their personal and family future in the region – they are a 'local anchorage', as Janine Dahinden (2010: 53) puts it. As much as houses connect migrants to their 'roots', they also create connections to the migrants' destination country. They are often built with 'Western' architectural details and interiors and thus also transform the appearance of the village and serve as signifiers of 'modernity' and 'progress'.

A village house is also a material expression of the household and the family – it is the family built in stone and an important means of creating relatedness. Many migrants invest in multistory houses designed to provide enough living space for several nuclear families, more specifically the families of brothers and/or sons. Such houses are built primarily in the home villages of the male spouse (rather than the female spouse) in Opoja, and in close proximity to relatives, and are often also built for the next generation and especially for the son(s). Their location and design make them a material expression of patrilocal, agnatic kinship solidarity and care. A series of similarly designed houses, usually found on the outskirts of villages in Opoja as well as in other rural areas of Kosovo, represent icons of 'equality' and solidarity among brothers.

However, this material expression of equality and unity is often only a shell, as brothers commonly will have established their own nuclear households, and day-to-day support among them may even be lacking. More generally, investing in a house in the village can also give rise to various forms of antagonisms – critical views and lines of differentiation – that impact the life of migrants and the community and family life in Opoja. Houses may, for example, signal a lack of solidarity or even represent a boundary between the migrants and their relatives in Opoja – especially if they are larger and more fashionably designed than the houses of their brothers living permanently in Opoja, who cannot afford such houses. Many houses built by migrants for their nuclear family are empty most of the year and thus do not always represent a bridge to relatives at home. Furthermore, conflict can also arise

within the migrant family over the construction of the house. The fact that investing in a house 'back home' often also means that the migrants have to save up or repay a mortgage – a practice that affects everyday life abroad – is not always supported by the migrants' children. The fact that many migrants build a house within the village of the male spouse and in close proximity to his relatives can also create tensions within the partnership.

Equally central to the ritualization and re-creation of the translocal family and kinship relations in Opoja are wedding celebrations. Like house building, they express the symbolic level of family and kinship relations that extends to different places within the EU and beyond and actively participate in rooting the kinship network. Weddings are also an occasion where the smaller family circle (where the translocal care relations are mainly expressed) expands to the larger kinship circle. Celebrated with hundreds of guests, mainly relatives, many of whom come from abroad, weddings fill notions of the family and kin group with meaning. More precisely, weddings bind individual members to the kin group and give them a place within the kinship grid, allowing for cohesion and kinship connections to be re-created. In that sense, weddings can redefine not only the status and position of the entire inviting family but also the gender and social roles of the spouses with respect to each other and within the family as well as of the individual members of the community. In this regard, it is important that wedding celebrations emphasize both tradition, patrilocality and patrilineality and also innovation/modernity and more egalitarian gender and kinship relations. As the study has shown, villagers and migrants alike value markers of 'authenticity' and the revival of 'traditional' customs that symbolize the patrilocal, agnatically organized kinship order, which support the creation of a localized identity and a sense of belonging to the region even beyond state borders. This is especially important for migrants and their children. At the same time, migrants and villagers have introduced new customs according to their perceptions of modern marriage ideals. Such new rituals emphasize romantic love between the couple, equal participation of the bride's family in the ceremonies, and more generally a gender-equalizing approach. Changes are also evident in wedding guest lists, as colleagues and friends are increasingly invited in addition to family members.

As weddings are increasingly held in glitzy and commercialized wedding salons, they can also become sites of conspicuous consumption and markers of income and class. While such new customs may be considered 'Western', they are also genuinely translocal. The high cost of weddings – mainly for the groom's family and which is also related to the abundance of expensive gifts for the bride – also has an economic impact, exacerbating social stratification among villagers. Many villagers in Opoja try to follow the same (trans-)locally defined style of weddings, making social differences between

families largely invisible. However, this has led to some families going into debt, as the capacity to finance such weddings varies from family to family.

The high cost and increasing commercialization of weddings can also affect the prospects of the celebrating family and the new couple. In Opoja, the high costs have pushed young people from less affluent families to take wage jobs early without pursuing education, sometimes against their will, or even to emigrate abroad. Migrants abroad who organize their sons' or also daughters' weddings in Opoja invest in such occasions, and these contingencies often have far-reaching effects on their lives abroad. This can also lead to intergenerational conflicts between parents and children. In some cases, this also leads to alternative ideas about the organization, design and costs of weddings. Despite the diversification and social stratification that weddings manifest or produce, as well as the changing meanings of gender and partnership therein, weddings remain an important means of symbolically connecting two families, creating new kinship bonds and reuniting geographically dispersed kin. As such, weddings can be regarded as the 'social glue' that renews the translocal family and wider kin group.

Importantly, translocal family and kinship ties are also newly established through cross-border marriages between migrants from Opoja and those back home. Depending on the perspective of those involved in cross-border marriages, such marriages are spurred on by a variety of social, economic and family considerations that are linked to global, local and personal affairs. In fact, cross-border marriages have become increasingly important since the end of the war in 1999, as marriage migration represents the most promising route to permanent migration abroad – at the same time facilitating entry into the labour market of immigration countries. Marriage migration can thus be seen as a social security strategy – both for the individual migrant and for his or her family in Opoja in expectation of remittances from the migrating family member.

Macro- and meso-level changes are important drivers for cross-border marriages, as they impact on the strategies of villagers in Opoja. Cross-border marriages, however, also link to migration biographies of families and individuals from Opoja living abroad. This points to the intergenerational dimension of marriage migration that results from different phases of migration to Western Europe. Marriage migration is also fostered by the fact that (some of the) children and young people who went abroad with (one of) their parents during the turbulent times of the 1990s or also after the war in the new millennium have nevertheless grown up with a stable connection to Opoja and thus may also opt for a spouse from the 'home region'. For parents abroad, the possibility of marrying off a child of marriageable age to someone in the home region in Kosovo, thus enabling migration, can be seen as an advantage that improves their own status in Opoja and creates

new relatives back home. Conversely, parents in Opoja may see marrying off a child to a migrant abroad as a social security strategy, as children abroad are seen as the best providers for families in Opoja – at least in financial terms.

In cross-border marriages, the role of the family is also strengthened because spousal choice is often based on family-framed encounters. And although this practice refers back to the tradition of family-based marriage counselling without involving the young people, the practice has changed and with it also its meaning. Instead of being regarded as a backward or regressive practice, it is seen as one which rather promises more certainty about the suitability of the partner and thus offers a greater possibility for fulfilling one's imaginations about partnership and life prospects. In fact, today's 'family-framed' marriages have gained new meaning and acceptance across state borders and territorial distances. They are dynamically spurred on by the corresponding migration regimes as well as by different imaginations of family care and individual life plans – which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Rather, the hope is that marriage will combine the two.

This study also allowed us to rethink the gender norms and relations that shape cross-border marriages. Marriage migrants may position themselves in line with, but also against, widespread gender constructions in their home contexts, and may thus also transform gender and family relations. Next to their wish to start a family, young men from rural Kosovo, who face unemployment and a certain imposed dependence on their fathers, seek such marriages to gain better economic prospects and thus greater agency. Young women who feel limited in their options by local gender roles partly hope that through a cross-border marriage they can gain more agency within their partnership and family than a local alliance would allow. Their goal is, for instance, to take up wage work and/or to educate themselves further. From the perspective of young migrants, the decision to marry someone from their home region (or the region of their parent(s)) in Kosovo can result from wanting a good position within the partnership and to create a harmonious family life where cultural values and their family language can be passed on. For migrant women, this means a more emancipated partnership and sometimes the prospect of a better social position in the host society through marriage to a person from Opoja who has enjoyed higher education. In general, however, such considerations do not preclude romantic unions but may be the basis on which romance is built.

The realities of cross-border marriages may also entail a change in family and kinship organization as well as individual gender and partnership roles within marriage. Here, again, the migration regimes of Western European states play a role, for within this framework family migration and especially cross-border marriages of migrants are culturalized and seen as 'patriarchal',

'backward' and 'problematic'. This has justified state measures against marriage migration, and partners encounter various obstacles when attempting to marry across borders. These obstacles have led to the disempowerment of female marriage migrants in particular.

As the study has shown, migrating spouses often, at least initially, depend on the sponsoring spouse and lack sufficient power and agency to take independent initiatives. Once the EU (and state) border is crossed and family reunification is concluded, spouses may find themselves in positions that partially challenge gender and family norms prevalent in Opoja. Male marriage migrants, for example, leave behind their paternal family as well as their own relatives in Opoja and establish a nuclear household with their wife – often in close proximity to their wife's family and relatives. This new spatial proximity makes the wife's relatives more present in daily life, and new care arrangements are made. Both kinship practices and partnership relations are thereby altered on an individual basis, while changes on the normative level tend to be much slower.

Male marriage migrants may be expected to become the primary breadwinners and heads of households abroad as soon as possible and to want to continue caring for family members back home. This is a challenging task that can often be realized only partly, even if their spouse and her relatives support migrating men in achieving such goals. In various cases, gender and partnership roles become adaptable, ambivalent and situational – differing in private and public spaces abroad as well as during visits to Opoja, often also in response to societal expectations. However, education also matters. Marriage migrants who are more educated and able to continue with their education abroad can also achieve a higher degree of self-realization than those who are less educated. This, in turn, affects partnership relationships.

Women from Opoja who have migrated through marriage tend to take on domestic tasks first, as they primarily expect and often want to provide for the household and children. However, female marriage migrants also tend to take up wage work at a later point in time. In addition to the positive financial effects on the household, the woman's employment also strengthens her position within the partnership and *vis-à-vis* relatives in Opoja, especially once she starts to support them financially.

Since a significant number of female marriage migrants move into a shared household with their in-laws, the male spouse's family has a decisive influence on their position. While migrating women may receive support from the spouse's family in realizing their aspirations, the family may also have a negative impact on the marriage and, in particular, on their ability to realize their dreams of an emancipated partnership. In this situation, some women lack support from their husbands. Nevertheless, divorce is often not a solution for marriage migrant women, as this may entail a return to the

parental household in Opoja, where they do not have many options to shape their future.

More generally, this research has shown that it is the continuous, family-based movement across state borders, between migrants' destinations in Western European countries and the home location in Kosovo, that sustains and invigorates the familial bonds between two or more sites and sustains family care within a translocal social field. Translocal kinship networks spanning rural regions within Kosovo and Western European states are preserved and re-created not merely in adherence to the past but also to ensure a stable home base in a globalized world, in which sending states have increasingly relinquished their role as providers of care and social security and in which options for migration to Western European states have been increasingly reduced or at least diversified and are based on economic needs of the receiving states. Family-based migration and family solidarity is a way to overcome these obstacles, but these practices are increasingly culturalized in the receiving societies. This is especially true for marriage migration, which according to Western discourses is supposed to follow patriarchal norms that undermine equal relations between men and women and generally reduce the choice and freedom of the individual partners, especially of women. But it has been shown that migrants and villagers see themselves as actors within a complex interplay of social factors in which they balance the fulfilment of norms and expectations with their own needs.

An examination of care relations in border-spanning families from rural Kosovo also reveals the complex and ambivalent transformations of gender relations, as they involve emancipatory processes but also re-patriarchalization processes on both sides – in Kosovo as well as abroad. Within translocal family networks, there are multiple notions of modernity and tradition, and collectivity and individuality, which are pursued, criticized and reformulated in the larger framework of a neoliberal, globalized world and specifically – for citizens from Kosovo – within relatively impermeable border regimes, and which find expression in social relations, especially gender and marriage relations, both locally in Kosovo as well as abroad. Depending on the actor's perspective, this goes somewhat hand in hand with a situational rescaling of European regions – in which the rural region of Opoja can suddenly appear to be 'more modern' and civilized than those where the migrants live. This depends on how people experience their own position (and that of others) within a particular locality and is, therefore, always relational.

Cross-border caring relations linking family members in rural Kosovo to migration destinations in Western Europe show not only the importance of migration in sustaining family care but also the complexity and challenges of cross-border family relations. Such relations cannot be understood within a simplified West-centred categorization of space and time, according to

which the global 'Southeast' is based on supposedly 'backward' and patriarchal kinship patterns, and the global 'Northwest' with 'modern' families, within which families in rural Kosovo may be positioned somewhere in-between. Within the framework of neoliberalism, globalization and its associated migration flows, translocal family relations are not necessarily weakening. Rather, they can be sustained in subsequent generations – a finding also supported by studies of migrant communities from Turkey in Germany and Belgium or of Pakistani migrants in Britain (Charsley 2005; Beck-Gernsheim 2006, 2007; Timmerman 2006).

Translocal family relationships can be seen as a way to advance modernization 'back home' and also empower individual actors as well as translocal communities and to challenge hierarchical notions of 'backwardness' and 'modernity', 'periphery' and 'centre' in their geographic, political, social and cultural senses. A translocal perspective on family organization and the negotiation of values and practices in such border-crossing families challenges not least the notion of geographically fixed family cultures.

Within translocal kinship relations that span between Opoja and Austria or Germany, translocal kinship and family care are established at multiple but interwoven layers. These are shared everyday experiences, perceptions and normative expectations within families that affect the rituals and material manifestations of kinship, such as the building of houses and the joint celebration of weddings and other life-stage festivals, as well as cross-border marriages. Often, such translocal family relations undergo dynamic transformations that affect gender roles, as well as inter- and intragenerational relations. With this, family constellations and care arrangements change. How such relations and arrangements are formed is based on individual agency and a complex interplay of political and social factors that influence the positions of individual members within the life course, the translocal family and the translocal community.

Moreover, it is important to note that not all migrants and not all villagers actively participate in translocal family relationships, for they may also choose not to partake in these relationships and instead invest in other assets, social relationships and family models – even if this may result in negative sanctions within the translocal family and community. What strategies and positions are open to those who do not engage in family caregiving may be a topic for future research.

The importance of internal migration from rural areas to cities, and especially to Kosovo's capital Prishtina, which accelerated at the end of the war in 1999, has been only partly touched upon here – but it is likely that it impacts translocal family forms and family care and more generally the rural region of Opoja, too. It could thus be explored in a further study. The future will also show if migrants manage to bring about an economic upswing through

economic investments 'at home'. If migrants successfully establish manufacturing and service-related businesses in Kosovo, the economic imbalances that underpin migration may be reduced, and people might create the livelihoods they desire and the chance for self-realization right where they are. As this is related to an exchange of ideas and new forms of translocal livelihoods that connect various European localities, such translocal dynamics must be further explored. Here again, gender and generational dynamics take on significance. It may matter, for example, whether young women or men choose to launch a business in Kosovo and what different assets and networks they can rely on for that purpose. Translocal family relations may also play a role here.

What remains clear is that all these dynamics take place across two or more states. The lack of social security and opportunities offered by the Kosovo state inhibits many people in rural Opoja, as in other regions, from building up a decent livelihood 'at home'. This includes services such as health care, as well as care for the unemployed and the poor. The high unemployment, especially among the youth, and the lack of state-provided social security pressures families to act as the main provider of social security, and to opt for migration as a way to create better livelihoods. This is the case in Opoja but also more generally in Kosovo. Still, this system of family-based care is by no means a stable and harmonious one, but one in which care gaps and vulnerabilities for single members open up, which often also increases the dependency on (family-based) outmigration.

If the state provided more social security for its citizens and was successful in stimulating Kosovo's economy and creating more promising workplaces – especially also in the rural areas – the need for outmigration would diminish. Migration and translocal family connections would, however, remain. As said, the positionings of migrants in the receiving states also play a role in the maintenance of translocal family connections. The desire to achieve an imagined 'modernity' while simultaneously investing in 'tradition' achieves greater significance and momentum from a geographical distance, across state borders. Local circumstances as well as individual positionings and agency are decisive in cultivating and preserving translocal family ties and in the provision of family care, which are again linked to national and global dynamics.